

Graffiti, Poetry, Dance: How Public Library Art Programs Affect Teens Part 1: Introduction & Literature Review

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This two-part article addresses the outcomes of art programs in public libraries by examining the literature, and by asking teens how these programs can affect their civic engagement. The literature review synthesizes previous research on art, libraries, teens, and civic engagement, and positions this case study in relation to the theoretical constructs of adult researchers.

The case study generates a grounded theory of the teen experience of art programs and its correlating shifts in civic engagement. Fourteen teens joined in six weekly arts programs, responded to surveys, and participated in interviews on art, libraries, various measures of civic engagement, and the ways in which these three concepts intersect. Teens were research partners. The resulting teen-generated and validated theory describes how library art programs can directly and indirectly affect teen civic engagement by facilitating the development of social capital, offering opportunities to engage, and allowing teens to guide their own actions and decisions regarding the sorts of civic engagement in which they want to participate. Overall, participants believed that these programs can positively affect empathy, a sense of belonging, social networks and connections, creativity, a sense of being listened to and valued, and other cognitive and emotional shifts.

Introduction

From coast to coast, public libraries are buzzing with energy as teens scrawl henna tattoos on their hands, record hip-hop tracks, or knit. Public librarians are serving teens through an increasing number of programs and services.¹ Books such as *The Hipster Librarian's Guide to Teen Craft Projects*² commonly advocate art programs for reaching out to teens, and daily chronicles of art-based programs fill YALSA's email discussion lists about teen programs. In best practice articles, young adult librarians offer heartfelt advice such as "librarians help teens make tight-knit connections...with craft, libraries can pattern a legacy of connection,"³ and

...the teen you helped will grow and learn more about themselves and the world. When you facilitate fine arts programs with teens...you present a program and then watch for a spark to appear in one of the participating teen's eyes, and you think, "This is perfect, I just changed someone's life today."⁴

Teen librarians want this to be the case, hope it is the case, but have little available research that demonstrates how our carefully planned art programs actually affect teens. Meanwhile, the civic engagement or citizenship-enabling mission of public libraries languishes, ostensibly exchanged for an economic one.⁵ Well-educated,

civically-engaged citizens founded the first tax-supported public library in the country, the Boston Public Library, to encourage the entire citizenry to become similarly engaged and educated.⁶ This justification for the use of tax dollars for libraries is that access to information will ensure an educated electorate, a citizenry informed about the issues of the day and willing to do the hard work of democracy.

The Problem

Catherine A. Johnson asks, “If the provision of information is no longer its most important role, how should the library reposition itself to remain relevant to municipal funders?”⁷ All sorts of answers present themselves, primarily the idea that libraries can continue to function as agents of civic engagement and social change, counteracting the tide of divisive individualism as people are becoming more and more isolated behind their screens. Researchers could explore several models of civic engagement support such as: zeroing in on the library as a thirdspace, maintaining online tools for community participation, citizen journalism or community publishing as facilitated through local libraries, and focusing library programming to foster active citizenship or civic engagement.

This research was proposed from my inchoate sense, even after thirteen years as a youth services librarian, that art programs in libraries offering a way for teens to socialize, learn, and respond to issues that impacted them seemed fundamentally different from school, church or other activities. Years of watching teens produce socially-aware art, and hearing teens describe their understanding of social realities while doing craft projects, had made me aware that something was happening under the apparently sugar-coated surface of making jewelry from bottle caps and writing song lyrics on t-shirts with bleach pens. I wanted to know what was occurring during these fun, well-attended programs, and to see if there was any correlation between the programs and some community benefit that could inspire funders to get as excited about programs as the teens were.

In response to these musings and observations, this research looks at a commonly-held program at libraries, beyond the private value these programs hold for each participant (which is by no means a statement about the relative worth of such private value), and examines how public funding for these programs results in a public benefit. Fourteen teens from one small public library helped to build a grounded theory addressing the research question, “How does art programming in public libraries affect civic engagement in teens?”⁸ They spoke of the barriers to engagement that they encounter. They were cautious participatory scientists. Through their own words and choices, this study situates the teen within his/her community, within the library, and in relationship to art and civic engagement.

Implications

When libraries use civic engagement to gauge outcome measures for the community impact of teen art programs, a circle is bound: Civic engagement created the public library through tax support, and the public library facilitates civic engagement and thus a stronger community. The impact of this research potentially goes beyond the immediate beneficiaries of the results, the teens, to communities in which they live. Since entire communities can conceivably benefit from increased teen civic engagement, this research adds to the conversation on how libraries benefit communities. If librarians interpret the grounded theory to provide more focused programming for teens, teens may begin to use libraries more regularly, and to feel better served and more satisfied with the library program offerings.

This study is relevant for a variety of other reasons. Teen librarians may be able to use it to justify and market their programs, garnering monetary, staff, and community support. Library administrators could use it to explain the need for teen program funding to library boards and city councils. Currently, few public libraries have dedicated teen funding.⁸ If quantitative research based on this and other theories of teens in libraries reveals that teen programming has a measurable benefit for the community, library boards may consider revising their mission to incorporate and fund art programs. On a cautionary note, both the literature review and the grounded theory describe how adult-centered ideas of what civic engagement “should” be can alienate or disenfranchise teens. Librarians should not plan their art programs for the sake of overtly facilitating civic engagement. Art for art’s sake, or for the sake of fun and individual enjoyment, is the teen-centered best practice; the potential benefits of civic engagement appear to be more important to community members, library staff, and funding agencies than to the teens themselves.

Literature Review

The literature on art, civic engagement, libraries, and teens is a well-developed conversation, even though some of the participants have yet to speak directly to one another. Philosophers and sociologists have mused upon the intersections between art, community, empathy, and communication.⁹ Library theorists and political scientists join the conversation as they describe the library’s critical impact on civic engagement, citizenship, community-building, and building social capital.¹⁰ The concept of the public sphere, where people come together to share experiences, is critical to the idea of civic engagement. Education philosopher Henry Giroux notes that the public sphere is defined as the “mediating space between the state and private existence...rooted in collective self-reflection and discourse under conditions free from domination.”¹¹ Libraries are perhaps the ultimate public sphere, due to their status as a least-mediated space compared to our other public, religious, economic, or social institutions. Teens have few places to gather that are not commoditized or in the business of faith or pedagogy. Unfiltered access to art may be available in a museum, if one can afford to go to a museum, or an art center, if one is lucky enough to have a free art center in one’s community. In some communities, none of those options are available and the library is the only free public space for creative activities.

To define two critical terms for this study, I turned to the work of sociologists. Erlich defines *civic engagement* as “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.”¹² In this study, both fine and applied arts fulfill the definition of “art”: painting canvas and painting mendhi, playing violin and listening to punk rock, are all treated equally. In terms of instrumental value, this research is informed by Gans, who considers the traditionally more desirable “high art” and less desirable “low art” as equivalent.¹³ While the literary arts should fall within the range of “art,” the impact of reading literature is not part of this research.

Research studies examining the impact of literature on teens are not discussed as part of this literature review.¹⁴ Furthermore, the shifting focus of libraries from purveyors of books to multimedia community centers is one of the main thrusts of this project. If libraries are offering non-book-related programs, we need to understand why and how these programs affect library patrons.

Teens

Many researchers have examined the concept of teen civic behavior, including how teens exhibit, build, need, or lack civic engagement.¹⁵ Church attendance, the length of time living in a community, size of friend network, mother's education level, family political views, and participation in social organizations are all factors in the formation of civic engagement.¹⁶ The types of programs available to teens are often quite limited, particularly in rural communities, where 4-H and Scouts are frequently the only options for extracurricular, non-religious, non-sporting programs.¹⁷ Generally, public libraries are mentioned in the context of literacy alone in studies about civic engagement or teen life.

Thousands of studies have been done on teen cognitive, social, and emotional development, from Piaget onward. A review of this literature is outside the scope of this paper, but one of the most commonly used tools describing the needs of teens is the Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets list.¹⁸ This list synthesizes teen development studies and responds with practical suggestions for people and institutions working with teens.

In *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media*, Ito et al.¹⁹ (2008) touched on many of the Source Institute's recommendations when they described their vision of how libraries can affect teens through the teen's interests in digital media and collaboration:

...what would it mean to enlist help in this endeavor from an engaged and diverse set of publics that are broader than what we traditionally think of as educational and civic institutions? In addition to publics that are dominated by adult interests, these publics should include those that are relevant and accessible to kids now, where they can find role models, recognition, friends, and collaborators who are co-participants in the journey of growing up in a digital age.²⁰

Where the case study in Part 2 of this article differs from previous studies of teens and teen attitudes toward civic engagement is that the teens were not only asked directly how they feel and perceive various issues, they were invited to directly participate in the research process. The theory results from teens as these "collaborators" □ and "co-participants." □

Art

Several large-scale studies answer Ito et al.'s question largely in relation to adult experiences of arts participation, which correlates with increased civic engagement.²¹ But teens are participating less often in many types of art,²² and overall participation in the arts is dropping precipitously.²³ Many young adults now access art through electronic media instead of through live performances or visiting museums. Yet young adults are increasingly willing to volunteer, though it is uncertain whether that is due to school requirements or other social changes.²⁴ Studies of people who participate in arts and who read literature reveal dramatically increased rates of voting, collaborative arts, and participation in community events; those who actually create art are civically engaged at still higher rates.²⁵ National Endowment for the Arts researchers parsed the statistics: "The odds that performing arts attendees will volunteer are 3.8 times greater than for non-attendees, regardless of their educational attainment, gender, and other selected demographic traits." □²⁶ Educational attainment level is a predictor for civic engagement activities such as volunteering, but art participation correlates even more strongly.

McCarthy et al. and Guetzkow and Fuqua²⁷ each described how the intrinsic and benefits of the arts, including individual cognitive and empathetic benefits, can spill over into community benefits.

Participation in the arts affected the economic, cultural and social health of communities and individuals. Fuqua described how skills garnered through arts programs are an economic benefit and described the need for access to the arts as a social justice issue:

In our modern skills-driven economy, access to arts education should be seen as essential for disconnected youth. Whereas in the past, discrimination prevented many minorities from reaping the benefits of higher levels of education, today, increasing stratification of wealth segregates those who achieve higher levels of education from those who do not.²⁹

This focus on equal access resonates with the librarian's credos established in the Library Bill of Rights and Freedom to Read Statement,³⁰ in which equal access is cited as a critical element of public library services.

Brice Heath, Soep, and Roach's longitudinal study of non-school art programs noted that kids who participate in these programs perform community service more than four times as often as the control sample.³¹ The artist children's belief that it is important to help others in their community was nearly 20 percent higher than the control group, and they were 13 percent more likely to see themselves as being able to address inequality.³² The researchers found that the art programs enabled a "commitment to understanding contemporary circumstances while creating new ways of seeing." □³³ Similarly to Brice Heath et al. and Maxine Greene, McCue's case study described how art itself is a civic space.³⁴ She found that, "seeing 'otherwise' is a crucial perspective in the development of a healthy citizenry; we have the chance to imagine what it is like to be someone other than ourselves. In this way, appreciating and producing art teaches habits of mind and heart that connect us to the world." □³⁵

While art does not necessarily make people "happier," □ most people discover the form of art that will be most meaningful to them at around age thirteen,³⁶ a target age for public library teen programs. Participation in the arts engenders important individual and societal benefits such as empathy, communication, civic engagement, social capital, tolerance and self-esteem, academic achievement, and pleasure. In most of the studies examined here, libraries are neglected as an important resource for the arts and artistic development.

Civic Engagement

Dozens of studies have investigated how civic engagement plays out, but the focus here is on those related to teens, art, and/or libraries.³⁷ Miklosi's study found that teens need to learn skills in order to discuss civic issues. Teens often didn't see the impact of national policy on their lives and thus didn't care about it, though they were willing to work on issues they felt were relevant to their lives, and they were individualistic about their engagement. In other words, "what's in it for me" □ was the name of the game.³⁸ Miklosi found potent evidence that teens desire leadership endeavors with "legitimate power-sharing opportunities." □³⁹ Topics surrounding respect and being listened to captivated teens' interest.

The MacArthur Foundation's book *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth* synthesized multitudes of studies and illustrated best practices for educators and youth advocates. In it, Rheingold described a poll in which 70 percent of respondents ages 12-24 believed that it was important to help one's community, and 82 percent reported doing something to support a cause monthly.⁴⁰ His depiction of teens refutes depictions of teens as apathetic slackers:

...it does seem that the majority of young people are convinced that supporting a social cause is something they should do. However, there is a strong disparity between interest and involvement, an ‘activation gap,’ and there is significant room for growth.⁴¹

danah boyd⁴² notes that civic engagement grows from real-world experiences of teens. Rheingold quoted boyd as saying “Politics start first with the school, with your friends...then they grow to being about civics. Pushing the other way won’t work. You need to start with the dramas that make sense to you.”⁴³ Coleman attacked the notion that young people’s activism should be pushed or managed, fearing that “citizenship is being molded and constrained by technological infrastructures that are designed to perpetrate a narrow, quiescent and consumerist model of civic action.”⁴⁴ As teens seek their own forms of engagement, often in digital worlds, or in ways not recognized by adults, they may push back against external pressure to participate in civic action. This pressure to volunteer or otherwise become “good citizens”⁴⁵ as defined by parents and teachers can backfire. Rules and guidelines surrounding teen civic behavior “simply exist to reinforce institutional fear and authority.”⁴⁵ Earl and Schussman affirmed that “one must ask whether existing notions of what comprises civic engagement tend to ignore, devalue, and otherwise marginalize ways in which younger citizens are connecting with one another to collectively make a difference in their own worlds.”⁴⁶ This research contributes a cautionary tone to the implications of this study: Imposing an external aim for civic engagement on teens may be less effective than offering a forum through which they can be heard.

Livingstone, Couldry, and Markham surveyed over one thousand British teens.⁴⁷ They found teens to be more interested in celebrities and conforming to peer norms than in politics. Teens protested that “‘having your say’ does not seem to mean ‘being listened to,’ and so they feel justified in recognizing little responsibility to participate.”⁴⁸ While the teens were not less trusting than older people, they did have less social capital, and fewer social expectations.

Sociologist Robert Putnam’s book *Bowling Alone* describes how involvement in community organizations, including libraries, increases the social capital of communities: They are more likely to have high voter turnout and increased volunteerism.⁴⁹ Individuals who participate in one sort of civic activity are likely to participate in other civic activities, building their own personal social capital. Putnam argued that we face a civic crisis in terms of young people’s civic disengagement,⁵⁰ and that Americans have largely abandoned civic life in favor of individualistic activities such as television viewing. Yet many researchers, including Putnam, consider both art and libraries as builders of social capital for both individuals and communities.⁵¹ Youniss, McLellan, and Yates’ metasynthesis of the last thirty years of studies determined that the sporadic development of civic engagement cannot be due to the macro-process of society-wide apathy, as Putnam asserts.⁵² They linked the development of civic identity to participation in organized groups as teens.

Empathy is one of the most commonly identified correlates of engagement,⁵³ and one of the building blocks of civic engagement.⁵⁴ Social interactions are mediated by feelings of empathy in which we interpret and predict the behaviors of others, and modulate our own behaviors on extrapolations of how we believe others will interpret ours.⁵⁵ The shared experiences of these interpretive and predictive interactions, specifically through art in the case of this study, can build teens’ inner empathetic “library”⁵⁶ to include more and more possible interpretations and predictions. Artist-philosopher Maxine Greene sums up the way art acts as a facilitator of empathy and connects diverse people:

Often times, the extent to which we grasp another's world depends upon our existing ability to make poetic use of our imagination, to bring the 'as if' worlds created by writers, painters, sculptors, filmmakers, choreographers, and composers, and to be in some manner a participant in artists' worlds reaching far back and ahead in time.⁵⁶

A reserve of social capital is necessary before a teen will choose to engage. In addition to empathy, another major factor identified as critical to building social capital is the sense of belonging in one's community.⁵⁷ A third factor of social capital and engagement involves social trust, which plays an especially important role in facilitating volunteering and charity giving.⁵⁸

Libraries

In conversation, librarians discuss how libraries benefit communities and enable stronger communities, but others in the community may forget the role libraries play. There is a resurgence of interest in social capital and civic engagement in library contexts, as evidenced by recent studies and the ALA Center for Civic Life.⁵⁹ Johnson found a strong correlation between indicators of community involvement, volunteering and charitable giving, and the frequency of library use.⁶⁰ Library users displayed a higher level of social capital than random residents of the city.⁶¹ In her research on libraries and communities, librarian de la Peña McCook noticed that librarians were rarely part of the conversation on community building and delineated myriad characteristics of community-building activities and how libraries already support them.⁶²

Librarian Jenny Levine conducted the sole study on teen civic engagement and library programs.⁶³ She looked at videogame library programs through a series of descriptive case studies. In one of the case studies, a librarian asserted that the programs transformed teen beliefs from "My community doesn't value me" to "My interests are valued by the community, and the library proves it."⁶⁴ These case studies were descriptive in nature and did not generate a theory, nor test one. Levine states that "transformational power—not books—is our brand, and those transformations happen in relation to many different media. They happen in relation to people, communal spaces, social programs, a wide variety of services, and many different content containers, including but not limited to books."⁶⁵

A growing body of research describes how libraries serve teens and how teens in turn perceive libraries.⁶⁶ A grim picture emerges. While libraries are offering more and better services to teens, often the teens are not responding with positive perceptions of libraries, especially boys. Walter acknowledged the tensions in serving teens: "Adolescent culture is not always compatible with library culture. Few public libraries have the kind of space that welcomes and nurtures teens. The needs of other patron groups are sometimes in conflict with the needs of young adults."⁶⁷

Australian case studies demonstrated that urban youth have more mobility and choices than rural or suburban youth, and often they choose not to go to library.⁶⁸ Derr and Rhodes identified a sense of belonging and place which stemmed from voluntary, uncoerced actions generated by teen-librarian interactions. The resulting social capital benefitted both communities and individuals. Edward and Williams took an ecological systems-theory approach and found that libraries can function as part of the mesosystem of linking key elements of teenage experience.⁶⁹ For example, libraries provide a "temporally and spatially available 'place to go' when school and home are not available."⁷⁰ They also pointed to the fact that teens not only have little access to public space, but they also must jockey for access to home resources such as computers or simply a space to make noise in. As in the

Derr and Rhodes report, Edward and Williams called for libraries to become thirdspaces that build social capital by facilitating the sense of belonging and place needs of teens.

The literature on library teen services impacts this study by highlighting the concept of social justice as a goal in offering programs and services to those who often have nowhere else to go. This literature is in its infancy in many ways; few quantitative studies have been done regarding teens in libraries. Most of the literature involves a case study, with limitations similar to this research. Until more large-scale, externally-valid, and longitudinal studies are done, the research on teens and libraries remains inconclusive.

Although some librarians were writing about arts in public libraries in the 1970s, this body of literature remains undeveloped. Jane Manthorne wrote in 1971 about the needs of disadvantaged kids and how libraries were meeting those needs through art programs such as film, music, and creative writing.⁷¹ Teens sought art spaces and experiences in 1971. They still seek them today; one teen noted, “They should build like a studio thing where kids can go and relax. I play the guitar, but I can’t play it in my house because they always go ‘shut up.’”⁷²

Writers have praised the ImaginOn Loft and its innovative studios for recording music, animating or filming, and writing.⁷³ Teens are content creators as well as content users at this library, which partners with a children’s theater. YouMedia at the Chicago Public Library also facilitates a teen-empowerment agenda with studio spaces and art performances.⁷⁴ Programs like YouMedia and ImaginOn are an answer to Manthorne’s 1971 call for a “living, changing idea place.”⁷⁵

The literature on the four main conceptual components of the research question contributes a great deal to a top-down, adult-originated theoretical framework describing how teens are affected by art, how art affects civic engagement, how civically engaged teens are, and how public libraries affect civic engagement. Less plentiful are studies on ways in which public libraries affect teens and support art. The library context for art and civic engagement is rarely examined, nor are teen attitudes often interrogated. In this study, the teens generate their own theory of how the four components of this research do, or do not, overlap in their lived experiences.

Conclusion

Part 2 of this article will discuss a case study that is situated within the larger body of research described in this literature review. However, as Moeller, Pattee, and Leeper note:

Adults often talk about the concepts and feelings young adults experience...without actually engaging young adults to understand their first-person accounts—a practice that, at best, provides only half of the picture and, at worst, results in the dissemination of false pronouncements about young people’s habits, tastes, and abilities.⁷⁶

An adult-generated theoretical construct provided by this literature review and other, even more abstract philosophical texts,⁷⁷ could be considered epistemologically valid and tested quantitatively. Yet Schaefer-McDaniel critically evaluated the various theories of teen social capital and found that few researchers have bothered to consider the teen’s perspective, choosing instead to survey and interview teachers or parents about their perception of teen behaviors.⁷⁸ However, without the input of young adults themselves, the use of adult-rendered literature neglects the teen context in which any studies of teens must be grounded. Part 2 of this research article

will use teen language, teen researchers, and an embedded researcher/teen librarian to build a theory grounded within teen realities.

Even without the teen perspective on art programs, libraries, and civic engagement, this literature review is valuable. First of all, it brings together several lines of inquiry from many disciplines to form a framework for considering how public library art programs can affect teen civic engagement. Irrespective of the truth value of the grounded theory that will follow in Part 2, this synthesis of the literature offers youth services librarians a useful foundation to begin the conversation on why arts programs in public libraries should be funded and valued, not only for the sake of the individual participants, but also for the community as a whole. A collocation of many studies on the civic outcomes of art programs, for example, will give the practicing YA librarian many tools with which to convince funders to support teen programs that can seem frivolous to people with a nineteenth-century view of libraries as “book places.”□

Secondly, one of the ways in which the validity of any given study can be assessed is to ascertain whether it substantiates previous research. The data gathered in the interviews of the case study that will be described in Part 2 overlaps with nearly every study mentioned in this literature review. One of the few exceptions is the idea that teens do not value public libraries or consider them relevant to their own lives. In the case study, it became apparent that the teens feel strongly that the library is important, relevant, and a place they respect. The reason for this difference from the previous research⁷⁹ appears to be the art program context in which the teens experience the library.

Finally, this literature review can have implications for a young adult librarian seeking research inspiration. While instituting a full-scale research project may be time- and resource-intensive for a practicing librarian, an analysis and/or synthesis of existing literature can move the corpus of literature on teen services forward, even when one takes as an interdisciplinary view as in this review. New ways to measure the outcomes and benefits of young adult library services can result from such synthesis, offering more tools for praxis⁸⁰ in the day-to-day offerings of teen services.

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Graffiti, Poetry, Dance: How Public Library Art Programs Affect Teens Part 2: The Research Study and Its Practical Implications

Posted on [September 26, 2012](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



‘By’ Shannon Crawford Barniskis, Director, Lomira Community Library

Part 1 of this article synthesized the literature on civic engagement, art, libraries, and teen services to demonstrate how public libraries can transform the lives of their patrons and the communities they serve. This case study responds to the top-down view of this topic generated by adult researchers by creating a bottom-up, teen-validated grounded theory. In my thirteen years as a teen librarian, it seemed that something special was occurring in the art programs I hosted or observed in public libraries. Teens were not simply creating steampunk sculptures, they were also appeared to be connecting with one another in interesting ways and talking about serious social issues while playing with glue. Yet I remained aware of my own biases: Did I simply *want* to believe my work had an impact on the teens I served? I decided to ask the teens.

The Problem

The problem facing teen librarians in particular, and public librarians in general, is that they may host art programs, but no one has yet developed a theoretical foundation to explain how and why, or if, these programs are widely beneficial. One could construct a theoretical foundation from the existing corpus of literature on art, teens, and civic engagement, such as one derived from the metasynthesis in Part 1 of this article. However, such an adult-centered theory may not reflect the worldview of teens in libraries. In the research study described in this paper, the teens who participate in library art programs appear front and center, recounting their own experiences and ideas.

This qualitative study asked the research question, “How does art programming in public libraries affect civic engagement in teens?” □ Teens who participated in library art programs reflected on questions such as:

- What does civic engagement look like to teens?
- How engaged do teens feel within their communities?
- What are the barriers to civic engagement?
- How can art affect this sense of engagement?
- How do libraries support civic engagement? How can they support it better?
- How do libraries support teens? How can they support them better?

Based on their responses, a grounded theory developed, which situates the teen within his/her community, within the library, and in relationship to art and civic engagement. Librarians can learn how the library can affect both

the teens and the communities they serve through programs already being held in most libraries.

Assumptions and Limitations

Throughout this project I referred to Ehrlich's definition of civic engagement: "working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes."¹ The concept of the public sphere, where people come together to share experiences, including art experiences, is critical to the idea of civic engagement and community-building. Giroux defines the public sphere as the "mediating space between the state and private existence...rooted in collective self-reflection and discourse under conditions free from domination."² Libraries are the least-mediated public sphere in most of our communities, when compared to our other public, religious, economic, or social institutions.

Teens have few places to gather that are not seeking to make money from them, or to further a particular educational or religious agenda through them. The motivation of the librarian is simply to serve (not educate, proselytize, or sell), and there are also sincere attempts to minimize informational filters by ensuring that the user can access the widest-possible range of materials, ideas, and services, without censorship.³ In addition, teens can find few outlets in which to engage in creative activities that are not schools, churches, or commercial enterprises. In many communities, there is no access to art that is unfiltered by pedagogical, commercial or religious goals. Free access to art may occur only within public library situations. This is certainly the case in the rural community in which the research site is located. There are no clubs, museums, or services that offer free art programming outside the library.

One main assumption resonates through this project: Civic engagement is necessary and desirable for our democratic system to thrive. This article treats this idea as a given. As a researcher, I value libraries, art, and civic engagement highly (and participants may not value them at all) so there was a danger that carefully crafted *a priori* conceptualizations would not overlap the study participants' ideas and values.⁴ By grounding the theory in the narratives of the participants, this study reflects the lived experience of the participants, not the researcher's values. At the same time, grounded theory rhetoric allows the language of the participants to shine through the theoretical framework.

The benefit of being a researcher situated within the library context is that some of the participants already have a relationship with me; new relationships were built through the act of making art as an equal participant in the programs. The participants were comfortable speaking to an embedded researcher. The drawback is that some teens may be reluctant to say negative things about the library or librarian. Ultimately, I steered the research away from the participant's judgments about the librarian role, which limits the information garnered on the importance (or lack thereof) of the librarian's role. Objectivity was not possible; the researcher is present in the data, in the codes and categories, and in interactions with participants in the focus group and interviews. I reflexively examined all identified assumptions, treating them as data, whether the assumptions were mine or those of the teen participants.

The study examines subjective data and assumptions about the power of libraries, art, civic engagement, and teens' described experiences. The subjectivity of the data is what makes this theory idiographic, personal, and contextual, but that does not mean it is invalid in a scientific sense—merely that its external validity may be

limited, depending on the epistemological stance one takes in relation to positivist and post-positive theory generation.⁵ The qualitative information gathered both from my assumptions and biases and those of the interviewed teens merge to build a holistic picture of what art programs mean to the participants in this study, including the researcher. This does not render the research less rigorous, but merely renders it in human scale.

There are other limitations. For example, the sample size in this study is small enough to preclude any meaningful quantitative data. The exploratory surveys offer limited quantitative data, which served to expand upon the qualitatively gathered data and to seed questions for the interviewees so they could muse upon the applicability of the survey data to their own experiences. Inferential statistics tests require larger samples to assess probability. The experiences of these rural teens may be only loosely generalizable when compared to those in urban libraries or those with more access to the arts.

Study Design

A qualitative case study design was used for this study. Teens were asked to reflect on their experiences during and after a series of arts programs hosted by the “H Public Library” (see Table 1). The teens in the focus group each attended five of the six programs. The teens that were later interviewed individually attended at least two of these six programs and had attended similar programs at this library previously.

| Program | Description |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Graffiti | A graffiti artist gave a brief presentation on the history, importance, and styles of graffiti. He then demonstrated basic techniques, and gave the teens many test sheets to practice and play with. He helped the twenty-two teens in attendance create a 4×8’ graffiti sign reading “teenspace” for the teen area of the library. 2 hours. |
| Digital Photography | A local photographer gave a presentation on designing a shot and how to use digital cameras to get the desired effect. The sixteen attending teens were paired up and told to go practice these techniques by finding the “alphabet” in the town. The teams returned to the library and shared the photos. The winning team was awarded Amazon gift cards supplied by the teaching artist. 2 hours. |
| Modern Dance | A modern company and its advanced students performed several brief pieces for the audience of fifteen teens, twelve adults, and four children (most of which had been choreographed, costumed, and musically directed by teenaged dance students). The company director and dancers introduced each piece and spoke of the creative process. A couple of professionally-choreographed pieces were also shown. A question-and-answer period followed. 1.5 hours. |
| Artist Trading Cards | A teaching artist explained what Artist Trading Cards were and talked about how artists exchanged them internationally and/or locally. She briefly demonstrated a few basic techniques of stamping and collage, but mostly let the sixteen teens play with the wide array of materials. Each teen created several ATCs and exchanged some of them. 1.5 hours. |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Poetry Reading | Six poets of various styles/ages/genders/ethnicities read poetry to the audience of eighteen teens and nine adults. The poem varied in length, subject matter, level of comedy, etc. Teen volunteers acted out in gesture and posture Gwendolyn Brooks' "we real cool." □ A lengthy question-and-answer period followed. 2 hours. |
| Manga Drawing | An artist and illustrator taught the techniques of manga-style drawing with a PowerPoint presentation and a demonstration of various styles and aspects. The teens practiced their own drawings and shared them. The teaching artist provided individual feedback to the sixteen teens and five adults who attended. 1.5 hours. |

Table 1. The art programs.

The Research Site

The "H Public Library" □ is nestled within a small community with a service population of about 5000 in south-central Wisconsin. At the time of my research, I had been the Youth Services Librarian at the "H Library" □ since 1999. While the choice of this library as the study site represents a convenience sample, it is also fairly representative of small-town Midwest life. The county in which this library resides is similar to other rural upper Midwestern counties in the percentage of people under age eighteen, the median household income, retail sales per capita, and other randomly chosen demographic data.⁶ The research site is located in a county that could stand in for any number of counties throughout the Midwest, and the town could be any town in those counties.

Teen programs and services have been a top priority of the "H Library" □ since late 1999. While little historical data could be located to determine whether teen programs were part of the library mission in earlier years, teens have participated on a limited basis in the Summer Library Programs since at least 1993,⁷ and probably for as long as there has been a Summer Library Program. Unfortunately, few records were kept to establish the historical context of teen programming at this library. Also, few records were kept that separate programs for children under age twelve from those for teens. Until 2009, the Department of Public Instruction Annual Report didn't separate programs for teens from those for younger children, but lumped them all together under "juvenile." □ However, in 2009, the "H Library" □ hosted 64 programs for teens, and 374 teens participated in them.⁸ In 2010, there were 62 programs for teens at this library, with 472 teens participating.⁹ About a dozen of the 2010 programs were small teen discussion groups, another 30 were gaming events, and the rest were art programs, with an average of ten teens attending each art program

The research site is located in a library system consisting of twenty-six libraries. Of these libraries, only two had greater teen attendance at library programs in 2009, and those libraries ("B" □ and "W" □) were 594% and 1048% larger than the research site library. The "W" □ larger library is the largest library in the system, and has the system's only dedicated Teen Librarian. Of these twenty -six libraries, only fourteen held any teen programs at all in 2009, and two of those libraries held only one program each. The "H Library" □ holds more teen programs than other libraries in Wisconsin of a similar service population size. In fact, when looking at twenty-four libraries that are closest in teen program attendance to "H Library" □ throughout the state, the average service population of those libraries is 22,039, or 386% larger than the "H Library." □¹⁰ All of this data is to show that the "H Library" □

takes teen services and programs seriously, and tends to provide far more teen programming than other similarly-sized libraries in Wisconsin, and more than many significantly larger libraries as well. The impetus for the increased teen services was due to several factors: The teen librarian saw a need for services aimed at teens in the small community, the community responded to the increased services with increased attendance and positive feedback, the mission of the library supported programming as a main function of the library, and the local businesses and granting agencies monetarily supported the successful teen programs.

Data Collection

Fourteen teens aged twelve to eighteen participated in this study (see Table 2). They do not reflect a statistically representative sample; instead they represent the widest possible range of social, economic, and age factors, especially those identified as correlates to civic engagement. In this way, it was possible to gather a wide range of narratives from varied experiences of the different teens.

| Pseudonym | Age | *Gender | *Family Income | *Church Attendance | *Parents Educational Level | *Time Lived in Community | Language Spoken at Home | Focus Group or Individual Interview? | Coder and/or Validator? |
|---|-----|---------|----------------|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Emily | 12 | female | \$40-50,000 | Weekly+ | 4-year degree | Over 10 years | Hindi, Arabic, English | Focus group | Coder |
| Matt | 13 | male | \$30-40,000 | Yearly+ | Some college | 1-3 years | English | Focus group | Validator |
| Megan | 13 | female | \$75-100,000 | Rarely | Graduate/doctoral degree | Over 10 years | English | Focus group | Coder |
| Kayla | 13 | female | Over \$150,000 | Monthly+ | 4-year degree | 6-10 years | English | Focus group | Validator |
| Jessi | 13 | female | \$100-150,000 | Weekly+ | 4-year degree | Over 10 years | English | Focus group | |
| Callie | 14 | female | \$50-60,000 | Never | High school/GED | 6-10 years | English | Individual interview | |
| Zach | 14 | male | \$30-40,000 | Rarely | Some college | 6-10 years | English | Focus group | |
| Laura | 14 | female | \$20-30,000 | Never | Some college | 1-3 years | English | Individual interview | |
| Ashley | 15 | female | \$100-150,000 | Weekly+ | Graduate/doctoral degree | Over 10 years | English | Focus group | Coder and validator |
| Nick | 16 | male | \$75-100,000 | Monthly+ | Less than high school | 3-6 years | English | Focus group | Coder |
| Rachel | 16 | female | \$30-40,000 | Weekly+ | Some college | 6-10 years | English | Individual interview | Coder and validator |
| Sam | 18 | male | \$10-20,000 | Never | Some college | Over 10 years | English | Focus group | Coder and validator |
| Eric | 18 | male | \$20-30,000 | Monthly+ | 4-year degree | Less than 1 year | English | Individual interview | Validator |
| Maria | 18 | female | \$40-50,000 | Rarely | High school/GED | 6-10 years | Spanish | Focus group | |
| *Found to correlate with increased civic engagement ¹¹ | | | | | | | | | |

Table 2. A description of the participants.

The study participants generated data in several ways.

Surveys: Participants completed an exploratory survey before the art programs began and a second survey after the programs ended (see Appendix 1). The survey questions included demographic data such as annual family income, gender, age, and so on. In addition, the survey asked the participants how strongly they agree with statements that loosely situated the participant in their feelings about social, civic, and consumer activities. Some of the questions were relevant to this research, such as “I am willing to take action in my community to make things better.” □ Others were “throwaway” □ questions that were intended to keep the participants from thinking too much about civic engagement issues, such as “Texting or otherwise staying in constant contact with my friends is important to me.” □ The survey did not explore these questions in depth; there was not a large enough sample for inferential statistics or any meaningful analysis of this data. However, the rate at which teens agreed or

disagreed with civic engagement statements was used as fodder for the focus group interview. The data from the pre- and post-test surveys were integrated into the resulting theory only when they were spoken about during the interviews. Since this data couldn't be meaningfully parsed statistically, it only shaded the interpretation of the data gathered by the interviews when the teens spoke directly to their interpretations of the results. For example, the level of agreement with the statement "I feel like a valued member of my community" was examined during the interviews. Teens talked about how and why the level of agreement shifted from a high level of disagreement before the series of art programs to a fairly high level of agreement after the programs.

Focus Group and Individual Interviews:

Ten teens participated in a focus group interview. Each of the teens had attended at least five of the six art programs together. They were interviewed at the library after the series of six programs had ended (see Appendix 2 for a list of the questions used during the focus group interview). Later, six of the ten teens helped to code the data and validate the theory that was generated.

I interviewed four more teens to fill in theoretically unsaturated areas of the grounded theory. Each of them had attended at least two of the six art programs and had attended similar programs in the past. They had all applied to be in the research study, but had not been chosen to be in the focus group. The individual interviews occurred over the course of two months, after the focus group interview, data coding, and initial theory development, and took place at the library and at a nearby coffee shop. In grounded theory methods, theoretical sampling is a vital step to developing a fully fleshed-out theory. After an initial coding and sorting of the codes using constant comparative methods, it becomes apparent that some categories are "thin" or need more data to explore them completely. The researcher must then gather more data from those people most likely to have had the experiences under study. In this study, the theoretical sampling interviews took place as new gaps became apparent in various categories. I used the same list of questions as I did for the focus group (see Appendix 2) but received more in-depth data due to the one-on-one nature of these interviews. Two of the theoretical sample teens helped to code and validate the theory once it was complete.

Coding and Memoing:

During the research process, the thoughts and insights of the researchers, including the teen coders and validators, were recorded as "memos" and treated as data. This process is inherent to grounded theory methods, and allows the researchers to reflexively examine their own assumptions in a systematic way.¹² Table 3 provides an outline of the research questions, data gathering, and data analysis process.

| Research Question | Method of Collecting Data | Method of Analysis |
|--|---|--------------------------------|
| <p>What are the barriers to civic engagement?</p> | <p>Interview questions such as (if teens mention not feeling valued or inclined to do things they identify as civic or community engagement) "What stops you? What could be changed to help you [feel more valued/engaged in engagement activities]?"</p> | <p>Open and focused coding</p> |

| | | |
|---|---|-------------------------|
| How can art affect this sense of engagement? | Interview questions such as “Do you think art can change how you feel about your community? What about participating in art programs with others that you may not normally hang out with?”□ | Open and focused coding |
| How do libraries support civic engagement? How can they support it better? | Interview questions such as “Do libraries affect civic/community engagement? How could libraries do a better job with this?”□ | Open and focused coding |
| How do libraries support teens? How can they support them better? | Interview questions such as “Do libraries support teens? How could libraries do a better job with this?”□ | Open and focused coding |
| Questions like these were explored during the interview(s), but are not fully resolved in the resulting grounded theory. These questions are intended to help us look at the research question “How does art programming in public libraries affect civic engagement in teens?”□ from multiple perspectives. | | |

Table 3. Research questions, data-gathering, and data-analysis methods.

Data Analysis

After all the data was collected, participants were invited to step inside the research process to help code and reflect on the data, making it their own, and crafting a personal reality in which the research results are meaningful in their own lives. Grounded theory methods were used to analyze qualitative data and answer the question “How do art programs in public libraries affect civic engagement in teens?”□

I invited all of the teens to participate in the study further, as part of the research team. Six teens volunteered to assist in the coding process by changing, adding, or expanding on codes. They were shown a video on the constant comparative process. Then I showed them the codes that I had developed based on my analysis of the data and spoke briefly about the coding process. This initial training was minimal because the teens learned as they worked by talking through the process with me. The teens were asked to change, add, or remove codes, but to reason aloud why they were doing so. Two teams of teens worked on this—one team of three and the second team of four. One teen worked on both teams. The first team worked on the coding just after I had completed the initial open coding, which simply described the action taking place on a line-by-line basis in the transcripts. For example, the transcript stated “I see poetry more as art now; I mean, before that poetry thing at the library, I just thought...saw poetry as kind of a nuisance to have to do in school.”□ I coded this statement as “considering art as a nuisance”□ and “seeing things as art that weren’t seen that way before.”□ The initial coders added a more abstract code: “liking art more.”□ This team coded for an hour and fifteen minutes, working solely with the focus group interview transcript.

The second team of coders worked for two and a half hours on transcripts of the focus group interview and three of the individual interviews. They worked at a more abstract stage of the coding process, and sorted the codes into categories. These teens compared different codes, original statements, and categories such as “art changes my

mind about engagement?”□ and “political overload.”□ I recorded the coding sessions with the teens and coded the transcripts of those recordings in turn. The teen coders clarified what they originally meant in the interviews during the coding process. Those clarifications helped me understand the nuances of the teen experience.

The teens and I ultimately developed sixty categories that collocated more than 2,000 lines of open coding. One example of the categories used to build the theory is “Art changes my self-image.”□ The code manual description of this category reads, “Any post-art changes in a teen’s self-image are collected within this code family, from feeling ‘better’ about doing art to feeling appreciated after doing art. Both negative and positive ideas are gathered within this one family, as are both internal and externally-motivated changes to a teen’s self-image.”□ The codes that make up this category include “feeling welcome anywhere their art is displayed”□ and “feeling appreciated when people see teen’s art.”□

Findings

This research revolved around the perceptions and experience of fourteen teens, ranging in age from twelve to eighteen (see Table 2 for a description of the participants). Notably, only two of these fourteen understood what the notion of civic engagement meant. The teens developed a concept of civic engagement based on the interview interactions. When they indicated ignorance of the concept, I offered the teens a wide definition based on Ehrlich’s, emphasizing that it encompassed anything aimed at making a community better. The themes generated from the data here are specific to these participants, but through a grounded theory approach, they contribute to and inform theory of the library’s role in promoting civic engagement.

The coded, categorized, and abstracted teen narratives form a complex tangle of related themes that describe how library art programs support teen engagement. Seven main themes, described in Table 4, resonated throughout the interviews.

| Theme | Description | Example of a Teen Statement | Examples of Categories | Examples of Codes |
|----------------------|--|---|---|--|
| Art moves us‘ | Art changes the way teens feel about other people, themselves, their communities, and political ideas. | “It’s definitely not something that I would ever think about normally...I had a picture of a prostitute at night smoking a cigarette and it’s all dark, and you see this outline of her in this coat and she has a cigarette and it’s lit and it just...you won’t think of it | Art changes my mind about my community; Art changes my self-image | Art changing response to things; Art enlightening teen; “Art has never changed my mind”□ |

but once I saw that picture, I was just like, ‘Oh, she’s got a life, too.’” □ (Rachel)

We want to connect, we want to open up

Building social connections and the often-accompanying feelings of enlightenment, empathy, or support.

“I’ve taught chain mail to a woman that was, I believe, was like 67 years old and she picked it up like that...I have done some knitting but it’s not my thing. But I respect and appreciate it. It’s actually a good—you can really brainstorm with people from different generations that have different ideas on the same things.” □ (Eric)

Out of my comfort zone;
Tolerance/empathy

Changing mind about kids after seeing their art; thinking library art programs discourage teens from ignoring others; identifying engagement as social

It’s an adult’s world

Teen perception that the world is based on adult realities, adults have all power, force adult forms of engagement.

“They’ll never even listen to your idea of what happened. It is like you’re a ghost—they don’t even hear you.” □ (Ashley) “They just have their own reality and it doesn’t have anything to do with your reality.” □ (Emily)

Adult ideas of engagement;
Voiceless

Adults having guaranteed voice; not being engaged because no one listens; adults thinking helping others is community engagement

Creating a community

Creating a community where teens feel

Community is “a network of people working together

Identifying the positive in the community; We

Escaping to the city to find art and

| | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| <p>that supports us</p> | <p>supported, valued, and listened to, and defining what that means.</p> | <p>to decide and accomplish something.”□ (Kayla)</p> | <p>want our own world</p> | <p>things to do; feeling local venues wouldn't be interested in teen art; identifying teen programs as support for teens</p> |
| <p>We want to help, but don't push us</p> | <p>Discussion of the resistance to engagement that sprang from a sense that teens were pushed or manipulated by adults, and how (and how much) teens prefer to engage.</p> | <p>“I don't personally like to take leadership when it comes to it, but if someone would... ask me something like, ‘Hey, let's do this,’ I'd totally be for it.”□ (Maria)</p> | <p>Feeling forced; Wanting more involvement</p> | <p>Feeling pressured to contribute; feeling listened to while volunteering; needing a ride to engagement opportunities</p> |
| <p>Libraries can make a difference for us</p> | <p>Discussion of how or if libraries can make a difference in teen lives or in teen civic engagement and teen perceptions of libraries.</p> | <p>“I definitely do feel closer to the libraries that I go to after going through a program. So it is like, the more programs that you go, to the more it feels kind of like home in a way. Not a real home but like a really comforting awesome place.”□ (Eric)</p> | <p>Do we belong in libraries?; Why gave art programs</p> | <p>Thinking adults wish teens weren't in library; performers [artists] relating to teens; ideal library offering art space</p> |
| <p>Does our engagement shift?</p> | <p>Examination of who engages, whether there</p> | <p>“If you only feel like you are valued and you aren't</p> | <p>Leveling up; Defining engagement</p> | <p>Having something to offer to</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| was a change in participant engagement, why engagement shifted. | actually valued, then you're not going to get any sort of civic stuff done."□ (Rachel) | community makes teens feel more valuable; engaging occurs when person is comfortable in their role; defining civic engagement as participation |
|---|--|--|

Table 4. Theme descriptions and examples.

The theoretical model shown in Figure 1 captures how the seven themes wind through the way teens experience art programs in public libraries, and how this experience affects civic engagement. The themes are so entwined that it is difficult to tell where one leaves off and another begins. Each theme (to a greater or lesser extent) addresses a slightly different aspect of how the experience of teens in library art programs plays out. In this way, the theory forms a holistic web describing teen experiences of library art programs and the programs' outcomes.

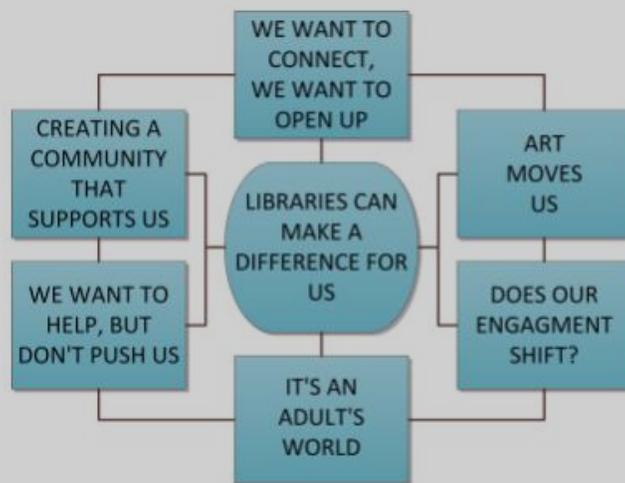


Figure 1. Theoretical Model of the Connection between Art Programs and Teens

The theme at the center of the web is “Libraries can make a difference for us.”□ The library was the physical and social context in which any changes took place, in which the art programs were experienced, and in which the research was conducted, and thus the hub of all the other themes. However, the most thoroughly-explored theme was “It’s an adult’s world.”□ Teens spoke of the many ways in which they were powerless to engage in an adult-driven civic context. The second most important theme, to the teen participants, was “We want to connect, we want to open up.”□ Many statements of “being enlightened”□ and “moving out of my comfort zone”□ resonate through the interviews, not just on the topic of art or engagement, but also in connection to adult attitudes and feelings about the library. The only clear theme that emerges as a motivation for the change in levels of civic

engagement that the participants describe is “Art moves us.” □ Through the exploration of the experience of the art program, as well as the skills gained through the art programs, the teen participants connected more deeply with each other and with their communities, and became more willing to try new things, including engaging in a civic world into which they had previously only dipped their toes.

Ideally, the themes could be arranged linearly: The teens arrive at the library from a world in which they have little power and feel unsupported; they experience art programs that move them, that inspire them to connect and open to possibility; and the teens leave the programs and library feeling as if they want to engage and that their engagement shifted. In reality, the data reveals a spiraling interconnectedness and non-linearity in each theme. For example, “It’s an adult’s world” □ is the background of the teen experience when they arrived at the library, but it was also a theme challenged by the programs, celebrated in some senses within the programs (when teens looked up to the adult artists), and remains the context in which teens will have to engage when the programs are in the past. The impetus, processes, and results of change cannot be so easily unraveled.

Discussion

This discussion addresses the question “How can public library art programs affect civic engagement in teens?” □ by describing attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs that changed or were identified as changeable by the teen participants. Overall, participants believed that these programs can positively affect empathy, a sense of belonging, social networks and connections, creativity, a sense of being listened to and valued, and other cognitive and emotional shifts. Teens, who often felt ignored or unwelcome in their communities, valued the teen-centric context of the art programs. These changes, while necessary to civic engagement actions, are not actual civic engagement behaviors.

The Ehrlich definition of civic engagement has two parts: One part speaks to the social capital required to engage (skills, values, motivation), and the other part describes active engaging behavior (working, promoting).¹³ This study supports the theory that art programs in public libraries builds social capital and the building blocks of engagement.

However, the direct effect of these programs on civic engagement behavior is less well-supported. While 71 percent of the participants indicated that art programs could affect teens in general to be more civically engaged, 20 percent of that majority said their own engagement was not affected. The remaining participants avoided asserting that library art programs could *not* affect teen engagement, but did not answer the question. They may have agreed or disagreed with this hypothesis. Participants who agreed that these programs could affect engagement wavered when confronted with the question of their own behavior shifts.

The uneven support for the hypothesis that library art programs increase teen civic engagement behaviors appears to be partially a result of the fact that many of the participants seemed willing to conjecture about other teens’ experiences, but unable to summon the assurance that these conjectures were entirely valid. These teens were too aware of the individuality of experience to offer sweeping statements of non-relativistic truth. They hedged.

Meanwhile, the self-awareness displayed throughout most of the interviews seemed to unravel when teens were specifically confronted with the idea that their own personal level of engagement could or perhaps should increase. “I’m good where I am,” □ said Laura; “I’m already doing it,” □ responded Rachel. Their statements about their own level of engagement may be, objectively speaking, wrong. The teens may be presenting themselves

as more engaged than they actually are, or they may be unaware that they are not really performing many civic engagement actions. Or the teens may be actually engaged at a high level. This research didn't examine this issue, but it's easier to *talk* about being engaged than it is to actually *be* engaged, and this is true for all ages. Rheingold's "activation gap" □ between interest and involvement in civic engagement activities may be in play here.¹⁴ Future research could quantify how large this activation gap is in those who participate in library art programs.

Regardless of the few specific statements that individual teens were not convinced that library art programs affect their civic engagement, questions were asked about the shift in engagement in several ways. The answers to the less point-blank questions make it apparent that these fourteen teens were affected.

Examining Relationships

The data collected in this study spoke to relationship-building. Teens described how they perceived relationships with each other and with various adults. The relationship between teens and librarians was not deeply interrogated, largely because I straddled the role of librarian and researcher. Thus, the following musings on the teen-librarian relationship somewhat derive from my memos created during the research process, when I was reflexively examining my role in the research and arts processes. These thoughts were validated by the five teen readers of the resulting text.

The teens described the best possible teen-librarian relationship, which involves an adult who obviously likes and cares for a teen while having no extrinsically mandated stake in how the teen turns out. Unlike teachers or parents, librarians are in a position of appearing entirely on the side of teens. The relationship is not based on coercion; none of these teens felt forced to come to the library, interact with the librarian, or perform tasks in the way they did with teachers and parents. The teens considered the librarian an advocate. For adolescents who feel they have few allies and little power, such an advocate may have an effect on their social capital and engagement. There were hints of this advocacy idea in the data collected in this study, but it was not sought or developed further. In this study, the librarian occupied multiple roles: While making or experiencing art, I was just one of the group; I was the one who created the programs and brought exciting programs into the community; I asked questions about teens' lives and genuinely wanted to hear their answers; I invited the participants into the usually adult role of researcher and ensured that my analysis reflected what they really meant; meanwhile, I was still the person who embodied the authoritative role of the library as institution, with all the preconceived notions teens, and I, have about librarians and libraries; I am the parent of one of the teens at the programs (although not in this study); I provided the pizza and snacks; I have the keys to the library. These multilayered roles are complex. An examination of the teen-librarian relationship is critical to fully explicating the ways in which libraries and their programs support teens. The roles of the researcher and librarian were too intertwined to be able to attempt that explication in this study.

Aside from the relationship built between the teens and the librarian, relationships amongst the teens also originated and developed during the art programs. One of the main reasons to hold a focus group interview, in which ten of the participants answered questions while eating pizza and candy, was that they enjoyed being with one another. They had just spent about fourteen hours creating and sharing their art, chatting, and laughing together. They had built a community centered on art in the library. The participants were unlikely to feel voiceless or disengaged when they were together.

In a couple of the programs, other community members stopped by or interacted with the teens. During the graffiti program, which was held outside, a city council member on her way to a council meeting was enthusiastic about the project. She asked teens to come and graffiti the side of her store. A banker came over and sprayed a symbol on the graffiti sign. One participant, Eric, stopped him just before he pushed the spray button while holding the can backwards, before the banker could inadvertently spray paint his suit. More interactions between teens and adult community members, with whom they may not have normally interacted, occurred during the poetry and dance programs. These interactions were entirely positive and signaled to the participants that some adults were paying attention and enjoyed some of the same things they did.

The participants mentioned the relationships they built with the artists who led the programs. The manga and graffiti teachers were in their early twenties, and the dancers were teens and young adults. Participants mentioned how much they appreciated that. The expertise of the young teachers was evidence of the “leveling up” that the teens could accomplish through art. All of the artists spoke a teen-friendly language, which participants particularly appreciated. Even if those teens never meet those artists again, they have associated a “cool,” sympathetic adult, a feeling of being heard, and a supportive group of peers, with the library. They learned that a community-based institution is available for them, to be co-created with them.

Recommendations

Librarians seeking to use this study to expand, guide, or initiate teen services have several pathways to take. The seven themes can help focus services. Many of the following recommendations (see Table 4), are based both on teen recommendations and my own brainstorming. During the interviews, teens often offered up a vision of how libraries could better support them and their engagement. Many of these recommendations are already in place in libraries, and are only examples of some of the ways librarians can meet the needs expressed by the participants in this study.

| Theme | Suggested Library Responses |
|---------------------|--|
| Art moves us | offer a multitude of art programs |
| | make sure art that teens might not be used to is included in programs, but be sure to reflect teen interests with art programs |
| | include time to reflect in art programs |
| | display teen art, or ask teens to curate art already in the library or community |
| | offer a studio space and supplies for teens to create art |
| | host teen art shows for the community to enjoy |
| | hire local teen bands |
| | use teen-created music for library publicity, such as commercials |

Theme**Suggested Library Responses**

make the teen library website a digital venue for teen art

art for its own sake is enough to build social capital, there need be no “message” or point beyond creation

It’s an adult’s world

plan programs to encourage intergenerational communication (such as Wii bowling with grandparents or mother-daughter spa days)

offer adults a way to respond to teen programs, art, or activities

invite teens to community discussions and plan for their participation if they are interested

tell teens when they do things “right” in the library

create a Teen Advisory Board or other group to do collection development, choose programs, and raise funds for the teen activities

make sure library program teachers or program presenters understand the need to listen and respect teen attitudes and behaviors

We want to connect, we want to open up

ensure that programs and services allow time for teens to connect and socially engage with one another

encourage teens to bring friends to programs

add a social component to all programs (such as a competition or challenge), facilitate new friendships during programs

use social networking tools to encourage kids to connect before and after the programs

include ice-breaking activities in the program structure

encourage teens with similar interests to meet informally at the library to share their interests further

be willing to create on-the-fly clubs and group activities based on teen interests, and be willing to dissolve the groups when the interest passes

hire teachers or program presenters that are only slightly older than the teens, or who are teens themselves

seek out local talent for program ideas

informally touch on themes of empathy, tolerance, and enlightenment during programs—beware of didacticism

Theme**Suggested Library Responses****Creating a community that supports us**

expand teen horizons by offering programs that they don't expect in their local communities

invite teens to participate in the Friends group or, even better, on the library Board of Trustees

host teen discussions based on controversial topics that they face in school or at home

make the library a venue for both art and ideas

publicize programs and events that other age groups are participating in so teens can see civic engagement in action

post teen photojournalism on social networking sites to make the community aware of issues that resonate for teens

offer teen-only services, programs, and spaces

We want to help, but don't push us

build partnerships with other community institutions, such as hospitals or senior centers

don't expect teens to have a great deal of free time to dedicate to any library project

take on the unwanted organizational tasks of civic projects, allowing teens to steer the project while not being overwhelmed by it

offer ideas for civic engagement, but only follow up on plans that teens pursue

make sure engagement activities are creative, or speak to real teen concerns

facilitate teen plans for political engagement, such as letter-writing campaigns for teen library budgets

use library bulletin boards and/or websites to announce local opportunities to engage, such as protests, volunteer opportunities, or needed donations

didactic or adult-motivated messages about engagement may alienate or pigeonhole teens; art program "messages" should stem from teen requests of engagement, not adult belief on what teens will benefit from

Libraries can make a difference for us

ensure that teens feel welcome in the library with teen spaces, materials, and programs, as well as librarian attitudes

Theme**Suggested Library Responses**

advocate for teen issues in the library and community

ensure that the library participates in local art or community festivals to build the sense of the library as an artistic community institution

go where teens are with library services instead of waiting for them to come to you

be willing to push the boundaries of traditional library service

offer gaming and social activities as much or more than literacy-based activities

listen

teen librarian should participate in arts programs with teens as equally as possible to build the sense of a shared experience

Does our engagement shift?

take on any teen that offers to volunteer, even if it creates work for you, and make sure their work is recognized in some way

offer ideas on how teens can engage to improve their communities

ask teens to contribute to campaigns, such as “Geek the Library”

ask teens to contribute to or entirely take over the teen library website or Facebook account

ask teens to teach things they’re interested in, or at least mentor other teens

promote a secular version of radical hospitality for teens to welcome other teens to programs

connect library programs with real engagement opportunities (such as a knitted graffiti project after a knitting class)

host read-a-thons that raise money for causes the teens choose

let teens do the book-talking

ask teens to report on teen events both at the library and in the community, on the library website

Table 4. Suggested library responses to this research

There is a danger in planning art programs with a goal of anything beyond the private intrinsic value of art—art for art’s sake. Earl and Schussman’s concerns over how “existing notions of what comprises civic engagement tend to ignore, devalue, and otherwise marginalize ways in which younger citizens are connecting with one another to collectively make a difference in their own worlds” are relevant here.¹⁴ Librarians who attempt to force civic

engagement out of art programs may be disenfranchising teens and their need for self-empowerment and connection on their own terms.¹⁵ Facilitating engagement is different from enforcing it; if teens are not participating in the art programs, it may be because they feel that they will be herded into an adult vision of civic engagement.

Teen librarians already know that the art programs we provide improve the lives of their teens.¹⁶ Librarians may not know why or how exactly the benefits unfold, but they are obvious to anyone who games, does art, or has a lively discussion with a passel of impassioned teenagers. Nevertheless, even a small case study that evaluates the how and why of the benefits of library programs can be reassuring and motivating for librarians. It can be empowering for librarians to recognize that research exists describing how library programs for teens can meet the needs of the community and fulfill the mission of the public library, even when the programs are not obviously literacy-based. Parents, staff members, trustees, funders, other patrons, and even the teens themselves may question what making sock dolls, spine label poetry contests, and photo scavenger hunts have to do with the library. Having a theory of how public library art programs affect teen civic engagement, or at least build social capital and provide the building blocks of civic action, is a valuable tool for librarians who have to answer these questions. At the same time, skepticism is necessary. Future research will need to be careful not to over-emphasize the role of the library program or service in affecting the actions of the patrons or community. Attitudes may be more easily affected than behaviors. In addition, not all teens will be reached by library programs. Participant Ashley believed that art programs can't affect "people [who] are so set that they don't like reading and they don't like hanging out at libraries. There's no way you can change them."□ Four other participants indicated that not every teen can or will be moved by library programs. Future studies should interrogate non-participation and lack of interest in libraries.

Future research

More research is needed to either continue the qualitative study of art programs in public libraries in other types of communities, or to quantitatively evaluate the theory generated here. For example, in this research, two of the teens had very little to say in the focus group interview. They mostly restrained themselves to comments such as "I agree,"□ and offered few opinions, even when asked to do so. This reluctance to speak up could have meant that they disagreed with what was being said, or they were not comfortable speaking on the topics under discussion, or they had nothing to add. They both indicated that someone had already spoken for them when they were asked to expand on various ideas. In future research of this nature, the investigator may prefer to focus on individual interviews. While the focus group interview encouraged a party-like atmosphere aimed at making the participants feel comfortable, some teens dominated the discussion, and others were less willing to speak. Nor did every participant fully participate in the interviews. A few teens stated ideas then retracted them partially, or agreed with ideas in one context, but disagreed in others, so there were occasionally uneven answers to the research questions. In addition, the case study nature of this research calls for further study of the adolescent experience of public library art programs. Future researchers could answer the call in several ways:

- Further case studies are needed to build an analytically generalized theory.
- Quantitative studies involving surveys could be used to nomothetically model a statistical generalization about the validity of the theory.
- Further qualitative studies could examine different aspects of the research question, such as the role the librarian plays in teen civic engagement.

Art programs are a popular way to reach teens in libraries. However, other library activities and services may also affect teens deeply. More research needs to be done on the outcomes of teen reference services, teen gaming programs, teen discussion groups, and teen collections. Libraries may be supporting adolescent development in a variety of cognitive, emotional, or social ways. For example, teen book discussion groups could be examined to see if participants have lower incidences of bullying. Teen perceptions of the young adult book collection could reveal changes in worldview, and art programs could be reexamined in the context of creativity or economic activity within the community. The literature on how library services affect teens is scant, but will hopefully be expanded by YALSA's *Journal for Research on Libraries and Young Adults*. Furthermore, research on how programs affect other populations, including adults and seniors, could focus more on community-based outcome measures. The more research available to practicing librarians on the outcomes of library services, the better we can align these services with their goals and mission.

It is unclear whether the research process of this study or the art programs themselves caused the apparent shifts in civic engagement. From the shifts that are measured in the pre- and post-test surveys, which were administered before the interviews, teens felt that the art programs made the difference. During the interviews, teens explained why the shifts measured in the surveys occurred. The act of asking the teens to participate in a research project, and then asking them questions during interviews, may have impacted their answers—any researcher knows that the act of examining a phenomenon changes it somewhat. Future research may be able to clarify to what extent art programs shift engagement, and to what extent participation in research studies affects teens.

Conclusions

Participant Emily stated that art has “something to do with humanity.”□ Art programs are a fun and safe way for teens to express that humanity and the emotions, fears, and triumphs of being human. Art programs enlighten teens, expand their horizons, and offer a new vision of a community that supports them. Art programs reinforce and expand on the human connections between the participants in these programs. Libraries are well-positioned as non-coercive, free, and relatively unbiased institutions in nearly every community and neighborhood, even those too small to support other cultural institutions. If art programs are going to happen in a free, non-pedagogical, secular, and non-commercial way in small or poor communities, libraries are ready to serve. Even in large or wealthy communities, libraries are already serving. To encourage civic engagement behaviors in teens, libraries have the tools to shift attitudes and build social capital. Participant Eric, who had partaken of library art programs at four different libraries, and who has taught art classes in libraries, sums up the effects of public library art classes on teen civic engagement:

They help with getting people involved and showing them that ... the library's not lame, rather it's one friend drawing another to the library, in getting them involved and like, “Oh, library, cool.”□ Or to somebody who didn't know that [the] library had stuff to offer and they were in there checking books and to see it, “Oh, sweet.”□ And then they get like into the community. They enjoy it, they go to other things, they volunteer. It gets a lot more people active, I think.

Art has an intrinsic value for individuals, whether it is enjoying learning, enjoying creating, or simply enjoying. These intrinsic benefits often spill over into community benefits.¹⁷ Such community benefits can be promoted to funders as a reason for communities to support art programs in public libraries, but will not often be the reason

teens choose to participate in them. Teens will say, “Oh, sweet” □ in response to art programs, and any civic engagement or social capital outcomes must occur free from coercion or didacticism, as a lucky bonus.

Libraries which offer teen-focused art programs are ensuring that an “engaged and diverse set of publics” □ are receiving the tools they need to act within the community and, ultimately, on the behalf of the community.¹⁸ The seven themes identified by the participants in this research describe how avoiding adult domination, finding friends and role models, and expanding the traditional concept of the library from book-place to creation-space can empower and motivate adolescents to create stronger communities.

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Appendix 1: The Survey Instrument

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY

1. When was the last time you attended a program at this library?

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Within the last month | Within the last 6 months | Within the last year | Within the last 3 years | Never |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

2. Please list some of the programs you remember attending:

3. If you are an artist, please check all the appropriate circles to describe the type of art you create:

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visual art, painting, photography, sculpture, etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> Films or videos | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | <input type="checkbox"/> Dance | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing, poetry, essays, stories, etc. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer-assisted art | <input type="checkbox"/> Fiber or bead art | <input type="checkbox"/> Performance art/Acting | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am not an artist. |

4. Please rate how much you agree with the following statements.

| | -1- Strongly Agree | -2- Agree | -3- I Don't Agree or Disagree | -4- Disagree | -5- Strongly Disagree |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| When I am over 18, I am likely to vote in most elections. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| When I am over 18, I will likely remain in the community I live in now. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I am likely to attend a four-year college. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Having a wide variety of friends is important to me. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I am likely to write a letter to the editor, either now or when I'm an adult. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Texting or otherwise staying in constant contact with my friends is important to me. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I am willing to take action in my community to make things better. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I think playing sports, or exercising regularly is important. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Having the latest gadget (phone, gaming console, etc.) is important to me. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I am likely to participate in a protest, march or sit-in. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I am likely to buy the latest fashions. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I am likely to volunteer for some organization, without being required to do so. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I feel like a valued member of my community. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

FILL IN AFTER THE PROGRAM: HOW DID THIS ARTS PROGRAM IMPACT YOU?

5. Please rate how much you agree with the following statements.

| | -1- Strongly Agree | -2- Agree | -3- I Don't Agree or Disagree | -4- Disagree | -5- Strongly Disagree |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| I found this program to be enjoyable. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I found this program to be worthwhile. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I am likely to attend future programs at this library. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| After this program I am more likely to join a local club, organization or group. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| After this program I am more likely to create art than I was before. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| After this program I am more likely to participate in other community events, at the library or elsewhere. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| After this program, I would be more likely to vote (if I could) to increase library funding. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

6. Do you think this program changed your attitudes about anything? If so, tell us what changed:

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANT TO TELL US ABOUT THE PROGRAM AND/OR THE LIBRARY?

7. _____

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY. CHECK OUT THE PROGRESS OF THE STUDY, AND THE RESULTS, ON OUR WEBSITE AT WWW.HORICON.LIB.WI.US.

1. Tell me about your experience of the six art programs you just participated in here at the library.

a. What, if anything, is changed from the beginning of the program to today?

b. Specifically, do you feel closer to or further apart from the other participants, the library, or librarian?

c. Are you more or less likely to do art now or appreciate art now in new ways?

2. Describe what it means to you to be “engaged in your community.” □

a. Do you think that’s different from what adults would consider being engaged?

3. Describe what the phrase “civic engagement” □ means to you.

a. Do you think that’s different from what adults would consider civic engagement?

4. How do you think art affects you?

a. Does it affect your empathy for others?

b. Does it change your mind about anything?

5. Do you feel closer to other people when you look at or experience their art or do art with them?

6. Do you feel more tolerant of others when you experience their art?

7. Do you think art in general can change how you feel about your community?

a. What about participating in art programs with others that you may not normally hang out with?

b. Do art programs like the ones you attended change how you feel about your community?

c. Do they change how likely you are to [do things teens identify as civic or community engagement]?

d. Do you think similar things happen for other people?

8. Can public libraries affect your ideas or feelings about things?

a. What things?

b. Do you think they can affect other people’s ideas or feelings?

9. Can they affect civic/community engagement?

a. How can libraries do better at this?

10. Do public libraries support teens?

a. How can they do this better?

11. How are you engaged either in your community or in the civic way?

a. Do you feel like you can or want to [mention things teens identify as civic or community engagement]?

b. Do you want to be more or less or differently engaged?

c. What stops/helps you?

d. What could be changed in the community to help you become engaged like you want to be?

12. Do adults listen to you?

13. If you made art, do you think adults would pay attention to it?

a. Do you think other teens would?

b. What you think would happen then to your feeling of engagement or being listened to?

14. Do you have a venue to share your opinions? Or your art?

a. Would you share it if you had a venue?

15. Let's talk about respect. Respect others have for you or you have for others, respect you have for the library, or the library has for you, respect you have for the artists we just met or the artists have for you. What's the story there?

16. I gave you guys a survey before the art program started and at the last program. I asked you all sorts of questions and I was a little tricky. I asked some questions that I'm not actually researching—for example, how important you think sports are, or the latest fashions. Those questions are interesting in that they gave a kind of picture of this particular group of people, but you can probably tell from the questions I've been asking during this interview that what I'm really interested in is civic and community engagement. So looking at the questions surrounding civic and community engagement in the surveys, there were some major shifts before and after. I want to ask you why you think these things changed. [Hand out graphs.]

17. What does it mean to be valued by your community?

18. Before the art programs began, several of you indicated that you really disagree with the statement “I feel like a valued member of my community.” After the six programs, no one said they disagreed with that statement, a couple people decided they strongly agreed, more people said they agreed, and everybody else was neutral. Why do you think this changed?

19. The statement “I am willing to take action in my community to make things better” also saw a large shift. Before the programs, some people disagreed with that statement and only a couple strongly agreed. After the six programs, a lot more people strongly agreed and nobody disagreed. Why do you think that happened? What kind of action are we talking here?

20. Other shifts occurred with the question about volunteering and the question about writing a letter to the editor. There was also a little change in people agreeing with the idea of remaining in this community after they turn 18. What do you think happened here?

21. Another change was how many people agreed that they were likely to join a club or participate in community events. Why do you think that changed?

22. Last question: How do you think other teens feel about art, civic engagement, and libraries? And how do you think adults feel about it?



About Anna Lam

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Recent South Korean Immigrant Adolescents' Everyday Life Information Seeking When Isolated from Peers: A Pilot Study

Posted on [September 25, 2012](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



By 'Joung Hwa Koo,' Doctoral Candidate, School of Library & Information Studies, College of Communication & Information, Florida State University

Peers are important to adolescents. This research explores South Korean immigrant adolescents' information seeking in the period of transition before new peer groups are established. In the pilot study described here, South Korean immigrant adolescents between the ages of 10 and 20 who had arrived in the United States within the past two years were contacted and asked to participate. Respondents were administered three research instruments in order to determine their level of isolation. Subjects whose scores satisfied the criteria of isolation were invited to participate in interviews about their information world and practices.

Findings indicate that isolated South Korean immigrant adolescents' main information issues and needs are: (1) to do well academically in order to achieve GPAs and SAT scores that will enable them to attend desired universities; and (2) to make very close friends and develop a social life. In terms of information sources, isolated immigrant adolescents seek information through their parents (especially mothers), regarding them as the most reliable information source available to them, even though they are not satisfied with the information that their parents supply. Related theories and concepts are discussed to show that among South Korean immigrant youth, the two major features of their information practices are passive information seeking and a strong attachment to their mothers.

INTRODUCTION

A salient social feature of teenagers—a strong dependence on peers and their relative lack of dependence on the adult world—is natural and an important phenomenon that contributes to the completion of age-appropriate developmental tasks. Research in the field of Library and Information Studies (LIS) discloses that teens regard their peers as their favorite and most valuable information source from which to acquire necessary information.¹

However, for many reasons, adolescents can find themselves isolated from peers. For example, new immigrant adolescents in the U.S. may experience difficulties in joining established peer groups. This can result in a transitional period in which a peer social group is unavailable to them. When this happens, how do they compensate for this lost but significant information source? How do they seek information needed to cope with their daily lives?

To answer the above questions, a pilot study was undertaken to explore South Korean immigrant adolescents' everyday life information seeking with particular interest in the period of transition before new peer groups are established. The research provides a preliminary understanding of isolated adolescents' information worlds by describing their information environments and information seeking behavior: what their daily life is like, how

they cope with problems, and how they apply information to both. Three scales were used to measure potential participants' degree of isolation in order to ensure that only subjects experiencing isolation were invited to participate in the study. This article describes the participants' information worlds within the constraints of social isolation and relates findings to relevant theories in LIS.

As a pilot study, this investigation also tests the feasibility of the research procedures used and informs a larger study exploring the salient features of immigrant youths' information behavior. Therefore, it will provide a preliminary understanding of isolated adolescents' information worlds by depicting young South Korean immigrants' information needs, and how they seek and use information. Fundamentally, this study will inform librarians, educators, and others who plan information services and instruction for youth groups by giving them a basic knowledge of the adolescent immigrants' information worlds.⁶

BACKGROUND & LITERATURE REVIEW

‘Adolescence

Adolescence is considered as a transitional period between childhood and adulthood in one's life span. Developmental psychologists have divided this life stage into three phases: early adolescence (10-15 years of age), traditional or mid-adolescence (15-18 years), and late adolescence or youth (19-22 years).² However, it is difficult to define the exact age range of adolescence, not only because this life stage is the middle of a developmental continuum but also because individuals master developmental tasks at different rates. Also, this developmental period may vary due to the influence of social milieus and cultural contexts.³ Thus, World Health Organization (WHO) roughly defines adolescence as the life stage between 10 and 20 years of age in line with current children's earlier puberty and rapid physical maturation.⁴ Therefore, in this research, the term “adolescent”⁵ is broadly defined as people between 10 to 20 years of age.

While adolescence is seen as a stage, it is not conceptualized as a chronological period or static temporal zone between childhood and adulthood, but rather as a “growing and developmental”⁶ transition that possesses unique physical, cognitive, and socio-affective characteristics.⁵ Physically, adolescents start puberty and become sexually mature, typically between ages 10 and 14 for girls and ages 12 and 16 for boys. But the speed and degree of physical maturity affects their peer relationships. Perkins notes, “Adolescents who mature at a slower or faster rate than others will be dropped from one peer group and generally will enter a peer group of similar maturity.”⁶ Cognitively, adolescents start acquiring the ability to think abstractly, reason logically, draw conclusions from the information available, and begin to understand metaphorical expressions, such as love, logical proofs, and value.⁷ Thus, adolescents begin a struggle to discover their identity, the meaning of self, and where their future lies. Questions such as “What kind of a person am I?”⁸ “How do others perceive me?”⁹ and “What will I do in the future?”¹⁰ are common.⁸ However, the similarities in the level of cognitive development or academic achievement strongly affect their relationships with peers.⁹ Socio-affectively adolescents seek to create a stable identity within their society. Adolescents, seeking autonomy from their parents, turn to their peers to solve their socio-affective needs and problems like doubts or daily trivial tasks.¹⁰ Through relationships with peers, adolescents develop social skills (such as how to get along with others), develop prototypes for adult relationships, experience autonomy (acting outside of the control of adults and parents), and witness the strategies others use to cope with similar problems.¹¹

In line with the above features of adolescence, the most important influences in the composition of peer groups are physical, cognitive, and socio-affective “similarity.”¹² The term *peer* already captures the meaning of a small group of “similarly”¹³ aged, fairly close friends, sharing the “same”¹⁴ activities.¹³ The issue of similarity

offers not only positive impacts like deep intimacy and psychological stability within the same cliques, but also negative results like bullying or alienation caused by “difference.” □ In that sense, new immigrant adolescents’ search for intimacy based on similarity seems to negatively affect their inclusion in peer groups. For this reason, immigrant adolescents are vulnerable more frequently and seriously than the general adolescent population. Immigrant adolescents’ unique characteristics—based on different ethnic and social backgrounds—can result in isolation or bullying rather than recognition of their uniqueness and valuable assets.

Immigrant Adolescents

Studies of immigrant adolescents extend beyond the general domain of Developmental Psychology and have been conducted in the areas of Cross-Cultural Psychology, Multicultural School Psychology, and Racial and Ethnic Minority Psychology. Scholars in these areas have focused on research questions related to immigrant children’s adjustment in new environments, such as: “How is the process of assimilation different for immigrants?” □ “How do immigrant family dynamics change after migration?” □ “What do we know about immigrant families and how they can contribute to their children’s education and development?” □ “How are immigrant adolescents forming their identities?” □ “How do culture, gender, and socioeconomic background impact immigrant adolescents’ educational adaptation and development?” □ and “How can we build programs that can promote immigrant youths’ positive development?” □¹⁴ In sum, the main concepts used in these studies are “assimilation,” □ “acculturation,” □ “adoption,” □ and “multicultural identity.” □ In the area of adolescent mental health, studies have focused on immigrant adolescents’ severe stressors and coping patterns, abnormal behaviors in new environments, and mental health programs.¹⁵

Considering the key issues from previous studies, it appears that immigrant adolescents face double burdens in that they must master developmental tasks like other adolescents as well as adjust to new environments and cultures. Their double struggle to seek their identity and solve daily life issues in new and unfamiliar surroundings may require different information sources and seeking patterns. Under this basic assumption, the study focuses on describing South Korean immigrant adolescents’ unique features in their information seeking.

Immigrant Adolescents’ ELIS

ELIS Model and Related Studies

Though students, scholars, and professionals continue to be the focus of interest for much of the information behavior research, recent studies have looked at ordinary people, minors, and minority groups like immigrants.¹⁶ This gradual transition from targeted user groups to the general public has led to changes in the methodological approaches and perspectives used to interpret phenomena related to information behavior. In this research milieu, the Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS) model was developed by Savolainen in the mid-1990s.¹⁷ Savolainen interprets information as “being constructed through involvement in life’s activities, problems, tasks, and social and technological structures, as opposed to being independent and context free.” □¹⁸ The ELIS model was initiated by the need “to elaborate the role of social and cultural factors that affect people’s way of preferring and using information sources in everyday settings.” □¹⁹ Therefore, ELIS enables us to appreciate information behavior as part of the holistic human communication process mixing cognitive, social, cultural, organizational, and affective factors.²⁰ Because of its use in exploring the information world of normal laymen or socio-affectively marginalized groups like immigrant children, ELIS is a suitable lens to comprehend immigrant adolescents’ daily life hassles or their information world.

In this article, the concept of ELIS is used in its broadest sense to include “informal” □ information seeking (or non-seeking/avoiding) in daily life contexts or the social perspectives rather than the limited concepts and components of the initial ELIS model suggested by Savolainen.²¹ Therefore, the term ELIS used in this study refers to informal information behaviors in social perspectives, as has been suggested in other scholarly work such as Fisher’s Information Grounds,²² Chatman’s Information Poverty,²³ Chatman’s Life in the Round,²⁴ and Williamson’s Ecological Model of Information Use.²⁵

‘Studies of Adolescents and Immigrants’ ELIS

Most studies of children’s information behavior have been performed in the school setting with the purpose of learning activities or for school library services. However, some studies of youth information behavior have examined the ELIS needs of young people. For example, Julien used Dervin’s Sense-Making to investigate female high school seniors’ information behavior in decision-making for their future careers.²⁶ Julien described adolescents’ information seeking as a help-seeking process and demonstrated that female high school seniors do not know where to go for help in their decision-making. The study demonstrated that the trustworthiness of information sources is critical to the usefulness of the help received and suggests that information providers improve information delivery for adolescents by taking these findings into account.

Todd and Edwards conducted a study of adolescents’ information seeking of drug information.²⁷ Within the framework of Chatman’s theory of Information Poverty, the research was initiated to examine the gap between information seeking and information use. The study concluded that adolescents actually live in an information-poor world devoid of sources that address their concerns about drugs, which are deeply embedded in peer groups’ social norms and developmental tasks. The major goal of this study was to discover the characteristics of information that adolescents desire, finding that teens prefer “contextualized and personal information that is also viewed by them as credible, rather than lists of salient facts presented in a bland and objective way, that answer their probing, inquiring questions and enable them to build an intimate and shareable knowledge about drugs.” □²⁸

Agosto and Hughes-Hassell²⁹ and Hughes-Hassell and Agosto³⁰ explored urban teens’ ELIS and proposed two models: a theoretical model of urban teen development, and an experimental model of urban teen’s ELIS. They described ELIS as “facilitating the multifaceted teen-to-adult maturation process.” □³¹ The studies revealed that urban teens engage in ELIS to satisfy their developmental tasks and needs, such as formulating their self-identity or navigating social norms.

Fisher, Marcoux, Meyer, and Landry³² explored tweens’ ELIS using qualitative methods. Because tweens see trust as a social cost and an important factor in selecting information sources, the study suggested that it is important to know how early adolescents interpret the value of the information sources they select. The researchers found that “tweens differentiate between the sorts of questions and information asked of peers and those asked of adults, that the curiosity-fuelled drive toward information seeking that is characteristic of this age group was tempered by peer pressure, and that adults frequently give children information they either do not want or regard as incorrect.” □³³

Among the few studies of immigrant children’s ELIS,³⁴ Chu studied immigrant children’s information literacy and their role as information mediators for supplying information to their family within the context of daily life.³⁵ The study discovered a unique phenomenon in immigrant families: immigrant children act as mediators with teachers, employers, and others to interpret, translate, and locate information to facilitate the demands of their new life for

their family's elders. Chu suggested strategies to extend the information services of libraries, using Immigrant Children Mediators (ICM) to bridge the literacy gap between immigrant family and their community.

Even though the main targeted populations were not adolescents, there are some earlier studies in LIS that explored immigrants' information worlds and which inform the current study. Courtright examined health information seeking behaviors among Latin American newcomers using the framework of social networks, and perceptions and uses of institutions and organizations.³⁶ She found that due to barriers to accessing formal information systems, such as unfamiliarity with the local health care system and insufficient English skills, immigrants usually use interpersonal social networks to access information. Courtright pointed out that the result of information poverty is that Latino newcomers use incredibly low-quality information via interpersonal social networks, and suggested alternative information services for this group.

Fisher, Durrance, and Hinton investigated how immigrants and their families benefit from programs in literacy and coping skills run by the Queens Borough Public Library in New York.³⁷ One interesting finding was that immigrants' first need is *not* information about jobs, resettlement, or health, but a need to feel secure and welcomed. These demands relate to socio-affective securities and a sense of belonging; they foster desires to meet people who are experiencing similar circumstances, to befriend others, and to feel part of a new and larger community. This research provides important insight regarding what immigrants' essential needs are, and how future researchers can conduct research to explore immigrants' ELIS.

In another study of immigrants' information behavior, Fisher et al.³⁸ investigated the information grounds of migrant Hispanic farm workers through field observations and interviews. Their study revealed that Hispanic migrants emphasize interpersonal sources such as church, school, and the workplace, and prefer to obtain information face-to-face. The study described how immigrants' dependence on interpersonal networks for seeking information results in information poverty.

RESEARCH METHOD

Sampling

The population of interest in this study is South Korean immigrant adolescents who are: (1) between 10 to 20 years of age and (2) who have arrived in the United States within the previous two years. Because new immigrant adolescent populations are both hard to reach and potentially hard to identify, purposive sampling and snowballing sampling were used.³⁹ To find representative subjects, Korean immigrant teens at a local Korean church were recruited to participate in the study. Each potential participant's level of isolation was measured using the three scales described below.

Three Scales—Measures of Social Isolation

The three instruments used to measure adolescents' isolation were the Dejong Giervard Loneliness Scale, the Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ), and the Social Competence Scale. All of the scales were translated into Korean to avoid potential misunderstandings of the questions due to language differences.⁴⁰ The researcher read the questionnaires in Korean and recorded participants' responses in Korean as well.

(1) The De Jong Giervard Loneliness Scale⁴¹: This scale was developed as a self-report instrument to assist with the diagnosis of loneliness and to provide a means of quantifying the severity of the loneliness. There are two components of loneliness in the scale: emotional loneliness and social loneliness. "Emotional loneliness is stemming from the absence of an intimate relationship or close emotional attachment (e.g., partner or best

friends), and social loneliness is stemming from absence of a broader group of contacts or network (e.g., colleagues, neighbors).”□⁴²People with scores above 6 are regarded as highly isolated people.

(2) SSQ⁴³: The SSQ was developed to measure the functions of social networks. Each question asks about people in the respondents’ environment, who provides them with help or support, and how satisfied they are overall. A low score means that they are socially isolated; people with scores below 4 in support and below 3 in satisfaction are regarded as highly isolated people.

(3) Walker-McConnell developed the “Walker-McConnell Scale for Social Competence and School Adjustment.”□⁴⁴This scale was used in this study in order to rule out subjects whose social isolation was originally caused by their personalities or dispositional problems in social skills, regardless of their environment. Thus, the scale was used to determine whether potential subjects have the basic skills to socialize with people in the school settings. The possible score ranges are highly functional (160-120), average (120-90), at-risk (90-50), and high-risk (50-32).

Scales Results Degrees of Social Loneliness

The results of testing revealed that three of the subjects recruited for the study suffered from low social support and high social isolation/loneliness, yet their personal social competence skills to adjust to the school environment and to make friends were high. This indicates that their socialization skills are well-developed but are not being used in their new social context. Therefore, the researcher regarded these three South Korean immigrant adolescents as appropriate subjects for the research and selected them for further in-depth interviews.

Table 1. Results of the Three Surveys

| | David* | Ethan* | Philip* | Criteria |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------------|---|
| Social Isolation | 4 | 6 | 8 | Min. 0: not lonely,Max. 11: extremely lonely > 6: highly isolated and lonely 4-6: isolated and lonely <4: normal |
| Social Support | 1 (2.3) | 0.16 (4.5) | 0.17 (0.83) | Max. 9: high support Min. 0: low support < 4: low support and high loneliness (Satisfaction of the support Max. 6, < 3: high dissatisfaction) |
| Social Competence | 127 | 124 | 127 | 160-120: highly functional 120-90: average (100) 90-50: at-risk 50-32: high-risk |

* The names are fictitious to protect against disclosure of the subjects' identities.

Data Collection and Analysis

To gather data from the selected subjects, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule to guide the interview process. The main categories of questions focused on: (1) demographic information and the journey of immigration; (2) the meaning of information; (3) current life problems and information needs; (4) information sources and channels; and (5) evaluation of used information sources and channels. To ensure reliability, questions were repeated in different expressions to check for consistency in the responses. The interviews were conducted one-on-one in Korean and were audio recorded. Each interview was held at the participant's home and took approximately three hours to complete.

The interview data were transcribed in Korean, and then translated into English. Transcribed texts in English were coded and categorized using the constant comparative method. Comparisons between the three transcripts were also made. Analysis resulted in the identification of five key themes.

Methodological Limitations

This study methodology has several limitations. First, there is the problem of generalizability which is always associated with qualitative methods. However, the purpose of this qualitative research is not to be able to generalize to a larger population, but rather to obtain a deep understanding of the particular behavioral and social activities of this special group. Therefore, the small sample size is reasonable, allowing for the collection of in-depth data that describes these South Korean adolescent immigrants' information worlds deeply.

Second, the potential for researcher bias must be considered. Bias may occur during the process of organizing and interpreting the interview transcripts and in applying theoretical frameworks. It is possible to interpret the interviewees' narratives according to the researcher's own lens rather than through the eyes of the interviewees. To guard against such possibilities, in thinking about the data, the researcher engaged in continuous self-evaluation and continuously referred to various theories and references related to adolescents with multicultural backgrounds.

Finally, there is the question of the honesty of the respondents and researcher's confidence in their ability to be candid. The researcher worked to develop rapport with each participant and emphasized the promise of the interviewees' privacy and confidence through the consent and assent process and before the interview began. All information provided by participants remains confidential and no potentially identifying information is included in this report. Fictitious names are used by the researcher to protect subject identities.

RESULTS

General Features: Demographic Information and Immigration Journey

Demographic Information

As shown in Table 2, all of the subjects are Korean male adolescents between the ages of 14 and 16. With the exception of Philip, who was born in the U.S. and currently lives there with his family, the other subjects are resident aliens and reside in the U.S. without their family members. While all of the young men speak English,

Korean is their native language. All three young men regard their social economic status as between middle and upper class; all of their parents are college-educated and have professional jobs.

Journey of Immigration

Philip’s story: Philip was born in the U.S. while his father was studying at a graduate school in Ames, Iowa. Four years later, after his father had earned a Ph.D. degree, his family returned to South Korea and Philip grew up in a small urban town near the capital. To provide the best educational environment for Philip and his younger brother—specifically to protect them from the negative impact of the intense academic competition found in South Korean high schools and to provide them with an alternative and holistic learning experience—his parents decided to immigrate to the U.S. Philip’s father resigned his job as a high-ranking government officer in his home country and is studying in graduate school once again. His family has lived in the United States for about two years.

Ethan’s story: Ethan came to the United States in order to avoid the extreme competition found in high schools in South Korea. Ethan’s family believes a quality education in the States will allow him to enter a good university in South Korea or an Ivy League school in the U.S. With the assistance of a Korean academic broker that connected him with private high schools and ESL programs in the U.S., Ethan moved without his family to a small town in the Midwestern United States where he studied for one year. Recently, he transferred to a more prestigious private high school in the southeastern region of the U.S. After graduating from a “good” university, he wants to attend a graduate school with an MBA program. Currently Ethan lives with his legal guardian and the guardian’s family as arranged by an academic broker.

David’s story: David also came to the U.S. to receive the benefits of the U.S. educational system. Like Ethan, he originally arrived in the Midwest and after one year, he too moved to the southeastern region of the U.S. to attend a more prestigious private high school. He lives with his American legal guardian’s family as arranged by an academic broker in Korea.

Table 2. Personal Information of Three Subjects

| | David | Ethan | Philip |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Age | 16 years old | 16 years old | 14 years old |
| Grade | 11th grade | 11th grade | 8th grade |
| Gender | Male | Male | Male |
| Citizenship | Resident Alien | Resident Alien | U.S. Citizen |
| Ethnicity | Asian | Asian | Asian |
| Primary/Second Language | Korean/English | Korean/English | Korean/English |
| Journey of Migration | Busan, South Korea (Hometown) → Midwestern region → Southeastern region of the U.S. | Seoul, South Korea (Hometown) → Midwestern region → Southeastern region of the U.S. | Ames, IA (Hometown) → Gunpo South Korea → Southeastern region of the U.S. |
| Family Status | David lives with his | Ethan lives with his | Philip has moved and |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| | guardian family; his family members—parents and an elder sister—live in their home country, South Korea. | guardian family member; his family members—parents and two siblings—live in their home country, South Korea. | lives with all his family members—parents and a younger brother—in a southeast region of the U.S. |
| Socio-Economic Status | Between middle and upper class | Between middle and upper class | Between middle and upper class |
| Parents' Job | Physician (father); Housewife (mother) | CEO in their own company (father); Housewife (mother) | Doctoral student/ Lecturer (father); Housewife (mother) |
| Parents' Education | Graduated from higher education (B.A.; B.A.) | Graduated from higher education (B.A.; B.A.) | Graduated from higher education (Ph.D.; B.A.) |
| Purpose of Immigration | Alternative and better education; to enter a good college | Alternative and better education; to enter a good college | Alternative and better education; to enter a good college |
| Duration of Time in the U.S. | 1 year and 2 months | 1 year and 4 months | 2 years |

New South Korean Immigrant Adolescents' Information World

Current Issues and Information Needs

The subjects' current ELIS information needs fall into two categories: (1) how to study in English and perform well enough to achieve a high GPA and earn high SAT scores; and (2) how to make real and close friends. Their ELIS issues represent two basic needs. The first represents a cognitive need. They want to do well in high school in order to earn a place at a good university; this is their original purpose for immigrating to the U.S. The second is a socio-affective need. They have a strong desire to connect with their peers, to make close friends, and to socialize with them.

ELIS Need 1: How to study in English and perform well enough to achieve a high GPA and earn high SAT scores

These young men do not believe they have any barriers which affect their ability to communicate with their classmates in English. They are accustomed to communicating in English, and judge themselves to be fluent or semi-fluent English speakers. In addition, they do not function as ICMs (Immigrant Children Mediators), which many immigrant children experience because of their parents' English-language limitations.⁴⁵ Their parents and legal guardians have fluent English communication skills. Nevertheless, their first ELIS concern is to achieve their original purpose of immigration—to improve their English skills, achieve a good GPA, earn high SAT scores, and then go on to a good university:

“I plan to take the test the SAT in December. I feel a little nervous about that. But compared to the degree and tension of the stress that I experienced in South Korea for the studies and exams, the current pressure is much weaker. But the main reason that I came to the U.S. is for this. So I am still worried about earning SAT scores to enter a good university.” □ (Ethan).

“The basic strategy to earn high SAT scores is to improve English. But there is no strategic way and shortcut to improve English. So I just do it by myself.” □ (David)

“The study should be done independently.” □ (Philip)

ELIS Need 2: How to make real and close friends

These three young men are concerned about making close friends. While they think they have many acquaintances at school, none of them believe they have any “close” □ and “real” □ friends. They feel lonely and want to develop American friends who will invite them to belong to their cliques or clubs.

“Almost all classmates are very kind to me, but I don’t think they all are my friends. It seems that in their words and smile, truth lacks. I just say hello to everyone actively, but they have something different with Korean friends. I cannot explain what the difference is and what the reasons are, but it is certain that there are invisible and unspoken walls with American classmates.” □ (David)

“Sometimes classmates act very kindly, but suddenly they ignore me. When we played basketball, I committed some fouls. They treated me very harshly and yelled at me, “Asian! Asian!” □ instead of calling my name. It hurt me. Whenever I experience similar things, I feel deeply lonely. But I have nothing to manage the feelings.” □ (Ethan)

Information Sources and Channels

These young men regard information as anything that helps them make a decision, from a map to previous experiences that help guide their new lives and their acculturation into American society.

“Information may be any knowledge or map. If we go into a new wonderland and do not have any information about that, we might not behave normally because we have no idea about the customs of the land. If we have information, we can act rightly in the wonderland or new world.” □ (Ethan)

“Computer data? As soon as I heard the term of *information*, it reminded me of the digits 0101010101. It is like computer data. [Or] it seems anything to help acting and living.” □ (David)

They view their parents in South Korea and their teachers in the U.S. as the most trustworthy information sources. Instead of looking to peers or friends to help them solve problems related to school or to daily life, they choose to talk with their parents and teachers.

All of these young men view their parents, especially their mothers, as the most helpful and trustworthy source of information when they are in trouble. Though David and Ethan live far away from their parents, they frequently ask for advice on all kinds of daily problems via the telephone. If the topics they seek are too sensitive to share with their mothers, such as questions about girlfriends or puberty, they do not talk with or take counsel with anyone.

“I think I am a blessed man because my parents, especially my mom, are nice people. So I have little experience of rebellion against my parents. Sometimes I feel the gap of generation when we go shopping to choose clothes or when they urge me to eat insipid healthy foods. But I understand such nagging because all of their statements are for me and finally the only person I can trust in the world is my parents.” □ (Ethan)

“Even though I dislike my mom’s nagging about my activities and her interrupting my life, I finally seek mom and ask information and advice about my daily life problems.” □ (Philip)

When they have specific questions about their studies, they either ask their parents or the teachers and counselors at their schools. They report feeling more comfortable talking with their teachers about homework and tests than with peers. They believe their teachers help them willingly, and report having no affective or cultural barriers in accessing teachers and counselors.

“Also, I get information from mom about school works.” □ (Ethan)

“Because almost all teachers are very kind, I often ask teachers about homework or unclear problems.” □ (Philip)

Regarding their socio-affective needs, the young men do not seem to seek information sources to help them. Instead, they are convinced that nothing can help them make friends and friendship cannot be earned by human effort or intention. In order to release their stress and overcome their loneliness, they usually engage in hobbies, such as playing the guitar and computer games, or just do their homework.

“I usually have hanged [sic] out with friends to release stress in South Korea. But because in the U.S. there are no friends to talk with about my personal issues, I usually lie in bed and stay alone for hours. I trust my parents but I could not talk to them about my stress or fatigue. I just talk with [my parents] about financial needs or daily problems at school. About my mental or emotional burden or emptiness, I don’t talk with mom.” □ (David)

“I do not seek friends to share my inner heart, actually. I feel a big difference and gap in the way of thinking of American friends. Whenever I meet [American] classmates, I feel a kind of pressure to show them I must be a cool guy. Thus, I do not meet friends to release the stress. I want to make friends and share my thoughts but I just stay at home.” □ (Ethan)

“I just do computer games during one or two hours whenever I feel lonely and bored. If so, mom always nags about that. Because of it, we frequently quarrel.” □ (Philip)

For daily questions, miscellaneous issues, or to satisfy a sudden curiosity, they search Internet sites like Google and Naver, a popular Korean Internet portal site. They never think of the library as an information source to help them with their decision-making or school activities but as a kind of place for studying silently. Librarians are regarded as book deliverers and keepers. In these isolated immigrant adolescents’ information worlds, the library is not an information mediator to satisfy their current information needs.

Satisfaction with Information Sources

In fulfilling their cognitive needs or answering questions related to schoolwork, each of the subjects demonstrated satisfaction with the information sources—parents and teachers—they usually use and seek. However, they did not express the same satisfaction with the sources they turned to for their socio-affective needs. Their passive coping strategies for overcoming their severe loneliness and isolation—playing the guitar, self-talking, or staying home—could not solve their current problems.

“The only person I can trust is mom. But if I ask mom any advice about human relationships, mom starts nagging me instead of consoling me. So I just write down my thoughts in blogs or paper, play the guitar, and play computer games. After I play the guitar for two or three hours, I feel better temporally, but the problems do still remain. I think it is not the best way, but I don’t have another option either.” □ (David)

“For the information regarding the SAT, I seek information through my host because he is a high school teacher and has experiences sending his daughter and son to good universities. I trust almost that about 90% of his information is true and precise. But regarding puberty, sexual desire, or my girlfriend, I cannot say to mom or host at all. Whenever the issues are reminded of me, I try to forget them by studying very hard.”□ (Ethan)

DISCUSSION

Unique Features of South Korean Immigrant Adolescents' Information Seeking

Attachment to Parents: Psychological Regress vs. Cultural Attributes

The most consistent feature of prior adolescent information behavior research has been the information source they most frequently use and trust: their peers. But the information source that these South Korean isolated immigrant adolescents seek most frequently is their parents, especially their mothers. Even though their physical, cognitive, and affective development appears to be normal, all of the subjects seem to be regressively dependent on their parents and to show a temporal abnormal behavior in their strong emotional attachment to their mothers. It may be possible to interpret the phenomenon of their attachment to mother and family in two dimensions: psychological and socio-cultural.

In terms of the psychological dimension, these young immigrant adolescents' strong dependence on their mothers bears a similarity to symptoms of Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD). RAD is a kind of disturbance of social interaction caused by the neglect of a child's basic physical and emotional needs, particularly during infancy. For instance, a child placed in an orphanage at birth and raised by multiple caretakers without primary parent-figures can develop RAD. The child's excessive attachment to the mother or guardians can also result from a mother leaving her babies in public nursery rooms or neglecting their need for physical safety and emotional bonds.⁴⁶ The subjects in this study were not assessed for RAD and the diagnosis of psychological disorders is outside the scope of the study reported here. This may be a topic for further research in developmental psychology.

Attachment to their mothers is related to the feeling of security, one of the most basic human needs.⁴⁷ In general, when students transfer to new schools or environments, there is a tendency for temporal developmental regression such as excessive attachment to their mothers rather than seeking autonomy or independence.⁴⁸ For the immigrant adolescents who participated in this study, daily life is totally different from that of their home country, even though school activities appear similar. The basic daily work that they could perform independently and easily in their home country—going to school, making close friends, and being involved in school activities—became life problems and burdens that they cannot overcome without parental assistance and support in the new country. Their current isolated and stressful environments make them feel that their physical and emotional security is jeopardized. In addition, they are living without parents in the new environment, which exposes them to feelings of vulnerability. While Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs in his *Theory of Human Motivation*⁴⁹ is not deeply analyzed here, he notes that people cannot seek higher level needs such as autonomy or independence before the basic needs—such as belonging and security—are satisfied. Insecurity and lack of social confidence may be partly why these students turn to parents instead of peers even though reaching out to peers might reduce their sense of isolation.

In terms of the socio-cultural dimension, it is possible to interpret the phenomenon of dependence on parents as a cultural difference reflecting the closeness and bonds of Asian families. Actually, Claes explored the differences in interpersonal relationship of adolescents from Canada, Belgium, and Italy.⁵⁰ The study revealed that Italian adolescents had very high level of closeness with all members of their families: “Italian adolescents clearly differed

from Belgians and Canadians in the level of intimacy of the conversation with members of the family...on the other hand, Canadian adolescents had the most frequent and longest daily contact with their friends and they shared more activities with their friends than either of the other groups... Belgian adolescents were found to adopt a middle position between two extremes: they chose equally often a parent and a friend as the person closest to them.”⁵¹ Therefore, it is possible that these new immigrant adolescents’ dependence on parents rather than peers or friends is a feature of Asian or Korean family culture rather than an abnormal behavior caused by social isolation and vulnerability.

Passive Information-Seeking and Negative Coping Strategies: Information Poverty

The results of the interviews show that these South Korean immigrant adolescents prefer interpersonal and informal sources to formal information sources such as libraries. The phenomenon of using limited informal information sources and channels such as parents may be caused by human nature, as described in Zipf’s “principle of least effort.”⁵² But it can also be interpreted as the outcome of typical information poverty by limited communication channels, one of chronic problems in immigrants or minority societies.⁵³

Beyond investigating the main reasons why new immigrant adolescents choose such information channels, it is at least certain that these South Korean immigrant adolescents seek information passively to solve their problems. Even though they are not satisfied with the information they seek and receive mainly from their mothers, they continue to use the same sources and seeking methods and do not experiment with other approaches that might relieve their social isolation and stress. Coping theories in psychology explain why people may “avoid” information, thus defending themselves against the discomfort they feel when seeking information in order to prevent further negative feelings (e.g., fear, insecurity, stress), even though their need for information to overcome their negative and difficult situations is strong.⁵⁴ Vulnerable populations have a tendency to use emotion-focused coping strategies like avoiding information or ignoring realities rather than problem-focused coping strategies like seeking information.⁵⁵ All interviewees focused on their emotions rather than on their realities or problems and then chose to seek information sources passively. This approach exacerbates immigrant adolescents’ poverty in terms of their information world resulting in limited information sources and/or communication channels.

To master adolescents’ developmental tasks, it is very important to make friends.⁵⁶ The basic purpose of all the study subjects’ immigration to the U.S. is to nurture balanced growth and receive the benefit of a better education that will serve the multiple dimensions of cognition, emotion, volition, and socialization. Ironically, these respondents are experiencing a dearth of socio-affective growth in response to isolation from peers even though the reason they immigrated to the U.S. is to receive holistic and balanced growth through better education. Therefore, it is important for information professionals to consider both the information sources these young people demand and seek shallowly, as well as to scrutinize the basic but multi-faceted needs of their developmental stage, and then to provide information sources and guidelines that help them satisfy these needs.

Limitation and Further Research

As already mentioned above, this study was conducted using a very small sample due to the difficulty in identifying immigrant adolescents who meet the criteria of the study. While this study made it possible to test the feasibility of the research procedures and produced useful findings, further research is required that incorporates a larger sample as well as including immigrant adolescents who represent other ethnic backgrounds. This study focused only on South Korean immigrants and so it is not possible to generalize to other immigrant populations. In further research, a sample that included various ethnic groups would help to establish whether the attachment

to parents, especially the mother, is a cultural artifact, a normal consequence of immigration, or is evidence of RAD symptoms.

Second, as partially mentioned in the discussion, this study focused on describing the phenomena related to information seeking rather than exploring and analyzing the reasons for such behaviors. Further study should focus on understanding why immigrant youth seek particular types of information in special contexts using a variety of research methods, such as longitudinal or comparative approaches. For instance, in the case of adolescents' attachment to their mothers, further research can diagnose the degree of attachment by using an attachment measurement scale.⁵⁷ The study could also determine the extent to which such behavior is normal or abnormal. Even though immigrant adolescents demonstrate normal attachment to parents, if they still depend on their parents as their primary information sources, the research will be able to focus on their social affects or to find relevant theories to interpret the reasons behind this distinctive behavior.

CONCLUSION

Through literature reviews on immigrants and adolescents' information behavior and actual interviews with isolated recent South Korean immigrant adolescents, this research described and analyzed immigrant adolescents' information worlds. It found that South Korean adolescent immigrants who are isolated from peers seek different information sources, such as their parents, and differ from general U.S. adolescents by passively coping with their problems by seeking limited information sources/channels to overcome their fundamental problems.

Further studies with more varied subjects and samples are required to draw a holistic picture of socio-affectively vulnerable adolescents' ELIS behaviors. Such research would contribute to the exploration of the correlations between adolescents' socio-affective conditions and their information seeking behaviors. Future studies will also enable teachers, librarians, and other information professionals to support immigrant adolescents' abundant information needs and their healthy growth and development.

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