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“This Is Our Library, and It’s a Pretty Cool Place”: A User-Centered Study of Public Library YA Spaces

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This study sought to collect data from teens and librarians about their preferences and recommendations for the effective design of physical library spaces for teens. Librarians and teens at twenty-two U.S. public libraries filmed narrated video tours of their young adult (YA) public library spaces. The researchers used qualitative content analysis techniques to analyze the video data and to develop a framework for guiding the design of effective YA public library spaces. In addition to providing specific recommendations for user-centered YA library space design, this study highlights the need for continued user input into the design and maintenance of YA public library spaces as teens’ needs evolve and vary across time and from community to community.

KEYWORDS *young adults (YA), space planning for YAs, research on YAs, film as research tool*

Within the field of library and information science (LIS), teens and their use of libraries and other information systems have received much less research attention than have adults and children (Naughton 2012). The issue of physical library space design for this population has received even less

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research attention. In a preliminary study of the allocation of public library spaces for teen services, Bernier (2009) found that “libraries still dedicate a proportionately small amount of space to young adults” (33).¹ This marginalization of teens is not unique to LIS. It reflects Owens’s (2002) contention that teens have been systematically and intentionally excluded from public spaces in the United States, and that public space designers often view them as problematic, undesirable users of public spaces.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

While the topic of designing public library spaces for teens has received some attention in the professional literature, there is little data-driven research that has studied best practices in teen library space design. As a result, current design recommendations remain largely untested with the populations for whom they are intended—teens and the young adult (YA) librarians who work with them. This research project sought to gather data directly from teens and YA librarians about their preferences and recommendations for the effective design of physical library spaces for teens. The following research questions drove the study.

1. What elements of physical space design do teens and YA librarians consider the most important in creating successful public library spaces for teens?
2. What kinds of activities do teens and YA librarians expect public library YA physical spaces to support?
3. What are the implications for best design practices for public library spaces for teens?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2012 the American Library Association’s (ALA) Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) issued new national YA library space design guidelines, with suggestions for “evaluating a public library’s overall level of success in providing physical and virtual space dedicated to teens, aged 12–18” (YALSA 2012, 3). The guidelines emphasized making teens feel included and welcome in their libraries, designing spaces to support teens’ informational needs, and designing with flexibility in mind to meet the evolving goals and purposes of public library services.

The creation of these guidelines followed considerable discussion in the professional literature about the general topic of YA library space design. Many of the participants in these discussions called for youth participation in the design process (e.g., Curry and Schwaiger 1999; Taney 2003), with

the dual goals of creating spaces likely to appeal to teens and of promoting pride of ownership among those who used the spaces.

For example, Taney (2003) suggested to librarians interested in redesigning their teen spaces that “teens will be your biggest and best resource. When young people are involved in creating and revamping a space, they will be more likely to accept and use the library. It will feel like it is theirs” (x). Chow (2012) agreed, saying that “the ways libraries are able to serve their communities is directly related to the agency patrons have in a space” (76).

However, Bernier (2009) called for more precision in defining “youth participation”: “Currently, youth participation can range from one-time opportunities for individual input to substantially more intensive collaborations involving multiple interactions with professional library staff, administrators, outside funders, library support organizations, and design professionals” (43).

Few of these authors tested their design ideas and recommendations via user research—data collected systematically from teens and/or adults who use these spaces. From the handful of data-driven studies that have examined issues relating to YA public library spaces, we know that teens often express negative opinions about public libraries, based at least partly on physical design issues. For example, as a part of a broader study of urban teens’ everyday life information behaviors, Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005, 161) found that outdated, unattractive physical spaces were one reason why teens in their study were infrequent public library users.

In a study focusing more closely on YA library space design, Cranz and Cha (2006) examined teens’ and adults’ use of and attitudes about a newly designed public library YA department. They observed space-use patterns and conducted interviews with teen and adult library users. Their work showed that both the design of the space and the activities that it can support are important to users of all ages:

Some people reported that they stayed in the space because of the quality and character of the activities and services provided within it—access to the Internet, comic books to check out, and a place to socialize with friends. Yet others said that they like the space because of its homey and informal atmosphere—clearly spatial qualities. (52)

Howard’s (2011) survey of Canadian teens’ attitudes toward public libraries concluded that “the single most desirable feature was a space to socialize” (342).

More recently, Bernier, Males, and Rickman (2014) surveyed 257 library and information science professionals to create a Youth Participation Index that indicates the levels of youth involvement in the design and execution of YA spaces. Despite the many calls for youth participation in the professional

literature, the majority of survey respondents indicated low levels of youth participation in the design of their YA spaces.

The Use of Public Library Spaces by Teens

The effective study of library design extends beyond the bounds of physical design to include examination of the intended purposes of the spaces and the range of activities likely to take place in them. In her discussion of public library physical design to support public activism, for example, Chow (2012) explained that “structure, design, and purpose must all intersect to serve the specific needs of a community” (71). Similarly, Bennett (2008) suggested that in designing academic library spaces, “the key . . . is to replace our typical first question about what should *be* in a space with the less typical question, what should *happen* in the space” (183).

Research investigating the purposes for which teens use public libraries is limited, but we do have a developing picture of how U.S. teens employ such facilities. Cook, Parker, and Pettijohn (2005) conducted a survey of 616 sixth- through ninth-grade students’ attitudes toward public libraries. The respondents used their libraries to conduct research for school, to look for books, to patronize the library restaurants, to access the Internet, to play video games, and as spaces for socializing with peers.

Based on a survey of ninety-seven teen public library users, Agosto (2007) found “three main roles of the public library: (1) the Library as Information Gateway, (2) the Library as Social Interaction/Entertainment Space, and (3) the Library as Beneficial Physical Environment” (58). Although researchers have found that female and male teens typically use public libraries for the same purposes, several studies (Abbas et al. 2007; Agosto, Paone, and Ipock 2007; Cook, Parker, and Pettijohn 2005) have shown that female teens tend to hold more positive views of public librarians than do male teens.

Despite these varied reasons for which teens use public libraries, library administrators and space designers still often conceive of public library YA spaces mainly as places to house books and other printed materials. Likewise, the U.S. public tends to think of public libraries mainly as book providers (De Rosa et al. 2011). Many YA librarians also tie their work closely to the concepts of circulating books and promoting reading and hold the limited view of libraries as spaces for housing reading materials (Bernier 2009).

Taken as a whole, this literature review shows the scant coverage of the study of YA library spaces for teens in the research literature. This article, which is part of a larger multi-method research project, seeks to study the issue of YA library space design from a user-centered perspective as an initial step toward empowering librarians, administrators, architects, and other adults to incorporate their voices and ideas into designing YA library spaces.

METHODS

With these issues in mind, the researchers designed an exploratory qualitative study to gather data from U.S. teens and YA librarians about their perceptions of YA public library spaces and the purposes for which they use these spaces. The researchers randomly selected twenty-five U.S. public libraries from the 257 libraries profiled in *Library Journal's* annual index of new and renovated U.S. library facilities between 2005 and 2010. The researchers then contacted leaders in these institutions, explaining the study and requesting library participation. After securing participation agreements, the researchers sent one hand-held digital video camera to each of the twenty-five libraries and asked YA librarians in each location to film a three- to five-minute video tour of their YA spaces. Each librarian was also requested to ask one teen at his or her library to make an additional three- to five-minute recorded video tour as a form of modified snowball sampling.

Recording guidelines for librarians and teens were included with the cameras. The guidelines included open-ended prompts to stimulate participant thinking but not to dictate video-tour content. The guidelines offered ideas for getting started in video creation and asked librarians and teens to “show us *what you want to show us* and tell us *what you want to tell us* about the young adult area.” The researchers included an e-mail contact for questions and provided video recording assistance and other procedural support when participants requested it. After participants recorded their videos, the cameras were mailed back to the researchers for audio narration transcription. Finally, the researchers returned the cameras to the libraries as thank you gifts for participating in the study.

Since each study participant chose which aspects of his or her library to film and narrate, the resulting videos were *personal video accounts* of the library spaces. Gibson (2005) explained that “like other data, personal video accounts are socially located constructions that are produced in response to a specific research context” (34)—they are an individual’s recorded representation of his or her view of the world. Personal video accounts are a new but increasingly popular qualitative data-collection method that works especially well with juvenile participants (Buchwald, Schantz-Laursen, and Delmar 2009).

This method was chosen in order to capture the participants’ own views of their library spaces and their purposes for using those spaces. The goal was not to create objective accounts of the physical elements of these spaces or to dictate video content, but to capture librarians’ and teens’ personal, socially constructed views. Participant-created videos “are always mediated by the participants’ internalized perceptions of the social world and their positions in it” (Gibson 2005, 38) and as such are useful in providing a window into participants’ thoughts and viewpoints.

Data Analysis

Of the twenty-five public libraries selected for the study, participants at twenty-three libraries successfully completed at least one video, for a total of forty-three videos. Since two libraries completed only librarian videos, and since one of the videos contained inaudible narration, the resulting data pool included twenty-two usable librarian videos and twenty usable teen videos.

The researchers used thematic analysis, “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within [qualitative] data” (Braun and Clarke 2006, 79), to analyze the video data. Also called *qualitative content analysis* (Wildemuth 2009), the process involves repeated readings of a body of qualitative data to develop and refine thematic categories. Analysis then moves to the conceptual level to address the research questions and, in this case, to lead to the development of design guidelines and recommendations.

The data analysis process proved to be complex and time consuming. Analyzing video-based data is notoriously difficult, presenting several problems unique to the video-data format. Erickson (2006) identified the three most significant of these problems:

Here reside the fundamental problems for video analysis—how to define what the “data” will be, how to find them once defined, and how to make appropriate comparisons across analogous instances of interactional events and across differing points in time within the same event. For those problems there are no easy solutions, nor are there at this point canonical approaches generally agreed upon. (188)

This first of the problems that Erickson (2006) identified is how to define the data. For the current study, the researchers decided to focus on the audio narration in the videos for data-analysis purposes. Toward this end, the audio components of the videos were transcribed, and the written transcripts served as the basis for data analysis. Most often the analysis of personal video accounts includes the analysis of facial features and nonverbal communication as shown in the visuals, but due to institutional review board (IRB) restrictions for research with minors, the participants were not allowed to film other people or themselves. The resulting visual components provided some information about the physical composition of the library spaces, but little in the way of information about nonverbal communication. With this limitation in mind, the video format was used more to stimulate the participants’ thoughts and to stimulate narration rather than to generate visual data for analysis. As the study participants walked through their library spaces creating their films, they described what they saw and explained what the spaces meant to them personally. The researchers did, however, refer to the visual data during the transcript analysis for help in understanding the participants’ narrated thoughts and ideas.

The second problem that Erickson (2006) identified in the analysis of video data is “how to find [the data] once defined” (188). Again, of the total of forty-three videos, twenty-two librarian videos and twenty teen videos contained audible audio narration. The researchers chose the individual theme as the unit of analysis, a common choice in qualitative content analysis (Wildemuth 2009). It was chosen to enable the inductive identification and modification of themes within the data in comparison to the research questions.

The final problem that Erickson (2006) identified is “how to make appropriate comparisons across analogous instances of interactional events and across differing points in time within the same event” (188). After generating and refining the coding scheme, the researchers returned to the raw data to count the number of times that each coding category and subcategory appeared in the videos. Participants’ speaking styles varied widely, with some participants repeating themselves while they were gathering their thoughts during narration and some who were simply more or less verbose than others. This made counting theme occurrences within videos problematic, as mentioning the same theme three times within a single video could not be accepted as proof that it was three times as important to a participant than to a participant who mentioned it just once. Instead of counting the total number of occurrences of each theme within each individual video, the researchers decided to count the number of librarian and teen videos in which each theme appeared at least once to determine the comparative frequency of the themes throughout the combined body of data. As a result, the maximum number of times a theme could be counted was forty-two—once for each librarian video and teen video.

Although counting when coding qualitative video-based data is common, there is disagreement about the reliability and validity of the actual counts, and caution must be used in applying quantitative measures to qualitative data (Pratt 2009). The validity of counting in video-based data analysis in particular is also widely debated.

Despite the number of studies that use coding approaches, it is by no means universal that data derived from video records are coded in a way that can yield quantitative data. Many researchers prefer to focus on examples (such as in the play-by-play approach) and therefore do not count types of events within or across cases. However, other researchers find coding and quantification useful aspects of their project. (Barron and Engle 2007, 31)

In this case, viewed as a whole the counts provide general information about the relative frequency of theme occurrence among the videos, but they should not be read as absolute statements on the relative importance of the various themes in the coding scheme. Again, this was a qualitative study,

not one intended to employ data-collection techniques that could yield valid quantitative results.

LIMITATIONS

As with any study design, there are limitations to the design of this study. The main limitations stem from the personal video account method. The findings are shaped by the participants' abilities to analyze and describe their library spaces, by the depth and clarity of their narratives, and by the researchers' abilities to accurately identify and interpret their intended meanings. There was also likely reactivity based in the researchers' virtual presence. Even though the researchers were not present as the participants made their recordings, the librarians and the teens were aware that their videos would be viewed and interpreted by the research team. Participants might have hesitated to critique their library spaces and library services knowing that the researchers would review their videos, possibly resulting in overly positive video portrayals of their libraries.

Moreover, when using videos to capture data, the quality of the audio and video recording affects the quality of the data collected (McNaughton 2009). As mentioned previously, one library submitted a video with inaudible narration. It could not be transcribed for data analysis and was therefore unusable for the study. A second library submitted a short, muffled recording that was salvageable but still afforded limited analysis. While most of the audio was clear enough for transcription, the unfocused visuals made it difficult for researchers to refer back to the original video footage for deeper comprehension of the audio content.

A further limitation was the lack of facial data to analyze and interpret. (IRB restrictions prevented the study participants from recording people's faces.) Although one reason many researchers choose to use video data is to be able to see and record participants' facial expressions, that was not a goal of this study. The visual content was used to inform and clarify the audio content but not to provide interpretable data about participants' emotional or cognitive states.

The fact that the researchers were not physically present during video design and filming also proved to be a limitation of the study. For example, instead of creating videos, staff at one library wrote a survey and distributed it to teens to complete, and two libraries did not submit videos created by teens. Moreover, the video instructions did not ask video producers to provide personal demographic data, and the researchers could not determine with certainty the gender, age, or cultural/ethnic backgrounds of the participants from their videos, precluding analysis according to participant factors beyond the general librarian/teen designation.

Lastly, although it is accepted methodologically to use video-based data as the sole data for a study, doing so brings with it “unique challenges” (Morse and Pooler 2002, 62). Chief among these challenges are the researchers’ lack of access to the participants after the recordings are completed and their inability to request participant explanation and clarification of their films. Morse and Pooler suggest that “the level and accuracy of interpretation possible depends on the context—on what is being studied, and what is known about the topic of interest” (62). Because YA library space design is a relatively new area of study, the results reported here should be viewed as initial results requiring further research for exploration and validation.

RESULTS

Thematic analysis of the librarians’ and teens’ personal video accounts resulted in five major categories related to the design and use of public library spaces for teens. The final coding scheme is a framework to guide the design of effective YA public library spaces.

Teens and librarians recommend YA public library spaces that support:

Physical Comfort (19,14) (86.4%,70.0%)

furniture (18,12) (81.8%,60.0%)

lighting (10,6) (45.4%,30.0%)

windows (10,5) (45.4%,25.0%)

Leisure Activity and Information Needs (19,18) (86.4%,90.0%)

leisure reading resources (11,11) (50.0%,55.0%)

access to computers/digital media for leisure (9,7) (40.9%,35.0%)

socialization/group spaces (10,5) (45.4%,25.0%)

lounging/hanging out spaces (6,8) (27.2%,40.0%)

relevant programs with strong teen community appeal (2,4) (9.0%,20.0%)

gaming spaces (4,2) (18.1%,10.0%)

snacking/eating spaces (3,1) (13.6%,5.0%)

leisure reading recommendations (0,1) (0.0%,5.0%)

Academic Activity and Information Needs (14,13) (63.6%,65.0%)

study spaces (8,8) (36.3%,40.0%)

access to computers/digital media for schoolwork (8,7) (36.3%,35.0%)

academic resources (4,4) (18.1%,20.0%)

reference services (1,2) (4.5%,10.0%)

tutoring services (2,0) (9.0%,0.0%)

Teen Space Ownership (11,4) (50%,20%)

clear demarcation from children’s and adult library spaces (8,2) (36.3%,10.0%)

teen input into physical design and decor (2,2) (9.0%,10.0%)

artwork (4,1) (18.1%,5.0%)

safe spaces (1,2) (4.5%,10.0%)

“teen look” (3,0) (13.6%,0.0%)

Effective Library Policy Display and Marketing (12,4) (54.4%,20.0%)

book and other resource displays (7,3) (31.8%,15.0%)

library information boards/bulletin boards (6,2) (27.2%,10.0%)

YA-only use policies (4,0) (18.1%,0.0%)

signage (2,0) (9.0%,0.0%)

The five major categories appear in boldface type. These are teens’ needs and library operational roles that well-designed public library YA spaces should support, based on analysis of the video data. The subcategories below each of the major categories indicate means by which library spaces can fulfill the corresponding major needs and roles. For example, public library YA spaces can support teens’ physical comfort via appropriate furniture, lighting, and windows.

The numbers in parentheses indicate the numbers of adult and teen participants who identified each category and subcategory as an important aspect of their YA library space. The first number indicates the number of librarians who addressed each theme, and the second number indicates the number of teens who addressed it. For example, “study spaces (8,8) (36.3%,40.0%)” indicates that eight (36.3%) of the twenty-two videos created by librarians and eight (40.0%) of the twenty videos created by teens included at least one mention of dedicated study spaces as being important parts of their YA library spaces. Note that these numbers should not be read as exact quantitative measurements of the relative importance of the various categories and subcategories to the participants, as the study was not designed to yield valid or reliable quantitative results. Rather, they tell us how frequently each theme appeared across the data set and offer some insight into which themes were more or less likely to have been identified by participants.

DISCUSSION

Analysis of the video data revealed librarians’ and teens’ beliefs about the elements of physical space design they consider to be the most important in creating successful YA public library spaces and about the kinds of activities that they expect YA physical space design to support. Each of the categories and subcategories from their resulting design recommendations are explained further on with representative supporting quotes from the video transcripts.

In most categories librarian and teen response rates closely mirror one another, signaling general agreement about design principals. However, librarians tended to focus on what *physical items* their library has and what they want to acquire, whereas teens focused more on what *activities* they conduct in the spaces. This tension between what physical resources libraries have and the activities that they can support is an important consideration in the design of ideal spaces.

Physical Comfort

Within the data set, the importance of YA library spaces that support teens' physical comfort was frequently identified, with nineteen (86.4%) of librarians and fourteen (70.0%) of teens discussing this category. Often physical comfort was tied to comfortable furniture; eighteen (81.8%) librarians and twelve (60.0%) teens discussed the importance of furniture in creating comfortable YA library spaces. As Curry and Schwaiger (1999) suggested: "For teenagers, casual seating options such as couches tend to encourage socializing. Their growing and restless bodies like a variety of seating options, not just the traditional hard-backed chair" (9), a position documented in Bernier and Males (2014). Librarians and teens alike recommended furniture that afforded mobility, was visually interesting, was comfortable, and was unique in design.

For example, one of the librarians explained: "We have very comfortable ergonomic chairs that many people like. The booth chairs are neat because they can be reconfigured into a little square or a circle or a little amphitheater so people can see stuff that's happening on the screen." Librarians stressed that both visual appeal and functionality are important when choosing furniture.

Library spaces with comfortable furniture encouraged teens to stay longer and to enjoy their libraries more fully. As one teen said: "There's my favorite [spot] right there, the couches. I usually come into the library, go straight to the teen space, and I pick out a book. And I just go over to those couches right over there and I read." A teen whose library did not have comfortable lounging spaces suggested that "something I would like to see in these libraries would maybe be some couches, maybe along this wall, to really hang out and relax, 'cause I know that when I like to read, I like to be able to be as comfortable as I can."

Good lighting was also tied to physical comfort. Participants stressed the importance of natural light, uniqueness of lighting fixture design, and visually appealing light fixtures. Ten (45.4%) of the librarians and six (30.0%) of the teens mentioned lighting. One of the librarians expressed the prevailing opinion about lighting when she said: "We had a teen on our planning group, and one of the things that the teen stressed (as well as other members of

the community) is they wanted a very much natural-light, open, airy space. So . . . that was one of our goals as we built this area: lots of natural light.”

Closely related to the concept of natural lighting is the design and number of windows. Ten (45.4%) librarians and five (25.0%) teens discussed the importance of windows for increasing natural light and providing appealing views. When interviewing users about a newly designed YA library space, Cranz and Cha (2006) found that several teens and adults consider openness and light to be positive qualities, for which good window design is key. For the current study, the participants also praised glass for its materiality—glass used as a building material inside library buildings, such as glass used as accents or walls made of glass. One librarian liked the line of sight to the YA space that her glass-walled office afforded.

As another librarian stated: “The west wall is really neat. It’s all windows all the way down, so we have these great views of downtown—lots of natural light. And teens can look out the window and see if their ride has arrived, and there’s a city bus stop right out there.”

In her video, one of the teens pointed out the windows and explained: “The lighting in here is very, very nice. There are very, very high windows. It takes up the whole wall, as you can see. And it just provides a great source of lighting and adds a vibe of energy and positivity to the room. I really like it.”

Leisure Activity and Information Needs

The next frequently identified category was leisure activity and information needs. Nineteen (86.4%) of the librarians and eighteen (90.0%) of the teens identified their YA library spaces as supporting their reading, socialization, and entertainment activities.

In terms of leisure reading resources, eleven (50.0%) librarians and eleven (55.0%) teens stressed the current popularity of manga, graphic novels, and recent fiction titles and the importance of YA spaces for housing these materials and for making them easily accessible. As one librarian said:

This is our graphic novel space directly outside of the Teen Lounge. It’s a little tall for our taste right now. We would love to have another set of lower shelves so people can reach the tops without a stepstool, but this collection has been growing by leaps and bounds and we just couldn’t keep it contained in the regular Teen Lounge anymore.

The teens tended to be avid readers, highly valuing their library collections. Comments such as “Also, let me show you another part of the library—[of] the young adults [section]—that I like *so much—Manga!*” and “The only thing about the bookshelves that I wish we could change is I wish they were higher because then we could have more books in here” were common.

It is not surprising that housing for books was so frequently mentioned. In the United States the public has long associated public libraries with print books first and foremost. Even despite the digital revolution and the increasing focus of public library collections on digital resources, 75 percent of Americans say that “books’ is the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about the library” (De Rosa et al. 2011, 38).

Access to computers and other digital media for leisure purposes was discussed by nine (40.9%) of the librarians and seven (35.0%) of the teens. For example, one of the teens said: “I’ll be over here [in the book stacks] sometimes, but I’m mostly on the computers doing the normal thing people do when they’re on the computer: Facebook.”

Ten (45.4%) librarians and five (25.0%) teens explained that teens also use their YA library spaces as group socialization spaces. According to one librarian: “Our big thing is conversation, interaction. That’s what this space is more about.” One of the teens explained that: “We’ve had everything from just kind of hanging out to it being completely jammed for finals week and people even doing crafts around here, so it’s a great space where teens can do a lot of different things together.”

Whereas socialization/group spaces support library use by multiple teens, lounging/hanging out spaces refer to library space use by individuals. Owens (2002) explained that “adolescents need environments where they can escape and be alone. For some youth, public places are their only options for these types of retreats. The ability to sit and think about their problems, the world, and their place in it is important to feeling secure with who they are” (157).

Six (27.2%) of the librarians and eight (40.0%) of the teens identified lounging/hanging out as an important purpose for YA library spaces. One of these librarians identified a tension between designing library spaces to support group socialization and individual use: “There’s a lot that can be happening at one time, and that’s terrific. The drawback of it is that it’s very open, and a lot of teens prefer, you know, cozy little nooks, so it’s six of one, half a dozen of another.” And as one of the teens said: “I would like to see more spots where you can curl up and read a book and not feel like people are staring at you.”

There was less emphasis on libraries as program providers than as leisure resource or leisure space providers. Just two (9.0%) librarians and four (5.0%) teens identified supporting relevant programs with strong teen community appeal as an important part of YA spaces. Further research is needed to explore how spaces can be designed to better support effective programming.

Related to YA spaces for library programs was the provision of gaming spaces. Four (18.2%) librarians and two (10.0%) teens praised their library spaces for supporting digital and face-to-face gaming, communal play, and game tournaments, and for providing technological infrastructure for

computer gaming. For example, one of the librarians said: “Some days . . . we whip out the Wii and just kind of have a free-for-all and let the teens play Wii here, which these comfy chairs are really ideally suited to playing Wii.”

Three (13.6%) librarians and one (5.0%) teen also mentioned the importance of snacking/eating spaces in their libraries. For example, according to one librarian: “We have a vending machine, and as you can imagine, that’s very, very popular. We do allow the kids to eat, but of course not around the computers. That’s the only stipulation.”

Within the data, eating in the library was closely tied to leisure enjoyment. For example, one teen noted: “So over here we have Alex’s café. It was a great idea to put the café in, because it allows you to take a break and relax.”

The final subcategory of leisure activity and information needs is leisure reading recommendations. While the about half of the librarians and teens discussed library spaces as places for *housing* leisure reading materials, there were surprisingly few mentions of *reading recommendations* within the data. None of the librarians and just one (5.0%) of the teens mentioned leisure reading recommendations. The teen said: “It would be really great if the library staff gave suggestions of other books to read from other young adults who have read similar titles, like ‘if you liked this book, you should try such-and-such.’”

Academic Activity and Information Needs

Next, librarians and teens viewed their library spaces as crucial in supporting teens’ schoolwork and educational needs. Eight librarians (36.3%) and eight teens (40.0%) identified their YA library spaces as desirable study spaces. One of the librarians showed a small room in her video tour, a room separated from the main YA space: “This room is used night and day. Groups come in here for group projects; tutors work in here; students from the high school run their club meetings in here sometimes. It’s a great little room. I want more rooms.”

About a third of the participants—eight librarians (36.3%) and seven teens (35.0%)—suggested that access to computers/digital media for schoolwork is important for enabling teens to complete homework. As one of the teens explained: “We also set up three different computers for teens to research and study with, which I think is very, very handy. Being a student, I like to have somewhere to go to focus that isn’t at home.”

In contrast to the roughly half of participants who identified the provision of leisure reading materials as a key role for their YA library spaces, just four librarians (18.1%) and four teens (20.0%) identified the provision of print and/or electronic academic resources as important. For example, one librarian stated: “We also have some binders down here that help teens pick

out historical fiction titles for their school projects or if they need a multicultural title. This is a great place where they can just come and grab it as well as other resources that we provide.”

Similarly, one of the teens stated:

Over here is the reference section, which I think is one of the biggest assets of the library, especially the teen room, because it provides a lot of test reference materials that are available for anyone to check out and use. I do think that it's underutilized, unfortunately. A lot of kids either don't know it's here or don't really feel comfortable coming in to use this stuff, but it is really helpful and great that we have it.

Based on this and other similar comments, it seems that merely providing academic resources does not ensure their use; active promotion is also necessary to make them known among users.

Also surprising was the infrequent mention of reference services—one librarian (4.5%) and two teens (10.0%)—and tutoring services—two librarians (9.0%) and no teens. These low numbers might indicate the underuse or limited provision of these services in the test libraries. The physical design of their spaces might be one contributing factor: “What we would especially like would be to have an information desk back here. If you look far across the library there, the information desk is very far away. Teens working on homework projects or . . . just those that have questions would be better served to have an information desk closer by” (librarian). The two librarians who mentioned tutoring services suggested that flexible physical space designs are best to support tutoring efforts, as they enable multiple uses for the spaces.

Teen Space Ownership

Both librarians and teens suggested that teens should feel ownership of their library spaces to increase their comfort and pride of place. Eight (36.3%) librarians and two (10.0%) teens felt that clear demarcation from children's and adult library spaces can help teens feel that their YA spaces are truly theirs. Demarcation can be accomplished with minor visual design elements: “This is the archway that everyone sees from the front of our building so that they are aware that we have a teen section in the library” (librarian). It can also be accomplished by putting physical distance between sections: “Having the teen section on the third floor is really great because . . . the younger kids don't make the trip up to the third floor . . . so we don't have little kids running around” (teen).

Teens expressed the desire for separation from both children and adults: “Oftentimes, adults monopolize the space, unfortunately, which becomes sort of a problem for teenagers because they don't want to use it when adults are already using the tables” (teen).

Another method of fostering teen space ownership involved building teen input into physical design and décor, as suggested by two (9.0%) librarians and two (10.0%) teens. In describing a recent space design project, one of the librarians said: “The idea behind . . . the teen space here was that the kids and the Interesting Readers Society group would choose the furnishings. The ultramodern furnishings that they picked are back here in the library’s teen area, as you can see.”

Four librarians (18.2%) and one teen (5.0%) also felt that displaying artwork created by teens could increase teen space ownership. Similarly, three librarians (13.6%) but no teens suggested that giving YA spaces a “teen look” could add to their feelings of space ownership. This echoes the idea that visual elements in the library can help members of the cultures represented feel more welcome in libraries designed to serve them (Agosto 2001).

Lastly in this category, one librarian (4.5%) and two teens (10.0%) felt that the provision of safe spaces could make teens feel more comfortable in their libraries. Whether public libraries are truly “safe” places has been a point of discussion in the professional literature (e.g., Bernier 2003), but providing spaces where teens can feel relatively safe is likely to increase their desire to spend time there.

Effective Library Policy Display and Marketing

The final category deals with library policies and the ways in which libraries publicize programs and services. Seven (31.8%) librarians and three (15.0%) teens suggested that teens are interested in book and other resource displays as a readers’ advisory tool. As one of the teens said: “Here, these are some new books just to spark your interest. It’s very fun having these books there, just because it helps you if you like different genres and helps you learn what different genres are like, and you probably might like them.”

Library information boards/bulletin boards were another recommendation for publicizing library programs and services, with six librarians (27.2%) and two teens (10.0%) discussing them in their videos. As one of the librarians said:

We have a number of displayers similar to this one that highlights the current events, and we do hold big events in our library, such as a chocolate festival. And as small as our community is, we usually get hundreds of kids at each event. Anyway, a good part of that is displaying, and we have special displayers, such as this one, that helps get the word out.

Along these same lines, one of the teens pointed out the YA department’s bulletin board, saying: “It’s an information board, which is handy to have, tells you about upcoming events, all of which are free, so that’s pretty cool.”

YA-only Use Policies

Although both librarians and teens expressed a preference for YA spaces that were visually and physically separated from children's and adult spaces, only four librarians (18.1%) and no teens stressed the importance of setting YA-only use policies to ensure that children and adults do not use the teen spaces for their own purposes, which is not surprising, as few teens are involved in writing policies.

Finally, two librarians (9.1%) but no teens identified good signage as an important method of disseminating library policy and service information. For example, "and then last thing that we'd like to change . . . we don't really have signage in here. We had someone make these up for us. They're just paper signs, and we'd love to have some actual fun, funky, usable signage."

CONCLUSION

The results of this study lend empirical evidence to the current, largely untested, guidelines for YA library design found in the professional literature. Returning to the research questions posed at the beginning of this article, the first question asked what elements of physical space design teens and YA librarians consider the most important in creating successful YA spaces. This study tells us that the need for physical comfort is of strong importance to both teens and their librarians. Participants were enthusiastic about appealing furniture, effective and attractive lighting, and furnishings that could be moved to accommodate varying activities and uses. These results also suggest a need for multipurpose spaces designed to accommodate both group and individual use.

Broadly speaking, librarians tended to focus more on resources when describing their library spaces, whereas teens tended to focus more on the activities that take place there. As a result, library space designers should take both resources and activities into account when making design decisions and remember that libraries are not just places to house materials but also places where a wide range of activities and interactions take place. Designers, architects, and others should look for creative design solutions and opportunities for overcoming the tension between library spaces designed to provide access to resources and library spaces designed to enhance and facilitate socializing, homework, programming, and other activities. A focus on supporting greater flexibility of use is consequently vital to successful YA library space design. This study also makes clear the need for increased promotion of the full range of services and activities that today's libraries can support, with librarians and other library advocates making conscious efforts to broaden the public's view of libraries from places that house books to viewing libraries as community information and interaction centers.

The second research question asked what kinds of activities teens and YA librarians expect public library YA space design to support. The results show that well-designed public library spaces should support teens' leisure activities and leisure information needs as well as their academic activities and academic information needs. Moreover, they tell us that to encourage more teens to use their libraries more frequently and for a wider range of purposes, YA library spaces should employ effective policy display and marketing while promoting feelings of teen space ownership.

The final research question considered the implications of this work for best design practices for YA public library spaces. The recommendations reported in the results section provide a framework for user-centered YA library space design and highlight the need for continued teen and librarian input as teens' needs evolve across time and vary from community to community.

Now that this exploratory work has identified many important elements of YA library space design, the next stage in the work should involve testing their relative importance with new groups of participants to learn which of these elements can have the greatest impact in improving YA library space design and, by extension, public library services to teens. Overall, the excitement and pride that the teens who participated in this study expressed when discussing their public libraries indicates that even in a world in which teens are often viewed as "digital natives" (Prensky 2001), there is still a place for the physical public library in their lives. For most U.S. teens the major motivating factor for spending so much time using cell phones, online social networks, and other digital technologies is for communication and social interaction with peers and family (Agosto, Abbas, and Naughton 2012). This study has shown that with thoughtful design, YA public library spaces can be places where teens can engage in this type of communication and interaction both online and in person, and it shows us that as teens' information practices and social behaviors evolve, public libraries must adapt to fit their changing behaviors. As such, and with thoughtful design and marketing, the YA public library spaces of today and tomorrow could become even more central to teens' lives.

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NOTE

1. The terms *teen* and *young adult* are used interchangeably in this article to refer to youth of approximately ages 12–18.

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