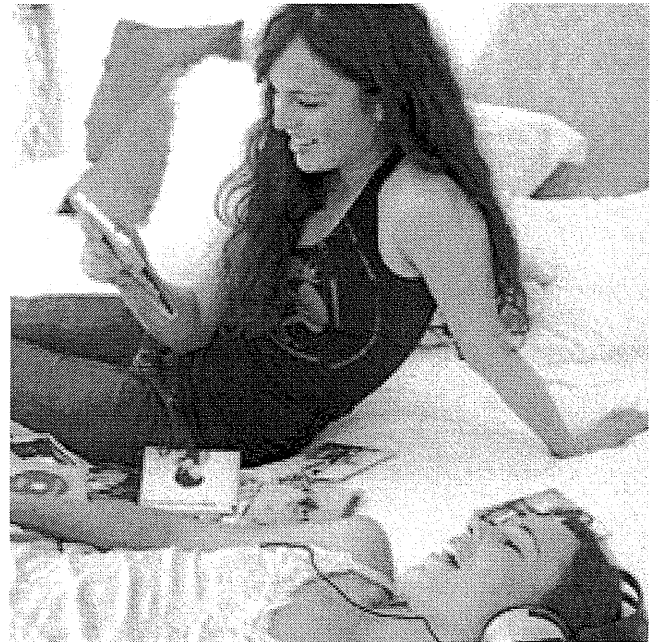


PART I: SELF-ACCEPTANCE, KNOWLEDGE AND THE POWER OF ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION: CURRENT ISSUES AND EMPOWERING YOUNG ADULT WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

By: Jaime Griffis

My favourite strong female character during my teen years was Jane Eyre. Charlotte Brontë's 1860 masterpiece of fiction captivated my attention as a developing young woman. Jane is a survivor: from the neglect of her family; of the strict disciplinarity of Lowood boarding school and of Mr. Rochester's love and deception. Jane Eyre is independent, feisty, and brave and most importantly always follows her heart. In today's real world, young women must navigate a world focused on impossible



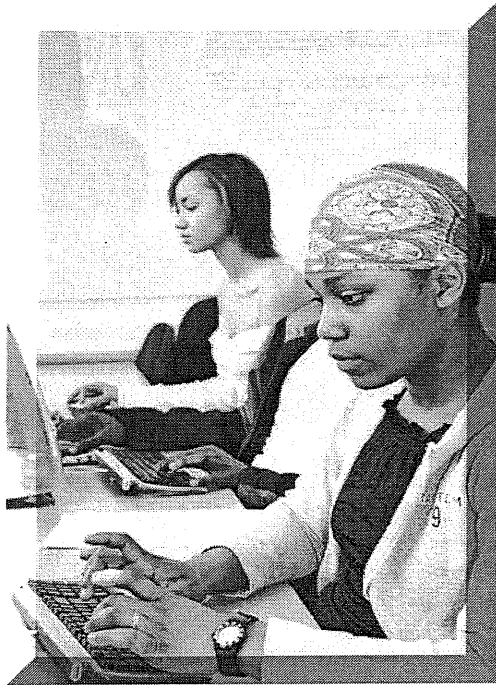
beauty standards, an increased dependence on technology, complicated relationships and a variety of choices in terms of sexuality. It is highly unlikely that Mr. Rochester will ride out of the mists and into the hallways of the nearest high school in rural or urban Canada. However, I argue that Youth Services Librarians and public libraries across the nation have a unique opportunity to provide accurate and accessible programming and information in order to empower young adult women. In this article, I consider the current issues of self-esteem/self-acceptance, coping with stress and sex and sexuality in the development of young teen women. I also address how public libraries and Youth Services Librarians can help empower young adult women through effective programming and collection management.

Encouraging Self-Esteem and Self-Acceptance

As a future public services librarian, I believe that it is my professional and personal responsibility to teach and learn by example. While I was always surrounded

by older women in my immediate family, I want to acknowledge the reality that there are many young adult teens that do not have the opportunity to learn the vital skills of perpetuating self-esteem and self-acceptance from an adult woman in their lives. One way to nurture self-esteem and self-acceptance in young adult women is through accessible programming that networks local women and teens together. The traditional day called "Take Your Daughter to Work Day," was first created by the MS Foundation. However, there are some problems with this concept when carried through in a community. Not all daughters have access to their parents' work and not all local business/professional women have daughters to share their experiences with.

This is where "Daughters Day" was created by the Litchfield County Women's Network in Connecticut and can be easily adapted to a public library setting. On "Daughters Day," over fifty professional and business women volunteered a couple of hours of their time to spend with one hundred grade eight teen girls (Carroll 2003, 286). There was an orientation for the volunteers for an hour and then the young women joined the volunteers for a long luncheon and chat. Here, "at each table, the three mentors engaged in discussion with the girls, covering topics such as what their jobs involve, requisite training and education, what they like and dislike about their jobs, the process of changing careers and raising families" (Carroll 2003, 286). After the luncheon, there was an open discussion and question period where the teens could ask questions of the mentors not yet answered. Lastly, each teen girl came away with not only memories and information on a possible future career but also a "Daughters Day Directory" listing each woman mentor and their telephone number in order to stay in contact with the teen girls. This type of programme addresses issues of equality (all grade eight girls of the area attended the day), targeted an age group that are at a high-risk for low self-esteem and showcased local women as role models (Carroll 2003, 286).



While executing a “Daughters Day” at your public library can be rewarding, it is also a complex programme that is demanding in terms of time and resources. Encouraging self-esteem can also happen in small skill building programmes for young adult women. For example, a smaller programme that a Youth Services Librarian could start at their library is a teen knitting group. Here, “library-based knitting groups are an opportunity to reach out to tweens and teens” that involve “community building, peer mentoring and knowledge sharing” (Okey 2005, 39). Teens of all ages have the opportunity to learn “hand-eye

coordination, attentiveness, fine motor skills, math skills, abstract reasoning, [and] project planning” (Okey 2005, 39). It is through the development of these skills that teens, both young men and women, can build confidence and self-esteem. As Youth Services Librarians, our “role is to facilitate the process of learning in a group, offer an initial direction for the group and incorporate library-friendly teaching into the dynamic” (Okey 2005, 39). Don’t know where to begin? Check out Jennifer Wenger’s, Carol Abrams’ and Maureen Lasher’s (2004) *Teen Knitting Club: Chill Out and Knit Some Cool Stuff* for ideas. Lastly, knitting as a programme is cost effective, extremely portable and can produce fast results young adult women can see right from the beginning.

Skills for Dealing with Stress

The speed of information and technology in contemporary Canadian society has permeated the young adult social and academic landscape. Along with the often fast-paced and rigidly structured day of teens comes the issue of increasing stress. How can public libraries work to help young adult women alleviate and cope with stress in their daily lives? There are some specific non-fiction titles that take on the issue of teen stress that could be left out on tables in a public library’s teen space. Deborah Reber’s

and Neryl Walker's (2008) *Chill: Stress-reducing Techniques for a More Balanced, Peaceful You* concentrates on teaching teens about what stress is, how one can deal with stress effectively and how teens can take action when stress seems to take over their lives. Annie Fox's (2005) *Too Stressed to Think?: A Teen Guide to Staying Sane When Life Makes You Crazy* takes a positive look at teen stress while giving young adults tools on how to reduce stress. Fox also includes a variety of scenarios and then information on how each situation could be dealt with. Lastly, Youth Services Librarians may choose to offer stress-free programming for young adult women. Online book predictions via text-messaging, writing contests, book reviews and portable "Take-Then-Make" craft kits for teens (Hastings 2008, 28-29) offers young adult women a variety of chances to participate in library programming in their own time and at their own pace.

Accurate, Accessible Information on Sex and Sexuality

With school libraries across Canada responding to multiple censorship challenges, the responsibility of providing accurate, accessible information on sex and sexualities for young adult women is falling on public libraries. While many non-fiction books on sex and sexuality for teens present a bias toward abstinence, there are a couple of non-fiction titles that stand out for their outstanding presentation of sex information for teens. Ruth Bell's (1998) *Changing Bodies, Changing Lives: A Book for Teens on Sex and Relationships* has become a classic resource since its first edition in 1981. This book presents information on puberty, sexuality, healthcare, mental health, eating disorders, sexually transmitted diseases, safe sex, birth control, and relationship violence. A new edition is needed presently. Most importantly, Bell's work includes a multitude of teen voices on every subject as well as artwork and lists of associations. Another cornerstone in non-fiction sexuality sources is Kelly Huegel's (2003) *GLBTQ: The Survival Guide for Queer and Questioning Teens*. This book aims to give gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning teens accurate and representative information on topics such as coming out, dating, religion, sexuality, school life, employment and home life. Huegel is smart to include quotes and experiences from GLBTQ teens as well as lists of accepted web sites and organizations

that may also help. Public libraries and Youth Service Librarians can also make other information readily available for questioning teens: “coming-out stories, activism how-to information, including starting a group and equal rights for queer youth, stories of fictional characters, lists of community resources, books about what it means to be queer, sexuality, queerness, and gayness and safe sex/sexual health” (Linville 2004, 184). In conclusion, while connecting young adult women with accurate and accessible information on self-esteem, coping with stress, sex and sexuality, Young Adult Librarians have a unique opportunity to empower these same young women to seek out and find their own voices, identities and answers.

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