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“It Is Silly to Hide Your Most Active Patrons”: Exploring User Participation of Library Space Designs for Young Adults in the United States

Anthony Bernier, Mike Males, and Collin Rickman

ABSTRACT

This article advances the first attempt to collect and examine empirical data on young adult (YA) spaces in public libraries from institutions across the United States by surveying current practices in new and renovated buildings. Analysis of an online survey of 257 library and information science (LIS) professionals produced an innovative Youth Participation Index (YPI) used to document the relative intensities of youth involvement in the design and execution of YA spaces. Libraries claiming higher levels of youth participation reported significant quality service improvements across a wide range of outcomes. However, after several decades of advocating for youth involvement in the delivery of library services from many LIS sources, only a minority of the libraries surveyed reported high YPI scores, and the specific mechanisms for enacting youth involvement require further investigation.

Young adults (teenagers) constitute nearly 25 percent of public library users,¹ yet library and information science (LIS) continues to mount weak research on how best to structure and administer service to this population.² Library buildings, like all public spaces, represent and manifest community ideals about who counts and what activities matter. Libraries are commonly linked to notions of democratic space within a shared

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1. This is the most frequent estimate of YA library patronage (see Nichols and Nichols 1998; Jones, Gorman, and Suellentrop 2004, xv; and Becker et al. 2011).

2. For the purposes of this study, “young adults” (YAs) refers to library users and potential users conventionally recognized by library and information science as ages 12–18. Other references to “teenagers” and “young people” are used synonymously.

and negotiated cultural realm. American libraries in particular trumpet broad, open democratic access.

With respect to young people, however, the ideal often fails to mirror practice. The presumption that young people should be included in the community's civic life lies at the heart of the present assessment, and it is a value libraries have endorsed and should be held accountable for implementing. However, due in large part to long-prevailing institutional preoccupation with collections, library legacy practice has largely conflated the concept of "young adult space" with mere housing, shelving, and access to print materials for young adults.³ Even marquee American YA spaces in the Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Chicago public libraries simply reassigned YA service functions to previously underutilized space (Noah and Brickman 2004). These practices illustrate that LIS systematically produces and tolerates many barriers to the YA experience.⁴

Yet the consequences of this marginalization (including underutilized resources and negative youth perceptions of libraries) are widely interpreted as youthful apathy and antipathy (Hill and Pain 1988; Fisher 2003; Cook, Parker, and Pettijohn 2005; Howard 2011). As Lynn Cockett (1998, 176) observed, "Inviting young people to a library that is architecturally not prepared to handle normal adolescent behavior can have some pretty negative consequences." Indeed, a major barrier to service is that prejudicial assumptions surrounding adolescents, not research, govern understanding of what "normal adolescent behavior" means. Classic Carnegie buildings were bifurcated into "sides," one for children, one for adults, with YAs neglected as neither or both. While there is evidence of some change, many new library buildings frequently do little more. As a result, young people have experienced libraries "as aristocratic, authoritarian, unfriendly and unresponsive" (Rubin 2004, 46).

The historic ambivalence of LIS to YAs contributes to the field's lack of a broader research tradition about this service population, particularly in the United States. In her seminal historical review of youth services research, Christine A. Jenkins (2000, 119) pointed out: "If . . . library programs and services for children is insufficiently studied . . . programs and services for young adults is nearly nonexistent." This lack of research extends to notions of YA spaces in public libraries despite this topic's rising popularity among practitioners over the past twelve years.

3. Commonly YA collections represent a meager allocation of shelf space within or adjacent to children's sections or on repurposed paperback racks, with the YA magazine collection in the children's section or interfiled with adult magazines. For all the profession's claims to be making materials accessible, such ad hoc practices have existed unexamined for decades.

4. Nor does this marginalization represent a new service barrier. Historically LIS has not deemed young adults entitled to space of their own or an equitable share of common library environments, nor has it produced research on the connections between YAs and space. For important historical texts focused on YA services that omit treatments of YA spaces, see Broderick (1977), Rogers (1979), LiBretto (1983), Chelton and Rosinia (1993), and Edwards (2002). For more recent documentation, see Bernier (1998), Glick (2000), Chelton (2001, 2002), and Harden and Huggins (2004).

Lacking YA spatial knowledge, libraries commonly design and enact space largely in ignorance of what constitutes normal and appropriate YA public behavior. The consequences of these institutional deficits are that libraries inadvertently create what Bernier (1998, 2003) has described elsewhere as a “Geography of No!” Libraries create spaces in which youth are told “no” for doing or wanting things that may be entirely appropriate for young people, such as sitting convivially in small groups, and they variously enforce a wide variety of prohibitions: one-to-a-chair policies, snacks, “saggy” pants, baseball caps, cell phone use, and certain other modes of expression.

However, the poor research base also offers new and rich possibilities for LIS researchers to raise library awareness about spatial equity for YAs. With little scholarly research upon which to ground claims of “best practice,” “models,” or even “guidelines,”⁵ this article develops and examines empirical data from libraries across the United States on their current YA spatial practices. It inquires into the presumed service barriers for young people by collecting and examining the largest and broadest collection of data on YA spaces in libraries to yet appear in LIS literature.

This study assembled a “Youth Participation Index” (YPI) for new and renovated facilities that reflects the role of youth participation in the design and execution of YA space in public libraries. The core questions are these: What YA space practices and patterns appear in the new and renovated buildings, and what service outcomes do YA professionals in the United States report as a consequence?

The article addresses a range of subquestions as well. What do library leaders need to know to achieve successful YA spaces? To what degree do appropriate YA spaces add value to library service profiles? What attitudes and concerns do professionals exhibit about YA spaces? What factors improve library spaces? How can libraries balance young peoples’ needs to develop social capital in public space with libraries’ general needs to provide service? This article, the product of a three-year US federal government Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) National Leadership grant,⁶ examines these questions in an effort not merely to advance scholarly outcomes but also to pursue a larger conceptual inquiry: How can libraries offer spatial equity for young people?

With input from library professionals in more than 250 of the newest and most recently renovated facilities in the United States, the contributions of youth participation in designing and executing greater YA space equity emerge clearly. High levels of youth participation were strongly connected to a range of positive outcomes, including staff satisfaction, service quality, larger YA spaces, funding opportunities, less concern for behavioral problems, and even

5. See, e.g., Landgraf 2012; and Young Adult Library Services Association 2012.

6. National Leadership Grants fund competitive research investigating challenges faced by the museum, library, and/or archive fields and that have the potential to advance practice in those fields in the United States. <http://www.ims.gov/applicants/detail.aspx?GrantId=14>.

greater sensitivity to “green” options and sustainability in building materials. Success in these participatory endeavors means envisioning youth not simply as needy information consumers but as social agents and citizens fully entitled to thrive in the library’s democratic space (Bernier 2013).

Literature Review

Interestingly, practitioners, not LIS researchers, first raised the issue of YA spaces in public libraries, and they have largely been responsible for keeping the topic alive in the literature, at conferences, and in workshops over the past decade. The fledgling efforts to date have proceeded without rigorously collected evidence, verifiable best practices, enhanced skill capacities, institutional infrastructure, theoretical grounding, and evaluation criteria. Paulette Rothbauer’s postmodern examination of library connections with youth and youth identity offers insights to our understanding of YA spaces in public libraries when she suggests that “the library carries the capacity to capitalize on its place of significance and function as a local site that can foster a lively and engaged reading culture for youth” (2009, 481). While it is important to note this capacity, it is more important to note that the library as an institution typically fails to capitalize on this potential. And little scholarly attention has to date engaged how LIS might achieve it.

Since 1999, for instance, the *Voice of Youth Advocates* (VOYA), one of the most important periodicals in North American YA librarianship, has published a regular column in its six annual issues profiling individual descriptions of new or renovated YA spaces, written largely by the professionals responsible for the innovations. While insufficient to provide systematic or generalizable patterns for LIS in general, the collective examination (based on nearly seventy spatial profiles) did inform some early categories of analysis upon which the present study is founded.⁷

In addition to the VOYA profiles, several resource guides produced by consultants and associational committees in recent years have concentrated largely on YA spaces (Bolan 2008; Feinberg and Keller 2010; Young Adult Library Services Association 2011a; Farrelly 2012).⁸ Guidelines and manuals, while not reflective of empirical and systematic evidence-based research and analysis, demonstrate the institutional capacity to attract and support the efforts of private consultants and practitioners to focus on YA spaces. The degree to which libraries employ consultants also illustrates the growing capacity to realize the need for supplementary and specialized advice to compensate for the historic lack of LIS research.

The topic of the physical library spaces for YAs is not entirely without scholarship, however. The first doctoral dissertation on the subject, an in-depth ethnographic study of one

7. Among the beginning categories of analysis emerging from this sample of library YA spaces were librarian-identified popular features, spatial and organizational changes since the YA space was inaugurated, and total square footage vs. YA space square footage (Bernier 2012).

8. See also the historical references in footnote 4.

branch library, appeared in 2009 (Lee). Although lacking larger and more synthetic generalizations, it represented an earnest attempt to plumb the depths of library practice via thick description.

The two conventionally published scholarly pieces, the only ones a search located, offered preliminary attempts to come to grips with this broad service challenge. The first, by a professor of architecture, conducted a YA-user-centered evaluation of a new YA space in one branch of a midsized urban library system—what architects call a “postoccupancy evaluation.” In addition to the novel highlighting of young peoples’ own reception and assessment of how a space met their needs, this article also called attention to the larger absence of post-occupancy evaluations for the vast majority of new library buildings (Cranz 2006). The second article speculatively synthesized common practices culled from the early pioneering efforts of ten of the smallest YA spaces profiled in the issues of *VOYA* (Bernier 2009).

The only scholarly attempt to draw theoretical insights from these early and sporadic YA library space treatments confirmed the historical marginalization and ambivalent status of YAs in public libraries, particularly within municipal and urban libraries (Bernier 2010).⁹ This analysis challenges LIS to confront this institutional deficit as it specifically pertains to spatial equity.

On the other hand, in imagining youth as entitled to library space on equitable footing with other library user groups, LIS might in the future serve as a more democratic foil to a broader and growing age-based “Jim Crow Junior” public policy (Bernier 2010).¹⁰ That is, rather than following prevailing trends constantly seeking more effective ways to marginalize, discourage, or even banish YAs from “adult” space in the same fashion that post–Civil War legal and social segregations distanced “minority space” from “white space,” libraries might actually expand the public sphere for young people into the broader, true “third space” of the entire community. Envisioning young people as fully entitled citizens opens up a vast terrain in which the community might come to see the library as an exemplar in civil society to be copied rather than promoting itself with simplistic “third space” and “safe” island metaphors.¹¹

In short, after a decade of individual library YA space profiles and growing interest exhibited by practitioners, LIS has produced only a fledgling literature with scarce data, metrics, theory, authoritative evaluation standards, and substantiated best practices, lacking even a base of professional YA spatial knowledge. As one key part of its attempt to quantify YA library space practices, this article assesses the qualitative relevance and influence of what LIS advo-

9. While LIS scholarship has avoided substantially interrogating YA space, other fields have begun to produce more engagement (see Travlou et al. 2008; and Weller 2006).

10. There is excellent critical theory available to LIS, too, in which to expand how libraries imagine the spatial resources they represent (see Lefebvre 1991, 1996).

11. Rothbauer (2007) develops a similar notion of the “emancipatory potential” of the library as civic space. Practitioner references to the library as a “third space” or “third place” for youth narrowly perpetuate a false “safe haven” cliché that libraries, as an actual public place, cannot deliver; see Kendal 2003; and Harris 2007. For scholarly treatments of the “third space” metaphor, see Soja (1996).

cates refer to as “youth participation” in its connections to design and execution (Cockett 1998; Jones and Young Adult Library Services Association 2002; Whalen and Costello 2002; Walter and Meyers 2003; Gorman and Suellentrop 2009; Institute of Museum and Library Services 2009; Meyers 2010; Young Adult Library Services Association 2011b; Flowers 2012). Responding to the admonition to increase youth participation in YA library services that has been consistent for so long from so many professional and scholarly sources, this article will offer LIS a self-check to gauge how well libraries realize that aspiration. By pursuing the first empirical and scholarly research of the nation’s new and recently renovated library buildings on their YA library spaces, this article begins to question the degree to which libraries have actually incorporated the YA end-user in imagining, contributing to, and executing these new spaces.

A growing scholarly concern with broader notions of youth and public space also extends to the experience of young people and libraries. Young people as a demographic are widely feared and excluded from public spaces, and in portrayals by the news media, by interest groups, and even by commentators in library publications, they are subjected to relentlessly negative publicity, segregation, and demands for ever-greater control (Buckingham 2000; Owens 2002; Driskell, Fox, and Kudva 2008; Owens, Thompson, and Maxwell 2008; Bernier 2011; Woo 2012). Since the 1990s scholars from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, such as critical youth studies, geography, history, anthropology, and sociology, have mounted a significant critique of planning and design professions not only for producing young people as an invisible and undesirable subject in the landscape but also for excluding them from design processes, with the result that young people essentially are erased from the built environment altogether (White 1990; Sibley 1995; Valentine 1996; Skelton, and Valentine 1998; Hill and Bessant 1999; Childress 2000; Vanderbeck and Johnson 2000; Aitken 2001; Borden 2001; Miranda 2003; Abbott-Chapman 2009; Shildrick, Blackman, and MacDonald 2009; Schee 2012). Thus, in reaching for more systematic and granular insights about the intersections among the public space manifest in libraries as institutions, young adults as participants in designing and using public space, and the built environment as the physical product of institutional decisions, libraries hold the potential to improve library services to this broadly marginalized population and to contribute to better integration of youth as citizens in the public sphere.

Method

Survey

From June through November 2011, a collaborative research team from San Jose State University’s School of Library and Information Science, funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, conducted a survey of 762 of the newest and most recently renovated libraries (as identified in *Library Journal’s* annual index of new and renovated library facilities between 2005 and 2010) in the United States. Pilot trials of the survey, including

follow-up focus groups, were conducted with the professional staff of the Salinas and San Jose, California, public libraries in the spring of 2009, and survey questions were further vetted by grant partners Group 4 Architecture, Research, and Design of South San Francisco and Noll & Tam Architects of Berkeley, California. The revised survey used for this article, directed at professional library staff, was published online on the SurveyMonkey hosting service.¹² Surveys complied with San Jose State University Institutional Review Board requirements and provided anonymity, no identifiable contact information, and freedom to discontinue taking the survey at any time. Some questions were restricted to one or several responses, while other questions were equipped with custom text fields that allowed respondents to write additional commentary or provide alternate answers where existing choices did not suffice.

Initially, 762 libraries were sent survey links via e-mail and invited to contribute to the study. This period of dissemination (five months) included several reminders to participate sent to all initial recipients. Team members also maintained ongoing communication with respondents by answering inquiries from subject librarians, including requests for technical assistance and confirmation of eligibility.

The 762 libraries contacted returned 411 surveys, of which 332 supplied complete or near-complete demographic and other basic information; of these, 257 (or 34 percent of the original sample) completed information on a wide variety of library spatial practices that proved usable for the purpose of the study. Examination revealed few differences between the 257 libraries whose staff fully completed the survey and the 762 libraries originally contacted. The 257 surveys used in this article were received from 42 states, led by California (41 libraries), New York (18), Texas and Florida (15 each), and Illinois (14). All national regions were represented: the West (72 libraries), the Midwest (66), the South (61), and the Northeast (58). While there was no discernible geographical bias, larger libraries and library systems (according to square footage figures reported in the annual architectural issue of *Library Journal*) tended to complete the survey at a somewhat higher rate than smaller institutions.

Although the surveys succeeded in attracting sufficient levels of response to allow for detailed evaluations of major topics, they also revealed some limitations. The focus of the survey audience (new and newly renovated libraries from 2005 to 2010 identified in the annual architectural issue of *Library Journal*) does not represent all YA spaces in all libraries, merely the most recent practices deployed by the libraries that reported new or renovated facilities during the study period.

Youth Participation Index

Nineteen of the survey's thirty questions were selected from the survey to create a Youth Participation Index (YPI) that connected the design and execution of YA spaces with the

12. See <http://www.surveymonkey.com>.

nature and scope of youth involvement in the projects. These questions (listed on the team's website, <http://www.YouthFacts.org/librariyspaces.php>) assessed the degree to which YA ideas and direct advocacy contributed to the development and design of YA spaces, including the extent of YA volunteering, employment, advisory board participation, and active administration of the YA space; whether the space contained YA-produced and YA-recommended artwork, posters, productions, and other items; and the degree to which youth participation affected a variety of service concepts.¹³ Libraries were ranked according to affirmative staff responses to the YPI. A YPI score of 5, for example, indicates that the library answered affirmatively to five of the nineteen questions. A higher YPI score indicates stronger youth participation. SPSS statistical software was used to analyze the survey data to produce raw frequencies, cross tabulations, and statistical testing for selected topics, the results of which are presented in table 1.

Results

YA Participation

The 257 libraries that responded fully on issues of YA space services to young people had an average youth involvement score of 3.5 of a possible 19 and varied sharply on the degree of YA involvement (see table 1). At one extreme, 22 libraries (9 percent) reported no youth involvement of any kind (zero positive responses). At the other extreme, 27 libraries (11 percent) reported strong YPI scores, indicating that YAs played a substantial role in the process of advocating for, creating, and/or governing the YA space (between 8 and 13 positive responses, here designated as a strong score). In between were 208 libraries whose scores ranged from 1 to 7 on the YPI scale.

Libraries scoring higher on the YPI scale tended to be larger in total size, and they generally reported allocating a larger proportion of their total space to their YA spaces. The proportion of total library space allocated to YA spaces as a percentage of total library square footage ranged from negligible (less than one-tenth of 1 percent) to nearly half (46 percent) and averaged 3 percent. Three-quarters of the 84 libraries with the lowest YPI scores reported devoting less than 5 percent of the total square footage of library space to young adults, as did 60 percent of 107 libraries with the highest YPI scores.

The Effects of YA Participation on Library Practices

The YPI score proved a strong predictor of library staffs' attitudes, practices, and perceptions about their YA spaces. Library staff with higher YPI scores were much more likely to believe that their new or renovated YA space improved services to young people. None with scores

13. Survey questions comprising the Youth Participation Index are listed on the project's webpage, at <http://www.YouthFacts.org/librariyspaces.php> (currently under construction).

Table 1. Selected Library Responses to Nineteen Youth Involvement Questions by Youth Participation Index Score

	Youth Participation Index Score					
	0	1–2	3–4	5–7	8–13	All Libraries
Number of libraries	22	62	66	80	27	257
Percent of all libraries	9	24	26	31	11	100
Total library size (median square feet)*	9,850	15,420	19,900	23,100	26,150	19,500
YA space size (median square feet)*	325	485	600	830	1,060	590
YA space as percent of library space*	3.3	3.1	3.0	3.6	4.1	3.0
Staffing (average FTE)**	.5	.8	.8	1.1	1.8	1.0
Seating (average capacity)**	7.3	10.8	13.1	15.1	18.5	13.2
Staff belief that YA space improved library service (%):						
A lot**	32	44	67	69	100	62
Somewhat	59	48	27	30	0	33
Very little/not at all**	9	3	2	0	0	2
No opinion	0	5	5	1	0	3
Selected issues:						
Staff trained in YA spaces (%)	14	19	18	30	36	23
Rules relaxed in YA space (%)**	0	2	14	25	37	16
Green features in YA space (%)**	14	29	46	49	85	44
Increased youth participation (%)**	0	7	26	54	70	32
Line of sight monitoring (%)	9	13	12	5	7	9
Connectivity to outside devices (%)*	86	84	89	93	96	90
Should allow food consumption (%)*	46	52	56	70	74	60
YA space needs noise separation (%)	14	24	33	30	26	28
Adult spaces popular with YAs (%)	36	26	11	14	26	19

Note.—Table shows the relationship between Youth Participation Index Score and variable, Pearson correlation, two-tailed.

* .00 < *p* < .05 (moderately significant).

** *p* < .001 (strongly significant).

of 5 or higher thought the space had little or no effect, compared to 10 percent of those with zero youth participation scores.

High-YPI-scoring libraries also were substantially more likely to report increased youth use of the library and participation in the YA space, another measure of the site’s effectiveness. Many high-scoring libraries also reported relaxed rules governing YAs, even as the space generated more YA participation. Among all 257 libraries, 41 reported relaxing rules after the YA space was opened, while only 8 reported making rules stricter. Of the 87 libraries reporting strong youth participation, 20 reported relaxing rules, and only 2 reported making rules stricter.

Another question bearing on this issue asked whether library staff thought that having a more line-of-sight view of the YA space to facilitate monitoring was a top priority. Only 9 percent of responders said yes, and though the pattern of answers was not statistically

significant due to small numbers, those wanting more surveillance tended to have lower YPI scores. Moreover, none of the 257 responding library staff reported increased safety concerns or danger to library users or staff.

The question regarding whether library users could connect their own devices such as personal laptops, entertainment, or communications technology to electronic resources in the YA space also raised issues of freedom versus control. Although a large majority of libraries did allow such connections, the availability of individual user connection ports increased from 80 percent to 96 percent as the YPI score rose from the lowest to the highest level. Another freedom/control issue involved whether libraries should allow food consumption. Allowing food consumption was moderately correlated with higher YPI scores. The size of the library bore no relationship to more permissive food consumption regulations.

High-YPI-scoring libraries were substantially more likely to report that incorporating “green” (environmentally friendly) features was important to YAs. This question was included as a measure of the influence of youth ideas on library design, following a separate national survey of youth library patrons ages ten through age twenty-one that reported 7 in 10 found their library’s environmental features important.¹⁴ Staff in libraries with higher YPI scores perceived that these features are important to young people, while low-scoring library staff tended to believe environmentally friendly features were not very important to YAs.

Testing the Covariate of Library Size

Libraries with higher YPI scores tended to be of larger total size, to have larger YA spaces with more dedicated staff, and to have allocated a somewhat larger proportion of total library square footage to the YA space. The median-sized YA space in the highest-YPI-scoring libraries (1,060 square feet) was three times that of the lowest-YPI-scoring libraries. There were exceptions: 5 of the libraries with the highest scores had among the smaller YA spaces (200–950 square feet), and 4 with YPI scores of zero had YA spaces ranging from 1,000 to 5,200 square feet.

It may be that larger libraries have more resources to generate more youth participation or a wider array of activities in which youths can participate, or both, accounting for their generally higher scores. Conversely, more youth participation may translate into libraries committing more resources to the YA space. When tested by linear regression, the YPI score was a strongly significant predictor of the key outcomes presented here in all cases, and library size was a moderately significant predictor in some cases and not significant in others. The YPI score was found to have substantially more positive effect than library size (as measured by YA space square footage and number of staff) on outcomes such as greater youth patronage, satisfaction with service, and application of rules. Relaxation of rules was not related to library size but was strongly predicted by YPI score.

14. YouthFacts.org, 2012 Library Youth Survey, results forthcoming.

However, the regression also showed that YPI score explained only small fractions of the variability in key objectives, such as youth participation or staff satisfaction with the YA space (adjusted $r^2 = 24$ percent and 16 percent, respectively). Adding library size to the equation added little predictive value. This means that the specific library practices and factors that are associated with the YA space outcomes investigated here remain largely unexplained.

Discussion

Libraries throughout the United States report widely varying levels of young adult participation in instigating, designing, collaborating, and governing their YA spaces, as measured by the YPI developed from questions on a survey of staff in 257 new and renovated libraries between 2005 and 2010. In several dozen libraries, youth participation proved pivotal in establishing funding, influencing space design, and possibly contributing to decisions to allocate a larger proportion of total library square footage to YAs. Greater YA participation may effectively “lobby” for more YA space or create a perception among library staff and designers that the space should be larger to accommodate greater youth numbers, or both.

“Middle-school-aged teens advocated for space during library programs,” commented one midwestern librarian regarding the origination of the site. The design of one library’s new space was advised by a “daily gathering of teens in YA spaces from a highly diverse environment.” Said another, “Our Teen Advisory Group successfully applied for a small grant two years ago to purchase a Wii and games for use in activities which provided a great learning experience, team building, a feeling of pride and accomplishment, and ownership in their library.”

Respondents from 20 libraries in 12 states in every region of the United States—including all 8 top-YPI-scoring libraries—reported that their YA spaces are actively administered by a YA advisory group. These libraries’ YA spaces ranged from 150 to 14,000 square feet in size, with a median of 1,060 square feet. Three-fourths of these libraries reported that youth ideas were among the most important factors in developing the YA space, compared to one-fourth of other libraries.

In turn, the level of youth participation was strongly connected to a set of positive outcomes in terms of library service profile to YAs and staff satisfaction with service quality. A number of comments expressed the desire for greater youth influence over design and use of library space. “I would like to see more teen-driven design,” wrote one youth professional. “Many of our adult patrons want an area that is modeled after our teen space,” commented another, an interesting perspective reinforced by several observations that adults often “invade” the YA space to take advantage of its features. “Our [YA] space tends to be filled with adults using the Internet computers and the study tables,” one said. “The teens are very good at sharing their space, more than adults are, to be honest.” observed another.

While library professionals might agree that encouraging more YA participation in the library and its services—an outcome strongly associated with higher YA involvement scores in

general—is beneficial, some might also feel that greater youth presence would require management by stricter library policies. Unexpectedly, this analysis found the opposite response. Of the 82 libraries reporting higher YPI scores, 32 provided additional narrative comments, and only 6 of these reported even mildly negative results, nearly all involving the need for more noise separation. Only two staff reported discipline problems, such as more “at-risk kids” (problems unspecified) or concerns that “too much privacy encourages bad behavior.” In fact, libraries with higher YPI scores and correspondingly large increases in YA presence and participation in the library were also the most likely to report relaxation—not increased enforcement—of rules concerning surveillance and discipline.

There are several possible explanations for this finding. Perhaps providing a separate YA space allowed libraries to accommodate greater numbers of YAs with fewer rules by segregating young patrons away from adults with whom they might otherwise compete for resources. This would suggest that spatial competition between youth and adult use of the library, not “youth misbehavior” as defined by objective criteria, is the problem. Alternatively, perhaps youth do not generate the discipline challenges they are so often imagined to present, especially when afforded their own space. Of the 88 spontaneous comments, very few mentioned discipline problems, and these tended to involve noise. One librarian expressed a strikingly positive strategy of featuring young people up front as the library’s “most active patrons” and facilitating contact with adults “without barriers”:

We located our YA area to the front of our building. The entire front area of the building has lots of windows and natural light. I deliberately pushed for the YA area to face the street with the entrance since I feel that it is silly to hide your most active patrons in some out-of-the-way corner of your building. I wanted teens to be able to drive by and see that the teen area was “hopping!” We did enclose the area with game rooms, computers, lounge furniture, and fiction collections in a glassed in sound-proof area. Our teen nonfiction and study area is just outside this room and flows into the adult services area without barriers. We love the way this works.

Finally, while the YPI did demonstrate significant predictive value in connecting higher degrees of youth participation with positive library YA space outcomes and practices, the fact remains that the YPI explained only a fraction of the variation in library outcomes. More refined and fine-grained research beyond this initial survey is needed to delineate specific library practices that fortify library confidence in defining, pursuing, and achieving best practices with regard to space equity for YA patrons. Many practical questions remain unaddressed. What accounts for variations in practices and outcomes in libraries with similar YPI scores? What kinds of aesthetic choices differentiate higher- from lower-YPI-scoring libraries, and what role do these choices play in space performance and service enhancements? To what degree did higher-YPI-performing libraries involve YAs in conversations to relax their rules structures? How does the

existence of a spatial “focal point” (an architectural feature defining a central or visual coherence in a physical space, much in the way a children’s reading theater or a fireplace might serve as focal points for children’s or adult spaces) matter? What range of seating options works best? To what degree does movable furniture matter? The ongoing research project is concurrently pursuing more qualitative data collection, including the creation of mock library spaces using a 3D modeling environment (Second Life), in hopes of offering more realistic and contextualized stimuli to elicit more authentic opinions and feedback from library professionals and LIS students who experience these faux spaces using avatars.

Conclusion

This article represents LIS’s first attempt to survey hundreds of the library professionals most closely associated with YA services in new and renovated libraries in the United States. It reveals that YA space sizes and key service outcomes are positively connected to youth participation. Library staff report less concern for perennially identified behavioral issues such as rule enforcement and surveillance with higher youth participation. Library staff report that greater YA participation in the design process is also connected to increased YA sensitivity to sustainable and “greener” building materials.

This first phase of the study reinforces the importance of youth participation and the value such practices add to comprehensive library service goals in the context of current practices of public libraries offering YA spaces. Library commitment to high youth participation in designing and executing new YA spaces clearly and consistently confers quality service improvements across a wide range of outcomes. Staff satisfaction with YA space overcomes historical LIS ambivalence toward envisioning young people as entitled to quality service.

In addition to the remaining practical questions about YA space mentioned above, there remain many more conceptual questions libraries need answered before “best practices” come into better focus as well. What research methods does LIS need to deploy and refine to address the liabilities inherent in online survey approaches or in conducting postoccupancy evaluations? (Krenichyn et al. 2007). That such a small number of surveyed libraries scored high on the YPI raises the question of the degree to which libraries have truly adopted youth participation as a key ingredient in mounting YA service profiles.¹⁵ While this study affirms the importance of youth participation, it does not identify what specific steps and techniques those libraries employ to achieve high-quality youth participation.¹⁶ Rather than adopting inaccurate understandings of young people as problematic, how can libraries improve current spaces based on accurate information founded in a growing literature demonstrating the overwhelming evi-

15. This study thus reinforces other recent findings that libraries continue to be challenged by this service ethic (see, e.g., Agosto 2013).

16. For an excellent discussion comparing and contrasting levels of youth participation intensity, see National Training Institute for Community Youth Development Work (2000).

dence of youths' pro-social behaviors?¹⁷ How can young people best be included in the community design and review process for new or renovated spaces? What roles do architect and design professionals play in better connecting youth with community process of space design and review? To what degree should a library's future YA space host and house collections versus providing spaces for social experience and creating meaning from interactions with information and media? How do youth themselves conceive of and enact the library's public space? How do libraries best identify and better incorporate youth's spatial aesthetic preferences, and what aesthetic overlaps exist between hospitable spaces for young adults and libraries' other uses? What are the best solutions for decreasing seemingly "natural" intergenerational conflicts and competition for space in libraries? Finally, what are the best evaluation metrics (outputs and outcomes) to demonstrate success, define true models, and identify exemplars in existing and new spaces?

LIS's traditional preference for, and privileging of, collections appears to have come at the expense of achieving equitable, enticing, and purpose-built spaces for young people in the past. It is essential that LIS study these issues, especially now, as the institution transitions from its historic role as a place to house printed collections to a far more uncertain future in which libraries become spaces for producing social experience and incorporating user meanings (Ito et al. 2010; London et al. 2010). Given the dramatic evolution in library design and service today, it may well be that in helping libraries "see into the future" of spatial usage, LIS needs YAs as much or more than YAs need libraries. Will LIS continue its reluctance to reassess how libraries apportion spatial resources, or will it begin to take into account new opportunities and options?

This work represents an effort to produce the empirical evidence required before LIS can confidently advance a more professional YA services profile with broad applicability to the nation's libraries. This project beckons to the broader imperative of ensuring that the needs of young people are not ignored by the spatial and design arts. The library's physical plant, particularly during current economic conditions, represents valuable spatial capital, especially for youth. In taking into account how young people long have been ignored by the designers, architects, and planners of public space—a concept that brings issues of design together with the issues of culture, history, power, and policy—dissemination of this research can inform (if not launch) discussions in architecture, urban planning and design, education, justice studies, and public administration, as well as youth-related public policy. In this scenario libraries do not need to follow. They can lead.

17. See, e.g., Males 1999; Nichols and Good 2004; Camino and Zeldon 2006; Sternheimer 2006; and Males 2010.

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