

## **From Dickens to 9/11: Exploring Graphic Nonfiction to Support the Secondary-School Curriculum**

Posted on [May 5, 2014](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



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### **Abstract**

Graphic nonfiction has been under-researched for content-area instruction, yet these hybrid texts may motivate reluctant readers as they blend elements of art, journalism, and scholarship. This study aimed to determine the appeal and utility of graphic nonfiction for teaching content concepts. It was collaboratively conducted by a literacy researcher and a library and information science researcher. The multimedia perspective of the New Literacies Studies informed the work. Graphic nonfiction titles *Charles Dickens: Scenes from an Extraordinary Life* and *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* were compared to terms/concepts in a literature textbook, a nonfiction trade book, and *The 9/11 Report*. This study illustrates the utility of graphic nonfiction for teaching content concepts. Students can learn key concepts and be motivated by these alternative texts. This study also demonstrated the need to include original source documents, textbooks, and graphic nonfiction to provide varying presentations of and perspectives on content concepts.

### **Introduction**

Recognizing the need to motivate adolescents, researchers have recommended using multiple texts for content instruction (Stahl and Shanahan 2004). Literacy researchers have suggested that alternative texts, such as trade books and original source documents, can be used to supplement textbooks to provide multiple perspectives (Stahl and Shanahan 2004), allow for constructions of knowledge through cross-text comparisons (Spoehr and Spoehr 1994), and foster deep understandings of content concepts (Spiro et al. 2004). Incorporating ordinary texts of everyday life can provide rich conceptual knowledge and engage students' curiosity (Walker, Bean, and Dillard 2010).

In considering multiple texts for content instruction, graphic nonfiction has been underused and under-researched (Lapp et al. 2012). Yet these hybrid texts may motivate reluctant adolescent readers as they blend elements of art, journalism, and scholarship (Butler 2011). Graphic nonfiction promotes multimodal learning and has been credited with increasing students' understanding by facilitating critical comparisons between words and images (Buckingham 2003). Graphic nonfiction has been found to be engaging for reluctant male readers (Griffith 2010), English Language Learners (Bridges 2009; Chun 2009), and readers with learning disabilities (Griffith

2010), but does not appear to have been systematically studied as a resource for at-risk secondary students in content learning.

Yet graphic nonfiction may help to reach goals for learning in both language arts and social studies and may be the most appropriate resource for doing so. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) have documented the need for students to attain multimodal literacies to construct meaning and gain understanding from information presented in a variety of media formats (Rycik 2008). Graphic nonfiction may be a promising genre to engage adolescents toward these visions. The visual emphasis, accuracy, and engaging writing in graphic nonfiction make this type of expository text appealing and comprehensible (Gill 2009) and can ease students into interacting around complex or sensitive issues (Christenson 2006). Historical events or issues may contain experiences or actions that are too complex, too violent, or too tragic to explain in words. Visual elements and contemporary portrayals in graphic nonfiction allow readers to use both text and images to build understandings of difficult or distressing concepts (Bridges 2009; Frey and Fisher 2004)

## Purpose

This study aimed to determine the appeal and utility of graphic nonfiction in relation to other types of nonfiction texts (i.e., textbooks, trade books, and original source documents). We were interested in determining the utility of graphic nonfiction for teaching content concepts and for motivating at-risk adolescents. Our study posed the following questions: What concepts are presented in graphic nonfiction that would support the secondary-school curriculum for social studies and English/language arts? How do the range and frequency of concepts and the format features found in graphic nonfiction compare to the presentation of concepts in academic textbooks or trade books?

## Theoretical Framework

The perspective of the New Literacies Studies (New London Group, Literacy Institute of Australia, and Culture 1995) that expands the definition of text to include visual images informed the study. These literacies include multiple forms of textual representations, including visual images—such as graphics, pictures, and diagrams—as well as auditory and spatial modalities (Cope, Kalantzis, and New London Group 2000). In this view, visual literacy is a core learning skill increasingly needed in the twenty-first century and is foundational to content areas (Mitchell 1994).

## Literature Review

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) proposed that “powerful social studies learning leads to a well-informed and civic-minded citizenry that can sustain and build on democratic traditions” (National Council for the Social Studies 2008, para. 3) and called for educators to focus on making social studies, including history and civics, accessible to all learners through pedagogical strategies that actively engage learners. Understanding the world is paramount, and engagement through diverse texts can assure this knowledge.

Nonfiction is often heralded as a genre that gives children important ways to make sense of the world and techniques to contrast facts with their own experiences. Indeed, the Common Core State Standards Initiative

(CCSS) has released K–12 curriculum standards that contain strong emphases on the use of nonfiction, particularly informational texts, in interdisciplinary learning; to date, these standards have been adopted in 45 states (National Governors' Association 2010). Effective use of nonfiction in the classroom is dependent upon the selection of works that will appeal to readers. Visual emphasis, accuracy, and engaging writing are cited as particularly important aspects to consider in selecting nonfiction (Gill 2009). For these reasons, graphic novels and nonfiction are seen as particularly promising subgenres to engage students toward the visions that NCSS, NCTE, and IRA have articulated.

Graphic nonfiction promotes multimodal learning through the readers' need to negotiate between text and image. This negotiation is credited with increasing understanding and allowing for critical comparisons between word and image (Buckingham 2003; Griffith 2010) and semiotic awareness (Schwartz and Rubinstein-Ávila 2006). Reading in this modality is especially in tune with adolescent brain development (Kress 2008). Images facilitate understanding of words, thus building vocabulary and reflection (Chun 2009; Griffith 2010).

That students want to read and how they read are important, but so is *what* they read. Graphic nonfiction that is focused on aspects of social studies such as current events, history, and biography has been shown to have a particular effect on student interest and learning. Exposure and gained facility with “reading” images build visual literacies that aid students' abilities to make sense of concepts presented and link them with prior knowledge and experience; media present current social issues and history in visually rich formats for which these skills are especially important (Schwarz 2007; Smetana et al. 2009). Whether the topic is World War II, conflict in the Middle East, or the biography of a significant politician, social issues and history can include concepts that are unfamiliar to youths, and graphic novels and nonfiction ease learners into interacting around these complex issues (Christenson 2006). Often historical events may contain experiences or actions that are too complex, and crises may contain occurrences that are too violent or tragic to express in words; the visual elements and contemporary portrayal of graphic nonfiction allow readers to disjunctively work between text and images to build understanding (Bridges 2009; Frey and Fisher 2004).

In an article that integrated prior research on graphic novels with a fresh analysis of the graphic nonfiction memoir of a racially charged childhood recounted in “Hurdles” by Derek Kirk Kim, Schwarz notes:

A number of graphic novels, directly or indirectly, address questions citizens need to be asking and researching . . . issues of war, injustice, terrorism, poverty, and alienation, the whole range of social issues in the United States. . . . Graphic novels may promote discussion in more lively and immediate ways than most textbooks, and they offer points of view often unexpressed in the usual curriculum resources. . . . The graphic novel can sometimes communicate the human reality better than academic text or strategy report (Schwarz 2007, 2, 8, 9)

Researchers, professional organizations, and curriculum policy makers point to nonfiction in a graphic format as a valuable way for learners to develop content knowledge and multiple literacies. This combination of accessible entrée to challenging topics and development of skills that hone learners' abilities to grasp issues and concepts makes graphic novels and nonfiction a compelling context for the research presented in this paper.

## Methods

## *Data Collection*

We analyzed alternative and academic texts that potentially could support two topics typically found in the secondary-school curriculum. For English/language arts, we selected Charles Dickens's life and works as a topic of author study. For social studies, we focused on the 9/11 terrorist attack, a common focus in the American history curriculum. We chose these two topics for their historic relevance, because they are topics addressed in secondary schools, and because they present disturbing social and political conditions that graphic nonfiction might more appropriately address.

We selected multiple types of texts, including two graphic nonfiction titles, two textbooks, an original source document, and a trade book, analyzing each for their concepts and features for a total of six texts or three texts per content area. The texts were chosen for their age appropriateness; availability to the target audience through their classrooms and school and public libraries; and, for the graphic and trade texts, positive published book reviews located through Follett's TitleWave database (<http://www.titlewave.com>), which is used by many teachers and librarians to guide collection development.

Although our primary focus was on graphic nonfiction, we followed other researchers' recommendations to explore the potential of multiple texts for learning (Stahl and Shanahan 2004) and to investigate graphic texts in comparison to academic and other alternative texts. The graphic nonfiction for English/language arts was *Charles Dickens: Scenes from an Extraordinary Life* (Manning and Granstrom 2011), and for social studies, *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* (Jacobson and ColÃ³n 2006)—both selected for their availability and relevance. Academic texts included a textbook for American history, *The Americans* (Danzer et al. 2010), a textbook commonly used in secondary schools for social studies, and a textbook currently used for author studies of Charles Dickens, *McDougal Littell Literature: British Literature* (Allen et al. 2008). We also examined a current trade book's treatment of Dickens, *The Best of Times: The Story of Charles Dickens* (Caravantes 2005), and an original source document, *The 9/11 Report* (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, Kean, and Hamilton 2004).

We identified and analyzed content terms in these texts because vocabulary represents concepts (Alvermann, Gillis, and Phelps 2010). Features and terms/concepts in the graphic nonfiction of Dickens's life in the Victorian age and his stories were compared to the popular textbook's (Allen et al. 2008) treatment of Dickens and to the trade book's (Caravantes 2005) coverage of Dickens. Terms and features in the graphic adaptation of the 9/11 report were compared to terms/concepts and features in the original document, *The 9/11 Report* (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, Kean, and Hamilton 2004), and to the social studies textbook's treatment of the events of 9/11.

## *Data Analysis*

We analyzed the vocabulary in these texts through matrix analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994). We first read each text and then reread each chapter to identify and list the content terms. We examined these terms to form categories that indicated larger units of meaning. Finally, we tallied the terms within each category and calculated the frequency percentage that each category represented. This content analysis enabled us to obtain an overview of the conceptual load and distribution in each text and make comparisons across textual forms.

Due to the length of the original *9/11 Report* and the numerous terms used in this original source document and in the graphic nonfiction report of 9/11, we present four tables of terms and their categories for these texts and for only the two most relevant chapters in them. We examined chapters 1 and 9 for both the original *9/11 Report* and the graphic adaptation by creating tables listing the terms/concepts included in each category of analysis. These chapters were selected because each of these chapters in both of these texts discussed the core events of 9/11 and most closely paralleled the textbook treatment of 9/11. The chapters' titles were the same and the content was similar across these two alternative texts. In addition, we examined each text's format features. We identified, listed, and tallied the supplemental elements of each text. We then compared these features across textual forms.

## Findings

In this section, we present the results on the analyses of texts for English/language arts on Charles Dickens.

### *Results of Analyses of Texts for Charles Dickens and Student Surveys*

***The Textbook's Treatment of Dickens.*** The textbook *McDougal Littell Literature: British Literature* (Allen et al. 2008) devotes only two pages to Charles Dickens's life and novels. This textbook briefly summarizes six of his stories and includes a 47-line excerpt from his thirteenth novel, *Great Expectations* (Dickens 1861). The textbook also includes a 12-page introductory essay on the Victorian period mentioning Dickens. In an "About the Author" section, five sentences describe Dickens's family's debt, his education, and his success as a writer, including the dire social conditions and mores in the Victorian period and how they inspired his writing. In an "About the Novels" section, the authors describe Dickens's writing style and provide information about his works, including a photograph of Dickens, a drawing of an English town, and the cover of one of the editions of his novel *Great Expectations*. The textbook does not include a glossary, and none of the relevant terms are defined in context.

There are only nine content terms in the textbook, each of which fall into four categories: social conditions, political conditions/structure, literary devices, and literary genres. About one-half (55%) of these terms relate to literary devices and genres, while the remainder relate to the political and social conditions influencing Dickens's writings. This balance between concepts related to social studies and literature makes the textbook useful for cross-disciplinary instruction if supplemented by other texts.

***The Trade Book's Treatment of Dickens.*** The 160-page trade book on Charles Dickens, *Best of Times: The Story of Charles Dickens* (Caravantes 2005), describes in seven chapters Dickens's life from his childhood to his death and the events that influenced his writings. This text presents terms of the Victorian period and provides excerpts or references to 28 of Dickens's stories. There are 64 color photographs or illustrations, including photos of Dickens, his family, and his shorthand notes. Additional features include a timeline of Dickens's life events from 1812 to 1866. This text also has a bibliography of 24 works on Dickens, a source list for each chapter, an index, and three websites, including the Dickens Project (<http://dickens.ucsc.edu>), the Charles Dickens Museum in London ([www.dickensmuseum.com](http://www.dickensmuseum.com)), and an overview of Dickens's life ([www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/index.html](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/index.html)).

Our analysis of this trade book revealed its utility for interdisciplinary learning in social studies and English/language arts. There were 66 content terms in seven categories: social conditions, political

conditions/structures, laws, settings/contexts, literary elements, literary devices, and literature genres. The largest category of terms (33%) relate to the social conditions of the times, including debtors' prison, the Industrial Revolution, ragged schools, and Sunday schools. Terms related to political conditions compose another 20%, including the French Revolution, the Gordon Riots of 1780, and Parliament. Hence, about one-half (53%) of these concepts are relevant to social studies. Terms related to literary elements, devices, and genres make up almost all (43%) of the remaining concepts, including terms like plot, protagonist, first-person narrative, parody, satire, farce, and, in the last category, melodrama, operetta, and memoir. Like the textbook, the conceptual load in this trade book is about evenly divided between concepts relevant to social studies and terms related to English/language arts, but does not include a glossary or define any terms in context.

***The Graphic Nonfiction's Treatment of Dickens.*** The 47-page Dickens's graphic text, *Charles Dickens: Scenes from an Extraordinary Life* (Manning and Granstrom 2011), describes Dickens's life in comic-book style in chronological order, including events that influenced his writings. The text defines terms from the Victorian period, and it provides excerpts and graphic synopses of 17 of Dickens's stories including information about the events or conditions that inspired each piece. Ten of these stories are given in a graphic form, including a one- or two-sentence summary; main scenes from these stories are presented as drawings and dialogue. The graphic text describes 22 events from Dickens's life, including moments from his childhood, his family's move to London, his responsibilities to financially assist his family, events of his adult life, visiting America with his wife, and a description of his final days. Each event includes a first-person account from Dickens's point of view; a scene/drawing, including characters and dialogue depicting the theme of the event; and two or three smaller drawings illustrating Dickens, important members of his life, or a related historical event, each with a caption. Events described relate to Dickens's development as a writer, his early start as a journalist, his pen name "Boz," and his strategies to make characters come to life.

The graphic nonfiction presents information with cartoon-like drawings that reinforce accounts of historical events from Dickens's life, including illustrations depicting the Victorian age, the war against France, the changes that Britain experienced at the time, Dickens's visit to his father in debtors' prison, and children's dire working conditions during the Industrial Revolution. This text also includes a map of London, pointing out the locations where events occurred in Dickens's life. Other supplements include a bibliography of referenced works, referrals to other texts by and about Dickens, and a glossary of 15 of the terms used in this graphic text.

There are 37 terms in this graphic nonfiction representing six categories, including a category not found in the other comparison texts, adaptations of Dickens's works. About one-half (51%) of these terms relate to the social and political conditions that influenced Dickens's writings, such as the Industrial Revolution, Yorkshire schools, and hard labor, and include terms that had not been used in the other two texts, such as prison hulks, Rat's Castle, pay clerk, and Fagin's gang. Of these terms, 11% relate to Dickens's experiences with buildings in London that he incorporated into his stories, including Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey, and Guildhall. For example, readers learn how as a child Dickens got lost in London and fell asleep in the Guildhall under the statues of giants. About one-third (38%) of the terms relate to literary devices (pen name and episode), literary genres (short story, comic songs, and fairy tale), genres that Dickens was interested in prior to becoming a writer and those in which he participated as he developed his craft. The final category, adaptations of Dickens's work, account for 16% of these terms. Readers learn that Dickens's masterpieces have been adapted into costume dramas, films, television series, animations, plays, and musicals, terms that relate to contemporary popular culture.

**Cross-Text Analysis.** All three texts are useful as resources for author study. Each one provides information about Dickens's life and the Victorian age that influenced the themes and content of his writing. Due to its brevity, however, the textbook's treatment of Dickens would need to be supplemented by other texts. Although the graphic nonfiction does not provide as many concepts as the trade book, the graphic text provides sufficient background for students to understand Dickens's life, the historical time period in which he lived that influenced his writings, and the style and type of works he produced—concepts not well developed in the textbook. In addition, the graphic nonfiction was more motivating for students than reading the textbook. The trade book offers readers the same information provided by the graphic nonfiction but delivers it in a more detailed account. Readers could learn much about Dickens's life, the period, and his writings simply by viewing the illustrations and reading the captions in the trade book or by viewing the hand-drawn illustrations in the graphic nonfiction, a common strength of the two alternative texts.

In addition to their individual strengths and weaknesses, all three of these texts had one common limitation and one common contribution to supporting the secondary English/language arts curriculum. None of these texts offer much information on Dickens's writing styles that would be required for a literary analysis. The two alternative texts present students with more detail regarding Dickens's life and times compared to the textbook, however. Knowing the social context that influenced a work is integral to understanding literature. Together, these three texts promoted understanding of the economic and political influences on the author necessary for author study.

### *Texts for Social Studies on 9/11*

**The Secondary School Textbook's Treatment of 9/11.** *The Americans* (Danzer et al. 2010) embeds the discussion of 9/11 in a six-page section on terrorism. This textbook describes the decline of national and local crime with new fears of international terrorism, new foreign policy challenges, the war on terrorism, the impact of 9/11, and aviation security. This textbook also discusses the Patriot Act of 2001 and the Transportation Security Act that made airport security the responsibility of the federal government.

The textbook's account of 9/11 also includes several supplementary features. These consist of six photographs or illustrations with captions, including the famous photograph of firefighters and rescue workers flying the United States flag while sorting through the rubble of the World Trade Center and a photograph of the impact of the two jets used by terrorists as missiles to destroy the World Trade Center. The textbook also has a timeline of the history of terrorist attacks against the United States from 1978 to 2001. One question to readers requires summarizing the information, and another question prompts critical thinking, asking readers their evaluation of the efficacy of the Bush administration's measures in preventing future terrorist attacks. There is also a link to a website (<http://classzone.com>), directing students to read an epilogue on the war on terrorism.

There are 57 content terms in this textbook's treatment of 9/11 that represent both past and current relevant concepts. These terms represent 10 categories, including the military (20%), personnel (16%), defense responses and strategies (11%), aviation (11%), weapons (9%), law (9%), agencies (7%), religion (7%), civilian structures (7%), and government (3%). In addition to these common categories related to historical events, the textbook is unique in addressing concepts related to the present day. For example, the textbook is the only text we examined that uses the term "ground zero."

However, the textbook is also the only one of the three texts we examined on 9/11 that includes less relevant information. For example, the textbook is the only text that mentions that the New York City Fire Department chaplain, Mychal Judge, was killed by falling debris after giving the last rites of the Catholic Church to a firefighter on the scene. The textbook also is the only text that describes how the destroyed Twin Towers accounted for an estimated 2 billion pounds of rubble. These are the kinds of “seductive details” in textbooks that students often focus on instead of main ideas (Wade, Schraw, and Buxton 1993).

***The Original Source Document’s Treatment of 9/11.*** *The 9/11 Report* authored by the chair and vice chair of the 10-member 9/11 Commission (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, Kean, and Hamilton 2004) is 592 pages with 14 illustrations and tables. This report includes front material, a “List of Illustrations and Tables,” the “9/11 Commission Member List,” the “9/11 Staff List,” “Appendix A: Common Abbreviations,” “Appendix B: Table of Names,” and “Appendix C: Commission Hearings and Notes.” A large section (129 pages) explains how the bipartisan 9/11 Commission composed of five Republicans and five Democrats was formed; presents the *New York Times*’ coverage of the 9/11 Commission’s progress and findings; and includes a preface, an “Executive Summary,” and an afterword. The 28-page “Background” describes how the impetus for the 9/11 Commission came from intense pressure by the families of the 9/11 victims for an investigation and calls for a sweeping overhaul of the security system at the time of the attacks. The 45-page description of the *New York Times*’ coverage includes newspaper articles describing how the 9/11 Commission identified nine operational failures that allowed the attacks to occur, four of which involved the FBI either not receiving or acting on intelligence information. This section also includes a timeline of terrorists’ plots from 1996 to 2001. A nine-page afterword projects why this report will remain relevant for decades. Eight pages consist of lists of staff and commission members, signatures of the commission members, and a “List of Tables and Illustrations.” These lists precede the 34-page “Executive Summary,” including recommendations for reorganizing intelligence, and a flow chart of the commission’s recommended restructure for promoting unity in sharing information. The preface is a five-page reflection on the commission’s mandate, their process, and acknowledgments.

This section with its five subsections includes 248 terms that represent concepts in 10 categories: the military, government, politics, defense responses and strategies, aviation, agencies, law, civilian structures, personnel, and the media. Most of the terms relate either to aviation (29%), politics (22%), the government (20%), or the military (17%). This section includes a unique category, the media, that discusses the news media’s coverage of the 9/11 Commission, the commission’s charge, and their progress, including critiques of the partisan nature of the running commentaries by individual members of the commission to the media while the investigation was in progress.

**Chapter 1.** Chapter 1, “We Have Some Planes,” in the commission’s report of 9/11 discusses the events of that day in 68 pages. This chapter chronicles the sequence of events that occurred on the four doomed flights that terrorists hijacked during the morning of September 11, 2001, and the government’s notification of and military response to those events through the Northeast Air Defense Sector (NEADS). The chapter describes the mission, structure, and working relationship of the two agencies responsible for the defense of U.S. airspace: the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). Three supplements include maps showing the locations of FAA control centers; the reporting structure for the Northeast Air Defense Sector; and the flight paths and timeline of events on the four doomed flights. Table 1 shows the 125 terms in the first chapter.

**Table 1**Chapter 1 Vocabulary: *The 9/11 Report*

Category	Term or Concept
<b>Agencies</b>	Boston Central New England Region; FAA; National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) (3)
<b>Aviation</b>	Airline Dispatcher; Airliner; Airspace; Air Traffic Control Center; Air Traffic Control Channel; Air Traffic Control Specialist; Air Traffic Control System; Air Traffic Control Transmissions; Air Traffic Controller; Autopilot; Beacon Code; Cabin Public Address Channel; Captain; Cellular Airphones; Checkpoint; Closed Circuit TV; Coach; Cockpit Voice Recorder; Command Center; Commercial Airliner; Computer Assisted Passenger Prescreening System (CAPPS); Contemporaneous Logs; Control Tower; Emergency Frequency; Explosive Trace Detector; FAA Rules; First Class; Flight Attendants; Flight Crew; Flight Data Recorder; Ground Stop; GTE Airphones; Hijacker; Infrared Satellite Data; Jump Seat; Mayday; Medevac Helicopter; Northeast Air Defense Sector (NEADS); Passengers; Pilot; Primary Radar Returns; Radar; Radar Scopes; Screening; Security Checkpoints; Terminal Control Facility; Throttles; Transcontinental Flight; Visual Flight Rules; “Weapons Free” Flying (50)
<b>Civilian Structures</b>	North Tower; South Tower; Twin Towers; World Trade Center (4)
<b>Defense Responses and Strategies</b>	Air Defenders; Alert; ATC Zero; Attack; Bunker; Chain of Command; CNN; Code; Command Center Teleconference; Counterattack; Counterterrorism; Hotline; Interceptors; Protocols; Scrambling; Signal; Squawking; Transponder; Radar Data; Radar Reconstruction; Universal Code 7500; Vectored (22)
<b>Government</b>	Capitol; Department of Justice; Department of State; Joint Chiefs of Staff; Motorcade; Secretary of Defense; Secret Service; Situation Room; Solicitor General; Vice President; White House; World Trade Center (12)
<b>Military</b>	Air Defenders; Air National Guard; Cargo Plane; Combat Air Patrol; Continental Region Headquarters; Department of Defense; Deputy National Security Advisor; Fighter Escort; Hostile Aircraft; Interceptor Pilot; Military Aide; National Command Authority; National Guard Base; National Military Command Center (NMCC) Fighters; NORAD Instant Message System; North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD); Otis Fighter Jets; Pentagon; Rules of Engagement; Terrorist (20)
<b>Personnel</b>	Acting Deputy Administrator; Command Center Facility Manager; Command Center National Operations Manager; First Officer; Immigration Inspector; Press; Quality Assurance Specialist; Strategy Hijack Coordinator (8)
<b>Weapons</b>	Bomb; Firearm; Box Cutters; Guided Missiles; Mace; Pepper Spray (6)

As table 1 indicates, about one-third of these terms (50 terms, or 40%), the largest number of terms in one category, are technical vocabulary related to aviation as the chapter describes the re-created events on the four doomed flights controlled by terrorists. The second largest numbers of terms (22, or 18%) represents the defense responses and strategies, followed in frequency by 21(17%)’ terms relating to relevant government, military, and aviation agencies that regulated responses to the events of 9/11. The remaining terms in this chapter are categorized (in order of frequency) military, government, personnel, weapons, and civilian structures (e.g., the World Trade Center, and the North and South Towers).

**Chapter 9.** Chapter 9, “Heroism and Horror,” in the original *9/11 Report* discusses the World Trade Center’s preparedness, the 1993 terrorist bombing at the site, the events of 9/11 in the two towers, and the Port Authority’s responses to the attacks by the New York City Police and Fire Departments. This chapter spans 64 pages and chronicles the impact of the collapse of the North and South Towers, and includes a diagram of the World Trade Center complex, a graphic of the complex’s radio repeater system, and a diagram of the North Tower stairwell. Table 2 lists the terms and concepts included in the chapter.

**Table 2**  
Chapter 9 Vocabulary: *The 9/11 Report*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Term or Concept</b>
<b>Agencies</b>	Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms; FAA; Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); Greater Hospital Association; International Monetary Fund; National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST); PAPD; Police Academy; Precincts; World Bank (10)
<b>Aviation</b>	Helipad; Mayday (2)
<b>Civilian Structures</b>	Boroughs Concourse; Mezzanine; North Tower; Sky Lobby; South Tower; Twin Towers; Underground Mall; World Financial Center; World Trade Center (9)
<b>Defense Responses and Strategies</b>	Chain of Command; Citywide Channel 1; Emergency Operations Center; Mobilization; Nonambulatory Civilian; Protocols; Repeater Channel; Tactical Channel; Tactical 1; Triage; Transmission (11)
<b>Government</b>	FBI; Jurisdiction; National Capital Region; 911; Port Authority (5)
<b>Military</b>	Arlington County After Action Report; Field Intelligence Unit; Impact Zone; Incident Command System; Military District of Washington; National Guard Base; Operation Omega; Pentagon; Protection of Sensitive Locations; Search and Rescue (10)
<b>Personnel</b>	Battalion Chief; Chief of Department; Commissioner; Dispatcher; Emergency Services Unit; Field Commander; Field Responder; Fire Commissioner; Fire Safety Director; Fire Warden; First Responders; Incident Commander; Ladder Company; Mayor; Medic; National Medical Response Team; New York Police Department; Police Commissioner; Specialized Operations Commander; Special Operations Division; Terrorists (21)

As table 2 shows, there were 68 terms in this chapter in seven categories of agencies, aviation, civilian structures, defense responses and strategies, government, military, and personnel. About one-half of the concepts in this chapter related either to personnel (31%) or defense responses and strategies (16%). The next largest categories of terms were military (15%) and agencies (15%).

**Chapters 2–8, 10–13.** These 11 chapters contain the remainder of the 1,162 terms used in the text, or 681 terms for an average of 62 terms per chapter. These terms are representative of 11 categories, most of which represented the government (223) or the military (236). These chapters discuss the foundation of the new terrorism, how counterterrorism evolved, and responses to al Qaeda’s assaults. The chapters depict the individuals and the mechanisms supporting terrorism and discuss the government’s immediate and long-term responses to the 9/11 attacks, foresight and hindsight regarding the attacks, a global strategy for countering terrorism, recommendations for reorganizing the government’s intelligence at the time (2004), and concluding with 13 recommendations to improve homeland defense.

**The Graphic Nonfiction Version of the 9/11 Report.** *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* (Jacobson and Colón 2006) is 144 pages, illustrated in comic-book style. The purpose of the graphic adaptation was—in the words of the chair and vice chair of the 9/11 Commission, Thomas H. Kean and Lee H. Hamilton—“to bring the work of the 9/11 Commission to the attention of a new set of readers . . . of all ages . . . [and] encourage them to learn more about the events of 9/11, to study, reflect—and act” (Jacobson and Colón 2006, ix–x). The authors also stress in the foreword that the graphic adaptation displays a “close adherence to the findings, recommendations, spirit, and tone of the original Commission report” and “conveys much of the information contained in the original report” (ix).

**Chapter 1.** As with the full *9/11 Report* (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, Kean, and Hamilton 2004), chapter 1 of *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* (Jacobson and Colón 2006) describes the events unfolding aboard the aircrafts presented in comic-book style. The first subsection of this first chapter, “Inside the Four Flights,” presents four concurrent timelines for each doomed flight. The first panel of each timeline has illustrations of each of the hijackers. Each event is presented and described with a time stamp so the reader can gauge the simultaneity of the events on each of the four flights, concluding with the plane crashes and national crisis management. Table 3 illustrates these concepts.

**Table 3**

Chapter 1 Vocabulary: *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* (Jacobson & Colón, 2006)

Category	Term or Concept
<b>Agencies</b>	FAA (1)
<b>Aviation</b>	AA Headquarters; Airborne; Aircraft; Airline Officials; Air Route Traffic Control; Airspace; Autopilot; Boston Center; Civil Aviation; Cleveland Air Route Traffic Control; Cockpit; Cockpit Intrusion; Cockpit Voice Recorder; Cockpit Warning; Cruising Altitude; Descent; Disengage; Dulles Tower; FAA Traffic Control Centers; First Class; Flying Time; Ground Stop; Message Unintelligible; New York Center; Passed Without

	Incident; Passengers; Radar Contact; Radio Transmission; Resolved Security Warning; Routine Communication; Suspicious Transmission; Takeoff; Takeover; Transcontinental; Transponder; Twin-Engine Plane; UA Headquarters (37)
<b>Civilian Structures</b>	Boston Logan Airport; North Tower; Ronald Reagan National Airport; South Tower; Trade Center; Twin Towers; World Trade Center (7)
<b>Defense Responses and Strategies</b>	All Points Bulletin; Chain of Command; Command Center Teleconference; CNN; Conference; Declaration; Exile; Interceptors (8)
<b>Government</b>	Attorney General; Capitol; Chief of Staff; Defense Department; Defense Secretary; JCS Vice Chairman; Motorcade; Multiagency; 9/11 Commission; Parallel Decision Making Processes; President; Secret Service; Security Adviser; Senior Adviser; Senior Decision Makers; Solicitor General; Vice President; White House (18)
<b>Military</b>	Binational Command; Command Center; Continental Aerospace Command Region; Defense Command; Herndon Command Center; National Military Command Center (NMCC); NORAD; Northeast Air Defense Reporting Structure (NEADS); Otis Fighter Jets; Pentagon; Soviet Bombers (11)
<b>Personnel</b>	Air Traffic Controller; Civilian; Dispatcher; FAA Controller; First Responders; Flight Attendant; Hijackers; Immigration Official; Pilot (9)
<b>Weapons</b>	Bomb; Knives; Mace (3)

As table 3 depicts, the conceptual terms in chapter 1 are classified in eight categories for a total of 94 terms. In descending order, they are aviation (37 terms), government (18), military (11), personnel (9), defense responses and strategies (8), civilian structures (7), weapons (3), and agencies (1). Aviation is the most frequently represented category with 39% of the terms, with government and military comprising 31% of the remaining terms and the other five categories accounting for the rest.

**Chapter 9.** Chapter 9, “Heroism and Horror,” provides an overview of the World Trade Center complex and its readiness for crisis. This chapter traces the World Trade Center’s experience with a prior bomb attack that exposed its vulnerabilities in response management and linked these vulnerabilities to ones that remained on September 11, 2001, and exacerbated the difficulties that emergency crews faced in reaching workers in the buildings. The chapter depicts the actions of firefighters and police officers in trying to rescue people trapped in the towers and briefly recounts the events surrounding the fourth plane’s crash into the Pentagon and the ensuing emergency response. This chapter concludes with an analysis of the emergency responses at the World Trade Center and Pentagon, comparing the strengths and weaknesses of each strategy, as shown in table 4.

#### Table 4

Chapter 9 Vocabulary: *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* (Jacobson & Colá³n, 2006)

Category	Term or Concept
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<b>Agencies</b>	FDNY; Local, State, and Federal Agencies; NYPD; Office of Emergency Management; PAPD; Port Authority Police Department (6)
<b>Aviation</b>	Helicopter Landings; Jet Fuel; Self-Dispatching (3)
<b>Civilian Structures</b>	Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel; Marriott; North Tower; South Tower; Twin Towers; West Street Lobby; World Trade Center; WTC (8)
<b>Defense Responses and Strategies</b>	Civilians; Communications Channels; Control and Command; Emergency Preparedness; Emergency Response Plan; General Evacuation; Integrated Communication; 911 Emergency Call System; PA System; Radio Zones; Rescue Operation; Second-Level 4 Mobilization; Unified Command; Unified Incident Management System (14)
<b>Government</b>	Border and Port Security; Port Authority (2)
<b>Military</b>	Impact Zone; Pentagon (2)
<b>Personnel</b>	Building Personnel; Chief; Commission; Elite Rescue Teams; Emergency Personnel; Emergency Service Team; Engine Companies; Engineer Fire Chief; FDNY Dispatch; Fire Company; Firefighters; First Responders; Hazmat Team; Ladder Companies; Lieutenants; Local Policymakers; Local Public Servants; Mayor; NYPD Aviation; NYPD Chief of Department; NYPD Lead Team; NYPD 911 Operators; Officers; Operators; Police; Rescue Workers; Responders; Sergeants; Transit Police; WTC Personnel (30)
<b>Weapons</b>	Bomb (1)

In retelling these events, the chapter contains 66 terms in eight categories as table 4 shows. The majority (30, or 45%) relate to personnel, and an additional 21% (14) are defense responses and strategies, with another 21% related to civilian structures (8) and agencies (6). Aviation accounts for three terms, and government and military each have two terms. Weapons only includes one term.

**Chapters 2—8, 10—13.** The remaining 11 chapters contain 1,692 terms within the same eight categories for an average of 130 terms per chapter, most of which represent the government (602) or the military (410). These chapters trace Osama bin Laden’s rise to influence between 1978 and 1998, including regional channeling of arms and finances to al Qaeda and bin Laden, concluding with a characterization of al Qaeda’s membership and operations as of the late 1990s. These chapters describe events at the World Trade Center in the early 1990s alerting the U.S. government to increasing terrorist activities, the need for counterterrorist strategies, the lack of interagency collaboration causing intelligence failures, the assault on the USS *Cole* battleship, and the transition from Clinton’s administration to Bush’s leadership with unclear federal response to terrorist activity; and they offer recommendations for counterterrorism.

**Additional Features of The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation.** *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* includes several features that enhance or limit the reader’s experience. Sophisticated vocabulary is used in descriptions, explanations, and dialogue. Some terms like “attrit” (p. 61) and “presage” (p. 79) are defined in context. Numerous undefined terms, however, also characterize the graphic adaptation of *The 9/11 Report*, and no glossary is included, presuming prior knowledge of terms/concepts and individuals’ roles. The graphic nonfiction

also has numerous references to countries and regions in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, with explanations about important events in these regions that influenced the 9/11 attacks. These references are often accompanied by illustrations, such as the map of the Gulf States, maps depicting the NORAD and FAA centers and the hijackers' home cities in Saudi Arabia, and flags of terrorists' nations.

**Cross-Text Analysis.** There are unique features or content in each of the three types of texts on 9/11 that we examined. The original *9/11 Report* contains information that the other two texts do not provide, including a link to footnotes providing background information, signatures of the 9/11 Commission members, and a list of the 9/11 Commission staff (<http://www.9-11commission.gov>). Boxed texts provide additional information or vignettes describing possible terrorist actions and feasible responses. However, only the graphic nonfiction includes the "Report Card" issued by the 9/11 Commission in 2005 as their final act. Their "Report Card" ranks the president's and Congress's responses to the commission's findings in homeland security and emergency response, intelligence and congressional reform, and foreign policy and nonproliferation—awarding mostly Ds (29%) or Cs (24%) in 42 areas. The graphic nonfiction is also the only one of the three texts to include both sketches and names of the 19 terrorists responsible for the demise of the four flights. This text also provides a graphic of *The 9/11 Report* overviewing the commission's findings, including the narrow range of response options provided to Presidents Bush and Clinton, and the incapability of the FBI to link collective knowledge. Conversely, the textbook is the only text to include the famous photograph of the U.S. flag flying over the rubble of the World Trade Center while firefighters and rescue workers searched for survivors. The textbook is also the only text with information on the recently established color-coded threat advisory system.

Of these three texts, the original source document was the most difficult to read. The quantity of concepts in the original *9/11 Report* made it a burdensome text to read. It was not uncommon for a single page to include eight or more terms, making it cumbersome to decipher, not only for the length of each chapter and the total report, but also for its density. Numerous unfamiliar terms are not defined in the original report, and there is no glossary. In addition, the report's appended list of abbreviations for agencies and organizations and identification of their names was often needed while reading. Hence, this text would be most suitable for enrichment or extensive research on the topic.

## Discussion

Our findings suggest answers to our two research questions. For the first research question—How do the range and frequency of concepts and the format features found in graphic nonfiction compare to the presentation of concepts in academic textbooks or trade books?—we performed comparative matrix analyses of the vocabulary and concept terms relating to the life of Charles Dickens found in a textbook, trade book, and graphic nonfiction text. Previous research on the content of graphic nonfiction (e.g., Buckingham 2003; Christenson 2006) has suggested that these alternative formats provide much the same breadth of content as traditional types of texts, but present the content with the aid of visual representations that can aid understanding. Despite Dickens's central role in the literary canon in secondary education, the textbook provides the briefest description of his life. Both the trade book and the graphic text include more in-depth explorations of the topic, with similar numbers of topics addressed in each work. However, at only 47 pages, the graphic text provides a denser exploration of Dickens's life and work while also providing timelines and illustrations.

Examinations of a textbook entry, primary source document, and a graphic nonfiction version of *The 9/11 Report* reflect somewhat different findings. While the textbook treatment of the 9/11 attack has the least amount of conceptual depth and supplemental supports, the graphic nonfiction and primary source versions of *The 9/11 Report* provide much of the same content. The original *9/11 Report* has an extremely detailed account of the prelude, occurrence, and aftermath that requires close reading due to its many undefined terms, but it does include footnotes and other visual features that could enhance understanding. The graphic nonfiction version is in an accessible style that has similar language supplemented with glossary, charts, graphs, timelines, and other visual supplements that aid concept identification. Each version has unique features, but the many supports included in the graphic nonfiction version better supported the needs of at-risk learners.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates the need to include not only multiple texts, but a variety of genres of multiple texts, particularly graphic nonfiction, to provide varying presentations of and perspectives on content concepts. Findings from this investigation illustrate the appeal and utility of graphic nonfiction for teaching content concepts. The graphic nonfiction texts provided more breadth and depth of conceptual content than did the textbooks we examined for social studies and English/language arts and had sufficient information to support the curriculum. The graphic texts also had a balance between too brief a treatment of a topic in a textbook and too lengthy or dense a treatment of a topic in an original source document or a trade book.

Like Chun (2009), we found that the images in graphic nonfiction facilitated students' understanding, assisted with vocabulary acquisition, motivated individuals, and prompted reflection. At-risk adolescents found the illustrations in the graphic texts to be a compensatory strategy for acquiring new conceptual knowledge that made learning entertaining and engaging. In addition, the cartoon-like visuals in these texts assisted in conveying disturbing subject matter in a more audience-appropriate way than could words or photographs.

Our experiences in comparing graphic nonfiction to a trade book, an original source document, and a textbook's treatment of a topic have led us to recommend that when possible, students read a graphic nonfiction account of a topic prior to reading other forms of text to build their interest and conceptual knowledge. Like other researchers (e.g., Vacca 2005), we found the textbooks' treatment of a topic to be inadequate for developing students' understandings or motivating individuals to read more about a subject. The textbooks we examined also contained seductive details that could distract readers. Like our colleagues (Alvermann, Gillis, and Phelps 2010), we found that a textbook does not always provide a comprehensive or coherent discussion of a topic. These issues can be addressed by incorporating alternative texts like graphic nonfiction into content instruction. We call for future research in additional content areas to further explore the educational potential of this genre of expository text and its role in a multiple-text approach to content teaching and learning.

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## Motivational Attributes of Children and Teenagers Who Participate in Summer Reading Clubs

Posted on [May 5, 2014](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



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\*Columbus Metropolitan Library is represented here as a Corporate Author. Numerous members of the Columbus Metropolitan Library system were involved in the conduct of this work, to include generating research aims, establishing and implementing research methods, and examining and interpreting research outcomes.

### ‘ Abstract

Library-based summer reading clubs are popular offerings across the country; however, very little is known about the children and teenagers who participate in them. This study examined demographic and motivational attributes of children and teenagers who participated in a summer reading club in a large midwestern city. The study also examined their perceptions about other possible extrinsic motivational reasons why they participated in the program (e.g., to get a prize). Results indicated that children and teenagers who participated in the summer reading club had high perceived competencies and value for reading across ages, and that the majority did not report participating to receive a prize (62.5%). Motivational attributes were also analyzed by gender and socioeconomic status (SES). Differences were noted for some dimensions of value for reading for gender, but no differences were noted for reading values or competencies for SES. The results of this study have implications for summer reading club design and the ways in which libraries attract students and motivate them to read.

### Introduction

Since their inception in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut in the late 1890s, public library summer reading clubs (SRCs) have grown to become a key program offered in over 98% of public libraries in the United States.<sup>1</sup> These programs are perceived to be an important resource for young children, teenagers, and even adults. A central goal of SRCs is to motivate or encourage participants to engage in independent reading during the summer, to foster a love of reading, and to encourage them to become lifelong library users. With these benefits in mind, in 2010 the Council of the American Library Association drafted a resolution in support of ensuring access to summer reading programs for all children and teens.<sup>2</sup>

A recent investigation examined the characteristics of children and teenagers participating in the SRC affiliated with a large midwestern public library system.<sup>3</sup> The SRC examined was that of the Columbus Metropolitan Library, which implements one of the largest summer reading programs available in public libraries in the United States. In 2010 and 2011, 58,500 and 68,000 children and teenagers participated, respectively. To put this into context in terms of the size of the city, Columbus is home to 788,577 people.<sup>4</sup> Study findings suggested that participants have many different reasons for enrolling in this kind of program over the summer. For some, it might serve as an academic opportunity that could help students prevent the “summer slide,” which refers to the decline in reading over summer months.<sup>5</sup> These students may see reading as particularly important for their future; thus, maintaining or improving their reading level through participation in a program like a summer reading club might be extremely important to them. Others might participate because their parent or school

requires them to do so, or because they are enticed by incentives such as prizes or other giveaways. This paper, which forms a part of that larger study, will delve more deeply into examining children's and teens' motivations for participating in SRCs and consider implications for effective SRC program design.

### *Motivators and Summer Reading Clubs*

Indeed, many SRCs today provide incentives for participants beyond print and non-print material access opportunities for independent reading. SRC programming activities may include themed read-aloud or story-time sessions, puppet shows, arts and crafts, and book talks. Interactive enrichment demonstrations developed to attract young readers and reluctant readers to participate in SRC programs are also common SRC program offerings; for example, a park ranger brings in local wildlife to introduce proper ways to handle wild animals, a nutritionist teaches healthy alternative cooking techniques, or a musician shares how to unleash the songwriter from within. Some librarians seek ways to motivate SRC participation by turning to resources shared through support consortiums or established professional organizations, such as the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA). With public library members across all fifty states, the Collaborative Summer Library Program (CSLP) consortium provides an opportunity for libraries to work together to share resources and to reduce the cost of providing high-quality programs. CSLP membership benefits include access to reading advocacy or marketing materials, such as professionally designed SRC-themed posters and bookmarks.

Traditionally, public libraries use an honor-based reading log in which the participants self-report the number of books read or the time spent in reading. The time-point incentive awards are usually tied to age categories plus a participant's tracking advancement in the reading log. Incentives frequently include food coupons (e.g., free ice-cream cones or pizza), passes to activities (e.g., bowling, movies, recreational or entertainment parks, sporting events, museums), free merchandise (e.g., books, backpacks, or T-shirts), and entry into a raffle for a grand prize (e.g., a bike, an iPod, Nintendo). For example, the Columbus Metropolitan Library (CML) 2011 SRC incentives included coupons for food and local museums and institutions as well as a book bag and a chance to be entered into a raffle for larger prizes. However, the purchase of SRC participation incentives and/or reading log incentives is tied to donations and an individual library's budgetary allocation. Contingent upon donations from local business, the particular incentives offered by summer reading programs may shift year to year even within a library system.

The incentives that libraries sometimes use to entice enrollment, participation, or completion in SRCs can be viewed as *extrinsic motivators*. Extrinsic motivators are external, tangible rewards provided for completion of a task, such as when a child receives an allowance upon cleaning his/her room.<sup>6</sup> Completion of the task is motivated by the individual's desire to receive the incentive or reward, rather than any internal factor related to the activity (e.g., feelings of pleasure induced by having a clean room).

There are other types of motivators that compel people to complete a task, referred to as *intrinsic motivators*. Intrinsic motivators are internal to an individual, such as one's personal interest in a task or the pleasure derived from completing it.<sup>7</sup> For instance, a child might clean her room because it makes her feel organized or competent, or because she derives pleasure from this act. Although extrinsic rewards can be effective in shaping children's behavior, a large body of research suggests that intrinsic motivation leads to more positive outcomes and greater engagement in the long term.<sup>8</sup>

In the literacy field in particular, researchers have examined children's motivation to read with respect to both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators. Study findings show that intrinsic motivation for reading leads to more long-term engagement in reading<sup>9</sup> and more frequent reading behavior in and outside of school.<sup>10</sup> Anthony J. Applegate and Mary D. Applegate highlight the fact that readers who are "engaged" or "ideal readers who are intrinsically motivated, and who read regularly and enthusiastically for a variety of their own purposes" also perform better academically.<sup>11</sup>

Some research has focused specifically on the use of incentives (a type of extrinsic motivator) on children's/teenagers' reading achievement in a variety of school and library reading-focused programs. Jeff McQuillan, in a review of such work, reports that no studies show "any clearly positive effect on reading comprehension, vocabulary, or reading habits that could be attributed solely to the use of rewards and incentives,

and in one case the practice may have led to a decline.”<sup>12</sup> McQuillan’s findings suggest that use of extrinsic motivators to entice children/teenagers to read can lead to less rather than more reading in the long term.

The current study examines the role of motivation with respect to why young people might enroll in SRCs. To guide our work, we drew on a more general theory of motivation, referred to as expectancy-value theory.

### *Expectancy-Value Theory of Motivation*

The expectancy-value theory of motivation predicts that individuals’ motivation is related to their *expectancies* and their *values* toward a specific task.<sup>13</sup> That is, when a person expects to do well on a task and values the task, he or she will be more likely to engage in that task. In educational settings, expectancy-value theory builds upon this framework by examining individuals’ expectancies and task value surrounding specific tasks.<sup>14</sup> One’s *expectancies* are expectations for success in a specific task, typically based on individuals’ assessment of their own capabilities; this is similar to the notion of perceived competence (or how good one believes he or she is at something). Put simply, if an adolescent feels that she is a very good driver, she will expect to pass a driving test.

In contrast, *task values* concern perceptions of the value of a task, based on three dimensions. Attainment value, or *importance*, reflects one’s perceptions of the personal importance of doing well on a task. *Interest* value reflects the enjoyment that one gets from engaging in a specific task. This is very close to the idea of intrinsic motivation,<sup>15</sup> in that individuals are likely to engage in tasks in which they enjoy. Finally, extrinsic utility value, or *usefulness*, reflects one’s perceptions regarding the usefulness of a task toward achieving a future goal. These aspects of motivation have been shown to predict different behavioral choices or outcomes, such as whether a child/teenager elects to enroll in an SRC and, upon enrollment, elects to complete the program in its entirety. In fact, some studies show that *values* predict enrollment in specific courses, whereas *expectancies* predict achievement-related outcomes.<sup>16</sup>

Specifically with regard to reading, Isabelle Archambault, Jacquelynne S. Eccles, and Mina N. Vida report that those who enjoy reading (or have an interest in reading) are more likely to perform better on reading tasks and aspire for careers that require reading skills.<sup>17</sup> Age may also play a part in determining these outcomes, as the usefulness of a specific subject may be more important for older adolescents in terms of their intention to continue with the subject.<sup>18</sup> Archambault and colleagues examined student reports of reading-related expectancy and value in grades 1 through 12. One major finding from this work was that most students (90%) experienced declines in their literacy motivation across ages.<sup>19</sup> Clearly, students’ perceptions of competency and task value are all important for motivation to continue and do well in a specific task.

Taken together, the literature on motivation suggests that students who place a high value on reading will also engage in reading activities or spend time in places where they can have the chance to read. For example, children and teenagers who believe reading is important might spend more time in places where they feel like reading is important, such as libraries. If children and teenagers are interested in reading, they may also spend more time at libraries or being involved in library programs, such as SRCs. Children and teenagers who believe reading is important for a future career or education might also choose to engage in an SRC with the library, where they would have a chance to practice their reading skills. The age of the individual might matter as well; for older children in particular, the value of reading for future career may have a significant influence on whether an individual chooses to participate in an SRC.

### *Gender, Socioeconomic Status, and Motivation for Reading*

Previous research has often found gender differences in motivation for reading, with females having higher levels of reading motivation as compared to males.<sup>20</sup> Jon Shapiro and Patricia Whitney looked at avid and non-avid reading during leisure time. In this study, “avid”<sup>21</sup> referred to students whose percentage of leisure time spent reading was at least one-half standard deviation above the sample mean, while “non-avid”<sup>21</sup> referred to students who did not report leisure reading at all over a three-week period. Shapiro and Whitney found that avid-reading girls had higher scores for enjoyment of reading and lower scores on reading anxiety as compared to non-avid reader girls and non-avid- and avid-reading boys.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, Lee Shumow, Jennifer A. Schmidt, and Hayal Kacker found that girls read more outside of class than boys.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, Applegate and Applegate found that self-efficacy (the belief in one's ability to do a specific task) for reading was the same across genders, but values assigned to reading were lower for males than for females.<sup>23</sup> In other words, whereas males and females may have similar feelings about their ability to read, we might expect girls to value reading more highly than boys.

Another important consideration when examining motivation for reading is the relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and reading. Poverty status, in particular, has been associated with several educational achievement outcomes, including reading skill. Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Greg J. Duncan found that children living below the poverty line scored lower on standardized tests of reading achievement as compared to those from higher-income families.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, Shumow et al., using parental education as a proxy for SES, reported that children's SES was associated with time spent reading for leisure.<sup>25</sup> Other research has shown that compared to students who had high motivation for reading (including high subjective task value and high perceptions of their ability for reading), students experiencing a motivation decline in reading over time were likely to be from low-SES backgrounds.<sup>26</sup> The study authors explain that "disadvantaged families may be less well equipped to intervene and help children catch up in their reading competence," and this may have consequences for the value that students place on reading.<sup>27</sup> These studies demonstrate that literacy-related habits (e.g., going to the library to check out books or reading often) may be less prevalent in low-SES families, which may have implications for children's and teenagers' perceptions of their ability to read, and as well as their value for reading. Therefore, family SES may have an important relationship with motivation for reading.

### *Study Aims*

The present study involves analyses of data collected from children and teenagers who elected to participate in an urban SRC during the summer of 2011. In a prior study, we examined general characteristics of these participants (and included a broader participant range; see Justice et al.); however, only limited attention was paid to exploring the motivational attributes of those participants. Thus, the aim of this paper is to (a) examine the motivational attributes of children and adolescents (ages 8–17 years) who participate in SRCs in an effort to understand why some children and teenagers elect to participate in such programs, and (b) examine the relations among participants' background characteristics, perceived reading competence, their value for reading, and extrinsic motivational factors.

## Methods

### *Participants*

Participants in this study were children and teenagers between the ages of 8 and 17 years who enrolled in a library-based SRC in the summer of 2011. Typically, U.S. and Canadian public libraries define *young adult* as ages 12–18;<sup>28</sup> however, the age range for this study was broadened to include younger children who would be able to read and respond to the survey without a proxy, such as a parent or caregiver. Participants were recruited from five of twenty-three branch locations of the CML system. This number represents just under one-fourth of all branch locations. These branches were purposefully selected to be representative of the broader library system, to include the flagship (the main branch), one suburban branch, one urban branch, and two mixed (suburban-urban) branches. In the selection process, each CML branch was coded as one of these kinds of branches (i.e., suburban, urban, or mixed). Then, within each subset of branch types, branches were rank-ordered in terms of the numbers of teenagers who participated in the summer reading program during the previous summer; the branch (or branches, in the case of the mixed subset) at the fiftieth percentile in terms of population served was selected to be representative of that type of library.

Children and teenagers represented in the present analyses self-selected into the SRC and registered in person at one of the five selected branches. Upon completion of program registration, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire designed to reveal more about those who elect to enroll in SRCs. Only those who agreed to complete this questionnaire are represented in this paper.

In total, 440 children and teenagers are represented in this study. Demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in table 1. In terms of age, the majority of participants were between the ages of 8 and 13 years (78%), with teenagers between the ages of 14 and 17 years a minority of the sample (22%). There were more females ( $n = 276$ ; 64%) than males ( $n = 155$ ; 36%) in the sample. Participants were 47% White, 30% Black, 4% Hispanic/Latino, 3% Asian, 13% Multiracial, and about 3% Other Ethnicities (e.g., Native Hawaiian, Native American). Compared to the population of Columbus generally (61.5% White), participants in this study were somewhat more diverse.<sup>29</sup> Children and teenagers represented a range of family socioeconomic levels, as measured by caregivers' highest levels of educational attainment. In terms of the primary maternal caregiver (which was unreported for 17% of participants), educational attainment was as follows: 10% did not finish high school, 23% were high school graduates, 21% completed some college, 33% were college graduates, and 13% attended graduate school. In terms of the primary paternal caregiver (unreported for 25% of participants), 15% didn't finish high school, 28% were high school graduates, 21% completed some college, 23% were college graduates, and 13% attended graduate school.

**Table 1**

*Descriptives by age*

Age group	<i>n</i>	% Girls	% White	% Black	% Hispanic/Latino
8-year-olds	48	67	56.3	22.9	27.1
9-year-olds	65	55	53.8	27.7	7.7
10-year-olds	57	61	42.9	32.1	5.4
11-year-olds	64	53	48.4	32.8	3.1
12-year-olds	58	72	33.3	38.6	5.3
13-year-olds	46	58	39.1	34.8	4.3
14-year-olds	36	75	52.8	16.7	2.8
15-year-olds	25	68	60	24	0
16-year-olds	13	92	38.5	38.5	0
17-year-olds	22	77	36.4	36.4	4.5

### *General Procedures*

As noted previously, children and teenagers between the ages of 8 and 17 years who enrolled in the SRC at five library branch locations were invited by teen volunteers to complete a questionnaire providing details about themselves. This procedure occurred over a two-week period of registration prior to the summer reading program. Those who agreed were provided a paper version of the questionnaire or were offered the opportunity to complete the questionnaire online. The majority of the questionnaires were completed on paper as there was a shortage of library computers. The questionnaire was designed primarily to reveal (a) general demographic characteristics (gender, race/ethnicity, SES as based on reported caregiver educational attainment), (b) self-reported reading competence, (c) how much children and teenagers value reading, and (d) extrinsic motivation.

*Reading Competence.* An individual's self-reported reading competence represents the expectancy component of the expectancy-value model and refers to one's expectations of success in a specific task. Expectancies have been shown to predict future grades and achievement.<sup>30</sup> Children and teenagers responded to two questionnaire items selected from Jacquelynne S. Eccles and Allan Wigfield's questionnaire and designed to examine their perceptions of their reading competence.<sup>31</sup> The items asked the participants to rate themselves as readers currently ("How good are you at reading?"□) and in terms of the near future ("Compared to other students, how well do you expect to do in reading next year?"□), using a five-point scale (1 = Not at all good, 5 = Very good). For our purposes, a single reading competence score was created based on the mean of the two items.

*Values for Reading.* Values have been found to predict future enrollment in particular courses or programs.<sup>32</sup> Children and teenagers responded to seven items that spanned the three dimensions of the task-value component of Eccles's model: interest, importance, and usefulness.<sup>33</sup> Items were drawn from prior survey research involving children and teenagers of similar ages to those studied here.<sup>34</sup> A five-point scale was used for all items. Two items measured *interest* related to reading (e.g., "How much do you like reading?"□); three items measured *importance* as related to reading (e.g., "I feel that, for me, being good at reading is [not useful at all, very important]"□); and two items measured *usefulness* as related to reading (e.g., "How useful is reading to your life when not in school?"□). Eccles and Wigfield's factor analysis demonstrated the uniqueness of these three types of values.<sup>35</sup> A single score was calculated for each of these three constructs—interest, importance, and usefulness—by creating an average score for the two or three items mapping onto a given construct.

*Extrinsic Motivation.* The questionnaire contained one item to consider extrinsic motivational factors that may relate to children's and teenagers' participation in SRCs. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate why they registered for the SRC and were provided a list of the following reasons: enrolling to get a prize, enrolling to practice reading, enrolling due to parental encouragement, enrolling due to school encouragement to sign up, and enrolling to fulfill a school requirement. The list of motivational factors was developed collaboratively between project researchers and public library personnel partners. Participants were asked to identify all that applied, and we calculated the percentage/number of participants who indicated that a given factor influenced their participation.

## *Limitations*

There are several limitations to this study that should be acknowledged. As with any self-report data, there may be unique characteristics of the participants that elected to complete this survey. This self-selection process is likely to introduce a bias into the results, such as overrepresentation of youths who place high value on reading. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to all children and teenagers who participated in the SRC through the Columbus Metropolitan Public Library, or to students who participate in SRC programs in general. An additional limitation is that these descriptive findings are not explanatory and should not be interpreted as having any causal relationships. Finally, youths were not included in the derivation of the list of motivational factors. As a result, some reasons for which they might have chosen to enroll in the SRC—such as for fun or to be able to participate in library programs—were not investigated.

Despite the limitations associated with this study, these findings expand the literature of SRC demographic and motivational attributes of children and teenagers and have implications for improved public library services and program development.

## **Results**

### *Motivational Attributes of SRC Participants*

The data regarding motivational attributes of participants was examined descriptively (see table 2), focusing specifically on participants' responses to questionnaire items assessing their perceptions of interest, importance, and usefulness of reading. The mean score for interest (the average of two interest items) was 4.21 ( $SD = 0.85$ ), well above the midpoint of the scale. For importance, the same trend was apparent, with participants providing a mean score of 4.53 ( $SD = 0.63$ ). Participants also had a mean score well above the midpoint of the scale for the

importance of reading. For usefulness, participants provided a mean score of 4.49 ( $SD = 0.73$ ) to these items (the average of two interest items), which indicates that participants viewed reading as quite useful.

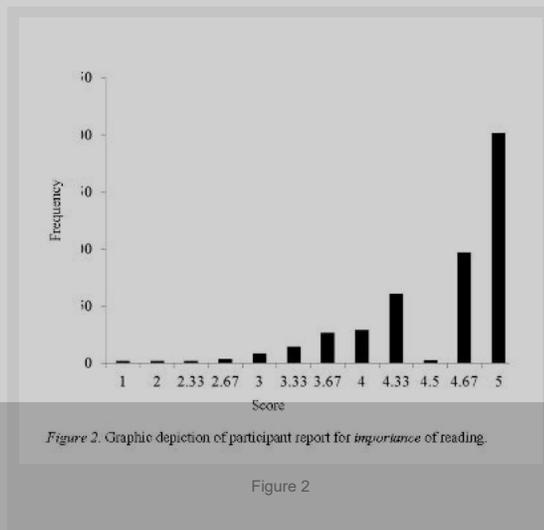
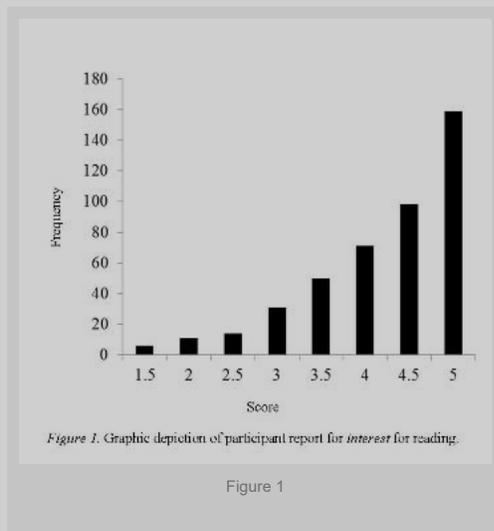
**Table 2**

*Descriptive statistics for measures of values for reading and perceived reading competence*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>
Reading Competence	4.19	.82	1–5
Interest	4.21	.85	1.5–5
Importance	4.53	.63	1–5
Usefulness	4.49	.73	1–5

*Note:* These items were based on a Likert scale of 1–5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest values for reading and perceived reading competence.

For all these indices, the distribution of scores was negatively skewed (see figure 1). For interest, the modal response was 5, with very few participants selecting a score below a 3. In fact, 74.5% reported a score of 4 or greater. For importance, the distribution of scores was similarly negatively skewed (see figure 2). The modal response was 5, with very few participants selecting a score below a 3, and 87% reporting a 4 or greater. The same was true for usefulness, with the distribution of scores also negatively skewed (see figure 3). The modal response was 5, with very few participants selecting a score below a 3, and 86% reporting a 4 or greater. These data show that the participants, as a group, reported high perceptions of the value of reading overall.



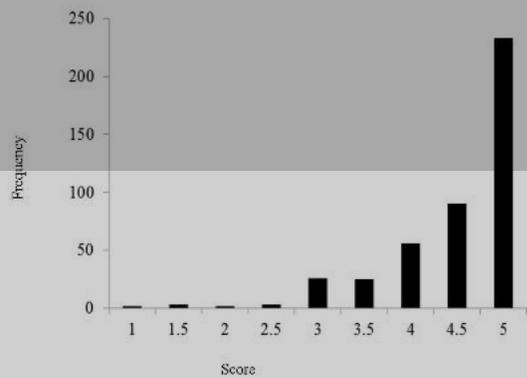


Figure 3. Graphic depiction of participant report for usefulness of reading.

Figure 3

We examined these data regarding values for reading as a function of participants' age, as shown in table 3. These data show that, in general, eight-, nine-, and ten-year-olds reported very high levels of interest, importance, and usefulness ratings for reading. However, these scores generally seemed to decline from ages eleven to sixteen years. To explore this trend, we calculated correlations of grade level with values in terms of interest, importance, and usefulness. Correlation coefficients showed a negative relation between grade and two of the three value variables: interest,  $r(434) = \hat{\rho}^{-.219}$ ,  $p < .001$ , and importance,  $r(434) = \hat{\rho}^{-.157}$ ,  $p < .001$ . Grade and usefulness were not significantly related,  $r(434) = \hat{\rho}^{.056}$ . For exploratory purposes, we compared ratings of interest, importance, and usefulness for primary-grade pupils (grades 1–6) and middle- and high-school pupils (grades 7–12). As suggested based on the correlational data, the older pupils reported significantly lower ratings for the interest and importance items,  $F(1,439) = 29.82$  and  $13.77$ , respectively ( $p < .001$ ); there was a trend for differences between the older and younger pupils for usefulness, as well,  $F(1,439) = 3.53$ ,  $p = .06$ .

**Table 3**

*Motivational values by age*

Age group	<i>n</i>	Interest ( <i>M, SD</i> )	Importance ( <i>M, SD</i> )	Usefulness ( <i>M, SD</i> )
8-year-olds	48	4.68 (.52)	4.67 (.57)	4.64 (.54)
9-year-olds	65	4.53 (.61)	4.68 (.50)	4.65 (.64)
10-year-olds	57	4.28 (.95)	4.78 (.38)	4.61 (.63)
11-year-olds	64	4.20 (.92)	4.39 (.75)	4.34 (.91)
12-year-olds	58	3.95 (.81)	4.39 (.66)	4.33 (.81)
13-year-olds	46	3.69 (.84)	4.42 (.64)	4.30 (.85)
14-year-olds	36	4.18 (.70)	4.44 (.80)	4.50 (.70)
15-year-olds	25	4.18 (.96)	4.45 (.55)	4.52 (.59)
16-year-olds 17-year-olds	1322	3.77 (1.03) 4.34 (.97)	4.27 (.78) 4.52 (.72)	4.12 (.68) 4.80 (.52)

With respect to extrinsic factors related to summer reading club participation, table 4 provides the percentage of participants indicating specific reasons for participating in the club. As can be seen, the majority of participants (63.2%) indicated that they participated to practice reading; far fewer participants participated for the other possible reasons provided, with the lowest percentage associated with club participation being a school requirement (8.2%). These data regarding stated purposes for participation, with the majority enrolling for reading practice and not extrinsic rewards, converge with findings showing the high level of intrinsic motivation reported by the participants.

Percent of students who selected reasons for participating in SRC

Reason for participating	Yes (%)	No (%)
Get Prize	37.5	62.5
Practice Reading	63.2	36.2
Parent Encouraged	37.5	62.5
School Encouraged	18.2	81.8
School Requirement	8.2	91.8

### ***‘ Interrelations among Variables***

A second aim of this study was to look at potential relations among participant background characteristics, reading competence, and value motivational attributes. Table 5 provides a correlation matrix with the relevant variables, with the exception of gender (for which alternative analyses were used given that the data were coded dichotomously). These data show there to be significant and moderately strong relations among the three value motivation variables (interest, importance, usefulness), as would be expected. These data also show there to be moderately significant relations between perceived reading competence and each of the values for reading, namely interest,  $r = .46, p < .001$ , importance,  $r = .37, p < .001$ , and usefulness,  $r = .26, p < .001$ . These findings suggest that children and teenagers who see themselves as better readers also tend to see reading as interesting, having importance, and being useful. Interestingly, note that there was no significant correlation among the motivational attributes and children’s/teenagers’ SES, based on maternal education.

Table 5

Correlations among key study variables

	Interest	Importance	Usefulness	Competence	SES
1. Interest	–	.54**	.46**	0.46**	‘ 0.06
2. Importance		–	.58**	0.37**	â^’0.01
3. Usefulness			–	0.26**	â^’0.03
4. Competence				–	‘ ‘ 0.07
5. SES					–

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: SES is captured based on maternal education.

To examine the association among perceived task values and gender, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Test results showed that girls provided higher scores than boys for interest,  $F(1,430) = 6.28, p < .05$  (for girls,  $M = 4.30, SD = .82$ ; for boys,  $M = 4.08, SD = .89$ ), importance,  $F(1,430) = 12.24, p < .001$  (for girls,  $M = 4.62, SD = .56$ ; for boys,  $M = 4.40, SD = .72$ ), and usefulness,  $F(1,430) = 17.25, p < .001$  (for girls,  $M = 4.60, SD = .57$ ; for boys,  $M = 4.31, SD = .89$ ). Cohen’s effect size values were  $d = .26$  for interest,  $.41$  for importance, and  $.49$  for usefulness, consistent with small- to medium-size effects.

# Discussion

This study examined the motivations of children and teenagers (ages 8–17 years) who participate in summer reading clubs to understand why they choose to participate. We looked at potential relationships between perceived reading competence, extrinsic motivational attributes, and how much children and teenagers value reading. Additionally, this study examined relations among students' SES, gender, age, and perceived reading competence; the degree to which children and teenagers value reading; and extrinsic motivational factors for reading.

First, participants in this SRC reported extremely high value for reading, in terms of their interest, perceived importance of reading, and the usefulness of reading. For all of these characteristics, most students responded very positively (4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is low endorsement). Interestingly, the majority of participants said they participated in the SRC to practice reading, while far fewer participated for other reasons, including only 37.5% saying they participated to get a prize. Perhaps students who participate in SRCs may be more intrinsically motivated to read, which has positive implications for future reading and performance.<sup>36</sup> While libraries invest resources to provide incentives for those who attend SRCs, it seems clear that most of the children and teenagers who completed the survey do not choose to participate in these kinds of programs simply to gain external rewards such as prizes or giveaways.

Second, as previous studies suggest,<sup>37</sup> there were some gender differences between certain perceived values for reading between boys and girls. More specifically, girls reported believing that reading was more important, interesting, and useful than boys. As reported in previous research,<sup>38</sup> there were no differences between genders in terms of perceived competence for reading.

Third, in terms of SES, while previous research suggests that children and teenagers from lower-SES families may have lower motivation for reading than their peers,<sup>39</sup> this study showed no significant relationship between maternal education and any student perception of reading competency or value. Thus, it seems clear that although there is a wide SES status range in terms of those who participate in SRCs, SES does not have a significant relationship with any motivational attributes looked at in this study.

## **Implications**

The findings of this study add to a body of work related to motivation for reading, such as gender differences for reading motivation<sup>40</sup> and the pattern of lower motivation for reading as students increase in age.<sup>41</sup> However, this study's specific focus on SRCs and libraries has important practical implications for libraries across the country. Understanding motivation is particularly important for libraries as they consider different areas for allocating resources, such as hiring more staff or providing more expensive incentives in support of SRC reading log achievements. In order to address lower levels of reading motivation in classrooms, Linda B. Gambrell gives several suggestions for increasing student motivation.<sup>42</sup> These suggestions include creating opportunities for more discussion and conversation about texts that students read, making reading more relevant to students' daily lives, giving students more choices about the content that they read, and providing incentives that foster value for reading.<sup>43</sup> While these suggestions are discussed in the context of classrooms, they would also be helpful for programs like SRCs.

Related to the idea of encouraging discussion about books, SRC program designers may want to consider expanding opportunities that foster discussion and social interactions attached to the message that reading is valued and important, such as bringing in authors to discuss popular books with children and teenagers or forming some sort of book club.

In addition to encouraging book-centered conversations, librarians can support intrinsic motivation by helping children and teenagers find books that are related to their personal interests. While support may be in a form of making available recommended book lists, such as YALSA's *Best of the Best*, librarians are encouraged to strengthen readers' advisory services that allow young patrons to be active participants in choosing their reading materials. Direct readers' advisory services are informal short interviews between a patron and a librarian who is generally specialized in literature resources. Based on the patron's reading interest and other interview responses,

the librarian will guide the reader to some next-recommended reading materials.<sup>44</sup> Practicing reader' advisory techniques with young patrons provides a positive reading selection model that encourages the development of increased intrinsic motivation behavior and encourages discussion about reading materials. New digital readers' advisory tools are finding a voice to expand recommendations even outside the librarian's experience, and librarians are encouraged to share these tools with children and teenagers.<sup>45</sup>

These kinds of services would be particularly important for boys and older teenagers, who may not value reading as highly as girls and younger children. Displaying or suggesting reading materials that are particularly relevant to their daily lives might be one way to encourage more participation. For example, considering the importance of peers in teenagers' lives,<sup>46</sup> suggesting a book that deals with relationships or peer pressure might be particularly relevant to teenagers. Since boys tend to be physical and tend to enjoy competition,<sup>47</sup> helping boys select reading materials that focus on movement, sports, or athletics might be one method of making reading relevant to their daily lives. For boys specifically, SRCs could also incorporate programs that foster activity and competition, such as a scavenger hunt in the library.

Additionally, librarians can continue to advocate for children and teenagers to have many options for reading material, both at SRCs and throughout the year. Many children and teenagers have required reading through their schools. SRCs and libraries in particular can present a unique community access space that provides choices and options for reading multiple genres, lengths, and types of reading material.

In terms of incentives related to motivation, libraries should consider that previous research suggests that providing incentives may not actually be helpful in fostering long-term reading behaviors.<sup>48</sup> Barbara Ann Marinak found that students who received either rewards that supported reading behaviors (such as books) or no rewards at all were more likely to engage in subsequent reading, whereas suggested students who received tokens not as related to reading exhibited weakened intrinsic motivation to continue reading.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, when considering incentives, SRC administrators may want to investigate reward incentives that are more highly related to reading behaviors, such as allowing a child to select a book to keep.

Finally, our study demonstrated that students who participate in SRCs are highly motivated to read. Clearly, there are many children and teenagers in communities who do not share this same motivation for reading, particularly as they move across grades.<sup>50</sup> A challenge for libraries is to continue to seek new opportunities to recruit children and teenagers who do not choose on their own to participate in SRCs. This message aligns with ALA's resolution to ensure summer reading programs for all children and teens.<sup>51</sup> In addition to the previous ideas suggested, libraries are encouraged to continue to seek out community partnerships that support the value of reading in society. Libraries are uniquely positioned within communities to be advocates for children and teenagers. As such, librarians are encouraged to stay active in both state and national literacy conversations.

Several important future research directions are suggested by this work. First, it is important to further examine how incentives may promote or detract from participation in library programming and to determine what kinds of incentives might be the most enticing. Many libraries invest heavily in using extrinsic incentives to motivate participation, yet the results of this study suggest that intrinsic motivators may be most powerful.

Second, it is also important for libraries to consider how to motivate children and teenagers with low motivation toward reading to participate in library programming. It may be that these youngsters have the most to gain from such programs. Systematic research on how reluctant readers can be brought into libraries is a critically important avenue for future research.

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## **Beyond Books, Nooks, and Dirty Looks: The History and Evolution of Library Services to Teens in the United States**

Posted on [May 5, 2014](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



**By Shari A. Lee**, Assistant Professor, St. John's University

### **Abstract**

Public libraries have had a long, though decidedly less than adequate, tradition of serving teens. While there have been encouraging transformations occurring in many of these institutions, a significant number continue to lag in their efforts to serve this group. Underlying this lag is not only the dearth of research that examines public library services to teens but also the quality of several recently published books about teen library services. Building on a background discussion of the purpose that U.S. public libraries were meant to serve, the development and provision of library services to teens is considered with specific focus on issues that have influenced and/or presented barriers to these services. Finally, using a model for inquiry that draws on William Scott, who posits that institutions are comprised of three pillars that enable them to keep order and provide meaning to individuals, the paper proposes that researchers look *to* the institution rather than *at* the community for new insights on serving and connecting with teens as a user group in a more meaningful way.

### **Introduction**

It cannot be ignored that the *problem of purpose* has plagued the public library since its inception or that the task of defining the library's role in the lives of the American public has been equally arduous.<sup>1</sup> This has understandably been the subject of much debate and discussion. It is also the focus of Patrick Williams's historical work *The American Public Library and the Problem of Purpose*.<sup>2</sup> Here the author analyzes the varying roles that the public library has played and how these roles have historically been determined and defined; he notes that these have often overlapped and that different purposes have been relevant at different times.

According to Virginia A. Walter and Elaine Meyers, in relation to teen services these roles are best understood as representing three different ideas about the nature of public library service.<sup>3</sup> The first is the library as an institution that promotes reading; the second is the library as an educational institution; and the third, and more conceptual, is the library as an institution that serves to advance society by uplifting the underserved. These ideas of the purpose of teen library services have coexisted at times. They have also competed at times, and different ideas have been dominant at different times in American library history. This is noteworthy because, as Walter and Meyers attest, these ideas have formed the basis for librarians' understanding of their work and the types of

service young adults have received over the years.<sup>4</sup> In this paper, I examine the evolving notions and role of U.S. public libraries and consider their effects on the development of public library services to teens.

## Background

The significance of defining the purpose and role of the public library is very evident in the founding ideals of the Boston Public Library, the first large, publicly supported U.S. municipal library. The library was expected to serve as a purveyor of democracy and knowledge, as well as an extension of the public school system. This agenda was clearly stated in the 1852 report that detailed the objectives to be accomplished by the Boston Public Library, which opened in 1854.<sup>5</sup> In the report, the trustees affirmed that the overarching goal was to create a large public library “as the means of completing our system of public education.”<sup>6</sup> They specifically focused on providing young people the opportunity to “carry on their education and bring it to practical results by private study”<sup>6</sup> as demonstrated by the following rhetorical query:

Why should not this prosperous and liberal city extend some reasonable amount of aid to the foundation and support of a noble public library to which the young people of both sexes when they leave the schools can resort for those works which pertain to general culture or which are needful for research into any branch of useful knowledge?<sup>7</sup>

This progressive model served as a blueprint for the almost two hundred U.S. public libraries that were constructed by 1875. Each of these libraries also set forth to provide *young people* with the opportunity to continue their education by functioning to broaden the reach of the public school system. Nevertheless, this goal eventually gave way to the realization that the public’s love for fiction eclipsed its preference for educational reading materials. The fact was that these libraries mainly provided popular fiction, not the enlightening materials that were thought to lead to self-improvement and intellectual growth.

Williams identifies this as the first problem of purpose with which librarians had to contend.<sup>8</sup> Librarians responded with the taste-elevation theory. They would continue to collect popular fiction as a means of whetting the public’s appetite for reading, as this would, hopefully, lead to a craving for more cultured reading.<sup>9</sup> Access to large amounts of fiction, however, did not expand the public’s interest in educational reading materials. Instead, by the 1890s the taste-elevation theory basically had been cast aside. David Levy comments on the fallout:

As the taste-elevation theory lost adherents, the debate grew about what to do: exclude inferior fiction? accept entertainment as having social value? permit whatever the public wanted? It came to be accepted that public libraries should supply readers with what they wanted, entertainment mostly. But this meant that the original stated purpose of the public library, to be an educational institution on a par with the public schools, to provide “self-culture through books,”<sup>10</sup> would have to be abandoned.<sup>10</sup>

A pattern of trial and error in its search for purpose would become the norm for the public library, and few would deny that it continues today in services to all ages of public library users, including teens. As each new purpose was found to be lacking or to simply have missed the mark, it was abandoned for a new, or improved—or sometimes reinvented—purpose.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the public library had positioned itself as militant, and librarians as missionaries charged to evangelize, reform, and save.<sup>11</sup> Motivated by what they termed the “library spirit,”<sup>12</sup> librarians reveled in their newfound purpose, which was to make the public library an integral part of the American fabric, one community at a time.<sup>12</sup> This vision, nevertheless, would quickly fall victim to the social upheaval wrought by World War I, which left the public library reeling and, once again, in search of a new purpose. The relentless search for purpose led the public library to take on adult education and the protection of democracy, among several others. These proved to be just as fleeting.

Levy observes, “It wasn’t until the 1980s, Williams claims, that public libraries finally began to come to terms with their more limited but realistic purpose: to be suppliers of books to the middle class and a symbol of culture in the community.”<sup>13</sup> However, this realization did not come without challenges to the progressive view, which, many will agree, still continues to underpin the public library’s mission in many ways. The most notable of these came in 1973, when Michael Harris questioned the theory of natural progression and the notion that public libraries served the betterment of society.<sup>14</sup>

### *The Paradigm Shifts: A New Purpose*

According to Harris’s radical revisionist theory, public libraries were developed by politically motivated elitists as a way of controlling the beliefs and actions of the middle class as well as a means of Americanizing immigrants.<sup>15</sup> He argued that these institutions were established as a means of keeping the public off the streets and in an environment where they could be controlled. Although Harris was criticized for a lack of evidence, his work did lay the foundation for a new way of thinking about libraries. It also prompted librarians serving all ages, including teens, to think differently about their work and their institutions.

This shift is evident in the *Mission Statement and Imperatives for Services: Guidelines for Public Libraries*, which was published by the Public Library Association (PLA) in 1979 and renewed in 2010.<sup>16</sup> In the original document, the PLA described a rapidly changing society that was different from that of the past century, which made it crucial to redefine the goals of the public library. These institutions were no longer simply to standardize American values; instead, they should identify and promote cultural differences among users, including education, information, recreation, and age. The mission placed on libraries a new responsibility: to serve the public as a whole. Instead of simply setting one standard for all libraries, the PLA encouraged these institutions to look at the community and whom they served and to develop services based on these factors.<sup>17</sup> The shift in direction eventually led the PLA and the American Library Association (ALA) to recommend the use of output measures instead of the traditional regulatory standards to which these organizations had previously prescribed.<sup>18</sup> While standards and guidelines are still in place today,

neither the ALA nor our division the Public Library Association (PLA) sets prescriptive standards for public libraries. Instead, we advocate an outcomes-based assessment process set forth in a series of books on planning and assessment. The reason for this is that each library serves a different community with different needs.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the shift in focus to unique community and user needs, teens as a group fared little better than they had in previous decades. The fact is that although serving young people was a fundamental principle of the Boston Public

Library, early advocates of youth services were influenced by the progressive view of the public library. Their underlying goal was to advance society.

## Early Library Services to the Young

Like most librarians of his day, Samuel Swett Green (1837–1918)—thought to be the father of reference work—believed in the progressive notion of public libraries.<sup>20</sup> This thinking is apparent in Green’s argument for the importance of personalized reference services, which offers a contextual vision of the purpose for which public libraries were meant to serve as well as the people they were meant to serve.<sup>21</sup> Young people were very much a part of Green’s public library, and he later advocated to “have in every library a friend of the young, whom they can consult freely when in need of assistance, and who, in addition to the power of gaining their confidence, has knowledge and tact enough to render them real aid in making selections.”<sup>22</sup> Social constraints of the time notwithstanding, the public library that Green was describing is just that, a library for everyone, including teens.

### *Age Restrictions and Library Services to the Young*

It is important to note that although the trustees repeatedly singled out young people as central to the early Boston Public Library’s objectives, many libraries initially denied access to those below a specific age, usually twelve or fourteen. In the introduction to her 1893 ALA report, *Reading of the Young*, Caroline Hewins summarizes the results of five annual surveys, which asked 160 libraries, “Have you an age limit, and if so, what is it?”<sup>23</sup> Seventy-four libraries responded that they would not serve children under the age of twelve or fourteen; sixteen did not serve young people under the age of fifteen or sixteen; and only thirty-six had no age limit for service. It is logical, therefore, to presume that the young people referred to in the report most likely excluded younger teens. This is certainly a reasonable assumption given that adolescence was yet to be identified as a specific and separate stage of development, which made the line between teens and children less visible or certainly more flexible. In any event, children, which then included younger teens, would not be denied service for long. By the time Green had delivered his renowned 1876 speech, the children’s movement was well under way.

A proponent of the cause, William Fletcher began his 1876 special report, *Public Libraries in the United States of America*, by asking the question “What shall the public library do for the young, and how?”<sup>24</sup> He enthusiastically proceeded to argue for the elimination of age restrictions on library use, emphasizing that this was the only recourse that fit within the notion of a true public library. The first *Yearly Report on Boys’ and Girls’ Reading*, which Hewins delivered in 1882 at the World’s Library Congress, confirms that this thinking had in fact gained momentum.<sup>25</sup> In the report, Hewins references the findings of a survey, the first in a series, in which she asked twenty-five librarians what they were doing to promote “a love of good reading in boys and girls.”<sup>26</sup> This survey shows that there was a growing interest in serving this relatively new and younger user group, children. Interestingly, Samuel Green was among the survey participants. His response to that question—“The close connection which exists between the library and the schools is doing much to elevate the character of the reading of the boys and girls”<sup>27</sup>—demonstrates that there also was an effort to work with schools to provide effective library services to children.

Just over a decade later, while delivering the 1893 ALA report on *Reading of the Young*, Hewins accuses the ALA of being slow to act on initiatives concerning library services for children.<sup>28</sup> This lack of early ALA support, however, was not indicative of the general attitude of the time. Long-standing supporters of the cause were riding

the wave of social reform for children that had been sweeping the United States (and Europe) since 1870. This trend not only led to social reform for children, but also to the expansion of public library services and to the development of children’s reading rooms.<sup>29</sup> As Alice Hazeltine observes, the leading editorial of the April 1898 issue of *Library Journal* speaks to this development, noting that “the phrase ‘the library and the child’—which was itself new not so long ago—has been changed about. It is now ‘the child and the library,’ and the transposition is suggestive of the increasing emphasis given to that phase of library work that deals with children.”□<sup>30</sup>

While this transposition signaled a turning point in children’s services at the time, the reality is that the first library dedicated specifically to children was created almost a century earlier. The library was founded in 1803, when Caleb Bingham donated 150 books to the town of Salisbury, Connecticut, with instructions that the books be used specifically for children between the ages of nine and sixteen.

Bingham’s library actually predates the 1833 founding of the Peterborough Town Library, commonly known to be the oldest free publicly supported library; therefore, as defined today, the first public library was created specifically for young people.<sup>31</sup> This is noteworthy because, as Jane Hannigan argues, library services to children in the late nineteenth century would be called library services to young adults today, and that the emphasis of service to young children represents a gradual shift.<sup>32</sup> Hannigan makes a keen observation regarding the shifting notions and definitions of children over time. For instance, in its 1972 *Standards for Public Libraries*, approved by and the Public Library Section and subsections, the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) defines children as those from infancy to the age of fourteen.<sup>33</sup> Approximately twenty-five years later, in its *Background Text to the Guidelines for Children’s Libraries Services*, IFLA still defined children as those from infancy to fourteen years of age; however, they were now broken down into the following four categories:

- Babies/toddlers
- preschool children
- (ages 5–10) elementary/primary school children
- (ages 11–14) “older”□ children<sup>34</sup>

This redefining also is apparent in libraries. For example, *the Young Adult Services division of the ALA, renamed the Young Adult Library Services Association in 1992, has defined teens as those from twelve to eighteen years old since 1991*. However, tweens—defined as eight to fourteen years old—long acknowledged and targeted as a viable consumer market, have been more recently identified and accepted as a distinct and separate user group in libraries.<sup>35</sup> The same is true in library and information science (LIS) research.<sup>36</sup> It is evident that as the public library struggled to define its role and purpose, the types of services deemed appropriate for young people evolved as much as the definition of who comprised this group. Even so, the focus on young people remained an important aspect of the public library’s purpose.

## Development of Library Services to Teens

It was the aftermath of World War I that drove the need for young adult library services. Miriam Braverman observes that postwar technological changes had significantly reduced the need for a large workforce; therefore, the age of transition from school to the job market (approximately twelve to fourteen years before the war) was increased to accommodate the growing number of economically dependent youth.<sup>37</sup> As a result, many more children went on to high school than in previous decades. The increase in the number of teens using the library for

homework raised the demand for adult reference services. According to Holly Willett, librarians in a few larger cities already had recognized that intermediary services and materials were needed for these users who were too old for the children's room but not quite old enough to roam the adult stacks unsupervised.<sup>38</sup> Willett notes that this need was also reflected in a 1924 survey, which revealed that libraries had developed different methods of handling these materials.<sup>39</sup> For example, some shelved these intermediary materials alongside children's materials, labeling the books to signify age appropriateness. Depending on available space, these intermediary collections ranged from single shelves to entire sections, with several libraries even providing separate reference areas for high school students.

Three large urban libraries at this time designated space, materials, and personnel specifically to young adults. These were located in New York City, Cleveland, and Baltimore, and they were run, respectively, by three innovative women: Mabel Williams (1887–1985), who believed in the importance of addressing developmental needs in library services to teens; Jean Roos (1891–1982), who championed social issues with the conviction that in order to provide effective teen services, libraries were obligated to work with other youth service providers in their communities; and Margaret A. Edwards (1902–1988), author of the influential book *The Fair Garden and the Swarm of Beasts: The Library and the Young Adult*. Their service philosophy was to meet the needs of the adolescent without imposing the ideals of the library; nevertheless, these women were very much influenced by the traditional reading ideology on which the public library was founded. Thus, reading programs became the foundation of teen library services.<sup>40</sup>

Walter and Meyers observe that between the 1930s and 1940s, the focus shifted from reading to include community betterment and education, which created a significant, though short-lived, increase in young adult library use.<sup>41</sup> Fast-forward through the 1970s and 1980s, they state that the focus turned to public accountability, with libraries adopting business management models, thus laying the foundation for the “next golden age” for teen services. The 1990s saw the dawn of this new era, which embraced the notion of supply and demand, with libraries giving teens what they wanted. Yet reading reclaimed center stage, as librarians armed with new marketing strategies tried, once again, to attract the elusive teen with books.<sup>42</sup> Seemingly by default, public library service to teens was founded on the long-standing purpose of the public library: reading.

### *Focus on Reading*

The focus on reading was not exclusive to libraries. By the late 1950s, educators focused on the importance of reading for pleasure with the goal of improving student reading skills. Many have correlated this with the publication of *Why Johnny Can't Read: And What Can You Do about It*.<sup>43</sup> The book stresses the value of literacy, which, one educator observed, is an important first step in reading for pleasure. Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR) soon followed. Known later as SSR, this program provided time for silent reading in schools, where students were encouraged to self-select reading materials with no requirement for book reports or comprehension testing. It was touted as a foolproof recipe for instantly improving students' ability to read.<sup>44</sup>

Since its inception in the early 1960s, SSR has undergone unending scrutiny in the education community. While the findings are mixed, the general consensus is that SSR is effective.<sup>45</sup> In fact, when SSR was discontinued in one high school, the impact was swift and significant. Within two years, the school library circulation nosedived, and there was also a decline in overall student achievement on standardized tests. The surprise was that this decline was not limited to reading scores; history and science scores had declined as well.<sup>46</sup> A more recent study on silent

reading concludes that “the need for efficient silent reading habits for success in the digital-global age is unarguable.”<sup>47</sup> Clearly, when provided the time to read for fun, the benefits are undeniable. Modified and offered under a plethora of acronyms, such as DEAR (Drop Everything And Read), SSR is still a part of the curriculum of many schools today.

Given the focus on reading in schools, as well as the role of reading in the development of library services to teens, it is not surprising that getting teens to read (or connecting teens with books) became the overarching goal of teen library programs. Even when justifying or promoting gaming programs in the library today, the benefits are often described in terms of increased circulation. By default, the underlying thinking seemed to be that teens did not like to read; thus, they needed encouragement. The opposite was, in fact, true. Most teens “like to read, read quite a bit, and value reading.”<sup>48</sup> When e-content is considered, it seems that today’s teens are reading as much as (or more than) they did in the past, though in nontraditional ways.<sup>49</sup>

Lee Rainie, director of the Pew Research Center’s Internet and Life Project, reports that today “teen reading levels match or exceed those of adults,”<sup>50</sup> and that 76 percent of sixteen- to twenty-nine-year-old respondents cited pleasure as one of the reasons they read.<sup>50</sup> A decade earlier, the Teen Read Week Survey found 72 percent of respondents reporting that they enjoyed reading recreationally when they had time.<sup>51</sup> The 2012 Scholastic survey of six- to seventeen-year-olds shows higher numbers, with 74 percent of respondents (76 percent of girls and 72 percent of boys) reading for fun at least once weekly.<sup>52</sup> Vivian Valberg, who looked at three major studies on teen media usage, finds that print was the only category that had lost ground in the prior five years and that the decline was mainly in newspaper and magazine reading.<sup>53</sup> Book reading had held steady, actually increasing by four minutes per day in the last decade. Similarly, Stephen Krashen’s analysis of reading surveys from 1946 to 2011, including several National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) questionnaires, finds little change in book reading among teens and that the only real drop was in magazine and newspaper reading.<sup>54</sup> His analysis also shows an increase in pleasure reading from 1946 to 1984, but a somewhat steady decline from 1984 to 2011, yielding no net increase in sixty-five years. English teacher Colette Bennett voices concern in that “there is heightened awareness about student reading for over fifty years, there is time provided in school, and there are materials published. Yet, there has been no increase in teenagers reading for pleasure?”<sup>55</sup>

Should libraries also be concerned? This is certainly worth considering in view of the fact that an analysis of Teen Read Week Surveys from 2001 to 2003 finds that only a “very small minority of teens [just over 5 percent] said that they read as a direct result of adult encouragement.”<sup>56</sup> Critical reading motivators in teens are found to be choice in reading materials and access to reading materials of value, which Krashen says presents an additional barrier for teens living in poverty.<sup>57</sup> Time pressure, or limited opportunity, was overwhelmingly cited by teens as the main barrier to more frequent reading.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, given the opportunity and a comfortable place to read, Krashen writes that “the first priority of reading promotion campaigns should be to help make reading possible by providing access to books. Once access to reading is taken care of, we can then deal with the small minority of potential readers who have access to reading material but do not read.”<sup>59</sup> Krashen suggests that this can be accomplished by improving library spaces for teens and YA collections, a strategy that Ken Haycock also supports.<sup>60</sup>

## Disconnect between Teens and Libraries

In contrast to the library's long-standing focus on reading, teens within the past two decades report that what they want from the library is research and homework help, Internet/computer access, opportunities to volunteer, teen-friendly spaces where they can study and socialize, useful teen websites, access to technologies they value, as well as technology-driven services that include online personalized readers' advisory and mobile apps.<sup>61</sup> When teens did mention books, it was to report that YA collections were more often comprised of materials that librarians believed appropriate instead of the popular fiction they valued.<sup>62</sup> In fact, respondents in the 2012 Pew survey said they wanted e-readers from their libraries; however, they specifically stated that these should be pre-loaded with the books they valued. Other critiques of services and resources were unfriendly librarians and unwelcoming, even hostile, library spaces; indeed, the spaces provided by libraries were cited as the most common barrier to teen services.<sup>63</sup>

These issues speak to a *disconnect* between teens and library culture, which is why teens perceive library services to be unsatisfactory and the library as uncool.<sup>64</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that teens prefer bookstores to libraries as they find bookstores more tolerant of their need to socialize.<sup>65</sup> In an effort to better serve teens and support teen developmental needs, Kay Bishop and Pat Bauer conducted a study in 2002 that aimed to identify strategies and programs that attract teens to the library. Their findings showed that although some progress was being made, "public libraries continue not to provide equitable service to young adults."<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, more than ten years later, the research findings are much too similar. Two recent, previously cited, studies confirm<sup>67</sup> what LIS research has shown for years: that teens are generally dissatisfied with the public library services they are provided, as Anthony Bernier points out in his argument for praxis in YA research.<sup>68</sup>

The first is Vivian Howard's 2011 mixed-method study, which shows that teens continue to find library services lacking.<sup>69</sup> Almost 64 percent of survey respondents reported that they had an overall positive impression of the library, 21 percent were impartial, with only 16 percent stating dissatisfaction. However, focus groups revealed a much higher percentage of dissatisfaction across all aspects of the library. This inconsistency was found to be due to the participants' overall low expectations and limited knowledge of libraries. Since teens did not have very high expectations of the library and were not very knowledgeable about programs and services, their responses to survey questions unwittingly appeared to be positive. However, when probed, the focus group participants revealed that they were unhappy with many aspects of the library. These included several long-identified barriers to teen services: poorly designed teen spaces; nonexistent relationships or collaborations with library staff; unappealing teen websites; as well as teens' lack of knowledge regarding library programs, services, and collections. These barriers were posited as the reasons why only 13 percent of participants reported using the library weekly, even though 63 percent said they were satisfied with the library. The number of teens who used the library occasionally was significantly higher, with 83 percent reporting that they had visited the public library at least once in the past year. Howard concludes that public libraries need to be more responsive to teen needs to attract teens to use the library.<sup>70</sup>

The second study to substantiate teens' negative perceptions of the public library is the most recent Pew Internet research on reading, which finds that although high school students rely more heavily on the library and are more likely to use library resources than other age groups, they did not necessarily like the library.<sup>71</sup> Specifically, the findings show that in the previous year, 63 percent of sixteen- to seventeen-year-olds had borrowed books from the library and that 55 percent had used the library for research; however, 45 percent said that "the library is not important or *not too important* to them and their family."<sup>72</sup> According to Rainie, teens have specific ideas about the types of library services they would likely use.<sup>72</sup> These include personalized online readers' advisory services

based on reading history; strategically located automated kiosks, similar to Redbox, where users can check out books, movies, and music; apps that allow access to library services; e-readers pre-loaded with books that teens value; classes on how to use e-readers and tablets; and a GPS app to help locate materials in the library. Rainie also predicts that teen behavior will be different in the future. He notes that teachers and others want libraries to make changes to accommodate these new behaviors as well.<sup>73</sup>

### *Notions of Teens*

Another issue that seems to be at the root of the type of public library services for teens is the notion that they are unruly or difficult.<sup>74</sup> However, Walter and Meyers challenge this stance and caution that YA librarians sometimes convey a disturbing core message, which seems to say that adults are not cool enough to relate to teens and teen culture. It is, therefore, up to YA librarians to demystify this exotic tribe in order to prevent their colleagues from undoing any progress previously made with this group. The authors caution that this view is overstated to make their point, but that it serves as inspiration for their new and more positive narrative that opposes this existing tenet and history of YA services.<sup>75</sup>

Even so, preexisting negative notions of teens are not exclusive to librarians and may simply be reflective of society's view of teens as a whole. Many adults view teens with varying degrees of revulsion as undesirable members of society.<sup>76</sup> This can manifest as ephibiphobia, which is not simply a dislike of teens, but an extreme irrational fear and repugnance. Even the "very word *adolescent* is almost always used in popular writing to characterize an immature, irresponsible, and undesirable individual or his or her behavior."<sup>77</sup> Included in this canon of behavior, at various times, are criminal activity, truancy, loitering or hanging out, sexual activity, drug use, and alcohol abuse. As Alexander Siegel and Lori Scovill ask: How did we get here? When did teens become the disease of society?<sup>78</sup> In order to understand this phenomenon and its impact on the development of library services to teens, a brief history of adolescence is helpful.

## History of Adolescence

In presenting one of the two conflicting schools of thought on the history of adolescence, Gerald Moran and Maris Vinovskis argue that adolescence—or, more specifically, the "problems of troubled youth"—had not only been recognized in premodern Europe and America but also that these societies "were sometimes as deeply preoccupied with youth as we are today."<sup>79</sup> In fact, contrary to Philippe Ariès's claim that there was no concept of what we now term *adolescence* before the eighteenth century, Jerome Kroll and Barbara Hanawalt, among others, contend that evidence of some concept of adolescence can be traced back to medieval times.<sup>80</sup> Very much an issue throughout the past, these historians claim that improving student reading skills was tied to the idea that adolescence was a period when individuals were more susceptible to crime and other social vices. However, they point out that while these societies were very much aware of the stage of development they referred to as youth, they did not possess a modern concept of adolescence.<sup>81</sup> Our modern notion of adolescence can primarily be attributed to G. Stanley Hall (1904), the first psychologist to look at this phase of life scientifically and as a separate area of study, which he believed began between the twelfth and fourteenth years of life.<sup>82</sup>

### *From Defining to Demonizing: Attitudes about Teens*

Influenced by the recapitulation theory, Hall believed that the empirical history of humans was embedded in the genetic makeup of each individual.<sup>83</sup> In other words, each individual would actually relive the development of the human race, transitioning from the primitive stage toward maturity and the civilized stage. Hall likens adolescence to the German literary movement *Sturm und Drang*, which emphasized a passionate and revolutionary rejection of the older neoclassical style among young writers at the turn of the eighteenth century.’ He saw a correlation between the objectives of these young writers and the *storm and stress* of modern adolescents. Teens were emotionally unstable beings who wavered between contradictory thoughts and behaviors. Periods of happiness and high energy followed by periods of apathy and loathing were manifestations of storm and stress. In this uniquely Western view of adolescence, Hall contends that during this stage of development, there also is a need for authority that manifests as rebelliousness. The tragedy, as psychologist Robert Epstein points out, is that although the recapitulation theory was completely discredited in the 1930s, “psychologists and the general public never got the message. Many still believe . . . that teen turmoil is an *inevitable* part of human development.”<sup>84</sup>

Adolescence, therefore, became a problem that had to be fixed, and, as a result, a sort of demonization of teens occurred.<sup>85</sup> Seigel and Scovill argue that this demonization did not take place “accidentally” or “incidentally,” and that it is not just a manifestation of present-day societal challenges.<sup>86</sup> Adolescents, Seigel and Scovill assert, have been demonized since they were identified as being in a separate stage of life. The idea here is that although Hall’s work brought attention to the adolescent as a thing, it is also the reason adolescence quickly evolved from thing to disease. The mid-twentieth century also heralded new analyses of Freudian research on adolescence that dominated our understanding of young people.<sup>87</sup> Hannigan cites the contributions of Anna Freud (1958), Peter Blos (1962, 1967), and Eric Erikson (1968), asserting that these works were rooted in Freudian thought and, as such, articulated a male view of adolescent development.<sup>88</sup> Psychologists worked to find a cure for this disease. The treatment was to control the lives of young people during this time of stress; it was administered through education and social practices that also emphasized the dominant social norms.<sup>89</sup>

## Teens Today

The fact is that teens in the United States, as well as several other Westernized nations, do show some signs of distress. Epstein points to the peak age of arrest for most crimes in the United States, long established at eighteen, as evidence.<sup>90</sup> He further states that suicide is the third leading cause of adolescent death; drug abuse is high; and the high school dropout rate is nearly 50 percent among urban minorities. Considering the number of deadly school shootings, he observes that American high schools now seem like prisons, and he questions whether these problems are truly unavoidable.<sup>91</sup>

Jean Piaget attributed adolescent behavior to increased cognitive abilities that gave teens the ability to reason, dispute, and theorize on an adult level, which could cause conflict.<sup>92</sup> More aligned with Epstein, Margaret Mead attributed this behavior to culture, noting that Samoan adolescents did not experience the same turmoil that Western teens experienced.<sup>93</sup> Citing a 1991 study, which found that 60 percent of 186 pre-industrial societies had no word for adolescence, Epstein notes that teens in these countries exhibited no psychopathology, and that there were no signs of antisocial behavior among adolescent males in more than 50 percent of these societies.<sup>94</sup> A more significant finding, Epstein observes, comes from a series of long-term studies that began in the 1980s. The studies suggest “that teen trouble begins to appear in other cultures soon after the introduction of certain Western influences, especially Western-style schooling, television programs and movies.”<sup>95</sup> Epstein believes that the

problem in present-day Western society stems from the fact that teens are consistently isolated from adults and are forced to learn about the world from peers rather than adults. Since they are wrongly treated like children, teens inevitably claim adult status through irresponsible behavior. Epstein concludes:

Fortunately, we also know from extensive research both in the U.S. and elsewhere that when we treat teens like adults, they almost immediately rise to the challenge. We need to replace the myth of the immature teen brain with a frank look at capable and savvy teens in history, at teens in other cultures, and at the truly extraordinary potential of our own young people today.<sup>96</sup>

Epstein's observations align with much of what research on teens and libraries show: public libraries are in a position to, and *need* to, support teen developmental needs. Here we have echoes of Walter and Meyers, who find that when teens are supported by their communities, they in turn support their communities, and that public libraries are perfectly positioned to contribute to this cycle of mutual support.<sup>97</sup> However, this requires supporting the needs of the entire person instead of primarily focusing on homework and pleasure-reading needs, which is the model to which many libraries still subscribe.<sup>98</sup>

## Lack of Research on Teens and Libraries

More than a decade ago Christine Jenkins remarked, "In considering the historiography of youth services librarianship, one is struck by how often a call for further research in this area has been sounded and how limited the response to that call has been."<sup>99</sup> Unfortunately, this observation is as relevant today as it was in 2000. Since that time several other researchers have acknowledged this enduring gap in LIS literature. For example, in commenting on the missing years of undocumented accounts of library services to children, Walter notes that services to young adults "is even more lacking in rigorous historical analysis and documentation,"<sup>□</sup> specifically:

What is largely missing from the history of young adult services is an understanding of its development since the 1940s. Why did public libraries apparently retreat from targeting high school students at precisely the moment in American history when teenagers were being defined? Why was there an apparent resurgence of interest in young adult services within the American Library Association in the mid-1980s?<sup>100</sup>

In 2006 Agosto and Hughes-Hassell highlight an additional gap in the literature, noting that "little youth-centered research exists that examines either the basic information-seeking behavior of teenagers, or reference and information services for young adults,"<sup>□</sup> which leaves information service providers with little knowledge of the types of services that teens need and limited methods of assessing if or how their everyday information needs are being met.<sup>101</sup> A year later, Meyers et al. make the observation that despite "the progress made in youth studies to date, there is still need for additional research."<sup>□102</sup> Consequently, it is not surprising that in 2010 Jenkins reiterates, "Several years ago I . . . noted that this history was wide-open for study. There has been some progress since then, but basically the history of youth services librarianship as a field of study is still as wide-open as ever."<sup>□103</sup>

No doubt, public libraries have had a long, though decidedly less than adequate, tradition of serving teens. While there have been encouraging transformations occurring in many of these institutions, a significant number continue to lag in their efforts to serve this group. Underlying this lag is not only the dearth of research that examines public library services to teens as well as the history of these services but also the quality of several

recently published books. Mary K. Chelton observes that “a number of these have been poorly researched and/or presented inaccuracies.”<sup>104</sup> As Bernier observes, “Thus, we continue on, blind to the more urgent and theoretically challenging questions of praxis about the library’s vision and role in the life of youth.”<sup>105</sup>

## The Landscape Today: A New Research Agenda

In response to these long-standing issues, the *Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA)* adopted a strategic plan in 2008 that proposed the following research objectives:

Objective 1. Increase member access to existing research relevant to library services to teens.

Objective 2. Increase opportunities for members, academics, and library professionals to direct original research that fills gaps in teen library services.

Objective 3. Influence appropriate external research-focused organization to increase inclusion of library services to teens in their research agendas.<sup>106</sup>

The overall decision to focus on research, and these areas specifically, confirms YALSA’s commitment to the task of increasing the appeal and the importance of public library services to teens. In 2010 the association took a giant step toward becoming a research-sharing resource for members of the library community with the launch of the *Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*, an open-source, peer-reviewed research journal. This was followed by YALSA’s newly formulated *National Research Agenda on Libraries, Teens, and Young Adults 2012–2016*, adopted in October 2011. As the chair of YALSA’s Research Committee, Don Latham, explains, “The Research Committee was charged with ‘survey[ing] the field to determine *gaps in research* and determine *the questions* that needed to be answered in order to fill those gaps’ (emphasis in original).”<sup>107</sup> The document focuses on the following four priority areas:

1. Impact of Libraries on Young Adults
2. Young Adult Reading and Resources
3. Information-Seeking Behaviors and Needs of Young Adults
4. Informal and Formal Learning Environments and Young Adults

According to Kafi Kumasi, the agenda builds on Walter’s earlier call for more historical research; however, she advises that the work required for the future demands a critical approach rooted in action research.<sup>108</sup> The question is will this new critical approach, even if it is rooted in action research, help libraries to connect more effectively with teens? To borrow from Michael K. Buckland, perhaps the question that should be asked is how can libraries achieve a deeper understanding of what makes the use of library services personally meaningful to teens?

## Conclusion

Could library services to teens be made more meaningful? As the literature shows, public libraries are in a position to, and need to, support teen developmental needs, but with a focus on the entire person rather than traditional services and objectives to which many libraries still subscribe. Considering the general disconnect between teens and libraries and the barriers to YA services that have been discussed—substandard collections, unwelcoming and poorly designed teen spaces, teens’ dislike and lack of knowledge of libraries, library staff’s negative notions of teens, as well as nonexistent relationships with library staff—one has to wonder if looking at this community would offer any new insights that could add meaning to the services that teens are now provided. Yes, there is a need for more research on teens as a user group, and there will always be. However, there is sufficient research to show that there are many existing and valid barriers to teen services. There is sufficient research to identify what teens value and want from the public library. However, the fact that this research has not resulted in any significant change in the way that teens view the library demonstrates that researchers in this area might need to think about things in a different way or, perhaps, from a different perspective. As Walter and Meyer assert, “A radical change is needed in our thinking about teens and libraries.”<sup>110</sup>

It might be beneficial for researchers to look *to* the institution rather than *at* the community for new insights on serving and connecting with teens as a library user group. According to Richard Scott, institutions are comprised of three systems or pillars—the regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive—which function to stabilize, keep order, and provide social meaning to individuals.<sup>111</sup> The regulative systems are concerned with rule-making and policy guidelines to which members of the institution have to conform. These can be formal or informal rules or laws that may be enforced either legally or through incentives.<sup>112</sup> The normative systems are concerned with how norms and values function in the creation of expectations and obligations. In essence, they are concerned with values, with how things should be done, and with conceptions of appropriate actions; therefore, social obligations and expectations are at the core of the normative systems. Regarding the cultural-cognitive systems, Scott states that this “conception of institutions stresses the central role played by the socially-mediated construction of a common framework of meaning.”<sup>113</sup> The cultural-cognitive systems, therefore, provide frameworks that offer meaning and internalized representations of the world. These are constructed ways of doing and being that operate within a shared notion of meaning.

“The core idea [here is] that organizations are deeply embedded in social and political environments [which suggests] that organizational practices and structures are often either reflections of or responses to rules, beliefs, and conventions built into the wider environment.”<sup>114</sup> Scott suggests that scholars not only need to be mindful of the dimensions of these social structures, or pillars, and how they operate within the institution, but that they also must understand how the characteristics of each structure relate to one another.<sup>115</sup> By examining how and why an institution operates as it does, why rules and policies are made, maintained, and/or abandoned, why members behave or act as they do, as well as how they make meaning of their social worlds, researchers will gain a better understanding of how the public library as an institution thinks, which could provide a starting point toward real change. As Mary Douglas proposes, institutions think.<sup>116</sup> The aim would be to learn how this institution thinks in regard to teens, so that a more meaningful connection might be established with this user group. If people become aware of why they do certain things or even think a certain way, it opens up the possibility for change. And changing the way an institution thinks is really about changing the way people think.

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## **More than Just Books: Librarians as a Source of Support for Cyberbullied Young Adults**

Posted on [May 5, 2014](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



**By Abigail L. Phillips**, PhD Student, School of Library and Information Studies, Florida State University

### **Abstract**

Young adults are becoming more and more engaged with social media for a variety of reasons. Social networking sites—such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter—provide them with free and open space for exchanges of ideas, collaboration, and expression. For the most part, these online interactions are positive, respectful, and socially responsible. However, a significant number of young adults are using social media for a darker and more dangerous purpose: cyberbullying. While this phenomenon has been discussed widely in the media, what is lacking is a clear and consistent understanding of cyberbullying.

This literature review will synthesize the current research on cyberbullying, identify key findings that can be drawn from the research, acknowledge existing research gaps, and suggest opportunities for further research. Although the focus of this article is a review of the literature, a secondary focus is the potential for public librarians, through pastoral care, to serve as a support system for victims of cyberbullying.

### **Introduction**

Young adults are engaging with social media at a rapidly increasing speed.<sup>[1]</sup> The majority of young adults are using social media tools to interact with real-world friends in positive and healthy ways.<sup>[2]</sup> Social networking sites, like Facebook and Instagram, can be venues for young adults to express themselves in creative and exciting ways. According to danah boyd and Nicole Ellison, social networking sites permit individuals to create a public or semi-public profile within a confined system, construct a list of other users with whom they wish to interact, and navigate through their lists of connections—“friends”<sup>[3]</sup> or “followers”<sup>[3]</sup>—and those of other users within the system.<sup>[3]</sup>

However, a significant number of young adults are using social media for a darker and more dangerous purpose: cyberbullying. National and international press coverage of extreme cases of cyberbullying has brought attention to this relatively new phenomenon.<sup>[4]</sup> Due to disagreements among researchers over the operational and conceptual definitions of “cyberbullying,”<sup>[4]</sup> it is difficult to construct a working definition and determine how prevalent it is among young adults.<sup>[5]</sup> For this literature review, the definition provided by Robert Tokunaga will be promoted: “Cyberbullying is any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others.”<sup>[6]</sup>

In a report on young adults, social media, and cruelty produced by the Pew Research Center, 15 percent of young adults reported being the target of aggressive behavior while online.<sup>[7]</sup> Nineteen percent of surveyed young adults said that they had been victimized by cyberbullies in some form during the previous year.<sup>[8]</sup> Clearly, online cruelty and harassment is an unfortunate reality for many young adults. Information professionals, particularly

public librarians, have an opportunity to work as first responders by providing support, education, and guidance for victims of cyberbullying. However, considerably more research must be conducted to create an appropriate and actionable rubric for librarians engaged in cyberbullying prevention and intervention. This literature review synthesizes the current research on cyberbullying, identifies existing gaps in the research, and suggests possibilities for future research.

## Outline of Literature Review

This literature review will begin with a brief description of the method used for research selection. Next, the finding/analysis section will summarize themes occurring throughout the current literature on cyberbullying. Finally, the implications for future research into cyberbullying section will point out the gaps and weakness that exist in the literature as well as make recommendations for further investigations.

## Method for the Literature Review

Four databases were used to locate relevant articles for this literature review: Library Literature & Information Science Full Text, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Web of Knowledge, and OmniFile Full Text Mega Edition. These databases cover the main fields in which the bulk of research on bullying and cyberbullying has been conducted. These fields include education, psychology, sociology, library and information studies, and human-computer interaction. To locate relevant articles in these databases, a combination of search terms were used including “online bullying,” “cyberbullying,” “bullying,” “young adults,” “teens,” “youth,” “school bullying,” “Internet bullying,” “school library,” and “libraries.”

Approximately 2,583 articles were returned through the database searches. From these articles, thirty-nine articles were selected for this literature review, with the oldest article published in 2004 by Michele L. Ybarra and Kimberly J. Mitchell.<sup>[9]</sup> The majority of the retrieved articles were not relevant to the focus of this literature review. When choosing the articles for this review, two criteria were particularly important: publication date and relevancy. Research into cyberbullying has grown steadily since the introduction of social media in the early 2000s. Although this review includes a few older articles, the bulk of the cited research has been published within the past three years. Through the selection of recently published articles, the researcher could present relevant and current information on cyberbullying. A quick read of the titles and abstracts aided the researcher in determining the relevancy of the returned articles for this review. Many of the 2,583 articles were narrowly focused on aspects of cyberbullying outside of this review’s focus on an overarching understanding of cyberbullying, young adults, and the roles of librarians. Thirty-nine articles were selected that fell within this range.

Young adults are engaging in more information sharing about themselves on social media than they had been in the early days of MySpace and Friendster.<sup>[10]</sup> As a result, there is almost no research about cyberbullying prior to 2004. A significant number of the thirty-nine articles were drawn from psychology- and education-focused journals, for example, *Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties* and *Journal of School Violence*. Within the total body of literature identified, the frequency of publication increased noticeably beginning in 2010. The majority of the articles included in this literature review were published within the past four years, and nineteen of the thirty-nine articles were published within the last two years (2012 and 2013).

## Findings/Synthesis

### *Bullying and Cyberbullying Are Different*

Although bullying and cyberbullying share many similarities, there are some significant differences. The most obvious ones are the definitions given for cyberbullying and traditional bullying, along with the characteristics that are ascribed to each. These differences are a result of the online environment through which cyberbullying occurs. A list of the key definitional differences between traditional bullying and cyberbullying is provided in table 1.

Table 1: Definitional Differences Between Traditional Bullying and Cyberbullying

Traditional Bullying	Cyberbullying
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power imbalance between bully and victim</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bully or bullies can remain anonymous</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bullying behavior is repeated over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bullying behavior is repeated over time</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intention to cause harm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intention to cause harm</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perpetrated by an individual or a group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perpetrated by an individual or a group</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face-to-face interaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bullying behaviors occur through an electronic device or online</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Largely confined to the school and school day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can occur anywhere and at anytime</li> </ul>

Table 1

Researchers frequently cite a definition of traditional bullying proposed by Dan Olweus that states, “A person is being bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons.”<sup>[11]</sup> Although Olweus’s definition is regularly referenced, bullying is not a clearly defined concept in the literature.

In addition to this definition, three criteria are commonly associated with traditional bullying: repetition, power imbalance, and intentionality.<sup>[12]</sup> In cyberbullying, these criteria may be absent or modified to better reflect the online environment where the behaviors occur. For example, traditional bullying involves repetition of an aggressive behavior. Offline repeated instances of bullying can be documented and counted.<sup>[13]</sup> However, in an online environment, it is extremely difficult to know how many times a single action has been e-mailed, posted, uploaded, or otherwise shared.<sup>[14]</sup> The effect of these types of behaviors is typically more devastating for the victim than traditional bullying behaviors.<sup>[15]</sup>

The audience for cyberbullying is also typically considerably larger than that of traditional bullying.<sup>[16]</sup> Since cyberbullying occurs in an online environment, attacks can spread quickly and with little effort or planning on the part of the bully or bullies.<sup>[17]</sup> Young adults often see this public form of bullying as having more serious repercussions than its more private form, face-to-face traditional bullying.<sup>[18]</sup> The victim can be reached anywhere at any time due to the always-on nature of the Internet.

Traditional bullying can be carried out physically, verbally, or relationally. Relational bullying, or social bullying, is an indirect form of bullying in which gossip, rumors, or exclusion play key roles.<sup>[19]</sup> Typically, relational bullying is associated with females and causes more emotional distress than more direct forms of bullying.<sup>[20]</sup> Relational bullying is common online as this environment affords bullies a sense of anonymity and privacy.<sup>[21]</sup> Individuals may easily and willingly post something online that they would be reluctant to say offline.<sup>[22]</sup>

Though there is some consensus in defining the concept of traditional bullying, an academic definition of cyberbullying is much more nebulous. The definitions of cyberbullying can vary widely, and this ambiguity has been criticized frequently in the literature.[23]

Additionally, the characteristics of power, imbalance, publicity, and anonymity in cyberbullying are much more context-sensitive and driven by the nature of the medium.[24] Without the physical context, some of the characteristics of traditional bullying are not present in cyberbullying. The power imbalance shifts from the physical power focus of traditional bullying to the focus on technological power in cyberbullying.[25] Instead of a victim lacking the physical strength of an offline bully, the victim lacks the technical savviness of a cyberbully.[26]

Anonymity is a key characteristic that distinguishes cyberbullying from traditional bullying. Cyberbullies are normally viewed as anonymous, hiding behind their laptops and smartphones.[27] This anonymity may disconnect young adults from the consequences of their online actions. This “disinhibition effect” may change how young adults portray themselves online and encourage them to share private information with one another.[28] For cyberbullying victims, anonymity has been shown to increase feelings of fear, powerlessness, insecurity, and frustration.[29]

Two cases of cyberbullying can help to illustrate the characteristics described above. Recently, Rebecca Sedwick, a twelve-year-old girl in Florida, jumped to her death after being bullied online nonstop over the course of eighteen months by two of her classmates.[30] In another tragic case, Canadian teenager Amanda Todd told her cyberbullying story through YouTube before killing herself in October 2012.[31] The bullying she suffered took place both online and offline, despite changing schools and friends. Both of these young adults experienced online bullying through social media over an extended period of time. The bullying, at the hands of their classmates, did not stop at the end of the school day but continued on Facebook, despite attempted intervention by parents.

### *Blurring of Roles in Cyberbullying: Bully/Victim*

During a bullying experience, individuals typically play one of three roles: bully, victim, or bystander.[32] Traditionally these roles are fixed, with very little shifting among them. However, in cyberbullying these roles can become blurred.[33] In one cyberbullying occurrence, an individual can be labeled a bully, but in another the same individual may be identified as the victim. The bully/victim role reversal often occurs when one individual seeks revenge or retribution for an earlier online attack. In fact, being bullied online is a strong risk factor for bullying online.[34] Danielle Law et al. highlight the need for more research into the frequency of bully/victim roles played during cyberbullying.[35]

### *What Drama Means for Cyberbullying*

Young adults use the term “drama” to separate their online experiences from the victimization inherent in the adult term of “cyberbullying.” According to Alice Marwick and danah boyd, “Drama is a performative set of actions distinct from bullying, gossip, and relationship aggression, incorporating elements of them but also operating quite distinctly.”[36] Drama can cover a range of behaviors including gossip, bullying, breakups, makeups, trash talk, and kidding around.[37]

With “drama,” young adults take ownership over painful experiences and diminish the power of these experiences.[38] The term “cyberbullying” reinforces the stigma associated with the “victim” label. In a *New York Times* editorial, boyd and Marwick point to the common refrain of “there’s no bullying at this school” that they encountered while interviewing young adults across the country to show that to young adults, cyberbullying and drama are two different concepts.[39]

By developing an understanding of the way that young adults label online interactions and behaviors, researchers can gain a sense of how young adults are truly living online. To provide young adults with the best support possible for cyberbullying, researchers must “work within a teenager’s cultural frame.” [40] Intervention programs against cyberbullying should be positive and empowering, not negative or emphasizing victimization. [41]

### *Perceptions Young Adults Have of Cyberbullying*

To better grasp young adults’ online experiences, their views, concerns, and recommendations about cyberbullying should be recognized. However, only recently has research been conducted regarding young adults’ perceptions of cyberbullying. [42]

After holding seven focus groups with thirty-eight fifth- and eighth-graders, Fay Mishna et al. found that participants largely viewed cyberbullying as anonymous. [43] According to the study participants, this anonymity encouraged their peers to behave in ways they might not offline. Although cyberbullying was often perceived as anonymous, the participants described it as occurring most often within already existing offline social groups and relationships. Additionally, participants expressed great reluctance to share their cyberbullying experiences with parents or other adults due to fear of punishment such as restricted access to the Internet or to cell phones.

Anna ÅševÄĀkovÄĀi et al. interviewed young cyberbullying victims to understand how they viewed online attacks and at what point such attacks were seen as harmful. [44] Participants were less disturbed by cyberbullying if the aggression never transferred from online to offline situations. Moreover, they described online attacks coordinated by several bullies as more harmful than individual attacks. [45]

Brett Holfeld and Mark Grabe surveyed 665 middle school students to investigate how they reacted to instances of cyberbullying. [46] They found that 60 percent of those who observed cyberbullying told an adult about it. This figure contrasts slightly with earlier research that reported that the majority of young adults involved in cyberbullying did not share the experience. [47] However, the participants in Holfeld and Grabe’s study said that whom they chose to tell had no impact on the likelihood of the cyberbullying ending. [48]

### *Why Aren’t Young Adults Telling Adults about Cyberbullying?*

One question appearing repeatedly in the literature is “Why aren’t young adults reporting these online attacks to adults?” [49] Instead of informing an adult about the behavior, young adults often turn to other methods of coping. These methods are usually technical in nature such as changing passwords, e-mail addresses, blocking messages, blocking users, or changing online accounts. [49] Generally, young adults perceive reporting cyberbullying to an adult as the last possible solution. Adults are seen as being both unfamiliar with the online environment and unaware of the severity of cyberbullying. [50] Samantha Biegler and danah boyd reported that bystanders are more likely to report instances of cyberbullying than victims or bullies. [51]

Frequently in the literature, young adults expressed that by reporting instances of cyberbullying they risked severe consequences from parents and/or teachers. [52] The main reason for young adults’ reluctance toward telling parents or other adults about cyberbullying is the fear that access to computers or smartphones may be taken away. [53] Another fear is that it would be difficult for adults to find enough proof of cyberbullying to identify the bully (or bullies), and they would be unable to end it. [54] Often students experiencing cyberbullying believe that teachers and school administrators can do nothing about the behaviors because it occurs outside of school grounds and school hours. [55]

## **Implications for Future Research**

## *Gaps in the Literature*

*Lack of Theory in Cyberbullying Research.* Tokunaga highlights the theoretical issues within cyberbullying research.[56] The chief issue is that there has been no unified theory applied to cyberbullying. Theory is a system of assumptions, principles, or rules that can be used to guide predictions, analyses, or explanations of the nature of a behavior or phenomenon.[57] Theory development and application are necessary for a research area or field to advance and become useful outside of academia. This is particularly true of cyberbullying research. Along with aiding in predicting the behaviors of bullies or victims, theory has the potential to explain the different aspects of the cyberbullying phenomenon.[58]

While noteworthy research has been conducted on the risk factors, criteria, roles, and victimization rates of cyberbullying among young adults, very little theory has been applied to the area.[59] Not only would theory aid in predicting the actions of cyberbullies and victims, but it could also clarify why the effects of cyberbullying can be worse than those of traditional bullying.[60]

Similarly, a well-thought-out and purposeful model could visually illustrate the complexities of cyberbullying interactions, roles, and behaviors.[61] In his literature synthesis, Tokunaga suggests several possibilities for how to model cyberbullying, such as modeling as an episodic process, as a non-recursive model, or as a stratification of cyberbullies and victims model.[62]

### *Possibilities for Public Librarianship*

In the cyberbullying literature, librarians are occasionally pointed out as members of a possible support system for cyberbullying victims. Libraries have long been promoted as safe, inviting, and supportive environments for young adults.[63] Librarians, especially public librarians and school librarians, frequently serve as adult advocates for young adults in their communities.[64] Librarians and library staff, in addition to their job description duties, often play a supportive role for troubled young adult patrons. To illustrate the emotional and social support that librarians provide for their patrons, pastoral care—a model borrowed from education—is useful. For cyberbullying, this model demonstrates how librarians can be a source of support for young adults who are experiencing cyberbullying.

*Pastoral Care.* In education literature, the supportive roles that are played by teachers and other school staff are often referred to as “pastoral care.”□[65] Pastoral care is a model native to education, particularly the educational system of the United Kingdom.[66] Within the past ten years, there has been a significant interest in the “teacher’s social-emotional competence”□ and the importance of a supportive relationship between students and teachers.[67] Many U.S. states include the emotional and social support of students within the classroom as part of encouraged teaching strategies, practices, evaluation, and assessments.[68] However, this theory can also be applied to librarians and their roles within the library.[69] Pastoral care by librarians is composed of three core components: “general support and positive relationships”□ with young adult patrons, “creating and maintaining the right environment,”□ and “contributing to social inclusion, self-esteem, and appropriate behavior.”□[70]

Librarians approach their pastoral care role in three ways. First, they “play it down.”□ This is a low-key approach, with librarians recognizing that they can only do so much and focusing instead on being strategic with resources to better serve their community as a whole.[71] Second, librarians promote the social role of the library within the community. Librarians using this approach may develop social events and activities that encourage social skills and foster positive associations to the library.[72] Third, they focus on the pastoral needs of young adults who see the library as a refuge. In this approach, librarians provide tailored one-on-one support to troubled young adults.[73] These three approaches are equally worthwhile and beneficial when helping cyberbullied or troubled young adults.

The concept of pastoral care is particularly applicable to cyberbullying interventions.[74] As a designated safe space that lacks the structure and teacher presence of the classroom, libraries are a natural location to which cyberbullying victims can turn. A library is a public space that satisfies many needs, yet it “allows for anonymity and independence.”□[75] Librarians do not possess the powers and influences that parents, teachers, school administrators, or even peers possess. However, by working in one-on-one, caring relationships with troubled young adults, librarians can connect with these patrons in entirely different and beneficial ways.[76]

*Education on Digital Citizenship and Online Relationships.* While pastoral care explains the psychological support that librarians can provide, another role that librarians can play is that of cyberbullying educators. Education is crucial in the prevention of cyberbullying and intervention when it does occur. Young adults should be educated on possible online dangers long before threats are encountered.[77] Prevention and intervention programs should focus on encouraging good digital citizenship and healthy, responsible online relationships.[78] Digital citizenship emphasizes teaching children and young adults how to be safe, ethical, and responsible on the Internet while successfully and intelligently participating in the online community.[79] Librarians can have a part in this education process by developing structured or unstructured workshops, presentations, classes, and online resources.[80]

Prevention and intervention programs should “emphasize prudent online disclosure of personal information, positive online social interaction, online empathy, and good communication channels for reporting online aggression.”□[81] The attention of these programs should be on the positive aspects of digital citizenship and online relationships, not the negative cyberbullying side. Young adults should not be labeled as “victims”□ of cyberbullying. Instead, any programs developed by librarians should empower and motivate young adults. It is critical that librarians support young adults in ways that encourage them to feel capable, strong, confident, and independent.[82] By doing so, young adults will become responsible, empathic, ethical, and active members of the fast-paced twenty-first-century participatory culture.

## Conclusion

Today’s young adults have grown up in a society that has incorporated social media into every aspect of daily life. Social media has prompted many positive changes in the ways in which individuals create, discuss, and collaborate. However, social media has also been a destructive force in the lives of some young adults. With the rise in the use of social media, cyberbullying has become a frequent topic of discussion among young adults, parents, teachers, school administrators, the public, and the press. While cyberbullying shares many of the same characteristics as traditional bullying, the distress experienced by its victims may be much more severe.

This literature review has synthesized the current major research into cyberbullying, highlighted gaps existing in the literature, and demonstrated how librarians can support victims through pastoral care and education. In literature on cyberbullying, librarians are often overlooked as sources of support for victims, yet through library programming, education, collection development, and one-on-one interactions, librarians can provide greatly needed help to troubled young adults. Because librarians do not have the same authority in young adults’ lives as parents or teachers, they can connect with young adults in more approachable ways. Proactive classes, workshops, and discussions that empower young adults before cyberbullying begins can encourage empathy, emphasize the severe consequences of cyberbullying, and demonstrate responsible and ethical online behavior. Cyberbullying research has the potential not only to improve the quality of many young adults’ lives, but to also prevent this negative behavior from ever occurring.

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## **Comics: A Once-Missed Opportunity**

Posted on [May 5, 2014](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



**By Carol L. Tilley**, Assistant Professor, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

### **Abstract**

During the 1940s and 1950s, comics were the most popular form of reading for young people in the United States, despite widespread disapproval for the medium by librarians and other guardians of reading tastes. Beyond simply reading comics, young people also used comics as a basis for developing participatory cultures. For instance, adolescents published fanzines and entered into political discourse about comics. This paper highlights some of these early examples of participatory cultures around comics to urge today's librarians to reflect on what media and technology-based practices we may be neglecting to nurture among contemporary adolescents.

Professional and popular resources about teens and libraries from the past decade often feature buzzwords such as “participatory culture,” “content creation,” “multimodal literacy,” and “affinity spaces.” We study how they live as “digital natives” and ponder what services, programs, and resources that libraries can provide them that will be relevant, desired, and even developmentally appropriate. We investigate alternatives to traditional notions of texts and strategize opportunities for engagement by investigating adolescents’ multimodal literacy practices outside schools and libraries. Of course, the popularity of these terms reflects larger social and cultural concerns about how people of all ages engage with digital resources and communities: we are living in an age that fetishizes, celebrates, and frets about the immersive, online Web X.0 world and its impact on our more “traditional” analog lives. Teens creating content in the online world? A good thing, unless the content they create are sexts. Adolescents engaging in participatory cultures in ways that simultaneously enhance their multimodal literacies? Wonderful, as long as the object of their fascination is something other than a time-wasting video game. The alarm for the media panic—perhaps not a panic as much as a heightened sense of immediacy—having been sounded, we librarians, educators, and youth experts step in to scrutinize the situation, plan our action, and respond just in time for the next new panic to arise.<sup>[1]</sup>

Both culturally and professionally, we tend toward ahistoricism. In part these blinders are necessary, keeping libraries and the librarians who serve young adults focused on the realities of here and now. Yet these blinders are also a hazard, obscuring information and stories that have the ability to inform current and future practices. For example, in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s, teens engaged in participatory culture, spurred by their interest in a particular set of cultural artifacts. They were content creators who engaged in the same kind of information-gathering, thinking, and creative practices in which Mary Ann Harlan, Christine Bruce, and Mandy Lupton found today's young people engaging in networked digital communities.<sup>[2]</sup> These teens from previous

generations talked with one another about their engagement with these artifacts, sharing recommendations and discussing their favorite creators, though without the computer-supported structure that researchers like Zorana Ercegovac have studied.<sup>[3]</sup> Through their affinities for these artifacts, other teens found career direction as well as inspiration for social and political action. Moreover, teens living in the 1940s and 1950s participated in this culture largely without the support of libraries or librarians. Just as with Angel and the other adolescents that Lalitha M. Vasudevan discusses, these youths engaged in “rich literacy practices . . . overlooked due to their perceived distance from academic literacy.”<sup>[4]</sup> The focus for all of the teens’ efforts? Comics.

This article presents a series of vignettes illustrating some of the ways in which teens in the mid-twentieth century engaged with comics. These vignettes undergird an argument that constructs such as “participatory culture”<sup>[5]</sup> and “multimodal literacy”<sup>[6]</sup> are not wholly new, at least in practice. Rather, young people have some modes of interacting with media that transcend time. By attending to these patterns, librarians and other professionals can break the cycle of our participation in media panics and become more proactive in managing our resources and services for teens. Certainly these patterns do not offer complete enlightenment. For instance, studies of contemporary teens find that only about a quarter of them are digital content creators, for instance, so one could argue that a similar portion of mid-century teens behaved similarly.<sup>[7]</sup> Comics are not the only medium around which youth have organized in a participatory manner; important insights may well be gleaned from the development of youth-produced amateur newspapers in the late nineteenth century or even from amateur filmmaking communities in the twentieth century. Furthermore, historical studies of young people’s media practices challenge researchers because there are scarce evidentiary resources that are unmediated by adults (e.g., surveys, news articles) or by the passage of time (e.g., interviews, memoirs).<sup>[8]</sup>

## Historical Context

The comics medium enjoyed its greatest popularity in the United States among young people from the late 1930s through the mid-1950s. Children, teens, and some adults followed favorite characters such as Dick Tracy, Superman, Donald Duck, and Hopalong Cassidy in the form of comic books, comic strips, and their related media such as radio and film serials. Comic books, originally conceived in the early 1930s as promotional pamphlets that repackaged newspaper comic strips, captured the imaginations of young readers, especially after superheroes and other original adventure, humor, and science fiction content became common in the late 1930s. Surveys of comics readership by both marketers and reading researchers found that nearly all young people—boys and girls—read comics regularly. Although comic book readership declined in adolescence, more than 80 percent of teens still read comics in some form frequently. A study conducted by Market Research Corporation for Fawcett Comics in 1943, for instance, found that about 95 percent of elementary-aged children read comic books often but only about 90 percent of high school—aged students did.<sup>[9]</sup> This near-ubiquitous readership propelled sales of new comic books from about 10 million issues monthly in 1940 to nearly 100 million copies monthly by 1954,<sup>[10]</sup> the equivalent of thirty comic books a year sold to every person then living in the United States. Because readers often traded or resold comic books, publishers estimated the pass-through rates—that is, the number of additional readers—for that format at between five and eight people, further extending comics’ reach.

A colossal community of young readers notwithstanding, librarians wanted little to do with this medium and its myriad expressions. Although the profession began moving away from its gentle compulsion for dictating literary tastes where adult readers were concerned, many librarians continued to view proscribing young people’s reading as a sacred commitment.<sup>[11]</sup> Because comics reading was both self-selected by children and teens and because

librarians viewed it as literary detritus at best, comics seldom found their way into libraries' collections or librarians' reading recommendations. For instance, only one comic book—*True Comics*, an often insipid nonfiction periodical issued by Parents Magazine Press—made its way onto a list of magazines recommended for juvenile library collections, although on occasion librarians could muster enthusiasm for Walt Disney comics.<sup>[10]</sup>

More commonly, librarians joined with other adults in deprecating comics and fretted that children's comics reading would lead to "a coming generation even more ferocious than the present one."<sup>[11]</sup> In the years following World War II, comics publishers expanded their offerings to include stories with criminal, romantic, and macabre themes, lending urgency to librarians' and other critics' concerns. Consequently, many municipalities considered or implemented ordinances restricting sales of particular comics to young readers. At least one librarian called for her peers to lend their voices to anti-comics advocacy efforts. The American Library Association maintained official silence on the matter of comics. In the wake of a 1954 U.S. Senate investigation of the relationship between juvenile delinquency and comics reading, comics publishers implemented a restrictive editorial code, and the Free Library of Philadelphia welcomed psychiatrist Fredric Wertham—arguably the biggest star of the anti-comics movement—as its fall festival speaker.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Comics Culture as Participatory Culture

Despite—or perhaps, in spite of—the derision that many librarians and other adults directed at comics, teens developed their own participatory cultures focused around comics. Although "participatory culture"<sup>[13]</sup> as a concept is frequently linked to technologies such as smartphones or social networking, perhaps the most expansive definition, proposed by media scholar Henry Jenkins and his colleagues, is technology agnostic. For Jenkins and his group, a participatory culture can be identified as one having the following:

1. relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement,
2. strong support for creating and sharing creations with others,
3. some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices,
4. members who believe that their contributions matter, and
5. members who feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, they care what other people think about what they have created).<sup>[13]</sup>

Comics' ubiquity, low cost, and otherwise easy accessibility to young people made it an easy locus for participatory culture. Even to create one's own comic or fan contribution required minimal materials: a pencil, some paper, perhaps a postcard-size letterpress (a novelty now, but available via mail order from the Sears catalog), or other inexpensive technologies. Similarly, because such a high proportion of young people read comics, it was not difficult to find someone who had a shared knowledge of—and frequently, a shared affection (or disdain) for—particular characters or stories. Thus, comics easily fueled conversations and connections among tweens and teens.

For the past decade, I have studied the historical intersection of librarians, young people, and comics. My initial interest centered on how librarians responded to the increasing popularity of comics among young readers in the 1940s and 1950s. In examining hundreds of articles from professional journals, archival sources, dissertations, newspaper articles, and similar sources for this research, I occasionally encountered brief glimpses of young people's actual engagement with comics. When my investigation led me to psychiatrist Fredric Wertham's papers at the Library of Congress a few years ago, I was astounded to find letters to him from children and teens; in this correspondence, young people offered their own firsthand accounts of comics reading. I found similar correspondence in the National Archives contained in the records of the 1954 Senate hearings on the role of comics reading in spurring juvenile delinquency. Now I have begun searching intentionally for evidence of young people's comics reading, going back to older sources, examining additional ones such as memoirs and comic book contest pages, and, when possible, interviewing adults in their seventies and eighties, who were once those young comics readers in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>[14]</sup>

Part of my goal in undertaking this work is to answer a rather broad question: How did young people engage with comics? The vignettes presented here provide a partial answer to this question. More specifically, they help to answer a related question: What did adolescents' participatory cultures organized around comics look like? These examples—selected in part for their richness in detail—point to types of literacy experiences that took place largely, if not completely, outside the purview of librarians, teachers, and other gatekeepers of young people's literary and literacy cultures. Not every example that follows meets all five requirements that Jenkins et al. established, but they demonstrate ways in which adolescents found purpose, forged relationships, played creatively, and otherwise engaged with the world in ways centered around comics.

## Fandom and Creative Expression

Bob “Bhob” □ Stewart had a peripatetic childhood, living with his family in small towns in Mississippi, Louisiana, and other southern states. Like most children of his generation, he developed an interest in comics at a young age. In conversations he and I have shared over the past year, Stewart told me that he sometimes read comics aloud on the playground to humor his classmates. Although he enjoyed comics of all kinds, the New Trends line of comics from EC, the Entertaining Comics Group, fascinated Stewart. Maxwell Gaines, a pioneering comics publisher, established EC in the mid-1940s, although at that time it was known as Educational Comics and published titles such as *Picture Stories from the Bible* and *Tiny Tot Comics*. Gaines died unexpectedly in 1947 and his son William “Bill” □ Gaines took over the company. Between 1950 and 1954, Bill Gaines invigorated EC by ceasing publication on the titles he inherited from his father and launching titles such as *Shock SuspenStories*, *Frontline Combat*, and *Weird Fantasy*. These new comics featured captivating artwork and riveting stories filled with black humor, surprise twists, and authentic details; they were aimed at teens and other more mature readers.

In 1953 at age sixteen, Stewart established the *EC Fan Bulletin*, the first fanzine dedicated to EC and its New Trends line. Stewart produced the multiple-page bulletins using hectography, a process that requires cutting stencils for each original page. These stencils are transferred onto inked gelatin; by pressing sheets of paper on the gelatin, one creates copies, with a typical run of no more than fifty. Hectography produces neither many copies—perhaps fifty before the quality degrades completely—nor copies that hold up well over time. Thus, copies of early fanzines like the *EC Fan Bulletin* are difficult to find. Former comics-reading teens turned comics historians Bill Spicer and John Benson provided me with scans of pages from the second issue; the original copies they have may be the only ones in existence for this issue. That second issue highlighted two fanzines, one about Superman

produced by another teenager, Ted White, and a science fiction one that was attempting a resurrection of sorts as its original publisher had entered college. Other features included a trading post, where readers could identify comics they had available for sale or for swapping, and a complete index of the *Vault of Horror* comics to date. Teenager Bill Spicer provided the cover art, a space homage to EC's Al Feldstein.

Stewart's *EC Fan Bulletin* lasted only a couple of issues—he also published another short-lived title—but he inaugurated a rich tradition of fanzines dedicated to EC's titles. His fanzine provided him and other teens with an opportunity to critique and discuss a medium that mattered to them. Stewart's interest in comics and his fanzines helped him forge a career in comics and related cultural industries. Some of the other readers and contributors to the *EC Fan Bulletin* followed suit. For instance, Bill Spicer worked in comics as a letterer and founded *Graphic Story Magazine*, a periodical that served as a platform for critical and historical examinations of comics. Another reader, Tom Inge, went on to a distinguished career as a humanities scholar, writing *Comics as Culture*, one of the first academics to argue for the value of studying comics.<sup>[15]</sup>

A few years younger than Bhub Stewart, Phil Proctor grew up in New York City, although he often spent his summers in northern Indiana with his grandparents. In a May 2012 conversation with me, Proctor revealed, “Any comics from 1945 on, you can bet that I saw them.”□ He read the Sunday newspaper funnies alongside his parents, pored over more innocuous comic books like *Archie* and *Little Lulu*, and swapped comics with other boys in their treehouse-cum-clubhouse. In his childhood, comics were more than something to read: they, along with the movie serials he viewed, were also inspirations for play. Proctor and his friends created games based on scenarios they read and viewed, dressed up like superheroes, and attempted to build things that they saw in comics from the junk they found in alleys.

In his early adolescence, Proctor's comics-inspired creativity took a more personal and literary turn. One of Proctor's favorite comics was *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet*, a series inspired by a Robert Heinlein novel. His interest in *Tom Corbett* led him to create his own comic, *Jim Solar*. It was a science fiction—influenced story that featured “tanks of the future,”□ and he traded episodes of it with his school friend John Pryke, who Proctor recalled was a more talented artist. Proctor also got “turned on”□ by the EC's New Trends titles—“the absolute top of comic-book-dom”□—and, later on, by the company's other hallmark publication *MAD* magazine. He wrote two letters to EC: one was published in *MAD* and the other in *Panic*, the company's short-lived companion comic to *MAD*, giving him a national audience of his peers. When EC's titles came under attack by social and cultural critics in the mid-1950s and the company ceased publication of everything save for *MAD*, Proctor was incensed. That incident helped set him on the road to becoming a satirist and co-founder of the groundbreaking comedy group the Firesign Theater because he wanted to spend his life making fun of “blue-nosed, tight-assed censors.”□

For other young people, fan culture took a variety of forms. Harley Elliott—a Salina, Kansas, native—was an EC fan as an adolescent in the early 1950s. He told me in an interview in May 2012 that he and some of his friends would share gossip about EC's comics, its new issues, and their favorite artists. Weaned on superheroes like Hawkman and Green Lantern, Ron Baumgardner also turned to EC's titles as a teen in central Illinois. In an October 2012 interview with me, he recalled writing letters and contributing song titles (e.g., “Oozing Down the River,”□ for “Cruising Down the River”□) to EC. From the 1930s onward, thousands of young readers—including many teens—entered contests, wrote letters, solicited for pen pals, and submitted book reviews in comics as varied as *Captain Marvel*, *Blue Bolt*, *Famous Funnies*, and *Flash Comics*. Although some of these actions required little investment

(e.g., filling out a contest coupon), in those pre-Internet days, they all required at least the expense of postage and a trip to the mailbox.

## Civic and Social Engagement

In 1945 teens from a Youthbuilders Citizen Club in New York City were motivated to take action against racist imagery in comics. Their focus was on *Captain Marvel*, one of the most popular comic books of the 1940s. The Big Red Cheese, as the titular character was sometimes known, early on employed an occasional valet named William Steamboat. An African American, Steamboat was depicted in the stereotypical manner common for the time—with nappy hair, swollen lips, and apelike features—and the Youthbuilders teens decided that Steamboat had to go. They gathered signatures on a petition and presented the petition in person at the Fawcett Publications office to William Lieberman, the company's editor. Lieberman initially resisted their request, noting that “white characters too were depicted in all sorts of ways for the sake of humor.”<sup>[16]</sup> The group's representatives countered that because Steamboat was the only African American character, his representation especially mattered. “This is not the Negro race,”<sup>[17]</sup> one teen argued, “but your one-and-a-half million readers will think it so.”<sup>[17]</sup> Lieberman was swayed, and Steamboat's run came to an end.<sup>[18]</sup>

A few years earlier in 1940, Louise Crutcher developed a lending library of comics and Big Little Books. Crutcher was an African American high school sophomore living in Chicago's South Side neighborhood when she was spurred to action by a conversation with a once-institutionalized girl who expressed a desire for amusement and diversion. Knowing that young people enjoyed reading comics, Crutcher amassed a collection of comics, including some donated by the boxer Joe Louis and others she scavenged and taped back together. By March 1941, her collection exceeded 1,500 items.<sup>[19]</sup> Crutcher ran her service in true library style with borrowers cards, a two-week loan period, and a request list. She traveled by bus on Saturdays to visit young readers in hospitals, children's homes, and even to the homes of individual children with disabilities. Notably she loaned books to both African American and white children, stating “we're both people.”<sup>[20]</sup> Crutcher was motivated to do good in her community, and comics served as the material for her work. Other young people used comics in similar ways. For instance, a brief newspaper article mentions Billy Abelove, a twelve-year-old Pennsylvania boy who created a comics rental library with proceeds going to support the Red Cross. He was inspired to action by Eleanor Roosevelt.<sup>[21]</sup>

In the summer of 1954, Los Angeles, California, city councilman Ernest Debs introduced legislation that would restrict the sale of horror and crime comics to minors. Since the end of World War II, various local and state municipalities around the country had experimented with legal measures designed to reduce the influence of comics in young readers' lives. Some of these measures met with limited success, but all told the popularity and sales of comics flourished rather than abated.<sup>[22]</sup> Debs's proposal was passed to committee for a public hearing on September 1, 1954.

Abe Hoffman, a sixteen-year-old comic aficionado, attended the hearing because, as he recalled in an October 2012 interview with me, “I had a garage full of comic books and I heard this was being considered, so I wanted to go testify.”<sup>[23]</sup> At the hearing Hoffman took the floor to remark on the violence depicted in folktales such as “Hansel and Gretel,”<sup>[24]</sup> which are commonly shared with young readers. He wanted city leaders to understand that readers—especially teenagers—had the capacity to discriminate, and that they would not be swayed to violence simply by encountering depictions of it in comics. Besides, Hoffman argued, if Los Angeles restricted the sale of

comics, readers would simply order them by subscription, a point the committee and councilmen had failed to consider. The ordinance died in committee, less because of Hoffman’s testimony and more because of objections raised by a local magazine publisher.[\[23\]](#)

Hoffman was not the only adolescent who challenged politicians as they attempted to regulate comics sales. In 1954 the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency held hearings on comics and other forms of mass media to investigate the role of these media in spurring juvenile delinquency. In the summer and autumn of that year, the subcommittee received several hundred letters, many from tweens and teens. Phil Proctor, whom I highlighted earlier in this paper, wrote to the senators to tell them that he was not, nor did he aspire to be, a juvenile delinquent.[\[24\]](#) Other young people wrote to exclaim the value of comics and to urge the senators to protect people’s right to read. For instance, sixteen-year-old Isidor Saslav wrote:

I am sixteen years old, level-headed, I believe, and have chosen my life-work, and am studying seriously. Certainly there are episodes of sadism and violence in these comics, but every time I read one, I don’t go out and rob a bank or kill somebody. . . . You are the custodians of my constitutional rights until I reach the age of 21. Please don’t send them down the drain for the interests of a small, but vocal, minority.[\[25\]](#)

Within a year of having written this letter, Saslav joined the Detroit Symphony as a violinist, one of its youngest members; he went on to a distinguished career as a musician and concertmaster, earning a doctorate from Indiana University.[\[26\]](#) Fourteen-year-old Donald Lowry also wrote to the senators, proposing what the senators eventually concluded: that juvenile delinquency is a complex phenomenon, one not solely induced by comics reading. He wrote:

I believe you’re wasting your time investigating comic magazines. Comics are a harmless form of entertainment meant for people that enjoy good reading and good art. If a child’s mind is weak enough to be driven to crime by comic books, he was on the verge of delinquency to start with. I believe that juvenile delinquency is caused by bad family relations, not by comic books.[\[27\]](#)

## Discussion

In the polarized and racially segregated mid-1950s, twenty-nine high school freshmen in Florida wrestled with the issue of prejudice as part of a unit on social stratification. The instructor facilitated a formal debate centered on the following resolution, “That segregation laws by the states are valid and should be enforced according to the Constitution of the United States.” Six students—three presenting arguments in support of the resolution, three against—argued in a perfunctory style informed more by opinion than research. The day after the debate, a student who in the discussion that precipitated the debate had pressed his classmates toward tolerance asked if he could read a story to the class.

Over the next several minutes, he read aloud “In Gratitude,” a fictional tale of a returning Korean War veteran, Joey.[\[28\]](#) It was a bittersweet homecoming; Joey had lost a hand, but through the sacrifice of his comrade Hank, who leapt onto an exploding grenade, he had not lost his life. Joey’s parents, grateful for Hank’s devotion, agreed to bury him in the family’s plot. Joey learns, though, that the townspeople prevented his parents from this act upon learning that Hank was black. Angry, Joey confronts the locals: “What did he die for? What did I give my arm for? You say you’re proud of me. Well, I’m not proud of you. I’m ashamed! I’m ashamed of you . . . and for

you!” □ The instructor reported that following this reading, “There was complete silence in the room. No one spoke for several seconds. . . . The story seemed to upset the group more than anything else that happened during their discussion of racial prejudice.” □ [29]

The story that unsettled a room filled with fourteen-year-olds came not from a library book or a contemporary magazine; rather, it came from a comic book. That an adolescent would select a comic book story to share with his classmates in the mid-1950s is not especially surprising, as most young people growing up during the 1940s and 1950s in the United States immersed themselves in comics. Yet that a comic book story could have such an emotional impact on its readers or that it would discuss socially relevant issues like racial prejudice would likely have surprised many adults who read the instructor’s account; undoubtedly some adults today might be incredulous.

Comics—whether in the form of newspaper strips or pamphlet-bound periodicals—have long been equated in popular wisdom with ephemerality, amusement, and childhood (if not childishness). That said, public perceptions are changing. In contemporary scholarly and literary realms, comics have increased credibility. There are academic journals and conferences devoted to the medium, highlighting scholarship on topics such as character histories or structural aesthetics. News outlets report extensively on fan conventions and comics-related media franchises. The *New York Times Book Review* reviews long-form comics (i.e., graphic novels). Within little more than a month of its release, *The Avengers* (2012), a comic-based superheroic fantasia, became one of the three highest-grossing films of all time in the United States and internationally.

Consider the library profession’s response to comics in recent years. A teenager browsing almost any school or public library collection in the United States today will likely encounter comics. Whether graphic novels, trade anthologies, comic strip compilations, manga, or some other format, comics have become ubiquitous in library collections during the past two decades. Likewise, libraries increasingly feature programming for teens such as mini-conventions, manga clubs, and cosplay events that center on comics and related culture. The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA)—which owns the journal in which this paper is published—sponsors an annual booklist highlighting the best in graphic novels for teens. Various professional review journals such as *Voices of Youth Advocates* (VOYA) offer recommendations for comics to purchase for library collections. Library conferences such as the American Library Association’s Annual Meeting host sessions on comics in library collections and programs; the exhibit floors feature comics publishers, vendors, and creators. Yet despite the generally widespread acceptance that comics are afforded among librarians today, comics readership among teens does not come close to approaching its apex in the early 1950s.

It often comes as a shock to librarians who work with teens that this fast friendship between comics and libraries is a recent development that was anything but quick in coming to fruition. For librarians who are young and new to the profession, this surprise is understandable, as they have grown up in a world where popular culture materials including comics are accepted in library work. For some more mature librarians, there occasionally exists a sort of professional amnesia that veils a time before comics and perhaps even before series books came into library collections. Still for a few other librarians, a focus on “giving ’em what they need” □ persists, and comics are seldom—or only grudgingly—viewed as what young people need.

Bhob Stewart, Phil Proctor, Louise Crutcher, Abe Hoffman, and the other young adults who took part in fandom were inspired to creative expression, engaged in civic action, and otherwise participated in comics culture in the

mid-twentieth century, and they acted largely outside and without the support of libraries and librarians. Held back by our fears of a medium we failed to understand and not recognizing alternative paths to literate/literary fulfillment, youth services librarians missed the grand opportunity that was comics. We were not champions for young people's intellectual freedom. We were not advocates, as Dorothy Broderick, co-founder of *VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)*, encouraged us to be in that journal's inaugural editorial:

Young people know better than any adult, however wise, what their needs are. Helping them obtain the right to act upon their self-knowledge of needs is what it is all about.[30]

What do young people need today and how can libraries and librarians help them achieve it? What are young adult librarians overlooking in our service to teens? What opportunities to nurture and facilitate participation, content creation, and multimodal literacies are we missing?

## References and Notes

[1] The invocation of “media panic” is quite intentional. New media and young people's engagement with them often provoke broad social concern. In many instances, the child-caring professions such as librarians, educators, and physicians, as well as more general cultural critics and scholars, are drawn into the conversation and tasked with intervening. See Kirsten Drotner, “Dangerous Media?: Panic Discourses and Dilemmas of Modernity,” *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 35, no. 3 (1999): 593–619; and Mark I. West, *Children, Culture, and Controversy* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1988).

[2] Mary Ann Harlan, Christine Bruce, and Mandy Lupton, “Teen Content Creators: Experiences of Using Information to Learn,” *Library Trends* 60, no. 3 (2012): 569–87.

[3] Zorana Ercegovac, “Letting Students Use Web 2.0 Tools to Hook One Another on Reading,” *Knowledge Quest* 40, no. 3 (2012): 36–39.

[4] Lalitha M. Vasudevan, “Looking for Angels: Knowing Adolescents by Engaging with Their Multimodal Literacy Practices,” *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 50, no. 4 (2007): 256.

[5] Comprehensive and current data on this topic are unavailable, but a recent survey examining how adolescents make use of online video found that 27 percent of teens surveyed had recorded and uploaded video to the Internet. See Amanda Lenhart, *Teens and Online Video*, Pew Internet and American Life / Pew Research Center (May 3, 2012), <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Teens-and-online-video.aspx> (accessed April 5, 2013).

[6] See M. O. Grenby, *The Child Reader, 1700–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Kate McDowell, “Understanding Children as Readers: Librarians' Anecdotes and Surveys in the USA, 1890–1930,” in *The History of Reading, Vol. 1: International Perspectives, c. 1500–1900*, ed. W. R. Owen and Shafquat Towheed (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 147–62.

[7] Louise Dunlop Yuill, “The Case for the Comics,” *School Executive* 64, no. 12 (1944): 42–44.

[8] See “The Hundred Million Dollar Market for Comics,” □ *Publisher’s Weekly* 165 (1954): 1906. For more information about the comics business during this time period, see Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*, trans. Barty Beaty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010); and Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book* (New York: Basic, 2005).

[9] See Evelyn Geller, *Forbidden Books in American Public Libraries, 1876–1939: A Study in Cultural Change* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1984). For more information on how librarians responded to comics during this time period, see Carol L. Tilley, “Of Nightingales and Supermen: How Youth Services Librarians Responded to Comics between the Years 1938 and 1955” □ (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2007).

[10] Laura Katherine Martin, *Magazines for School Libraries* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1947); Gweneira Williams and Jane Wilson, “They Like It Rough: In Defense of Comics,” □ *Library Journal* 67 (March 1, 1942): 204–6.

[11] Sterling North, “A National Disgrace,” □ *Chicago Daily News*, May 8, 1940, 56.

[12] Two good overviews of the anti-comics movement are David Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America* (New York: Macmillan, 2009); and Amy Kiste Nyberg, *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998). Additional information about Fredric Wertham, his role in the anti-comics movement, and problems with his research can be found in Carol L. Tilley, “Seducing the Innocent: Fredric Wertham and the Falsifications that Condemned Comics,” □ *Information & Culture: A Journal of History* 47, no. 4 (2012): 383–413. The librarian who sought to rally her professional peers was Jean Gray Harker. See her article “Youth’s Librarians Can Defeat Comics,” □ *Library Journal* 73 (December 1, 1948): 1705–7. The text of Wertham’s Philadelphia speech can be found in “Reading for the Innocent,” □ *Wilson Library Bulletin* 29 (April 1955): 610–13.

[13] Henry Jenkins et al., *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Reports on Digital Media and Learning (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 5–6. For a more interdisciplinary and nuanced view of participatory culture, see the recent volume by Aaron Delwiche and Jennifer Jacobs Henderson, eds., *The Participatory Culture Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

[14] My work on comics includes the pieces mentioned in some of this article’s other notes: Tilley, “Of Nightingales and Supermen” □; Tilley, “Seducing the Innocent” □; and Tilley, “Children and the Comics.” □ Beyond this work, you may be interested in the following two selections: Carol L. Tilley, “Comics in the Classroom: Using Comics to Teach the Language Arts in the 1940s and 1950s,” □ in *Graphic Novels and Comics in the Classroom: Essays on the Educational Power of Sequential Art*, ed. Carrie Syma and Robert G. Weiner (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013): 12–22; and Carol L. Tilley, “Superman Says ‘Read’: National Comics and Reading Promotion,” □ *Children’s Literature in Education* 44, no. 3 (2013): 251–63.

[15] M. Thomas Inge, *Comics as Culture* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1990).

[16] “Negro Villain in Comic Book Killed by Youngsters,” □ *Chicago Defender*, May 5, 1945, 11.

- [17] Ibid.
- [18] Richard Dier, “Kids Crusade to Eliminate Stereotypes,” □ *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 8, 1945, 6.
- [19] Diana Briggs, “Louise Crutcher’s Library,” □ *Chicago Defender*, March 15, 1941, 15.
- [20] “Little Cripples Find a Friend in Girl of 14,” □ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 8, 1940, S2.
- [21] “Rents Comic Books,” □ *Bradford (PA) Era*, June 6, 1940, 3.
- [22] See Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague*.
- [23] Abraham Hoffman, “The Los Angeles City Council and the Comics Caper,” □ undated manuscript.
- [24] Philip Proctor, letter to the Subcommittee, received June 9, 1954, Box 169, “Corres Pro-Comic Letters,” □ Records of the United States Senate Judiciary Sub-Committee on Juvenile Delinquency [10E3/16/11/2], National Archives, Washington, DC [hereafter Subcommittee Papers].
- [25] Isidor Saslav, letter to the Subcommittee, received June 10, 1954, Box 169, “Corres Pro-Comic Letters,” □ Subcommittee Papers. It is worth remembering that at the time Saslav wrote this letter, the legal voting age in the United States was twenty-one.
- [26] See “Dr. Isidor Saslav: Obituary,” □ *Longview (TX) News-Journal*, January 29, 2013, <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/news-journal/obituary.aspx?pid=162722543> (accessed August 27, 2013).
- [27] Donald Lowry, letter to the Subcommittee, received June 18, 1954, Box 169, “Corres Pro-Comic Letters,” □ Subcommittee Papers. For more on young comics readers’ protests, see Carol L. Tilley, “Children and the Comics: Young Readers Take on the Critics,” □ in *Protest on the Page*, ed. J. Danky, J. Baughman, and J. Ratner-Rosenhaugen (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, forthcoming).
- [28] “In Gratitude,” □ *Shock SuspenStories* #11 (October/November 1953), EC [Entertaining Comics].
- [29] Thomas J. Hill, “Early Teen Agers and Racial Prejudice in the South,” □ *Clearing House* 30, no. 1 (September 1955): 28, 30.
- [30] Dorothy M. Broderick, “What Is Youth Advocacy?” □ *Voice of Youth Advocates* 1, no. 5 (1978): 20.



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