

Gender Observations in Owen D. Young Library

The gender norms and stratifications are enforced into our lives everyday. Studying at St. Lawrence there are many places on campus where these norms highlight and reinforce the gender dynamics, but not everywhere are these enforced. At St. Lawrence the space of the library was not one of the areas that harbored the ideals of hegemonic masculinity or gender differences. This happened because of the functionality of the space. The rules and unwritten rules of an academic study area are what lead to inconclusive data in the gender relations in the library. In relation to readings on gender dynamics, Owen D. Young Library can be compared to authors such as Thorne and Webster.

The library hours are Monday through Thursday from 8:00am until 1:00am, Friday 8:00am until 10:00pm, Saturday from 10:00am until 10:00pm, and Sunday from 11:30 until 1:00, there is also a 24 hour room. The library is open to students, faculty, staff, and community members.

There are three different floors to the library. When you first walk in, you are on the main floor; this is the floor we did the most research on. On your right when you first walk in there are many tables and chairs that students often use for group projects.

The third floor is basically for studying purposes. There are lots of comfy chairs, tables, and even separate rooms for students who like to study in an even more quiet area. Most people respect the fact that people are normally in the library to study or to get

work done. That is really the one rule to the library, being respectful of others in the sense that people go there for quiet learning environment.

The first floor is very similar to the third floor, except that on the first floor you have the periodicals, journals, and government documents. There are comfortable chairs and tables for people to study at.

Most students who study tend to go to the top or bottom floors. Here, it is quieter and there are fewer people coming and going. The large couches upstairs are an interesting place to look at. Often, people avoid sitting with someone they don't know on these couches. Individual rooms upstairs are often popular. Students can access the internet in a completely solitary room and work with groups up there as well.

Computer labs are another interesting place to study gender interactions. The three computer labs in the library typically are close to full. It is hard to find a computer especially in the evening hours. In the computer lab was the only area where there were definite groupings of each gender. In a row of computers it was mostly all women or men. It was usually in groups of a few girls and then a few guys. Once again there was very little talking between the people. It looked as though after looking at both days and nights that if people had a choice of where to sit they would choose someone familiar or of the same gender. This highlights the hegemonic norms that our society teaches us about the position of dominance over another or the thought of male power. The women and men just might feel more comfortable around their own gender when doing work this comes from the societal norms that we hear everyday that separate the males and females and enforce the ideologies and stratification of gender dynamics.

Through our observations, we've concluded that men tend to frequent ODY library more than women. Jessie, who works at the circulation desk, was able to keep track of people entering the library very easily. She works usually in the evenings, when the library is busiest. On average, men tend to use the library in a higher volume than women. We didn't see many girls come in by themselves; rather they were either in large groups. Males came into the library in groups but not as often as females did; it seemed to us that males would rather come alone than with a group of friends. We also noticed that there were not many mixed groups of males and females that came in together. Our guess is that maybe males and females don't feel as comfortable studying together as they are with the same gender. Although when group projects occurred we noticed that most of the time it didn't really seem to matter, that both females and males were together.

Gender interactions in the library are not typical of interactions between college students on the St. Lawrence campus. This happens due to the rules put in place regarding quietness. Students working in groups are not always able to choose their partners and are often only interacting for academic purposes. In this area, people working alone are not uncommon, although on campus, people are often found in groups. The only interactions that occur outside of group work tend to be students not currently involved in work and taking a break. The library is one of the few places on campus where equality can be found. There are no restrictions on race, gender, sexuality, or class.

Other places on campus foster gender interactions. Dana Dining Hall, for example, is a very social place. Students are rarely alone and people go in groups and become engaged in conversation. There is nothing to hinder social and gender

interactions. In the library, rules constrain social exchanges and frequently people are found alone. Even in Dana, where gender interactions seem to be equal, we found that workers tended to be mostly female. We found that in terms of the faculty and staff in the library, that there are more females than males. In society, stereotypically being a librarian is a female profession. There are certainly some male librarian/supervisors that work at the library; in fact Jessie's boss is male.

In the movie, *Assembly Line*, all the supervisors or people with higher paying jobs were always males, while the workers were females. In ODY, most of the regular librarians are females while most of the men hold supervisor positions. With this evidence we can infer that even today it is typical of women to be workers while men hold managerial positions.

Thorne created an elaborate theory about male and female interactions in an academic setting. Thorne's theory of gender does play out to some extent in the library. It does seem to happen that girls come in together in groups while men come alone. Thorne might argue that women come in with a friend or two to create a more intimate bond. As talking isn't really the norm in the library, a comfort level must be achieved before it is not awkward to sit in silence with someone. One problem with Thorne's theory was that, admittedly, it focused mainly on the popular students. In college, popularity is less of an issue. It would be impossible to determine whether popular students or unpopular students used the library more. Because Thorne believes boys and girls have different cultures, the fact that men visit the library more often than women may lead Thorne to believe it is because male culture on campus is more academically related.

Webster's article spoke about her belief that educational money went into programs that reinforced hegemonic norms. These programs which would include academic studying areas such as the library space, which haven't reinforced gender dynamics. The library is a place where the interactions are not like everyday encounters. In most all areas on campus the interactions are informal and you have a choice who you are around. Yet you are influenced by the societal norms that are placed in our heads everyday. Usually people do travel in groups which are many times both male and female yet these groups don't usually go too far outside of their familiar friends group. In the student center, for example, you may think about going up to a person or a group to talk or to meet, yet in the library the atmosphere is different. It is a bother to go up and talk to people that you are not close to. You would be bothering their work. This limits the interactions that actually take place.

Owen D. Young Library was not a good representation of the gender dynamics at St. Lawrence. It is not a social place which makes it hard to research the interactions. It's a place where the interactions are limited by the rules. Our results on gender dynamics were skewed from normal everyday gender relations. The ideas of hegemonic masculinity are not played out in the library. Equality among gender is found more prevalently in the library than most places in society.

