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# Envisaging Young Adult Librarianship from a Teen-Centered Perspective

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Young adult library services were founded on the idea of meeting teens' needs and interests, yet an adult-centered perspective dominates both the research and practice in this area. This chapter presents a small-scale content analysis of recent professional literature as proof of the prevailing adult-centered perspective. It is then suggested that a teen-centered perspective for public library research and practice is a better approach in terms of benefits to the target population. A truly teen-centered perspective means that we must change our thinking to (1) conceptualize adolescents as "teens" instead of "young adults"; (2) focus on teen development; (3) focus on teens as individuals first and foremost, and as members of their age and other demographic groups second; and (4) make teens—not information resources—the center of our work.

Library services for teens were founded on the idea of providing information resources to meet teens' needs and interests, yet since their inception much of the related research and practice has been conducted from an adult-centered perspective. For example, a great deal of the scholarly and professional writing relating to teens and libraries has taken the form of theoretical or thematic analyses of young adult literature, with the goal of enabling librarians to encourage youth to read the highest quality books.

Certainly, there is value in encouraging teens to read (or watch or listen to or play) high-quality materials, but this approach is an adult-centered approach, with adult scholars and adult librarians assuming that they know what kinds of resources teens need and want and that they can identify the best books (or websites or video games) to meet teens' needs and interests.

This concept of adults determining what is "best" for teens has also led to an emphasis on collecting and recommending award-winning materials, with adults serving as the driving forces behind award designations. There are literally hundreds of youth literature awards, many of which are for young adult (YA) materials (Hilbun and Claes, 2010). Even in the case of youth choice awards, librarians still typically select the short lists, and adults still determine what is best for teens.

"Teen-centered" refers to (1) direct youth participation in program and service design, (2) research that uses teens as research subjects or participants, and (3) library programs and services based on research that uses teens as research subjects or participants. In a more teen-centered approach to library research, teen behaviors, thoughts, and preferences would serve as the main sources for research data, as opposed to information resources serving as the most common data for analysis. In a more teen-centered approach to library practice, teens themselves would serve as the experts of their own thoughts, behaviors, needs, and preferences, and teens themselves would determine what resources and services are the best fits to their needs and interests. This is not to suggest that current library research and services for teens are exclusively adult-centered. There is an element of the teen-centered approach in both practice and research, with a growing number of public libraries setting up teen advisory boards and other mechanisms for enabling teens to provide input on program and service design (Tuccillo, 2010), and with a small but significant body of teen-centered library and information science (LIS) research being disseminated via academic outlets each year (see, for example, some of the entries on the Young Adult Library Services Association Research Committee [YALSA, 2009] research bibliography).

The concept of a teen-centered approach to public library services is not new. Librarians have been encouraging teens to participate in library services on a limited basis for decades. Tuccillo traced teen participation in both public and school libraries back as far as the early twentieth century,

and she argued that librarians have placed importance on fostering teen participation ever since. What is new is the *level* of teen participation that is required to achieve the vision of a truly teen-centered approach.

The question that drives this chapter is, What should be the central focus of today's library research and services for teens? I will argue that the teen-centered focus is the best approach for creating the public library research and services that can best benefit teens. With this goal in mind, I will show how we must change our thinking in order to lead the field toward a truly teen-centered approach. My intention is not to suggest the elimination of the adult-centered approach but to nudge us further into teen-centered thinking, with the goal of making the teen-centered approach the guiding perspective of library research and services for teens. In this vision, the adult-centered approach does not disappear, but it does become less of a focus, falling beneath the broader teen-centered umbrella guiding library services and research for teens.

## An Analysis of Representative Current Literature in Library Services for Teens

Before I can outline necessary changes for making the teen-centered vision a reality, I need to provide some proof of my contention that the adult-centered perspective is dominant. One way to determine the prevailing perspective of a field is to analyze its professional literature. Looking at the current LIS professional literature for teen librarians, many of the articles focus on analyzing information resources, programs, and services from the adult authors' perspectives, without gathering data or input directly from teens. As an example of how the adult-centered perspective dominates the current teen librarianship professional literature, I will analyze the most recent three complete years of articles published in *Young Adult Library Services*.

*Young Adult Library Services* is, of course, the member journal for YALSA. It is edited and run by active YALSA members, most of whom are teen librarians working in public libraries. Its writers' guidelines explain: "*Young Adult Library Services* is a vehicle for continuing education of librarians working with young adults (ages 12–18) that showcases current

research and practice relating to teen services and spotlights significant activities and programs of the division" (YALSA, 2011). Thus, the target audience of the journal is teen librarians, and the intent is to provide them with the most relevant and significant research, lessons from practice, and YALSA news and activities. It is not intended to be a research journal read by academics, but a continuing education resource for practitioners. For many teen librarians, it is their main external connection to the field of youth librarianship after completing graduate school.

I used the *Library Literature and Information Science Full Text* database to gather all of the articles published in *Young Adult Library Services* for the period 2008–2010, a total of 220 articles. I hypothesized that authors of research articles were more likely to include direct input from teens in the form of data than authors of practice-based articles. To calculate the percentage of research-focused and practice-based articles within the dataset, I defined *research* very broadly as any article that (1) included analysis of some form of data, defining data in the broad sense of any text, such as a book or website; any information collected via a survey, interview, experiment, or other data-gathering means; any information collected systematically about a library program or service, such as attendance or circulation figures, or any use of a theoretical or conceptual framework; and (2) included at least one scholarly reference. All other articles, such as descriptions and announcements of information resource awards, program reports that described programs but did not analyze program success or impacts, editorials, and so on, were considered practice articles.

I used standard qualitative content analysis techniques to analyze the main topics of the articles in the dataset, coding each article for one main topic, iteratively collapsing the emerging list of topics into broader categories until there were eight distinct topic categories for the practice-based articles and five topic categories for the research articles. In some cases, an article could have fit into two or more categories. I chose just one main category per article to simplify analysis and reporting. I used simple descriptive statistics to calculate the quantitative findings.

## Practice-Based and Research-Based Articles

Table 1.1 shows the percentages of practice and research articles in the dataset. Of the 220 articles published during the three-year period, 21 (9.5 percent) could be considered research using the very broad definition of *research* on page 36. The remaining 90.5 percent were practice-based articles. As a journal aimed at practitioners and intended partly as a vehicle for dissemination of professional association news, it makes sense that the majority of the articles were nonresearch pieces. However, this analysis indicated that teen librarians who keep up with the field only through professional journals such as this one were exposed to only a small body of the relevant research, just five to ten items per year for this particular journal during the period of analysis.

## TABLE 1.1

Practice/Research Breakdown of Articles Published in *Young Adult Library Services*, 2008–2010

| Category | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Practice (nonresearch) | 64 (91.4%**) | 53 (84.1%**) | 82 (94.3%**) | 199 (90.5%) |
| Research | 6 (8.6%**) | 10 (15.9%**) | 5 (5.7%**) | 21 (9.5%) |
| TOTAL | 70 (100%**) | 63 (100%**) | 87 (100%**) | 220 (100%) |

*Percent of total articles published for that year.

## Main Topics of Articles

Data analysis of the practice articles yielded eight main topics, as shown in Table 1.2. The most frequent main topic was "teen book/resource awards," accounting for 43 of the 199 total practice articles, or 21.6 percent. Articles falling into this category were announcements of award winners, discussions (as opposed to scholarly analyses, which were considered research) of award-winning books and other information resources, texts of teen resource award acceptance speeches, and descriptions of teen information resource awards.

## TABLE 1.2

Categories of Main Topics for Practice Articles Published in *Young Adult Library Services*, 2008–2010

| Topic | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teen book/resource awards | 18 (28.1%) | 14 (26.4%) | 11 (13.4%) | 43 (21.6%) |
| Other awards/grants | 3 (4.7%) | 4 (7.5%) | 3 (3.7%) | 10 (5.0%) |
| Programs (e.g., book clubs) and services (e.g., reference) | 9 (14.1%) | 9 (17.0%) | 15 (18.3%) | 33 (16.6%) |
| Editorials/columns/ professional advice | 10 (15.6%) | 9 (17.0%) | 8 (9.8%) | 27 (13.6%) |
| Books and other resources for teens | 7 (10.9%) | 4 (7.5%) | 7 (8.5%) | 18 (9.0%) |
| Professional books/other professional resources | 10 (15.6%) | 2 (3.8%) | 15 (18.3%) | 27 (13.6%) |
| Conferences and professional associations | 3 (4.7%) | 5 (9.4%) | 18 (22.0%) | 26 (13.1%) |
| Administration/budgeting/ advocacy/marketing/ collaboration | 4 (6.2%) | 6 (11.3%) | 5 (6.1%) | 15 (7.5%) |
| **TOTAL** | **65 (100%*)** | **53 (100%*)** | **82 (100%*)** | **199 (100%)** |

*Column does not add up to 100% due to rounding.

An additional 18 (9.0 percent) practice articles discussed "books and other resources for teens," such as bibliographic essays of recommended teen books about a particular topic or representing a particular genre. Combining the information resource awards category with the other information resources category, a total of 61 (30.7 percent) of the practice articles were discussions relating to teen information resources, most commonly fiction books. This means that nearly one-third of the practice articles focused on teen resources.

The other most common practice topics included "programs and services" (33 articles, or 16.6 percent), "editorials/columns/professional advice" (27 articles, or 13.6 percent), "professional books/other professional resources" (27 articles, or 13.6 percent), and "conferences and professional associations" (26 articles, or 13.1 percent).

Table 1.3 shows the five categories of main topics found in the research articles. Again, articles relating to teen books and other information resources accounted for the largest combined category. Together, "analyses of books and other resources for teens" (nine articles, or 42.9 percent) plus "analyses of teen book/resource awards" (two articles, or 9.5 percent) total 11 articles, or 54.4 percent of the research articles. This means that more than half of the research articles were analyses of information resources for teens. "Analyses of programs and services" was the only other research category representing more than 10 percent of the research articles.

## TABLE 1.3

Categories of Main Topics for Research Articles Published in *Young Adult Library Services*, 2008–2010

| Topic | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Analyses of teen book/ resource awards | 1 (16.7%) | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (20.0%) | 2 (9.5%) |
| Analyses of programs (e.g., book clubs) and services (e.g., reference) | 2 (33.3%) | 1 (10.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 3 (14.3%) |
| Analyses of books and other resources for teens | 2 (33.3%) | 6 (60.0%) | 1 (20.0%) | 9 (42.9%) |
| Analyses of professional books/other professional resources | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (10.0%) | (0.0%) | 1 (4.8%) |
| Analyses of teen behaviors/ health/development | 1 (16.7%) | 2 (20.0%) | 3 (60.0%) | 6 (28.6%) |
| TOTAL | 6 (100%) | 10 (100%*) | 5 (100%*) | 21 (100%*) |

*Column does not add up to 100% due to rounding.

## Teen Input Represented in Articles

Table 1.4 shows the number and percentage of practice and research articles that included some form of direct input from teens. I defined "input" as *any* mention of teens' words, thoughts, or behaviors, such as quotes from verbal conversations or e-mails, anecdotal tales of direct observation of

teen behaviors, or more formal data collected via surveys, interviews, and so on. Of the 199 practice-based articles, just four (2.0 percent) included teen input. Of the 21 research articles, just four (19.0 percent) included any data or input from teens. The hypothesis that a greater percentage of research articles than practice articles would include direct input from teens was correct, but the numbers were still very low overall. Just eight (3.6 percent) of the 220 articles in the entire dataset included any input whatsoever from teens, and again the definition of teen participation was very liberal.

## TABLE 1.4

Articles Including Teen Input Published in *Young Adult Library Services*, 2008–2010

| Category | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| *Practice articles with teen input* | 4 | 2.0% (of 199 practice articles) |
| *Research articles with teen input* | 4 | 19.0% (of 21 research articles) |
| **TOTAL ARTICLES WITH TEEN INPUT** | **8** | **3.6% (of 220 total articles)** |

*Analysis of the Teen-Centered Perspective in Articles*

The goal of this analysis was to examine whether a youth-centered or adult-centered perspective dominated in the recent teen librarianship professional literature, based on content analysis of one representative journal. The analysis showed that the most common article topic in *Young Adult Library Services* between 2008 and 2010 was a discussion or analysis of teen information resources, most often books. Only a small percentage of practice or research articles included any direct input from teens, even casual mention of one single e-mail or conversation excerpt. Again, of the 220 total articles published during this three-year period, just eight articles (3.6 percent) included any direct input from teens in the form of quotes, survey responses, interviews, e-mail communications, casual observational

data, conversations, anecdotes, and so on. The remainder of the articles (96.4 percent) were written from the adult perspective, such as bibliographic essays or reports of library programs presenting the authors' assessments of literary quality or program success. Some of these authors might have taken into account teens' opinions and viewpoints, but if so it was not discussed and readers would be unable to determine any teen input.

Thus, based on this small-scale analysis, it seems that little teen-centered work is making its way into the journal. For many teen librarians, professional journals such as this one are their main source of information about developments in the field of teen librarianship. To move to a more teen-centered approach across the field as a whole, one important step is increasing teen input in the professional writing.

I want to stress here that my purpose is *not* to criticize this journal. It reflects the prevailing perspective of its field and can only publish youth-centered work if potential authors—mainly librarians and library school faculty—write and submit youth-centered work. My point is that based on analysis of the items published in the field's member journal, very few librarians, university faculty, and others are submitting work based on teen input or research data collected from teens. Change needs to take place within the field before the professional literature can reflect it. I should note here that YALSA has recently begun a new journal devoted to publishing research, *Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*. It remains to be seen the extent to which the journal will publish a higher percentage of teen-centered research. Regardless, *Young Adult Library Services* stands as a good example of the kinds of research and professional writing that teen librarians and teen LIS researchers publish in the professional literature, and this body of work has been shown to be overwhelmingly adult-centered.

## Changing Our Thinking to a Teen-Centered Perspective

*Focus on "Teens," Not "Young Adults"*

The purpose of this book is to start a conversation about how students, practitioners, and scholars should conceptualize young adults, as well as to shape the future of library services for this population. The analysis

presented above leads me to conclude that we must change our thinking to make teens the central focus of our practice and research. To move toward a truly teen-centered approach, we need to include teens in the conversation, to include teens as much as possible in the process of designing and delivering teen library programs and services, and to make teens themselves our most frequent sources of research data.

Related to the question of what should be the central focus of today's library research and services for teens is what we should we call this population. The answer to that question comes easily for me: *teens*. A truly teen-centered approach to library research and services means replacing the term *young adult* with a term that teens understand and appreciate. We should call this population *teens* because this is a term that they understand and use. For our work to be truly user-centered, we must use, as much as possible, the language that our population identifies with and uses to describe itself.

I learned the importance of using language that teens can understand and appreciate as I have learned virtually every important lesson about teens—from a teen. Years ago I was the head of the children's and young adult departments of a medium-sized public library. A few weeks before I began my new job, the library where I worked had created a new young adult fiction section, a long wall lined with YA paperbacks perched on painted metal shelves. A neon sign above the shelves read, "Young Adult Paperbacks." One day not long after I had begun working I noticed a teenage girl staring at the sign. "What do you think of this new section?" I asked her.

She answered my question with a question: "Who are these books for? I might read some of these books, but I can't figure out who they're for."

"They're for people your age," I explained.

"Then I think you should do this," she said, removing her coat and holding it up to the sign to cover up the words "Young Adult." Now the sign read simply "Paperbacks." "It's confusing. We're not adults yet, you know," she added, shaking her head as she walked away empty-handed.

She was right, of course. *Young adult* is a term known only to librarians (and publishers) to mean "adolescents." As Aronson (2002: 82) explained: "The term YA is an odd one; it refers to no clear developmental

age group. If anything, it seems to apply to people in their 20's who are just leaving college, beginning careers, and starting families."

Cart (2010: 3) pointed out, "The amorphous part [of the term *young adult literature*] is the target audience for the literature: the young adults themselves. For it's anybody's guess who—or what—they are!" He cited YALSA's "Two Hundred Years of Young Adult Library Services History" bibliography (Bernier et al., 2010), which traced the use of the term in the professional library literature back as far as 1944.

In my many years of research with teens I have found them to voice consistent objections to the term. So why then do librarians, library researchers, and publishers use this term to refer to teens and sometimes to preteens? Pulliam (2010: 2) suggested that publishers adopted the term *young adult* in the 1960s since "the term 'adolescent' was perceived by teens as condescending and necessarily denoting immaturity." The term had to have been in use in the library field earlier, as the American Library Association's (ALA) Young Adult Services Division began in 1957 (Cart, 2010). Regardless of the specific date it entered usage in library research and practice, the intent behind adopting the term seems to have been to give teens respect as full-fledged human beings by calling them adults who just happen to be young. But teens *are* full-fledged human beings, just as babies, children, adults, and senior citizens are all full-fledged human beings, regardless of their ages. We don't have to call teens adults to lend them human legitimacy.

I choose to use the terms *teens* and *teenagers* because they are widely used and understood by both teens and adults. The teens I conduct research with also often call themselves "kids." I do use the term *kids* when speaking with teens, but I don't use the term in academic and professional writing because it is not as specific as teens or teenagers.

The point here is not the specific term that we use. It's not the actual words that matter; it's the thinking behind the use of the words that matters. In a few years or decades, the terms *teens* and *teenagers* might fall out of fashion with the target population, and they might start calling themselves something else. If that happens, I hope I'll be astute enough to pick up on the change and to adopt the new term. If we want to serve teens' best interests, we need to place them at the center of our work and

to communicate with them as partners in designing and delivering library research and services. We need to use language that they understand, and language that other adults outside of the field of librarianship understand. We must think of teens as the experts of their thoughts, behaviors, and lives, and we must use their language as much as possible to give authentic voice to this population.

Making teens the central focus in our work also means broadcasting our lessons and messages about what we have learned from teens to a wider audience than just other librarians and LIS researchers. We need to broaden the target audience for our academic and professional writing and presenting to other adults outside of the library field—to adults with influence over teens' lives and livelihoods, such as parents, guardians, teachers, informal educators (such as museum professionals and religious group leaders), government officials, program funders, and so on. We can teach these other adults about the importance of listening to teens and about the importance of respecting teen cultures.

## Focus on Teen Development

Since most developmental theories and concepts were developed based on data collected from teens as research subjects, they offer us a teen-centered basis for designing library research and services by enabling us to mold our work in ways likely to optimize developmental benefits for teens. I have argued for a number of years that public and school library services can, and should, promote teens' healthy development. Based on my research with Sandra Hughes-Hassell, I have argued that public and school libraries can and should promote teen development in seven areas: the social self, the emotional self, the reflective self, the physical self, the creative self, the cognitive self, and the sexual self (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell, 2006a). I have further argued that we need to broaden our view of the developmental benefits of public library services beyond the traditional focus on homework and leisure reading to support a much fuller range of developmental areas (Agosto, 2007, 2010).

Moving from the research literature to the professional literature, long-time teen services librarian Tuccillo (2010: 14) listed a number of benefits

of greater teen participation in program and service design and delivery, including promoting positive youth development at the community level:

*Some essential rationales for offering youth participation opportunities include the fact that they provide a catalyst for teenagers to enter adulthood as readers, learners, and library supporters; they promote reading and the library by teen participants to their adolescent peers, who in turn will hopefully also partake in what the library has to offer; they proliferate library usage by helping teens to eventually pass on their love of books and libraries to their offspring; they uphold the concept of positive youth development in our communities; and they affirm the prospect of librarianship as a career option for young people.*

These are important benefits to teens, but they are not the only benefits. We need to think of potential benefits on a much broader scale than just turning teens into more avid readers, library users, and possibly future librarians. We need to talk to teens about their goals for using library resources and services and make these our goals as well. As seen in this quote, in teen library practice the philosophy behind encouraging teen participation has been grounded in the belief that library use is inherently good, and that increased library use is the goal in itself. We need to move away from this library-centered focus to the teen-centered focus in which the goals of library services are not increased use of library services and resources but increased social, intellectual, creative, and entertainment opportunities, especially for teens with economic, educational, physical, social, cognitive, and other disadvantages.

As my past work has shown, teens turn to public libraries for much more than just information-related purposes. Public libraries commonly play three roles in teens' lives: (1) the library as information gateway, (2) the library as social interaction/entertainment space, and (3) the library as beneficial physical environment (Agosto, 2007, 2010). Moving beyond just focusing on the library as information provider to focusing on these three categories of benefits enables us to serve a much wider range of needs.

Still, the question of whether theories and concepts of youth development should drive teen library research and practice cannot be answered by simply saying "yes." Developmental theories must be viewed as general guidelines—general patterns of growth and development. They should not be viewed as exact rules outlining all teens' behaviors, nor should they be seen as immutable laws for planning library programs and services.

We must remember that a theory is a lens for looking at something, be it library services, human behaviors, or anything else. In the social sciences, theory is rarely an absolute law or an absolute truth. With respect to teens and developmental theories and concepts, we must always remember that humans are first and foremost individuals and secondly products of their environments. Teens live and grow in many environments, including cultural, socioeconomic, age-related, racial, ethnic, linguistic, and other contexts. These environments, as well as teens' individual personalities, physicalities, intellects, and life experiences, make them individuals—individuals who in some cases might not represent general developmental patterns. As helpful as developmental theories and concepts can be, they can be dangerously misleading if we accept them to the point of forgetting about basic human differences (as in the digital native discourse described below).

Thinking of developmental theories as rough guidelines, not immutable rules, means remembering that each teen, each person, is unique. Teens' needs and interests vary radically from one person to the next, and as a result, each library needs to turn to its own teen population to discover its unique needs and interests as the basis for designing library services.

As researchers, librarians, and students we stand outside as concerned—deeply concerned—adult observers, but we adults are merely interpreters of teens' thoughts, behaviors, preferences, and needs, as well as designers and promoters of the research and services that can identify and fulfill them. This means that we must constantly talk to teens via formal and informal avenues to follow changes in how they think, behave, and interact—not how adults *expect* them to think, behave, and interact.

Indeed, Kunzel and Hardesty (2006: 5) explained that in the public library teen-centered approach to practice, program and service design should begin with asking teens for ideas:

*Teen-centered means that the first point of reference for every decision and plan and action is teens' longings and desires and interests, stated and unstated. Teen-centered means going to the source—asking teens questions and listening—and then putting the answers to work.*

Now a cautionary note: We stand as adult outsiders looking into the teen world, but as librarians and researchers who work with teens, we must be careful not to create an "us versus them" narrative, a "teens are different than we are" attitude. Sure, teens are members of distinct youth cultures, but teens are people first and youth second. Perhaps nowhere is this dangerous "us versus them" narrative more prevalent than in the digital natives (Prensky, 2001) discourse. This discourse is not the sole purview of the library field, but it has taken a strong hold in library research and practice (see Biladeau, 2009; Gilmore-See, 2007; Harris, 2009; Ojala, 2008). Yes, those with more experience online tend to be more advanced, more comfortable technology users. However, these advanced digital skills are largely results of the effects not of *age* but of the *information age*. We must be careful to challenge the widely accepted digital natives view of all teens as technology experts and enthusiasts because it simply doesn't hold true for all teens (Agosto and Abbas, 2010). Similarly, media portrayals often lump teens into one big group—often one big troublesome group (Bernier, 2011). These portrayals are dangerous stereotypes that we must challenge while promoting awareness that teens are individuals first and members of their age group second.

## Focus on Teens over Information Resources

The monolithic digital natives view of all teens as technology enthusiasts and digital whizzes is largely a resource-centered view: it defines teens by the resources that they use. In the field of library services much of the scholarly and professional writing has taken a similar resource-centered view, most commonly a YA literature-centered view. In the professional literature analysis presented at the beginning of this chapter, for example, by far the most common article topic was teen information resources, particularly books. Certainly it is legitimate and important for LIS students and librarians to

be familiar with the wide range of books and other information resources available to today's teens, but it's not enough as a human-centered field for us to focus on literary quality, or on analyzing information resources to identify the "best" ones. Focusing on teens and their information needs first, and on the kinds of resources that can fulfill those needs second, arms librarians, LIS students, and researchers with longer-lasting knowledge that they can apply for decades to come as they work with teens.

From an educational standpoint, LIS educators should focus first on teaching students about teen information needs and behaviors. After students understand the kinds of needs that information resources can fulfill for teens, we can then use specific information resources (everything from print novels to social network sites to online newspapers to video games) to show how these resources can fulfill teens' needs. We need to remember that books and other information resources are not just creative works to be appreciated for their literary and artistic qualities, but tools for meeting teens' varying needs and interests. Popular titles will come and go, but teens' needs and interests are more static. Thinking about information resources from the teen-centered perspective equips us to better serve teens and to serve them for the longer term.

## Conclusion

Going back to the question of what should be the central focus of today's library research and services for teens, I want to repeat the major themes that I have discussed in this chapter. First, moving toward a truly teen-centered perspective means respecting teens as the experts of their own thoughts, behaviors, preferences, and needs. This means including teens as research participants, as partners in library services design, and basing teen library services on research that gathers data directly from teens. Second, developmental concepts and theories continue to be useful for providing general lenses and explanations of teen behaviors, but they must be seen as general guidelines within which there is wide individual variance. Teens are individuals first and members of their age groups second. We must recognize, respect, and honor individual differences and avoid stereotypes. Third, we need to approach our study of information resources for teens

not with the goal of determining the "best" resources from a literary and artistic standpoint but with the goal of learning how resources can best fulfill teens' needs and interests.

Based on the small-scale analysis discussed above, it seems the adult-centered perspective dominates the current professional writing, as just 3.6 percent of the articles analyzed included any type of teen input, from direct teen input in the form of casual verbal feedback on library programs and services to service design based on teen-centered research. Placing teens more squarely at the center of research and practice can be fairly simple, such as incorporating teen input into analyses of YA literature via focus groups, online literature circles, and other conversations with teens, or designing library programs based on research into teens' information needs, uses, and behaviors. Of course, more teen-centered research is needed in the first place to enable librarians to build programs around it, and teen services librarians need more exposure to the teen-centered research that is being conducted. This is one way that professional journal editors can help to move the field more toward the teen-centered perspective—by publishing brief reports and discussions of the practical applications of this research.

Again, it is important to point out the limitations of the small-scale study presented in this chapter. I examined only one of several journals that publish professional literature relating to library services for teens. Much of this work is also disseminated via books, blogs, and other venues, none of which were included in the analysis. Further, the analysis covered just three years and therefore did not afford historical analysis or examination of trends over time. Future investigations could examine a wider range of publication venues and longer time periods. Even more useful would be the examination of library school curricula to determine the extent to which the teen-centered approach is presented in course topics and readings. The examination could consider questions such as the following:

- To what extent do courses across institutions address library services and research from a teen-centered focus?
- To what extent do they present a literature-centered approach?
- How many institutions offer courses in teen information needs and behaviors? In youth development?

An understanding of prevailing educational approaches could lead to additional suggestions for moving the field more toward the teen-centered approach advocated throughout this chapter.

The good news is that, based on the most recent version of "YALSA's Competencies for Librarians Serving Youth," YALSA (2010) at least is advocating a more teen-centered focus. Six of the seven areas of competencies mention at least briefly the importance of including teens in designing library services. As Flowers (2011: 14) interpreted the competencies: "Youth participation in library decision-making is important as a means of achieving more responsive and effective library and information services for this age group." If we keep in mind the important underlying concepts of individuality, teens as the experts of teen cultures and needs, and an emphasis on teens over information resources as the central focus of the field, we can follow this important movement toward more teen-centered library services for teens and take fuller advantage of our potential for improving teens' lives.

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