

Image of the Librarian in Five Music Videos: Narrative Roles and Stereotypes

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.30742/tb.v9i2.4898>

Received: 22 September 2025 | Revised: 25 September 2025 | Accepted: 29 September 2025

ABSTRACT

Purpose Research. To analyze the representations of librarians in five music videos from different periods. **Research Method.** Descriptive, qualitative study with visual content analysis of five popular music videos: Head Over Heels (Tears for Fears, 1985), Everytime We Touch (Cascada, 2005), Teardrops on My Guitar (Taylor Swift, 2007), Out of the Game (Rufus Wainwright featuring Helena Bonham Carter, 2012), and Have It All (Jason Mraz, 2018). **Results.** We observed the recurrence of immediately legible signs of the librarians such as silence, order, and control, as well as variations that shift the persona toward registers of affection, humor, or cooperative mediation, with arcs of change within some videos. **Conclusions.** The music videos still activate recognizable clichés of the professional image and reinforce long-standing stereotypes, but they also offer openings for reconfiguration when the narrative allows.

Keywords: Librarianship; Popular culture; Stereotyping; Professional representation; TV.

A. INTRODUCTION

According to (Baccega, 1998; Lippmann, 1931), stereotypes are current patterns or standardized versions of something or someone that interfere with the perception of reality in relation to the figure represented, shaping public opinion about a given object, in the case of this article, a professional category. Thus, the stereotype present in the popular imaginary concerning the librarian is, to a certain extent, still tied to two spheres: physical and behavioral characteristics. Regarding physical characteristics, the female figure stands out, often older, with glasses and a hair bun. As for behavioral traits, hostility, withdrawal, a focus on the book (more than on its contents, which are the librarian's actual working material), and, evidently, an attachment to silence are prominent.

Countless studies have mapped librarian stereotypes. Rocho (2007) categorizes librarian stereotypes in film into five types: the traditional (a conservative figure, ill-humored, quiet, and routine-bound); the professional (a figure with good rapport with users, agile and up-to-date); the ambiguous (a shy, routine-bound figure, modestly dressed, formal, youthful, yet slightly monotonous); the fantastic (a figure possibly distinct in appearance from the usual,

endowed with supernatural abilities and often portrayed as a superhero); and the informal (a figure without professional training in librarianship who, for some reason, works in the library).

Presented fictional representations of librarians in anime (Meilinda & Prasetyawan, 2024; Morigi, Kussler, & Massoni, 2017), while pursued the same in animated cartoons (Nascimento, Ferreira, & Ferreira, 2016). Further emphasize that such studies are important because they act as vehicles of public education and serve as references for future research and for scriptwriters seeking to subvert negative professional stereotypes (Meilinda & Prasetyawan, 2024).

The music video is another type of audiovisual work consumed on a large scale by the public. The music video is a product of the recording industry, with commercial appeal, used to promote songs (Goodwin, 1992). It is generally short and influenced by cinema and advertising (Severo, 2022; Soares, 2013).

Like any other audiovisual work, it also functions as what (Boaventura, 2024) refers to as a source of information and a cultural mediator. It can therefore create the persona-meaning of a professional figure, such as the librarian. The music video also has a characteristic that differs from other audiovisual works because it is made to encourage replay, which, in the streaming era, directly impacts the commercial performance of a given song (Picalho, Ribeiro, & Fadel, 2023). Repetition in the medium reinforces the stereotype represented by the work, which can be viewed repeatedly.

Accordingly, the guiding questions of this study were: how are librarians represented in popular music videos, and which stereotypes and narrative roles emerge from these representations? The objective was to analyze the representations of librarians in five music videos from different periods.

B. METHODS

This is a descriptive, exploratory study with a qualitative approach. The music videos were consulted in the dataset on films, series, music videos, and other audiovisual productions that portray librarians, libraries, or librarianship, available in the Zenodo data repository (Picalho, 2025).

Music videos were selected, and the librarian figure is prominent in the narrative. The five music videos presented in this study, in chronological order, are: Head Over Heels (1985), Everytime We Touch (2005), Teardrops on My Guitar (2007), Out of the Game (2012), and Have It All (2018). Table 1 provides a clearer illustration of the music videos and their performers.

Table 1. Analyzed music videos

Music video	Artist	Year
Head Over Heels	Tears For Fears	1985
Everytime We Touch	Cascada	2005
Teardrops on My Guitar	Taylor Swift	2007
Out of the Game	Rufus Wainwright featuring Helena Bonham Carter	2012
Have It All	Jason Mraz	2018

The categorization of characters followed the principles developed by Rocho (2017), who divided fictional librarians into five types. Narrative roles and

stereotypes were constructed inductively through close reading of the music videos, with operational definitions developed by the study itself and refined through repeated viewings. A practice that aligns with the media format examined, which is designed for replay. Within the scope of this research, narrative roles and stereotypes function as descriptive labels.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

What follows are the results by music video and the integrated discussion. The data collected are presented in chronological order, with four frames from each video in the narrative order shown in each piece.

Tears for Fears - “Head Over Heels” (1985)

Set almost entirely in the library, the video frames the librarian as a romantic interest and organizes the narrative around a play of curiosity, shyness, and approach. Visual markers of the professional appear in the glasses and discreet attire, in addition to the full library setting: circulation desk, catalog cards, and bookshelves.



Figure 1. Tears For Fears – Head Over Heels (10 pt)
Source: <https://youtu.be/CsHiG-43Fzg?si=qHRSZfjFxDvYRmJT>

The plot adopts a light humor, paired with an affectionate ending that softens the image of the librarian without breaking it altogether. The professional remains an enchanting, quiet figure with little voice in the storyline.

Cascada - “Everytime We Touch” (2005)

The library appears as a setting of tension between desire, “freedom” and normativity. A male librarian, marked by formal clothing and a supervisory stance, attempts to enforce rules and preserve order while the romantic narrative physically disorganizes the collection, with the card catalog being disturbed and dance scenes occurring within the library space.



Figure 2. Cascada – Everytime We Touch
Source: <https://youtu.be/LjZ2zwXbta4?si=efiaSZQTsdvapBel>

As an electronic track, the video has an accelerated rhythm. There are scenes that shift the professional's authority into a comic register, reducing his power to that of an ineffective “guardian” of silence. Here, the stereotype operates as a functional obstacle to romance, reiterating the association between library, control, and normative frameworks.

Taylor Swift - “Teardrops on My Guitar” (2007)

The on-screen presence of the school library is very brief but symptomatic. The professional figure appears as a disciplinarian, reminding users to maintain silence in the space. Even though short, the scene foregrounds the well-known “shhh” gesture, reinforcing the image of the librarian as a “shusher”.



Figure 3. Taylor Swift — Teardrops on My Guitar
Source: https://youtu.be/xKCek6_dB0M?si=L9oonlc02QRGHf0c

In this case, the character acts punctually and instrumentally to the adolescent narrative of the video, lending school verisimilitude without narrative weight that would effectively affect the story presented.

Rufus Wainwright (feat. Helena Bonham Carter) - “Out of the Game” (2012)

The video explores the library as a stage for performance. The librarian character begins rigidly coded, glasses, hair up, formal attire. As the music progresses, she shifts to an expanded gesturality and a slightly looser wardrobe.



Figure 4. Rufus Wainwright (feat. Helena Bonham Carter) - “Out of the Game”
Source: <https://youtu.be/6KvTDeHlIfI?si=0GF0qsUxXwirc7sT>

The camera oscillates between frontal shots and close-ups, composing a calculated ambivalence between discipline and liberation. Humor and parody operate as engines that subvert the cliché.

Jason Mraz - “Have It All” (2018)

Near the end, Jason enters the school library and encounters the librarian in the classic figure of normativity at her desk with a silence sign and later with the “shhh” gesture, quickly activating the disciplinarian stereotype.



Figure 5. Jason Mraz - Have It All
Source: <https://youtu.be/BFkTu8YIKLs?si=T5IOb1HMaI-QffLF>

The sequence, however, pivots, and the character joins the singer in dance, shifting into the role of ally and reinscribing the library as a space of community participation and joy.

Assigning the categories presented by (Rocho, 2007), the a priori categorization is that all characters are presented traditionally, with emphasis on maintaining silence and organization, with caveats for Head Over Heels, Everytime We Touch, and Have It All, which display characteristics of the ambiguous librarian over the course of the narrative, with joviality and friendliness attributed to the characters.

Table 2 presents the narrative roles of each librarian, the associated stereotype, and their categorization according to Rocho's (2007) typology.

Table 2. Comparative synthesis

Music video	Narrative role (stereotype)	Category
Head Over Heels	Romantic interest (grumpy)	Traditional → Ambiguous
Everytime We Touch	Romantic interest (disciplinarian)	Traditional → Ambiguous
Teardrops on My Guitar	Disciplinarian (shusher)	Traditional
Out of the Game	Disciplinarian (comic)	Traditional → Ambiguous
Have It All	Disciplinarian (ally)	Traditional → Ambiguous

Librarians are professionals who work with information, continually reshaped and influenced by technological advances day by day, thus requiring constant professional updating to remain current (Boaventura, 2024). Certain stereotypes that cast the librarian as a rigid professional create an image opposite to what the profession demands.

Looking at the set as a whole, brief representation events prevail with a gestural focus (the “shhh” or the disapproving look), which sustain the stereotype and reinforce (Baccega, 1998) idea that the world we live in and its impressions often arrive edited by the media, which portray profiles that are frequently unfavorable to a given issue or group of people. This idea aligns with what Rocho (2007) states when noting that cinema (in this study, music videos) can propagate notions that do not match reality but, because they are instruments that help shape society's opinion about something, turn stereotypes into truths. On the interpretive plane, these same events function as narrative triggers that either keep the librarian at the threshold of the plot or allow turns in which the character begins to co-act with protagonists and audience.

E. CONCLUSION

The music videos analyzed confirm that the popular imagination about librarians in pop culture continues to rely on classic signs such as silence, order, and control, especially when the character occupies peripheral roles. At the same time, we find consistent indications of reconfiguration, in which, at certain moments, the profession escapes this symbolism. From a professional standpoint, this ambivalence is an opportunity for narratives that showcase technical competence, leadership, and care, without relinquishing the human and community dimensions, which help to reduce the stereotype of the old persona, as proposed by studies that call for positive and complex.

In short, pop music still favors the figure of the shusher librarian, but mainly when there is some turn in the personality of the professional portrayed. In this sense, when the librarian dances, sings, or opens up to the fun presented in the narrative, the representation ceases to be a closed door and becomes an open invitation.

We acknowledge as a limitation that coding was conducted by a single researcher, without a formal check of inter-coder reliability. Future studies may employ coding teams to analyze this and other music videos that feature librarians, libraries, or aspects of librarianship, using media-reading methods such as close reading, and verifying independent judgments by multiple researchers on the same analytic objective.

Future research, too, may address the figure of the librarian in other specific audiovisual works and analyze changes across decades, in addition to deepening the analysis from semiotic perspectives.

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