

**Meeting in the Middle:**  
**Does Maintaining Tween and Teen Patronage Benefit Public Libraries and Increase  
Lifelong Library/Community Relationships?**

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LIS-5713 995

Methodology Assignment

May 5, 2019

## INTRODUCTION

While those in the library community can easily list off at least 15 reasons why libraries are still relevant (Del Busto 2018; Grady 2018), the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Digital Age has brought a tide of nay-sayers as to the importance of libraries, especially public libraries (Siegler, 2013). Phrases such as, “does anyone still use libraries?” and “aren’t libraries dinosaurs?” can still be heard across Facebook-linked comments of non-library journal articles that so much as *mention* a library. This belief of library irrelevancy is false but permeated in a time of open-information just a click away. It is grounded in a society of people who may not always prioritize or see the usefulness of libraries; people who either remember the library as a fond piece of nostalgia but not a part of their future, or who were never taught to appreciate the inherent value in a public library in the first place. Public libraries are often seen as a place for either the very young (Storytimes! Picture books!) or the ancient (books are as old as they are!). However, libraries are not perceived to be hubs of activity for tweens, teens, and early adults; despite the myriad of resources perfect for the development of those age groups. It is easy to find an exhausting amount of blog posts, scholarly journal articles, and publication op-eds about why youth services are essential to fund. They are routinely one of the least-funded demographics in schools and public libraries due to obstacles such as low program attendance and dismissive attitudes about the value of reaching these groups by decision makers.

Despite these issues, library staff dedicated to teens and tweens will regularly fight for a demographic they are intensely passionate about. A demographic that time and time again has proven to be influential, outspoken, and motivated to support causes and organizations that polarize them. Teens and tweens of today are tomorrow’s voting, working, tax-paying adults: but

does it matter if we invest in them before they get to that point? Does ingratiating teens and tweens into the library and earning their trust, respect, and devotion lead to more supportive adult patrons? Does maintaining steady relationships over the entirety of childhood to adulthood lead to more library activism? The research is limited.

### **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The question of whether or not maintaining relationships with tween and teen patrons in a public library setting is a generally-needed research topic. While it requires some evaluation of specific locations, the information as a whole adds to a professional knowledge base with the intent of re-valuing teen librarianship and the funding of teen programming. The importance of teen involvement in the library is therefore integral to determining public librarians' ability to create lifelong library users, supporters, and advocates. The importance of teen involvement in the library will be addressed by answering the following questions:

- Are adults who visited the library in their tween and teen years more or less likely to utilize public libraries than those who did not?
- Are adults who attended library programming or volunteered at a library more or less likely to participate in programs at their local library than those who did not?
- Is utilization of a public library as an adult affected by the use of a public library, specifically, during the tween and teen years, as opposed to an in-school library during those years?

## METHODOLOGY

Funding for public libraries depends heavily on the prioritization of resources. The teen demographic is often de-prioritized in favor of age groups that historically have higher programming attendance, completely disregarding the number of factors that control a teens ability to attend programming (Agosto et al 2016, 262). So how can we attempt to refocus on the importance of reaching teens in public library settings? By proving that making them a priority will pay off for libraries in the long run. This focus group seeks to determine whether public library involvement during teenage years (aged 10-18) directly correlates to adult involvement and usage of public libraries.

## POPULATION

This focus group will represent adults aged 18 and over, prioritizing volunteers aged 25 and up for surveying. This prioritization takes into account college-aged adults and those still quite close to their teen/tween years to better study the long versus short-term effects of teen interactions with public libraries (as opposed to school libraries). The population should be evenly split between males and females (genders self-identified, as able) and include a range of ethnic backgrounds. Priority for focus group attendance will be given to those who also grew up in the community of Tulsa County in and around Tulsa, OK.

## PROCEDURES

Focus group members will be taken voluntarily. An invitation for the focus group will be posted on Facebook and utilize SurveyMonkey to receive private information for review by the focus group leaders. Participating libraries will also accept paper forms. Local libraries will be

encouraged to share the invitation to their own social media pages to promote the reach of posts and available sampling. Twenty volunteers will be accepted and focus group leaders will aim to take a diverse group of participants (both current library users and not). Chosen participants will be contacted via email and followed up with via phone call if no response is given within 72 hours. Participants will be asked to participate in a study regarding the correlation between their adult and teen relationship with their public library. This population is key to identifying current adult interactions against individual teen interactions with public libraries.

Two different sessions of the focus group will be available, one on a weekday evening and another on the weekend, during the day, to accommodate the various schedules of volunteers. Participants will be given the option of attending either session with the hope of receiving 10-15 actual final participants. The focus group will provide a selection of cookies, fruit, and non-alcoholic beverages for consumption during the focus group. Focus group leaders will cover costs for refreshments. The focus group sessions will be recorded via audio and video and will last approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour depending on turn out to each session. The focus group will take place in the meeting room of the Central Library in Downtown Tulsa.

#### INFORMED CONSENT

The attached informed consent document is based on the requirements of the University of Oklahoma's IRB. It is designed to inform potential study participants of the expectations of their participation, any associated implications, as well as the study investigator's obligations to their privacy. The informed consent document additionally includes contact information for the investigator, should participants have additional questions. The goal of the informed consent documents is to be as forthcoming and clear to potential participants as possible.

## STUDY LIMITATIONS

This study is, by nature, limited in its ability to prove direct causation. Evidence is anecdotal and heavily based on personal memories and brain associations of individuals, whose memories may be compromised by numerous, uncontrollable factors. However, the cause of any human behavior is difficult to prove precisely even in situations with perfect recall. Anecdotal evidence by individual users will offer inferred implications of responses that libraries and librarians can utilize to better understand the way adults *believe* their teen years may or may not have affected their adult library usage and the most likely impacts on the future of public libraries by involving current teens in the library.

The study is also limited by the availability of participants to take part in the focus groups. They do not have the flexibility of participating solely at their convenience, which can limit responses to particular demographics with the ability to both get to the site of the focus group and at one of the two specified times. The study has been designed to offer two sessions so that a more diverse group might have the ability to participate and to limit inherent biases of schedule availability.

## DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

Focus group data is best summarized through qualitative data analysis. As the results of a focus group would include mostly anecdotal results, data would be analyzed using common, recurring themes and only small amounts of exact quantitative data. Topics are best discussed using qualitative means, where themes can be grouped by similarities rather than exact matching data sets. This also allows data analysis to compare and explore potential cause and effect

relationships in retrieved data, to best support the research hypothesis and the resulting implications of an individuals' teen library involvement on their adult library involvement. Data can be visualized using a word cloud of recurring terms during the conversation and by a bar chart analyzing smaller amounts of received quantitative data such as how many participants utilized a library in their teens versus not, and how many used one in adulthood versus not.

### **ANTICIPATED RESULTS**

Data is anticipated to reveal a link between teen relationships with the library and their adult relationships with the library. While some adults who did not visit the library as teens may have become library users during adulthood (or vice versa), having the importance of library and community involvement stressed during developmental teen years is predicted to be the highest marker to indicate adult usage (Pisarski 2014, 14). The nostalgia that comes with fond memories of the library during youth (particularly older childhood years, where those memories don't feel as distant) are more likely to encourage adults to visit and utilize available resources as opposed to adults who do not have an existing emotional investment.

This analysis will be best used in encouraging libraries to invest in youth programming for teens, not just children. This field is notoriously underfunded in most systems, despite a strong need for teens to have a safe, welcoming place to gather and enjoy. The benefits of teen library involvement (especially in programs that promote life skills) is well documented (Murthy 2015, 195), yet this demographic is consistently underserved due to a perception of low interest or programming attendance by decision and policy makers. More in-depth studies into the link between teen and adult library involvement are needed for the continuing support and potential growth of these vital community programs for teens.

## REFERENCES

- Agosto, Denise E., Rachel M. Magee, Michael Dickard, and Andrea Forte. 2016. "Teens, Technology, and Libraries: An Uncertain Relationship." *The Library Quarterly* 86 (3): 248–69. doi:10.1086/686673.
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### **FOCUS GROUP VOLUNTEERS NEEDED**

The School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Oklahoma is hosting a focus group to study the implications of teen library interactions on later adult usage of public libraries. The research team is seeking 20 individuals between the ages of 18 and 100 to voluntarily participate in a focus group by answering questions about their teen and current usage of public libraries in Tulsa City-County. Two sessions of the focus group will be held at the Central Library on Tuesday, March 5, 2019 (5:30pm-6:00pm) and Saturday, March 9, 2019 (11:00am). Small refreshments will be available to participants. If you are interested in participating in this voluntary study, please visit: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/surveylink> or visit your local Tulsa City-County Library branch to fill out a paper application form. Applications are due by 5pm on February 1<sup>st</sup>. Selected participants will be contacted by 5pm on Friday, February 8<sup>th</sup> to confirm their focus group session.



## AGENDA

### Focus Group on Teen and Adult Public Library Interactions

**Facilitator:** Hannah Moore, MLIS Graduate Student

**Location:** Central Library, Pochontas Greadington Learning & Creativity Center (LL2)

**Time and Date:** Tuesday, March 5, 2019 (5:30pm-6:00pm) and Saturday, March 9, 2019 (11:00am)

1. Select refreshments and find seats
2. Welcome and introductions
3. Review of the agenda
4. Focus group goals
5. Rules for participation
6. Questions for discussion
  - a. Did you visit a public library between the ages of 12-18? Can you tell us why or why not?
  - b. Did you engage with your library via programming or volunteering as a teen? Why or why not?
  - c. Are you currently an active library user or participant? Why or why not?
  - d. Do you feel like your involvement (or lack of) with a public library during your teen years directly affected your adult involvement (or lack thereof)? Why or why not?
7. Wrap up and goodbyes

**Thank you for participating in our study!**

**If you have further questions, please don't hesitate to contact our study investigators at [hannah.e.moore@ou.edu](mailto:hannah.e.moore@ou.edu)**

## INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title: Implications of Teen Interactions with Public Libraries on Adult Public Library

Involvement

Principal Investigator: Hannah E. Moore, Graduate Student

Department: School of Library and Information Studies

1. You are being invited to volunteer for this focus group because you are an adult between the ages of 18-100 years old in the Tulsa County Community.
2. Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.
3. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this focus group is to gather information about the link between teen involvement with public libraries and later adult involvement with public libraries.
4. Number of Participants: About 20 people will take part in this study.
5. Procedures: If you agree to share your experiences, you will be asked to participate in this focus group.
6. Length of Participation: It should take no more than 40 minutes to an hour and a half of your time.
7. Risks of participation: There are no known risks to taking part in this study.
8. Benefits of participation: There are no benefits to participation.
9. Compensation: You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this study.
10. Confidentiality: In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you. Records will be stored securely and only approved personnel will have access to the files. There are organizations that may inspect and/or copy the research records for

quality assurance and data analysis. These organizations include the OU Institutional Review Board. 11. Voluntary nature of the study: Participation in this focus group is voluntary. If you withdraw or decline participation, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the study. If you decide to participate, you may decline to answer any question and may choose to withdraw at any time.

12. Contacts and Questions: If you have concerns or complaints about the study, the researcher conducting this study can be contacted at hannah.e.moore@ou.edu 13. Contact the researcher if you have questions, or if you have experienced a research-related injury. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than individuals on the research team or if you cannot reach the research team, you may contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

14. If you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records, you may contact Hannah Moore, and she will email you a copy.

**The Focus Group will be Audio and Video recorded. Your consent to participate includes consent to be recorded. These recordings will be kept entirely confidential and used only for research analysis.**

Do you agree to participate in this focus group including being recorded for research purposes?

Yes

No

Signature and Date: \_\_\_\_\_