

The Vanishing Male

Guy Stuff at the Library that Lures and Hooks

New England Library Association

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Presentation Available

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What We Will Discuss

Current library use by men

Why men don't use libraries more

Strategies to increase usage

Open exchange of ideas from your
libraries

Gender Generalization

Proceed with Caution!

Fact

Research conducted in dozens of states reveals that men are less likely to use their public library than women.

It's Important for Libraries to Connect with Men

- Meet the needs of your community
- Men less supportive of libraries and library funding
- Many elected officials are male.
- Libraries have services and information men could be using—especially in economic downturn.

Important to Connect, cont.

- Men view libraries as less useful than women—non-essential.
- Men tend to devalue educational role of libraries.
- More working wives=more important to connect with fathers

Increased Male Use= Opportunity

- Card registration
- Better serve the community
- Bolster academic achievement
- Create male role models who read
- Improve customer service
- Boost circulation
- Increase program attendance
- Increase financial support
- Connect with more organizations

Gender Issues

- Long debated in profession
- Traditionally female-dominated profession
- Can be reflected in library collections and programs
- 2/3 of trustees are female.
- Friends groups predominately female

What Research Tells Us

- Attitudes about libraries formed early and manifested in adult behavior
- Libraries equated with reading
- Boys read less than girls
- Boys more than a grade behind girls in reading
- Males dominate special education population
- Males completing high school still lag behind female counterparts
- More women than men in college

Parents of Boys Tell Us

- Daughters more interested in library than sons
- Boys have harder time fitting in
- Book collection for girls better than boys
- Children's programs often have more appeal for girls than boys.
- Story hours often not designed for boys
- Few male role models at the library

In Focus Groups Men Report

- Never liked to read
- Have not been in library since college
- Have dated perceptions/some negative memories
- Don't know how to act or what to do
- Wives took children to library/more connected to library
- Don't feel like they fit in/female environment

Focus Groups, cont.

- Read professional or business materials
- Before retirement no experience reading for pleasure
- Often find non-fiction collection is dated or non-existent
- Go to Borders instead

What Do Libraries Have to Do Differently?

Understand Reading Preferences

She Likes: He Likes

Gender Differences

- Theories about causes of differences in reading preferences
- Men and women “wired differently”
- Multiple types of intelligence
- Socialization and cultural influences
- Grew up thinking reading was a feminine activity
- Mother 10 times more likely to read than fathers

Female Preferences

- Have more diverse reading interests
- Read more fiction
- Read more in every category except history and biography
- Classic and contemporary
- Are willing to read books written by men
- Will read about people different than themselves
- Emotions, feelings, empathize with characters, inter-personal and family relationships

Male Preferences

- Read more non-fiction—account for only 20% of retail market for fiction
- Harry Potter gives us hope
- Younger men spending less time reading and more time devoted to Internet, television, movies, computers and video games
- Comic books, graphic novels, hip-hop and urban fiction popular with younger males
- More willing to read books in non-print formats
- Fiction perceived by some men as female

Male Preferences, cont.

- Some men become fiction readers as they grow older.
- Prefer fiction with strong active narrative themes;
- Titles that don't stress emotional issues
- Action, adventure, personal challenges and triumphs
- Tend to want characters they can relate to
- Unconsciously less interested in books by female authors

Understand “Shopping” Preferences

- Men and women behave differently in retail environments
- New emphasis on libraries as retail environments
- Retail has responded to gender differences—libraries can as well

Female Shoppers

- Think of shopping as an adventure/social event
- Not always purpose driven
- Browse
- Ask for assistance
- Make impulse buys

Male Shoppers

- View shopping as chore
- Many men are having to do more household shopping
- Task oriented
- Don't browse
- Don't always ask for assistance
- More likely to read signage and product information
- Make rapid buy or no buy decisions
- Spend less time in a store
- Leave if don't find what they want
- Change adverse

Give your Library the “Male Appeal” Test

- Diverse staff and board
- Marketing materials that resonate with men and women
- Non-fiction and fiction collections equally strong
- Displays that appeal to men and women

Test, cont.

- Hours of operation equally convenient for men and women
- Library environment comfortable for men and women/open uncluttered spaces, chairs and tables
- Staff trained to respond to differences

Plan of Attack

- Decide it is important
- Pro-actively issue cards to men
- Target fathers
- Check out your signage and instructional materials
- Market full menu of services/eliminate emphasis on reading
- Position library as source of information/solutions to problems
- Market e-resources and remote access

Plan, cont.

- Stress benefits in economic downturn/free information and entertainment
- Job and career information
- Continuing education/tests/certification
- Assess the non-fiction collection
 - History and biography
 - Personal investment
 - Home and car repairs
 - Technology
 - Business
 - Sports
 - Science
 - Consumer information

Plan, cont.

- Revamp programs
 - Unisex appeal: gardening, cooking, travel, etc.
 - History, world affairs, politics
 - Father-son story hours
 - Gaming
 - Author talks by male authors/mystery and sci- fi writers
 - Mentoring
 - Book clubs for men

Plan, cont.

- Enhance readers' advisory
- Identify unique community needs/opportunities to interact with males
- Presentations to community groups with male members
- Get men into the library/promote use of community room to community groups with male members

Other Ideas??