

The Female-Friendly Public Library: Gender Differences in Adolescents' Uses and Perceptions of U.S. Public Libraries

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ABSTRACT

This article reports the results of a written survey of ninety-seven female and male adolescents, ages fourteen through seventeen, at two U.S. public libraries. In addition to exploring gender-related variance in the reasons for which teenagers use public libraries, the survey investigated how frequently the respondents needed information relating to twelve major topic areas and how useful they considered public libraries in helping them to find information relating to these topics. For the most part, the results indicated no significant gender difference in the respondents' reasons for using libraries or in their frequency of information needs. The only major gender difference was the girls' tendency to rate libraries as more useful in helping them to meet their personal information needs, making public libraries "female-friendly spaces" for adolescent girls. The authors conclude with suggestions for helping both female and male adolescents realize the full potential of public libraries and public library services.

INTRODUCTION

Do girls and boys choose to use public libraries for the same reasons? Are there differences in the kinds of information that girls and boys look for at public libraries? While the effects of gender on youth behavior has been an area of considerable interest in related disciplines, such as education (e.g., Klein, 2004; Volman & Van Eck, 2001) and computer science (e.g., Countryman, Feldman, Kekelis, & Spertus, 2002; DeKeuster, Walter, Colar, & Holcomb, 2005), it has received surprisingly little attention in library and information science (LIS) research. As a result, we are unable

to answer many of these kinds of questions relating to youth, gender, and libraries. This article will review the existing body of LIS research relating to gender and youth. It will also report the results of a recent survey of teens' public library behaviors and perceptions, focusing on gender-related variance and offering suggestions for librarians who want to make their libraries friendlier and more useful to adolescent girls and boys.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the early 1990s, Burdick (1994) reviewed the major findings of education research into gender and learning and called for LIS researchers to examine these issues in library environments. However, few researchers have responded to her call.

Gender, Youth, and Computers

Most of the LIS researchers who have done work in this area have focused on gender, youth, and computer uses and attitudes. Many of these studies have investigated the computing gender gap, the idea that girls use computers less than boys and exhibit less positive attitudes toward computers. Major related LIS findings include evidence that this gap has largely diminished, with the exception of computer gaming (e.g., Agosto, 2004; Jakobsdottir, Jonsdottir, & Hjartarson, 2004; Leong & Hawamdeh, 1999), and suggest methods for encouraging girls to become more comfortable with computers (e.g., Dobosenski, 2001; Jacobson, 1991, 1994).

Other LIS researchers interested in gender, youth, and information technology have focused on gender-based differences in online searching behaviors. Major findings include boys' tendency to browse more quickly when searching online, and boys' tendency to follow more hyperlinks than girls (Large, Beheshti, & Rahman, 2002; Schacter, Chung, & Dorr, 1998).

Still other LIS researchers have focused on variance in girls' and boys' preferences in evaluating digital information resources. These studies indicate that girls place more value on graphic (visual) content than boys (Agosto, 2004; Fidel et al., 1999; Hirsh, 1999) and that boys are more likely to use more technologically complex language to discuss computers than girls, even though girls and boys hold equal interest in computing (Enochsson, 2005).

Gender, Youth, and Libraries

Of more interest to the current project are LIS studies of gender, youth, and library use and attitudes. In the earliest such study, Jacobson (1991) examined female and male high school seniors' library use anxiety, computer use anxiety, and anxiety in using library computers for research. She concluded that the library "seems to be a 'friendlier' environment for girls" (p. 275).

Five years later, Burdick (1996, 1997) studied the impact of gender on the information-seeking processes of 103 high school students in a school

library media center. She found limited behavioral variance by gender. The only two areas of significant difference were students' preferred research topics, and their affective judgment of the research process, with the girls being more emotionally connected to their projects than the boys.

Gross, Dresang, and Holt (2004) also found no identifiable patterns of behavioral variance by gender in their study of children's computer use at three urban public library branches. Although their study did detect some minor gender-based variance at each of the branches, across the three branches the data showed girls and boys to use library computers for the same three most frequent reasons: gaming, chat, and e-mail, and at basically the same preference levels for both girls and boys.

Most recently, Cook, Parker, and Pettijohn (2005) found a gender-based difference in public library attitudes that reinforced Jacobson's (1991) earlier study of school library attitudes. The authors showed that:

Along with age differences in library use, there were also differences in the perceptions of the public library based upon one's gender. Females were much more inclined to rate the services of the library higher than were males. This was particularly true for rated statements such as: I like to go to the library; I like to check out books; People who work at the library are nice to me; I would go to teen activities at the library; I like the way the library looks; and I like the restaurants at the library. (p. 159)

While these studies provide a preliminary look at the kinds of things girls and boys do at libraries, such as using computers for gaming, chat, and e-mail, they do not explain why girls and boys go to public libraries in the first place, nor do they show us the specific kinds of information that youth seek when they turn to libraries as information sources. The current study attempted to fill these research gaps and to create a more complete picture of the role of gender in adolescents' public library uses and attitudes.

METHODOLOGY

Keeping these earlier studies of gender, youth, and library use in mind, we designed a written survey to investigate the influence of gender on teens' public library uses and perceptions. The survey was divided into three parts. Part 1 asked a series of basic demographic questions concerning age, biological sex, frequency of public library use, frequency of school library use, and the availability of home computer access. Part 2 asked three open-ended questions: "Why did you come to the library today?" "What kinds of information do you look for at the library?" and "What kinds of information do you need that you can't find at the library?"

Part 3 of the survey was based on Agosto and Hughes-Hassell's (2005) research into urban teens' everyday life information-seeking behaviors. Using a variety of qualitative research methods, Agosto and Hughes-

Hassell found that the twelve categories for which urban teens most frequently need information to support their everyday lives are: schoolwork, times or dates, social life and leisure activities, weather, daily life routine, popular culture, current events, transportation, personal finances, consumer information, personal improvement, and job information. The survey presented a four-point Likert scale and asked respondents to rate the frequency with which they needed each of these twelve types of information, as well as to rate the usefulness of the public library in providing information relating to each of these topics. Part 3 of the survey also included brief explanations of each of these twelve types of information.

The Libraries and Their Communities

Two public libraries participated in this project, the Elizabeth Public Library, located in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and the Sellers Library, located in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania. The young adult (YA) librarians at each library oversaw survey administration. Each library received fifty copies of the survey to distribute to teen patrons aged fourteen through seventeen on a first-come, first-serve basis. Each interested teen was offered a candy bar to encourage her/him to fill out a survey.

Both of these libraries are located in densely populated areas, within close proximity of large cities. The Elizabeth Public Library serves a population of 120,568 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000) and has a widely diverse population. Most notably, the population is 49.5 percent Hispanic/Latino and 20.0 percent African American. Elizabeth has a substantial immigrant population, with 43.9 percent being foreign born, and with more than two-thirds (67.5 percent) speaking a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The median annual household income is \$35,175—16.2 percent lower than the \$41,994 national average. The library employs a full-time librarian who supervises adult and teen services, and it has a separate YA collection and room. It offers a wide variety of YA programs and activities, such as an anime club, an annual teen art show, a teen literary magazine, teen movie showings, a teen book discussion group, a teen advisory council, YA author visits, and more.

The Sellers Library serves a more typical suburban population of 81,821 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The population is about three-quarters white (77.3 percent), 11.3 percent African American, and 8.9 percent Asian. Only 1.6 percent are Hispanic/Latino. The population is 13.9 percent foreign born, which is only slightly higher than the 11.1 percent national average. About 17.5 percent speak a language other than English at home, which is roughly equivalent to the national average (17.9 percent) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The median annual household income is \$41,489—just 1.2 percent lower than the \$41,994 national average. The Sellers Library has a separate young adult collection located within the children's department, and it employs a full-time young adult librarian.

The library offers a wealth of young adult programs and activities, such as a YA book group, a teen advisory board, a knitting club, a teen blog, monopoly and other game tournaments, a trading card game club, and a comic/manga club.

Data Analysis

The open-ended questions were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the most common method for analyzing qualitative data. Chi-square analysis was used to determine whether any statistically significant gender effects existed at the $p \leq .05$ level for each of the Likert-type questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the one hundred surveys, ninety-seven usable surveys were returned, for a 97 percent return rate. Although the two libraries serve somewhat different populations, the most notable difference being the large immigrant population in Elizabeth, there was very little overall difference in the responses of the two groups of teens by location. As the analysis of gender-based variance was the goal of this project, discussion of the results will focus on gender-related effects rather than on any possible geographic-based differences.

Part 1: Basic Demographic Information

Of the ninety-seven respondents, fifty four (55.7 percent) were female, and forty-three (44.3 percent) were male. As mentioned above, participation was limited to teens, ages fourteen through seventeen. The respondents tended to fall on the younger side of this range. Table 1: Respondents by Age, Girls and Table 2: Respondents by Age, Boys indicate the number and percentage of respondents by sex and age.

The respondents were asked to rate their frequency of public and school library use on a four-point Likert scale ("about once a week," "about once a month," "a few times a year," and "almost never"). There were no statistically significant differences between the girls' and boys' responses, although both the girls and the boys indicated much higher levels of public library use, and at statistically significant levels. (For frequency of public library use, Chi-square = 1.05, $p \leq 1$, $df = 3$. For frequency of school library use, Chi-square = 2.38, $p \leq 1$, $df = 3$.) Table 3 and Table 4 show the numbers and percentages of each response.

According to chi-square analysis (girls: Chi-square = 34.17; $p \leq .001$, $df = 3$; boys: Chi-square = 26.97; $p \leq .001$, $df = 3$), there was a very strong statistically significant difference in both the girls' and the boys' greater frequency of public library use than school library use. This preference for public libraries makes sense considering that the surveys were administered in public library environments, meaning that respondents were likely higher-than-average public library users.

Table 1. Respondents by Age—Girls

Age	GIRLS	
	Number	Percent
14	22	40.7%
15	10	18.5%
16	14	25.9%
17	8	14.8%

Table 2. Respondents by Age—Boys

Age	BOYS	
	Number	Percent
14	18	41.9%
15	10	23.3%
16	6	14.0%
17	9	20.9%

Nonetheless, we must be careful not to read too much into the answers regarding the frequency of public and school library use, as survey respondents generally find it difficult to estimate how frequently they engage in a particular behavior. Instead of taking the responses at face value, as in assuming that a teen who responded “about once a week” actually does visit a public library roughly once a week, these results should be viewed as relative frequencies. That is, respondents selecting “about once a week” view themselves as relatively heavy library users, whereas those selecting “almost never” view themselves as relatively infrequent library users, regardless of the actual frequency of use. Thus, the respondents viewed themselves as generally frequent public library users, and as generally much less frequent school library users.

The final basic demographic question asked respondents to indicate whether or not they had access to a computer at home. Of the girls, forty-two (77.8 percent) indicated that they had access, as did thirty-four boys (79.1 percent). This minimal 1.3 percent difference in access to home computers by gender adds support to the increasing cross-disciplinary evidence indicating that the long-standing computer gender gap, which meant that girls had less access to computers and typically spent less time using them, has now largely diminished (e.g., Jakobsdottir et al., 2004; Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 1999; Volman & Van Eck, 2001). Of course, equal access does not guarantee equal encouragement by family members, teachers, and librarians, or even that girls and boys use computers to accomplish the same types of tasks.

Part 2: Open-Ended Questions

Participants' responses to the question “Why did you come to the library today?” proved to be some of the most interesting data collected. Often a respondent would indicate more than one reason for visiting the library that day, such as “For a TAB [Teen Advisory Board] meeting and [for] borrowing books.” Analysis of the responses led to the creation of a coding scheme of the various library use reasons, and a model of these reasons was created from the coding scheme. As Figure 1 shows, the model includes three major roles of the public library in teens' lives: the library as information gateway, the library as social interaction/entertainment space, and the library as beneficial physical environment.

Table 3. Frequency of Public Library Use

Response	Girls		Boys	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
about once a week	37	68.5%	30	69.8%
about once a month	9	16.7%	5	11.6%
a few times a year	7	13.0%	6	14.0%
almost never	1	1.9%	2	4.7%

Table 4. Frequency of School Library Use

Response	Girls		Boys	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
about once a week	9	16.7%	8	18.6%
about once a month	18	33.3%	9	20.9%
a few times a year	10	18.5%	8	18.6%
almost never	17	31.5%	18	41.9%

Both the girls and the boys indicated that the library played all three of these major roles in their lives, although at somewhat different levels, as indicated in Table 5, with the girls using the libraries the most frequently as information gateways, and the boys using the libraries the most frequently for social interaction/entertainment space. This reflects the boys' very frequent indication that they had gone to the library to participate in a social/entertainment event, such as to attend a library club meeting or to play computer games. However, according to Chi-square analysis, this difference by gender is not statistically significant (Chi-square = 4.26, $p \leq .20$, $df = 2$).

In their study of teen use of public libraries, Bishop and Bauer (2002) found most adolescents use the library as a place to find information: "The majority of the teens said they came to the library to study, to do assignments, and to use the Internet" (p. 41). When using the public library as an information gateway, the respondents of the current study used their libraries in similar ways, checking out and returning books, using library computers to look for homework-related and personal-interest information, reading books and magazines, doing homework, and seeking homework assistance. For example, one of the girls wrote, "I'm babysitting. I came to check out books," presumably to read to her young charges. Another girl went to the library "to look up photos of Hayden Christensen." One of the boys wrote that he wanted "to get information off the computer," although he did not indicate the purpose of his information gathering.

For this group of teens, the libraries served almost as frequently as space for social interaction and entertainment as a place to seek information. Common activities for which the libraries served in this capacity included participating in library club meetings, attending library programs

LIBRARY AS INFORMATION GATEWAY

- For information related to unspecified needs
- For information related to personal interests/needs
- For information related to school work

LIBRARY AS SOCIAL INTERACTION/ENTERTAINMENT SPACE

- For organized entertainment
- For interaction with peers
- For unorganized entertainment
- For interaction with library staff

LIBRARY AS BENEFICIAL PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- For refuge
- For community improvement
- For personal improvement
- For financial support

Figure 1. The Role of the Public Library in Teens' Everyday Lives

and shows, socializing with friends, trying to make new friends, meeting with boyfriends or girlfriends, playing computer games, and visiting library employees. As one of the girls wrote, she went to the library "cuz [sic] I wanted to see my boyfriend and talk to my friends." Another one of the girls replied, "I came to the library today so that I can have fun and meet new people."

Although the library as a facilitator of social interaction and as a place for entertainment might appear to be two separate roles, it was impossible to separate them. For example, one girl wrote that she came "for manga club." Her desire to participate in the club was most likely motivated both by enjoyment of manga and by enjoyment of social interaction with the other club members as well.

Perhaps the most surprising of these three major roles of the public library is the library as a beneficial physical environment. Some of the teens who used the library in this way viewed it as a place of refuge, either from a dangerous home or neighborhood environment, or from the higher noise levels of home and of public places. Still other respondents used the library for personal improvement, as in a place to gain personal knowledge or in order to please one's parents/guardians. As one of the girls wrote, "I came to the library today because my mom thinks it's a good idea that me and my sister read during the summer and stay out of trouble." Another wrote that she had gone to the library that day "to improve my reading and communication skills." One of the boys explained that he "love[s] to read and loves the library. It is a quiet place to get away from family."

The final two open-ended questions asked the kinds of information that the respondents look for at the library and the kinds of information that they are unable to locate there. The respondents listed a number of

Table 5. Purpose for Visits by Sex

Response	Girls (N = 99)		Boys (N = 64)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
information gateway	57	57.6%	28	43.8%
social interaction/ entertainment space	32	32.3%	31	48.4%
beneficial environment	10	10.1%	5	7.8%

specific topic areas of interest. These areas of interest tended to be more specific than Agosto and Hughes-Hassell's (2005) twelve categories of information need. Table 6 lists the five most frequently mentioned types of information by sex, in order from most frequently to least frequently listed. The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times each was given.

Three of the topics appear on both the girls' and the boys' mostly frequently needed lists: information for school projects, popular fiction/recent fiction, and history. The girls' list also includes comic books/anime/manga and paranormal phenomena/mythical creatures. The boys' list also includes computer game codes and biographies/information about specific people. The boys' greater interest in computer game codes reflects findings from other studies that have shown boys to express greater interest in computer games than girls (e.g., Inkpen et. al., 1994; Roberts et. al., 1999).

As for the types of information that they felt the library could not provide, forty-three girls (79.6 percent) and thirty-three boys (76.7 percent) indicated that there were no such types of information, meaning that more than three-fourths of both the female and the male respondents identified no topics for which they had difficulty finding information at their libraries. For the girls, only three topics were mentioned more than once (popular culture, information for school projects, and animals), and for the boys, no topics were mentioned more than once.

Part 3: Information Needs and Library Usefulness

This section asked the respondents to rate the twelve areas of everyday life information need (schoolwork, times or dates, social life and leisure activities, weather, daily life routine, popular culture, current events, transportation, personal finances, consumer information, personal improvement, and job information) on a four-point Likert scale: "often need," "sometimes need," "rarely need," and "never need." It also asked the respondents to rate library usefulness in helping them to find information about these topics, also using a four-point Likert scale: "very useful," "useful," "a little bit useful," and "not useful at all." Chi-squares were calculated for each of the twenty-four total questions to determine if statistically significant differences existed between the girls' and the boys' responses.

Table 6. Most Frequently Mentioned Types of Information Looked for at the Library

Girls' Topics	Boys' Topics
1. information for school projects (22)	1. information for school projects (15)
2. popular fiction/recent fiction (15)	2. popular fiction/recent fiction (6)
3. history (6)	3. computer game codes (3)
4. comic books/anime/manga (4)	4. biographies/information about specific people (2)
5. paranormal phenomena/ mythical creatures (4)	5. history (2)

None of the twelve questions relating to the frequency of information needs resulted in a statistically significant gender-related difference.¹ However, it is interesting to compare the two groups' areas of most and least frequent information needs. (See Table 7: Most Frequent Information Needs Topics and Table 8: Least Frequent Information Needs Topics.)

Three of the four most frequently needed types of information (schoolwork, current events, and popular culture) appear on both the girls' and the boys' lists. Interestingly, the two items that appear on just one list seem to echo traditional gender stereotypes. Personal improvement, which appears only on the girls' top list, seems reminiscent of the long-standing cultural positioning of females as the moral role models in a family, with the mother modeling "goodness" (morality, kindness, etc.) for her children (Eagly, 1987). Job information, which appears only on the boys' list, seems reminiscent of the long-standing cultural positioning of males as the economic providers for a family, with the father being responsible for the family's financial support (Eagly, 1987). However, it is impossible to determine any contextual reasons for the variance in the two lists based on the type of data collected, leaving these issues for future exploration.

Three of the four information needs identified as the hardest to fulfill at the libraries also appeared on both the girls' and the boys' lists: transportation, daily life routine, and personal finances. The girls' unique topic was weather, which does not seem to reflect traditional gender stereotypes. The boys' unique topic, social life and leisure activities, seems to contradict the traditional view of females as more social than males (Eagly, 1987). Again, the contextual causes of the variance cannot be determined from the available data.

Gender differences were much more pronounced when it came to rating library usefulness. The girls tended to rate the libraries as more useful in providing information, even for topics that they rated as relatively infrequent information needs. Chi-square analysis of the girls' twelve combined ratings of library usefulness compared to the boys' twelve combined usefulness ratings proved statistically significant (Chi-square = 35.21, $p \leq .001$, $df = 3$).

Table 7. Most Frequent Information Needs Topics

Girls' Most Frequent Information Needs	Boys' Most Frequent Information Needs
1. schoolwork	1. current events
2. personal improvement	2. schoolwork
3. current events	3. job information
4. popular culture	4. popular culture

Table 8. Least Frequent Information Needs Topics

Girls' Least Frequent Information Needs	Boys' Least Frequent Information Needs
1. transportation	1. daily life routine
2. daily life routine	2. social life and leisure activities
3. personal finances	3. personal finances
4. weather	4. transportation

Table 9: Library Most Useful and Table 10: Library Least Useful present the topics for which the girls and the boys rated the libraries as the most or least useful in providing information.

Surprisingly, the topics for which the girls and boys rated the libraries as the most useful are identical, as are the order of their rankings. These four topics are: schoolwork, current events, times or dates, and job information.

The three of the four topics for which the respondents rated their libraries as the least useful are also identical in content and ranked order: daily life routine, consumer information, and social life and leisure activities. The girls' unique topic was transportation, and the boys' was personal finances. Of these five topics, daily life routine, which includes everyday information needs such as how to cook dinner or how to decide what to wear to school, is probably the hardest for a library to provide related information. Libraries can be excellent resources for the other four topics, however. Public librarians should try to strengthen their YA collections and resources as much as possible in these topic areas, and to promote their libraries as able to serve the full range of teens' information needs, as opposed to just their schoolwork and leisure reading needs.

Limitations

While this study yielded a great deal of useful information, a number of limitations restrict the generalizability of the findings. Most significantly, the respondents were already in public libraries at the time of the study, meaning that the survey only reached teens who actually use public libraries. Had the surveys been distributed at another location, such as a shopping mall or a school, the responses would likely vary. Therefore, it must be understood that these findings refer to teens who are public library users, not to the larger general population of teens.

Table 9. Library Most Useful

Library Most Useful—Girls	Library Most Useful—Boys
1. schoolwork	1. schoolwork
2. current events	2. current events
3. times or dates	3. times or dates
4. job information	4. job information

Table 10. Library Least Useful

Library Least Useful—Girls	Library Least Useful—Boys
1. daily life routine	1. daily life routine
2. consumer information	2. consumer information
3. social life and leisure activities	3. social life and leisure activities
4. transportation	4. personal finances

The sample was also a convenience sample, not a random sample, or even a purposive sample. So even within the population of teens who do use the library, the respondents were teens who trusted libraries and library staff enough to participate in an organized library activity (the survey). Thus, it is likely that the teens who chose to complete the surveys put greater trust in the library than the larger population of teen public library users, and it is likely that the responding teens are also teens who are more likely to participate in other library activities, such as clubs and advisory boards, than the average teen public library user.

Finally, the two libraries used for this study have extremely active YA programs and services. Had the study been conducted in libraries that less actively cater to teens, it is likely that the respondents would have expressed less positive opinions about them and less interest in participating in library groups and events.

CONCLUSION

As Burdick (1996, 1997) found in her studies of high school students' use of school library media centers, this study shows that there are more similarities between adolescent girls' and boys' perceptions and uses of public libraries than there are differences. Perhaps most significantly, public libraries played the same three key roles in the girls' and boys' lives, serving as information gateways, as social interaction/entertainment space, and as beneficial physical environments.

The Multiple Roles of Public Libraries

Although the library as provider of information is the most traditional view of the role of the public library in people's lives, this study suggests that this is but one of the three most significant roles of the public library. With the ever-increasing popularity of the Internet and its many informa-

tion services, such as Google (www.google.com) or the InfoPlease Homework Center (<http://www.infoplease.com/homework/>), some people, both within and outside of librarianship, have questioned the ongoing viability of the brick-and-mortar public library. These results show that physical libraries fulfill social, entertainment, and security needs. That is, the library as a physical space still plays important roles in many teens' lives, roles that cannot be filled by the Internet, with its indeterminate physical space. YA librarians need to be aware of these other roles and to promote their libraries accordingly.

Gender-Related Findings

The most significant gender-based difference in this study proved to be the girls' more positive view of the libraries' success in meeting their information needs. In addition to rating the libraries as significantly more helpful in meeting their information needs, the girls also wrote many more positive comments about the libraries when explaining the reasons for their visits. For example, one girl wrote that she was "addicted to reading and to the library." Another wrote that she "love[s] all the fun programs" at the library. This finding strengthens Jacobson's (1991) claim that school libraries are "friendlier" to girls, and Cook et al.'s (2005) finding that teenage girls tend to express more positive views of public libraries than do boys. It is good that libraries are seen as friendly places for girls, as girls need public places where they can feel comfortable, welcome, and confident.

On the other hand, this finding might also reflect the pancultural stereotype of the ideal female as being more agreeable than the ideal male (e.g., Williams, Satterwhite, & Best, 1999). Perhaps girls are culturally conditioned to rate agencies and organizations, such as public libraries, more positively than boys. Regardless of the possible social context of this finding, it is clear that adolescent girls tend to express more positive views of public libraries than adolescent boys.

Implications for Library Services

What does all of this mean for librarians who want to make their libraries equally beneficial to both girls and boys? Keeping in mind the one most significant difference in female and male perception of libraries, youth librarians need to be aware that their male population likely views the library as less efficacious in meeting their information needs. Targeted programming might help to mitigate this perception, such as a computer gaming club (as the boys indicated much more interest in computer gaming at the library than did the girls), or a father-son book club. Also important is making males more visible presences in our public libraries. The most recent statistics available indicate that U.S. librarians are over 82 percent female (Lynch, Tordella, & Godfrey, 2004). As a consequence, it is possible that boys tend to view libraries as "female spaces," or at least as more "female friendly" than "male friendly." Encouraging male teens

to volunteer in visible library roles, such as programming assistance and homework help, can work to counteract this perception, as can recruiting male program presenters and library club coordinators.

Above all, youth librarians need to strive to serve girls' and boys' interests equally, and to promote the happy, healthy development of all young people, regardless of biological sex.

NOTES

1. The relatively limited four-point scale might have slightly reduced the likelihood of finding statistical differences between the girls' and boys' responses. However, pretesting showed teens to find a wider scale confusing, and pretesting participants strongly recommended a simplified scale.

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