

YA Spaces and the End of Postural Tyranny

By Anthony Bernier & Mike Males

When children tilt back in chairs they are frequently reprimanded and sometimes disciplined. When two youth share a library chair they may receive a negative reaction from a librarian. When youth slouch, put their feet up on furniture, sit on a ledge or edge of a table, or rearrange furniture, they risk disapproval from authorities—though it's hard to imagine them similarly chiding grown-ups who find conventional seating postures overly constraining.

While libraries demonstrate concern for safety, furniture, and propriety with these reactions, they are also instituting policy and power over young bodies. Yet, anecdotes aside, there is no empirical research supporting such policies. Neither is there research questioning why, decade after decade, young bodies continue to impulsively push back into a more active tilt mode, gravitate toward sharing seats, or why they try to rearrange furniture. Perhaps libraries have something to learn here.

As libraries historically have marginalized young adult (YA) spatial needs, young people continue to be enticed into more accommodating and predominantly private virtual “spaces.” Further, the rapid increase in nontraditional educational environments and spaces such as continuation schools (frequently one

room environments), home schooling, “flipped classrooms,” and increasingly online learning arrangements also pose keen competition for libraries wishing to attract young users into the public realm.

Conversely, libraries as public spaces represent a unique civic experience for young people. Although commercial interests (hardware and software firms, for instance) continually attempt to intensify their profiles, public libraries remain fee-free and essentially commercial-free environments. They facilitate rare spaces for intellectual exploration and offer a range of activities and opportunities to access rich and well-organized information resources. They provide connections to professionals trained to help them access information, allow for observation and interaction within the entire age-integrated community, and thus facilitate development of social capital. In the face of the culture's increasingly privatized public experience,¹ they offer youth from poorer material circumstances access to well-maintained environments increasingly inaccessible to marginalized young people.² The library's physical plant thus represents valuable and unique spatial capital for youth, most especially for urban youth.³

Yet for all these potential benefits, and by continuing a practice of privileging space for materials over youth-preferred social experience, library and information science (LIS) professionals remain reluctant to research and value space itself as a resource for youth: to take into account YA-specific spatial needs and to better exploit the opportunities inherent in existing library spaces. More pointedly, in asking what YAs thought about public libraries, Vivian Howard's 2011 study of 267 young adults confirmed what LIS researchers have heard for decades: “Teens were quite outspoken in their feeling that the library currently failed to offer them a welcoming and comfortable space to socialize.”⁴

This article introduces research data and analysis offering an illustrated expedition into what may seem mundane but is actually a surprisingly potent question: How can libraries maximize seating options to improve the spatial experience of YA library users? This project, part of a larger national research project studying YA spaces in libraries, assesses direct youth responses to the seating options they currently find in relatively new libraries and offers a range of additional solutions rendered with suggestive visual anecdotes.⁵ Taken together, this study argues that libraries

About the Authors

ANTHONY BERNIER is an Associate Professor at San José (Calif.) State University School of Information. **MIKE MALES** is a Senior Research Fellow at the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice in San Francisco.



Contact Anthony at anthony.bernier@sjsu.edu.
Contact Mike at mmales@cjcc.org.



Anthony is currently reading *Uncivil Youth: Race, Activism, and Affirmative Governmentality* by Soo Ah Kwon. Mike is currently reading *Conservatism Is Un-American & Other Self-Evident Truths* by Jerome Nicolas.

should expand and incorporate a broader (and frequently more cost-effective) vocabulary of seating and postural options in their YA spaces.

Literature Review

LIS research has long recognized the service barriers young adults confront in library buildings, policies, and practices. As Professor Richard E. Rubin noted nearly a decade ago, the ways in which young people experience libraries is “aristocratic, authoritarian, unfriendly, and unresponsive.”⁶ Certainly empirical research on specialized library spaces for teenagers has not advanced significantly.

Library literature is replete with bargain basement solutions for furniture and spatial arrangements for YA design challenges in which neither the concerns nor the alleged solutions are grounded in evidence. Even the field’s marquee YA spaces in the Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York public libraries evolved from afterthought, reassigned, and underutilized space. Further, lacking a systematic research base, and with conventional YA courses in library schools focused largely on literature and materials, LIS proceeded without meaningfully engaging the complex and dynamic topic of space, its connections to actual young adults, or the advance of evidence-based professional practice. Thus, *ad hoc* and ritual responses continue to guide what little vocabulary exists for YA spatial “solutions.” More pointedly, library design continues to devote more space and design attention to restrooms than to their young patrons.

While practitioners, not LIS researchers, have kept the issue of YA spaces on the agenda in publications, at conferences, in workshops, in webinars, and aspirational guidelines over the past ten years, schools increasingly recognize that libraries are becoming key social/meeting places.⁷ Designers, architects, and school administrators are rapidly incorporating changes in formal and informal learning venues such as learning labs, learning commons, makerspaces, and smart classrooms. Additionally, by sponsoring several research and demonstration projects, the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services is itself promoting a new spatial vocabu-

lary about youth and library spaces. In the IMLS report, “Museums, Libraries, and 21st Century Skills,”⁸ for example, libraries gain recognition as featured facilities playing important roles in promoting and sustaining engagement with critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and innovation, collaboration, and literacy.

On the other hand, these efforts have proceeded without rigorously collected and analyzed evidence, verifiable best practices, skill building, institutional and infrastructure capacity enhancements, or evaluation criteria. Libraries, for instance, may ask architects or designers, librarians, and (under the best circumstances) enlist even young people, to create a YA space as a team.⁹ However, a kind of “naïve triangle” then develops. Architects frequently know little about the function of libraries or youth aesthetics. Librarians generally do not possess architectural backgrounds or know a great deal about how young people enact space. And young people usually know little about the spatial potential of libraries or the needs of architects.¹⁰ This triangle is destined to produce mediocrity in which YA spaces are seldom distinguishable from conventional library designs.¹¹

Clearly, the field continues to exhibit a growing need to advance practice-relevant research for offering successful and equitable YA spaces. But until more applicable data and analysis come forward, this deficit in evidence-based YA spatial knowledge will continue to result in libraries commonly designing spaces in ways that contradict or conflict with normal YA public behavior. The consequences of these institutional deficits are that libraries, inadvertently or not, perpetuate what is described elsewhere as “Geography of No!”¹² Libraries create spaces in which youth are told “no” for doing or wanting things entirely appropriate for young people—such as sitting convivially in small groups or adopting a greater variety of seating postures than conventional furniture allows—and then enforce one-to-a-chair policies and related postural edicts.

In addition to the demonstrable importance young adult library users place in wanting welcoming space, as demon-

strated most recently in Vivian Howard’s research,¹³ one article remains the first and only “post-occupancy study” of any YA space to appear in LIS literature.¹⁴ The present article expands this work into the public space seating options for young people in new and recently renovated libraries.¹⁵

Methods and Findings

In 2011, a research collaborative under the auspices of YouthFacts.org, an online information service focused on youth issues, fielded a voluntary web-based survey of young adult library users in more than 300 of the nation’s newest and most recently renovated libraries.¹⁶ In seeking to respond to calls for direct youth participation in research, this study examines the first empirical data on YA spaces drawn from that study.¹⁷ The YA surveys included 122 direct responses along with 62 spontaneous comments on library seating, as well as 259 responses to a broader set of questions concerning preferred seating when at home.

YAs from libraries in 23 states responded; 72 percent were female and four-fifths were ages fourteen to seventeen, the rest slightly older or younger. Moreover, an earlier part of this research revealed that “82 percent of librarians and 60 percent of teens discussed the importance of comfortable furniture in their teen spaces.”¹⁸ Survey respondents represented a snapshot not of all randomly selected youth, but specifically of library-using youth, including volunteers.¹⁹

These findings indicated that a large majority of young people feel that library seating options and variety were important in defining a welcoming space.²⁰ Nearly three times more YA survey respondents reported favoring group seating (such as couches, benches, or platform risers) over conventional individual or task seating. Large majorities wanted seating to be varied and moveable. And a surprising one-third expressed preference for sitting on or near the floor over all other options.

Indeed, in spontaneous survey comments, YAs nearly always suggested more group and floor-proximate seating. “More sofas and couches,” one commented.

"There are about four small, one person couches at my library's teen section." "More furniture like comfortable sofas, bean bags . . . etc.," another wrote. "Couches or something to sit on other than stools and tables," said another. "More comfortable furniture" emerged as a common theme. These striking survey results are described and illustrated in the following sections.

Discussion

If libraries are to be guided by evidence-based information, they must seriously consider reprioritizing space currently dedicated to housing collections and conventional furniture, and offer YA patrons a more varied range of seating options. To build on the new survey data, as well as on issues raised in the Cranz study cited previously, this study focuses on seating options as a key index of how young adults value postural variety as an important feature in defining spaces as welcoming or inviting.

Figure 1 illustrates one of LIS's most idealized and reproduced seating options for youth as imagined by today's library space planners and administrators: "the information trough," at which assembly lines of young users mold static postures (limited or restricted postural movement) into identical, hard plastic or wood task chairs lined up uniformly (or symmetrically) to facilitate simultaneous information dispensing and consumption.

This attempt at efficiency production amounts to a kind of cynical pre-cubicle-training for future information workers. It does not respond to the postural desires of young people, as will be illustrated, when they are given broader options in public space.

Another nearly universal idealized seating option places identical wooden chairs arrayed symmetrically around matching wooden tables (see figure 2). In large spaces, this can create a "warehouse" effect. Little variation is endorsed, or tolerated, for joining additional chairs around the same table, joining tables, sharing chairs, or using chairs alternatively beyond determined task-oriented postures, such as sitting in one chair while using another as foot prop or ottoman.

Further, while many library seating options may differ slightly (task chairs are commonly available along with perhaps a lounge chair or two as accents), most idealized library seating options privilege the facilitation of curricular tasks or materials and rarely address what YAs consistently report as the most important dimension of their library experience: social interaction.²¹ In both of these conventional furniture solutions in which identical or matching task chairs are instituted, without recourse to other options, youth are forced into problematic postures. As Cranz's work amply documents, conventional chairs and couches require a potentially harmful ninety degree angle between upper torsos

and thighs. Heavier torso weight necessarily forces pressure on the lower back. Seat backs force the inward curvature of the shoulders and compress lungs. Blood circulation constricts in the legs as thigh weight compresses against upward tilting seat bottoms. Uniform and static seat height requires all shoulders, necks, and heads to bend in a perpetually downward position to interact with print materials, screens, and keyboards on uniformly sized tabletops. More importantly, no other postural orientation is possible in a task chair. Thus, it is not altogether unreasonable for active bodies to, in seeking some dynamic movement while sitting, appear to oppose conventions rather than remain in the same position the entire time.²²

Figure 1. The Information Trough (photo by iStock)



Figure 2. Library Tables (photo by Anthony Bernier)



Youth, Cranz points out, “are constantly forced to round their backs and distort their bodies in order to see their work.”²³ Danish physician A.C. Mandal goes further in stating that the, “abuse of children’s backs during adolescence could well be the reason for the rapidly increasing number of back ailments [later in life].”²⁴

The following discussion and illustrations, from the authors’ photo collections, book images, and common website searches, amplify survey results and present how young people actually enact and reappropriate seating postures on their own terms rather than to those dictated by legacy institutional practice. These seating options fall into four categories: (1) one-butt-to-a-chair library policy, (2) private postures in public, (3) fugitive postures from history, and (4) floor-seeking or “dápeditaxis” (a term we coined meaning “floor orientation”). Taken together, and building on the evidence of what youth themselves say, as well as what can be observed in daily practice, libraries can incorporate a broader and more healthy vocabulary of seating and postural options in YA spaces.

1. One-Butt-to-a-Chair Policies and YA-Enacting Postures

Discussion of the first seating option begins with the nearly universal library practice that a chair (traditionally defined) must not be shared. Of course, many may insist that such rules preserve social order and allow for the proper use of interior furnishings. Also, the vision of deliberate body contact between youth frequently disturbs adults, particularly those with supervisory authority. It can raise the specter of “gateways” into other unacceptable behaviors: “if we allow this, what will they do next?”

On the other hand, in addition to lacking justification in research to support such concerns, these survey results and long-observable YA enactments of youth preference for seating options suggest just the opposite. The violation of the one-butt-to-a-chair rule exhibited in figure 3 (lap, leg, or side-by-side-sitting) clearly demonstrates the capacity for youth to both remain on task while simultaneously

sharing a convivial seating arrangement. Further, as few libraries offer YA spatial equity with other departments (like the children’s room), youth frequently responsible for supervising younger siblings will often try to accommodate shared seating options with younger brothers and sisters. In these daily circumstances, and at the risk of forcing sibling separation, conventional policy becomes yet another barrier for young users. Further, such policies ignore how young people routinely navigate shared seating in many other environments, frequently with little or no adult supervision, such as on buses, at malls, and in many non-class school settings.

2. Private Postures in Public: Fugitive Enactments

Even when they sit singly, teenagers tend to repurpose conventional seating in ways rarely endorsed by library staff, policy, or convention. Figures 4 through 10 demonstrate typical furniture reinterpreted through the second category of YA spatial enactments—the fugitive postures youth enact on their own. Figure 4 shows a wide variety of otherwise familiar postural enactments using furniture commonly characterized as a lounge or comfy chair located in the library ostensibly to signal and facilitate comfortable seating. In rejecting conventional posture (back against chair back, legs faced forward, feet on the floor), these youth, caught in candid photos, reinterpret armrests alternatively as back and leg support. Slouching down against the back of the chair (another nearly universally disapproved posture) with outstretched legs supported on an adjacent table, is also a familiar youth enactment. In these instances, the relationship between backs (especially lower backs) and thighs contrasts with the posture imposed by conventional seating—the angle between them is much wider than the ninety degrees required by conventional chairs.

Figure 5 was captured in an indoor shopping mall containing an open space for public seating. Although differing from the fugitive postures in the preced-

Figure 3. “One-Butt-to-a-Chair” Policy Violation (photo by iStock)



ing lounge chair image, the young subjects reinterpreting appropriate public posture here also use the couch much as they might in the private home: one has feet up, knees bent, with legs on the sofa; the other uses the sofa’s armrest as a back support while occupying the floor with curled knees supporting reading material (note, too, their adjacency). This sitting configuration exhibits social togetherness while not physically sitting together. Individual experience and reading privacy are enacted while simultaneously expressing obvious familiarity and social comfort in still being quite close.

Another fugitive interpretation of youth’s demonstrated desire to stretch backs and legs while remaining on task is to lie on one’s stomach. Figure 6 depicts a posture also clearly resisting conventional and institutionally enforced ninety degree back/torso/leg angles commonly required of library furniture. As with the previous image, many may find this posture more common in private’s spaces like bedrooms.²⁵ Figure 6, however, demonstrates this posture of the young subject propping upon elbows during a study session. Note not only the existence of colorful ottomans, but also how they are arrayed to custom-fit this otherwise fugitive public posture.

Figure 7 demonstrates another inventive use of similar ottomans rearranged to comfortably support arms, elbows, back, and torso while sitting on a carpeted floor. Here, rather than supporting a wider torso/thigh angle, both subjects prefer to fully stretch both legs.

Like many of these fugitive postures, however, such seating enactments do not

find an equivalent in conventional library spaces. In these illustrations, the young readers both remain on task and take advantage of the mobile dimensions of the furnishings to customize their respective postural experiences. Also, each of these illustrations demonstrates individual isolation while at the same time remaining public or social.

Thus, seating and postural options serve two distinct purposes that have no equivalents either in adults' use of library seating or in conventional YA spaces (it is hard to imagine a fortysomething adult sitting in a peer's lap or stretched on the floor). While conventional library seating signals institutional dominance of formal propriety, control, and power, YAs' seating and postural options first serve as signals of social comfort, hospitality, and conviviality.

Second, as figures 4 through 7 demonstrate, young bodies, when offered the opportunity, seek postural variety in many different ways: a wider angle between torsos and upper thighs, opportunities to fully stretch backs and extend legs, and customized arrangements *in the moment* to accompany varying degrees of privacy and sociality. These are features not frequently welcomed, designed for, or even allowed in common library seating options. Thus, youth who might otherwise feel encouraged or even entitled to spread out run the risk of violating conventional and institutional practice.

3. Fugitive Postures from History

While contemporary illustrations help us conceptualize a wider array of postural options for young adult library users in today's libraries, it is important to realize that these desires are not inventions of the current generation. Abundant anecdotal and visual evidence has been sending signals ignored or resisted for decades by architects, furniture designers, and library space planners. Such images are inadvertently and well-documented in 1940s and 1950s educational films teaching teens all manner of social propriety. These films capture youth enacting fugitive reading postures in (i.e.,

against) conventional furniture. In many instances youth widen the torso-to-leg angle, for instance, by throwing one leg over a standard chair's arm while using the other leg to hang toward the floor for balance.

However, these troubling postures also predictably accompany the disapproval of adults more concerned with a girl's presumed "unladylike" behavior than how she attends her reading. And, as in most conflicts between conventional and fugitive postures even today, youth sustain the blame for breaking convention, not the furniture for its design or the observer for lacking a more liberal postural interpretation.

In figures 8 and 9, we see young bodies forsaking furniture altogether in an attempt to achieve comfort. Figure 8 depicts a teen girl taking inventive advantage of a carpet-covered interior staircase and wall to enact a posture she finds comfortable for talking on the telephone. Like many fugitive youth postures, this one also seeks alternatives for torso, back, elbow, arm, shoulder, and neck support (this one with stairs against an interior wall).

In order to gain this degree of comfort, however, the girl occupies what is not only a heavily trafficked part of the home, but must sit essentially on a dirty shoe-worn staircase. The social consequences are not difficult to predict. And, as with many examples of young people enacting fugitive postures, the enactor is quite likely to be blamed for social transgression rather than the failure to better accommodate the task/posture relationship sought by young bodies.

Figure 9 even more boldly demonstrates the teen body's best attempt to liberate itself from the postural overdetermination of conventional furniture. Here, furniture is reinterpreted as a mere prop, a vertical ottoman serving only to facilitate the greater comfort found on the floor. In this image, the back, torso, shoulders, and neck are not only relaxed in the flat position against the carpet-covered floor, but the torso/leg angle remains open (i.e., wider than the standard ninety degree angle required of conventional seating). While admittedly not the best posture to support reading tasks (though some youth

Figure 4. Fugitive Posture with Conventional Furniture

(photo used with permission from *Voice of Youth Advocates*)



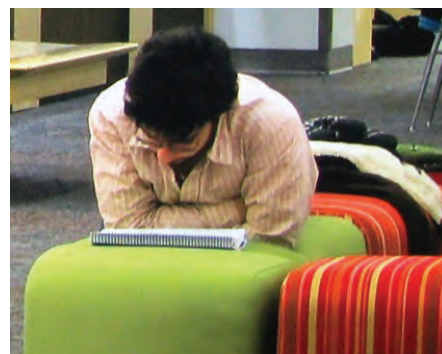
Figure 5. Fugitive Postures: Private Postures in Public

(photo used with permission from *Voice of Youth Advocates*)



Figure 6. Fugitive Posture with Arrayed Ottomans

(photo by Anthony Bernier)



find comfort reading this way), it offers the extra advantage of avoiding pressure on the upper thighs as is found in all conventional chairs, seats, and couches.

Figure 7. Ottoman at Right Angles Offers Fugitive Posture Options on the Floor (photo by Anthony Bernier)



Figure 8. Fugitive Postures without Furniture (photo used with permission from Prelinger Archives)



Figure 9. The Wall as Vertical Ottoman (photo used with permission from Prelinger Archives)



Indeed, by observing youth in the home and in spaces where they achieve the most liberation and freedom to exploit postural options, libraries can learn a great deal about how better to design public seating for them. In these common observations (visual anecdotes) we gain insight into how youth continually innovate and seek postural variety even as they risk near certain disapproval. When observed critically, youth constantly demonstrate how their bodies—not yet accustomed to adult social, functional, and physical disciplines imposed by static, conventional furniture—seek active postures better suited both to their own comfort and task orientation.

4. Dápedotaxis: The Democracy of the Floor

The final category of potential options is perhaps the most obvious: an expanded seating vocabulary of the modest (and inexpensive) “floor solution.” If *integrated* into the original design of a YA space, the open-floor, or furniture-reduced, solution offers the widest array of postural opportunities and social interaction that youth have, for decades, been demonstrating they prefer.²⁶

Figure 10 depicts a typical group scene, in which youth eschew the rigidity of stan-

dard static plastic task chairs in favor of floor occupation. The postural democracy of floor-oriented behavior (dápedotaxis) is further shown in figure 11.

It is important to note that both images depict groups of young people studying collaboratively while exhibiting conviviality and remaining focused on their tasks. It is also significant to point out that active postural variety and freedom facilitate frequent changes and movement rather than the long, uninterrupted, static postures and body positions required of conventional seating.

There are, of course, potential liabilities inherent in floor seating.²⁷ However, the fact that the young adults in this survey still chose floor seating over conventional seating renders this option all the more compelling. Combined with their other identified preference (couches or sofas) the common pattern is clear: YAs prefer seating allowing them to arrange and change their postures.

In the image taken from the classic 1985 John Hughes film, *The Breakfast Club*, young people from explicitly different backgrounds find common, convivial space, enacting a kind of consecrated community counsel space on the floor of their library (see figure 12). Note the postural individuality and variety depicted even as the group convenes on an open floor space without furniture (dápedotaxis).

Designing for YA Seating Options

While it is unreasonable to expect libraries to entirely eschew conventional public seating and furniture, it is even more unreasonable to expect that furniture manufacturers will risk incorporating the fugitive postural enactments exhibited by young people illustrated in this article. Thus, the question remains: How to best expand and accommodate the preferred seating options of YA library users? There is no single answer to this perplexing question. However, a much broader range of seating options exists, including more cost-effective options than libraries have previously explored. For example, a practical floor seating option for libraries is the carpet-covered

riser platform. Such elements are inexpensive, durable, easy to customize, easily illuminated, and simple to reconfigure or reshape for future needs in ways that tables and chairs are not. Additionally, they afford greater interactivity promoted by user experience advocates.²⁸ Most importantly, platforms maximize the personal control, postural volition, and the natural dynamic movements of young bodies.

Figures 13–16 depict recent library experiments with platform solutions. In these instances, platforms are constructed above floor elevation to separate and distinguish them as well as enhance panoramic views of the library.

The platform solution depicted here offers backpack storage and various ottoman configurations while taking full advantage of natural light and commanding exterior views from the tall windows in the corner. This riser is also designed flexibly to accommodate a larger group, such as a class assembled for bibliographic instruction, demonstration, or storytime.²⁹ A smaller rounded platform, also carpet covered, mounted in the center of the riser, offers sufficient height to support back, torso, shoulders, and neck, as well as opportunities for stretched-out legs or cross-legged seating and a variety of postural options for those sitting on top. The platform maximizes both the resource and utility of the limited space (higher density than tables and chairs and easy access to power outlets and data cabling installed adjacent to or inside the platform) and seating options with postural variety defining a distinctive social space.

In figure 14, an otherwise vacant corner is filled with postural possibilities to create this foam-based, two-level platform with matching ottomans on caster wheels. While conventional table and matching chairs occupying the same space might accommodate only four to six young people, the platform allows many more to convene in comfort.

Another variant of the carpet-covered platform is the creative adaptation of simple, broad, and open stairs or internal steps as a design form. As can be viewed in many Progressive Era and neo-classical building motifs such as Washington, D.C.'s Lincoln

Figure 10. Youth Eschew Chairs In Favor of Floor Occupation (photo by Shutterstock)



Figure 11. Youth Eschew Chairs In Favor of Floor Occupation (photo by Shutterstock)



Figure 12. *The Breakfast Club*, 1985, John Hughes (photo used with permission from Universal Studios)



Memorial (among the most democratic spaces in the nation's capital), stairs invite a wide variety of seating enactments, particularly when compared to the overdetermined forms evident in conventional library chairs, and thus offer a broad range of postural variety.

A more complex hybrid enactment combining both a raised platform with internal carpet-covered stair seating appears in figures 15 and 16. Designed by an architecture firm sensitive to YA library users, this arrangement features a large seating area situated nearly entirely on a raised platform.³⁰ In this space, youth are accommodated with a wide variety of seating options, from fixed restaurant-style booths to a tall counter (facilitating either standing or high stools), as well as a two-sided, carpet-covered, stair-stepped bench platform. The arrangement and programming of the space permits panoramic views both into and out of the

space.³¹ It is important to note again the wide variety of seating postures enacted in these images.

Conclusion

While libraries have become increasingly aware of the importance of spatial equity for young adults, new and recently renovated buildings exhibit a continuing inability to respond to the aesthetic and postural preferences of YA users. How-

ever, in many instances, the profession's policies and legacy privileging of collections continue to come *at the expense* of creating accommodating, hospitable, and purpose-built environments for young people. And without practice-relevant research, library solutions will likely remain *ad hoc*.

Several valuable insights emerge from this more systematic approach to advancing quality designs and spatial equity. First,

Figure 13. Custom Platform Riser

(photo by Anthony Bernier)



Figure 14. 81st Ave. Branch Library, Oakland, Calif. (photo by Anthony Bernier)



Figure 15. Scotts Valley (Calif.) Public Library (photo by Tim Maloney, Technical Imagery Studios)




Figure 16. Scotts Valley (Calif.) Public Library (photo by Tim Maloney, Technical Imagery Studios)



research demonstrates that youth, when asked informed questions, are aware of the importance of spatial resources in a public space like libraries and are capable of offering insightful and practical solutions to space inequities and design challenges. Second, it is clear that legacy library policies (such as one-but-to-a-chair and an historic commitment to conventional furniture) present social obstacles libraries may have overlooked or underappreciated. Third, library seating practices (conventional chairs and tables) pose not only unnecessary social obstacles but also severely and unnecessarily limit the postural freedom and choices of young people.

At a time when libraries face keen competition from technological and institutional transformations in the storage of and access to information, they must constantly seek new ways to prove their value in contributing to the well-being of their communities. By directly asking what youth want, in deriving such insights as we can from observing them in spaces where they achieve their highest degrees of comfort, and then in bending practical applications and insights back into library spaces, libraries can improve upon many legacy liabilities and barrier-producing practices. Librarians work exclusively in public space and so should exhibit more sophistication in approaching its complexities and tensions—particularly in a space where young people are at least encouraged to relax, participate, learn, and engage. Libraries will never afford all the postural options of, say, teen bedrooms. But expanding the variety of opportunities and increasing customizable control over the postural enactments of young people remain potent features that libraries—even those with limited resources—can explore to radically improve spatial equity.

In more general terms, library buildings, like all public spaces, demonstrate who counts and what activities matter in a community. American libraries often trumpet these democratic ideals but do not always mirror them in practice. Library designs that are inclusive of the actual physical realities and preferences of young adults will express these values in their public spaces. 

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10. One example can illustrate this circumstance. When well-intentioned architects or library designers ask YAs an open-ended question, say, about seating options, youth commonly respond that they want "couches and bean bag chairs," which exposes their uninformed vocabularies about the much broader range of public seating options. When asked to select from among a broader vocabulary of options (as was done for this study), or when observed in daily life, they identify or gravitate to a broader range of responses.

11. Happily, there is evidence that the topic of library spaces for YAs has been attracting research interest. The first doctoral dissertation, an in-depth ethnographic study of one branch library, appeared in 2009 (Shari A. Lee, "Teen Space: Designed for Whom?" unpublished doctoral dissertation, 2009, University of California, Los Angeles).
12. Anthony Bernier, "The Case Against 'Safe Spaces,'" *Voice of Youth Advocates* 26, no. 3 (Aug. 2003): 198–99. See also: Anthony Bernier, "Bathrooms, Bedrooms, and Young Adult Spaces," *American Libraries* 29, no. 9 (Oct. 1998): 52; Anthony Bernier, "A Space for Myself to Go: Early Patterns in Small YA Spaces," *Public Libraries* 48, no. 5 (Sept./Oct. 2009): 33–47; Anthony Bernier, "Ten Years of 'YA Spaces of Your Dreams': What Have We Learned?" *Voice of Youth Advocates Online*, May 13, 2010, accessed Mar. 19, 2014, www.voyamagazine.com/2010/05/13/ten-years-of-ya-spaces-of-your-dreams-what-have-we-learned; Anthony Bernier, *VOYA Spaces of Your Dreams Collection* (Bowie, MD: Voya Press, 2012). For a rejoinder to the "Geography of No!" thesis, see Leonee Ariel Derr, "Breaking Down Barriers: Engaging Young Adults by Creating a 'Geography of Yes!' in Public Libraries," 2011, accessed Mar. 19, 2014, www.libraries.vic.gov.au/downloads/Margery_C_Ramsay_and_Barrett_Reid_Scholarship_Reports/20130822_final_report_leonee_derr_geography_ofyes_barrettreidscholarship.pdf.
13. Howard, "What Do Young Teens Think About the Public Library?"
14. This research, conducted by an architecture professor from the University of California, Berkeley, deployed a two-phase ethnographic study examining the degree of YA customer satisfaction achieved in an innovative YA space design, particularly with respect to seating options. Galen Cranz, "Body Conscious Design in a 'Teen Space': Post Occupancy Evaluation of an Innovative Public Library," *Public Libraries* 45, no. 6 (Sept./Nov. 2006): 48–56.
15. Galen Cranz, *The Chair: Rethinking Culture, Body, and Design* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998).
16. Subject libraries were drawn from new and renovated library facilities catalogued in the five years of the annual architectural issue of *Library Journal* (2006–2010).
17. Sarah Flowers and Young Adult Library Services Association, *Young Adults Deserve the Best: YALSA's Competencies in Action* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2011); Robin Moeller, Amy Pattee, and Angela Leeper, "The Young Adult Voice in Research about Young Adults," *The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults* (Nov. 15, 2011), accessed Mar. 19, 2014, www.yalsa.org/jrly/2011/11/the-young-adult-voice-in-research-about-young-adults; Denise E. Agosto, "Envisaging Young Adult Librarianship from a Teen-centered Perspective," in *Transforming Young Adult Services*, ed. Anthony Bernier (Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman, 2013), 33–52.
18. L. Meghann Kulmann et al., "Learning from Librarians and Teens about YA Library Spaces," *Public Libraries* 53, no. 3 (May/June 2014): 24.
19. At least two methodological liabilities are incurred with this approach. The first is that non-library-using YAs are not included in the sample. The second is that, like all surveys, these are merely self-reported data. The larger project, from which this data is drawn, will include more narrative data from YAs in the future. Full results from this study in Anthony Bernier, Mike Males, and Collin Rickman, "It is Silly to Hide Your Most Active Patrons: Exploring User Participation of Library Space Designs for Young Adults in the United States," *The Library Quarterly* 84, no. 2 (Apr. 2014): 165–82.
20. This finding is supported as well in the video commentary received from both librarians and teens in another part of this research project, Kulmann et al., "Learning from Librarians and Teens about YA Library Spaces."
21. Howard, "What Do Young Teens Think About the Public Library?"
22. Cranz, *The Chair: Rethinking Culture, Body, and Design*.
23. Ibid. See also Tyson A. C. Beach, et al., "Effects of Prolonged Sitting on the Passive Flexion Stiffness of the in vivo Lumbar Spine," *The Spine Journal* 5, no. 2 (Jan. 2005): 145–54.
24. A. C. Mandal, "Changing Standards for School Furniture," *Ergonomics in Design: The Quarterly of Human Factors Applications* 5, no. 2 (Apr. 1997): 28–31, cited in Cranz, *The Chair: Rethinking Culture, Body, and Design*.
25. Reid, "'My Room! Private! Keep Out! This Means You!'" 34.
26. This is actually not a new idea for libraries. The profession long ago recognized that the signature 1960s–70s furniture creation, the "bean bag chair," was popular with young people. The bean bag chair manifested many of that period's aesthetic preferences: plastic, filled with recycled materials, easily shaped to individual bodies, counter-cultural in its floor-orientation, and decidedly not a "task chair" to be pulled up to a desk. However, aside from the postural contortions required to sit in or get out of bean bag chairs, and their famous capacity to be punctured, these aesthetic values are a half-century old now and the design community's lack of imagination in redesigning new floor-based options since then ought not keep libraries stuck in the past.
27. Of course, floors present distinct disadvantages. They can be dirty. Floor seating can draw disapproval from parents, staff, and other adults. If not designed well as a seating option, floors can easily be cold and drafty. They can present poor vantage and observation points and thus work against social experience. And it is common for designers to poorly light areas used for floor-based activity.
28. Aaron Schmidt, "The User Experience," *Library Journal*, Jan. 15, 2010, accessed Mar. 19, 2014, <http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2010/01/opinion/aaron-schmidt/new-column-launch-the-user-experience>.
29. Accommodating an entire class could have been even easier on this platform had the same carpet been run up the wall behind it. This is a feature that clearly signals the permissibility of floor seating, especially when it is located near such wonderful natural light and street views.
30. This design, created by Group 4 Architecture, Research + Planning, South San Francisco, Calif., is a partner in the larger study of YA spaces supported by an IMLS research grant.
31. Not pictured are two additional features: the wheelchair ramp leading up the back of the raised platform and the space's adjacency to tall windows with garden views that flood the space with natural light.

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