
Women and the Public Library: Using Technology, Using the Library

DOLORES FIDISHUN

ABSTRACT

In today's rapidly changing world of technology and information, libraries find themselves trying to understand more about their users. The results of a qualitative survey of 184 women library patrons give insight into why and how they use library and information technology and how they learned to use that technology. Women discuss what services they particularly value, including traditional services like printed books and reference, but also their appreciation and use of the Internet, including the library's Web site and databases. Trends showed that women are still the ones who bring children to the library and encourage their use of books. They also value the library as a place of solitude where they can find books or just be by themselves. Women use a variety of resources outside of the library to locate information as they make choices about how to find information in everyday life. It will be important for public libraries to discover ways to increase their role in educating women about library use, particularly electronic resources, and how to effectively locate and evaluate information from the Web and other resources so libraries can remain a vital part of lifelong learning.

INTRODUCTION

The nature of library use is changing rapidly. New frontiers of technology and the ever-changing information landscape have created endless possibilities for those who seek information. Moyo (2004, p. 223) explains that "reference services are being transformed in response to changing technology and information environments." Some users prefer in-person service while large numbers of patrons look to technology, using the

Internet and its search engines and databases, to find the information they need. Even print books, the traditional draw of public libraries, are now provided through electronic copies, can be easily purchased through online sites such as Amazon.com, or are conveniently available at bookstores that offer not only books but coffee shops and programs similar to those found in libraries. Therefore, it is important that librarians understand why users come to the library and how they use the library once they are there. Libraries are also concerned that they effectively serve all users (Lange, 1987). Over time our patron base has become increasingly diverse (Vincent, 2005), making it imperative that we find out not only what services our users require when they come to the library but also what they value most when they use those services.

It is in the midst of this setting that a qualitative survey of adult public library patrons was undertaken to try to understand how patrons use the library and information, both print and online, as well as whether females and males use the library and information in different ways. Analysis of women's responses permits us to gain insight into how women use the library, any unmet needs they perceive, and the types of resources both inside and outside of the library that women use to find information. A qualitative study permits the researcher to understand more about how the women in the study think, their reasoning as they use the library, and why they respond positively or negatively to libraries and the use of information and technology.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most librarians would agree that understanding our patrons and their needs is an important part of planning for quality services in any library. Janet M. Lange (1987) spoke about the necessity of understanding those we serve when she stated, "Public library administrators are increasingly interested in being able to predict who will use the library, why and how they will use it" (p. 50). Previous research on user behavior studied the general population and was not necessarily concerned with how women, in particular, use libraries. Even OCLC's comprehensive report *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources* (2005) does not break data down by gender. Although some researchers such as Wittig (1991), Marchant (1991), and Steele (1994) have used gender as one of their variables, little extensive work has been done on women's interactions in libraries. Feminist Standpoint Theory (Harding, 1991) proposes that "the distinctive features of women's situation in a gender-stratified society" (p. 119) should be emphasized in research. This perspective is important to consider as libraries seek to attract diverse clientele. Women's role in society and the patterns of their lives create situations that may give a unique character to how they use libraries and technology or how they learn to use these resources. Indeed, women's use and experience of libraries may be different from that of men.

In addition, previous user studies are primarily quantitative in nature, asking specific questions about use based on the researchers' experiences. While these studies gave us valuable information about library use, they did not permit patrons to "speak their mind" about the library, how they use it, and positive or negative experiences they have encountered in the process. It is for this reason that a qualitative study was undertaken in the hope that a more extensive knowledge of women's patterns of use would emerge as a part of the grounded theory that was generated from the data. Grounded theory, as explained by Michael Quinn Patton (2002), allows the researcher to create theory from the data rather than seeking to prove or disprove a theory the researcher has already proposed (p. 127). This qualitative method of research is especially effective when working with patrons and allows the researcher to consider alternative meanings of patterns they observe in the real library world.

METHODOLOGY

Working with the library director and staff of Chester County Library in Exton, Pennsylvania, a qualitative survey was developed. As Applegate (1993) recommends, user satisfaction studies should allow patrons to give more comprehensive information about their patterns of library use than the simple "yes/no" answers allowed in many surveys. A qualitative survey would permit respondents to tell more of their own stories about how they use libraries and information, in response to open-ended questions, which are not limited to a set number of words. The survey included questions about how patrons used the library, what kinds of information they were seeking, how they found information, and whether they used technology, including how they learned to use technological resources. In addition, positive and negative critical incidences dealing with their library experiences were requested. These incidences provided insight into what users really thought of the library and the kinds of services they used and valued. Another section asked patrons how they found particular types of information and whether they used the library or other resources such as the Internet, television, newspapers, or friends to obtain what they needed. Final questions on the survey asked demographic information including age, gender, and education level. Space at the end of the survey asked for any other comments about how the person locates information or uses the library, giving the patrons a chance to further express ideas or patterns of use that were not covered in previous questions.

The anonymous survey was distributed to all patrons eighteen years of age or older who entered the library on four separate days and times. Working with the library director and staff, it was possible to establish times that would give a good representation of library patrons, including during the day, evening, and weekend hours. The weekend day chosen to distribute the surveys was the Saturday of the library's book sale, guar-

anteering a particularly large number of patrons. Patrons were given the survey as they walked into the library, and were asked to complete and return the finished document to a desk before they left. Four hundred and sixty-five surveys were distributed and 329 were returned. A number of patrons who did not complete the survey told the researcher that they were only there to get tax forms and did not have time to fill it out. Of the 329 responses, 184 came from female patrons, 127 came from male patrons, and 18 listed no gender. The data reported in this article is derived primarily from the 184 female respondents who listed ages between eighteen and seventy-nine years of age. The majority of women answering the survey were fairly well educated as 71 percent reported having a bachelor's degree or higher. Some contrasting data from men's responses to the survey is used where appropriate.

Once the survey process was completed the questionnaires were collated and spreadsheets were created that reported answers to "yes/no" or other data questions. Word documents were created that listed more qualitative answers ranging from short one or two word answers to lengthy paragraphs. The data was then analyzed using a thematic content analysis to find themes and patterns that emerged to create grounded theory.

TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

In qualitative research one looks for trustworthiness in the data. Do the results ring true, are they authentic? Are they, as Patton (2002) explicates, "balanced, fair, and conscientious in taking account of multiple perspectives . . . multiple realities"? (p. 575).

The trustworthiness of the study is further enhanced by bringing multiple forms of evaluation to the study, also known as triangulation. In this case, the survey asked questions in more than one way so that the researcher could determine whether patrons' responses were truly authentic. Additionally, the researcher discussed the results of the study with a number of public librarians, including the library director who helped design the study. These discussions permitted a verification of the results, including allowing librarians to report corresponding observations of the concepts exhibited in their own libraries.

In addition to the concept of triangulation, it was important that the study include enough respondents. Seidman (2006) states there are two criteria for deciding if enough people have been interviewed for a study. Although this study was not conducted using interviews, the criteria are still appropriate. Seidman's first criterion is sufficiency: "Are there sufficient numbers to reflect the range of participants and sites that make up the population so that others outside the sample might have a chance to connect to the experiences of those in it?" (p. 55). In the case of this study, distributing the surveys on four days and times permitted the researcher to reach many types of patrons who were as representative of most of the library's patrons as possible.

The second criterion, saturation of information, is a point in the study at which the researcher begins to hear the same information reported. The results of this study demonstrated a number of trends that quickly became evident even on brief perusal of the results at the end of the days the surveys were returned.

From my own perspective as a researcher, it was necessary to put myself into a frame of mind that reflected the mission and clientele of the public library. As an academic librarian, I have become accustomed to working with patrons who come to the library for assignment-related research from graduate classes and who are very direct in their needs. While these students come from diverse backgrounds, public library patrons tend to exhibit more diversity than found in most universities. I also tried to place myself in the atmosphere of a public librarian, one grounded in the diversity, equality, and true community spirit that is found in public libraries. I had to envision library service in light of the needs of patrons with varying educational and socio-economic levels who come to the library with more varied requests than the requests I encounter in an academic library.

Finally it is important to stress that the results of this study are qualitative in nature and are not generalizable to the entire public; they reflect the responses of the patrons that were surveyed. The results still contribute to how librarians understand patrons' needs by providing insight into ideas about women's use of public libraries and information, and by providing library staff opportunities to be aware of the trends described in the study as they work with their own patrons.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Using the Library

Respondents to the study were active library users. When asked how often they visited the library, 42 percent of the women surveyed came to the library monthly while 36 percent came weekly (See Table 1).

Most users in the survey visited the library regularly, but they were also aware of other ways to contact the library. When asked, 62 percent of the women surveyed knew that they could email the library and 72 percent knew that they could call the library with a reference question.

Why do they come to the library?

It is still the traditional concepts of library use and women's roles that brought many women to the library. By far the most prominent response about why women came to the library was to get books. A number of women commented that they came to "borrow books instead of buying them," a major theme that reassures librarians there still is a core use for physical libraries. As one woman stated, "I enjoy reading enough that the library is much more economical than going to purchase books on a regular basis."

Table 1. How Often Do You Visit the Library?

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Every Few Months	Once or Twice a Year	Every Few Years	Other
1%	36%	42%	15%	3%	2%	1%

Other comments exemplifying women's responses in this area included: "to check out reading for pleasure books," "to borrow fiction and sometimes nonfiction," and a number of comments relating to getting books for oneself and/or members of one's family. A number of women commented on the availability of nonprint materials, but finding books was the overwhelming reason women came to the library. Clearly for these users, electronic media and online resources have not completely taken the place of the physical book that library patrons have used for years.

The second significant reason for using the library related to children's books or storytimes and children's programs. A fairly large number of responses detailed women's role in making sure their children developed an appreciation for books and the library. Comments reflecting these activities included, "storytime for my 2 & 4, my children love to take out books," "children's free programs—great children's book selection," "bedtime story hour," and "so my children have the experience." In their role as parents and grandparents, these women chose the library as an important place to bring their children. One woman summed this feeling up saying that she came "mainly to enrich my children 9, 8 & 6 to use other resources than [the] Internet" while another stated:

My children really enjoy the storytime programs. So much that we signed up a friend and are this close to signing up a second friend. Truly great program, not only for basic library visits but socialization skills and listening skills for children. Keep it up!

A number of women came to do research, another traditional library function. One woman commented that she came to "research misc topics—information I want to learn but do not want to buy a book about," another said she was there for reference for "cooking, crafts, gardening," and yet another was doing "research for work (nurse)." Student use of the library for research was also evident. As one woman said, "I am a grad student so I need books for projects, research, etc." Women felt that the library can provide quality information. One woman was particularly enthusiastic. She wrote:

Though the Internet allows access to vast amounts of information not all of it is accurate or reliable. The Library is not only a treasure house of information culture and reading for pleasure. I trust the accuracy of its information more or rather I feel I can evaluate the reliability of its information more effectively than some of what can be found on-line. Also it is invaluable to have people—knowledgeable and personable in the library to consult with.

The availability of public computers was another popular reason to come to the library. Women commented that the "free wireless Internet" was something they took advantage of while others simply stated that they came to use "computers" or "the Internet."

Additional reasons for visiting the library included reading, particularly newspapers or magazines, and studying. Special services such as copy machines and tax forms, and locating materials for teaching or homeschooling were also mentioned. A few women came to the library to volunteer or tutor. Finally a number of responses reflected not only the busyness of women's lives but also the role that the library plays for these women in finding a place and time for themselves, a place to attend programs, and to socialize. One woman wrote "Recreation place to hang out especially in cold weather. Close to the mall, great location, place to unwind, relax and read."

When men's answers were compared with those of the women, men also wanted to get books, but the response was not as overwhelming as female patrons. Very few men mentioned children's materials or programs as a reason for visiting the library. Finally, men came to the library to study or to read newspapers and magazines more often than women. Other reasons tended to reflect the same strength of response as with the women who responded to the survey.

Using Technology

Women in this survey were fairly tech-savvy. When asked, most women (74 percent) said they felt comfortable using computers and only 11 percent indicated that they did not feel comfortable using computer technology. Only 5 percent of the women indicated that using a computer meant more work for them. Eighty-two percent of the women who responded said they use a computer on a regular basis, and many women (98 percent) reported they had used the Internet. Of those who use the Internet, 91 percent said they used the Web at home, 64 percent said they used it at work, and 34 percent said they used the Internet at the public library. This validates the importance of library provision of Internet service for the general public. Some women indicated that they accessed the Web in more than one place, including at a friend's house or another location (See Table 2).

Most women who used the Internet (98 percent) used a search engine such as Google or Yahoo to find information. The women indicated that they used the search engines to find many kinds of information with the most prominent comment that said "research." Medical information, travel information, information for their children, and shopping were also frequently cited as reasons women used search engines. A few women mentioned using search engines to find book or movie reviews, information about local events, and phone numbers of businesses or people. A small number of women listed banking or finance as an additional reason to use the Internet. Men also listed general research topics as the most

Table 2. Where Women Use the Internet

Home	Work	Public Library	Public School	Higher Education Institution	Other
91%	64%	34%	5%	7%	2%

prominent reason to use search engines. However, women again demonstrated their commitment to family responsibilities, as men listed shopping and finding medical information as their second reason for using the Internet, followed by finances, locating book and movie reviews, and obtaining contact information on people or businesses. It is interesting to note that only a few men in the survey listed finding information for their children or for travel as the reasons to use a search engine. It was evident that for this group of women, they were the family members finding the information for children's needs, travel, and local activities.

Finding Information

A significant insight that came from this survey was learning how women found information, either by using library resources or by other means. Seven questions asked women what sources they used to find various types of information. The pervasiveness of the Internet was prevalent in several of their answers as it was the number one choice listed for finding health information, sports scores, the date of Thanksgiving, and the phone number of their state Senator. Television was the first place most women went to find the weather, but the Internet was listed as the second most popular choice. The library was the first place to go to find a good book and was also chosen by a number of women as a place to find details when selecting an appliance. Results showed that although women use libraries to find information, today's world offers so many choices when looking for information, that in most cases libraries were at least third on the list of places women looked for most of the topics listed (See Table 3).

Women also indicated how they liked to find information and how important technology is to their lives. When asked if they used a computer to access information for various purposes, 71 percent said they used it to gain information for work, 74 percent said they used it for hobbies, and 81 percent said they had accessed medical information on the Web. A number of the women (65 percent) used email and chat to keep in touch with their friends and family. Thirty percent of the respondents felt that books were more valuable than using a computer. However, some women commented that both books and the Internet were valuable depending upon the situation. When questioned about being able to ask a librarian for help, 46 percent of the women said that this was a service they appreciated. It appears that although many of the women regularly use computers to find information, a fair number appreciate having a knowledgeable librarian who can assist them.

Table 3. How Women Find Information

Type of Information	First Place Women Would Go to Find:		Second Place Women Would Go to Find:	
Tomorrow's Weather	newspaper	9.78%	newspaper	1.09%
	call library	0.54%	call library	2.17%
	come to library	1.63%	come to library	2.17%
	Internet	38.04%	Internet	8.15%
	television	51.09%	television	0.54%
	friend	4.35%	friend	9.24%
	don't use	1.09%	don't use	0.00%
	other	8.15%	other	2.72%
Health Information	newspaper	2.17%	newspaper	17.39%
	call library	2.17%	call library	0.00%
	come to library	8.15%	come to library	1.63%
	Internet	73.91%	Internet	21.20%
	television	4.35%	television	19.57%
	friend	4.89%	friend	3.26%
	don't use	1.09%	don't use	0.00%
	other	5.98%	other	0.54%
A Sports Score	newspaper	14.67%	newspaper	6.52%
	call library	0.54%	call library	1.09%
	come to library	0.54%	come to library	20.11%
	Internet	28.80%	Internet	8.70%
	television	19.57%	television	7.07%
	friend	1.63%	friend	10.33%
	don't use	33.70%	don't use	0.00%
	other	1.63%	other	4.35%
Date of Thanksgiving	newspaper	1.63%	newspaper	11.41%
	call library	2.72%	call library	0.00%
	come to library	1.63%	come to library	1.09%
	Internet	41.30%	Internet	10.87%
	television	1.63%	television	19.02%
	friend	4.35%	friend	3.80%
	don't use	14.13%	don't use	0.00%
	other	21.20%	other	0.54%
Phone Number of State Senator	newspaper	3.26%	newspaper	3.80%
	call library	5.43%	call library	10.87%
	come to library	3.26%	come to library	10.33%
	Internet	64.67%	Internet	4.89%
	television	1.09%	television	0.54%
	friend	3.26%	friend	5.43%
	don't use	9.78%	don't use	0.00%
	other	8.15%	other	3.26%
Selecting a New Appliance	newspaper	12.50%	newspaper	8.70%
	call library	2.72%	call library	0.54%
	come to library	12.50%	come to library	8.15%
	Internet	50.00%	Internet	15.22%
	television	1.63%	television	4.35%
	friend	4.89%	friend	7.61%
	don't use	4.89%	don't use	1.09%
	other	14.13%	other	5.43%
Finding a Good Book to Read	newspaper	2.72%	newspaper	6.52%
	call library	4.35%	call library	4.35%
	come to library	68.48%	come to library	9.24%
	Internet	25.54%	Internet	18.48%
	television	1.09%	television	3.80%
	friend	11.41%	friend	14.67%
	don't use	1.09%	don't use	0.00%
	other	4.35%	other	3.26%

When it came to using library technology to find information, women once again demonstrated that they were quite competent. Most (72 percent) said that they were comfortable using the online catalog while 53 percent said they used the library's Web page. Most used the Web page to access the catalog in some way or to renew or reserve books. Another substantial group used the library's Web pages to check their library record. A few used the Web pages to find out about library events or to find information such as hours or a staff phone number. Some women indicated that they used the Web page to access research information or to get to the Pennsylvania Power Library, a group of online databases that has been provided to all libraries statewide. Information about these databases needs to be publicized more. When asked if they used the library's databases only 19 percent of the women responded that they did, and when questioned about how they used these resources most women described using the online catalog. This may be one area where libraries need to do more patron education and better marketing of resources, so that all patrons who come to the library understand more about the wealth of information available to them online. It may be possible that the women are using the databases, particularly in the library, or that a librarian is using a database to help them to find information and they do not fully understand that the information comes from an online database. Women's comments about the databases indicate that they do not know that these resources exist or they do not understand what they do.

Although many of the women did not know about accessing the public library's online databases, 47 percent said they had access to databases from another source. These sources included higher education institutions, public schools, businesses, and in a few cases, personal subscriptions. This leads one to surmise that perhaps the women surveyed do not realize that the public library has databases similar to those they find in other institutions (See Table 4).

Learning to Use Online Resources

Those who did use online databases either at the public library or elsewhere were asked how they learned to use them. Of those responding, 16 percent said that they taught themselves. Only a few people had any formal instruction including 3 percent who were taught by a public library staff member (See Table 5).

When asked if they would like formal training on how to use online databases, 60 percent of the women surveyed said they would. Of those who wanted such training, 23 percent said they would like individual training and 77 percent said they would prefer that the training was conducted in a class setting.

The Value of Their Library Experience

Using positive and negative critical incidences gave insight into women's attitudes and priorities as they use the library. By responding to questions

Table 4. Sources of Access to Online Databases (Other Than the Public Library)

Higher Education Institution	School District	Private Business	Personal Organization	Subscription	Other
33%	19%	23%	9%	13%	3%

Table 5. How Did You Learn to Use Library Online Databases?

I taught myself	16%
One-on-one instruction at my public library	3%
Formal instruction—public library	2%
One-on-one instruction at higher education institution	3%
Formal instruction—higher education institution	2%
One-on-one instruction in my school district	1%
Formal instruction—in my school district	1%
Family member or friend taught me	3%
Learned from a manual	1%
Learned from a computer-based tutorial	2%
Other	1%

about their best and worst experiences using the library, women could express the services and experiences they valued most as well as give voice to frustrations they encountered when using the library. Their responses illustrate the women's thinking about the definition of a great library.

Books are still important. Even if women used databases and technology, when asked about their best library experience most women mentioned a connection with books. They spoke of "finding some delightful or illuminating book on the shelf," of "finding a good book," "having access to[a] large selection of books," and one woman even described her ultimate experience of acquiring "an original copy of *Gone with the Wind* 30+ years ago." Clearly these women love books and value the library as a place to find print treasures or information.

Children's literature, programs, and family projects are important reasons that women come to the library. In discussing their best experiences, a number of women felt that library visits shared with their children or family members were special. Comments included "my daughter loves it. She learns nursery rhymes, body parts," and "I bring my younger brother to read books, he and I love the selection." Another woman answered that "Sat. am storytime-perfect for cold rainy days in winter. Son loves finger plays, felt storyboard and songs." Other women simply mentioned "children's storytimes" or "the free children's programs," but all of the answers in this category exemplified the idea that bringing children to the library was important. This finding was interesting when compared with the results from men in the study. Very few men mentioned children's activities among their best experiences.

Women do use and value library technology. Even if they are not always aware of all the technological resources that the library has to offer

such as databases, women use and appreciate the library's Web site and the ability to reserve and renew materials online. They are also grateful for the Internet access provided by the library and listed "using the computer to find information" and checking "email before I get my own computer" among their best experiences. One woman enthusiastically wrote that her best library experience was "Finding it accessible on my home computer!"

Having access to non-print materials such as videos and CDs are also appreciated. Women commented on "being able to borrow DVDs at a reasonable price" and praised the library for their "selection of DVDs, most of them you can not find in a commercial store." Other women appreciated the "books on tape" and one woman said that one of her best experiences was "finding the CD section."

The library can be a place of solitude. A number of women indicated that the library was a place where they could have time to themselves and appreciate life; it was "a wonderful place to be." One woman characterized her best library experience by saying that "I just enjoy wandering up and down the rows of books when I am not looking for anything specific and being surprised." Even women with children found time for themselves, as one woman said, "Best experience—when kids are home and I can browse in peace," while another praised the library as having a "good atmosphere to get some work accomplished. Clean and friendly." These experiences are complemented by one woman's experience of giving back to the community when she said that her best time at the library was "being part of the adult literacy project and helping people learn English and to read better." Although women were especially appreciative of the library as a place, many more men reported that they came to the library to avoid distraction, to read, or to study undisturbed. Best experiences also included library services such as "a very short wait for book coming from other libraries," "putting holds on favorite books," and "using the wonderful quick scan check-out."

Finally, the women who responded to the survey appreciated the people who assisted them and understood the important role the library staff plays in making their library use a positive experience. They complimented the "very friendly and approachable staff," children's librarians who "have been fantastic, so caring, warm and enthusiastic" and the reference staff who they found to be "very helpful."

A few women did relate negative experiences, but they were greatly outnumbered by positive comments. For responses of negative incidences twenty-three women wrote "none" and seventeen women described good experiences. Most negative responses had to do with typical library issues of having to return books on time or getting an overdue notice or fine for something they had already returned. One woman wrote that "no real wors[t]—can be hard to find time to get here and return books on time."

In some cases women did write about "books not being in and having to be on a waiting list." There were two comments about noise. One woman said that her worst experience was "The day I came to the library and there were so many children running around, crying" while another simply said "please crack down on the noise."

Among the comments about negative experiences, two situations were mentioned that specifically dealt with this library. The first negative situation had to do with parking, which the library staff knew was a problem. The second negative situation was the recently completed renovation of the restrooms that required patrons to go upstairs to an out-of-the-way location to use a restroom. Along with these comments, however, a number of women complimented how nice the new restrooms are.

In the space for comments at the end of the survey there were several remarks about how much women liked this particular library and staff and about the value of libraries in general. These comments can be summed up by one woman who said, "Keep up the good work! Libraries are one of the best uses of our tax dollars," and another who said "Thank you for all you do to make the library a part of our lives." As discussed earlier, the women who entered this library found it to be an institution that was highly valued.

DISCUSSION

Women in the study indicated that they used many resources to find information but still evidenced high regard for the library and books. Many were truly devoted to the printed word even if they used technology to find information. This trend indicating the importance of books to patrons reflects what was found in previous studies (Steele, 1994; Wittig, 1991).

Children's programs and literature were an important part of why women used libraries and contributed to some of their best library experiences. This also echoes previous studies such as Marchant's (1991). Women's use of the library to get materials or find information for their family also replicates Wittig's (1991, p. 31) results that women came to the library more than men to check out materials for another adult or for children.

Finding information or doing research was another core use that still brings women into the library. Women sought information on topics from work-related issues to hobbies and more. A number of women also reported that having a librarian whom they could ask for help when they needed it was a vital service.

Women in the study used the library Web site and also indicated that they used online databases to some extent in the public library but more frequently through other institutions. It appears that the women are not as aware of what the public library has to offer regarding technological resources as they could be, and that additional marketing or training for

patrons on how to use these resources would be helpful. Most women also used the Internet as found in the Pew report (Fallows, 2005), as well as other resources, to find various kinds of information. For some types of information, women were more likely to use the Web or other venues than they were to come to the library. One implication of this tendency is that, as Jehlik (2004, p. 8) suggests, it may be important for libraries to begin teaching the public more about how to find information in addition to simply locating information.

When learning how to use online databases a number of the women said they that taught themselves how to use them. Few women had any formal training either in the public library or at any other institution. In a world where lifelong learning has become the norm, public libraries should find ways to meet what Jehlik (2004, p. 2) says is the library's primary challenge: "to train adults to use the library's electronic resources."

Finally, the women in this study also proclaimed the importance of the library as place: a place of solitude, of discovery, and of enrichment. As Ranseen (2002, p. 203) states "people visit the library as much for the actual experience there as for the documents it holds." It was interesting that although the women did appreciate the library as a place and used it to find time for themselves, to socialize, to read magazines and newspapers, or to study, men mentioned this trend more often. In conversations with librarian Ronda Dibas and others (no conversations were held with library staff, only librarians), they noted that men tend to come to the library to socialize or to find time for themselves, whereas women usually come in, do what they need to do, and leave (Dibas, 2006). Wittig (1991, p. 30) also noted that "reading magazines and newspapers was clearly an activity of better educated adult males."

FURTHER STUDY

This study of women's use of the library reflected their technical expertise, their love of books, and the roles women play in life, including that of mother, employee, and more. It did, however, focus on women who came to the library. To completely understand how women use libraries, it would be crucial to conduct a follow-up study that would survey women who only accessed the library via its Web site to see if the patterns demonstrated in this study also appear with online users. It would also be important to find out how women who are non-library users find information, so that librarians could find ways to meet the information needs of those who do not come into our institutions. This particular study does not break data down by age or education. Such a study would give librarians additional insights into how women use libraries during various periods of their lives. Finally, although this study deals with women's use of the library and technology, it is also important to find out more about how men use these resources.

CONCLUSION

This study of women public library patrons found that technology is a large part of women's lives and that they regularly use the Internet and other resources to find information. Many women in the study were not aware of the database resources available at the public library although some used them through other institutions. It was, however, important to these women to be able to find books at the library and to access traditional library services, such as librarians who can offer assistance. Women tend to be the ones who seek information for children and bring them to the library, many in the hope of giving their children the opportunity to learn to truly appreciate the library and reading. Finally, the women surveyed appreciated the library as place, finding it to be somewhere they can find solitude from busy lives, connect socially, or give back to their community. To the women in this survey, the library is still an important institution even in an ever expanding world of information. This feeling can be summed up by a comment from one of the women who said, "The library is my sanctuary—place of calm—knowledge—imagination. It's the source of all info—so, all good!"

REFERENCES

- Applegate, R. (1993). Models of user satisfaction: Understanding false positives. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 32, 525–539.
- Fallows, D. (2005, December 28). *How women and men use the Internet*. Washington, DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project. Retrieved June 5, 2005, from http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Women_and_Men_online.pdf.
- Harding, S. (1991). *Whose science? Whose knowledge?: Thinking from women's lives*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Jehlik, T. (2004). Information literacy in the public library. *Nebraska Library Association Quarterly*, 35(4), 7–13.
- Lange, J. M. (1987). Public library users, nonusers, and type of library use. *Public Library Quarterly*, 8, 49–67.
- Marchant, M. (1991). What motivates adult use of public libraries? *Library & Information Science Research*, 13, 201–235.
- Moyo, L. M. (2004). Electronic libraries and the emergence of new service paradigms. *The Electronic Library*, 22, 220–230.
- Online Computer Library Center, Inc. (2005). *Perceptions of libraries and information resources: A report to the OCLC membership*. Retrieved June 5, 2006, from http://www.oclc.org/reports/pdfs/Percept_all.pdf.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ranssen, E. (2002). The library as place: Changing perspectives. *Library Administration and Management*, 16, 203–207.
- Seidman, I. E. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Steele, E. (1994). A survey of adult library users in the King County Library System. *ALKI*, 10(3), 28–30.
- Vincent, J. (2005). So who are 'proper' library users then? *Public Library Journal*, 20(3), 10.
- Wittig, G. (1991). Some characteristics of Mississippi library users. *Public Libraries*, 30, 25–32.

Dolores Fidishun is Head Librarian at Penn State Great Valley School of Graduate Professional Studies where she supervises the library and the Instructional Design Department. She holds an Ed.D. in Leadership in Higher Education from Widener University, a M.S.L.S. from Drexel University, a M.Ed. in Adult Education from Widener University and a B.S. in Library Science Education from Kutztown University of Pennsylvania. In previous positions she has served as Head of Audiovisual Services and part-time reference librarian in public libraries and as a public school librarian. Research interests include adult learning and technology, particularly women and computing, library/computer center interface, libraries and adult users, and instructional design for library instruction. She has edited a special issue of *TechTrends* on women and technology. Articles on her research have appeared in journals such as *Information Technology and Libraries*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, and *portal*.