



a **yalsa** publication

[Home](#) [About JRLYA](#) [Author Guidelines](#) [Midwinter Paper Presentation](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Staff](#)

## 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](#),<sup>1</sup> **Advisory Board Members**, *Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*

[Tweet](#)

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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

### About JRLYA

The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults is an open-access, peer-reviewed online research journal published by the Young Adult Library Services Association. Its purpose is to enhance the development of theory, research, and practices to support young adult library services, as emphasized in YALSA's National Research Agenda.

 

### ISSN

- 2157-3980

### Masthead

- [Anna Lam](#)
- [Dr. Robin Moeller](#), Editor

### Research Journal Editorial Advisory Board

- [Dr. Annette Y. Goldsmith](#)
- [Dr. Casey Rawson](#)
- [Dr. Jennifer Luetkemeyer](#), chair
- [Edith Campbell](#)
- [KE Hones](#)
- [Sarah M. Sogigian](#), Board Liaison

### YALSA on the Web

- [Facebook](#)
- [Research Resources Clearinghouse](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Wikis](#)
- [YA Services Symposium](#)
- [YALSA Blog](#)
- [YALSA Website](#)

### Subscribe to JRLYA's Email Notification List

Sign up to receive an email notifying you of new content at the Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults!

Your email:

 

### Archives

 

### Categories

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.”<sup>4</sup> 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.”

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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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

### Meta

- [Log in](#)
- [Entries RSS](#)
- [Comments RSS](#)
- [WordPress.org](#)

### Recent Posts

- [Pausing at the Threshold: Peritextual Images in Young Adult Nonfiction Award Winners](#) January 18, 2019
- [The First All-Digital Library Space: The Effectiveness of BiblioTech’s Services for Urban Youth](#) January 18, 2019
- [Call for Papers for Special Themed Issue: Movements That Affect Teens](#) December 5, 2018
- [Asian American Teen Fiction: An Urban Public Library Analysis](#) July 13, 2018
- [Happiness at the End of the Rainbow: Exploring Happy Endings in Young Adult Literature with Queer Female Protagonists, 2009–2017](#) July 13, 2018

### Recent Comments

- [Anna Lam](#) on [About JRLYA](#)
- [George Clifford Yamson](#) on [About JRLYA](#)
- [Anna Lam](#) on [About JRLYA](#)
- [Iwok Shabi](#) on [About JRLYA](#)
- [2015 iSchool research roundup | The Information on Putting Youth First: The Radical Eliza T. Dresang](#)

- [RSS - Posts](#)
- [RSS - Comments](#)

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?*) and Full Fathom Five, the burgeoning book packaging company founded by literary outlaw James Frey, is receiving similar treatment.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> Academic and professional criticism of the Stratemeyer model abounds; however, little has been done to investigate teen reception and opinion of such content.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup>

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.<sup>20</sup>

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.

## References

1. Arua E. Arua and Comfort E. Arua, "The Reading Behavior of Junior Secondary Students During School Holidays in Botswana," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 54, no. 8 (2011): 589-599.
2. Ibid.
3. Michael Cart, *From Romance to Realism: 50 Years of Growth and Change in Young Adult Literature* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996).
4. Robin A. Moeller, "'Aren't these Boy Books?': High School Students' Readings of Gender in Graphic Novels," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 54, no. 7 (2011): 476-484.
5. ' Ibid.
6. Karen Gavigan, "More Powerful than a Locomotive: Using Graphic Novels to Motivate Struggling Male Adolescent Readers," *Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults* 1, no. 3 (2011).  
<http://www.yalsa.ala.org/jrlya/category/volume-1-number-3-june-2011/>  
(accessed October 26, 2011).
7. Kira Cochrane, "Publishers Themselves Often Come Perilously Close to Encouraging Their Authors to Commit a Form of Plagiarism," *New Statesman* 135, no. 4792 (2006): 27; Thomas Leitch, "Scapegoating Kaavya," *Kirkus Reviews* 74, no. 11 (2006): 530; James Poniewozik and Andrea Sachs, "An F for originality," *Time* 167, no. 19 (2006): 184.
8. Suzanne Mozes, "James Frey's fiction factory," *New York Magazine*, November 12, 2010, <http://nymag.com/arts/books/features/69474/>.
9. Cecily von Ziegesar *Gossip Girl* series (Boston: Little Brown, 2002-present); Ann Brashares, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (New York: Delacorte, 2001); Pittacus Lore *I am Number Four* (New York: Harper, 2010).
10. For example, see Daniel Hade, "Curious George Gets Branded: Reading as Consuming," *Theory Into Practice* 40, no. 3 (2001): 158-166.
11. Margaret J. Finders, *Just Girls: Hidden Literacies and Life in Junior High* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997); Meredith Cherland, *Private Practices: Girls*

- Reading Fiction and Constructing Identity* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994); Dawn Currie, *Girl Talk: Adolescent Magazines and their Readers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Denise Agosto and Sandra Hughes-Hassell (eds.), *Urban Teens in the Library: Research and Practice* (Chicago: ALA, 2010).
12. *The 39 Clues* series (New York: Scholastic, 2006-2008); Sean Stewart and Jordon Weisman, *Cathy's Book* (Philadelphia: Running Press, Weisman, 2006); Patrick Carman, *Skeleton Creek* series (New York: Scholastic, 2009-present); Amanda Valentino and Melissa Kantor, *The Amanda Project* series (New York: HarperTeen, 2009-present),
  13. Scott Voth, "Equality in E-book Access: E-book Reading Devices in the Public Library," *Library Student Journal* 2, no. 2 (2007): 6-7.
  14. Linda Braun, "28 Days of Teens and Tech #4: What's the Digital Divide," *YALSA Blog* (February 24, 2011), <http://yalsa.ala.org/blog/2011/02/04/28-days-of-teens-tech-4-whats-the-digital-divide/>.
  15. Pew Research Center, "Demographics of teen Internet users," *Pew Internet and American Life Project*, <http://pewinternet.org/Static-Pages/Trend-Data-for-Teens/Whos-Online.aspx> (accessed October 24, 2011).
  16. Pew Research Center, "Trend data for teens," *Pew Internet and American Life Project* <http://pewinternet.org/Trend-Data-for-Teens/Online-Activites-Total.aspx> (accessed October 24, 2011).
  17. Virginia Walter and Cindy Mediavilla, "Teens are from Neptune, Librarians are from Pluto: An Analysis of Online Reference Transactions," *Library Trends* 54, no. 2 (2005): 209-227.
  18. Margaret Berg, "On the Cusp of Cyberspace: Adolescents' Online Text Use in Conversation," *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 54, no. 7 (2011): 485-493.
  19. Barry Gilmore, "Worthy Texts: Who Decides?" *Educational Leadership* 68, no. 6 (2011): 46-50.
  20. Joan Kindig, "If You Want Them to Read—Motivate Them," in *Exemplary Instruction in the Middle Grades: Teaching That Supports Engagement and Rigorous Learning*, eds. Diane Lapp and Barbara Moss (New York: Guilford, 2011).

**Robin A. Moeller**, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of library science at Appalachian State University. She conducts research on visual representations of information as they apply to materials for youth.

**Amy Pattee**, Ph.D., is an associate professor of library and information science at Simmons College's Graduate School of Library and Information Science in Boston. Amy teaches and researches in the areas of young adult and children's literature and library services to youth.

**Angela Leeper** is the Director of the Curriculum Materials Center at the University of Richmond. She was previously an educational consultant at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and earned her MLIS from the University of Rhode Island.



#### About Anna Lam

Anna Lam is a Communications Specialist for the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA).

[View all posts by Anna Lam →](#)

This entry was posted in [Volume 2 Number 1: November 2011](#), [Volume 2 of the Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults](#) and tagged [graphic novels](#), [information seeking and use](#), [reluctant readers](#), [teen input](#), [YALSA research agenda](#), [young adult literature](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

## Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked \*

Comment

Name \*

Email \*

Website

Notify me of follow-up comments by email.

Notify me of new posts by email.

---

**The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults**

*Proudly powered by  
WordPress.*

Podcast powered by [podPress v8.8.10.17](#)

Explore the feelings adults have about young people. Youth and adults should work together to find the source of frustration, resentment or treatment towards youth. Acknowledge anger and let youth and adults know that it is okay to feel anger – but remind them they do not need to act out their anger towards young people. Engage allies by asking an adult ally to address and explore adultism with other adults. If you are an adult trying to reach another adult, it can be powerful to bring young people directly into the picture. For more information about how The Freechild Project can help support youth voice in your community or organization, contact us. Order *FACING ADULTISM* by Freechild founder Adam Fletcher! Share this News of how young adults are using social media more than ever and how a startup is saying it will obliterate fake news should pique your interest as you determine what information you need to keep on your radar. New social media trends emerge for young adults. Over the last few years, marketers and others have come to expect that Facebook will remain at the top of the social media food chain and that YouTube will also continue to be a popular channel for social sharing. For example, this week, Pew Research Center released a study that found not only that young adults would rather use Snapchat and Instagram, but also that the rate at which they are consuming content from these channels is quickly increasing. What's new. Young adult fiction is awash in projections of a dystopian future, yet we're still sliding into that future, and young adults are going along with it. An author in the young adult genre, Laura Moriarty, wrote a dystopian novel—what an original idea!—with an impeccably politically correct premise: “a future America in which Muslims are...corralled into detention centers.” She jumped through every hoop you could expect, passing the book by her Iranian immigrant friends while the publisher subjected it to “sensitivity reads” by “a member of a minority group.” So what could go wrong? If you've been paying attention, you have some idea what happens next.

□