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ATTITUDES TOWARD LIBRARY PATRONS WITH PHYSICAL CHALLENGES:

A Survey of Members of the Public Library Division of the Alabama Library Association

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History of the Civil Rights Thesaurus

By surveying members of the Public Library Division of the Alabama Library Association, this study sought to determine attitudes toward patrons with physical challenges. The continued growth in the population of persons over age 65, coupled with the fact that nearly one in five Americans report some level of physical challenge, suggests the need for libraries to provide resources and services to this growing constituency. The advent of new technologies and resources for libraries to provide access to information by persons with physical challenges, allows more users to fulfill a more participatory role within their information-seeking activities. The application of Social Role Valorization Theory provides that social integration requires the medium of valued social roles regardless of competency. In libraries, socially isolated older adults are one of the fastest growing segments of the service population, already experiencing problems with their hearing and vision as well as challenges to mobility (Quezada, 2003). This study sought to determine the levels of preparation and professional status of library personnel, attitudes toward patrons with physical challenges, and attitudes toward library services for patrons with physical challenges. The study focused solely on members of the public library division of the Alabama Library Association. Based on analysis of survey outcomes, this study sought to determine if a need exists for improvement in attitudes as a foundation for training for better library service to those with physical challenges.

Background

The profession of librarianship has been a proponent of the protection of intellectual freedom with a dedication to equity of access to information. Equity of access is one of the five key action areas adopted by the American Library Association (ALA) in order to help libraries fulfill their mission of providing equal access to information regardless of age, education, ethnicity, language, income, physical limitations, or geographic barriers (American Library Association, Equity of Access Statement, 2008). The American Library Association Code of Ethics, Article One states: "We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests" (American Library Association Code of Ethics, 2008).

Bonnici, Maatta & Wells (2009, p. 13) state that "people with physical disabilities have the same needs and desires for information to conduct their daily lives as those who are without disability." Major legislation relating to disabilities was passed in 1990. "The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) holds information specialists in all types of settings responsible for ensuring equal access to all materials and resources provided" (p. 15). Their survey of librarians for the Blind and Physically Handicapped revealed that one of the four main areas of concern was insufficient funding to meet the needs of the defined population. This may affect library services in general as more patrons with physical challenges are forced to seek

services outside the National Library Service (NLS) Talking Books Program.

Furthermore, there is an increasing accessibility gap between the numbers of those who qualify for services from the NLS Talking Books Program under guidelines of the ADA (U.S. Department of Justice, 1990) and those with invisible, temporary, or moderate physical limitations. A review of the medical literature reveals that the portion of the impaired community who meet the standards of eligibility is small compared to the totality of persons with impairments (Bonnici & Wells, 2011). The 2006 American Community Survey reported 41.2 million people who have some level of disability, representing 15.1% of the population. Of this number 1.8 million people age 15 and older reported visual disabilities, while one million people age 15 and older reported auditory disabilities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). In the state of Alabama, in 2008, 13.8% of the population were age 65 and over, while 21.6 % of those over age five report some level of physical disability (U. S. Census Bureau, 2008). By 2030, 19.7% of Americans will be 65 years of age and older, compared to 13% in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). From 2010 to 2035, Alabama's age 65 and over population is projected to increase by 87% to over 1.237 million. "Trends for the future present a demographic picture which assures that the largest growing segment of the population and that which has the highest incidence of ability challenges will be over the age of 65" (Bonnici & Wells). A third factor contributing to the accessibility gap is the reduction in funding for the National Library Service Talking Books Program. Funding levels for the National Library Service (NLS) between the years 2006-2008 showed an average decrease of 12% annually when adjusted for inflation (U.S. Government Printing Office, 2009). Additionally, over the past several years the number of subregional libraries for the blind and physically handicapped across the United States has decreased from 86 to 65. In Alabama, one of the five subregional libraries suspended service in 2010 due to budgetary issues (Alabama Public Library Service, 2010).

Therefore, the graying of America along with the increase in population with physical limitations and the limited resources for the NLS Talking Books program will necessarily mean that public libraries will see an increase in users with some level of physical challenge. "In 2001, the American Library Association Council approved a policy on services to people with disabilities that translated the ADA legal requirements and recommendations into applications in a library setting" (Burke, 2009, p.44). In brief, the policy states that libraries must provide equitable access for people with disabilities through modified services "such as extended loan periods, waived late fines, extended reserve periods, library cards for proxies, books by mail, reference services by fax or e-mail, home delivery service," remote access to resources, volunteers to help patrons, and various measures to assist those with hearing issues. Potential barriers to people with disabilities not specifically mentioned in the American Library Association policy include web accessibility, staff attitudes, and lack of staff training on how to accommodate people with disabilities (Burke). Perceptions of Public Library Accessibility for People with Disabilities (Burke) sought to determine opinions about efforts by public libraries to be useful to people with disabilities.

Review of the Literature

From an analysis of ALA policies, Schmetzke (2007) found that several policies neglected to address the needs of users with physical challenges, including preparation of future librarians in ALA-accredited Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) programs. Walling (2004) found that there was a need for library and information studies (LIS) programs to educate LIS students about ADA and services and adaptive technologies for people with physical challenges. A recent study conducted to ascertain the state of services based on the observations and experiences of the librarians serving the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped found that more than half of the respondents indicated insufficient content in library school curricula addressing special needs access (Bonnici,

Maatta, & Wells, 2009).

Velleman (1990) found that people may unwittingly exhibit fear in the presence of people with physical challenges, perhaps of undue emotional involvement if the person should request assistance. Shannon, Schoen & Tansey (2009) found that negative attitudes can help contribute to barriers preventing full inclusion in society.

Research has shown that interpersonal contact with people from groups of which one is not a member correlates with more favorable attitudes (Olson & Zanna, 1993). According to Krahé and Altwasser (2006), contact should include the perception of equal status, common goals, and institutional support.

Harold E. Yunker conducted extensive research on the attitudes of various groups toward people with physical challenges and developed the Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons (ATDP) scale in 1959 in order to quantify attitudes. Yunker, Block, and Young (1966) found that increased information, by way of courses or workshops about serving people with physical challenges, alone did not result in favorable attitudes. They also found that amount and type of contact with people with physical challenges affected attitudes.

No study could be found in the literature addressing the attitudes of public library personnel other than Dequin and Faibisoff (1983) who surveyed public librarians in Illinois and found that those who held a graduate degree in library science had more positive attitudes than those who did not. The study also found that attending an institute or workshop produced more positive attitudes than attending an entire course or part of a course.

Research Questions

The review of the literature and the evidence supporting the need to serve a growing population of users with physical challenges has led to the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the attitudes of Alabama

public librarians toward patrons with physical challenges?

RQ2: How does level of formal professional preparation affect librarian attitudes toward patrons with physical challenges?

RQ3: How does type of contact with persons with physical challenges affect attitudes of librarians toward patrons with physical challenges?

Method

Participants

This study analyzed a population consisting of 278 public library professionals listed as members of the Public Library Division of the Alabama Library Association. Electronic mail contact information for the members was secured from the membership directory of the Alabama Library Association.

Data Collection Instrument

The authors distributed a web-based survey via a hyperlink in an e-mail invitation to 278 public library professionals in Alabama who were active members of the Alabama Library Association. The survey consisted of nine demographic questions, including age, gender, position at the library, length of employment in a public library, length of employment in present position, level of formal preparation in serving patrons with physical challenges, and type of personal and professional contact with people with physical challenges. Twenty-three questions were included from the ATDP scale, and three additional questions about attitudes toward library services to people with physical challenges were added. The survey is included in the Appendix. The language in the original ATDP questions was updated to utilize People First Language. According to Snow (2009), People First Language avoids the use of a disability or other condition as an adjective to describe a person, such as “a disabled person” or “a deaf person,” and instead indicates a person with a condition, such as “a person who uses a wheelchair” or “a person with a hearing impairment.” The authors obtained Institutional Review Board approval for the survey instrument

to ensure the protection of privacy and confidentiality of all participants.

Results

Seventy-nine or 28.4% of the 278 possible respondents began the survey. However, seven surveys were eliminated from the ATDP results for omitting more than three responses to the ATDP questions. Thus, 72 respondents completed the survey, for a response rate of 25.9%.

The survey asked nine demographic questions to determine librarians' levels of professional preparation and experience. Seventy-nine respondents answered the question, "What is your current library position?" Twenty-one or 26.6% of respondents classified themselves as library directors. Thirteen or 16.5% were adult reference librarians. Eight or 10.5% were assistant directors, eight or 10.5% were branch managers, six or 7.6% were circulation managers, and 17 or 21.5% classified themselves as other (see Figure 1). Seventy-eight respondents answered the question that asked how long respondents had worked in a public library. Eighteen or 23.1% reported working in a public library for one to five years, 13 or 16.7% stated six to ten years, 17 or 21.8% stated 11 to 15 years, five or 6.4% stated 16 to 20 years, and 23 or 29.5% stated over 20 years (see Figure 2). The survey also asked about educational level. Seventy-seven respondents answered this question. Fifty-seven or 74% reported earning a graduate degree in library science, seven or 9.1% reported attaining a non-LIS four-year degree, and four or 5.2% reported earning a non-LIS master's degree. The survey also asked the level of preparation for serving patrons with physical challenges. Thirty-eight or 48.7% reported training through continuing education, 23 or 29.5% reported receiving no training, 13 or 16.7% received training in part of a library school course, and 6 or 7.7% of respondents reported receiving training from a library school course. Twenty-one or 26.9% of respondents reported training through self-study, on-the-job experience, workshops, or combinations of these. (See Figure 3)

ATDP scores were calculated using a formula that changed the algebraic signs of the response to "positive" statements, such as question #13 (see Appendix), and adding the sum of those results to the sum of the responses to "negative" statements, such as question #10, and adding 90 to the final result. Thus, the highest possible score on the ATDP scale would be 165, indicating the most positive attitude. The lowest possible score would be 15, indicating the most negative attitude. The mean score would be 90, indicating neither a positive nor a negative attitude. The highest score that a respondent achieved during this study was 153, with the lowest score 71, and a mean of 123.04. A one-sample t-test was conducted to compare the mean achieved score to the mean possible score of the respondents to this ATDP. As a result of this test, 36 or 50% of respondents had a slightly positive attitude toward patrons with physical challenges, and 35 or 48.6% had a positive attitude toward patrons with physical challenges. One respondent scored below 90, indicating a negative attitude toward patrons with physical challenges.

ATDP scores were compared across categories according to level of professional preparation for serving patrons with physical challenges. Participants with professional preparation through continuing education and other types of training such as municipal training scored slightly higher. However, there was no significant difference in scores on the Attitudes toward Disabled Persons scale between any of the groups. Scores were also compared between categories according to type of personal contact and type of professional contact with persons with physical challenges. No significant difference in scores could be found, although all other groups scored higher than the one respondent who indicated no professional contact.

Included among the ATDP questions was question #31, "Patrons with physical challenges may require a librarian to fill a caretaking role." Seventy-five respondents answered this question. Twenty-four respondents or 30.2% agreed or slightly agreed with this statement, and none of the respondents strongly agreed. However, 33 or

44% disagreed or slightly disagreed, and 11 or 14.7% strongly disagreed with this statement.

One question was asked regarding the provision of equitable services to patrons with physical challenges. The question, #33, was, "Patrons with physical challenges receive library services equitable to that of the general public," with 75 responses. Fifty-eight or 64% agreed or strongly agreed, and 23 or 31% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Limitations of the Study

Results of this study are difficult to generalize due to the low response rate of 25.9%. Additionally, valid comparisons within some categories were not attainable because some categories contained only one response. The original ATDP scale was not designed to include a neutral choice for responses. Included in this study was the zero or neutral choice in order to provide an additional option for respondents. The addition of the neutral position into the scale affected the results by allowing respondents to choose a neutral position and thus avoid expression of a positive or negative attitude.

Although the authors asked the respondents to be completely honest and assured them that all information would be completely confidential, it is possible that social desirability affected respondents' answers due to the sensitive subject matter and respondents' possible desire to present a positive image. Furthermore, because the respondents in this study were members of the Public Library Division of the Alabama Library Association, it is likely that their membership in a professional organization indicated their interest in professional development and best practices. Thus, the results could not necessarily be generalized to the entire population of public library personnel in Alabama.

Discussion and Suggestions for Further Research

Outcomes suggest that future studies should be conducted with larger populations of public library professionals. Similar studies should also be expanded to include academic and school

library personnel as well in order to gain further understanding of attitudes toward patrons with physical challenges and resources and services provided to them.

The ATDP, although widely used, assesses only the affective dimension of attitude, or how a person feels about various statements about people with physical challenges. Respondents were offered an opportunity to provide information they felt was not adequately addressed within the questionnaire in an open ended comment section. Three respondents stated that the ATDP made assumptions that people know how people with physical challenges feel. One commented, "Some of these questions are difficult to answer because I don't know how people with physical challenges feel - for example do they resent those without physical challenges" (see Appendix, Question #22).

Further research could be conducted using other scales, such as the Multidimensional Attitudes Scale (MAS), which presents scenarios about people with physical challenges, followed by three sets of questions that measure the affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of a person's attitudes (Findler, Vilchinsky & Werner, 2007). This type of assessment, which asks what a person would do in various situations, could provide assistance in construction of better training opportunities for library professionals in serving people with physical challenges.

Although questions in the ATDP scale that were used were reworded where possible to reflect current terminology, and questions were added to determine attitudes toward library service to people with physical challenges, attitude scales such as the ATDP and the MAS were constructed to reflect general attitudes and not attitudes in a specific circumstance such as the library professional/patron relationship. Therefore, to determine attitudes in library-specific situations, construction of a new survey instrument may be necessary.

Reductions in funding resulting in budget constraints and reduction in services of the National Library Service Talking Books program

would suggest that public libraries will struggle to provide equitable services. The response from the library professionals to question #33, which sought to determine if they believe that patrons with physical challenges receive equitable services to those of other patrons, revealed that 64% believe that these patrons do receive equitable services. Due to the general nature of the question, it is not clear what "equitable services" meant to each respondent. Additionally, public libraries in Alabama vary in size as well as number and type of patrons with physical challenges, so the results may not be significant. As budget restraints inevitably result in reduced specialized services, more training of librarians to provide services to patrons with physical challenges will likely be necessary.

But it does mean that more training is necessary. Respondents who indicated that they had continuing education training or "other" training tended to have higher ATDP scores than those who had "none" or had a library school course or part of a library school course. "Other" and "continuing education" training may be more

relevant and more recent. As one respondent stated, "Training employees helps to develop awareness and lessens discomfort - or at least that is what we are trying to do."

Although this study showed overwhelmingly positive attitudes of public library professionals in Alabama toward patrons with physical challenges, the small sample size and the validity of the revised survey instrument should be taken into account, as well as factors such as position in the library, and library size and location. Many respondents were library directors, who may not have as much daily contact with patrons as reference librarians, etc., but who are responsible for decisions regarding policy. Indications of more positive attitudes by those who have had formal training than those who have had none, suggest that targeted specialized training in library school courses, continuing education classes, and municipal training workshops can positively affect attitudes toward patrons with physical challenges.

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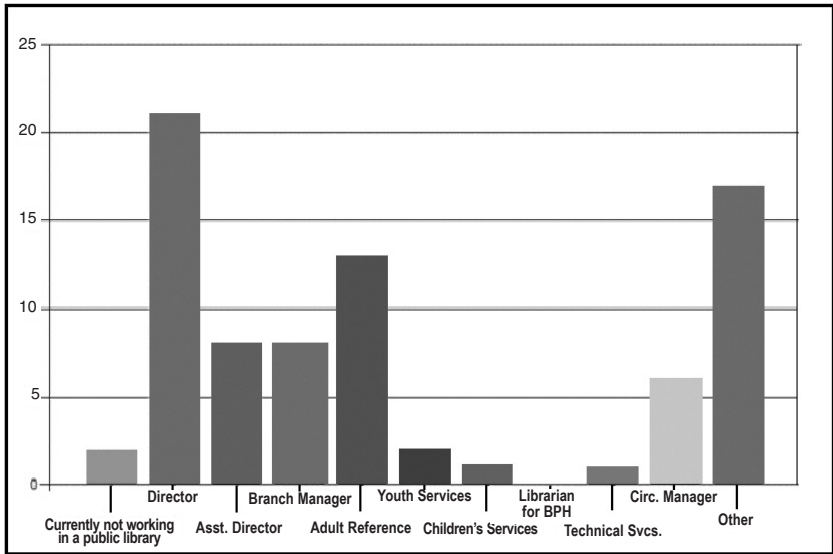


Figure 1. Public library position measured in number of respondents.

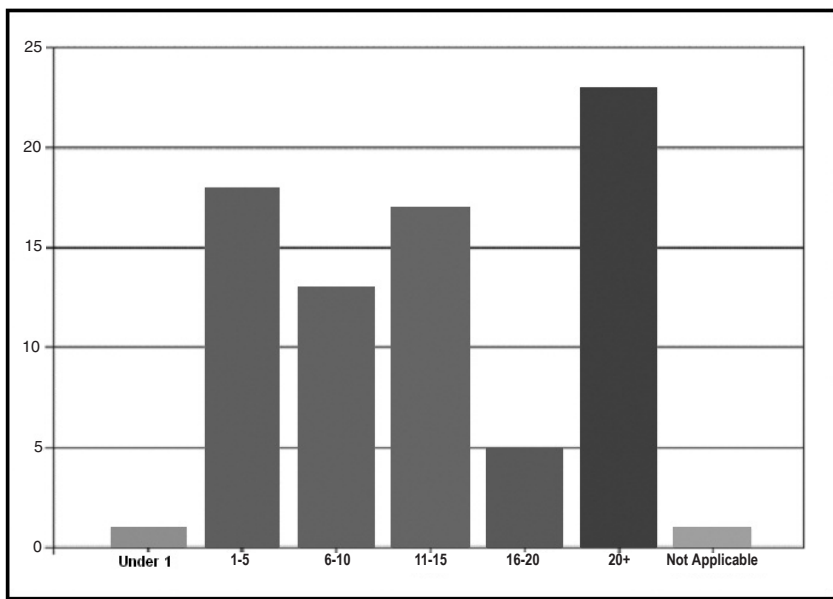


Figure 2. Years worked in a public library measured in number of respondents.

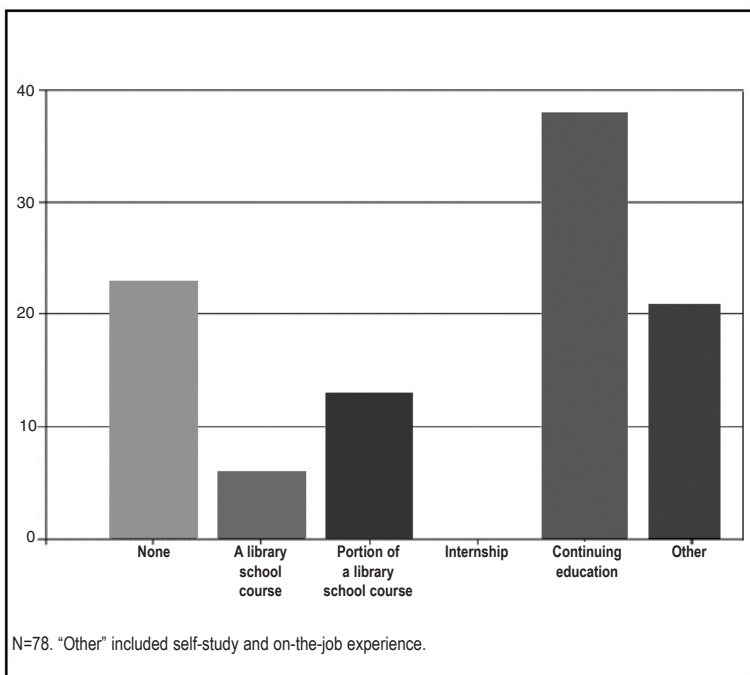


Figure 3. Level of formal preparation for serving patrons with physical challenges measured in number of respondents.

Appendix

Demographic Questions

1. What is your gender?
 - Male
 - Female

2. What is your age?
 - Under 25
 - 25-30
 - 31-40
 - 41-50
 - 51-60
 - 60+

3. What is your current library position?
 - Currently not working in a public library
 - Director
 - Assistant Director
 - Branch Manager
 - Adult Reference
 - Youth Services
 - Children's Services
 - Librarian for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (BPH)
 - Technical Services
 - Circulation manager
 - Circulation staff
 - Govt. Docs. Librarian
 - Other (please specify)

4. How long have you worked in a public library?
 - Under one year
 - 1-5 years
 - 6-10 years
 - 11-15 years
 - 16-20 years
 - 20+ years
 - Not applicable

5. How long have you been in your current public library position?
 - Less than one year
 - 1-5 years
 - 6-10 years
 - 11-15 years
 - 16-20 years
 - 20+ years
 - Not applicable

6. What is your highest level of education?
 - High school diploma
 - Associate's degree
 - 4 year degree
 - Master's degree (ALA accredited program)
 - Master's degree (non LIS)
 - Ph. D.
 - Other

7. What is the level of preparation you have had for serving patrons with physical challenges? (Choose all that apply)
 - None
 - A library school course
 - A portion of a library school course
 - Internship
 - Continuing education/workshop
 - Other (please specify)

8. With whom do you or have you had contact with physical challenges? (Choose all that apply)
 - Self
 - Family member in household
 - Other relative
 - Friend
 - None

9. With whom do you have, or have you had, contact with professionally with physical challenges? (Choose all that apply)
 - None
 - Co-worker
 - Patron
 - Other (please specify)

The following are statements regarding persons with physical disabilities. Please use the following scale to indicate your level of agreement with each statement.

- +3 agree very much
- +2 agree
- +1 agree somewhat
- 0 neutral
- 1 disagree somewhat
- 2 disagree
- 3 disagree very much.

10. People with physical challenges are often unfriendly.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
11. Most people with physical challenges are more self-conscious than other people.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
12. We should expect just as much academically, socially, and mentally from people with physical challenges as from people without physical challenges.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
13. People with physical challenges show as much enthusiasm for life as other people.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
14. People with physical challenges are more easily offended than other people.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3

15. People with severe physical injuries have poor personal hygiene.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
16. Most people with physical challenges believe they should be given the same consideration as others in academic and social situations.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
17. People with physical challenges are usually sociable.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
18. People with physical challenges are usually not as conscientious as other people.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
19. Most people with physical challenges do not feel sorry for themselves.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
20. There are more people with eccentric personalities among those with physical challenges than among the general population.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
21. Most people with physical challenges do not get discouraged easily.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
22. Most people with physical challenges resent those without physical challenges.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
23. Most people with physical challenges are able to take care of themselves.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
24. People with physical challenges do well when they live and work within the same environments as people without physical challenges.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
25. Most people with physical challenges are as ambitious as those without physical challenges.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
26. People with physical challenges are as self-confident as other people.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
27. Most people with physical challenges need more praise than other people.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
28. People with physical challenges are often less intelligent than other people.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
29. People with physical challenges do not expect more sympathy than others.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
30. The way most library patrons with physical challenges act is irritating.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
31. Patrons with physical challenges may require a librarian to fill a caretaking role.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
32. Patrons with physical challenges make me feel uncomfortable.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
33. Patrons with physical challenges receive library services equitable to that of the general public.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
34. Patrons with physical challenges are often disruptive.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
35. Patrons with physical challenges are no more difficult to assist than other patrons.
+3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3
36. The research team is very appreciative of the knowledge and insight you have shared regarding attitudes toward patrons with physical challenges. If there is additional information you would like to share with us that has not been addressed in these questions, please do so in the space below.