

Editor's Message: Fall 2011

Posted on [November 15, 2011](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



By Sandra Hughes-Hassell

This issue of the *Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults (JRLYA)* marks the beginning of our second year of publication. Over the past year, we have published articles on research topics such as the reading interests and modalities of teens, the representation of minority communities in young adult literature, and the information seeking behaviors of young adults with Asperger's Syndrome—to name just a few. We have also expanded the types of research we publish to include juried conference papers and juried posters. In this issue, we turn our focus to the [YALSA National Research Agenda, 2012–2016](#).

To provide a context for the agenda, we've asked the chair of the YALSA research committee and the members of the *JRLYA* advisory board to contribute to this issue. Each has written a thought-provoking piece aimed at expanding our understanding of the agenda and challenging us to use the agenda to “help guarantee that librarians serving young adults are able to provide the best service possible as well as advocate for funding and support in order to ensure that teens are served effectively by their libraries.”¹

Don Latham, Chair of the YALSA Research Committee gets us started by discussing how the agenda fits into YALSA's strategic plan and introducing the agenda's four priority areas. Focusing on Priority Area 1, **Impact of Libraries on Young Adults**, Kafi D. Kumasi challenges researchers to apply the principles and methodologies associated with critical research to the questions posed by the agenda. She argues that a critical research stance “positions young adults as capable researchers who can use their real-world experiences as a place to generate powerful and purposeful learning experiences where they serve as the professional researcher who poses the question, gathers resources, analyzes data, and educates their communities.”² Similarly, in their discussion of **Young Adult Reading and Resources, Priority Area 1**, Robin Moeller, Amy Pattee, and Angela Leeper encourage researchers “to consider the role of young adults in the research process, marketing efforts, and personal choice in reading assignments tied to the curriculum.”³ They argue that the only way we can really understand and meet the reading interests and needs of teenagers is to include their perspectives and voices in our research.

In her essay, Denise E. Agosto provides an overview of what we have learned so far about young adults' information behaviors and practices (the focus of Priority Area 3) and suggests guiding questions for advancing this important line of research. She too emphasizes the need to learn *from* young adults about their information behaviors and practices, writing that “it is only through a deeper understanding of young adults' information needs, perceptions, and preferences that we can make young adult library services truly youth-centered and designed to meet youths' ever-evolving information needs.”⁴ Finally, Frances Jacobson Harris, in her discussion

of Priority Area 4, Formal and Informal Learning Environments, reminds us that in our increasingly digital world, learning is no longer limited to formal settings such as the school or classroom. She challenges the research community to consider the impact technology is having on young adult learning and to look at how the library community is responding in terms of our understanding and design of library spaces and programs “particularly in terms of the core values that define YA services, such as intellectual freedom and privacy.”⁵

In addition to presenting the National Research Agenda, YALSA is also providing support for researchers to implement the agenda. The [Frances Henne/YALSA/ VOYA \(Voice of Youth Advocates\) Research Grant](#) annually provides \$1,000 in seed money for small-scale research projects that respond to the YALSA Research Agenda. Applications for the 2012 award are due December 1, 2011. The [Young Adult Literature Symposium](#) provides a venue for researchers to share the results of their work with other researchers and with library practitioners. The theme of the 2012 symposium is “The Future of Young Adult Literature: Hit Me with the Next Big Thing.”
Located on the YALSA wiki, the [Research Resources Clearinghouse](#) is YALSA’s primary source for information about conducting research involving libraries and young adults. The Research Resources Clearinghouse Taskforce put together a set of page links of information to make developing a research project easier for YALSA members. Recently YALSA launched the *Network for Research on Libraries and Teens*, a community and space “for those interested in and performing teen research to connect with each other” (<http://yaresearch.ning.com/>). Finally, *JRLYA* is published four times a year with the purpose of enhancing the development of theory, research, and practices to support young adult library services.

We hope you are inspired by the YALSA National Research Agenda and look forward to receiving your manuscript submissions to *JRLYA*.

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Research for the Next Generation

Posted on [November 15, 2011](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



By Don Latham, Chair of the YALSA Research Committee

The *YALSA Research Agenda 2012–2016*, adopted in October 2011 by YALSA’s Board of Directors, supports the organization’s mission to “build the capacity of libraries and librarians to engage, serve and empower teens.”¹ Specifically, the new research agenda helps facilitate Goal 2 of the Strategic Plan, which states, “YALSA is the recognized source for access to targeted research and best practices relating to teen and young adult library services.”²

Developed over a two-year period by the YALSA Research Committee, with input from YALSA members and constituencies, the research agenda identifies key areas of research on the information needs and preferences of young adults, both for today and for the next generation. The previous research agenda was published in 1994, so it was felt that the time for revisiting and re-envisioning was long overdue, this time with an eye toward developing a robust research agenda for the 21st century.

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”³ (emphasis in original). After collecting data and engaging in much thought and deliberation, the committee decided to organize the new agenda around 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

Few people would argue with the importance of these priority areas, but some might wonder why other key issues are not addressed—such as technology and young adults; intellectual freedom; cognitive, emotional, and physical development; information, media, and technology literacies; and the history of young adult services. ‘ In fact, these issues *are* addressed within specific research questions associated with the various priority areas. The committee felt that these admittedly important aspects of young adult services are present in all areas to a certain extent, so the decision was made to incorporate these across areas rather than “isolate”⁴ them by placing them in their own areas. Similarly, the committee developed the priority areas so as not to emphasize particular library types and/or age groups. Of course, some research questions may apply more directly to certain kinds of libraries or certain age groups, but the goal was to achieve maximum applicability and adaptability in the wording of the research questions associated with each priority area. ‘ In addition, the research areas and research questions

reflect the inherently interdisciplinary nature of research on young adults, their information needs, and their information seeking behaviors. It is the hope of the Research Committee that the new agenda will inspire researchers in a variety of disciplines and settings—certainly practitioners and academics in the field of library and information science, but also researchers in education, psychology, sociology, public policy, information technology, and more.

The *YALSA Research Agenda 2012–2016* is one of three initiatives that serve as the foundation for YALSA’s emphasis on research, the other two being the [YALSA/VOYA/Henne Research Grant](#) and the newly established [Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults](#). The Research Committee will use the new agenda in updating the *YALSA Research Bibliographies*. Clearly, opportunities abound for using the new research agenda, and no doubt the agenda will be reviewed and modified as needed. As such, it should be seen as the “latest word” □ rather than the “last word” □ in YALSA’s ongoing effort to promote research as a crucial component in developing and providing effective information services for today’s young adults, as well as those of the next generation.

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Don Latham, Ph.D., is associate professor of library and information studies at Florida State University. He has been active in YALSA since 2004, has served as chair and/or member of the Research Committee, Legislation Committee, Organization and Bylaws Committee, and the Continuing Education Task Force, and is the author of “The Importance of Young Adult Services in LIS Curricula: A YALSA White Paper.” □



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Young Adults' Information Behavior: What We Know So Far and Where We Need to Go from Here

Posted on [November 15, 2011](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



By Denise E. Agosto, Advisory Board Member, *Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*

As the *YALSA Research Agenda 2012–2016* reflects, an understanding of young adults' information behavior (IB) is key to designing and delivering the best possible library services for young adults. IB research “focuses on people’s information needs; on how they seek, manage, give, and use information, both purposefully and passively.”¹ Some IB researchers call this research “information practice”² to highlight the roles that sociological and contextual factors play in humans’ use (and nonuse) of information.² This essay provides an overview of what we’ve learned so far about young adults’ information behaviors and practices, and poses guiding questions for advancing this important line of research.

To date, most IB research has focused on adults or children, with limited attention to adolescents. Nonetheless, an increasing number of researchers are working in the area of young adult information behavior. It is difficult to identify the exact parameters of this research due to variance in definitions of “young adult.”³ IB researchers have studied youth as young as nine and as old as twenty-nine, all under the term “young adult.”³ Most commonly, IB researchers have studied teenagers as young adults, generally focusing their work on either early adolescents (roughly age eleven to age fourteen) or late adolescents (roughly age fifteen to eighteen).

Young adult IB research spans several disciplines, most notably library and information science, education, psychology, and communications. It can be divided into three general categories: 1) studies resulting in the identification of young adults’ information needs; 2) studies leading to the development of models of young adults’ information practices; and 3) studies resulting in descriptions of young adults’ digital information behavior.

Young Adults' Information Needs

From Minudri’s work nearly forty years ago to Meyers, Fisher, and Marcoux’s more recent work and beyond, one common approach to the study of young adult information behavior involves the identification of categories of information needs.³ Across these studies, several categories of information needs recur, including information relating to:

- peer, family, and other relationships
- popular culture
- emotional needs

- physical health and safety
- emerging sexuality
- consumer needs
- academics
- leisure activities and interests
- careers
- college

Other studies have identified barriers that prevent young adults from successful information seeking and use.⁴

Common barriers identified across studies include:

- lack of source knowledge
- background and contextual knowledge deficiencies
- negative perceptions of libraries and librarians
- information avoidance
- embarrassment and social unease
- use restrictions by parents/guardians, schools, or libraries
- access issues
- information overload

Questions to Consider for Building on Our Current Understanding of Young Adults' Information Needs

1. How can librarians and other adult intermediaries help young adults to overcome these barriers to effective information seeking and use?
2. Faced with most types of information needs, young adults generally turn first to other humans as information sources, viewing librarians and libraries as secondary choices.⁵ How can we make librarians and libraries more frequent and more valued information resources?
3. In light of the rise of social media, what is the role of social searching (gathering information from peers via mediated channels) in young adults' information seeking?

Models of Young Adults' Information Practices

Several researchers have proposed young adult IB models. For example, Kuhlthau's model of the Information Search Process (ISP) has served as a basis for much of the young adult IB research, particularly studies involving academic research.⁶ Her model identifies common behaviors, thoughts, and emotions that students often experience during the research process.

There has been less IB research in the public library arena, meaning that researchers know less about young adults' information practices in public libraries. Agosto developed a model of the roles that public libraries can play in young adults' lives.⁷ It shows that public libraries typically serve as: 1) information gateways; 2) social interaction and entertainment spaces; and 3) beneficial physical environments.

Other research has focused on young adults' information behaviors outside of schools and libraries. Everyday life information practice research examines "socially and culturally established ways to identify, seek, use, and share

the information available in various sources such as television, newspapers, and the Internet.”⁸ Agosto and Hughes-Hassell proposed a model which showed that everyday life information practices support young adults’ social, emotional, self-reflective, physical, creative, cognitive, and sexual development.⁹

Questions to Consider for Building on Our Current Understanding of Models of Young Adults’ Information Practices

1. How do demographic factors such as socioeconomic status and cultural context affect these IB models?
2. There is little research that compares information behaviors among age groups. How do teens’ and adults’ information practices differ? How do teens’ and children’s information practices differ?
3. How do early adolescents’ and late adolescents’ information behaviors differ?

Young Adult’s Digital Information Practices

Much of the current young adult IB research focuses on digital information. Researchers have learned that young adults’ online information behaviors fulfill many of the same needs that offline information behaviors fulfill, including the need for: 1) social interaction and communication, 2) relationship building and maintenance, 3) emotional support, 4) identity exploration, 5) positive self-esteem building, and 6) academic and intellectual support. Researchers know that young adults are increasingly mixing their online and offline lives, seamlessly integrating a range of information technologies into their everyday information practices.

Contrary to the popular narrative surrounding young adults’ digital information behaviors, many IB researchers are finding that not all young adults are technologically advanced.¹⁰ This has led to growing opposition to the concept “digital natives,”¹¹ and to its portrayal of all youth as technological enthusiasts and experts. Indeed, “[t]he picture beginning to emerge from research on young people’s relationships with technology is much more complex than the digital native characterization suggests. While technology is embedded in their lives, young people’s use and skills are not uniform.”¹¹ Moreover, even though most young adults use multiple technologies for communication and interaction with peers, family members, and others, face-to-face communication is still the most popular form of communication among youth peer groups.¹²

Questions to Consider for Building on Our Current Understanding of Young Adult’s Digital Information Practices

1. Again, few studies have compared behavioral differences by age group. How do young adults’ digital information behaviors differ from adults’ behaviors?
2. To what extent are age-based differences due to chronological age, and to what extent are they due to varying levels of experience with digital information, digital information resources, and digital information systems?
3. In view of the fact that young adults’ digital information proficiency levels vary radically, how can public and school libraries mitigate these differences?

Conclusion

To move young adult IB research forward, we must build on existing research with additional youth-centered, data-driven studies. Above all, we must work to learn from young adults about their information behaviors and practices, as opposed to prescribing our own adult views of ideal information behaviors and practices onto youth.

It is only through a deeper understanding of young adults' information needs, perceptions, and preferences that we can make young adult library services truly youth-centered and designed to meet youths' ever-evolving information needs.

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The Impact of Libraries on Young Adults: Toward a Critical Research Agenda

Posted on [November 15, 2011](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



By Kafi D. Kumasi, Advisory Board Member, *Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*

One of the primary reasons for conducting research on any subject is to help administrators and policy-makers make informed decisions about resource allocation. Conducting research on the impact of libraries on young adults can yield data that helps decision-makers better understand where and how to allocate resources to support library services for young adults. Readers who are interested in identifying the various areas of research that might generate this kind of data should read the *YALSA Research Agenda 2012–2016*, which outlines a national research agenda on libraries, teens, and young adults.¹ This document expands upon an earlier work by Walter, which focused more on the need for historical research outlining how libraries have served teens and young adults throughout various historical periods.² These documents outline several areas for future research including, but not limited to, research on:

- Best practices in library services to young adults, including staffing levels, budgets, collection, programs, etc.
- The role of young adult library services within the overall library program and/or its impact on communities.
- Library programs for young adults and their impact on literacy skills and development.
- The emergence of library services for teens and young adults in particular periods of U.S. history.
- The various social, political, and economic forces that have caused library services for teens to receive greater or lesser support than other historical time periods.

There is no doubt that we need a robust research agenda that can yield data showing how and why young adults use the libraries and the subsequent benefits on their literacy development and life success. However, is this research agenda enough?

I would argue that researchers need to expand the agenda to include criticality—that is, to show the potential for libraries to become sites for critical youth participation. A critical orientation to the research agenda might position libraries as sites whereby youth engage in critical inquiry activities that bring to the foreground issues of social justice and human equality. From a research standpoint, library scholars might document the various ways libraries and librarians can support critical literacy activities among young adults. Critical literacy has to do with an ability to challenge the status quo of the social order and identify meaningful action to help shift power imbalances. This approach to research focuses on the real-life experiences of young adults as a place to begin inquiry. It also positions young adults as capable researchers who can use their real-world experiences as a place to generate powerful and purposeful learning experiences where they serve as the professional researcher who poses the question, gathers resources, analyzes data, and educates their communities.^{3,4}

In order to carry out this kind of research, library scholars need to understand some of the basic principles and methodologies associated with critical research. In short, critical research looks at whom and what is being privileged or marginalized in various social contexts and tries to disrupt asymmetrical power relations through direct social action and/or consciousness-raising. Critical research is rooted in critical theory, coined by the philosophers of the Frankfurt School in the 1930s. Critical theory challenged the biased nature of all knowledge, specifically knowledge that was transmitted via dominant institutions such as schools and the media.⁵

Typically, critical scholars employ action research and other research methods that take place in natural settings whereby the researcher often takes on a role as a participant and an observer in the research site. What better age group might library scholars target to take on this kind of critically oriented, action-driven research than young adults? Through this kind of collaborative, authentic research, young adults can develop a range of skills that translate into traditional academic literacies. Morrell has shown in his research with California students that allowing youth to investigate issues in their community can transfer into mainstream literacies sanctioned in schools.⁶ ‘ Some potential areas of research that examine the impact of libraries on young adults from a critical perspective might include research on:

- The perceptions and experiences of young adults in libraries, particularly those from historically underrepresented cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- The development of critical literacy practices among young adults through library-based programs and instructional activities.
- The digital divide and its implications for young adult library services.
- Librarians’ belief systems about urban youth and their conceptions of literacy learning among young adults.

In conclusion, library research on young adults should not only aim to provide data that helps decision-makers keep library doors open for young adults and save the jobs of teen services librarians. It can and should do much more.’ It should be exciting research that people want to read. It should be research that educators and policy-makers point to as the gold standard for what libraries can do for young adults. It should be the engine behind new and innovative library services for teens. It should help young adults understand that the library is more than a place to consume information, but a place where new knowledge can be created with the help of caring, skilled young adult librarians. This is one scholar’s vision for using the research agenda to illustrate the impact of libraries on young adults. What is your vision?

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Gimme Shelter: Informal and Formal Learning Environments in Library Land

Posted on [November 15, 2011](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



By Frances Jacobson Harris, Advisory Board Chair, *Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*

When reminiscing about their high school years, alumni from my school often focus on the creative projects they voluntarily undertook *outside* of formal class requirements—projects that were often more pointless than useful, generally fraught with complexity, and always out-of-the-box. I was recently in touch with a few such students from the class of 1973 who conveyed how they went to great lengths to sneak (highly inappropriate) books *into* the library. They created and filed catalog cards for each title, and affixed call numbers, pockets, and cards in the books. In order to succeed in this venture, they had to develop more than a rudimentary understanding of the Dewey Decimal system and descriptive cataloging. I compare their efforts to my many years of (often futilely) trying to teach similar concepts to students with no intrinsic interest in the subject. On a much grander scale, we can look to Steve Jobs' life and legacy as a compelling case for the kind of learning that can occur both inside and outside of formal schooling.

Recognizing the value of interest-driven learning, Priority Area 4 of the YALSA Research Agenda focuses on informal and formal learning environments. YALSA is not alone in seeking answers to these questions. The Pew Research Center, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is launching a new research initiative to study the changing role of public libraries and library users in the digital age (<http://pewinternet.org/Press-Releases/2011/Gates.aspx>). And of course, the ongoing work of the MacArthur Foundation Digital Media and Learning project directly addresses informal learning practices (<http://www.macfound.org/>).

The MacArthur-inspired research has identified *genres of participation* as a way to describe everyday learning and new media engagement.¹ This framework makes an important distinction between *friendship*-driven and *interest*-driven genres. Friendship-driven practices are dubbed “hanging out” □ behaviors, interest-driven practices are “geeking out” □ behaviors, and “messing around” □ is the genre of participation that can bridge the gap between the two. For those doing research on 21st century library services for young adults, a singular challenge lies in exploring the intersections of formal and informal environments (along with friendship-driven and interest-driven pursuits) with library-related activities as varied as adolescent development and literacy acquisition. As an example, Gross and Latham recognized these dynamics in their study of information literacy acquisition skills among first-year community college students with substandard information literacy skills.² They allowed the students in the study to select topics of personal interest in order to focus on self-generated (rather than imposed) information seeking behaviors and skill-building. A major goal of the research was to identify ways of embedding some of the attributes of informal learning into a formal learning environment, thereby improving information literacy skills.

The YALSA Research Agenda defines informal environments as including *public* libraries (emphasis added) and other community spaces in which young adults choose to participate in activities. The rationale is that, by their nature, these spaces can lead to learning but are not considered to have an overtly educational focus. In contrast, formal learning environments include classrooms—spaces that are specifically designed for pedagogical purposes. However, I would not wish to place school libraries solely in the formal camp simply because they reside within school walls. Although a major function of school libraries is to support and enrich the curriculum, their mission also includes (and is not limited to) literacy promotion, development of lifelong learning habits, and providing students with access to resources and spaces that enhance social and emotional development.

At the same time, it is undeniable that the school framework limits the ways in which young adults can use school library spaces and services. Certain activities are much more likely to be proscribed than they are in public libraries. Use of the Internet may be restricted to “curricular” □ research and is likely to be heavily filtered.³ Cell phones and other mobile devices—core accouterments of contemporary teenage life—are often not regarded as appropriate learning tools. Many young adults use social technology—generally forbidden in schools—to connect with outside expertise as they “mess around” □ in the pursuit of their passions. Even access to the library’s physical space may be limited by scheduling issues or restricted to particular types of activities. Without doubt, more research is needed to study the impact of these elephant-in-the-room issues that do not take the value of informal learning into account.

During her closing keynote speech for the 2011 AASL National Conference, Mimi Ito described school libraries as the ideal interface between interest-driven and friendship-driven inquiry, the critical locale for connected, transformational learning experiences facilitated by new media.⁴ Her message to schools was to make the formal environment responsive to and supportive of personal interests and affinities. She urged adults in schools (and elsewhere) to help young people create the environments they need for a connected learning experience, one that supports peer learning, specialized content, and diversified assessment. She observed that the real digital divide is not defined by access to technology, but by access to interest-driven learning opportunities. Along similar lines, Ishizuka’s recent article on young people and hacking illustrates the need to see beyond the stereotype of black hacking, and instead focus on ways to guide the skill-building, inquiry, and creativity intrinsic to the activity.⁵

For libraries, a significant take-home message of the MacArthur work is to consider reengineering the restraints of formal learning environments and endow them with traits young adults seek when engaged in their own informal learning. Our charge as a research community is to study the process and impact of this reengineering (or lack thereof) on the library spaces and programs that serve young adults, particularly in terms of the core values that define YA services, such as intellectual freedom and privacy.

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The Young Adult Voice in Research about Young Adults

Posted on [November 15, 2011](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



By Robin Moeller, Amy Pattee, and Angela Leeper, Advisory Board Members, *Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*

Research that examines the interests, behaviors, and preferences of young adults is often conducted by those scholars who hold an affinity for young adult resources. This is evident amongst the three scholars writing this article who have each contributed to the dialogue of young adult reading and resources. While it is important and encouraging for scholars to maintain an affective connection with the materials that comprise their research agendas, those of us who conduct research in the field of youth services must consider the role of the actual young adult, and if or how they inform the research of young adult reading and resources. As researchers consider the questions posed by the *YALSA Research Agenda 2012–2016* we encourage them to consider the role of young adults in the research process, marketing efforts, and personal choice in reading assignments tied to the curriculum.

Young Adults in the Research Process

Traditionally, research about young adult reading and resources has been conducted by adults who use theoretical concepts to judge young adult material and its use by young adults. Without the theoretical grounding identified by the adult investigator, it would be very difficult to envision these studies being conducted. That said, adults often talk about the concepts and feelings young adults experience through the materials marketed to them without actually engaging young adults to understand their first-person accounts—a practice that, at best, provides only half of the picture and, at worst, results in the dissemination of false pronouncements about young people’s habits, tastes, and abilities. Arua and Arua illustrated the importance and strength of young adult-informed research when the authors investigated media claims that those living in Botswana experienced a culture of poor reading.¹ After surveying 121 young adults on school holiday about their reading habits, the authors found that the overwhelming majority of these students enjoyed and engaged in reading for pleasure on a regular basis, contrary to media claims.

Arua and Arua’s study suggests that what we assume young adults feel and know may not actually be the case.² In other words, young adults and young adult materials are not the same as they were when most of us were still young adults; as we grow, so does the world. Cart noted that young adult fiction came into its own during the decade of the 1960s and since then, young adult materials and reading has continued to evolve.³ The market presence of materials published with the designation of “young adult” or “teen” is stronger than ever and includes various formats of print and electronic versions of audio, visual, and textual representations of information. Thematically, young adult literature continues to grow with regard to providing representations of

teens' and tweens' experiences on a global basis. Researchers need to acknowledge that it is within a specific historical moment that they are exploring issues of young adult materials and reading. With the rapid changes in information use and resources for young adults, researchers need to engage young adults, now more than ever, as direct subjects and reviewers of research. It is within their specific historical moment as young adults that scholars look to young adults to inform their research.

Engaging young adults in the research process can help the researcher challenge or validate her ideas or previous findings about young adult reading and resources, as was the case for Moeller, who examined the gendered preferences and practices of graphic novel reading amongst high school students based on multiple practitioner journal suggestions that they were “boy books.”⁴ After conducting a series of focus group and individual interviews with fifteen young adults, the researcher found that the graphic novel medium appealed in different ways to both boys and girls and thus could not be labeled as “boy books.”⁴

One criticism of the type of research that involves a smaller number of participants, such as Moeller's study, is that the generalizability of such research is limited.⁵ This is indeed a challenge; however, reports of small-scale research might inspire other researchers and practitioners to undertake similar projects in different communities. Another challenge that is often proffered at the notion of engaging young adults in the research process is the adult researcher's ability (or lack thereof) to encourage young adult participants to openly participate in conversation. Gavigan's study of four middle school male struggling readers and the role of graphic novels in motivating them to read demonstrated that researchers do not necessarily have to engage in verbal communication with young adults in order to include them in the research process.⁶ Gavigan used reader profiles, reading logs, observations, and interviews with teachers in order to understand if and how graphic novels served to entice this group of readers.

Those of us who are granted the privilege by young adults to use their voices in our research know that their voices give our work depth, interest, and relevance. Those who further engage their young adult participants in the process of member-checking more soundly validate their research and the young adult's experience. To produce robust, informative research, we as scholars need to talk *to* young adults, not just about them.

Considering Young Adults and Young Adult Literature

Since the advent of the digital era, young adult publishing—and young adult literary marketing—has changed significantly. Publishers and media producers have entered the electronic realm to address teens directly, through interactive websites, email blasts and advertisements, and promotional opportunities, and now compete to deliver and popularize multimedia literary content. Additionally, teen connectivity has provided opportunities to articulate their responses to young adult literature and media on a national and even worldwide scale; teen-created blogs, websites, and discussion boards have become important conveyers of teen voices. These millennial developments provide researchers in the area of young adult literature and media with fruitful new avenues of exploration.

Building on the mass-market literary production process popularized by Edward Stratemeyer, intellectual content development and book packaging companies like Alloy, Full Fathom Five, and Fourth Story Media have entered the young adult literary arena. Alloy, as a leader in the development of teen-targeted media, has been criticized for its creative practices in the popular and professional press (see, for example, the controversy surrounding the

development of Kaavya Viswanathan's *How Opal Mehta, Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life* ⁷) and Full Fathom Five, the burgeoning book packaging company founded by literary outlaw James Frey, is receiving similar treatment.⁸ That both of these companies are associated with popular (and profitable) products—*Gossip Girl* and *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* for Alloy and the *I am Number Four* novel and movie for Full Fathom Five—invites us to consider the relationship between production, content and reception.⁹ Academic and professional criticism of the Stratemeyer model abounds; however, little has been done to investigate teen reception and opinion of such content.¹⁰ The work of Margaret J. Finders, Meredith Cherland and Dawn Currie, as well as the more recent work of Denise Agosto and Sandra Hughes-Hassell with urban teens, has the potential to inform future teen-centric research in this direction and enlarge our understanding of such popular forms.¹¹

The success of interactive, multimedia series like *The 39 Clues* for middle-grade readers, and the development of the multimedia young adult novel *Cathy's Book*, the series *Skeleton Creek*, and *The Amanda Project*, have heralded the establishment of new literary terrain for young readers.¹² The availability of a number of electronic platforms on which to experience traditional and interactive literary texts only further portends the development of interactive content. Additionally, children's and young adult literary content is infiltrating the exploding world of mobile device applications. These new developments in literary production are certain to affect the ways readers consume texts; however, and especially where young people are concerned, the issue of access to supportive technology and to electronic content remains paramount. Voth's article presciently pointed out the potential for "device-dependent" content to "put a price tag on information that is supposed to be free" by requiring users to purchase or otherwise procure the device necessary for accessing the "device-dependent" content.¹³ Linda Braun has pointed out the digital divide that exists between those teens who "are able to access current technologies in their libraries and learn how to use those technologies with the help of teachers and librarians" and those who are not.¹⁴ Research related to the availability and use of Internet and other technologies in libraries, as well as research related more specifically to the availability and use of multimedia material like e-books and mobile device applications is clearly needed, as youth-serving librarians advocate for expanded collection development and circulation policies and increased technology.

According to the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life project, 93 percent of all teens make use of the Internet; however, the relationship between Internet use and demographics related to race and socioeconomic status reveal discrepancies among this population.¹⁵ Approximately 73 percent of Internet-using teens engage with social media like Facebook and MySpace, while 38 percent of teen users share their own creations online and 14 percent publish their own online blogs or journals.¹⁶ Researchers interested in teen online content creation—particularly as it relates to teens' responses to teen-targeted media and literature—will find the Internet a fruitful source of first-person data. Walter and Mediavilla's study of online reference transactions between teen library users and librarians can be considered a model of content analysis research related to teen Internet use.¹⁷ Additionally, Berg's study of teen face-to-face interaction during public computer use concluded with the development of a typology of electronic text usage that could be tested and applied to future studies.¹⁸ As the Internet stands at the intersection of teen literary consumption and response, researchers may find fan fiction, review sites, and discussion boards useful locations for inquiry.

Choice in Young Adult Reading

Despite the proliferation of young adult literature today, classics continue to dominate the curricula in secondary schools. In addition to requiring select texts from the canon, many schools continue to offer little, if any choice, in

reading selections. In an examination of fifty school reading lists from around the country, Gilmore not only found that most of the book lists looked nearly identical, but that none included an option for student choice.¹⁹

Some misconceptions related to young adults selecting their own reading material is that they will not select books that are as rigorous as the classics, that their reading experiences with young adult literature will not be as meaningful as with classic literature, or that they will opt out of reading all together. In a research experiment with a public middle school, in which the students' entire reading curriculum comprised choosing their own reading material, Kindig found that not only were students motivated to read more widely, but they also read the young adult literature more critically.²⁰

To understand how choice influences the reading habits of young adults, more research is needed. Other areas that need to be addressed include the impact of choice on critical reading in the classroom and if alternative approaches are necessary to teach literature when young adults select their own reading. When we think of reading choices, we usually think of print resources, particularly fiction. Yet we know that teens rely on diverse media to garner information. Therefore, research also needs to address choice in the types of material young adults are using in the classroom.

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