“Cause they only have a few books I like” (Michael, male, 13 years):
Young adults and (non) use of public libraries

Gryphon Lecture
University of Illinois

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What the literature says

Studies of public library use by teens


Studies of young adult reading

What the teens say

Methods

• Semi-structured interviews
• Inventories of personal collections
• Sample

  n = 31 teens, 13 – 15 years
  21 (67.7%) female; 10 (32.3%) male
  almost all residents of Ontario
Context: Collections

- Collection size
  - Median: 60 books
  - Mean: 85.7 books
  - Range: 3 – 544 books
- Also owned comic books, magazines, CDs/tapes, Videos/DVDs, computer games
- All had Internet access at home
Context: Collection content

Series

e.g., Sweet Valley High
Redwall
Chicken Soup books
Fantasy / science fiction

e.g., David Eddings
   *Lord of the Rings*
   *Harry Potter*
Classics

e.g., *The Outsiders*
*To Kill a Mocking Bird*
*Pride and Prejudice*
Adult titles

e.g., Mary Higgins Clark
Michael Crichton
Stephen King
*Memoirs of a Geisha*
*Life of Pi*
*DaVinci Code*
Magazines

e.g., Teen People
Nintendo Power
Sports Illustrated
Mad
Seventeen
Elle Girl
WWF
Collections: How acquired

Most of the books were given to me, passed down from my sister. Some of them were birthday gifts, some of them I bought with my own money.

Anita (female, 14 years)

I probably read this in grade 7. Stole it from school.

Alexander (male, 15 years)
Most of the hardcover ones I got . . . The library was selling them like for 25 cents each [chuckle].

Matt (male, 14 years)

I bought it myself at the Price Club. Cheap!!!

Jan (female, 15 years)

Oh, I’m in a music club. Columbia House.

Anne (female, 13 years)
My friend Paul, me and him we read the same, we both like the same stuff. So I borrow a lot of his books and he borrows my books. And he was the one that gave me Black Gryphon. And after that, that’s how I got interested in that author.

Apollo (female, 14 years)

Gifts, purchases (Chapters, school book orders, garage sales, library sales), hand-me-downs, borrowing from others, theft
Findings: Public Library Use

Yes  
- n = 16 (51.6%)
  - Summer only  n = 6
  - Very occasional  n = 4
  - Had books on loan  n = 4
  - Worked/parent worked in library  n = 3
  - Surrogate user  n = 1

No  
- n = 15 (48.4%)
Researcher: Do you have any books from the public or school library?
Ann: [Smiling] Huh . . . Library?
    Ann (female, 14 years)

Researcher: Do you often borrow books from the public library?
Jamie: [Nervous laugh] No.
Researcher: No, as in never?
Jamie: No as in once or twice.
Researcher: In your whole life?
Jamie: Yes
    Jamie (female, 13 years)
Researcher: Do you borrow books from the school library at all?

Aaron: Sometimes when there’s a new book I haven’t been able to get anywhere else, or if I don’t have a book at school then I will borrow books from the school library.

Aaron (male, 13 years)
Findings: Reasons for non use

1. Barriers
2. Reading and information practices
Barriers to use

Circulation policies

Because I’ll forget them and get horrible, horrible late fees.

Aviva (female, 15 years)

Too much of a hassle to go and get your book and then read it and then bring it back.

Subject 1 (female, 14 years)
Barriers to use

Collections

I’m in the middle of that *Redwall* series but I can’t get the next book. The library, the public library, their copy’s lost.

Matt (male, 14 years)

I don’t really use the school library because it’s not a very good collection.

Sophie (female, 15 years)
Barriers to use

Lack of information

Researcher: Do you ever ask . . . At the public library for ideas?
Bob: No . . . I didn’t know you could.
Researcher: You can . . . Why would you think that you couldn’t?
Bob: I doubt they would know a lot about the kind of stuff I like to read.

Bob (male, 15 years)
Reading and information practices

Multiple reads

Anne: Most of them I’ve read more than once.
Researcher: You have?
Anne: Yeah.
Researcher: You like to read books more than once?
Anne: Yep.
Researcher: Why is that?
Anne: I just really like to go through it again.

Anne (female, 13 years)
Reading and information practices

Condition of reading materials

Researcher: All your books look fairly, fairly new, or newish. I mean they’re in really good condition for being read a lot. Do you take good care of your books?

Michael: Yeah, definitely. I don’t even like to get the corners folded or anything.

Michael (male, 13 years)
Reading and information practices

Abuse of materials

[Referring to Seventeen magazine] And I also like to cut out a lot of the advertisements, the cool ones that say “one part rocket scientist; one part super model,” and make collages like that and put them on my door and stuff.

Valerie (female, 14 years)

I mostly buy them because I’m mean to my books.

Aviva (female, 15 years)
Reading and information practices

Like to collect

Subject 2: I’d rather buy a book.
Researcher: You’d rather buy a book?
Subject 2: Because then I have it forever.

Subject 2 (female, 15 years)
Reading and information practices

Good collections at home

No. I don’t really use the public library. I usually have a pile of books here ‘cause y’know my Mom and Dad are both readers. My Dad always has a good selection of books. He collects Newbery winners.

Tanner  Macrobiotica Gorilla (male, 14 years)
Reading and information practices

Willing and able to purchase materials

If we are out somewhere and we see a book that I really want or something then my parents always buy it for me. If it was something else then they wouldn’t be as likely to, but they want to keep me reading.

Valerie (female, 14 years)
Reading and information practices

Alternate resources available

Mostly I just use the Internet for projects, for research stuff.

Aaron (male, 13 years)
Reading and information practices

Non readers / non-reading

I’m the only one in my class who reads voluntarily.

Ignatius Globetrotter (male, 14 years)

I used to read . . . Like when I was a kid.

Bob (male, 15 years)
No time

Usually I’m too busy. I have a tutoring job and I usually go to dance so I never really go by the library and pick up a book.

Jamie (female, 13 years)

Alexander: I don’t buy any books now.
Researcher: No, why not?
Alexander: Don’t know. Don’t know. Don’t have enough time for it.
Researcher: What do you do with your spare time then?

Alexander (male, 15 years)
Bob: I am too busy to read now anyway.
Researcher: Why so busy?
Bob: I got exams this week.

...  
Bob: I don’t really read a whole lot anymore.
   Except for school.

Bob (male, 15 years)
Reading and information practices

School reading

Alexander: School is kinda shit. You know, like, read 5 – 6 chapters, answer all these questions.
Researcher: That turns you off from reading?
Alexander: Turns me right off from reading.

Alexander (male, 15 years)
A final comment from Elizabeth
(Female, 15 years)

I read a lot, and books are a huge thing, one of the things I do in my spare time, when I actually have spare time.
Implications for public libraries?
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