ABSTRACT
              This study examined whether user satisfaction with
library services is affected by certain objective and subjective
librarian behaviors exhibited during the reference interview. A
patron survey was conducted during July 1993 in three branches of
Cuyahoga County Public Library, located in northeastern Ohio. The
sample was determined by the patrons who had used the reference
services at the branch and chose to complete the survey. The survey
included questions which measured the friendliness and the
helpfulness of the reference librarian during the reference
interview. The results substantiate the opinion that patrons rate
library service highly when they are comfortable with librarian
behaviors. Librarian friendliness and helpfulness seem to affect
patron rating of library services. Patrons rate service as average
when comfort level with the librarian was low or if the librarian
appeared to be indifferent to the query. The survey instrument is
included in the appendix. (Contains 77 references.) (Author/JLB)

ED 367 336

PATRON SURVEY OF USER SATISFACTION WITH LIBRARY SERVICES:
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIBRARIAN BEHAVIORS
DURING THE REFERENCE INTERVIEW AND USER SATISFACTION

A Master's Research Paper submitted to the
Kent State University School of Library Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Library Science

by

Mary Ellen Nichols

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PREFACE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Like many organizations in today's consumer-oriented society, the public library seeks ways to determine to what degree it is satisfying the needs of its patrons. Definition and measurement of how well the library is accomplishing this task, as well as definition and measurement of how effective and efficient the library is as a complete system is both "difficult and . . . crucial to the evaluation of organizational performance."[1]

Quality of library service is important because how well the public library performs its tasks or is perceived to be performing its tasks helps to determine its share of the information market and, eventually, the proportion of available resources that it is allocated. As Robert Swisher and Charles R. McClure point out, public libraries must

> ...recognize that they are not the only 'information show' in town...[that there is]...competition for both resources and users, realizing that research is necessary to produce appropriate goals and prioritize objectives, to demonstrate accountability, to justify services, and ultimately to compete effectively in the information environment.[2]

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[1]Nancy A. Van House and Thomas Childers, "Dimensions of Public Library Effectiveness II: Library Performance,"<u>Library and Information Science Research</u> 12 (1990): 132.

[2]Robert Swisher and Charles R. McClure, <u>Research for Decision making: Methods for Librarians</u> (Chicago: American Library Association, 1984): 13.

The problem involved in determining library effectiveness is that of determining what factors to measure and the correct manner of measuring those factors. Easiest to measure because they are quantitative are the library's resources or inputs: its budget, collection size, number of employees. A Planning Process for Public Libraries provided libraries with a system to plan its role and subsequent allocation of resources.[3] Its use by libraries showed a need to be able to measure library outputs or services.

Measurement of a library's resources or inputs does not reveal the results or effectiveness of its services, nor how well these services are actually satisfying the users or patrons. Marchant suggests use of a model which views the library as an "open system" in which changes to one part of the system have an effect on other parts of the system. Outputs eventually affect inputs because "the value of the output is determined in its environment. . . . But the amount of input [resources] received by the library is a function of the extent to which salient groups and individuals outside the library value the library's services. The library staff and management's judgement may or may not be accurate."[4] In other

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[3]Ernest R. DeProspo, Ellen Altman, and Kenneth E. Beasley, Planning Process for Public Libraries ([Chicago]:Public Library Association, American Library Association, 1974).

[4]Maurice P. Marchant, "An Open System Theory Approach to Library Effectiveness" in Library Effectiveness: A State of the Art (New York, New York: American Library Association, June 27 and June 28, 1980), 152.

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words, how well library patrons are satisfied by the service they receive in libraries helps to determine how much of the available tax dollars are available for the resources which the library needs to provide service.

DuMont expanded this systems model with a model of library effectiveness, applicable to the reference interview, which revolved around the process of being responsive to the expectations of patrons.[5] In this view, inputs and outputs change over time; neither is static.

Output Measures for Public Libraries is an attempt to measure the performance of libraries in "terms of library services (outputs) rather than library resources (inputs). ...[providing] a set of measures related to common public library service activities."[6] Two factors are geared toward measuring effectiveness of reference services: "Reference Transactions Per Capita" and "Reference Completion Rate" or "the staff's estimate of the proportion of reference questions asked that were completed on the day they were asked."[7]

However these measures do not reveal what patrons think of the reference transaction: whether or not their actual needs were satisfied. The tests recommended in Output Measures reveal the

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[5]Rosemary Ruhig DuMont, "A Conceptual Basis for Library Effectiveness," College and Research Libraries 41 (1980): 103-111.

[6]Nancy Van House, Mary Jo Lynch, Charles R. McClure, Douglas L. Zweizig, and Eleanor Jo Rodger, Output Measures for Public Libraries: a Manual of Standardized Procedures (Chicago and London: American Library Association, 1987): ix.

[7]Ibid., 3.

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librarian's perception; the patron's perception of the encounter is not measured.

However, according to M. G. Beeler in <u>Measuring the Quality of Library Service</u>, it is the patrons themselves who can provide needed information, because "in the library business the people most likely to know [about the quality of library service] are the users."[8] However, there is a "struggle to find ways of permitting users of library services to communicate with managers of library services."[9]

Libraries provide information to patrons. Reference service provided by individuals at the reference desk is one factor of the many included in complete information service. Just how well this reference service is providing information is difficult to measure definitively because many subjective factors, in addition to the objective factual data, must be considered and evaluated.

One way of describing how well library patrons are satisfied with reference services is by measurement of "user satisfaction," rather than "user success" in using reference tools and use of reference assistance, because the term "user satisfaction" includes both ". . . success and subjective feeling of satisfaction."[10]

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[8]M. G. Francher Beeler, <u>et al.</u>, <u>Measuring the Quality of Library Service: A Handbook</u> (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1974): vii.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Jean Bird and Barry Totterdell, <u>The Effective Library: Report of the Hillingdon Project on Public Library Effectiveness</u> (London: Library Association, 1976): 58.

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Need for Study

In trying to assess whether it should place a levy on the 1992 ballot, Cuyahoga County Public Library hired Data Research Corporation to conduct a survey of a stratified random sample of Cuyahoga County residents. The telephone survey measured county residents' "perceptions of public libraries" as well as their "library use and satisfaction with library amenities," "importance of services," "support for a levy" and "reasons for voting against" a levy.[11] Of particular interest in this study are the findings on perceptions of "helpfulness" and "friendliness" of librarians, found in the questions on library use and satisfaction with library amenities. Compared with results of a similar survey conducted in 1983, ratings on the helpfulness of librarians fell from an excellent rating of seventy percent in 1983 to the 1992 excellent rating of fifty-eight percent. The satisfactory rating in 1983 was twenty eight percent; in 1992, thirty seven percent. This is significant because "... the percent giving an 'excellent' rating is an indication of the intensity respondents feel toward that item."[12] Thus although "... a majority of library users rated items [gauging library amenities] positively (excellent and satisfactory combined)... there is room for additional improvement concerning several of the items asked about."[13]

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[11]"A Community Attitudes Survey Regarding Cuyahoga County Public Library (June, 1992)"(Cleveland, Ohio: Decision Research Corporation, July, 1992): 3.

[12]Ibid., 14.

[13]Ibid.

The results of this survey caused library managers to question exactly how library patrons view the system's reference services; what is needed to gain an "excellent" rating.[14] The patron's perception of the quality of reference service does not always hinge on whether or not the information received is factual or even useful.

Quality of service is difficult to define because it consists of many intangibles which cannot be quantifiably measured with any assurance of precision. At times the patron does not know whether the information has been helpful until some time has elapsed. Reference service can be considered good even though the information provided proves unhelpful or less than accurate, because "the patron may find _relative_ accuracy acceptable and seek other indicators of the quality of the transaction [such as] convenience and timeliness of information."[15] Factual questions account for about one-eighth of all reference questions; research must be focused on the total reference encounter.[16]

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[14]John Lonsak, Regional Manager, Fairview Park Branch, Cuyahoga County Public Library, in a telephone conversation, July 24, 1992.

[15]Duane E. Webster, "Examining the Broader Domain," in "Library Reference Service: An Unrecognized Crisis - a Symposium" 13 _Journal of Academic Librarianship_ (May, 1987): 79.

[16]Thomas Childers, "The Quality of Reference: Still Moot After 20 Years" in "Library Reference Service: An Unrecognized Crisis - A Symposium" 13 _Journal of Academic Librarianship_ (May, 1987): 74.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to determine user satisfaction with personal reference service provided by librarians conducting a reference interview in branches of a public library system located in northeastern Ohio. Of particular interest will be user perception of the friendliness and helpfulness of librarians and whether how these factors are perceived affects the overall rating of service by the patron or user of the service. Do the perceptions of the user about the individual librarian's helpfulness and/or friendliness determine to any degree whether that patron finds the reference encounter satisfactory or excellent? Does the librarian's going to the shelf with the patron rather than directing the patron toward the shelf make any difference in the user's perception of the quality of the service provided?

Definition of Terms

Library User: A person who uses library materials or services.[17]

Reference Interview: The interpersonal communication between a reference staff member and a library user to determine the precise information needs of the user. Synonymous with question negotiation.[18]

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[17]Heartsill Young, ed., ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science, (Chicago: American Library Association, 1983) s.v., "Library User," 132.

[18]Ibid., s.v., "Reference Interview," 188.

Reference Staff: All library staff members whose assigned duties include the provision of information service. Synonymous with information staff.[20]

Public Library: Any library which provides general library services without charge to all residents of a given community, district, or region.[21]

User Satisfaction: The degree to which the library is able to meet the demands of the user. [22]

Friendly: Favorably disposed; inclined to approve, help, or support; not hostile or at variance; amicable.[23] This term will be further defined by (1) whether the librarian was considered approachable, defined by actions such as looking up at the patron, initiating the interview or being occupied with desk work or another patron and not acknowledging the patron's presence; (2) whether the librarian was considered enthusiastic or indifferent to the question; and (3) the patron's perception of comfort when working with the librarian.

Helpful: Giving or rendering assistance.[24] This term will be further defined operationally by the following actions: (1)

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[20]Ibid., s.v., " Reference Staff," 189.

[21]Ibid., s.v., "Public Library," 181.

[22]George D'Elia and Sandra Walsh, "User Satisfaction with Library Service - A Measure of Public Library Performance?" Library Quarterly 53 (April 1983): 110.

[23]Webster's College Dictionary (New York: Random House) 1991, s.v., "Friendly": 533.

[24]Ibid., s.v., "Helpful":623.

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assisting the patron at the reference source or at the shelf or directing the patron to the proper area; (2) asking a follow-up question as to whether anything else is required.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review will focus on the growing body of literature which deals with the evaluation of the effectiveness of the reference interview from the patron's perspective, excluding articles dealing with online searches. The multitudinous studies done on the reference interview indicate its importance in determining the effectiveness of a library. Since 1964, when Samuel Rothstein focussed on the distinction between "measurement" or the "description in quantitative terms" and the "evaluation" or the rating or assessment of effectiveness or worth," noting that "evaluation presupposes measurement against a specific standard or yardstick or goal and no area of library service has been more deficient in such standards than reference service," researchers have been dissecting the reference interview, trying to develop standards of reference interview effectiveness.[25] The literature shows a growing interest in the patron's perception of the reference interview and the connection between the patron's satisfaction with information service and his overall judgement of the library's performance.

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[25]Samuel Rothstein, "Measurement and Evaluation of Reference Service," Library Trends 12 (April, 1964): 456-472.

In 1974 Weech updated Rothstein's evaluation of reference service and found that the actual truth about the state of reference services needed to be uncovered and standards of performance needed to be developed.[26] In 1984, Powell reviewed the research done on reference effectiveness after 1970. The importance of output measures was emphasized: focus began to be placed on user satisfaction with attention placed on a measurement of combined outputs and the patron's interactions with staff.[27]

The first research centered on the accuracy of the information presented. Reference service was thus evaluated on this basis by Crowley and Childers,[28] Goldhor,[29] Bunge,[30] Gers,[31] Powell[32], and Benham and Powell.[33] More recent investigators,

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[26]Terry Weech, "Evaluation of Adult Reference Service," <u>Library Trends</u> 22 (January, 1974): 315-335.

[27]Ronald R. Powell, "Reference Effectiveness: A Review of Research," <u>Library and Information Science Research</u> 6 (1984): 3-19.

[28]Terence Crowley and Thomas Childers, <u>Information Service in Public Libraries: Two Studies</u> (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1971).

[29]Herbert Goldhor, <u>A Plan for the Development of Public Library Service in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul Metropolitan Area</u> (Minneapolis: Metropolitan Library Service Area, 1967).

[30]Charles Bunge, "Professional Education and Reference Efficiency" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1967).

[31]Ralph Gers and Lillie Seward, "Improving Reference Performance: Results of a Statewide Study," <u>Library Journal</u> 111 (November 1, 1985): 32-35.

[32]Ronald R. Powell, "An Investigation of the Relationships Between Quantifiable Reference Service Variables and Reference Performance in Public Libraries," <u>Library Quarterly</u> 48 (January, 1978): 1-19.

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such as Myers and Jirjees[34] and Hernon and McClure,[35] also focused on the factual side of information service.

The construct, "user satisfaction," was the subject of several studies by D'Elia. Three properties were ascribed to the construct: descriptive, which described the level of library performance; diagnostic, which showed the library's strengths and weaknesses; and, behavorial, which would show whether the patron's response to current use was related to future use of the library. Two approaches, objective or library-based, and subjective or client-based were also explained.

In a 1983 study, D'Elia and Walsh tried to show connections between the objective and subjective measures of user satisfaction and the descriptive, diagnostic, and behavioral aspects of the construct. Two assumptions were made: that library users could evaluate library services and that the scale used to gauge patron evaluations had face, content, and construct validity. It was found that the scale measuring user satisfaction reflected a "generalized, positive reaction" to the library and was not

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[33]Frances Benham and Ronald R. Powell, Success in Answering Reference Questions: Two Studies (Metuchen, N.J. and London, 1987).

[34]Martha Myers and Jussim M. Jirjees, the Accuracy pf Telephone Reference/ Information Services in Academic Libraries: Two Studies (Metuchen, N.J. Scarecrow Press, 1983).

[35]Peter Hernon and Charles R. McClure, "Quality of Data Issues in Unobtrusive Testing of Library Reference Service: Recommendations and Strategies," Library and Information science Research 9 (1987): 77-93.

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reflective of any particular library service.[36] The authors concluded that library use and library evaluation are not related and that the results proved the limited knowledge librarians have of their users' behavior.

Continuing this line of thought, D'Elia and Walsh sought to discover if patrons could distinguish between libraries. Their 1985 study showed no differences in patrons' activities, duration or frequency of visits, or evaluations of collections due to differences in libraries. There were only trivial relations between patron use and evaluations of libraries. The conclusion drawn was that patrons' personal characteristics could explain library use and evaluation, while actual library differences cannot. The authors concluded that there might be minimal standards of service, determined by patrons' individual personal characteristics. When service falls below this level, patrons register dissatisfaction with service.[37]

Similarly, D'Elia and Rodgers conducted in-house surveys of twenty libraries of a county public library system. They found no real reasons why patrons visited a particular library: there were no differences in patrons' uses of the different libraries although they could distinguish among the different branches. The authors concluded that this study's results corroborated D'Elia's earlier

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[36]George D'Elia and Sandra Walsh, "User Satisfaction with Library Service - A Measure of Public Library Performance?" Library Quarterly 53 (April 1983): 127.

[37]D'Elia and Walsh, "Patrons' Uses and Evaluations of Library services: A Comparison Across Five Public Libraries" Library and Information Science Research 7 (1985): 28.

work and was further "evidence of the idiosyncratic nature of patron behavior."[38]

Other researchers studied more concrete aspects of the reference interview: the interpersonal communication skills of the librarian, including verbal and non-verbal aspects of the communication process. Summarizing the research that had been done on the communication process in the reference interview, Roloff also provided an overview of the components of the reference interview, dividing it into inter-personal and intra-personal communications.[39]

In 1969 Lopez and Rubach hypothesized whether there was any relationship between the patron's satisfaction with the interview and the reference librarian's interpersonal skills. They tested the relationship between the variables of empathy, respect, concreteness and specificity of expression and patron perception. Six librarians were trained to conduct interviews showing different degrees of warmth. The investigation showed that there was a significant relationship between the librarian's interpersonal skills and the level of the patron's satisfaction with the reference interview.[40]

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[38]D'Elia and Eleanor Jo Rodgers, "Comparative Assessment of Patrons' Uses and Evaluations Across Public Libraries Within a System: A Replication" Library and Information Science Research 9 (1987) 5.

[39]Michael E. Roloff, "Communication of the User-System Interface: A Review of the Research" Library Research 1 (1979): 1-18.

[40]M. Lopez and R. Rubacher, "Interpersonal Psychology: Librarians and Patrons," Catholic Library World 40 (1969): 483-487.

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The reference interview involves the exchange of information between two individuals, an exchange of communication. Helen Gothberg focused on aspects of the communication process. Her doctoral thesis dealt with the user's satisfaction with the librarian's verbal and non-verbal communication patterns.[41] She continued her investigation of this theme with a study of the connection between the warmth of the librarian or "immediacy" and patron satisfaction. She found that patrons exposed to immediate verbal and non-verbal communications will have better feelings about the library experience though not necessarily better feelings about the information received. She noted a separation between process and task evaluation on the part of the patron.[42]

The lack of adequate evaluative techniques as documented by Rothstein and Weech, led Howell, Reeves, and Van Willigen to study the reference department of a state university library from the perspective of the many dimensions in an interview, using role theory and the research methods of anthropology. In "Fleeting Encounters - A Role Analysis of Reference Librarian - Patron Interaction," the authors attempted to establish more precisely the relationship between patron satisfaction and the nature of the interaction between patron and staff member during the reference interview or "fleeting encounter," in which two strangers try to

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[41]Helen Gothberg, "User Satisfaction with a Librarian's Immediate and Non-Immediate Verbal - Nonverbal Communication" (Ph.D. diss., University of Denver, 1974).

[42]Helen Gothberg, "Immediacy: A Study of Communication Effect on the Reference Process" Journal of Academic Librarianship 2 (July, 1976): 126-129.

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establish quickly an effective mode of communication. The authors tried to identify the factors involved in patron satisfaction, using questionnaires to survey both librarian and patron involved in individual reference transactions. Patron satisfaction was judged on two factors: how well the librarian determined the patron's need or his actual question and patron satisfaction with the information provided. A high correlation was discovered between these two factors, emphasizing how vital psychological factors of the interview are to patron satisfaction. The importance of providing instruction in the use of information tools, rather than providing the answer alone, was also discovered.[43]

Calling attention to the importance of a librarian's non-verbal communications, Boucher described two non-verbal modes of reference librarians: the preoccupation mode and the availability mode. She suggested that attention be pai to the entire context of the interview, regarding verbal and non-verbal information and behavior of the patron, with the librarian modifying her non-verbal behavior when necessary in order to relay to the patron an attitude of interest.[44]

Munoz noted that nonverbal communication affects the reference interview urging attention be paid to aspects of the reference encounter such as physical distance, orientation, appearance,

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[43]Benita J. Howell, Edward B. Reeves, and John Van Willigen, "Fleeting Encounters - A Role Analysis of Reference Librarian-Patron Interaction," RQ 16 (Spring, 1977): 124-129.

[44]Virginia Boucher, "Nonverbal Communication and the Library Reference Interview" RQ 13 (Fall, 1976): 240-243.

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posture, head nodding, facial expressions, gestures, eye contact to enable the librarian tc grasp the nuances of the client's conversation.[45]

Another researcher, Mary Jo Lynch studied the reference interview in her 1977 dissertation, investigating the difference between librarian responses to requests for holdings or location of items and more substantive questions, concluding that the content of the communications exchange should be studied more extensively.[46] She later analyzed reference interviews, which had been audio-recorded and transcribed, as to type of questions asked: whether they were directional, holdings, substantive or moving. The relationship between the occurrence of a reference interview and the kind of question asked was investigated, as well as whether the busy demeanor of the librarian affected whether or not an interview occurred. Questions were also analyzed as being open or closed, and whether the librarian asked secondary questions. The author concluded that some standard assumptions can be questioned: that an interview is always a necessity, and that closed questions are always inferior to open ones, observing that the reference interview often resembles a sales interview.[47]

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[45]Joanna Lopez Munoz, "Significance of Nonverbal Communication in the Reference Interview" RQ 16 (Spring, 1977): 200-224.

[46] Mary Jo Lynch, "Reference Interviews - Public Libraries" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University,1977).

[47]Mary Jo Lynch, "Reference Interviews in Public Libraries," Library Quarterly 48 (April, 1978): 119-143.

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In 1979 Herbert Goldhor investigated the reference interview from the patron's perspective, using information from both the reference librarian and the patron. After obtaining permission, the reference assistant called the patron, asking five questions concerning the question's origination, the use made of the answer, whether the librarian understood the question, whether the patron was satisfied with the answer and patron occupation. The staff member answering the question had recorded the patron information as well as data about the question, answer sources, and time needed to answer the question. Results of this study explored subject areas, tools used in the search, as well as accuracy. It was found that the patron was almost always pleased to have been promptly served, but seldom scrutinized the answer to his question. Accuracy was found to be around eighty percent for the usually practical questions which needed replies immediately.[48]

Another important psychological factor in the success of the reference interview was researched by Markham, Sterling, and Smith in 1983 when they studied "Librarian Self-Disclosure and Patron Satisfaction." Their research attempted to discover any connection between a librarian's self-disclosure and both patron satisfaction with the interview and patron willingness to use the reference assistance again. Two librarians and two aides, trained in self-disclosure techniques, conducted sixteen interviews each, half using the techniques and half not using them. Patrons were given

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[48]Herbert Goldhor, "The Patron's Side of Public Library Reference Questions," Public Library Quarterly 1 (Spring, 1979): 35-49.

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questionnaires after the interviews; results were analyzed on the basis of a composite score and groupings of questions dealing with the communications skills of librarians and the factual answers provided. The composite score for all responses showed no significant correlation with self-disclosure, but analysis of the scores for the grouped questions showed a correlation between self-disclosure and communications, but not with self-disclosure and the practical value of the interview. Patrons felt more satisfied with the interview and their part of the interview. Although self-disclosure made the patrons feel more like returning to work with the librarian, it did not affect whether they would return. The authors recommended self-disclosure as an effective and easily utilized public relations tool.[49]

Attempting to develop a methodology that could be used with Output Measures for Public Libraries, Weech and Goldhor surveyed staff and clientele on their perception of the same reference question. After receiving permission, questionnaires were mailed to reference patrons. The staff member answering the question recorded it, the manner of answering it, and the length of time spent doing it. The staff member was also queried on age, salary, and education level. Questionnaires mailed after two days requested information on age, gender, education, origin of the question, reason for the question, why the question was asked at the library, whether the patron felt understood by the librarian, how the information was

[49]Marilyn J. Markham, Keith H. Stirling, and Nathan M. Smith, "Librarian Self-Disclosure and Patron Satisfaction in the Reference Interview," RQ 22 (Summer, 1983): 369-374.

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used, and satisfaction with the answer. Ninety-two percent of the respondents were satisfied with the service.[50] This information, however, did not ask about the components of user satisfaction, but only about whether the patron was satisfied.

Although the research of Gers did focus on accuracy, it also showed that the variables involved in a good evaluation by the patron are mainly behaviors that can be controlled by the librarian, and that demand and resources have only a slight effect on performance. Accuracy was found to be positively related to the negotiation toward the specific question, as well as being related to whether the information provided "completely" answered the patron's question.[51]

The Columbus Metropolitan Library found that training reference staff in the use of certain behaviors related to factors such as approachability, making the patron comfortable, showing interest in the patron, listening, inquiring with open questions, searching several sources, informing the patron of the results of the search, as well as use of an appropriate follow-up question

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[50]Terry L. Weech and Herbert Goldhor, "Reference Clientele and the Reference Transaction in Five Illinois Public Libraries," Library and Information Science Research 6 (1984): 21-42.

[51]Ralph Gers, "Output Measurement in Maryland - Book Availability and User Satisfaction," Public Libraries 21 (Fall, 1982): 77-80.

improved accuracy and patron satisfaction.[52] The training program was inspired by the results of Gers' Maryland research.[53]

The use of a follow up question has proved to be such an important factor in improving user satisfaction with the reference interview that the American Library Association has developed a training video for reference staff which attempts to provide guidelines for implementing this action.[54]

In 1984, Olson evaluated reference service in medium-sized academic libraries, presenting a model that could be used for the improvement of reference services. Performance was examined on the basis of interviewing techniques, as well that of factual accuracy, knowledge of library policies and procedures, and bibliographic instruction. A questionnaire was devised for patrons asking about the kind of question asked as well as about aspects of the librarian's interpersonal skills, such as availability, self-confidence, helpfulness, and the patron's comfort working with the librarian. Unobtrusive studies of the staff's ability to negotiate questions was advised.[55]

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[52]Joe Fowler and Susan Malloy, "Reference Communication Training," presented at 1992 OLA Chapter Conference, Hudson, Ohio, April 19, 1992.

[53]Mary Kelly, Manager, Popular Materials Library, Columbus Metropolitan Library, in a telephone conversation, August 14, 1992.

[54]American Library Association, Does This Completely Answer Your Question?, 16 min. (Towson, Maryland: Library Video Network, 1992), videocassette.

[55]Linda M. Olson, "Reference Service Evaluation in Medium-Sized Academic Libraries: A Model," Journal of Academic Librarianship 9 (December, 1983): 322-329.

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Aspects of communication traits and their effect on the reference interview were also explored by Michell and Harris. Reference interviews were video-recorded and assessed by both librarians and library patrons. The tapes showed interviews demonstrating varying degrees of librarian friendliness or non-verbal warmth toward the patron as well as different levels of "inclusion" or instruction in the use of reference tools. Librarians were found to be harsher in their judgements of competence than the library patrons, but both groups rated as highest in competence those librarians that showed the highest degree of warmth toward patrons. Female librarians proved to be harsher judges of competence than either patrons of either sex or male librarians.[56]

Dissertations have been based on the subject. Crum determined that if libraries were to fulfill patron wants, services would have to be based on surveys of the public library patron, as his research found that the library establishment (personnel, board, and educators) were unable to accurately determine what the library user really wanted.[57] Conley researched library performance trying to relate it to user satisfaction and resource allocation. He found a relationship between the two factors, but could not demonstrate

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[56]Gillian Michell, and Roma M. Harris, "Evaluating the Reference Interview: Some Factors Influencing Patrons and Professionals," RQ 26 (Fall, 1987): 95-105.

[57]Mark L. Crum, Jr., " What Does the Public Library User Really Want? The Accuracy of Library Personnel, Library Educators, and Library Board Members in Perceiving the Library-Related Wants of Public Library Users," (Ph.D. diss., Western Michigan University, 1970).

a strong positive correlation.[58] Similarly, Coffindaffer could find no positive correlation between user satisfaction and six output measures as defined by the Public Library Association.[59]

Also emphasizing the importance of interviewing skills are two recommendations for reference staff evaluation based on staff behavior during the interview. Young urges use of a methodology for reference staff evaluation based on librarian behaviors such as interaction with patrons and skills in interviewing. In his opinion what a librarian does and the method of doing it should be the focus of evaluations, rather than the factual result of the search.[60] Similarly, Kleiner suggests a peer process of evaluating service at the reference desk, also emphasizing interpersonal skills. Seven categories of evaluation were suggested: approachability; interaction with the patron; question negotiation, including followup; referral and consultation with other staff members; reference source familiarity; interaction with staff and individual attitudes. The five characteristics rated highest by the staff for effective reference performance are: approachability;

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[58]Binford Harrison Conley, "A Study of Performances as Measured by Selected Indicators and Its Relationship to User Satisfaction and Resource Allocation in Five 1980 Land-Grant Institutions" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1981).

[59]Clarence Lee Coffindaffer, "An Application and Analysis of Six Output Measures Correlated with User Satisfaction in the Branch Libraries of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh System" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1987).

[60]William F. Young, "Methods for Evaluating Reference Desk Performance," RQ 24 (Fall, 1985): 69-75.

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interaction with the client; providing appropriate information about services and follow up.[61]

Several attempts have been made to develop tools to test indicators of library effectiveness, for example the Public Library Effectiveness Study and the Reference Transaction Assessment Instrument.

The Public Library Effectiveness Study (PLES) was developed to test empirically how valid the measures proposed to be indicators of library effectiveness actually were. A three part survey instrument was devised for both librarians and outside participants. The parts attempted to identify the respondents' ratings of the usefulness of sixty-one indicators of library effectiveness; to calculate the librarians' ratings of their library on the indicators compared to an 'ideal' public library; and to identify librarians' perceptions of service roles from among those described in A Planning and Role Setting Manual for Public Libraries. Researchers Childers and Van House reported in "The Public Library Effectiveness Study: A Final Report," that the public was generally in agreement as to the library's effectiveness, possibly because of a "halo" effect, or positive bias on the part of patrons. Twelve indicators were presented to users in questionnaire form.[62]

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[61]Jane P. Kleiner, "Ensuring Quality Reference Desk Service: The Introduction of a Peer Process," RQ 30 (Fall, 1991): 349-361.

[62]Thomas Childers and Nancy A. Van House. The Public Library Effectiveness Study: Final Report (Philadelphia, PA: Drexel University, August, 1989).

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The Reference Transaction Assessment Instrument (RTAI) was developed as part of the Wisconsin-Ohio Reference Evaluation program. The computer-scannable form was designed by Charles Bunge[63] and Marjorie Murfin.[64] Bunge[65] and Murfin[66] had previously researched various aspects of the client-librarian interaction during the reference interview. The instrument tests the relationship between success in answering a reference question as perceived by librarians and patrons and other factors occurring during the reference interview, including the librarian's behavior in replying the the question.[67] A test of the form in fifteen academic libraries found that 55.16 percent of patrons found just what they wanted, with the success rate affected by whether the librarian was busy, and whether the librarian directed the patrons to the source or assisted them with their search. The survey also found a positive correlation between the number of sources cited and both librarians' and patrons' perception of success. The

[63]Charles A. Bunge, "Factors Related to Output Measures for Reference Services in Public Libraries: Data from Thirty-six Libraries" Public Libraries 29 (January/February): 42-47.

[64]Marjorie E. Murfin and Gary M. Gugelchuk, "Development and Testing of a Reference Transaction Assessment Instrument," College and Research Libraries 48 (July, 1987): 314-338.

[65]Bunge, "Interpersonal Dimensions of the Reference Interview: A Historical Review of the Literature" Drexel Library Quarterly 20 (Spring, 1984): 4-22.

[66] Murfin, "A Study of the Reference Process in a University Library" (M.L.S. diss, Kent State University, 1970).

[67]Murfin and Bunge, "Evaluating Reference Service From the Patron Point of View: Some Interim National survey Results" in Evaluation of Reference Services, edited by William Katz and Ruth A. Farley (New York and London: Haworth Press, 1984): 175-182.

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research of Bunge and Murfin highlights the importance of effective communication between patron and reference librarian, including the value of determining whether the patron needs any further assistance.

Research continues on this subject. Burton found a need for client-centered services, rather than institution-centered services, with an emphasis on interpersonal and communication skills. He suggested that resources now devoted to behind the scenes activities should be re-allocated to the more obvious reference services.[68] The conclusion that appears to be evolving is that libraries, like consumer-based for-profit organizations, must focus on the needs of the patron or user.[69]

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[68]Paul F. Burton, "Accuracy of Information Provision: The Need for Client-Centered Service" Journal of Librarianship 22 (October, 1990) 201-215.

[69]John Hinks, "Customer Care in Libraries - Taken as Read?" Library Association record 92 (February, 1990): 109-115.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire (see Appendix) was distributed in a field experiment to reference patrons at three branches of the Cuyahoga County Public Library. The questionnaire was distributed during representative times of the day during a typically busy week. Questinnaires were distributed until sixty were collected.

Data obtained will be subjected to statistical analysis including frequency distributions and percentages. Survey results were analyzed as to the relationships between user satisfaction with library service and the helpfulness and friendliness of the librarian.

Surveys were distributed as patrons left the reference desk or as they checked out. On the survey the patron were asked a filter question, whether they had used reference services. They were asked whether the librarian was busy when they approached the reference desk, and, if busy, whether the librarian acknowledged the patron's presence. The patron was asked whether the librarian directed him to the information or helped him at the shelf or with sources. Another question determined whether the patron was asked if there was anything else the librarian could do to help. Patrons were

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asked how they would rate library service, as well as librarian friendliness and helpfulness.

The questionnaire was compiled from information gained during the literature review, especially the study of Olson, and Murfin and Bunge.[70] Questions rating library service, librarian helpfulness and friendliness were suggested by questions asked in the 1992 Cuyahoga County Library User Survey.[71] Librarian helpfulness as indicated by the use of a follow-up question was suggested by the video, <u>Does This Completely Answer Your Question?</u>[72]

An attempt was made to show relationships between patron ratings of "excellent" and "satisfactory" for library service and the factors of helpfulness and friendliness on the part of the librarians.

<u>Limitations</u>

This study was limited to branches of Region D of the Cuyahoga County Public Library, located in northeastern Ohio. The sample was determined by which patrons, using reference assistance or personal help from the librarian during the specified survey time, agreed to fill out questionnaires. Therefore, generalizations are not possible because the survey sample was not scientifically

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[70]Olson, op. cit.; Murfin and Bunge, op. cit.

[71]"A Community Attitude Survey Regarding Cuyahoga County Public Library (June, 1992)," op. cit.

[72]American Library Association, op.cit.

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determined by random sampling. However, the outcome should prove to be of interest to librarians and library managers interested in reaching some understanding of patrons' perceptions of what goes into quality, or excellent, library reference service.

CHAPTER IV

EVALUATION OF RESULTS

The survey was conducted during July, 1993. Questionnaires were distributed to three branches of Cuyahoga County Public Library. The branches selected, located in Brook Park, Middleburg Heights, and Berea, Ohio, were chosen because of their geographical proximity which allows patrons to use multiple branches. All three branches belong to Region D in Cuyahoga County Public Library, which is managed by John Lonsak. The patrons who use these branches provide a representative cross section of the typical patron who lives in this area of Cuyahoga County.

One hundred questionnaires were distributed to each library. The manner of distribution was determined by the librarian managing each facility. In Brook Park branch questionnaires were placed in front of the circulation desk and the circulation department was instructed to encourage patrons to participate in this project. Similarly Berea and Middleburg Heights Branches placed the questionnaires on or in front of the circulation desk. In Berea Branch the questionnaires were also available at the reference desk.

The branches were instructed to return any surveys that were answered, along with those left over; the cutoff date for the

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project was August 6, 1993. This was done in an attempt to isolate
the normal procedures of the reference staff; some alterations in
style might be expected when the entire library system changed to
a new software package in mid-August. The hope was that this
instrument would measure the typical, established, interaction
between reference librarian and patron.

In all, 73 surveys were returned. Brook Park Branch returned
37 (50.7 per cent) of this total; Middleburg Heights returned 13
(17.8 per cent); and Berea Branch had 23 replies (31.5 percent).
The return rate for the instrument overall was 24.3 percent (See
Table 1A). The differences in return rates among the branches could
be attributed to the aggressiveness with which the staff of each
branch marketed the instrument. Because of this the possibility of
the Hawthorne effect on the answers received must be considered in
evaluating results.

Table 1A.

Distribution of Respondents by Library Branch

Library Branch	f	%
Berea	23	31.5%
Brook Park	37	50.7%
Middleburg Heights	13	17.8%
Total	73	100 %

Of the 73 surveys returned, 68 patrons had asked a question at the reference desk, answering "yes" to the first question which allowed the patron to answer the remainder of the questions. This resulted in a total of 68 questionnaires (93.1 percent) which were available for analysis (See Table 1B).

Table 1B.

Distribution of Respondents Completing Questionnaire

by Library Branch.

Library Branch	f	%
Berea	23	34.3%
Brook Park	36	53.7%
Middleburg Heights	8	12.0%
Total	67	100%

The questionnaire required the respondents to evaluate not only their overall satisfaction with the reference transaction but also to report on whether certain objective behaviors were demonstrated by the librarian and to report on their perceptions of the librarian's attitudes and demeanor during the transaction. Of course, asking people to report on such matters allows a wide berth

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for subjectivity, reducing the objectivity of the study. The majority of respondents found the service they received to be excellent or satisfactory; a distinct minority found service to be average. Interestingly, the small minority which found the reference person to be uninterested in the question, and which felt very uncomfortable working with the reference person, rated overall service to be average.

Question two dealt with the availability of the reference librarian at the information desk when the patron first approached. In 82.4 percent of the cases a librarian was immediately available. In 14.6 percent of the cases the librarian was helping another patron either on the phone or in person. In only 1.5 percent of the instances no librarian was available at the desk. Another 1.5 percent replied that "other" was the appropriate answer; however, no explanations were given for this reply (See Table 2).

In the cases where the librarian was busy with another patron, 24.2 per cent of the patrons said they were acknowledged by the person at the reference desk. Only three percent said they felt they had not been acknowledged. The majority of the replies (69.4 percent) said that this question did not apply in their case; two respondents gave no answer to this question (See Table 3).

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Table 2.

Availability of Reference Librarian.

Availability	f	%
Librarian available to help immediately	56	82.4%
Librarian helping another patron	10	14.6%
Librarian not at desk	1	1.5%
Other	1	1.5%
Total	68	100%

Table 3.

Patron Acknowledgement by Librarian.

Acknowledgement	f	%
Patron was acknowledged	15	24.2%
Patron was not acknowledged	2	3.2%
Did not apply	43	69.4%
No answer	2	3.2%
Total	62	100%

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In the process of obtaining material to answer their questions 62.9 percent of the patrons indicated that the librarian accompanied them to the shelves or reference area to find needed material (See Table 4). Sixteen of those surveyed (22.9%) indicated they were instructed as to the location of the needed information. In one case the patron indicated that both methods were used. Because no allowance was made in the questionnaire for evaluation of the activity levels of the branches this factor has to be carefully considered. The librarian might have been very rushed when first queried or the patron might have suggested himself that he had enough knowledge not to need assistance. Ten respondents (14.2%) indicated another method of assistance, providing no further clarification; speculation might include answers found in ready reference collections, or through use of the computerized catalog, or with the librarian selecting needed material while the patron stayed at the reference desk.

In evaluating the librarian's helpfulness, 86.1 percent strongly agreed that the librarian was helpful; 10.8 percent agreed that the librarian was helpful; only 3.1 percent disagreed about the librarian's helpfulness. No answers were received that strongly disagreed with this premise (See Table 5).

Question six asked the patron to evaluate how he perceived the librarian's friendliness (See Table 6). A majority (82.5 percent) strongly agreed with the statement "The librarian was friendly," and 15.9 percent agreed. Only one questionnaire (1.6 percent)

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disagreed with the statement and no replies were received which strongly disagreed.

Table 4.

Personal Assistance With Material.

Type of Assistance	f	%
Directed to material	16	22.9%
Accompanied by librarian	44	62.9%
Other	10	14.2%
Total	70	100 %

Table 5.

Patron Perception of Librarian's Helpfulness.

Helpfulness	f	%
Strongly agree	56	86.1%
Agree	7	10.8%
Disagree	2	3.1%
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	65	100%

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Table 6.

Patron Perception of Librarian's Friendliness.

Friendly	f	%
Strongly agree	52	82.5%
Agree	10	15.9%
Disagree	1	1.6%
Strongly disagree	0	0
Total	63	100%

Patron evaluation of the librarian's manner produced similarly positive results (See Table 7). Patrons were asked to rate their perception of the librarian's manner as enthusiastic, interested, uninterested, or indifferent. The majority of replies found the librarian to be interested (56.1 percent) and another large group (40.9 percent) found the librarian to be enthusiastic. Only two replies (3.0 percent) found the librarian to be uninterested; none found the librarian to be indifferent in answering the queries.

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Table 7.

Patron Perception of Librarian's Manner.

Manner	f	%
Enthusiastic	27	40.9%
Interested	37	56.1%
Uninterested	2	3.0%
Indifferent	0	0
Total	66	100%

When asked about the patron's overall comfort level in dealing with the reference person an overwhelming majority (79 percent) perceived themselves as being "very comfortable" and another large group (17.7 percent) who answered "comfortable." Only two replies (3.3 percent) were received which answered "very uncomfortable" with none received which answered "uncomfortable" (See Table 8). Most patrons responding to this poll apparently perceive themselves as having quickly established rapport with the reference person serving them.

Table 8.

Patron Rapport With Librarian.

Patron's Comfort Level	f	%
Very comfortable	49	79.0%
Comfortable	11	17.7%
Uncomfortable	0	0
Very uncomfortable	2	3.3%
Total	62	100%

In utilization of the follow up question 80.3 percent of the patrons reported being queried as to whether they needed more assistance. The remainder, 19.7 percent, were not asked this question. One questionnaire was marked "couldn't remember" (See Table 9).

An overwhelming majority (96.7 percent) of respondents perceived the librarian as having done everything possible for the pa: ron in this encounter. Only two patrons (3.3 percent) thought the reference person had not done everything possible to help them (See Table 10).

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Table 9.

Librarian's Use of Follow Up Question

Question asked	f	%
Yes	49	80.3%
No	12	19.7%
Total	61	100%

Table 10.

Patron Perception of Librarian's Effort.

Librarian did all he/she could	f	%
Yes	59	96.7%
No	2	3.3%
Total	61	100%

When asked to provide an overall rating for the service received in this instance, 88.5 percent rated service as excellent, 6.6 percent (four patrons) rated it satisfactory, and 4.9 percent

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(three patrons) found it average. No replies were received which rated service as poor (See Table 11).

Table 11.

User Satisfaction.

Patron's Evaluation of Total Service	f	%
Excellent	54	88.5%
Satisfactory	4	6.6%
Average	3	4.9%
Poor	0	0
Total	61	100%

Comments received on the questionnaires did show that the patrons appear to have pre-determined expectations of outstanding sevice. Voluntary comments received included the following: "This library is always more than helpful"; "All librarians at this branch go out of their way to find answers for you"; "The Brook Park library has the best and most helpful librarians of all the Libraries I visit." The reasons for these expectations are difficult to determine, but the answer seems to lie in the relationship developed between librarian and patron.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

This study attempted to evaluate user satisfaction with overall library service and to investigate whether this rating is affected by certain objective and subjective librarian behaviors. The majority of respondents in this poll perceived the librarian to be doing all that was possible to answer the question asked. The librarians were also found by the majority of those polled to be helpful, in that they either went to the shelf with the patron, or gave directions or a combination, and friendly, in that the librarian was enthusiastic or interested in the question, and the patron was comfortable working withthe librarian.

These results appear to demonstrate that most librarians attempt to provide personalized service to patrons, which allows the patrons to build rapport and feel comfortable with the service provider. Overall ratings of service appear to be affected by the librarian's personal behaviors. This conclusion is based on the average ratings given when comfort level was low and the librarian appeared indifferent to the patron's query.

The generally high level of patron satisfaction (94% rated service as excellent or satisfactory) appears to be dependent on the librarian's interpersonal skills. The overwhelming majority of those polled found the librarian who had helped them to be

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friendly, helpful and interested, if not enthusiastic. Most patrons also appeared to have been comfortable working with the reference person. The numerically few instances in which the librarian was judged not to have demonstrated these traits during the encounter, in other words to have been less helpful and friendly than the patron expected, resulted in an "average" rating for the service received.

These findings, although extremely limited, appear to substantiate the Lopez and Rubacher hypothesis of the existence of a relationship between librarian interpersonal skills and patron satisfaction. These findings also agree with Gers' conclusions that many of the variables which result in a favorable evaluation are within the control of the reference person.

However, the increased circulation of the libraries involved points to the fact that the personal service expected by patrons is sometimes affected by the external circumstances existing in the library, for example, patron queues and understaffing at the reference desk.

Because of the structure of this study it was not possible to determine whether thoroughness (as shown by searching for materials with the patron as well as use of the follow up question) actually resulted in a change in the library's service rating.

Despite the fact that correlations cannot be made due to the method of data collection, certain observations are possible. There is no way of proving a direct correlation between use of the follow up question and patron satisfaction; however, several replies

rating service as "average" also noted that the follow up technique had not been used. Perhaps asking the concluding question conveys the notion of librarian concern with filling the patron's needs. By doing this the librarian establishes a feeling of rapport, raising the patron's comfort level and causing him to feel that his query was important, thus satisfying certain needs, and causing service to be more highly rated. Although this connection cannot be scientifically proven, it does illustrate the human aspects of the entire reference transaction.

Service was considered "average" in the few instances when the librarian's manner was judged to be uninterested and when the patron felt uncomfortable working with the reference person.

Interestingly, of the patrons who were uncomfortable with the librarian and only satisfied with service as opposed to rating service as excellent, only one felt the librarian could have done more to help satisfy their query. Does this reflect on the facility or on patron's expectations of the person helping him?

Balancing this opinion was a reply in which the patron felt the librarian was friendly, as well as interested in the query, and in which the patron was comfortable working with the librarian, but the patron still rated the librarian as not having done all possible to help the patron.

These isolated observations emphasize the fact that the reference interview is a unique encounter between two individuals who must quickly establish communications and from which the librarian must quickly decipher many levels of need: the stated

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question, the actual question, and the unstated expectations of the individual. How the patron perceives the end result is a complex process which emphasizes the fact that reference staff must be trained not only in the sources which objectively answer the stated question but also in communication techniques which leave the patron feeling understood, his needs met.

Further study of this topic could prove enlightening. In addition to investigation of the relationship between the objective answer to the patron's query and the relationship of this result to user satisfaction, study of the librarian's manner when working with the patron, and the patron's evaluation of total library service are warranted.

This study is a small step toward answering these complex questions, but could be used to justify training staff in good customer relations skills. As stated earlier the library is not the only information show in town and disgruntled patrons, like disgruntled customers, might take their business elsewhere. With funding limited as it is today, the library must do all it can to satisfy its customers.

APPENDIX

Cuyahoga County Public Library

Library User Questionnaire

Thank you for spending some time filling out this questionnaire, which is being distributed to patrons of this Cuyahoga County Public Library branch who have used our reference services today. This survey is being conducted by Mary Ellen Nichols, a graduate student at Kent State School of Library and Information Science, in an attempt to have our reference services better serve you, our patron.

Please answer all questions as honestly as you can. Your answers will be completely anonymous and confidential.

1. Have you asked a question at the reference desk today?
   a)_____ Yes
   b)_____ No

   If "yes" please proceed with this survey:

2. Choose the statement that **BEST** describes the reference desk when you approached it:
   a)_____ The librarian was available to help you immediately.
   b)_____ The librarian was helping another person in person or on the telephone.
   c)_____ The librarian was not at the desk.
   d)_____ Other.

3. If the librarian was busy with another patron, did the librarian let you know that she knew you were waiting for help?
   a)_____ Yes.
   b)_____ No.
   c)_____ Does not apply.

4. Choose the statement that applies:
   a)_____ The librarian told me where I could find the information I needed.
   b)_____ The librarian went with me and helped me find what I needed.
   c)_____ Other.

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5. Choose the statement that **BEST** expresses your feelings:
   The librarian was helpful.
   a)_____ Strongly agree.
   b)_____ Agree.
   c)_____ Disagree.
   d)_____ Strongly disagree.

6. Choose the statement that **BEST** expresses your feelings:
   The librarian was friendly.
   a)_____ Strongly agree.
   b)_____ Agree.
   c)_____ Disagree.
   d)_____ Strongly disagree.

7. Choose the category which describes the librarian's manner when
   you explained your question:
   a)_____ Enthusiastic.
   b)_____ Interested.
   c)_____ Uninterested.
   d)_____ Indifferent.

8. Check how comfortable you felt working with the librarian:
   a)_____ Very Comfortable.
   b)_____ Comfortable.
   c)_____ Uncomfortable.
   d)_____ Very uncomfortable.

9. The librarian asked if I had received all the help I needed
   today.
   a)_____ Yes.
   b)_____ No.

10. I felt the librarian did all she/he could to help me today.
    a)_____ Yes.
    b)_____ No.

11. Choose the answer which **BEST** reflects the service you received
    today.
    a)_____ Excellent.
    b)_____ Satisfactory.
    c)_____ Average.
    d)_____ Poor.

THANK YOU for completing this survey for us! We appreciate your
comments and will use them to serve you better.

<div align="center">Staff of C.C.P.L.</div>

Please return to desk.

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