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Some libraries are using video games to get young adults interested and active at their local public libraries. When exploring gamers and the use of video games in libraries, it is important to put the topic in context of what young adults want from the library and what types of programs, especially those focusing on video games, are successful in getting teens to patronize the library. This study examines the views of young adult library gamers on the idea of playing video games in the library and on public libraries in general. Participants of the Gaming Club at the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County's Teen Loft were interviewed to look at their thoughts and perceptions of libraries and playing video games at the library.

#### Headings:

Video games and teenagers

Teenagers and libraries

PERCEPTIONS OF LIBRARY GAMERS AT THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF  
CHARLOTTE AND MECKLENBURG COUNTY'S TEEN LOFT

by  
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## Introduction

Librarians are just beginning to realize the benefits of offering programs geared towards young adults to increase the patronage of libraries. A new trend in programming is to utilize video games as a way to increase young adult interest. While many librarians are hesitant to use such blatant forms of entertainment as a lure for young adults, it is possible that this type of program may have a lasting affect on library use and conceptions. Those who advocate for young adult services in libraries have long encouraged the inclusion of programs that ensure teenagers are given treatment equal to that of other stakeholder groups (Bishop & Bauer, 2002). The recurring defense most often used by libraries for not specifically serving this special population is lack of resources. They say there is not enough funding, staffing, or space to focus on young adults. However, many claim that it is not an issue of not having enough resources, but of not making young adults, as a group, a priority (Bishop & Bauer, 2002; Jones, 2007). In the meantime, libraries have little difficulty finding the resources to serve other select groups, such as seniors, toddlers, and college students. According to Jones (2007), in doing this, libraries are not realizing that this is ostracizing an important population—teenagers.

Many library systems see young adults as an issue that needs to be dealt with, and not a segment of patronage that need to be served; a section of the community that many studies show to be nearly one-quarter of public library regulars (Jones, 2007). It is the responsibility of libraries to ensure the success of teenagers by providing the

programming and instruction that produces an inspirational experience. It is imperative that programming is created to foster positive relationships and provide supportive role models; video gaming is a potential way to do this (Bishop & Bauer, 2002).

Video game programs in libraries supply young adults with “mental stimulation, solid entertainment, and attainable mastery” (Neiburger & Gullett, 2007), and provide a rich environment for social interaction. The shared experience of playing a game or participating in a tournament together provides an occasion for young adults to enjoy common interests and form bonds between groups of players (Neiburger & Gullett, 2007). These bonds and friendships can carry over into the teens’ regular world and open the opportunity to meet new people that they may not have had the chance to encounter otherwise.

Taking advantage of the recreation pursuits, especially the entertainment-related ones, of young adults is an easy way for libraries to enter and be accepted into the lives of teens. Implementing gaming programs at libraries offers a unique opportunity to foster young adult leadership skills and to develop long lasting relationships between teens and specific librarians and libraries. Through these connections, many teens participating in gaming events are more likely to participate in other library programs, either because they are more likely to know about them, or by seeing how enjoyable spending time in the library can be (Saxton, 2007).

By holding on to deceptive ideals of what libraries should be, librarians are frequently missing what it is that patrons truly want (Helmrich, 2004). With this in mind, it is easy to understand why so many librarians may be hesitant to purchase systems or

implement gaming programs at their location (Jones, 2007). Often, community members wonder how gaming can impact lifelong experiences, claiming that play is not part of a learning environment. According to Jones (2007), these individuals are not seeing the larger picture. Young adults who are participating in gaming programs may not be at the library for educational pursuits, but there is the possibility that they are learning something much more important to librarians as a profession and the community at large. They are given the opportunity to see the importance and value of libraries to schools and the community and to reach the elusive goal of forming an identity (Jones, 2007).

### *Purpose of Study*

The purpose of this study is to examine the thoughts of young adults on the use of video games in public libraries. The research intends to answer the following questions: What do young adults think of gaming in the library? Does participation in gaming programs change teens' perceptions and patronage of libraries?

### Literature Review

To examine the opinions of library gamers, it is important to first understand and investigate the prior research on: (1) teenagers' views of the public library and what types of programs are successful in getting young adults to patronize them; (2) the affects of gaming and of game genres on teens, and the motivations for young adults to play video games; and (3) the development and use of video game programs and gaming programs in libraries.

### *Young Adults and Libraries*

In "Attracting Young Adults to Public Libraries," Kay Bishop and Pat Bauer examine what strategies and services are used to entice young adults to libraries. This

research utilizes a mixture of quantitative and qualitative measurements to gather data, including surveys, field notes, and face-to-face and e-mail interviews of young adults and librarians. Two focus groups were also conducted of 18 middle and high school students. Each focus group was asked a series of 24 questions regarding library use, programming, young adult areas, and their likes and dislikes regarding the library. Qualitative methods of collecting data were used to validate information and were weighted into quantitative results to better compare and formulate conclusions from the findings (Bishop & Bauer, 2002).

A survey was disseminated to individuals in charge of youth services at 160 public library branches in Florida. The survey asked participants to evaluate their library's methods for recruiting teenagers and how effective these methods were in attracting young adults to the library. Despite follow-up phone calls and mailings to non-respondents, there was only a 30% return rate on the survey. Non-respondents were asked why they did not respond to the survey. The most common answer was that they library did not have any programming geared specifically for young adults. Of the libraries who responded to the survey, only three had rooms designated for young adults; on the other end of the spectrum, 16 had no areas specifically for teens (Bishop & Bauer, 2002).

From the surveys that were returned, 10 libraries were selected for site visits based on the number of young adults who used the library and the respondents' willingness to be interviewed for the study. For each of these libraries, the young adult area, collection, displays and flyers were evaluated. Each librarian responsible for young adult services was asked a series of questions regarding the YA area, issues in attracting

teens to the library, attitudes towards teens by staff members, programs, and future plans for attracting young adults (Bishop & Bauer, 2002).

The survey for young adult patrons was administered online, in hopes of getting teens from all over the state to participate. The survey was completed anonymously and a total of 47 teenagers responded to the survey. Young adults willing to be interviewed for this study were able to include contact information to the survey. Six teens were agreeable to further questioning, and they were asked, via e-mail, to respond to some of the questions that were asked of the focus group (Bishop & Bauer, 2002).

Librarians and young adults tended to agree on the strategies they found the best to attract young adults; both ranked providing refreshments at the library or events as the second best way to increase attendance. According to the young adults surveyed, the best way to attract teenagers to the library is to provide them with their own space. This method tied for the third best way to attract teens from the librarians who responded to the survey. Young adults also ranked encouragement to bring friends (ranked third for librarians), placing publicity materials throughout the library (ranked fifth for librarians) and the library web page in their top five attractions to patronize the library. Bishop and Bauer assert that the word of mouth, which was ranked first for librarians and sixth for young adults, works better if there are other positive points to sell, such as having a comfortable teen area. The study found a disparity in the importance of the library's website between librarians and young adults, ranked 11<sup>th</sup> and fifth respectively. Young adults assume pertinent information will be provided on websites and public librarians may need to take more opportunities to use the internet as a communication tool (Bishop & Bauer, 2002).

Librarians seem to view young adults primarily as internet users, ranking internet use as the best service to provide to attract young adults. The teens, however, ranked research first, indicating that they see themselves primarily as researchers. Librarians may be missing the fact that young adults see the internet as a way to accomplish their research goals, instead of being a priority unto itself. Both parties ranked volunteering at the library high in the survey (second for both young adults and librarians), opening opportunities to develop more public service programs for teenagers. Storytelling, career resources, and exam preparation are also areas that saw large disparities in importance and changing library priorities may open more opportunities for attracting young adults (Bishop & Bauer, 2002).

The teenagers who were interviewed, either via e-mail or in a focus group, appeared to much more concerned with services provided by the library than by what attracted them to use the library in the first place. Many stated that they used the library for studying and school work. They also offered their appreciation for the ability to give input for library programs and volunteer opportunities. The interviewed young adults also added their desire for a comfortable teen section of the library, more computers, and more books that are of interest to their age group (Bishop & Bauer, 2002).

Bishop and Bauer assert that public libraries still do not meet the needs of young adults, although much progress has been made. Technology has had, and will continue to, have a large influence on programming for young adults, however, there is much promise in using other library programs to foster relationships with teens (Bishop & Bauer, 2002).

Bishop and Bauer's study can influence the decisions libraries make when developing programs, including those involving video games, for young adults. Using enticements rated highly in this study by young adults, such as providing refreshments and a dedicated area, can be useful when designing a video game program. According to Bishop and Bauer's research, technology is important for young adults, however, they tend to use technology more for research purposes. It may be important that libraries interested in using video games also provide information regarding other services the library offers that can help them with homework and other research activities.

Bernard Vavrek, in "Teens: Bullish on Public Libraries," examines whether or not younger generations will utilize and endorse the public library in the future. The research into this topic consists of two national studies describing teen's use and attitudes about the public library. An original sample of 4000 households with teenaged residents was attained and a letter was sent to the adults residing at 3000 of the homes. The respondents to the letter allowed their young adults to be interviewed via telephone. A second survey, a revision of the original, was carried out on the remaining 1000 homes, by random phone calling (Vavrek, 2004).

Most of the respondents of the first survey had used library services within the past year. Of those users, 65% went to use the computers, 95% had borrowed or returned a book, and 93% had gone to complete school work. Nearly all of the library users claimed that they would be frequenting the library again; not because of the internet or programs focused towards young adults, but because of the variety of print materials the library offered. The researchers found this slightly disconcerting, as they view libraries as promoters of computer use and the internet, instead of advocates for other services.

Many of the interviewees reported that they preferred to be at home when using the internet, citing an aversion to time limits and the lack of privacy users sometimes encounter in libraries (Vavrek, 2004).

The second survey attempted to discover the use of libraries beyond that of schoolwork and class assignments. Results showed that patronizing the library to use or borrow books and magazines was the prime motivation for use. Only 16% of the respondents had utilized any programs, including lectures and meetings, which the library had offered for young adults. The study concludes that with an ongoing interest in the young adult population, as teens age, they will utilize and remain loyal to public libraries (Vavrek, 2004).

The results of Vavrek's studies suggest that librarians may have to adjust their thinking as to the place of entertainment and atmosphere for attracting young adults to the library to ensure their perpetuated use. Offering programs and services that may not be available to young adults at home or school, such as video games that requires unique and expensive equipment, may be an avenue for capturing teen interest in libraries.

Denise Agosto, Kimberly Poane, and Gretchen Ipock attempt to decipher if young adult boys and girls use the public library for the same reasons in their article, "The Female-Friendly Public Library: Gender Differences in Adolescents' Uses and Perceptions of U.S. Public Libraries." Previous research in gender differences do not provide any reasons for library use in teenagers or describe the types of information they are hoping to find at the library. This study intends to offer a greater understanding of these behaviors and to examine the function of gender in library use and attitudes (Agosto, Poane, & Ipock, 2007).

A survey was used to garner information from young adults regarding their use of libraries. The first part of the survey asked participants for demographic information regarding their age, gender, school and public library use, and accessibility to computers. Part two of the survey consisted of a set of open-ended questions about the types of information they use the library to find and their reasons for patronizing the library. The third portion of the survey is based on prior research regarding the information seeking behaviors of urban teenagers. The participants were asked to rate 12 categories identified as everyday information needs of young adults using a four-point Likert Scale. Respondents were also asked to rate public libraries in their ability to meet each of these information needs (Agosto, et al., 2007).

Two public libraries participated in the study, with each library receiving 50 copies of the survey to deliver to young adults. The researchers experienced a 97% return rate of the survey. Of the respondents, 55.7% were female and 44.3% were male. Each of the open-ended questions was analyzed and the Likert Scale questions were analyzed using chi-square analysis to determine if there were any significant differences based on gender (Agosto, et al., 2007).

This study found no differences between boys and girls when asked to rate their frequency of school and public library use. However, both boys and girls appeared to use the public library much more than the school library. Agosto, et al. warn to be cautious when examining the outcome of the questions regarding library use, as the respondents tended to consider themselves frequent public library users and infrequent school library users. It is also pointed out that the survey for this study was given to young adults at the public library (Agosto, et al., 2007).

A major finding in this research found that questions regarding accessibility to computers showed a nominal difference in home computer access for boys and girls. Of the respondents, 77.8% of girls and 79.1% of boys had access to a computer at home. Prior research has indicated that there is a gender disparity in regards to computer use and accessibility. This research shows that this gender difference has been greatly reduced, if not nearly eliminated (Agosto, et al., 2007).

According to Agosto, et al., the public library fills three important roles in the everyday lives of teenagers. These roles show the library as an information gateway, a place of social interaction/entertainment, and a valuable physical environment. Girls tend to use the library most as an information gateway, utilizing the library for checking out books, using the computers, reading, and doing homework. Boys use the library as a place for social interaction and entertainment. This supports suggestions by boys that they use the library for social engagement and fun, such as playing games or attending social club meetings. However, the differences between the major use of libraries for boys and girls were not statistically significant, with both genders using the library as a social entity. Many young adults participate in club meetings, library programs, socialization with friends, a place to meet people, playing games, and visiting with library staff members. As for the library's physical environment, some respondents mentioned using the library as a safe haven from noisy places or dangerous environments and as a place to acquire knowledge (Agosto, et al., 2007).

The types of information that boys and girls use the library to gather were fairly similar. Both ranked information for school projects and popular fiction first and second. Girls ranked history third (fifth for boys), comic books, anime, and manga fourth, and to

find information on the paranormal and mythical creatures fifth. The information interests for boys included computer game codes (ranked third), and biographies (ranked fourth). Most of the respondents indicated that there was no type of information the library could not provide for their informational needs (Agosto, et al., 2007).

In Part three of the survey, participants were asked to rate the information needs of 12 areas of their everyday life; including schoolwork, social life, finances, personal improvement, and career information and how the public library helped them to find this information on a four point Likert Scale. The study found no gender related differences in the information needs of the participants. The most common types of needed information, school work, current events, and popular culture were on the lists for both girls and boys. Personal improvement appears only on the girls' list, while job information appears only on the boys' list. Information needs that were categorized as difficult to fulfill were similar between boys and girls, with transportation, daily life routine, and personal finances on both lists. The girls also had weather as an information need and the boys added social life and leisure activities. When rating how useful the library is at providing this type of information, girls tended to rate the library as more useful than boys. Statistically the difference in library usefulness for the information needs of girls and boys was significant, indicating that girls find the library more useful than boys. Both boys and girls rated the library as useful in finding information for schoolwork, current events, times or dates, and jobs (Agosto, et al., 2007).

The study concludes that there is little disparity between the perceptions and uses of public libraries for boy and girl adolescents. Public libraries served in three roles for teenagers—as information gateways, a place for social interaction and entertainment, and

as beneficial physical environments for both genders. Teenaged girls tend to have a more positive perception of the library, suggesting that the library is accomplished at meeting their information needs. Boys, however, were less positive in their views of the library, indicating that the needs of this population is not being met. Libraries may need to implement more programming and resources that target the needs and wants of teenaged boys (Agosto, et al., 2007).

#### *Young Adults and Video Game Play*

In “Needs Met through Computer Game Play Among Adolescents,” John Colwell explores the reasons why young adults play video games. Group discussions were conducted with fourteen groups of students ages 8-11 and 11-15 to talk about leisure activities, game play and preferences, changes in play, and reasons for playing. Researchers also distributed a survey to 483 11-15 year olds, with questions developed to determine the frequency and duration of play. Items were also created to measure the needs of young adults that are fulfilled through video game play and to explore feelings of guilt associated with gaming (Colwell, 2007).

Colwell found that young adults participate in a wide variety of leisure activities and that game play tends to be heavier with boys. Younger boys tend to play for excitement purposes, while older boys tend to use gaming as a form of relaxation. Boys in general tended to play more action games, while girls showed a preference for puzzle games. As children grew older they described a decrease in the duration of game play due to more homework, involvement in sports, and employment. The young adults claimed to play more when no one else was around and noted that they at times experience feelings of frustration and addiction towards particular games. The amount of

game play could be predicated by sex, age, use as a stress reliever, and the preference of gaming to friends (Colwell, 2007).

The results provided support for theories that claim video games provide a form of electronic friendship. Also, the finding that teens use gaming as a stress relief supports the catharsis gaming theory, which contends that aggressive game playing provides individuals with a socially suitable way to release aggression. Teens did not report any enhanced aggressive emotions after playing especially violent games nor an increase in aggressive behaviors. The author suggested that subsequent researchers include the reasons for playing in their studies (Colwell, 2007).

Colwell's study has many implications for promoting the use of video games in public libraries. It is possible that many librarians are hesitant to install video game programs due to the possible violent side effects that video games are believed to cause. Colwell's results show that the young adult's felt no increase in aggression after playing games and that playing games may in fact give them an outlet for stress and hostility. Colwell's study also suggests that teens use video games as a form of friendship. Playing video games in libraries can potentially provide young adults the social interaction and friendships they desire, while participating in an activity that they enjoy.

John Colwell and Makiko Kato further examine if there should be any apprehension regarding the effects of playing video games on aggression and violence in their article "Video Game Play in British and Japanese Adolescents." A group of 204 12-14 year old participants in London and, at a later date, 305 12-13 year olds in Japan were given a survey in two parts. Part 1 of the survey endeavored to decipher how much time young adults spent playing video games, teens' perceptions of parental attitudes towards

gaming, the role of gaming in their everyday lives, and what the young adults' favorite games were. Part 2 consisted of demographics, a seven-item self esteem scale, a 13-item scale intended to measure aggression, and questions regarding the number of friends the young adults had (Colwell & Kato, 2005).

The surveys found that playing video games is equally popular in the UK and Japan, although there were differences in the number of years the young adults had been playing (51% of UK teens had been playing for two years; 65% of Japanese young adults had been playing for five or more years). There was also a discrepancy in the duration of each gaming session of the adolescents in each country—teens in the UK spent one-half to one hour each time they played, while teens in Japan spent one to two hours. The results found that parental concern over the amount of time spent playing video games was higher in Japan and parental approval of the games that were played was higher in the UK. For male adolescents in the UK, the researchers found a negative correlation between the amount of time spent playing games and the number of friendships and in self-esteem. Japanese young adults with a penchant for more violent video games had lower aggression scores, but more aggressive video games were played by young adults in the UK (Colwell & Kato, 2005).

Playing games at a high level is equally popular in both countries, especially with boys. Game play is not associated with social isolation in either country, however this does not indicate that gaming is not linked with friendship needs. The results of the surveys suggest that for some young adults, playing video games can be better than hanging out with friends. Playing can fulfill teens' companionship needs, but the study did not find the number of friends to be related to game play. The research found that the

amount of time spent playing games was not connected to the level of aggression and that aggressive games are not predictors of aggressive behavior. The survey data actually indicated a reverse causal link between game play and aggressiveness; aggression appears to cause adolescents to play video games, of which many tend to be more violent (Colwell & Kato, 2005).

While many studies have found that violent video games increase the amount of aggression (Barlett, et al., 2007), Colwell and Kato found that there is no correlation between the two. Again, this may help to assuage any hesitance regarding the implementation of video game programs in libraries and may help to stress positive aspects of video game use. For the purposes of this study, this can have severe effects on the implementation of video game programs in libraries and the views of subjects regarding the use of their use in libraries.

#### *Video Games in Libraries*

In “Out of the Basement: The Social Side of Gaming,” Eli Neiburger and Matt Gullett explain that gaming is a social activity and is not meant to be done alone. According to Neiburger and Gullett, video games provide young adults with mental stimulation, entertainment, and supplies individuals with the opportunity to master something. In libraries, video games offer a stimulating environment where rewarding social interactions can occur. The authors assert that social groups that may never have interacted before have the opportunity to meet on a common ground, establishing bonds of friendship and shared experiences when playing games together. Video gaming also offers library staff an opportunity to develop relationships with some young adults who may not otherwise care about or utilize the library (Neiburger & Gullett, 2007).

Promoting the learning benefits of video games is beneficial in garnering support for video game programs at libraries. Playing games forces individuals to build cognitive skills and develop “pattern recognition skills, spatial memory, and information processing” (Neiburger & Gullett, 2007). The authors also found that the issues of learning and social interaction that are involved in gaming in the library develop many of the assets and skills that foster community involvement and interest (Neiburger & Gullett, 2007).

Jenny Levine in, “Why gaming?” asks the question: why should gaming be included as a service in libraries, when so many are able to game at home? The author presents playing a video game as a more enhanced version of a book, where a reader has the ability to control the narrative and engage with others while doing so. Levine describes video games as dramatic three dimensional books with movies, sound, and the option to employ a number of motor and sensory functions. She contends that because games include in-depth story lines, characters, and narrative, they should be considered content, like a book or magazine, and not just a medium (Levine, 2006b)

Levine also claims that gamers are given a type of mental stimulation that is unequalled to any other medium. She suggests that using games as a learning tool combines a player’s imagination with a form of virtual reality where split second decisions and critical thinking skills are the keys to success. This potentially forces individuals to fully comprehend the game and be able to act immediately on their appraisal of the story’s events (Levine, 2006b).

In “From Game Studies to Bibliographic Gaming: Libraries Tap into the Video Game Culture,” Christy Branston contends that because game studies have become a

popular topic for academic research, libraries should look for ways to incorporate gaming into their policies. She asserts that gaming integrates more and more into society, the medium needs to be examined from a collection and service point of view (Branston, 2006).

Branston dedicates a majority of the article to discussing the use of video games as a learning tool. She provides significant evidence that playing video games enhances problem solving skills; this is especially true for games with well developed storylines. According to Branston, the current generation of young adults have been inundated with gaming since birth, creating a society of visual learners with an inclination towards active learning and a disdain for the typical lecture style teaching. When using games as a teaching tool, it is important to take the focus off of the learning aspect of the game and to allow the interactivity and immersion of the medium to be the motivating factor for play. Branston also discusses the social skills that can develop between players both during play and outside the game environment and information skills players develop as they partake in secondary research about a particular game (Branston, 2006).

Branston (2006) concludes the article by recommending that the best games to use for teaching should integrate information literacy and research skills. Also, good learning games should optimize the tendency of gamers to freely share information. Libraries should take advantage of the learning capabilities of gaming to help libraries to grow with the information age.

The article “Case Studies: Public Libraries,” by Jenny Levine, describes a group of librarians that have implemented successful gaming programs and services in libraries. The Worth Public Library is a small institution that did not have the funds to devote to

gaming. The Youth Services Librarian took the initiative and began offering game tournaments with his own game systems, using word of mouth as the main marketing tool. The program was so successful that it was expanded and incorporated into the library's summer reading program as a gaming club. Currently the library plans on creating an online forum on its website for library gamers and hopes to match game play to current community events (Levine, 2006a).

Two staff members at the Ann Arbor District Library, after deciding that their library would benefit from a video game program, developed a five month tournament before pitching the idea to their supervisor. The idea was fully embraced by staff members and approval was given to purchase \$6,500 in equipment to implement the first tournament. The library originally undertook a huge marketing campaign, utilizing advertisements, logo t-shirts and bracelets, as well as word of mouth. Luckily, the original and subsequent tournaments were a huge success. The tournaments are now broadcast on the local public access channel and staff members say that behavioral problems are extremely rare. Young adults tend to use the library more in general, in fact, teenaged boys line up on Saturday morning, waiting for the library to open. Staff members report that approximately one-quarter of event attendees have never been to the library before (Levine, 2006a).

Bloomington Public Library also developed a successful program that originated with computer games. Eventually, the library was able to convince local organizations to donate game systems and funds to expand their program. Levine concludes that gaming has become an integral part of our culture and that libraries should reflect that culture.

All that is necessary to set up a successful video game program in the public library is the willingness to do so (Levine, 2006a).

According to prior literature, most teens view the library positively and use it for a variety of reasons. Successful library programs tend to provide teens with services they are unable to get elsewhere, such as a designated space of their own, materials for research, and socialization. Supplying teenagers with video game play opportunities at the library is a specialized services that may expand the patronage of this age group. Many teens report using video games as a form of friendship and often use gaming as a method of stress relief. Combining libraries and video games opens avenues to provide teens with a community of gamers, instead of just a select group of friends. Playing video games at the library offers an opportunity for groups of teens to develop relationships with the library and enjoyment in a safe place.

#### Methodology

To investigate the views of adolescent library gamers, the use of qualitative field research was employed. Young adults were interviewed at a public library gaming event to obtain their views on gaming in libraries and libraries in general. With this method, there was the expectation that site visits would allow the researcher to ascertain attitudes and behaviors that may not have been noticeable in other forms of research, such as interactions between individual and library staff members (Babbie, 2004).

The role of researchers, especially when encountering young adults, can be precarious and it is important to weigh the benefits of the different roles researchers can employ in the field. Researchers have the option to fully integrate themselves with the group that they are studying; in this case, researchers could interact and play video games

with young adults. It is possible that through this method, researchers may become too involved with the participants and relate too closely with their beliefs, skewing their study's results. On the other hand, researchers can establish a boundary between them and the participants. Using this role, researchers would observe the library gamers and only speak to them during a formal interview. This method may cause participants to stress the fact that they are being observed, changing their natural behaviors, also skewing the study's results (Babbie, 2004). For research involving young adults, it may be better to do neither of these role options, instead blending them together. Researchers may find that they have a more productive session if they first speak to the young adults about why they are being researched at the onset; this also opens the possibility of building a rapport with some participants.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher attended a library gaming event, and conducted interviews with the participants. Even though there are restrictions to performing a single case study, for the purposes of this research, it is feasible to limit to one specific library with a successful gaming program (Babbie, 2004). It is possible that the viewpoints of the young adults observed and interviewed from one library are representative of libraries of the same size, with similar demographics, in the geographical area that the library is located.

Less formal modes of gathering data, such as the qualitative interview, were determined to be more appealing to the age group of the interviewees in this study. Young adults may be turned off by formal interviews and a removed researcher conducting observations on their activities. Allowing the researcher to interact with the participants may enable the researcher to build a rapport with some subjects, making it

easier to persuade them to be a part of the interview process. Open ended interview questions allow the interviewer to follow the attitudes and views of the participants, permitting new ideas and information not originally anticipated by the researcher to surface. Not having a formal set of interview questions also opens the possibility of developing a relationship with reluctant subjects and empowers the young adults to guide their responses towards their own attitudes. The adolescents are able to discuss topics that they would like to talk about and have a forum to voice their opinions (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). If the general questions that are developed for the interview turn out to be limiting, biased, or not conducive to interaction with the age group, the questions can be altered mid-study without impeding the results of the research (Babbie, 2004). Allowing the young adults to become comfortable with the researcher and explaining the purpose of the researcher's presence may counteract any biased behavior that a subject may exhibit in the presence of a researcher (Eder & Fingerson, 2002).

#### *Description of the Study*

Appendix A provides a list of interview questions for the field research. Question 1 aims to decipher the participant's thoughts and feelings about playing video games at the public library. Question 2 focuses on the participant's initial perceptions of playing video games at the library. Question 3 seeks to uncover the reasons the participant began to play video games at the library. Was there a particular enticement that convinced them to go to an event, such as refreshments or just a place to hang out? Question 4 aims to interpret what other people think about the participant playing video games at the library. Are their parents supportive of the idea? Do their friends look down on them for frequenting the library? Question 5 intends to understand the participant's view of the

public library before they began utilizing the video game resources. With question 6, the researcher hopes to find out if the participant uses the library for anything else, such as checking out books, doing research, or reading periodicals. Question 7 asks if the participant notices any attitudes towards them from other library patrons and staff members. This question is intended to see if other individuals in the library exude an unpleasant sentiment towards gamers in the library. Question 8 is meant to decipher how much the participant plays video games, to compare how much time is spent playing at home and how much time is spent playing at the library. Due to the nature of qualitative interviewing, there was little structure within specific questions asked, allowing the researcher to ask follow up questions, if necessary, to glean further information from the participant on each of the eight questions. For example, a follow up question to Question 1 may include what it is that the participant actually likes about playing video games at the library.

The population for this study was recruited at the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County's (PLCM) Teen Loft at ImaginOn, a branch of the library that partners with the Children's Theatre of Charlotte to provide programs, education, and the arts specifically for young people. ImaginOn was conceptualized when both organizations realized that they were quickly running out of space. When they realized that both the PLCM and the Children's Theatre of Charlotte shared the same mission of "bringing stories to life," the two decided to merge and to create an atmosphere that would help young people learn "through all five senses" (ImaginOn, 2005). A staff member explained the benefits of having two such different organizations share the same space; people who may not ordinarily take their children to the library, but would take

them to a stage production (or vice versa) opens up the patronage, for both organizations, to a new segment of the population.

The bottom floor of the building is dedicated to the children's library, story lab, and the two theatres that serve the Children's Theatre. The second level of the building houses the technology lab and five classrooms that provide space for a variety of programs, including art and dance. Also on the second floor is the Teen Loft, which is only accessible to young adults. The Teen Loft houses the young adult collection, study space, and listening booths, as well as Studio-i, a blue screen theatre that provides teens with tools to create and record movies, cartoons, and music. The building itself is green and many programs are designed around the theme of recycling (ImaginOn, 2005).

Although located in the heart of downtown Charlotte, North Carolina, the library can be difficult to get to. As described by one of the Teen Loft's staff members, public transportation in Charlotte is limited and crossing major streets may be difficult. This can make it difficult for teens to get to the library; unless they live in downtown Charlotte, they must rely on parents or other adults to get to the library. Another issue revealed by staff members is the lack of signage promoting the building as part of the PLCM. A visually stimulating building, it is next door to a museum and could easily be confused to be a part of that museum, instead of a public library.

The monthly gaming club meets in one of the meeting rooms in the Teen Loft. The room is set up with multiple gaming consoles, including Rock Band, a game that requires special guitars, drum kit, and microphone to play. No one is allowed in the room until the appointed starting time and a staff member is always in the room with the participants. On the day of the study, once participants began to arrive, an announcement

was made to the group explaining that volunteers were needed to be interviewed for a study regarding video games and playing in the library. Introductions were made with some of the more regular gamers and further details regarding the research and the role of volunteers was explained. Volunteers were interviewed in between games or when they had down time.

Interviews were conducted in a kitchenette off of the meeting room. Research subjects were given a more detailed description of the study and a fact sheet to take home should their parents have more questions regarding the study or their child's participation in it. Once assent was given to participate in the study, the interviewer turned on a digital voice recorder and began to ask the set of questions found in Appendix A. At the conclusion of the interview, the teen was signed up to be entered in a drawing for a \$40 giftcard from GameStop. At the end of the gaming event, the winner of the giftcard was drawn by a Teen Loft staff member.

Each of the recorded interviews was transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. The transcribed text from the interviews was analyzed using NVivo to aid in the determination of patterns within the data. Nodes based on library usage, gaming in libraries, other people's perceptions, and reasons for participation were developed to better organize the answers for each question asked in the interview. Answers were further separated based on answers for each of the four nodes and analyzed for correlations and patterns.

### Analysis

Seven young adults were interviewed for this study, including one female. Five of the research participants were regular users of the library's gaming club and two

(including the one female) had never been to that library before. The library had recently moved the monthly game night to a different day of the week, which may account for the lack of participants. Prior to the day change, between 20-30 gamers would patronize the library specifically for game night.

All of the participants liked the idea of playing video games in the library and saw it as a nice addition to the library's services. One participant said, "I think it's cool! If you don't have a console at home, you just come here and play and you don't get a big hassle about it." Another teen said that having video games at the library "gives kids more time to play and have fun at the library, other than reading books." One boy thought that playing video games at the library helps them acquire knowledge and increase their "mapping skills" and another mentioned that video games "can be good for the mind." Other respondents also mentioned that it gave opportunities to those who do not have gaming consoles at home to play. It is not surprising that all participants gave positive feedback to the idea of gaming in libraries, as they all regularly play video games and use the library in some fashion. It would be interesting to interview non-gamer patrons, young adults who do not use the library, and adult employees and patrons to observe their thoughts about playing video games at the library.

While the participants liked the idea of playing video games at the library, they differed on their initial reaction to the program. One teen replied that "I thought it was cool, because I didn't have a console so I could come here and play." While another thought "it would be real awesome that they would have something that teens could get into." Others thought that it would be a great opportunity to learn new gaming techniques and skills. One boy said that he first liked the idea of having video games in

the library because they can “help them to increase their minds and try to think of something more than just of what they can do.” This suggests that some video gamers may see gaming as a way to use their imagination and creativity. The responses to the question regarding their first impressions of video gaming in the library suggest that young adults like the idea of libraries providing programming that they would like or have a difficult time coming by at home.

When asked why they initially began coming to the library to play video games, four participants claimed the main draw was the opportunity to play with others. One teen said that he comes to the library “instead of playing games at my house where there is no one at.” Other participants mentioned that they see it as an occasion to test their skills against other people. Two of the subjects began playing video games at the library because they did not have a gaming console at home and one individual began to come to learn new skills. According to these library gamers, they were drawn by the social aspect of going to the library, opting to find a place to play with others rather than playing at home by themselves. One boy even mentioned that the library “has more community.” Offering video game play at the library also provides opportunities to those who are unable to afford expensive gaming consoles to play and fit in with their peers.

Of the seven young adults interviewed for this study, five reported that their parents or guardians were supportive of them patronizing the library to play video games. One teen said “they like that I’m doing something I’m really interested in” and another mentioned that he thought his parents found it “intriguing.” Others reported that their parents thought that it was good for them to go to the library, even if they spent a portion of their time playing video games. One participant reported that his parents showed some

concern about gaming in the library, saying that “my mother doesn’t like me coming too much because she says that sometimes I just come here a little too often.” Another participant said “my family really doesn’t care,” suggesting that at least one participant’s parents were indifferent.

The friends of the participants also appear to be receptive to the idea of playing video games at the library. One teen reported that “everyone in my school comes to it,” while another claimed to have “referred them, and now everyone comes.” According to the young adults interviewed both parents and friends are supportive of the utilization of library services for entertainment purposes.

When asked what they had thought about libraries before they began participating in gaming events, one subject said that “it was a place where you could read, look up everything, search for jobs, which is cool. Now we can just come over here play games and just have fun.” Other respondents said that libraries were “a good source for learning; the best place to come to do some homework” and only used them for internet access. Another teen said that libraries were “all right, it’s about the same. The games have me coming more.” The library gamers interviewed for this study appeared to have fairly positive views of the library before they started playing video games there. It is possible that their prior experiences at the library made them more receptive to participating in library programs, like the gaming club.

Of the seven participants, four claimed that they utilize the library more than they had previously. The other three subjects claim to patronize the library the same amount. All of the respondents reported currently using the library to check out books or access other reading materials, such as magazines. Five of the participants said they use the

library as a place to “hang out.” One teen said that “this is like our hang out, pretty much. We go to all different libraries.” Two of the participants mentioned using the library for internet access and only one said they use the library to complete school projects. For individuals who do play video games, it appears as though providing video games at the library does promote more visits to the library, even though they may just be there to “hang out.”

All respondents said that they felt welcome by the staff members of the Teen Loft, however, ImaginOn is a library specifically for young people. Employees of the Teen Loft are individuals who are interested in and enjoy working with this age group. It would be interesting see if teenaged patrons of public libraries that serve all age groups have different feelings regarding staff members. One of the participants did mention using other libraries in the PLCM system and said that staff members there were “pretty much rude; not cool at all.” This individual called the Teen Loft’s staff “the best ever.”

Most of the participants claimed to play between 1-2 hours of video games at home (one responded that he plays 3-5 hours) each day. At the library, three young adults claim to play 1-2 hours of video games, one individual plays between 2-3 hours, and two individuals play for 3-5 hours per week. The teenagers interviewed for this study spend much of their time play video games, with varying degrees of time spent at the library. It is possible that some of the young adults interviewed would be willing to play at the library more often, but have difficulty getting to the library.

In between interviews, the group was observed to see their interactions between each other and the Teen Loft staff member moderating the event. The gamers pointed out to be “regulars” appeared to be very comfortable with the group and the staff member.

They played many different games and seemed to not play with one specific group the entire time they were there. Other individuals remained on one console the entire time, playing the same game, but appeared to be open to other gamers joining them. Some of the teens seemed to be more adventurous, pointing out games they had never played before and asking to play them. A few of patrons, two of them girls, walked into the room and after looking around for a few moments, left. They may have been looking for someone specific, or they may have been interested in playing, but were intimidated by the event, gaming in general, or did not see anyone they knew.

One of the two teens interviewed, the only girl, who had never been to the library before was a home schooled student. She seemed to be a bit uncomfortable at first, choosing to only play game alone, but was playing with a couple of other teens by the end of the event. It appeared that she was a little uncomfortable being the only girl in the room and seemed to talk with and ask questions of the female researcher instead of the boys or the library staff member, who was male. In an effort to recruit more girls to the event, it may be beneficial to include a female staff member in the gaming events for girls who may be uncomfortable around groups of teenaged boys.

### Conclusion

Understanding why library gamers are drawn to the library to play video games can be beneficial in developing other programming for young adults. The teens interviewed for this study mention that they come for socialization and to use items that they may not have access to at home. Programming for young adults may benefit from offering more social events, where groups of teens can interact and have fun together. The research participants seemed to appreciate being provided with an opportunity to

have fun with their friends without any parental involvement. The positive response by these teenagers to having availability to video games may inspire other libraries to implement similar programs to attract young adults to their library. Libraries may also look into accessibility gaps in the needs and wants of young adults, such as providing items they are not able to afford or services they unable to find in other places.

The teenaged boys who utilize video game services at the library appear to enjoy and appreciate the opportunity to have fun and play video games with groups of people. The girls observed in this study, however, seemed intimidated and uncertain about playing. Even though the gender gap in computer use in teens has nearly been eliminated, this is not the case in computer gaming (Agosto, et al., 2007). The computer gaming gap could be extended to include video games, which would explain some of the uncertain behavior of the girls observed during the course of this research. Libraries who implement video game programs may need to begin to look at ways to recruit girls to their events. They may want to develop an all girls night where novices can experiment and play without feeling intimidated by long time gamers.

According to the results of this research, young adults who play video games like the idea of offering gaming in the library. One of the main reasons for their support is the opportunity for them to play video games with other people. Playing video games in the library allows something that is typically done alone, or with a few close friends, to be turned into a social event. Purchasing video game equipment also allows individuals to experience new games or equipment that they may not be able to afford normally. Most of the young adults interviewed for this study had fairly positive views of the library before they began utilizing its video game services and their perceptions of the library did

not change. However, most of the individuals who participated in this research did change their patronage habits of the library, claiming that they do in fact go to the library more often than they had in the past.

Providing teenagers opportunities to play video games at the library is an opportunity for libraries to enter the teenaged world. Video games provide entertainment to young adults, while allowing them to develop social skills. Teens who participate in gaming events appear to appreciate the opportunity to develop a community of gamers who they can test their skills against and do something they enjoy together. However, libraries need to do more to get girls involved in these events to help close the lingering technology gender gap in gaming. Ultimately, according to this research, providing teens with video games in the library will help increase their patronage.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

Question 1: What do you think about playing video games at the library?

Question 2: What did you think when you first heard that the library would be offering an area for you to play video games?

Question 3: Why did you decide to start coming to the library to play video games?

Question 4: What do your friends and family think about you coming here to play video games?

Question 5: What did you think about libraries before you started participating in video game events?

Question 6: What else do you use the library for?

Question 7: Do you feel welcome here by staff members and other library users?

Question 8: How much time do you typically spend playing video games, both at home at the library?