This study describes an online questionnaire survey of young adult librarians at school and public libraries regarding their literacy engagement with adolescent male users. The purpose of this study was to address the question of what librarians know about best practices in boy-focused literacy strategies and to what extent they are employing them in their libraries.

The majority of young adult librarians are aware of reading problems associated with adolescent males but are not always applying this knowledge in the consistent use of boy-focused literacy strategies. Professional development appears to have a significant effect on the frequency with which young adult librarians reported employing targeted reading strategies. Successful experiences revolved around games, creative activities, personal interaction and choice. Areas identified as needing improvement included focusing on boys’ interests, providing opportunities for social interaction and hosting teen book discussion groups.

Headings:

- Libraries & teenagers
- Teenagers/ Books & reading
- Young adult services librarians
- School librarians
- Questionnaires
- Surveys
MINDING THE GAP: THE ROLE OF YOUNG ADULT LIBRARIANS
IN ENGAGING TEENAGE BOYS IN READING

by
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For John, my partner in life, who has never missed an opportunity to encourage and support me.
Introduction

There have been numerous studies over decades showing that boys, on average, do not read as much, as often or as well as girls. This is particularly true for adolescent boys, who consistently score lower than girls on national assessments in reading and are found on average to be one and a half grades behind girls in reading (Taylor, 2005). The disparity is seen time after time, in state after state. A 2006 study of eighth-graders in Maryland showed that 72% of girls read at or above a proficient level compared with just 61% of boys (Whitmire, 2006). In one Wyoming county, seventh-grade boys scored 45% lower than girls on the state’s 2007 reading proficiency test (Robinson, 2007). This achievement gap only widens as students move into high school, where nearly half of boys identify themselves as nonreaders (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). In a 2008 assessment by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), female students had progressively higher average reading scores than male students, with the gap between boys and girls increasing from 7 points at age 9 to 11 points by age 17. (Rampey, Dion & Donahue, 2009).

While these and many other studies show that the disparity in reading achievement between male and female students worsens as children grow into adolescence, the difference is evident early on. For example, a DOE fourth-grade reading assessment in 2011 showed that the extent to which students reported reading for fun differed greatly by gender. In that study, 18% of boys reported “never or hardly ever” reading for fun, compared with only 10% of girls. Similarly, 53% of girls said they read
for fun “almost every day,” compared with just 39% of boys (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Because vocabulary knowledge and growth are known to improve reading comprehension, children who read more tend to have more rapid gains in reading skill than children who read less (Stanovich, 1986). It stands to reason, then, that the volume of reading matters.

Yet boys very often find themselves at a disadvantage in academic literacy because much of the reading promoted by educators tends to appeal more to girls than to boys. Boys very often prefer plot-driven over character-driven stories and informational texts over fiction, feeding their desire to find out more about things they are already interested in (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Yet research suggests boys are faced with a lack of availability of texts that match their interests and needs (Millard, 1997). This difference in access and promotion is not surprising considering the majority of teachers and librarians are female. Indeed, some researchers have wondered whether girls’ higher achievement in reading could possibly reflect the predominantly female-focused nature of the reading demands made of students in general (Barrs, 1993).

It can’t be said with certainty whether or not this is the case, but any attempt to connect boys with reading material that appeals to them is a step toward closing this persistent gap in reading achievement. As a result, Michael Sullivan, author and researcher on boys and reading, says in the introduction to his 2009 book Connecting Boys with Books 2: Closing the Reading Gap, “We must address the boys’ reading problem one boy at a time” (p. 2). Sullivan notes that these alarming yet persistent statistics on the gender gap in reading should represent a call to action for individuals, given the fact that schools and society as a whole have not been able to solve this
problem. Sullivan advocates a personal approach, as do Michael W. Smith and Jeffrey D. Wilhelm, authors of *Reading Don’t Fix No Chevys: Literacy in the Lives of Young Men*. In other words: Get to know boys -- ask them about their interests, find out what they like to read outside of school and make it available to them. It could be argued that there is no one in a better position to connect teenage boys with texts that appeal them than young adult librarians who have access to this demographic and to resources in their school and public libraries.

Many librarians have witnessed the drop off in boys’ reading firsthand, as “generation after generation of story-hour-loving boys turn into adolescents who never set foot in a library” (Sullivan, 2009, p. 3). But the reading gap between boys and girls has become more talked about and publicized in recent years, perhaps most notably since *Newsweek* ran a cover story in January 2006 titled, “The Trouble with Boys.” That story, as well as other mainstream media coverage, touched off more widespread interest in the work of a number of researchers, including those listed above, who have taken the time to ask boys about their relationships with reading and have written about what they had to say. As a result, there is a growing body of research that spells out what boys like to read and what attracts them to reading material.

Experts note that there are distinct patterns in what boys and girls like in terms of reading material. In general, boys prefer books with multiple characters and a lot of action, suspense and visual stimulation. They read more nonfiction and historical texts than girls, seek out escapism and humor and have a higher tolerance for violence (Cole, 2008). Smith and Wilhelm (2002) note research that shows boys typically are more inclined to read magazine and newspaper articles, graphic novels and comic books, and
they like to read about hobbies, sports and other things they might do or be interested in doing. In their own research study, working with 49 teenage boys, Smith and Wilhelm found the reading they enjoyed most always had a purpose, clear goals and immediate feedback. “Game-like structures supported much of the boys’ literate activity outside of school” (p. 126). More than half of the boys in their study reported playing video games and reading on the Internet. Many talked about enjoying classrooms games and word puzzles, active learning pursuits not traditionally associated with literacy in school.

Given the persistent boys’ reading problem and research that identifies numerous ways to connect teenage boys with reading, it is important to learn to what extent young adult librarians in school and public libraries are implementing these practices. This research study seeks to identify what young adult librarians in school and public libraries know about boy-focused strategies and to what extent they are employing these strategies. It is my hope that the findings of this study will inform and encourage young adult librarians to work toward finding entry points to reading for the adolescent boys served by their libraries.

**Literature Review**

In DOE reading tests, girls have scored higher than boys in every year in every age group for the past 30 years (Scieszka, 2003). While this difference is clearly not a new phenomenon, it remains a problem that is unresolved and worsening. The DOE reported in 2005 that the reading gap between male and female high school students widened between 1992 and 2000 (Whitmire, 2006). In 2011, a DOE reading assessment showed that while fourth-grade girls scored 7 points higher on average than their male
classmates, the gap widened by eighth-grade to a 9-point difference (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). According to the DOE’s National Assessment of Educational Progress 2004 Trends in Academic Progress, the gap between boys and girls, which was only slightly noticeable in fourth grade, left boys 14 points behind girls during their 12th-grade year (Perie, Moran & Lutkus, 2005).

These statistics should not surprise anyone in the field of education, given that the score gaps in reading between 17-year-old boys and girls have remained virtually unchanged for nearly four decades: the gap was 12 points in 1971, and 37 years later, in 2008, the gap was 11 points (Rampey, Dion & Donahue, 2009). In a 1998 article for the Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, Richard T. Vacca, the past present of the International Reading Association, called attention to what he sees as the neglect of older literacy learners due in large part to a policy and public mindset that focuses almost entirely on early childhood and elementary school. Vacca refers to what he calls the “faulty and misguided” assumption that, “If young children learn to read early on, they will read to learn throughout their lives” (Vacca, 1998, p. 606).

These issues are compounded when it comes to boys and reading. Adding to what Vacca perceives as “benign neglect” (p. 605) of older literacy learners is the fact that adolescent boys have few if any male role models when it comes to reading. Sullivan (2010) points out that society lauds men for athletics, business and entertainment, but rarely for education, and “the vast majority of adults that boys see read are female” (p. 133). In discussing what he sees as a lack of focus on the needs of boys in libraries, Sullivan (2003) notes that “one major contributing factor to this blurring is the absence of men in children’s libraries” (p. 8). Women made up 83.4% of the profession in the United
States in 1998, with the few men in the field often being moved into administrative positions (Piper & Collamer, 2001). Perhaps as a result, the literature notes that boys very often feel less comfortable than girls in both school and public library settings. Studies have shown that girls tend to express more positive views of public libraries than do boys (Jacobson, 1991) and that school libraries often appear to be friendlier to girls (Cook, Parker & Pettijohn, 2005). In a 2007 survey exploring gender-related differences in reasons teenagers use public libraries, girls tended to rate libraries more useful in helping them meet personal information needs, making public libraries “female-friendly” spaces for adolescent girls (Agosto, Ipock & Paone, 2007, p. 387).

Given the reality and/or perception of the female-friendly library, Sullivan notes that librarians are faced with two challenges -- first, to strive be understanding and inclusive of boys, even though most librarians don’t know what it’s like to be a boy, and second, to dispel the impression that libraries are the territory of women and girls, not of men and boys (Sullivan, 2003). A first step is the acknowledgment that boys’ interests in general differ from those of girls. In his 2002 book Even Hockey Players Read: Boys, Literacy and Learning, David Booth, an author and professor of education at the University of Toronto, notes that, “as we look at studies and reports that examine boys and girls and their learning styles and special interests . . . we do notice differences. These differences are not in all boys or all girls, but in enough of them to cause us to reflect about our demands on their young lives” (pp. 11-12). Similarly, William G. Brozo, a professor of literacy at George Mason University, says in the 2010 edition of his book To Be A Boy, To Be A Reader that teachers (and librarians) “will never make significant progress eradicating boys’ difficulty with reading and learning unless they dedicate themselves to
discovering boys’ interests and acquainting boys with quality books related to those interests” (p. 79).

While warning against over generalizing the differences between boys’ and girls’ literacy interests and behaviors, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) begin their study by highlighting the major findings, taken from the literature, they found most compelling about adolescent boys and reading:

- Boys read less than girls read.
- Boys don’t comprehend narrative and expository texts as well as girls do.
- Boys tend to think they are not good readers and increasingly consider themselves “nonreaders” as they get older.
- Boys tend to be better at information retrieval and work-related literacy tasks than girls.
- Boys value reading as an activity less than girls do.
- Boys have less interest in leisure reading and are more likely to read for utilitarian purposes than girls.
- Boys are more inclined to read informational texts.
- Boys are more inclined to read magazines, newspapers, graphic novels and comic books.
- Boys are more enthusiastic about reading electronic texts than girls.
- Boys tend to resist reading stories about girls.
- Boys like to read about hobbies, sports and things they might do or be interested in doing.
• Boys tend to enjoy escapism and humor.
• The appearance of a book and its cover are important to boys.
• Boys prefer active responses to reading in which they physically act out responses, do something or make something (pp. 10-11).

Smith and Wilhelm noted that the above listed findings were drawn from among the following studies: Abrahamson & Carter (1984); Barrs (1993); Children’s Literature Research Centre (1996); Dunne and Khan (1998); Hall and Coles (1997); Kelly (1986); Millard (1994, 1997); OFSTED (1993); Shapiro (1990), Wilhelm (1997); Wilhelm and Edmiston (1998); and Wilhelm and Friedemann (1998).

Given this evidence, young adult librarians in schools and public libraries are in a unique position to reach adolescent boys by actively developing programs and activities and using strategies and approaches designed to appeal to their habits and interests. Indeed, in a 2006 study of the leisure reading habits of urban middle school students, school and public libraries were cited as among the teens’ primary sources for reading material (Hughes-Hassell & Lutz, 2006). Based on what the research shows, the balance of this literature review will highlight specific programs and activities as well as approaches and strategies young adult librarians in schools and public libraries might employ in an effort to connect teenage boys with reading.

Programs and Activities

**Book discussion groups.** Book discussion groups, or book clubs, represent one promising approach to addressing the trend of lower reading achievement among adolescent boys. Teen book clubs, designed to increase reading engagement and reading
time for students in middle and high schools, are employed in classrooms and libraries throughout the country. Among the documented benefits to adolescent boys of such groups are improvement in the reading and writing skills of diverse learners, improvement in self-esteem, greater leadership and independence and tolerance of diversity (Brozo, 2007). However, across the country in schools, libraries and book stores, young adult book clubs are dominated by girls (Kinsella, 2006). This is partly explained by the way most book clubs are organized, with everyone reading the same novel and discussing it in a social setting with an emphasis on character development, reflecting a predominantly female approach to reading (Sullivan, 2009).

In the attempt to bring more boys into the fold of teen book clubs, it’s critical to employ strategies that address the unique adolescent male experience. One middle school in Alexandria, Virginia, set out to do just that with a program called the Boys in Literacy Initiative, which “organizes monthly book clubs around topics, genres, authors and themes that the boys identify as important to them” (Mitchell, Murphy & Peters, 2008, p.70). Organizers report participation has increased each year since the program’s inception. Sullivan (2003) suggests librarians consider creating separate book discussion groups for boys and girls. He notes that “the more openly expressive nature of girls will likely move the discussion, while the boys hang back, unable to connect to the proceedings” (p.35). If a co-ed book group is necessary, he suggests staggering the formats of books chosen to read to appeal to both girls and boys.

**Online presence.** Today’s teenage boys also have grown up using video games, social media and the Internet, not only for entertainment but also as platforms for learning, creating and connecting with others. Online teen book clubs, or at least book
clubs that have an online presence, are shown to encourage teens to discuss books, gaming or their favorite technologies while at the same time teaching them how to create blogs, wikis, and other collaborative online products (Peowski, 2010). In addition, linking book club selections to members’ interests outside of school, including humor and making having fun with books a high priority in book clubs make a difference to boys (Brozo, 2007). Outside of book clubs, Sullivan (2010) advocates librarians practice indirect readers’ advisory by providing bibliographies both in print and online that include a mix of “print and non-print materials, real world and virtual sites, fiction and nonfiction and books across genres” (p. 73-74). Sullivan points out the wisdom behind providing readers’ advisory in different formats with this important question, “How do you reach out to a nonreading audience using a traditional written format?” (p. 73).

**Competitive games.** Games, by their design, offer both clear goals and immediate feedback, which are two things the teenage boys in Smith and Wilhelm’s study (2002) said they desired in order to feel challenged and fulfilled. They point out this has important consequences for boys’ reading because reading long novels does not provide this immediacy, while reading shorter informational texts either online or in print does. As a result, competitive games may be just the thing to get boys into the library in the first place. There are numerous books that outline teen programs for libraries, but librarians seeking to reach teenage boys would do well to research ideas for competitive games that tap into boys’ interests while including a reading component and the immediacy that boys seek for feedback. One example, from RoseMary Honnold’s 2003 book *101+ Teen Programs That Work*, that meets these criteria is a sports team trivia game where users pick their favorite team and research trivia about the team on the
Internet. Trivia questions are posted on the library web site and in the library itself, alongside a display of team and sports books and biographies. Trivia contest winners might receive tickets to a game. Honnold also recommends book-related games, word games and contests and suggests, “make the game colorful, include pictures, and make the instructions simple” (p. 41).

Social action projects. In their 2006 book Going With the Flow: How to Engage Boys (and Girls) in Their Literacy Learning, Smith and Wilhelm advocate giving students the opportunity to undertake social action projects as a way to encourage them to come to an informed opinion and “stake your own position and your own identity on an issue of importance” (p. 114). For example, in one leadership unit, the class did a project called “a letter a day,” which required the class to commit to writing a letter to a different leader each day for a month. “Of course, this required research into the activities of various leaders and also offered students the chance to make compelling arguments, persuasive proposals, explanations of gratitude, and the like” (p. 114). While a public librarian might not be able to commit to such a daily undertaking, this leadership project could be adapted by teen services librarians to address community leadership or issues important to teens served by the library.

Creating artifacts. The leadership project discussed above dovetailed into a project that allowed students to create multimedia knowledge artifacts based on the leader they chose for the project. Working in groups, some of them created video documentaries, one of which was focused on lesser known leaders in the community. Smith and Wilhelm (2006) note that “such an enterprise is inherently social; it cried out to be shared so that you can be known and other people can benefit from what you have learned” (p. 114). In
her 2007 book *Get Connected: Tech Programs for Teens*, Honnold notes that a public library in Springfield, Mo., held a wildly popular video production workshop for teens by partnering with a local film group that added a teen category to its annual film festival. Honnold (2007) also highlights the public library in Cheshire, Conn., that produces a podcast that is a teen-created and -hosted cultural magazine that includes poems, book reviews, music reviews, comedy sketches and songs.

**Dramatic activity.** In part because of structural differences in the brains of boys and girls, Sullivan (2009) points out that “the addition of sound, color, motion and kinetic energy (the body in motion) can stimulate boys’ brains to work at a higher level in terms of language” (p. 26). In Smith and Wilhelm’s 2002 study of teenage boys, a majority of boys said they felt better able to meet reading challenges when they were allowed to pursue active responses and projects. Various forms of dramatic activity, including literature circles and reenacting scenes from the reading, were cited as most helpful. In describing one African-American 10th-grader, Smith and Wilhelm note, “Though he professed not to like reading in English and not to be able to remember even what he had just read, he did assert that he enjoyed reading when people participated together to create drama or discuss important ideas” (p. 202). Similarly, in public libraries, so-called “coffeehouse programs” (Honnold, 2003) have proven popular among both male and female teenagers, providing opportunities to recite poetry and demonstrate various talents, from singing and rapping to performing skits and telling jokes. In her 2009 book *Start-to-Finish YA Programs*, Ella W. Jones offers instructions for public libraries to present a hip-hop symposium, with a panel of industry professionals, a live DJ, performances and open-mic sessions. Jones notes, “Music is a strong influence in the
lives of young people. Spotlight the collection and the services of the library to show teens the business side of the hip-hop industry” (p. 95).

**Booktalks.** The booktalk, typically in which a teacher or librarian shares a brief but intriguing part of or summary of a book, is a time-honored way to try to interest students in reading. Yet Sullivan (2003) points out that traditional booktalking often fails boys because of the types of books many librarians choose to talk about or the points they choose to emphasize. Very often librarians zero in on the characters of a book and their relationships, which is an approach that the literature shows is most appealing to girls. To hook boys, Sullivan suggests keeping it short and focusing on the humor, suspense or action in a story. He says, “Girls are more likely to be drawn in by an emotional setup; boys are looking for the impact” (p. 99). In addition, booktalks of both fiction and nonfiction books are useful in practicing what Smith and Wilhelm call frontloading, which involves “helping students bring prior interests, experiences and knowledge to bear on a new task” (p. 33). Booktalking, both formally to a group or informally to one or two boys in a conversation, can help to build interest before reading begins.

**Strategies and Approaches**

**Plot over characters.** Sullivan (2010) urges librarians to acknowledge the physical nature of boys and their need for stimuli and movement to spark brain function. In promoting fiction to boys, he suggests promoting “books about active subjects that focus on plot elements over characterization” (p. 3). He further states that boys are more likely to focus on the action and progression of a story over who the story is about. “Boys,” Sullivan notes, “are more likely to be outward thinkers, so the books should focus
outward toward the greater world and less inward toward personal feelings and relationships” (p. 7). When considering characters, however, Brozo (2010) says teen and preteen boys may be more inclined to read fiction with strong male protagonists or classic male archetypes that affirm masculine identities. He identifies 10 positive male archetypes: pilgrim, patriarch, king, warrior, magician, wildman, healer, prophet, trickster and lover. Brozo notes that getting teenage boys to read books featuring these positive archetypes can have life-altering results: “This literature has the chance to capture boys’ imaginations, bring them into the literacy club, and ultimately bestow hope for academic possibilities and life options” (p. 23).

**Get to know them.** Nearly every researcher on boys and reading points out that finding entry points to reading for adolescent boys starts with cultivating their outside-of-school interests. Brozo (2010) points out that it makes little sense to ask a struggling reader or a nonreader what they like to read. Instead, he suggests teachers and librarians talk to adolescent boys to discover their personal interests and make an attempt to connect them with informational or fiction books that align with those interests. Indeed, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) noted that, “When boys talked about their music, their sports, their hobbies, their art, they seemed to us to be talking about healthy work. Most of them talked about school and reading in a different way, as a means to an end or an obstacle to overcome to get where you want to go” (p. 67). In addition, the teenage boys in their study felt it was the duty of teachers to take the time to find out about them as people. This implicit contract appeared to have several features, including the following:

- My teacher should try to get to know me personally.
- My teacher should address my interests in some way.
• My teacher should care about me as an individual (p. 99).

This contract applies not only to teachers but to teacher-librarians and anyone else interesting in bringing teenage boys to literacy. Booth (2002) notes that, “We have to find ways to help a difficult boy move towards literacy. We know that if one person connects with him in a caring way, his behavior can change in quick order” (97).

**Use enabling texts.** It’s important for teachers and librarians to provide meaningful reading material to all adolescent boys, but in particular when working with African-American males. Alfred W. Tatum (2006) notes the striking absence from the curriculum of specific texts and text characteristics that are needed by this demographic that as a whole continues to struggle with achievement deficits as measured by standardized testing and other accepted educational measurements. Tatum urges the use of the enabling text, which he defines as “one that moves beyond a sole cognitive focus – such as skill and strategy development – to include social, cultural, spiritual or economic focus” (p. 47). Tatum further notes that these texts engage students in authentic discussions and connect the social, economic and political environment to the educational environment. Tatum provides a number of examples of these types of texts, many of which serve as jumping-off points for discussions that explore societal questions but are grounded in the current conditions of life for these young men. He refers to several anti-slavery documents, such as David Walker’s 1829 *Appeal*, as well as texts from the American Civil Rights Movement. Tatum (2007) identifies four characteristics of texts that African-American males find meaningful and significant: They contribute to a healthy psyche, focus on a collective struggle, provide a road map for being, doing, and acting and provide modern awareness of the real world (p. 83). And just as most
researchers urge educators to get to know students, Tatum advocates seeking input from African-American male students on the value of these texts. “Their voices,” he says, “are noticeably absent in conversations about their literacy-related successes and failures in middle and high school classrooms” (Tatum, 2006, p. 48).

**Go with the flow.** Smith and Wilhelm’s research (2002) on teenage boys and literacy is grounded in the idea of flow, a psychological construct coined by Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1990) that describes “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter” (p. 4). Smith and Wilhelm found that this theory of flow seemed to explain their analysis of what the young men in their study enjoyed doing and how that related to their literacy activities both inside and outside of school. They narrow down Csikszentmihalyi’s eight characteristics of flow into four main principles:

- A sense of control and competence.
- A challenge that requires an appropriate level of skill.
- Clear goals and feedback.
- A focus on the immediate experience (p. 28).

In his 2010 book *Motivating Students to Learn*, Jere Brophy (2010) also identifies this characteristic of flow in his discussion of students’ preference for immediate feedback and active over passive forms of learning. He notes that, “Activities that offer the greatest potential for enjoyment and flow experiences allow students to respond actively and get immediate feedback that they can use to guide subsequent responses” (p. 166). Brophy suggests structuring learning activities to include features typically associated with games
or recreational pursuits – activities that involve clear goals but require students to solve problems or puzzles to reach them.

**Celebrate multiple literacies.** Literacy researchers and educators are struggling to define what counts as literacy among adolescents today, most of whom are proficient in multiple literacies both inside and outside of school (Vacca, 1998). Similarly, Brozo (2010) notes that what it means to be literate is changing daily in the age of digital media, where the ability to communicate through digital means and social networking has exploded. He calls for educators to honor the new literacies that adolescent boys bring to the table. He points out that, “Adolescent boys are inveterate purveyors of these new literacies, including but not limited to (a) playing and reading about computer and video games, (b) reading comic books and graphic novels, (c) interacting on web sites devoted to their hobbies (skateboarding, collecting, sports), and (d) listening to or playing music and reading/writing song lyrics” (p. 138). Along the same lines, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) advocate a redefinition of literacy that would include, “the ability to communicate and make meaning with various sign systems, such as music, video, visual arts and electronic technologies, and would build on the interconnections among various forms of literacy” (p. 186). Booth (2002) echoes these ideas when he asks: “Are you connecting what boys write and talk about with what they are reading so that *they* begin to connect the different literacies in their lives?” (p. 85).

**Think purpose and practicality.** Smith and Wilhelm noted (2002) that the reading the boys in their study enjoyed most always had a purpose. In explaining the appeal of this type of reading, they said having a purpose gave the boys a reason to read, and the competence they gained from reading served as the reward. Many of the boys reported
that they read in order to learn how to fix things, figure out how something worked or to learn more about a topic or activity in which they already had an interest. They also found boys were more receptive to reading about things that related to the real world:

“They challenge us to negotiate curricula organized around topics, themes and problems of interest to the kids in the here and now instead of around mandated historical periods or canonical texts” (p. 112). In addition, they noted that the desire for choice in reading material and “the ability to pursue one’s interests as an exercise of freedom and possibility was pervasive throughout the study” (p. 109). Sullivan (2003) attributes the different reasons boys and girls seem to have for reading to innate differences between the genders: boys want to master their world, while girls want to understand it. As a result, boys tend to read for information they can use to work toward goals and results, while girls read to explore methods of communication and cooperation (Langerman, 1990).

**Give them what they want.** Study after study has shown that boys have a clear preference for certain types of reading material. In a 2008 study for the National Literacy Trust in England, a survey of more than 1,600 students at 29 schools showed a significantly higher percentage of boys than girls reported reading newspapers, comics, graphic novels, informational books and manuals (Clark & Akerman, 2008). Similarly, a 2007 study of the leisure reading habits of urban adolescents found that both male and female teens cited magazines as their favorite reading material, with boys citing sports magazines as their top choice (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007). As a result, the researchers suggest “that teachers and librarians promote magazine reading by providing and circulating magazines in both library and classroom collections” (p. 28). Smith and
Wilhelm (2002) noted that the teenage boys in their study showed a preference for short, informational texts, such as magazines and newspapers, but identified the following characteristics that appeal to them in fictional works: visual, action-packed, high-impact, suspenseful, humorous, edgy, subversive and controversial. Sullivan (2010) echoes these themes in his book on readers’ advisory for boys, saying that literature that appeals to boys tends toward the extremes, with gore, horror and themes often considered disgusting by adults. He notes, “Boys are outwardly focused. They are intellectual explorers. They want to reach the edges” (p. 8). In urging parents and teachers to respect boys’ interests, Brozo (2010) says, “We have known for many years that a large number of adolescents prefer to read nonfiction, yet it is rare to find this genre in middle school and high school classrooms and libraries. . . When boys say they like anything with sports, action, scary stuff, and comics and graphic novels, they mean it. We should honor boys’ interests by making texts on these topics available to them” (p. 187).

Given this knowledge, it stands to reason that targeted programming and strategies designed to appeal to the habits and interests of teenage boys would connect more boys with library programs and reading resources at school and public libraries. The study described below addresses the question of what young adult librarians in school and public libraries know about best practices in boy-focused strategies and to what extent they are employing them.

Methodology

The methodology of this study consisted of a survey for collecting both qualitative and quantitative samples. Data was gathered through the use of an online
questionnaire for young adult librarians at school and public libraries who subscribe to relevant listservs. Listservs are online mailing lists that provide electronic mail to subscribers with similar interests, thereby linking together professionals in a community. The survey was hosted by Qualtrics™, a web-based survey and data analysis tool. A recruitment email inviting young adult librarians to take the survey was posted to the following five targeted listservs:

- **YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association) book discussion listserv.** This American Library Association listserv is an online community of approximately 3,800 members, most of whom are media specialists at middle and high school libraries or teen services librarians at public libraries. ([http://lists.ala.org/sympa/info/yalsa-bk](http://lists.ala.org/sympa/info/yalsa-bk))

- **AASL (American Association of School Librarians) Forum.** This American Library Association discussion list of approximately 700 members covers issues and new developments in school librarianship. ([http://lists.ala.org/sympa/info/aaslforum](http://lists.ala.org/sympa/info/aaslforum))

- **ISS (Independent Schools Section) discussion list.** This American Library Association listserv, with approximately 350 members, offers a forum for discussion of non-public school librarianship. ([http://lists.ala.org/sympa/info/iss](http://lists.ala.org/sympa/info/iss))

- **LM-NET.** This discussion group is open to school media specialists worldwide as a forum to discuss new ideas in school library practice, seek advice and ask questions. LM-NET has more than 10,000 members worldwide. ([http://lmnet.wordpress.com/](http://lmnet.wordpress.com/))
• **WakeMedia listserv.** This discussion group, with approximately 250 members, is open only to school media and technology personnel in Wake County, North Carolina. (There is no website; email address for members to post: wakemedia@mailman.wcpss.net)

For the purposes of this study, “young adult librarians” refers to middle and high school librarians and teen services librarians at public libraries, and the term “adolescent boys” or “teenage boys” refers to boys in grades 6 to 12. The use of both open- and closed-ended survey questions made the results of this study appropriate for both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Responses to the open-ended questions were mined for common themes using manifest content analysis; Qualtrics™ statistical analysis tools were applied to the nominal and ordinal data gathered from the closed-ended survey questions.

**Survey questionnaire.** A link at the bottom of the recruitment email sent respondents to the first page of the Qualtrics™ survey, where a message of consent was displayed. Respondents who agreed to take the survey by clicking “yes” were sent to the first question in the survey; those who clicked “no” were taken to a screen that exited the survey. The survey questions were derived from the literature describing what is known about adolescent boys and literacy, with a primary emphasis on recommendations from the following five books whose authors are highly acclaimed researchers who focus on the reading preferences and practices of boys:


The 31-question survey began by collecting demographic information about gender, work site (school or public library), number of years in the field, size of library staff and whether or not the respondent had a Master’s Degree in Library Science (MLS). It was important to collect this demographic information in order to be able separate variables in the data analysis stage that may or may not have an effect on the professional behavior of the respondents. For example, the size of the library staff could have an impact on how much time a librarian is able to spend focusing on one user group. Respondents were then asked about how they receive information about best practices in serving teens in school and public libraries and whether or not they have read any professional literature or attended conference presentations about the reading gap between adolescent boys and girls. This information might prove important in discerning whether or not those who read about or attended presentations about boys and reading were more inclined to employ strategies specifically designed to interest them in reading.

The next section of the survey included a mix of open- and closed-ended questions about the operation of teen book discussion groups (book clubs), if respondents
hosted such groups in their library, as well as specifics about the makeup of their library collections. Respondents were then asked to provide the frequency, measured on a 4-point Likert scale, with which they performed certain behaviors in their roles as teen services librarians. The survey wrapped up with a few open-ended questions designed to find out what strategies and experiences (listed or not listed in the survey) respondents found most successful in engaging teenage boys and what obstacles prevented them from engaging more often with this user group. The last question asked respondents whether there was anything they wanted to add about their experiences working with teenage boys in their libraries. (See survey, Appendix A.)

**Sample and data collection.** The population of interest in this study was young adult librarians, defined for the purpose of this study as librarians/media specialists in middle or high schools or teen services librarians in public libraries. In order to gain wide exposure, I chose to post the survey online to listservs whose membership is made up of this population. The online survey also provided for the anonymity of the respondents because the Qualtrics™ survey software did not record or collect the subjects’ email addresses, IP addresses or any other identifying information. Qualtrics™ did, however, collect and organize the survey data automatically and made it available for analysis with the statistical tools that are part of the product. While the exact number of librarians who read the invitation to take the survey is unknown, 179 participants completed the entire survey. Once survey respondents consented to take the survey, they could choose not to answer a question and move on to the next question without penalty. In addition, some questions were only answerable if the respondent answered in the affirmative to the previous question. As a result, the number of participants who responded to individual
questions varies. Participants were given two weeks to complete the survey, after which time the survey was deactivated so that data analysis could begin.

As is noted in the limitations discussed below, those who chose to take this survey may not be representative of the population of young adult librarians as a whole. It is likely that those who already have an interest in the literacy of teenage boys were more inclined to take the survey. Because of this, statistical significance was not calculated for the results of this survey. Patterns in the data are presented through the use of descriptive statistics, discussion and in table form where appropriate.

Limitations

This study was undertaken with the intention of gathering reliable, unbiased data and analyzing that data to draw useful conclusions. But like most research studies in the social sciences, it has limitations. This study aims to discover to what extent young adult librarians in school and public libraries know about and use established strategies designed to appeal to teenage boys. This data was self-reported by the respondents and will not be independently verified. This represents a limitation in that self-reported data typically is subject to several potential sources of bias, including selective memory and exaggeration. For example, respondents may not remember something but may feel obligated to answer anyway by using a best guess. They also may under-report or over-report statistics, for instance the number of boys or girls participating in their book clubs, particularly if they haven’t consistently collected this data.

In addition, a limitation of the survey methodology used in this study, as opposed to field research, is that the survey itself remains unchanged throughout data collection.
Therefore, I was unable to change survey questions based on responses, particularly to open-ended questions that might offer insight into effective but previously unreported strategies or variables (Babbie, 2010). Also, because no identifying information was collected from respondents, I was unable to ask follow-up questions that might help clarify or add more in-depth explanation to some of the answers to open-ended questions.

Another limitation of this particular study is that four of the five listservs that the survey was posted to have a target audience of school librarians. Only the YALSA book discussion group has a mixed membership of young adult librarians at schools and public libraries. As a result, it would be expected that the results will include more input from media specialists at middle and high schools than teen services librarians at public libraries. This could affect the results because school librarians generally serve more of a teaching role and perhaps also have more frequent access to adolescent boys as they may be required to visit school libraries but not public libraries.

Finally, another limitation important to note is that this survey was voluntary. As a result, there is the possibility, mentioned above, that those people who are interested in working with teenage boys and reading would be more inclined to spend the time to take the survey. Those young adult librarians who do very little work with adolescent boys might choose to skip it. In this case, the results would be skewed by data from those people who already focus on this target group and might not be generalizable to the entire population of young adult librarians.
Findings

Characteristics of respondents. As expected, more school librarians than public librarians chose to take the survey, with 72% of respondents saying they work in schools and 28% in public libraries. Also, reflecting the fact that librarianship is a feminized profession, as discussed in the literature review above, the gender breakdown of the survey respondents was 92% female and 8% male. The librarians surveyed represented a wide range of experience in the area of teen services librarianship, with 41% reporting they have worked in the field from 0 to 5 years, 28% reporting 6 to 11 years, 16% reporting 12 to 17 years and 15% reporting 18 or more years working with teenagers in libraries. An overwhelming majority of respondents (71%) reported that they are the sole librarian working in their libraries. A staff of two librarians was reported by 18% of respondents and 6% and 5% of participants reported a librarian staff of three or more than three, respectively. In terms of education, 78% of respondents reported having a Master’s Degree in Library Science (MLS), which is not surprising since holding an MLS is a requirement for application to most librarian and media specialist positions.

Information on best practices. Before addressing the engagement of teenage boys in their libraries, respondents were asked to indicate how they receive information about best practices in serving teens. This question was designed to find out what resources young adult librarians rely on to keep up with the latest information and trends with regard to teen services. Respondents were encouraged to check all resources that applied from the list, acknowledging that professionals typically consult a wide range of resources for professional development. For this question, there were 171 responses (Table 1). National professional organizations such as YALSA and AASL had the
highest percentage of users at 89%, while other teen services librarians, or colleagues, were noted as resources by 81% of respondents.

**TABLE 1. Sources of Best Practices Information in Serving Teens (check all that apply)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents (n=171)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From national professional organizations such as YALSA and AASL</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From other teen services librarians</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From reading professional literature</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From professional conferences</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From social media</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From state professional organizations</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the question about best practices information, respondents were asked whether or not they have read any professional literature or attended any conference presentations about the reading gap between adolescent boys and girls. From the 171 responses to this question, 77% noted they had read literature or attended a presentation about the reading gap. This indicates that the majority of the respondents are familiar with the reading problems associated with adolescent boys. This is important information to consider when looking at responses to later questions that get at whether or not teen services librarians act on this knowledge.

**Boy time vs. girl time.** To get an idea of how much time participants spend interacting with boys versus girls in their libraries, respondents were asked to estimate what percentage of the time they spend performing readers’ advisory is typically spent
with boys and what percentage is spent with girls. Responses were in text form and sorted according to those respondents who estimated spending more readers’ advisory time with girls, those who reported spending more time with boys and those who said they spend equal time with each gender. Of the 161 responses to this question, three were not used because the respondents did not list percentages that added up to 100 or did not specify which percentage applied to which gender. Of the 158 responses used (Table 2), 52% reported spending more time performing readers’ advisory with girls, while 32% reported spending an equal amount of time with each gender. Just 16% of respondents reported spending more time with boys, and of those, one-fifth said they work in all-boys schools with no opportunity to interact professionally with girls.

### TABLE 2. Time Spent on Readers’ Advisory With Each Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number of respondents (n=158)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50/50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After learning that a majority of respondents consult professional resources in their roles as young adult librarians, are aware of the reading gap between adolescent boys and girls and spend more time on readers’ advisory with girls than with boys in their libraries, the next step was to discover to what extent the respondents apply best practices and boy-focused strategies when they do work with boys in their libraries.

**Book groups.** Because teen book clubs or discussion groups are identified in the literature as one promising approach to addressing the trend of lower reading
achievement among adolescent boys, respondents were asked several open- and closed-ended questions about the makeup and operation of teen book clubs hosted in their libraries. Of the 169 respondents to the question asking whether or not they host book clubs, 56% indicated they do host book discussion groups. And just 12% said they host separate book clubs for boys and for girls. These respondents were then asked to comment on what is different about the focus and operation of the boys’ group versus the girls’ group. A number of the respondents noted that they work in boys’ schools and did not elaborate, but a few listed specific differences in their boy and girl groups that are documented in the bulleted list below:

- We focus more on books with male characters or books from sites like Guys Read in the boys' group. In the girls' group, we typically pick books that are more girl-focused.
- The majority of boys prefer to read non-fiction, unless they are sci-fi or fantasy fans and so we have some separate groups, some mixed groups. If we have an emotional category read, we may see GLBT males.
- We are running a mini-course on dystopian youth literature for 12th graders in the spring and groups independently became all boys and all girls.
- Teen boys want to read different types of books and discuss books differently. I recommend same-sex book clubs in high school but coed book groups still work in middle school.
- They have different group leaders, but I think the focus and operation are similar (mother/daughter; father/son); the boys’ group probably has more related activities like games with their discussions.
• Our boys’ book club (led by a male teacher as I am female and not invited) focuses on guy authors who write for boys.

In further exploring the operation of teen book clubs, respondents who indicated they host co-ed groups were asked about the gender composition of those groups. Of the 78 usable responses, 74% said their groups are made up primarily of girls, while just 5% indicated a majority of boys. And 21% said their co-ed club’s gender makeup is 50% male and 50% female (Table 3).

**TABLE 3. Gender Composition of Co-Ed Book Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number of respondents (n=78)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Female</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50/50</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In an effort to learn whether respondents attempt to make book club reading choices that might appeal more to boys, those who operate co-ed book groups were asked whether or not they stagger formats in reading choices, such as a mix of plot-driven and character-driven stories. Of the 95 responses to this question, 58 (or 61%) said they do stagger formats while 37 (or 39%) said they do not.

**The collection.** While boy-focused book groups and other library programs represent potential ways for young adult librarians to reach boys, the library collection itself is important. As boys browse the shelves on their own or ask librarians for help, are they likely to find resources that appeal to them? A survey question asking whether or not respondents’ collections include short, informational texts, such as magazines,
newspapers and manuals indicated that the overwhelming majority of them do. Of the 169 respondents to this question, 92% stated that these types of publications are part of their collections. Those who answered in the affirmative were then asked to indicate which subjects their collection includes from a list of informational subjects identified in the literature as of interest adolescent males (Table 4).

**TABLE 4. Subjects of Interest Included in Collection (check all that apply)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects of Interest</th>
<th>Number of respondents (n=157)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaming</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobbies</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automobiles</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results show that respondents say they do stock shelves with short informational publications covering a wide variety of subjects of interest to teenage boys. For example, all but seven of the 157 respondents (96%) noted that their collections include short texts on sports. The majority of respondents also indicated collecting materials on news, hobbies, automobiles, gaming and music.

**Walking the walk.** The next section of the survey asks respondents to rate the frequency with which various statements apply to them in their roles as teen services librarians. Respondents were asked to rate the frequency of behaviors on a 4-point Likert scale, choosing “often,” “sometimes,” “rarely” or “never” (Table 5). This section of 10
questions was designed to get at the daily behaviors of respondents in an attempt to
answer this question: How often do they think about and apply boy-focused strategies as
established in the literature?

**TABLE 5: Percentage Selecting “Often” or “Sometimes” for Behavior Frequency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Often/Sometimes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Think about or research specific ways to engage teenage boys with</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>books, programs and other library resources. (n=170)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to interest adolescent male users in highly visual texts such</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as nonfiction with illustrations, graphic novels and comic books.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=170)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to interest adolescent male users in fictional texts with plot-</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>driven stories that feature action, adventure, humor and/or suspense</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rather than a primary focus on character development. (n=169)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage adolescent male users to try different reading formats such</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as audio books and electronic texts, via computer or hand-held devices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=168)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice indirect readers’ advisory by providing bibliographies (in</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>print or online) that include a mix of print and non-print materials,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>real world and virtual sites, fiction and nonfiction, and books across</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genres. (n=167)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask adolescent male users (formally or informally) about their</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>literacy practices and interests outside of school and attempt to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>connect them with related library resources. (n=167)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicit (formal or informal) input from adolescent male users on what</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>types of resources they would like to see but are missing from the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collection. (n=169)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 5: Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Often/Sometimes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organize library curricula and programs around topics, themes and problems of interest to teenagers in the today’s world instead of primarily around historical periods or classic texts. (n=167)</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss interesting information about a text via a book talk, activity or informal conversation with teen users in order to build interest before reading begins. (n=169)</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build in opportunities for social interaction, group work and/or active responses as part of teen services programs/lessons. (n=168)</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results show that 95% of respondents say they “often” or “sometimes” think about ways to engage teenage boys with library resources and attempt to interest them in visual texts such as graphic novels and comic books. And 100% of respondents indicate they “often” or “sometimes” try to connect teen boys with fictional texts that feature action, adventure, humor and suspense over character-driven stories. Responses to questions about personal interaction with adolescent male users were similarly encouraging, with 86% of respondents saying they “often” or “sometimes” try to connect with resources related to their outside-of-school interests, and 89% indicating they “often” or “sometimes” ask teenage boys what type of resources they would like to see but are missing from the collection. In alignment with teen interests in real-world problems and issues, 84% of respondents said they “often” or “sometimes” center library programs around topics or interest to teenagers in today’s world. Not surprisingly, since booktalks are a popular tool among librarians, 90% of respondents said they “often” or
“sometimes” attempt to build interest in reading preemptively through booktalks or informal conversations. A considerably lower percentage of respondents (59%) say they “often” or “sometimes” practice indirect readers’ advisory with teen boys, offering them bibliographies for reading not only print materials across genres but also web sites and other electronic resources. And just 68% say they “often or “sometimes” encourage teenage boys to try different reading formats, such as audio books and electronic texts. One additional area of concern is that just 77% of respondents say they “often” or “sometimes” build in opportunities for social interaction and active responses in teen services programs or lessons, with 17% saying they do this “rarely” and 6% saying “never.”

In an attempt to discern whether professional development has an effect on the frequency of behaviors performed by respondents, responses to the 10 questions were cross-tabulated with responses to whether or not participants have read any professional literature or attended any conference presentations about the reading gap between adolescent boys and girls. Not surprisingly, it appears that those respondents who report having read or seen presentations about the reading gap are much more likely to say they “often” perform each of these boy focused behaviors. For example, 56% of those respondents who have read about the gap said they “often” think about ways to engage teenage boys with books and other library programs, compared with 38% who said they had not seen any professional literature on the subject. Similarly, 73% who had professional development reported “often” attempting to interest male users in highly visual texts, compared with 59% who had not seen literature.
As a whole, those respondents who said they create opportunities for social interaction and activities at least some of the time reported using a number of techniques identified in the literature as appealing to adolescent males (Table 6).

**TABLE 6. Techniques Used (check all that apply)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Techniques Used</th>
<th>Number of respondents (n=156)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book discussion groups or literature circles (in person or online)</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of visual art, such as a video or other artifact</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogs/wiki/social media</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive games</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatic activity (role playing, poetry or rap performance)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie discussion groups (in person or online)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think-a-louds</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social action projects</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debates</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Evidence of success.** An open-ended follow-up question asks respondents which techniques listed or not listed on the survey that they have found most successful in engaging teenage boys. This question aims to help shed light on which strategies and activities identified in the literature actually work in the real world. Of the 113 respondents who offered comments, 21% listed competitive games or gaming as most
successful. A number of comments centered on the creation and/or screening of book trailers, visual art and videos and dramatic activity. Respondents were then asked to provide an open-ended description of one of their most successful experiences working with adolescent boys in their libraries. The 122 responses were rich and varied, and often humorous and novel, with a majority of themes that aligned with what has been discussed in the literature in terms of games and contests, booktalks and one-on-one readers’ advisory, but also with some experiences that represent new and promising approaches.

Examples of some of these are noted in the bulleted list below:

- Zombie cookies (from zombie books or movies) decorated and baked by boys
- Predict a Snow Day, with weather forecasting books and web sites
- Program on designing a car of the future
- Book display on animals and tracking techniques
- Boys drew self-portraits after reading *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*
- Library promotion video produced by boys
- Playing Jeopardy
- Having male teachers make book recommendations to struggling male readers
- Creating puppet scripts based on books and performing for younger children
- Library podcast program produced by adolescent boys
- Reading Olympics
- Programs involving physical activity and food
- Anime and Manga collection and clubs
- Having male teachers read to boys and high school boys read to middle school boys
- Teen band concert
- One respondent noted the boys in her library like “anything gross” and added, “I talk about books I ‘hate,’ which they must then read because I hate them.”

**Time constraints.** Perhaps the most telling answers, although not the most surprising, came in response to a question asking participants to identify the greatest obstacles preventing them from engaging more often and more effectively with teenage boys in their libraries. Of the 166 total responses to this question, 58% cited the demands of the media center/library as their primary obstacle, followed at 34% by a lack of interest from boys. Considering that 76% of respondents noted that they are the only librarian on staff in their school library and 57% of teen services noted they are the sole librarian in their public library department, time management might be expected to be a challenge. Interestingly, however, when responses to the 10 Likert-scale survey questions on frequency of boy-focused behaviors were cross-tabulated with the number of librarians on staff, there did not appear to be a connection. For example, those with one librarian on staff and those with more than three on staff often reported performing these behaviors with similar frequency.

When responses were separated by school and public venues, however, some differences regarding obstacles were noticeable (Table 7). For example, school librarians were more likely to cite demands of the media center as an obstacle compared with teen services librarians in public libraries. In another difference, just 3% of school librarians cited unfamiliarity with ways to interest boys as an obstacle compared with 15% of
public librarians. Similarly, just 5% of school media specialists cited lack of success in the past as an obstacle, compared with 17% of teen services librarians in public libraries.

**TABLE 7: Perceived Obstacles by Librarian Type (check all that apply)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>School Librarian (n=120)</th>
<th>Public Librarian (n=46)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demands of media center/library</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interest from boys</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfamiliarity with ways to interest/engage boys</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of success in past</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None – there are no obstacles</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked to specify any obstacles to engagement not listed above, respondents as a whole most often cited time/staffing constraints, followed closely by budget/funding issues. Several respondents also noted a lack of access to adolescent boys in the library as well as a lack of support from teachers, administrators and parents.

**School librarian vs. public librarian.** In further examining the responses of young adult librarians at school and public libraries separately, I looked for differences in the approaches of these two groups when it comes to serving adolescent boys. In some areas, there appears to be little appreciable difference. For example, about the same percentage of each group reported hosting teen book clubs: 50% of public librarians and 58% of school librarians. Of those, 8% of public librarians and 14% of school librarians reported hosting separate groups for boys and for girls. A higher percentage of school
librarians (81%) than public librarians (67%) reported reading professional literature or attending conference presentations about the reading gap between adolescent boys and girls. Among those who reported hosting co-ed teen book clubs, 74% of public librarians compared with 56% of school librarians reported staggering the formats in reading choices to appeal more to boys or to girls. An overwhelming majority of both groups reported including short informational texts such as newspapers and magazines designed to appeal to the interests of teenage boys: 93% of school librarians and 89% of public librarians. To make sure notable differences were not overlooked, responses to the 10 survey questions on frequency of behaviors discussed above were cross-tabulated with type of respondent (school or public librarian) to determine whether any relationships existed. Few patterns were found that suggest strong relationships, but there were some differences worth noting in terms of behaviors reported frequently:

- School librarians are more likely to try to interest adolescent male users in fictional texts with stories that focus on plot over character development, with 75% saying they do this “often” compared with 55% of public librarians.
- Public librarians are somewhat more likely to organize library programs around present day topics of interest to teenagers: 57% of public librarians say they do this “often” compared with 45% of school librarians.
- School librarians are more likely to ask adolescent male users about their literacy practices and interests outside of school, with 56% indicating they “often” do this compared with 33% of public librarians.
- Similarly, school librarians are more likely to solicit input from adolescent male users on what types of resources they would like to see in the collection: 57% of
school librarians said they “often” do this, compared with 31% of public librarians.

- School librarians are also more likely to discuss information about a text via a book talk, activity or informal conversation with teen users, with 51% say they “often” do this compared with 31% of public librarians.

- Public librarians are much more likely to build in opportunities for social interaction, group work or active responses in programs or lessons, with 54% saying they “often” do this compared with 23% of school librarians.

**Candid comments.** The final question on the survey asked respondents if there was anything they would like to add about their experiences working with teenage boys in their libraries. This open-ended question yielded 76 comments offering a number of different points of view, as well as a wealth of insight and tips about what has worked. One respondent took issue with the concept that there are “boy” books and “girl” books, saying, “I wish this kind of binary thinking would fade away from the profession. . . A reader is a reader, and we should excel at providing access to materials that all readers want.” The vast majority of respondents, however, offered ideas on ways they do things differently to attract adolescent boys or observations on how boys’ literacy behavior differs. Among the comments were:

- Boys, like everyone else, want to have a voice in what they read.

- If you build social activities into your reading programs, high school boys will come.
• Design teacher/librarian collaborations with boys in mind, rather than generally.
• Do not shy away from discussing violent or edgy content with them.
• My issue is with parents and teachers who consider the material boys gravitate towards “not real reading,” magazines, comics, nonfiction.
• They are usually honest and often shy about expressing their reading desires.
• Get to know them.
• Select materials they will like, not what you think is good for them.
• They readily read material that is of interest to them and shut down when forced to read out of this comfort zone.
• Love working with boys. They need movement, noise and something to grab their attention.
• It’s a shame, but they just don’t want to read a book with a girl main character or with a girl on the cover.
• Provide many different books on things they are interested in, have many copies and give them time to read at school.
• Never ask a student, boy or girl, what they like to read. Ask them what they like.
• I buy lots of biographies of boy/male figures – sports and music are most popular.
• Treat them with respect; they will do the same.
• Outreach -- getting them into the building in a public library is the hardest part.
• To draw boys into the media center, get a flat-screen TV and tune to ESPN in the mornings before school. It gets them in the door and they pick up books.
• Boys are less likely to ask for help, but if you give them the right book they will keep coming back.
• One boy reads a lot of graphic novels, so I asked him to be my collection development partner for that section.

• Boys spread the word about their favorite books to other boys.

• Talk to them about their favorite movies, TV shows, hobbies.

• Ask their opinion – they are not used to being asked what they think or what they want.

• Series, series, series. (Rick Riordan, *Chronicles of Vladimir Tod, Hunger Games*) Hook them with a series book.

• So frustrating. This year even the ones who read a lot won’t participate in book club.

• They are friendly but distant, which makes interactions awkward.

• They usually are the ones you have to discipline or correct more often.

Discussion

The results of this study show that a majority of the young adult librarians who participated say they are aware of the reading problems associated with adolescent boys and are employing boy-focused literacy strategies and activities in their libraries at least some of the time. However, the study revealed a number of areas where improvement is needed. For example, the fact that more than half of the respondents indicated that they spend more time providing readers’ advisory to girls would seem to reinforce assertions in the literature that school and public libraries often appear to be friendlier to girls
(Cook, Parker & Pettijohn, 2005) and more useful in meeting their information needs (Agosto, Ipock & Paone, 2007). Because face-to-face interaction has been cited as one of the most important ways to connect adolescent boys with reading material that interests them, young adult librarians should make a purposeful effort to engage with their male users.

Another area of concern worth noting is the low percentage of respondents who reported hosting teen book discussion groups in their libraries. Just over half of participants said they host book groups, and there was little difference in responses when separated by school and public librarian: 58 percent of school librarians compared with 50 percent of public librarians answered in the affirmative. These are particularly troubling numbers given that the latest AASL guidelines (2009) specifically focus on the role of the school librarian in promoting reading “as a foundational skill for learning, personal growth and enjoyment” (p. 21). The guidelines call on the school librarian to model reading strategies, develop initiatives to engage learners in reading, create an environment where independent reading is encouraged and foster “reading for various pursuits, including personal pleasure, knowledge and ideas” (p. 21). Similarly, the YALSA competencies (2010) call on young adult librarians to demonstrate a knowledge and appreciation of literature for and by young adults in both traditional and emerging formats. The book discussion group is an easily organized and inexpensive tool designed to help achieve all of these goals and should be employed by a higher percentage of young adult librarians.

While just 12% of those respondents who said they host book discussion groups reported having separate groups for boys and girls, it appears, based on their comments,
that they are tailoring choices to boys’ interests by working in activities and focusing on nonfiction and stories with male characters. These comments align with the reading preferences of boys as noted in the literature (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002), in particular that boys tend to resist reading stories about girls and prefer active responses to reading in which they physically do something such as playing a game. In co-ed book groups, however, the picture looks different. An overwhelming majority of respondents (74%) indicated their co-ed book group membership is primarily female. This reflects the female-dominated makeup of book groups across the country, which Sullivan (2009) attributes partly to the female approach to the way most book clubs are organized, with all members reading the same novel and discussing it with an emphasis on character development. Indeed, with 39% of respondents saying they don’t stagger formats between plot-driven and character-driven choices in their co-ed groups, it is not surprising that membership is dominated by females. It is little wonder, then, that several respondents noted in comments that they could not get boys to participate in their book groups.

Given that adolescent boys very often prefer to read short, informational texts, such as magazines, newspapers and manuals, over fiction books, it is encouraging that nearly all (92%) of respondents said they carry these publications and a majority also indicated collecting materials on sports, news, hobbies, automobiles, gaming and music. These findings align with best practices in collecting for teenage boys, as the top choices for leisure reading material among adolescent boys include magazines about sports, video games, music and cars (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Hughes-Hassell & Lutz, 2006).
The section of the survey that asks how often respondents actually perform boy-focused strategies offered a wealth of information on behavior. It is interesting to note that while 100% of respondents said they “often” or “sometimes” try to connect teen boys with texts that feature plot over character development, this behavior apparently does not carry over into many of their book club choices, given that 39% said they do not stagger choices for their co-ed book groups. Another area of concern is that just 68% reported “often” or “sometimes” encouraging teenage boys to try different reading formats, such as electronic texts. This represents a missed opportunity given evidence in the literature that adolescent boys are proficient in multiple literacies (Vacca, 1998), including digital media and electronic technologies, and are interested in interacting with print and electronic texts and web sites devoted to their hobbies and interests (Brozo, 2010). Finally, it was somewhat disappointing that just 77% of young adult librarians who participated said they “often” or “sometimes” make social interaction and activities part of their programs or lessons, with 23% saying “rarely” or “never.” Given the evidence that sound and body movement can stimulate boys’ brains to work at a higher level in terms of language (Sullivan, 2009), young adult librarians should try to include group work and movement as part of programs and lessons whenever possible.

A cross-tabulation comparing frequency of boy-focused behaviors with professional development provided perhaps some of the most valuable information in the survey. The fact that those who reported reading professional literature or seeing presentations about the reading gap between adolescent boys and girls were more much likely to say they “often” perform these behaviors represents a powerful argument for the necessity of periodic professional development training for young adult librarians in both
schools and public libraries. AASL (2009) recommends not only attending local, regional and state educational conferences but also reading research relevant to developments in the field. In addition, participating in virtual discussion groups is an inexpensive way to make professional development a continual process. YALSA (2010) also recommends that young adult librarians design, implement, and evaluate an ongoing program of professional development for all staff in an effort to continually provide excellence in service to young adults, which includes both female and male users.

In examining techniques used by respondents to build social interaction and activities into library programs and lessons, a few things stood out. Most popular were book discussion groups or literature circles, followed closely by the creation of visual art pieces or artifacts and the use of blogs/wikis/social media. These findings support the literature noting that boys prefer active responses to reading in which they physically act out responses, do something or make something (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). In addition, a number of the comments on those techniques most successful in engaging teen boys centered on the creation and/or screening of book trailers, visual art and videos and dramatic activity. Competitive games followed those techniques listed above, which aligns with what is known about the appeal of games and game-like structures to adolescent boys (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Alarmingly, 5% of respondents noted that they use none of these techniques in their libraries. It’s hard to imagine a library program for young adults that could be successful without employing some of these group activities.

It’s no surprise that the majority of respondents identified demands of the media center/library as the primary obstacle preventing them from engaging more often and
more effectively with the teenage boys in their libraries. Since the 1970s, both school and public libraries have experienced budget cutbacks (Garland, 1989), and librarians are expected to do more with less. Just last year, North Carolina’s Charlotte-Mecklenberg school district targeted 80 media specialists in an attempt to help make up a $101 million budget shortfall (Barack, 2011). Many schools across the country that once had several media specialists now have one or none. While the survey did not ask for explanation of the demands cited, it would be interesting to discover whether respondents were referring to administrative or teaching demands, other time constraints or staffing and budget issues. Additional research on this topic would be worthwhile to identify specific obstacles and pinpoint potential ways to lessen their impact on the librarian’s engagement with users. Interestingly, those with one librarian on staff and those with more than three on staff often reported performing boy-focused behaviors with similar frequency. This might be attributable to the effects of self-reporting, in which responses are potentially subject to biases such as selective memory and exaggeration.

In examining the responses of school and public librarians separately in terms of obstacles cited, school librarians were more likely to cite demands of the media center. This seems logical because whether they are on a fixed or flexible schedule, school librarians might be expected to have more scheduled classes to teach and in many cases may be the only adult in the library at any given time. As a result, public librarians might be expected to have more unscheduled time with which to engage with patrons. In another difference, a higher percentage of public librarians cited unfamiliarity with ways to interest boys as an obstacle. This also appears to make sense because school librarians are likely to see more boys who are required to visit the library as students and therefore
might be expected to be more familiar with their interests. They also may be in a position to be included in professional development for teachers that focuses on the gender gap in reading. This may not be the case at public libraries, where librarians may have less exposure to adolescent males who are not required to come to the library. In fact, access to boys was cited by a number of public librarians as an obstacle not listed in the survey.

In another important difference, a higher percentage of school librarians reported reading professional literature or attending conference presentations about the boys’ reading gap. This could be attributed to the continuing education requirements for school librarians, who also may be likely to collect and read education journals as part of a professional collection. It is fair to say that more information on boys’ reading achievement is likely to be published in school library professional journals than in library journals that focus on serving the general public. Among those who reported hosting co-ed teen book clubs, 74% of public librarians compared with just 56% of school librarians reported staggering the formats in reading choices to appeal more to boys or to girls. This could explain why many school librarians commented that they have difficulty interesting boys in their discussion groups.

In cross tabulating the frequency of boy-focused behaviors with type of respondent (school or public librarian), among the most notable differences was that public librarians were much more likely to create opportunities for social interaction and activities in library programs. This might be explained by the fact that teen services librarians in public libraries are not required to follow or support a school curriculum, so they may find themselves freer to implement programs created purely around social interaction in an effort to attract patrons. Also, much of the literature on public libraries
and teens tends to focus on developing active programs. Also of note is that school librarians were more likely ask male users about their interests outside of school and to try and interest them in a plot-driven text. Again, school librarians have regular access to adolescent boys and might also be expected to personally know boys, have relationships with some of them and feel more comfortable interacting with them.

In additional comments on working with teenage boys in their libraries, respondents echo much of what the literature says about boys and literacy in terms of what tends to interest them and what tends to catch their attention: activities, games, choices, etc. Some of the comments also highlight attitudes about stereotypical boys’ behavior that may represent barriers to reaching boys in libraries, such as, “They usually are the ones you have to discipline or correct more often.” However, given the evidence supporting the persistent reading gap between adolescent boys and girls, the results of this study can offer young adult librarians guidance in their efforts to engage teenage boys with reading in their libraries.

**Conclusion**

While many studies over the past few decades have demonstrated that adolescent boys consistently fall behind girls in reading throughout their school-age years, the problem persists. It is my view that progress in this area must be attempted, as Sullivan (2009) says, “one boy at a time” (p. 2). Driving this study was the acknowledgement that young adult librarians at schools and public libraries are uniquely positioned for access to this population, yet the literature shows that teenage boys often feel uncomfortable and
unwelcome in the library setting. It is my belief that one potential way to change this is to target adolescent boys through the creation of library programs and strategies designed to appeal to their habits and interests. The results of this study show that while the majority of young adult librarians who participated say they are aware of the reading problems associated with adolescent boys and of some of the literacy strategies that appeal to them, they are not consistently applying this knowledge in their daily behavior.

It should be unacceptable to young adult librarians that one-half of our potential user base often feels the library is not a place designed for them. While nearly all respondents said they collect informational texts known to appeal to adolescent boys, it is simply not enough to stock the shelves. We must talk to boys and seek them out, even when, as one librarian noted, they appear to be “distant” and “awkward.” How do we accomplish this? By showing; not by telling. Show boys that we care about them by getting to know them, staggering reading formats and including nonfiction in our lessons, programs and book groups so boys see that their interests are important to us. One librarian advocated asking teens what they like instead of what they like to read. Similarly, instead of telling boys it’s important to read, we as librarians must show them that they are important by providing them with texts and formats that meet their needs. We should keep in mind what the boys in the Smith and Wilhelm study said they expect from their teachers and teacher-librarians: individual attention. Show them we care by taking their needs and preferences into account in our planning. Make activity, social interaction and the creation of something tangible a part of literacy learning for all teenagers. Give reading a learning purpose, such as predicting the weather, designing an automobile or tracking an animal.
The purpose of this study was to address the question of what young adult librarians know about best practices in boy-focused literacy strategies and to what extent they are employing them. Its findings are significant in terms of pinpointing obstacles preventing librarians from engaging more with boys and identifying strategies and programs that have been successful in this regard. It is important to note that continuing education and professional development appear to have a significant effect on the frequency with which young adult librarians reported engaging in boy-focused behaviors. This represents strong evidence in support of recommending funding for continuous education and professional development training for all young adult librarians. In addition to attending conferences and formal training in young adult literacy issues, teen services librarians might also commit to seeking out professional literature and trade publications to read on their own and to networking with colleagues to compare experiences and learn from one another. These steps are particularly important in the absence of organizational funding for professional development training.

The study’s findings not only serve to identify strategies that have proven successful in connecting teenage boys with reading in schools and public libraries, but also to inform the library community as a whole on ways to better serve young adult males. Among the most successful experiences respondents noted revolved around games and contests, one-on-one interaction and purposeful projects and activities. The study also identified a number of areas where improvement is needed, most notably in the amount of time young adult librarians spend performing readers’ advisory with adolescent boys and in the percentage of young adult librarians hosting teen book clubs in their libraries. It is true that librarians nationwide are being forced to operate in an
atmosphere of shrinking budgets and smaller staffs. But while we find ourselves increasingly accountable to administrators, teachers, government officials, parents and community members, we must not lose sight of our most important stakeholder: the young adult reader, both male and female. And while schools and society as a whole have been unsuccessful in addressing the boys’ reading problem, we, as a profession, cannot accept this. Everyone has a right to experience the expanded options for life that go hand-in-hand with literacy engagement. We must commit to doing what the evidence shows is successful in engaging teenage boys with reading . . . one boy at a time.
References


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*Young Adult Library Services*, 8(2), 26-28.


*Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 27, 406.


Appendix A: Survey

Consent Form

All data obtained in this study will be reported as group data. No identifying information will be collected, and your responses will be completely anonymous. The only person who will have access to these data is the principal investigator named below. There are neither risks associated should you participate, nor any anticipated benefits. However, there will be educational or professional benefits from this study. The information you provide will help identify what is working in current practices and what needs improvement. There is no cost to you or financial benefit for your participation. If you have questions about this study, you may contact me (Julie Waresh - principal investigator) at waresh@live.unc.edu or my advisor, Dr. Sandra Hughes-Hassell, at smhughes@email.unc.edu. All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at (919) 966-3113 or by email at IRB_subjects@unc.edu. Completion of the questionnaire should take 10-15 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and you have no obligation to complete the survey once you begin. Thank you for your time and input.

I have read the above information and consent to be a participant in the study.

- Yes (takes them to first question)
- No (takes them to a thank you screen and exits the survey)

1. Where do you work as a teen services librarian?
   - School library
   - Public library

2. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female
3. Do you have Master’s Degree in Library Science (MLS)?
   - Yes
   - No

4. How many librarians work in your school library or public library teen services section?
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - More than 3

5. How many years have you worked as a teen services librarian?
   - 0-5
   - 6-11
   - 12-17
   - 18+

6. How do you receive information about best practices in serving teens in school and public library media?
   - From the school district or public library umbrella organization
   - From other teen services librarians
   - From national professional organizations such as YALSA and AASL
   - From state professional organizations
   - From reading professional literature such as VOYA
   - From social media
   - From professional conferences
   - Other
7. Have you read any professional literature or attended any conference presentations about the reading gap between adolescent boys and girls?

- Yes
- No

8. Of the time you spend providing readers’ advisory in your library, approximately what percentage would you estimate is spent working with boys and what percentage with girls?

9. Do you host teen book discussion groups (or book clubs) in your library?

- Yes
- No

10. If yes, do you have separate groups for boys and girls?

- Yes
- No

11. If yes, what is different about the focus and operation of the boys’ group versus the girls’ group?

12. For co-ed book groups, what percentage of participants are boys and what percentage are girls?

13. For co-ed book groups, do you stagger formats in reading choices that are likely to appeal more to boys or to girls, such as a mix of plot-driven and character-driven stories?

- Yes
- No
14. Does your collection include short informational texts such as newspapers and magazines designed to appeal to the habits and interests of adolescent boys?

- Yes
- No

15. If yes, check all subjects that apply:

- News
- Hobbies
- Gaming
- Automobiles
- Music
- Sports
- Other

16. Please provide the frequency with which the following statements apply: In my role as a teen services librarian, I . . . Think about or research specific ways to engage teenage boys with books, programs and other library resources.

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

17. Attempt to interest adolescent male users in highly visual texts such as nonfiction with illustrations, graphic novels and comic books.

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
18. Attempt to interest adolescent male users in fictional texts with plot-driven stories that feature action, adventure, humor and/or suspense rather than a primary focus on character development.

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

19. Encourage adolescent male users to try different reading formats such as audio books and electronic texts, via computer or hand-held devices.

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

20. Practice indirect readers’ advisory by providing bibliographies (in print or online) that include a mix of print and non-print materials, real world and virtual sites, fiction and nonfiction, and books across genres.

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

21. Ask adolescent male users (formally or informally) about their literacy practices and interests outside of school and attempt to connect them with related library resources.

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
22. Solicit (formal or informal) input from adolescent male users on what types of resources they would like to see but are missing from the collection.

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

23. Organize library curricula and programs around topics, themes and problems of interest to teenagers in today’s world instead of primarily around historical periods or classic texts.

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

24. Discuss interesting information about a text via a book talk, activity or informal conversation with teen users in order to build interest before reading begins.

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

25. Build in opportunities for social interaction, group work and/or active responses as part of teen services programs/lessons.

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
26. If so, which of these techniques have you used? (check all that apply):

- Book discussion groups or literature circles (in person or online)
- Movie discussion groups (in person or online)
- Dramatic activity (role playing, poetry or rap performance)
- Debates
- Think-a-louds
- Competitive games
- Blogs/wikis/social media
- Social action projects
- Creation of visual art, such as a video or other artifact
- None
- Other

27. If you have used any of the above techniques or others not listed, which have you found most successful in engaging teenage boys?

28. Please provide a description of one of your most successful experiences working with adolescent boys in your library.

29. What is the greatest obstacle preventing you from engaging more often and more effectively with teenage boys in your library? (check all that apply)

- Demands of media center/library
- Lack of interest from boys
- Unfamiliarity with way to interest/engage boys
- Lack of success in past
- None -- there are no obstacles
- Other -- please specify below

30. Please specify any obstacles not listed above.
31. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences working with teenage boys in your library?