Educating and Empowering Teen Activists in Public Libraries:

A Case Study of the Impact of Reading on Young Adult Social Justice Actions

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Abstract

In recent years, young adult (YA) fiction has, like its Generation Z audience, turned to social justice issues and activism. At the same time, the discussion of social responsibility in librarianship has begun to include human rights and social justice. This thesis investigates the relationships between social activism narratives in YA fiction, real actions taken by teens who read that fiction, and public library programming. To do so, I conducted a participatory case study in partnership with the Camrose Public Library. I involved the youth who participated as research partners, inviting them to provide feedback and make adjustments to each stage of the process. My aim was to discover how public libraries might use YA fiction featuring social activism narratives in their programs to engage with youth and empower them to actively create change in their communities.

In general, this case study found that, on their own, neither social activism narratives nor library programs motivate teens to conduct social justice actions; instead, they contribute to a network of learning opportunities and information that leads to teens becoming motivated to make a difference in their communities. Thus, public libraries can provide teen programming that uses social activism narratives and collaborative discussions to teach teens more about social justice issues, show them how to get involved in social justice movements, and instill in them the confidence to do so. The ability of libraries to accomplish this rests on a symbiotic relationship between inspiration, education, confidence, and motivation. Having inspiration, education, and confidence leads to increased levels of motivation, while already being motivated leads to a desire to acquire more inspiration, education, and confidence. The participants brought their already-established values and opinions about social justice issues and actions to the text and, from the books and the program, took away a deeper understanding and increased confidence.

They were most inspired, and thus motivated, by social activism narratives that they had enough prior knowledge and experience to find enjoyable and relatable, as well as those that featured characters who took direct action. Collaborating during the program and participating in the research process made the participants feel appreciated and succeeded in teaching them tools for taking social justice actions.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Jennifer McDevitt. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Educating and Empowering Teen Activists in Public Libraries: A Case Study of the Impact of Reading on Young Adult Social Justice Actions”, No. Pro00101151, 2020-06-04.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In recent years, young adult (YA) fiction has, like its Generation Z audience, turned to social justice issues and activism. The 'social problem' narratives dealing with serious topics like violence, substance abuse, sexual assault, and racial justice that have populated YA fiction since its beginnings have expanded to include 'social activism' narratives. I define social activism narratives broadly as any work of fiction (book, video game, television show, interactive fiction, etc.) that centers around a social justice issue, imagines a world where young adults are revolutionary heroes, and depicts the characters fighting to make change in their society, often but not always via protests (adapted from Ventura, 2011; Winters, 2019). At the same time as this evolution in YA literature, the discussion of social responsibility in librarianship has begun to include social justice (Gorham, Taylor & Jaeger, 2016; American Library Association, 2016). Social justice has many definitions depending on the contexts of individuals, societies, and the tension between the two; in the field of librarianship, the focus of social justice tends to be "the social and societal structures that foster equality based on laws and policies" (Gorham, Taylor & Jaeger, 2016, p. 5). In the context of this thesis, social justice issues include things like climate change, discrimination on the basis of any aspect of identity (including gender, race, sexual orientation, or age), internet access, and any other major societal issue youth in general, and my research participants specifically, might be interested in and/or affected by. This thesis investigates the relationships between social activism narratives in YA fiction, real actions taken by teens who read that fiction, and public library programming. To do so, I conducted a participatory case study in partnership with the Camrose Public Library (CPL). My aim was to discover how public libraries might use YA fiction featuring social activism narratives in their

programs to engage with youth and empower them to actively create change in their communities. Thus, this thesis explores the following research questions:

- How might reading social activism narratives and discussing them in the context of real-world issues affect young adults' thinking about and motivation to conduct social justice actions?
- How does acting as collaborators to design the library program and choose what to read affect the experience of the young adults participating in the program and their reactions to the media they read?
- How can public libraries create spaces where young adults can learn about and enact social justice actions through reading?

Thesis Overview

Chapter 1 of this thesis provides an introduction to the research problem and questions, a brief overview of the study, and a literature review. Chapter 2 provides full details of the research design and data collection processes, including the methodological and theoretical frameworks and an introduction to the themes found in the data. In short, I recruited youth ages 13-18 to participate as research partners and enlisted their input throughout the research process. As this was a participatory case study, the participants were invited to modify the research questions and to help build a library program centred around reading social activism narratives and conducting social justice actions. The program, which we named the CPL Social Justice Teen Book Club, ran for about two months in the summer of 2020 via Google Meet. Based on their own interests and desires, the participants chose the material we read, the social justice issues we focused on, and the social justice actions that the group undertook together. Following the conclusion of the program, I used critical ethnographic qualitative analysis methods and the

framework of reader-response theory to analyze data collected via fieldnotes taken during the program and during individual discussions with the participants. My research partners were invited to provide feedback on the data analysis after each stage; they were sent the initial coding, the themes I first organized those codes into, and a semi-final draft of the entire thesis.

My data analysis identified overarching themes, which I have organized into three broad categories that will be discussed in Chapter 3: Identifying and Interpreting Power Structures in Fiction and Reality, Chapter 4: Factors of Motivation for Social Justice Actions, and Chapter 5: Successes and Failures of the Program and Participatory Research. In broad strokes, I found that the participants transacted with the books we read; they brought their already-established values and opinions about social justice issues and actions to the text and, from the books and the program, took away a deeper understanding and increased confidence. They were most inspired, and thus motivated, by social activism narratives that they had enough prior knowledge and experience to find enjoyable and relatable, as well as those that featured characters who took direct action. Collaborating during the program and participating in the research process made the participants feel appreciated and succeeded in teaching them tools for taking social justice actions. Chapter 6 will summarize my findings in relation to the research questions and provide practical recommendations for young adult librarians.

Literature Review

Social Justice and Young Adults in Library and Information Studies

The principles of intellectual freedom that were laid out in the American Library Association (ALA)'s Library Bill of Rights in 1939 are central to the debate surrounding social responsibility that gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s, in which librarians such as David K. Berninghausen argued that it was not the purpose of librarians to take positions on social

issues (Joyce, 2008; Samek, 2005). It was not until 2004 that the ALA adopted social responsibility as a core value of librarianship (Samek, 2005). In 2007, Toni Samek defined "critical librarianship", which is also known as "socially responsible librarianship" and "progressive librarianship" (Samek, 2005), as "an international movement of library and information workers that consider the human condition and human rights above other professional concerns" (Robertson, 2007). However, discussion of socially responsible librarianship has recently begun to be framed in terms of the interrelationship between human rights and social justice (Jaeger, Taylor, & Gorham, 2015). Indeed, the ALA now considers equity, diversity, and inclusion fundamental values of the association, and their Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services uses a social justice framework, which they define as "[focusing] on power dynamics among different groups of people while acknowledging historical and institutional inequities" (American Library Association, 2016). Myself and others in the field of librarianship argue that the position of libraries as public institutions with considerable societal and political power necessitates that public libraries cannot be regarded as neutral entities (Hudson, 2018; Childs, 2017), nor librarians as neutral professionals (Jensen, 2004). Further to this, Gorham, Taylor & Jaeger (2016) assert that libraries and archives worldwide have been "at the forefront of major political issues related to inclusion and equity" (p. 7) and that issues "of rights and justice—education, employment, civic participation, digital inclusion, social services, public spaces, digital literacy, and other community needs—are the defining issues for the present and future of public, school, and academic libraries" (p. 8). However, this perspective is a radical one when compared to historical and contemporary discourse surrounding social responsibility in LIS. The road to including social justice as an

essential part of librarianship is still being paved as debates regarding neutrality, intellectual freedom, and social responsibility continue (CFLA-FCAB, 2018; Magi & Garner, 2015).

Bernier (2019) points out that socially responsible librarianship in the context of young adults is even less commonly discussed in academic literature. He argues that it is not enough to simply acknowledge that social justice issues affect today's youth; LIS professionals have an obligation to develop policy and collections that support the needs of youth, and in order to do so, LIS scholars must critically engage with these issues (Bernier, 2019). The various articles featured in *Transforming Young Adult Services* (2019) do precisely that; as a whole, they work together to underscore the reality that while YA services have become more productive in the last 25 years in terms of technological innovation, civic-engagement programming, and equitable YA spaces, there remains a lack of evidence-based research on YA services (Bernier, 2019). LIS has historically defined young adults according to the hegemonic concept of the youth development paradigm, which posits that young adulthood is stable and universal across historical, cultural, and social contexts (Rothbauer, 2019). LIS tends to lump "young adults" into an age category that often erases individual differences within it and is burdened with the idea that youth are biologically imperfect and need adult guidance, as well as with stereotypes like the idea that teens are "coming of age" or "becoming" rather than simultaneously already being, are controlled by hormones, and are easily influenced by their peers (Agosto, 2019; Rothbauer, 2019). Youth do experience emotional, mental, and social changes related to maturation, but these cannot explain youth behaviour fully or with nuance (Rothbauer, 2019); teens exist as individuals and products of their environments (Agosto, 2019). Agosto (2019) calls for a more teen-centred approach to teen library services, which focuses on asking teens what they need and want rather than analyzing texts in an attempt to determine what is best for them. I discuss this

approach further in Chapter 2's "Methodological and Theoretical Frameworks" section. Similarly, multiple authors in *Transforming Young Adult Services* build on the history of youth community engagement and youth activism to encourage young adult librarians to consider teens as fully-realized people with concerns about social justice issues and to work directly with them when developing library services and programs (Coats, 2019; Lesko, 2019; Males, 2019; Rothbauer, 2019).

Many public and school libraries, especially in the urban United States of America (USA), report having success acting on their social justice values by providing social activism programming for youth, sometimes combining programming with YA literature. This takes shape as incentives (like winning prizes or the opportunity to review books on social media) to read 'woke' books—which "must inform about a disenfranchised group, challenge the status quo, and have a protagonist from an underrepresented or oppressed group" (Lewis, 2019a)—and engage in dialogue about them; as using technology to help solve social justice issues in a school library (Lewis, 2018, 2019b); as youth activism programs solely focused on discussion of a topic (Hughes-Hassell, 2018); and as discussion groups regarding nonfiction books about salient political topics such as gun violence, like at the Denver Public Library (Hem-Lee & Evans, 2018). The librarians running the program at the Denver Public Library, which was called "Read. Awareness. Dialogue. Action.", consulted their Teen Advisory Board and school teachers during the creation process. They established ground rules for discussions to help guide difficult conversations, and they chose to evaluate the program in terms of impact on the community rather than statistics. Though this program did not directly encourage social justice actions as part of the program itself, it was intended to help develop the public speaking, debate, and critical thinking skills of youth. Hem-Lee and Evans claim that some of those outcomes will be

more readily seen once "youth mature and begin to become active in their community" (2018, p. 30), implying that teens are not already active in their communities.

Conversely, Richards-Schuster & Dobbie (2011) provide a sociological perspective on what might motivate and assist youth in getting involved with civic actions, highlighting that grassroots community organizations often ignore contributions youth can make to public life. They define youth civic spaces as both informal and formal "environments in which youth participation in civic action is fostered—the pathways, structures, and vehicles that provide opportunities for young people to engage in critical discussion, dialogue, and action" (Richards-Schuster & Dobbie, 2011, p. 234). Richards-Schuster & Dobbie provide a framework for creating youth civic spaces which includes:

1. creating physical space and organizational roles for young people;
2. providing dedicated adult allies;
3. facilitating critical education and skill building for community action; and
4. integrating action and reflection. (2011, p. 242)

This framework can be easily applied to a public library context; indeed, Denver Public Library's "Read. Awareness. Dialogue. Action." program integrates all but the fourth. Similarly, Hoopes (2018) details an annual Social Justice Symposium for Teens, which is a day-long program for teens to talk and learn about social justice. This symposium was planned by a youth committee in an effort to empower teen voices and included keynote speeches from authors and workshops on various social justice topics. Furthermore, Hoopes encourages librarians to leverage their power as trusted, privileged adult allies with access to information by listening to young people, being prepared to talk about local issues with teens, and modelling activism.

In addition, Crawford Barniskis (2013) conducted a case study of teen engagement with art programs in a public library and found that, while the art programs positively affected teens'

sense of power and heightened empathy, they did not bridge the 'activation gap' between the desire to engage in political activism and actual engagement. However, the data did reveal "an intent for the teens to bridge the activation gap and become more civically engaged with the understanding that they would be supported by public library programming in specific ways that address their concerns of adult hegemony and limited time to engage" (Crawford Barniskis, 2013, p. 54). She suggests that further research into the factors of active engagement is necessary, and this thesis endeavours to help fill that gap.

In their book *Reading for Action: Engaging Youth in Social Justice Through Young Adult Literature* (2019), Boyd & Darragh present ways for high school English teachers to use YA literature to facilitate youth civic action. Like Richards-Schuster & Dobbie, this book focuses on helping teens make a difference now rather than leaving them feeling helpless. Each chapter focuses on a different social justice issue (some examples are bullying, mental health, police brutality, immigration reform, and environmental protection) and provides a YA book on that issue, teaching strategies, ideas for social action projects, and avenues for student research and exploration. All of these are presented as potential options, emphasizing that students should be able to choose. Although written for secondary school English teachers, Boyd & Darragh's approach to using YA literature to encourage social action projects that stem from issues students are concerned with is highly applicable to library programs, especially in regards to their emphasis on youth choosing what to read and what social justice actions to take. The research I conducted for this thesis mirrors the arguments made by Boyd & Darragh by focusing on allowing teens to make their own choices about their reading and their civic involvement.

Young Adult Reading Habits and Identity Formation

While this research proposal focuses on data drawn from teen behaviours and thoughts, it is the teens' interactions with and reactions to YA social activism narratives that creates that data, and so attention must be paid to the history, themes, and effects of YA literature. Social activism narratives include extremely popular books like *The Hate U Give* (Thomas, 2017) and *Your Own Worst Enemy* (Jack, 2018), which reflect the concerns and actions of youth worldwide (Winters, 2019; Dar, 2020). In addition, speculative fiction, particularly dystopian settings, are "a vivid snapshot of contemporary cultural anxieties: what individuals and even the human species as a whole might have to fear in the future" (Basu, Broad, & Hintz, 2013, p. 13). Social activism narratives imagine worlds where young adults are revolutionary heroes positioned in terms of their agency, power, and resistance (Ventura, 2011). Such themes are often viewed as controversial: controversial YA literature has been a topic of discussion in children's literature since the first YA novel—commonly considered to be S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967)—was published. Additionally, there has long been a lack of diversity in children's and YA literature, with most YA literature focusing on hegemonic white, heterosexual, cisgender, middle-class, able-bodied characters (Cai, 2002; Larrick, 1965). Change in this regard has often been slow (Harris, 2003; Lo, 2014, 2015), though there have been significant strides made thanks to publishing industry initiatives such as We Need Diverse Books (n.d.), which was founded in 2014. Library collections have historically replicated this lack of diversity, with some librarians hesitating to purchase books that could be considered controversial (Hughes-Hassell, 2020). Representation of diverse identities in YA literature is vital for adolescents to see themselves and their lives reflected rather than Othered, a systemic phenomenon that marginalizes individuals or groups that do not fit within hegemonic norms (Naidoo & Dahlen, 2013; Sims Bishop, 1990).

Social activism narratives are just one subgenre of YA literature that allows for this kind of representation. Thus, it is important to acknowledge the power structures that limit the selection of YA literature, from publishing to library collections. In addition, access to controversial content has become even more salient as society and technology shifts to allow teens to access even more information even more quickly. Adolescence is characterized by its in-between nature, and when teens have access to information previously only available to adults, the transition period between childhood and adulthood becomes even more blurred (Bodart, 2006).

Identity-seeking is a key theme of all young adult fiction (Aitken, 2001; Basu, Broad, & Hintz, 2013; Bernier, 2019; McCallum, 1999; Ostry, 2004; Trites, 2000). This is especially true as it relates to the influence of society on identity: "the YA novel, with its questioning of social institutions and how they construct individuals, was not possible until the postmodern era influenced authors to explore what it means if we define people as socially constructed subjects rather than as self-contained individuals bound by their identities" (Trites, 2000). Adolescents form their identity from their experiences and engagement with societal structures and cultural objects (Bernier, 2019; McCallum, 1999). Thus, the books teens choose to read for pleasure have a significant impact on their identity formation and the transition from childhood to adulthood (Becnel & Moeller, 2015; Bodart, 2006; Howard, 2011). YA literature helps teens explore who they are and who they want to be by trying on many possible and impossible selves, as well as by providing a safe space to think about their beliefs, priorities, and interactions with others (Richardson & Eccles, 2007). Rather than, or in addition to, using pleasure reading as an escape, teens use it to actively engage with the text and construct their own identity (Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Taylor, 2011; Wilhelm, 2016). Youth actively make meaning from the text they read—they "don't consume books like junk food – they transact with them and make them their own"

(Wilhelm, 2016, p. 37). In her oft-cited article on this topic, Howard (2011) categorizes the reasons youth read into social reasons and personal reasons. The social reasons include understanding of the world, social conscience, and empowerment, while the personal reasons include entertainment, relaxation, and enhancing the imagination: "As suggested by reader response theorists, the reader is actively engaged in constructing meaning as he or she selectively expands the meaning of the text in the context of his or her life" (Howard, 2011, p. 53). Therefore, reading has an impact on how youth understand and interact with the world, especially when they are allowed to choose what they read—suggesting that reading social activism narratives could give young adults the tools to engage with social justice issues in the real world.

Digital Media, Place, and News Consumption

Beyond the impact of pleasure reading on the sense of identity youth form, youth are also influenced by digital media and technology, both of which are intrinsically linked to power dynamics in society and thus to social justice issues. In her study of teens in a Canadian rural municipality, Rothbauer (2009) asks questions about the relationship between reading, readers, and place. She found that teens lacked access to places to go to select books and a community of readers to engage with because they had limited time, the library was often not open at convenient times for them, and it did not have the materials the teens wanted. Nonetheless, the teens were avid readers, which Rothbauer reconciles with her concept of the "placelessness of reading" (p. 478). Rothbauer questions whether previously noted barriers of isolation and distance are overcome by mass media and communication technology. She notes that the teens in her study considered the Internet itself a place to go to hang out and to locate reading materials, a sentiment echoed by boyd (2014) in her study of teens' use of social media: "Each cohort of

teens has a different space that it decides is cool. It used to be the mall, but for the youth discussed in this book, social network sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are the cool places" (p. 5). These questions and arguments are even more salient during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the Internet necessarily became a place that many people went for work, school, and leisure purposes.

Digital media complicates the notion of "reading" by offering more platforms for reading than simply words on the page of the print book, and I also offered my participants the option of reading media other than print. Mackey (2007) highlights video games, television, movies, and interactive hypertext fiction as examples thereof, and the landscape of reading options has become even more vast since her research was conducted in the late 1990s. Media literacy is becoming as important as textual literacy, as reading exists in and is developed in connection with social context: "the web of our daily lives informs our reading in positive and constitutive ways as well. We learn how to read in and through the company of other readers, not simply how to decode but how to place ourselves in relation to a particular text" (Mackey, 2007, p. 6). This is particularly true in the context of digital media and modern-day social worlds being online.

Though my participants did not take me up on my offer and instead chose to read books for the purposes of our discussion group, they also chose to add reading of nonfiction, primarily news articles, to the research questions. Young adults not reading newspapers has been a trend since at least the 1980s, and much research has been done on why that might be and what kind of news might appeal to them instead (Cobb-Walgren, 1990; Kohut, 2002; Zerba, 2008; Zerba, 2011). Teens might not read news or newspapers due to lack of time, cost, lack of interest, and simply not enjoying it (Cobb-Walgren, 1990; Kohut, 2002; Zerba, 2008). However, newspapers are no longer the primary mass communication tool: the digital media landscape has changed

how everyone, especially youth, consumes news. The Internet has become a new way for people of all ages to build political knowledge through things like conversations on social media, rather than through traditional mass media (Moeller, de Vreese, Esser, & Kunz, 2014). Zerba (2008) found that narrative journalism evoked emotion, created a sense of drama, and personalized stories for readers, helping youth not to lose interest in news as quickly. Thus, narrative journalism is mostly useful as an engagement technique (Zerba, 2008). The effects of narrative journalism identified by Zerba are mirrored by incidental news consumption on social media, which is more immediate, highly interactive, and allows for personalization.

Indeed, a 2018 study of youth 18-29 from Argentina found that, among young people, incidental news consumption on social media is the centre of the contemporary online information practices (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, & Matassi, 2018). While Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, & Matassi focus on youth older than my teen participants, their study's recency and analysis of how those youth get their news provides useful context for the discussion of how my participants usually interact with news media and how reading news for a library program compares and contrasts to everyday interactions. This is especially true when considered in combination with Cortesi & Gasser's findings (2015); they identify the Internet as an important site of information usage and the news as an important category of information, linked to sound decision-making, civic engagement, and democratic participation. Their study consisted of group interviews with youth, ages 11-19, who defined "news" as related to politics and current events, but also as new information in general. The youth incidentally consumed news in the form of top posts on Facebook and YouTube and push notifications from news apps. Incidental news consumption by the youth in Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, & Matassi's study (2018) also stemmed from their constant use of social media on smartphones, often consisted of partial news

consumption in the form of headlines and pictures, and resulted in the filtering of news based on the political opinions of the friend sharing it.

However, sometimes the news consumption of the youth was intentional and specific (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, & Matassi, 2018), a sentiment echoed by the fact that youth in Cortesi & Gasser's study often double-checked the news they saw on one platform with a difference source (2015). In addition, Cortesi & Gasser (2015) argue that research shows that people share news from their weak social ties on social media, meaning it is not entirely an echo chamber: there is diversity of source, content, and exposure. The youth in this study also engaged in interactive news practices like content creation (for instance, making memes), news sharing, and commenting on news. These interactive practices are important when it comes to the development of internal political efficacy, which is a person's beliefs about their own competence to understand and participate effectively in politics. Internal political efficacy develops early in life and influences the degree to which citizens participate in politics, through actions like voting, throughout their lives (Moeller, de Vreese, Esser, & Kunz, 2014). Civic messaging is the most important predictor of an increase in internal political efficacy over time. Furthermore, Moeller, de Vreese, Esser, & Kunz (2014) found that:

> If adolescents are part of message construction, be it by engaging in an online discussion or merely by forwarding a political message to their peers, their level of internal political efficacy rises significantly. The effect is stronger than the effects of usage of any of the more passive form of news, including newspapers (p. 696).

Digital media has made it much easier and more accessible for youth to consume and interact with news, thus raising their confidence in their ability to get involved with politics. This context

is a crucial consideration for this thesis project, especially considering that one of its goals is to find ways for libraries and librarians to empower teens to engage with politics and social justice.

Summary

While social responsibility has been at the centre of debate in librarianship since the mid-20th century, social justice is a new addition to that debate, and those discussions have also only recently started to include conversations that centre young adults and YA services. There are a number of social activism programs for teens being run by libraries, but they often lack the inclusion of reading YA literature, and there is a significant gap in research about the effects of those programs. Academic literature surrounding YA fiction shows that identity-seeking is not only a key theme of that fiction, but also something young adults do themselves by using YA fiction to try on possible selves and formulate opinions on real-world issues. Research also shows that youth actively engage with and construct a text rather than mindlessly consuming it. Further, there are many ways to read in our technologically-driven social context, and youth engage with and are influenced by digital media. The majority of news consumption done by youth occurs incidentally on social media, which allows them to actively engage with news stories and, in turn, increases their internal political efficacy. All of these issues and considerations provide a rich landscape for my participatory case study to investigate how reading, public library programming, and social justice actions might intersect and influence the behaviour of teens.

Chapter 2: Research Design and Data Collection

The following chapter discusses how I built upon the findings of my literature review to select the methodological frameworks of case study and participatory research and the theoretical frameworks of critical ethnography as theory and reader-response theory. I detail how I designed the research based on these frameworks, as well as how I modified those designs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter then provides a chronological recounting of recruitment, the events of each program session, and the ideas touched on in individual debriefs with my research partners. This chapter focuses largely on presenting said events without in-depth analysis; instead, I simply introduce the themes that arose in my qualitative data analysis. Those themes will be detailed in the chapters that follow this one.

Methodological and Theoretical Framework

My methodological approach for this research project is a participatory case study. A case study is an in-depth exploration of a certain person or group of people in a setting bound by time, place, or physical boundaries (Creswell, 2008). This particular case study focuses on a group of teens and is bound by the library program's duration and the virtual boundaries of Google Meet calls. In addition, the design of this research is predicated on the assertion of Agosto (2019) that YA librarianship should be based on a teen-centred approach that prioritizes teens as individuals first and members of demographics second:

> "Teen-centered" refers to (1) direct youth participation in program and service design, (2) research that uses teens as research subjects or participants, and (3) library programs and services based on research that uses teens as research subjects or participants. In a more teen-centered approach to library research, teen behaviours, thoughts, and preferences would serve as the main sources for research data, as opposed to information resources

> serving as the most common data for analysis. In a more teen-centered approach to library practice, teens themselves would serve as the experts of their own thoughts, behaviors, needs, and preferences, and teens themselves would determine what resources and services are the best fits to their needs and interests (p. 34).

My research design aimed to use a teen-centred approach in terms of both research and practice. Agosto's teen-centred approach echoes the bottom-up nature of participatory research, which this research uses by considering the participants to be research partners, as opposed to subjects who are not asked what they think about the goals of the research.

Participatory research encompasses a range of methods that aim to give research participants more power in the researcher-research relationship, most often when doing research for people who have been considered voiceless or powerless (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Nind, 2011). It has "roots in Paulo Freire's (1972) theory of conscientization, where he advocates a strategy for liberation of oppressed peoples via engagement and collaborations with local people for cultural action to oppose dominating power or cultural forces" (Bharat, Bishop, Bazzell, & Smith, 2002, p. 1259-60). It goes by a variety of names, depending on the precise nature and goals of the research, including "participatory action research", "community-based research", "community partnership research" and "empowerment research". Broadly, participatory research acknowledges communities, or traditional research subjects, as research partners; focuses on problems important to the community; and attempts to produce output that is relevant to the community (Dennison & Stillman, 2012; McKemmish et al., 2012). In community-based settings, it is often defined as a collaboration between researchers and community members that spans from conception to dissemination, iteratively involving all stakeholders in all stages of the research process (McKemmish et al., 2012; Bharat, Bishop, Bazzell, & Smith, 2002). The actual

level of involvement and investment in the research project by the participants exists on a spectrum, but the focus is always on including the research participants as partners by establishing common understanding of research goals, methodologies, data collection, and future use of data (Dennison & Stillman, 2012; Stoecker, 2012). While the "participation" element of this method of research focuses on broadly changing social structures surrounding who produces knowledge and who has power in the knowledge-production process, participatory research is often also "action-oriented"; it is geared toward making practical changes and/or taking tangible actions (Stoecker, 2012). In a workplace setting such as a library, participatory action-oriented research asks what effective professional practice might look like (Somerville, 2014) and endeavours to inform and support actions, thus distinguishing itself from solely theoretical inquiries.

Even with the best of intentions and a firm grounding in the theoretical intentions of participatory research, it can be difficult to break out of the traditional structures of academia and the research machine. Academic researchers have needs and priorities that can be very different from those of their research partners; for instance, securing tenure or job promotions, intangible benefits such as a sense of contributing to social justice, and different priorities regarding timeliness (Dennison & Stillman, 2012). I was very much not an exception to this; as a master's student with intentions to graduate on a strict timeline, I prioritized my own deadlines over the more community-based elements of participatory research. Instead of starting the research with iterative community consultations, I came to my research partners with research questions and strategies already planned, which is a common flaw of participatory research (Stoecker, 2012). Despite that, I made efforts to prioritize collaboration where I felt I could within the limits of both my own capacity and the willingness of my participants.

Participatory research is particularly useful for drawing on sources of knowledge that were previously ignored or underacknowledged (Dennison & Stillman, 2012). The lack of teen voice in library research is problematic; teens deserve to be talked to and not just about, and thus have their perspectives heard, validated, and unfiltered as much as possible by adult opinions (Moeller, Pettee, & Leeper, 2011; Crawford Barniskis, 2013). Participatory research should involve ongoing self-evaluation on the part of the researcher, allow for evolution based on the ideas and priorities of the research partners, and pay careful attention to the need to make collaborative adjustments that serve the common goals of the research (Stoecker, 2012; Somerville, 2014). Throughout the case study, I remained open to the direction of my research changing according to the participants' desires. Participating as research partners who are involved in making decisions about what will be researched, how data is made sense of, and what is done with the research ensures that teen voices are included to the extent that the teens want them included. Ultimately, my research seeks to understand what effect including teenagers as research partners had on the program itself and, thus, the reactions of the teens.

The methods used in this case study are also informed by critical ethnography, a methodology that not only describes what the conditions of existence already are for a group of subjects, but also aims to disrupt power relations by considering how those conditions could change in order to give the subjects equity and greater freedom (Madison, 2012). The core of ethnographic research is comprised of two interconnected activities: "firsthand participation in some initially unfamiliar social world and the production of written accounts of that world that draw upon such participation" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). My research is not a traditional ethnography, as my participation was not unobtrusive in the way that it might have been had, for instance, a staff member at CPL been the primary leader of the program and I simply

participated. Instead, I took an active role in facilitating and participating in designing a library program, conducting the program, and engaging in individual discussions with the teens who participated in this research. Even so, I used data analysis methods informed by ethnography. To produce written accounts drawing upon my participation, I took fieldnotes with the intent of creating a detailed description of setting, time, and chronology of events—the usual style of case studies that have an ethnographic focus (Creswell, 2013). I then analyzed my fieldnotes as a data set using qualitative analytic coding. My data analysis and my role as a facilitator and researcher are informed by my own biases, as well as the influence of my theoretical frameworks of critical ethnography as theory and reader-response theory.

Critical Ethnography as Theory

Critical ethnography is critical theory in action, and the critical ethnographer "takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the status quo, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control" (Madison, 2012, p. 5). Where ethnographers might focus on representing a social group without actively disrupting the way it works and its place in society, critical ethnographers acknowledge that societal structures make life less than ideal for marginalized subjects and explicitly aim to contribute to working against those structures. In short, "critical ethnography is conventional ethnography with a political purpose" (Thomas, 1993). Crosthwaite (2015) undertook a similar critical ethnographic case study for her dissertation research. Her study was focused on students participating in literature circles in a grade-four classroom and the capacity for literacy to teach not only reading skills, but also "the skills for individuals to learn to be compassionate towards others, understand their individuality, and envision how their self can alter their community for a most just world" (p. iii). Crosthwaite found that her participants

formed a collective unit of supportive readers while maintaining their individual identity (p. 167), changed their opinions over time and exposure to social justice literature and were enabled to "embrace their current world and understand the active role they influence in changing it" (p. 168) through immersion in historical narratives, and achieved deeper understanding through discussion with peers than would have been possible reading alone (p. 169). Her foundations of reader-response theory, socio-cultural theory, and critical literacy theory, which is "fueled by the need for social change, to empower those marginalized and voiceless to take a stance and action against the inequalities that maintain society's power relations" (Crosthwaite, 2015, p. 42) serve as inspiration for this study's structure. In my case, I hoped to empower teens to learn about and acknowledge social justice issues. In particular, my goal was for them to learn practical ways to work against power dynamics that have a negative impact on them, both as an age group and at the intersections of other aspects of their identity, including but not limited to gender, race, class, and sexual orientation.

Reader-Response Theory

Reader-response theory is best described as a school of literary theories focused on the role of the reader (McQuillan, 1999) and thus how meaning is produced through the reader's active participation. Barthes' (1978) concept of the 'Death of the Author' aligns with the assertion that young adults form their identities through interactions with literature. Rather than passively consuming a work, readers actively create the 'text', which is the interaction between reader and writing that produces meaning, and so render the author (as a producer of meaning) dead. A precursor to Barthes, Rosenblatt (1995) considers reading from a pedagogical point of view. She argues that it is impossible for writers and readers to refrain from reading their own values into a work, as both they and the work are a part of "a scheme of values, a sense of a

social framework" (p. 6). Teachers should, therefore, point out those value assumptions and encourage students to consider and criticize them. Rosenblatt's transactional theories of reading aim to have readers not only understand texts, but also understand the world and their place in it, and thus feel empowered to change it. Her belief in the transformative power of reading is foundational to this study, and I endeavoured to reflect it in my facilitation of the program sessions and to encourage my participants to reflect upon the ways they were actively engaging in creating the text.

As argued by Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (2011), "fieldnotes are always products of prior interpretive and conceptual decisions and, hence, are ripe with meanings and analytic implications" (p. 198). The coding and analysis of my fieldnotes was informed by my biases and the theoretical frameworks I adopted prior to conducting this research project. Analysis is not a process of finding something that is already there, but rather a process of creating meaning based on my own experiences and constant thinking about the relationships between and importance of previously recorded events and meanings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Thus, I used reader-response theory to constantly inform my approach to formulating discussion questions, facilitating program sessions, and interacting with my participants, as well as to analyze the data.

Initial Research Design

This research took the shape of a library program at the Camrose Public Library (CPL), developed by and for teens ages 13-18, centred around social activism narratives and social justice actions. I chose to collaborate with CPL for this research because I had already built relationships with the staff and some of the teen patrons during my own time working there, and the staff were confident that there were regular teen patrons interested in social justice issues. Camrose is a rural city in Alberta (population 18,520 in 2016), and the age range of 13-18 was

chosen because it is what CPL considers the demographic for teen programs. The program was originally intended to be held in-person but was moved to Google Meet due to COVID-19 restrictions. Over the course of the program, the participants read group-selected YA fiction and engaged with guiding questions to discuss how the themes of social activism in the works are reflected in society and in the teens' lives. The group then, if they so chose, could enact a related social justice action. The duration and number of sessions was flexible according to the participants' desires, with the stipulation that it should consist of at least two sessions. Crawford Barniskis (2013) asserts that individual discussions with her participants in a similar study were crucial to hearing all the participants' thoughts in depth, rather than potentially filtered or left unsaid because of the nature of a group setting. Thus, in addition to attending all the program sessions, the research participants were asked to fill out individual surveys that I discussed with them in brief individual interviews after the conclusion of the program. The surveys were intended to be used as a place for the participants to get started on thinking about the questions I wanted to discuss with them in more depth and give me a starting point to develop more effective follow-up questions.

This was the extent of my plan for the program itself prior to recruitment, as I wanted the teens to be involved in shaping the program's themes and elements according to their interests. The decisions they made are detailed throughout this chapter, but primarily in the "Presession: Program Decisions" section.

Data Collection and Analysis

As mentioned previously, data was collected throughout this process in the form of my own fieldnotes and audio recordings of each of the sessions. The main data set for analysis was my fieldnotes, with the audio recordings serving as a resource for pulling exact quotes. In all

cases, my participants were referred to only by pseudonyms, and my fieldnotes and audio recordings were stored on a password-protected Google Drive. When recording the fieldnotes, I followed the general outline of each session, writing down approximately what the participants said in response to each question and the questions they asked themselves. This approach led to non-linear notes, arranged by topic. I endeavoured to write down everything that happened during discussions and the general gist of what we did during the more hands-on elements of the program, such as creating a digital poster together. My fieldnotes also included all of the data I collected from the individual surveys, as only one participant filled it out prior to our individual debrief, and her answers were all about one sentence and thus easily copied into my fieldnotes. I undertook analysis of my fieldnotes through an iterative process of reading the fieldnotes as a complete corpus, close coding, and writing intensive analyses (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). The first step consists of approaching my fieldnotes as though they were written by a stranger and reading them as a whole, in the order they were written. I waited about two weeks after the last individual debrief to revisit the fieldnotes to gain some distance, read through all of what I had written, and then undertook the process of expanding the brief bullet points into full sentences that depicted the events linearly, consulting the audio recordings to clarify the order of events and exact wording of quotes. This process allowed me to perceive changes over time and gain fresh insights (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). The second step is qualitative analytic coding, which includes open coding, selecting themes, and focused coding. Open coding aims to generate as many codes as possible in order to "name, distinguish, and identify the conceptual import and significance of particular observations" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 175) rather than with the intent of sorting data into categories. This stage also includes writing "code memos" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 185) that elaborate on and connect certain notes to

explore patterns. From these codes and memos, I selected core themes by determining which codes I thought were most useful in terms of answering my research questions, and I organized the fieldnotes to facilitate focused coding: "a fine-grained, line-by-line analysis of selected notes" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 191), which involved elaborating on themes by connecting data and identifying subthemes. The third step is writing integrative memos by "reorganiz[ing] and revis[ing] previously written in-process and code memos, identifying a theme or issue that cuts across a number of these memos and pulling together relevant materials" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 193). This step is where I began to add contextual information that readers need to understand the research.

At each step of the analytic process, I sent my research partners the codes and themes I identified for further feedback and approval. In so doing, I hoped to ensure that I do not misinterpret or misconstrue what the participants have said and, thus, am able to maintain as authentic a teen voice in the research as is possible when an adult is the one undertaking most of the data analysis (Moeller, Pettee, & Leeper, 2011; Crawford Barniskis, 2013). This was not as effective a strategy for participatory research as it could have been if I'd asked my research partners to be more hands-on and help me to identify themes and write up my findings. This fact is belied by the reality that only one of my research partners responded to my emails about the data analysis to say they agreed, the rest of them likely choosing to use the "your silence is approval" method I offered. As such, I cannot be sure I was indeed successful in preserving their voices. Once again, my own priorities as a researcher, mostly to do with time constraints, limited the potential of my participatory research. Even so, in analyzing this data, I intended to evaluate how the participants' reading of YA social activism narratives affects their motivation to

undertake social justice actions, what they learned from the library program, and how being research partners influenced those two reactions.

Collecting the Data

Revising the Design and Recruiting During COVID-19

What I thought would be the final version of my research proposal was completed on March 7, 2020, just before restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic began in Canada. While the heart of the research project remained the same—retaining its theoretical basis, methodological approach, and research questions—those restrictions resulted in a significant redesigning of the project's practicalities, especially since I had intended to hold the program in-person. With the library closed and people encouraged to isolate in their homes, I was forced to consider what activism might look like when you cannot leave your house and how the role of the library in fostering that activism might change. I considered waiting to conduct the research in person or doing it unaffiliated with the library, but I was just as interested in the library creating a virtual space, and I wanted to continue the research through partnership with an institution that already had community relationships and legitimacy. Therefore, I rewrote my proposal and my Research Ethics Board (REB) application to reflect conducting the library program online.

To do so, I consulted with the REB regarding privacy concerns and with Camrose Public Library (CPL) on their virtual program policies, which were understandably new and thus broad, and selected Google Meet as the platform. Access to technology became a limitation of this study, as CPL did not have the resources to loan participants items like tablets or laptops, and the only way to access their WiFi would be to sit outside the library building, which is a safety concern. Accessing library materials at all also became a looming problem, the solution to which

depended on the decisions the participants made about the program and will be discussed later in this chapter.

My first step after successfully defending the updated research proposal was to acquire REB 1 approval. This process resulted in a few additional changes: I added Ground Rules for conduct in all program sessions (Appendix A, as part of the consent form), decided not to allow non-participants to attend the program for ease of data collection, and met individually with prospective recruits instead of having a group information session. After being approved, I moved into recruitment. Because CPL does not have many older teen patrons, I had planned for recruitment through junior and high school visits to be one of my primary recruitment routes, but with the delays from COVID-19, I was only approved by the school division to begin recruiting in the fall of 2020, which was after I intended for the program to end. This, on top of CPL staff not being in the library to help directly recruit patrons, meant that my recruitment strategy was limited to emailing community groups in Camrose that CPL had relationships with (Camrose Pride Community, About Time Productions, Camrose Family Resource Centre, and Camrose Open Door) and posting on social media (Appendix B). Recruitment happened in June, as mass protests against racism and police brutality—which had initially begun in response to the killing of George Floyd in America—were widespread globally (Estrada, 2020; Sugrue, 2020), including one in Camrose facilitated by an organization called Camrose Against Racism (CAR). Posting in CAR's Facebook group was one of my best recruitment strategies, as at least two of my three participants found the study there. My approach to recruitment resulted in finding participants who were already fairly engaged with social justice issues and with the library. Ultimately, I recruited three participants and met with them individually over Google Meet to review the consent form (the general outline for these sessions is in Appendix C; the consent

form is in Appendix A). In these individual sessions, each participant selected a pseudonym, which I used to create Google accounts for them that they then used to join the group Google Meet calls. I also asked each participant what kind of material they liked to read and what social justice issues they were most interested in so that I could prepare a list of examples of social activism narratives (Appendix D) that would be relevant to their interests.

Pre-session: Program Decisions

My research partners and I gathered together for the first time on July 13 for a Pre-session, during which we made all the decisions about the library program (the pre-written outline of this session is in Appendix E). Everyone introduced themselves with pseudonyms, pronouns, age, and favourite fiction genre. They were Violet (she/her/they/them, 16 turning 17, murder mystery), Jane (she/her, 14, fantasy), and Noah (he/him, 14, war fiction). I then gave them a recap of the project by offering basic definitions of social justice, social activism narrative, literature review, participatory research, critical ethnography, and reader-response theory. I asked if the participants had any questions, but they did not.

From there, we moved into discussion questions I had prepared and emailed them beforehand. The first question was "What social justice issues are you interested in?" Jane was interested in climate change, women's rights, LGBTQ2+ issues, and Black Lives Matter (BLM). Noah said he was interested in anything going on the world right now. Violet was interested in equality in general, especially BLM and the LGBTQ2+ community. The second question was "Have you already read any social activism narratives? Did you enjoy them? Why? What did/didn't you like about them?" We only touched on this one briefly because I failed to follow-up on their answers; Jane said she had read and liked Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give* (2017), Violet said they had read *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008) and seen *Hamilton* (Kail, 2020),

and Noah said he hadn't read much of anything. The third question was whether my research partners agreed with the research questions and what they would change about them, if anything. The questions were presented as follows:

- How might reading social activism narratives affect young adults' thinking about and motivation to conduct social justice actions?
- How can public libraries create spaces where young adults can learn about and enact social justice actions through reading?
- How does acting as collaborators to design the library program and choose what to read affect the experience of the young adults participating in the program and their reactions to the media they read?

They all thought the questions were good and seemed relevant. I prompted them again after we had gone through all three and asked if there was anything they wanted to add, such as looking at nonfiction or changing the structure of the research. Noah suggested that looking at nonfiction could be helpful, and Violet and Jane agreed. Violet thought we should look at social activism in multiple scenarios, and Jane agreed, adding that looking at the difference between situations that happen in real life and those that are fictional would be useful. I agreed that it sounded like a good idea, since they wouldn't necessarily know what social justice actions to conduct if they don't know what's going on in the world—so reading nonfiction, even just the news, is important. These early opinions are reflected in my findings and discussed further in Chapter 4.

That decided, we moved on to making decisions about the program itself. The questions that guided that process were as follows:

- Do you all want to read the same thing?
- What do you want to read?

- How many sessions do you want to do?
- Do you want to have a group chat to discuss what you're reading in between sessions?

Everyone was okay with either reading the same thing or not, though Jane expressed a preference for everyone reading the same thing. I pointed out that it would depend how many program sessions we did, and we decided to meet weekly for four weeks. I suggested that would give time to all read the same book and then branch out, and everyone agreed. We moved on to picking reading material. I asked if they wanted to read books or a different medium. Jane immediately said she wanted to read a book, and Violet and Noah agreed. None of them had a particular suggestion and were enthusiastic about looking at the list of examples I had compiled previously (Appendix D). They took some time to look through the list, and each of them picked a top three and then a top choice of which to share the description. After they shared the descriptions of each book by reading the Goodreads synopsis, we decided that four sessions of about an hour each would be enough for us to read all three together.

The book Violet chose was *We Set the Dark on Fire (WSTDOF)* by Tehlor Kay Mejia (2019). *WSTDOF* is a Latinx-inspired fantasy dystopia and the first book in a duology. Protagonist Dani is about to graduate from the Medio School for Girls, where high-class girls are trained for one of two roles: Primera, a wife who runs her husband's household, or Segunda, a wife who raises her husband's children. This three-person family structure is a result of an in-universe religion that worships the Sun God, who rules in concert with his two wives. Medio is structured so that the main city is within walls blocking the outer islands, where it does not rain. The closer one lives to the center of the city, the richer and more comfortable one is, and vice versa. Dani is married, along with rival Segunda Carmen, to Mateo, the son of the president of Medio. She is hiding that her family comes from outside the wall and the identification papers

that allowed her to attend the Medio School were forged. Keeping that secret is complicated by a rebel spy group called La Voz attempting to get her to spy for them by threatening to reveal her fake papers. Dani witnesses mass protests in the streets and the arrest of a fellow Primera due to involvement with the rebels. Dani eventually becomes a member of La Voz by choice rather than blackmail, and she and Carmen fall in love with each other. At the end of the book, Carmen is revealed to have also been faking her identity; she was raised as a member of La Voz. Carmen escapes the city while Dani is left to continue to spy on Mateo.

The book Noah chose was *Missing in Action (MIA)* by Dean Hughes (2010). *MIA* is historical fiction set during World War II. The protagonist Jay and his mother move in with his grandparents in small town Utah after Jay's father is declared missing in action somewhere near Hawaii. Jay plays baseball with other boys from the town, many of whom make fun of Jay for being a quarter Navajo. Jay's grandfather gets him a job working at a farm alongside a Japanese-American boy named Ken, who lives in the nearby internment camp. Over the course of the book, Jay is forced to confront his internalized racism regarding his Navajo heritage, his own and others' racism toward Ken and other Japanese-Americans, and his denial of the fact that his father was abusive to him and his mother. At first standoffish because of the stereotypes he's been taught, Jay slowly warms up to Ken as he gives Jay baseball tips and teaches him how to dance. At the climax of the book, one of these dance lessons is witnessed by some of the racist bullies, and Jay runs away by hopping onto a train. He is quickly waylaid at the next train station by a sheriff and, after talking to a Navajo woman at a diner, returns home with his grandfather. Jay apologizes to Ken and participates in a baseball game that pits the team Ken coaches at the internment camp against some of the boys from town Jay has been playing with. After some

initial animosity, the game ends with the racists from town grudgingly respecting the Japanese-American baseball team.

Jane chose *Flygirl* by Sherri L. Smith (2009) for us to read. *Flygirl* is another work of historical fiction that follows the life of Ida Mae Jones, a young Black woman from Louisiana who joins the USA's Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) during WWII. WASPs were tasked with flying military aircraft from factories to bases and flying planes for military drills. Historically, there is no evidence that any Black women were allowed to join the WASP; in the novel, Ida Mae is white-passing and hides her heritage in order to serve. *Flygirl* follows Ida Mae through her training and service, detailing the misogyny the women faced despite often being more competent pilots than the men; the struggle Ida Mae has with hiding that she is Black, even from her best friends in the service; and tangentially, the political work of the women who established the WASP attempting to get them recognized as military personnel. At the end of the book and the end of the war, Ida Mae is faced with a choice: continue to live her life passing as white and be able to keep all her friends and potentially marry a white man, or return to her family and life in Louisiana. *Flygirl* leaves this question unresolved.

Due to the library being closed, and more saliently, not having inter-library loans so we could acquire multiple copies of the books, I decided to use the money I would have spent on food for the program to purchase gift cards so my research partners could buy ebook copies of each book. We also agreed to start a group chat to discuss the books and share nonfiction articles between sessions, though we ended up only using the chat before the first session. I contributed to the chat a little at first to share scheduling details and reminders, but once the participants did not seem to engage, I let it rest instead of further modelling how they could use the chat.

Program Sessions: Camrose Public Library Social Justice Teen Book Club

Session 1. The general structure for each of the program sessions is located in Appendix F. Noah did not attend the first session, but Violet and Jane did. I followed up on their desire to add nonfiction to the research questions by asking if we should add a new question (How does reading nonfiction influence young adults' perception and understanding of social activism narratives?), or add nonfiction to the question that was already there (How might reading social activism narratives, alongside related nonfiction, affect young adults' thinking about and motivation to conduct social justice actions?). Violet and Jane thought it was a better idea to add nonfiction to the existing question. I did so, but further modified the wording after analyzing the data I collected.

Despite agreeing to finish *We Set the Dark on Fire* for this session, Violet and Jane made it to Chapter 7 and 12, respectively. Violet suggested we discuss their thoughts up to that point and then compare with what they thought at the end later, which Jane agreed with. We optimistically intended to start *Missing in Action* for the next meeting as well. I asked Jane and Violet what they wanted to talk about regarding *WSTDOF* so far, prompting them by asking if they liked the book, what sort of themes they might want to talk about, their favourite and least favourite parts so far, and anything that rings true. The discussion that followed will be presented in more detail in Chapter 3. After this discussion, we decided to wait until the next session to discuss potential social justice actions that we could do; as Jane pointed out, the characters in *WSTDOF* hadn’t done much to change society yet. I discuss this choice further in Chapter 4. This meeting was about 50 minutes long.

Session 2. We ended up taking two weeks between sessions one and two due to the holiday on August 5—despite agreeing we could meet on a holiday, not everyone showed up, so

I cancelled it. Everyone was in attendance at this meeting, though it is the last time I end up hearing from Noah, for reasons I can only speculate. He never received the gift card to buy *WSTDOF*, so he had not finished it, but Jane and Violet had. Our conversation around the book this time was similar to the previous one, but we went into more detail, especially in terms of relating the social issues in the book to the real world. In addition, we discussed what we could do in terms of our own activism and how we might do it.

Immigration rights were something that stood out to everyone in the conversation, and Jane suggested doing something related to that for our social justice action. Violet suggested we make a poster to raise awareness. They were most enthusiastic about trying to fundraise for a group that supports immigrants, and we did some brief Google research to look for some options. We decided that we would definitely make a digital poster promoting services for immigrants and ways one could help, and I would look into how we might be able to do a fundraiser virtually. All three participants agreed to assemble some content and ideas for the poster for the next week's meeting, including a summary of how *WSTDOF* motivated them to make the poster. They also agree to start *MIA* for the next meeting. This meeting was about forty minutes long.

Session 3. Jane and Violet started reading *MIA* for this session, but they were both a little confused by the historical events. I told them I didn't know enough about WWII to explain it without Googling it, so we did so together. My intent here was to model that it is always okay to admit when you don't know something and to show how we could find out the answers together. We went over some of the basic facts that are most important to understanding *MIA*: the years the war spanned, which countries were on which side, the USA joining the war after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, and the subsequent internment of Japanese-Americans in camps. Jane was also wondering why exactly Jay seemed to be ashamed of being part-Navajo, and Violet asked if

it was because Native Americans were looked down on as well. I explained a little about colonialism and reservations and said that I thought *MIA* was attempting to draw parallels between Japanese-Americans and Navajo, though I felt it did not do a very good job of executing that goal. We talked about not liking the characters because of their racism, why they are racist, and how the book might be a social activism narrative. I discuss this further in Chapters 3 and 4.

After that discussion, we talked about where we were with our immigration poster. Violet and Jane had written explanations of the book and their motivations, but they were not yet ready to share them. We clarified some points about the plot of *WSTDOF* (who lives outside of the wall?) and what kind of nonfiction resources we wanted to collect to put on the poster (a long-list of news articles and recommended resources). Jane asked what we were going to do for *MIA*, and I said that was up to them if they had ideas. They didn't have anything specific, just general thoughts like connecting the racial points to today or supporting veterans somehow. I reminded them we didn't need to do anything if they weren't inspired to.

This was the last meeting we had pre-scheduled, so we scheduled another one for two weeks from that date. I suggested they try to get some things for the poster compiled in the next week so we would all have time to look at it before the next meeting. This meeting was about thirty minutes long.

Session 4. Jane and Violet both finished *MIA* for this session, which was two weeks after the previous, and we discussed it for about fifteen minutes. This conversation was short but fruitful, as Violet and Jane explained why they found it more difficult to relate *MIA* to real-world events than *WSTDOF* and why they did not really feel inspired by it to conduct a social justice action. I discuss this in-depth in Chapter 4.

The rest of the session was devoted to the immigration poster. In the time off between sessions, I had conversed with CPL's director and determined that we couldn't do a library-sponsored fundraiser because of library policy, but they were happy to put our poster on their social media and in the physical library. I discuss this choice further in Chapter 5. We belatedly named our program the Camrose Public Library Social Justice Teen Book Club, and I shared my screen with Canva open on it so we could work together on the poster. We got about half of the poster done. This session ran about 45 minutes in total.

Session 5. Our final session was two weeks later. Violet and Jane had just started reading *Flygirl*—Violet was not enjoying it much because they do not usually like books about war, though Jane did like it. Our conversation centred around how the book could be defined as a social activism narrative and whether it was motivational for them as readers or not, which I talk about in Chapter 4. Additionally, before this session, I emailed the group links to a few news articles about current events relating to racism and some historical facts about racism in the military in Canada, and we talked about about those articles, which Jane had skimmed, in brief. I also discuss this conversation in Chapter 4.

We spent the rest of this session finishing the immigration poster, again with me sharing my screen. I also provided them with an overview of the individual post-program survey and asked if a week was long enough to respond, to which they agreed. This meeting happened in September, which was already past when they had agreed to commit to program meetings, so I gave them the option to do one more if they chose. They did want to, but we ended up cancelling it due to other commitments on their part. This program session was just over an hour long, with 20 minutes of discussion and the rest of the time spent creating the poster.

Post-Program Individual Debriefs

I asked all three of my research partners to fill out a post-program individual survey (Appendix G) and then meet with me individually to discuss their answers in-depth. Despite my assuring Noah I wanted to hear from him even though he had stopped attending meetings, he did not respond to my emails.

I met with both Jane and Violet individually. Jane had filled out the survey, but her computer crashed and she lost her answers, so we went through the questions together. That approach seemed to be just as effective as my meeting with Violet, who had put brief, one-sentence answers to the questions in the survey. Jane and Violet generally enjoyed the program and being involved in its planning, and they had some suggestions for improvements. The products of these conversations are largely detailed in the "program benefits/strategies" and "program challenges/improvements" sections of Chapter 5.

Summary

I approached my participatory case study by focusing on centring teens and including them as research partners. My research design, data collection, and data analysis were informed by critical ethnography as theory and reader-response theory. Working with Violet, Jane, and Noah to design, conduct, and assess the Camrose Public Library Social Justice Teen Book Club resulted in a rich dataset of fieldnotes and audio recordings. I read my fieldnotes as a complete corpus, used qualitative analytic coding to generate themes, and wrote integrative memos to connect them together. The themes I found are intrinsically connected, but they can be broadly divided into three categories. Accordingly, I will discuss the themes in further detail in the following three chapters.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss the following themes, which largely emerged from discussing the books we read—especially *We Set the Dark on Fire* and *Missing in Action*—in the context of our own society:

- identifying power structures as causes of character actions and as they relate to real-world current events
    - disillusionment
    - gender roles
    - class relations
    - racism
    - protests and immigration

These themes showcased how Violet and Jane were able to recognize power dynamics in the books by bringing their pre-formed opinions and disillusionment with our society to the texts. They highlight that social activism narratives are simply one tool that teens can use to engage with social issues within the context of the other media, fiction and nonfiction, they consume in their lives.

In Chapter 4, I will analyze themes related to what elements of fiction and nonfiction did and did not motivate the participants to conduct social justice actions, our discussions of those choices, and our strategies for the social justice action we did take:

- motivations for social justice actions
    - inspiration (defining 'motivational social activism narratives')
        - choosing what to read (enjoyability)
        - reading nonfiction (understandability)
        - personal/emotional responses (relatability)
        - characters modelling direct action
    - outcomes of the program: education and confidence

These themes revealed that the participants considered reading nonfiction essential for making connections between the books and the real world. Because of this, they found social activism narratives to be more inspiring when they chose what to read, when they already understood and had context for the social issues depicted in the book, when they could relate to the book, and

when the characters in those narratives took direct social justice actions. Overall, the participants felt the program was a learning opportunity and helped them build their confidence.

Following from that, in Chapter 5, I will present the following themes related to the overall effectiveness (and lack thereof) of the program itself and of the participatory nature of the study:

- program benefits/strategies
- program challenges/improvements
- flexible decision-making in participatory research
- influence and opinions of participatory research

These themes largely emerged from the process itself and the debrief sessions, and they indicate that the participatory and collaborative elements of the study and program mostly went well. The participants felt appreciated when asked for their opinions and preferred to be presented with choices. The program's challenges mostly centred around time constraints and the virtual nature of the program; however, the program was also challenged by the tension between intellectual freedom and social justice in libraries, as the director of CPL said no to one of the social justice actions the participants wanted to conduct (a fundraiser for an organization that supports newcomers) out of concern that it would compromise the library's commitment intellectual freedom. Working together strengthened the sense of learning from the program and gaining deeper understanding and confidence highlighted in the analysis of the other themes.

Finally, Chapter 6 will conclude the thesis by more broadly discussing this data analysis in terms of how it answers the research questions, as well as providing practical recommendations for young adult librarians who are interested in creating similar programs in their libraries.

Chapter 3: Identifying and Interpreting Power Structures in Fiction and Reality

Violet and Jane were able to identify injustices that appeared in the books we read, and they interpreted and related to them based on their prior knowledge of injustices in our own society. Their understandings of those injustices shaped their understanding of social justice issues and social activism. This chapter centers around themes related to "identifying power structures as causes of character actions and as they relate to real-world current events". These themes emerged from our discussions of the books we read, as opposed to the program pre-session or the individual debriefs. The discussion questions I presented to the participants and the discussion topics they brought forward often centred around interrogating the motivations of the characters in the books. Those motivations were naturally tied up in the power structures of the society those characters lived with, and the participants were able to identify those structures and then connect them to similar structures in the real world. I identified the major issues we discussed by reading through my fieldnotes as a whole and noting where the same concepts appeared, especially when I knew those concepts were related to later actions we took during the program and/or to a specific research question. These themes are most relevant to the first research question, "How might reading social activism narratives and discussing them in the context of real-world issues affect young adults' thinking about and motivation to conduct social justice actions?" In order to determine how reading social activism narratives and discussing them influences motivations, I found it important to look at how we read and discussed them. The themes that emerged from our discussions of the books detail the reactions my participants had to the texts we read, and so they also help to answer the second research question, "How does acting as collaborators to design the library program and choose what to read affect the

experience of the young adults participating in the program and their reactions to the media they read?"

The themes relating to identifying power structures are as follows:

- identifying power structures as causes of character actions and as they relate to real-world current events
    - disillusionment
    - gender roles
    - class relations
    - racism
    - protests and immigration

Most of the discussion these themes emerged from was around Meija's *We Set the Dark on Fire (WSTDOF)*, with a few insights stemming from Hughes's *Missing in Action (MIA).* These themes most often emerged from early discussions of the books and thus set up the groundwork for how we talked about social justice issues and actions throughout the program. What my participants found most interesting or relatable in the books informed what they wanted to talk about, which in turn informed what social justice actions they wanted to take. Jane and Violet read *WSTDOF* and *MIA* within the context of their own lives and the other media they consume, as well as in and with the company of the book club (Mackey, 2007). Thus, their reactions were influenced by what they already had experience with and what they didn't; they were able to have more fulsome discussions about issues like sexism and classism than they were about racism, and they related the events of the books to global-scale current events that they were aware of rather than more local events. They brought what they already understood about themselves and the world to their reading of the texts, and they took away insights from the books to apply to their perceptions of the society they live in.

Disillusionment

Violet and Jane identified similarities in the characters arcs of the protagonists of *WSTDOF* and *MIA*: both Dani and Jay become disillusioned with the rules of their society. They begin their respective books firmly within the hegemonic system of their societies; Dani wants to be a good wife and follow the rules, and Jay wants to fit in with the white kids he plays baseball with. When the characters talk to other people, they learn how the rules and stereotypes they've been living with affect other people in their society, and they become motivated to change their own behaviour. Violet and Jane found this kind of character journey personally relatable. For example, they both thought Dani's journey as a character and the way her opinions change was convincing. Violet said that at first Dani didn't want to get involved with the rebels, instead wanting to keep living her life, but then she slowly changed her mind and started to get intelligence for the rebels without being blackmailed into it. Jane added that Dani realized how awful her society is and that the life she thought she wanted—a better life than what she had at the border—isn't as great as she thought.

From their life experiences and the media they read, Violet and Jane are aware that there are unjust things about the system they live in. Violet's and Jane's assertions that they would have acted similarly to Dani if they were in her position are underscored by their being a part of the Social Justice Teen Book Club. Violet said they would probably: "stand up against how the system is working, I mean, I'd be on the more La Voz side than going with the flow and behaving how they want you to." Jane agreed and said she "probably wouldn't enjoy being in that system very much." Given the chance to join a group centred around making change, they signed up and stuck with it on an entirely volunteer basis. The library is not a rebel group like La

Voz, but it is the avenue for some form of resistance to hegemonic structures that Violet and Jane were directly offered.

Similarly, Violet and Jane related to Jay's journey toward becoming disillusioned in *MIA*, which relied on him talking to other people and learning to accept himself and others even when broader society does not. Jay is initially hostile to Ken, the Japanese-American boy that he works with, but becomes real friends with him by the end of the book. Violet identified that this initial hostility came from the fact that WWII was going on. Jane added that Jay likely resents Ken because Jay's dad was potentially captured by Japanese soldiers, and Jay is projecting that onto Ken. In addition, Violet liked the last few chapters of *MIA*, in which Jay tries to run away to avoid the town's bullies lumping him in with their judgments of Ken. They thought this was the moment they could relate to most because Jay was "mad about everything and thought running away would fix his problems but found out quite fast it wouldn't." Violet relating to this moment suggests that she has gone or is also going through a similar journey and ended up accepting her own identity and wanting to try to make a difference rather than run away. Much like happens with youth in real life, in both *MIA* and *WSTDOF* the protagonist must talk to and learn from other people in order to become disillusioned with the rules of their society. Thus, Jane and Violet were familiar with this process and were able to relate to it.

Gender Roles

Violet and Jane identified issues of gender in *WSTDOF*, especially in terms of what the book's society claimed it was supposed to be and how the characters actually behaved. They identified with the dissonance between those claims and behaviours because, as feminine-presenting people, they experience sexism in their own lives. Having prior knowledge and/or experience with an injustice depicted in a text made it easier for my participants to understand

the text and to apply the ways the characters try to overcome or change those injustices to their own lives. Indeed, Violet said that they often think about the way gender roles work in our own society, and so they found it interesting that "the rules in the book" make it so that girls are either an object to men, because they are well-off and thus able to afford Primera or Segunda training, or they are poor. *WSTDOF* rests on the premise that high-class society trains women to be either Primeras, wives who run the household and are ruled by their thoughts, or Segundas, wives who raise children and are ruled by their emotions. Upper-class men are married to both a Primera and a Segunda. We are told by *WSTDOF* that all three of the people in this relationship are equal. However, Jane observed that as time passed, society made it more of an assignment for the women. For example, the main character Dani (a Primera), her Segunda Carmen, and their husband Mateo do not get along. Jane pointed out that Mateo's negative treatment of Dani is because Mateo doesn't see his Primera as equal—instead, he thinks Dani should prove to him that she is able to serve him. Violet and Jane recognized that the actions of the characters betray that sexism and classism make equality impossible.

Furthermore, Violet and Jane easily recognized the rules of society and their effects on power dynamics and were bothered by them within the first few chapters of *WSTDOF*. This was the case even though Dani had not yet been convinced to join the rebels, indicating that Violet and Jane were not simply agreeing with the protagonist's opinions and instead brought their own opinions to the text. Like Howard (2011) describes, Violet and Jane actively constructed meaning from the text by expanding the meaning of the text using concepts they understood in the context of their own lives. They had particularly strong reactions to the sexism present in the book—for instance, Violet pointed out that the rules Dani has to follow are not for everyone, they are just for Primeras, and that "the rules are ridiculous, they really bug me."

Violet and Jane were also able to relate the sexism easily to examples of the same in our society because they have experience with sexism in their everyday lives. For example, *WSTDOF* begins each chapter with a quote from the in-universe Primera's Handbook, and Jane mentioned she likes these quotes because they give more context for what the Primeras and Segundas are taught and the rules they follow. When we discussed each quote from the Primera's Handbook specifically, Violet and Jane drew broad connections that underscored how both our society and the one depicted in *WSTDOF* rests on sexism and patriarchy. For instance, when I asked if the quote before Chapter 1: "The key to a Primera's strength is her restraint and immunity to scandal. She must not only behave like someone with nothing to hide, she must have nothing to hide" (Meija, 2019) is a rule our society has for women, Violet and Jane both said yes. Violet added that there is a taboo in our society that men should not show emotion because that makes them look weak, which is similar to the role of Primera. Jane agreed. She related the quote preceding Chapter 2 ("Analysis and logic are a Primera's greatest tools; irrationality her greatest enemy. There's no room for emotion in her decision making" [Meija, 2019]) to how people in our society say that women cannot go into politics because they are too emotional. The handbook teaches Primeras to be emotionless in order to be rational—again, since Primeras are meant to be equal to men. Jane observed that this was the case even though, in both the book and in real life, you can have emotions *and* think rationally.

Existing outside the expectations of society seems to be the part of the *WSTDOF* that Violet and Jane related most to; for example, when I said the rules seemed impossible, Violet agreed, saying that the rules are impossible because society's expectations are impossible: you have to be a specific type of person based on gender, but no matter how hard you try, you can't live up to that, because there's always going to be something about you that's different and will

bug you. Violet believes that, in both the book and in our society, no one can fully fulfill an expectation from the world. Similarly, after reading the entire book, we discussed the question: "How do you think it would change the story if Dani was a Segunda?" Jane said that Dani's character arc was learning how to feel and accept emotions, so if she was a Segunda, it would have been more how to think for herself and not just accept everything that was happening to her. Jane observed that, either way, Dani's character would need to develop to become a whole person, because Primeras and Segundas are taught to be half of a person, which is impossible to achieve. Once again, Violet and Jane used their own experiences to recognize the dissonance between what society says it expects and what it actually does in the book and their real lives.

Class Relations

Our discussions surrounding class relations in *WSTDOF* were similar in nature to and often overlapped with those about gender roles; they highlighted the excuses and motivations the characters use to justify their actions, how those actions fit into society's expectations, and how what society expects contradicts what it claims to expect. One of the primary examples of this is the behaviour of Mateo, Dani and Carmen's husband and the son of the current president of the city. One of Violet's very first comments was that she doesn't like Mateo, because he's "got the creepy vibes with [Carmen] and is also just a major jerk." I asked what they think makes Mateo a major jerk, and Jane said that Mateo is rich and spoiled. She added that even though Dani is supposed to be his equal in intelligence and responsibility, he doesn't treat her that way. Violet agreed, stating that Mateo is not equal with either of them and that he only acts nice when he has to because of his political role. Violet and Jane recognized that it is not only his gender that gives Mateo more power over Carmen and Dani, it is also his class position, and the ways gender and

class influence power dynamics in the book are dissonant with the equality the society claims it functions on.

Violet's and Jane's opinions of the text and of social justice issues were influenced by what their life experience has taught them and what it hasn't. For example, Violet drew comparisons between how the book depicts Dani's internal struggle near the beginning—when she considers throwing away everything she and her parents have worked toward and simply going home instead of marrying Mateo—and Violet's own worldview and values. Violet thought that in our society parents more often prioritize safety and happiness over money, and it's hard to say how a parent would react if their child came home after their parents had sacrificed everything. I pointed out that parents in our society might still pressure their children to make a particular choice because of sacrifices the parents made, such as working hard so their kids could go to college. Violet thought it depended on the personality of a parent; it might be harder to forgive a child in the book's society, but easier in ours. Violet's argument that parents are more likely to prioritize safety and happiness over money suggests that their own life experience has taught them this is true.

Jane and Violet were able to use aspects of class relations in our society to explain the society in the book, and they did so while being mindful of the relationship between classism and other power structures. Dani's character is influenced by class relations because she is from outside the border wall, where people live in poverty, but has false papers that say she is from a town just inside the wall. One of Violet's favourite parts was when Dani's papers are being checked by the police as she and Carmen are travelling to their new home with Mateo. Dani is nervous that the police might look too closely at her false identification papers. She asks them why they are taking so long when it's clear that, since she is Mateo's wife, verifying her papers

would be redundant—in Violet's words, Dani "told off the police." Jane observed that the police treat Dani with respect and don't apply the rules to her as much because she is a high-status wife. Jane builds on this observation by recognizing instances in which multiple aspects of Dani's identity—her current class status, her previous class status, and her gender—are at odds. Jane said it felt really familiar when Dani thought the protestors at the beginning of the book were being too emotional, because people in our society say protestors rely too much on their emotions, and she argued that it's worse in Dani's case because she's from the people protestors are protesting for, but "she feels it's unnecessary because she's all rich and fine now." Jane recognized that Dani's perception of and aversion to emotions comes from what she was taught because of her gender and her class, and that Dani was not "fine now" because there are other aspects of her identity that contribute to her marginalization. Additionally, Jane drew attention to how people who are too poor for the school are shamed when two people marry instead of three, which adds to how they're frowned upon for their class: "because they can't afford to be part of this system, but yet they're shamed for not being part of the system." Violet and Jane were aware of multiple power structures in the book and in the real world, and they were able to begin to articulate ways in which those structures might intersect with each other. Even when they didn't have lived experience with a certain type of oppression, being able to read about it in the context of oppression they did relate to helped them to understand it with more depth.

Racism

Jane and Violet found it harder to discuss *MIA* because they did not have as much everyday experience or media consumption to draw on to interpret it, and the book solely focuses on the issue of racism. Neither of them experience racism themselves, and they do not often consume media about WWII, and so they did not initially fully understand the context of the

book. This provided the library program with more of an opportunity to provide some education. During the program, we researched basic details about WWII that the book assumed we knew, such as the USA joining the war after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour and subsequently opening internment camps that Japanese-Americans were forced to live in. Jane and Violet were also a little confused by Jay feeling ashamed of being a quarter-Navajo; Violet asked if it was because Indigenous Peoples were looked down upon. I said yes and explained that I thought the book was trying to draw parallels between the experience of Japanese-Americans and Navajo, but that I didn't think it did it very well because it lumped the two experiences together rather than examining their similarities and differences with any depth. Unlike *WSTDOF*, the book did not address multiple social issues, making it more difficult for Jane and Violet to find something in it they related to and use that to help interpret power structures they were less familiar with.

However, once given the context from our brief research, Violet and Jane were able to identify in broad terms that the racism present during WWII, and thus in *MIA*, still exists in our world today. For example, Violet argued that the book was about "trying to view everyone as equals", and Jane argued that we could relate the book to any situation where there's something bad the government of a country does, and then people dislike people from that country even though they didn't do anything. The only specific connection they made between *MIA* and current events was Jane's assertion that we could relate *MIA* to how the coronavirus started in China, which led to stereotyping that every Asian person had it or it was their fault. While Jane and Violet did come to the program with an idea of what racism looks like in our society—as evidenced by their knowledge of the Black Lives Matter protests—as well as with a strong sense of the need for social justice, they had trouble drawing specific connections because they didn't have the context needed to do so. My own lack of experience with the same meant that I was

only able to help provide context to a certain extent, and that context was necessarily filtered through my own knowledge and biases gleaned from my media consumption. Even so, reading *MIA* provided an opportunity for the participants to learn more about and deepen their understanding of racism because we did outside research and connected it to the text; indeed, Violet and Jane stated that they felt they learned from reading and discussing *MIA*.

Protests and Immigration

Our discussions around protests and immigration incited by *WSTDOF* were some of the most grounded in current events, especially because of the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020. The Black Lives Matter protests were an issue that all of us were relatively familiar with because it was a constant presence on our social media feeds and in the news, and it was the discussions surrounding these issues that prompted us to make a poster about immigration rights in Canada. These discussions continued to make evident that Violet and Jane were making meaning from the books we read rather than passively consuming them (Barthes, 1978; Wilhelm, 2016; Howard, 2011). They constantly brought their own opinions, values, and knowledge from other sources to their interpretations of *WSTDOF*.

The connections made between *WSTDOF* and real-world protests were from a perspective that already prioritizes the values of social justice. For instance, when asked about relating *WSTDOF* to our society, Jane immediately observed that the protestors in the book can be related to real-world protests—they're stuck in poverty, face police brutality, get punished for protesting, and are looked down upon by richer people. Jane's favourite part of *WSTDOF* was when Dani and Carmen went to the marketplace together and witnessed La Voz's protest. Members of the rebel group lined up, blocking the street leading to the government buildings and elite residences, and spoke about the violence committed against them by the government

maintaining the wall and refusing shelter, medical care, and food for the poorer residents of Medio. After the speech, Dani watches a police officer walk into the forest behind the protestors and set off an explosion, which the police immediately blame on the rebels. Violet commented that the first protest really showed the connection of the book to now, because the protestors said they didn't want violence, but the government police brought it in, "kind of like what's been happening now. Like, because the violence has been instigated by the police." Jane added that, in both *WSTDOF* and real life, the police blamed the protestors for it. *WSTDOF* makes clear that it is the police instigating violence, and this conversation made evident that so too did the news media where Jane and Violet were learning about the Black Lives Matter protests. Their opinions of *WSTDOF* were influenced by the fact that they are exposed to other media that also focused on the role of the police in maintaining structural inequalities.

As is argued by many reader-response theorists (Howard, 2011; Rosenblatt, 1995), Jane and Violet expanded the meaning of the text by responding to what they read while also selectively drawing on their own experiences and concerns to form the substance of their responses. Thus, Jane and Violet focused on the parts of the books that related most to issues that mattered to them and that they already knew about, and they used the power structures they already understood and related to in order to make sense of those they didn't. This is evident in the fact that Jane and Violet continually brought our discussion of *WSTDOF* back to protests and immigration rights. They used what they knew about the Black Lives Matter protests and the police brutality surrounding them to discuss the protests that were depicted in *WSTDOF*, and they used what they knew about immigration rights in the real world to understand those in *WSTDOF.* For example, Violet said they'd learned in Social Studies about people in the USA and Canada who have illegally immigrated in search of healthcare, much like the La Voz agent

Sota's family crossed the wall because they were trying to get medical help for his father, and they knew from watching the reality TV show *Border Security* that people sometimes have fake identification papers like Dani's. Similarly, Jane pointed out how Dani observed that police would come arrest people in the villages along the border for "no reason", which meant things like hoarding food or trying to sell things. Violet said that also happens now—especially during the Black Lives Matter protests, where some cops would arrest people not involved in the protests just for being there. All of Jane's and Violet's observations and connections rely upon prior knowledge of protests and power structures in our own society; additionally, they rely on that prior knowledge coming from a perspective that already agrees with how the book depicts those power structures.

Summary

The idea that youth constantly transact with societal structures and cultural objects by bringing their own values to texts and taking away new thoughts and opinions (McCallum, 1999; Bernier, 2019; Rosenblatt, 1995) is evident from how Violet and Jane were able to easily recognize the ways the rules of society affected power dynamics, especially in terms of gender and class, in *WSTDOF* and *MIA*, and were bothered by them independently of the book characters. Identifying and understanding power structures in fiction and connecting them to reality can be a first step to recognizing injustices, which is in turn the first step in taking action to combat them. The discussions we had comparing the events of each book to our own society highlight the level of awareness that Violet and Jane already had prior to reading these social activism narratives. They are already teens who are somewhat disillusioned with our society and recognize the need for social justice; the fact that they signed up for this library program belies that fact, and it was evident in their responses to the books. Violet and Jane actively engaged

with the text by speculating about the characters' motivations and how they might change, connecting the book to things they knew about our society, and relating the opinions that characters expressed to their own opinions. They struggled to make those connections when they did not have enough outside context or personal experience with the issues presented in the book; this was evident in the way they were more readily able to discuss issues like sexism and classism than they were issues like racism. When they did not already have context, they asked questions, and they were able to draw connections based on the information they learned from the answers.

Furthermore, Jane and Violet almost always agreed with each other, which makes sense in the context of the small size of our group, in which disagreements might be harder to express, and because they have similar backgrounds and knowledge; they are part of the same school system, have similar interests in terms of social justice issues, consume media and news that comes from a social justice perspective, and came to the books already interested in interpreting them in terms of the real world and using that knowledge to make change in their own society. I also shaped the discussions by asking questions about the things I saw in the books based on my own outside knowledge, by encouraging Violet and Jane to ask questions themselves, and by agreeing with the things they were saying—not because I was reluctant to disagree, but because I generally did have the same opinions as them. Because so much outside context is necessary to understand how fictional plotlines connect to current events, social activism narratives themselves serve as only one tool to engage with social justice in the real world. The books, along with the program, did provide a safe space to think about their beliefs, priorities, and interactions with others (Richardson & Eccles, 2007), but Violet and Jane bringing in outside knowledge and opinions, as well as asking specifically for more knowledge when they didn't

understand something presented in the books, made clear that the books work best in concert with other elements of the youth's lives. Whether that would be true for all youth is unclear and warrants further research, especially since the 'safe space' of the program was never truly tested by any significant disagreements between the participants.

Chapter 4: Factors of Motivations for Social Justice Actions

This chapter focuses on the themes that I identified in my fieldnotes related to what did and did not motivate the study's participants to conduct social justice actions. In the context of this thesis, "motivation" refers to whether participants had the desire and willingness to conduct a social justice action during the program, as evidenced by their statements and actions. I use "inspiration" as a more specific word, referring to when the participants have concrete ideas for actions that come directly from something they read, as evidenced by their statements. Thus, inspiration is a factor of motivation; it can lead to being motivated or influence the level of motivation a participant feels. Other factors of motivation include education and confidence. In this context, education refers to how much one knows or comes to learn about a social justice issue, which influences motivation because it provides the context needed to understand what the goals of social justice in a particular situation might be. Education overlaps with confidence, as the more one learns about social justice and social justice actions, the more confident and thus motivated they might feel about taking practical action.

The themes I identified related to motivation are as follows:

- motivations for social justice actions
    - inspiration (defining 'motivational social activism narratives')
        - choosing what to read (enjoyability)
        - reading nonfiction (understandability)
        - personal/emotional responses (relatability)
        - characters modelling direct action
    - outcomes of the program: education and confidence

My first research question asks "How might reading social activism narratives and discussing them in the context of real-world issues affect young adults' thinking about and motivation to conduct social justice actions?", and thus I began my data analysis by looking specifically for instances of motivation in our discussions. This approach yielded a few main factors when it

came to being inspired by social activism narratives: teens choosing what to read, teens having background knowledge of or experience with the issues presented in the books, the characters being personally relatable, and the characters taking direct action. These factors were all present in *WSTDOF*, which inspired us to make a poster about immigration rights. However, my research also found that thinking about or being motivated to conduct social justice actions was not the only benefit a library program like this one was able to provide. The participants were already motivated to get involved with social justice prior to joining the program, and having a space to discuss that motivation helped deepen their understanding of social justice issues and increased their confidence to get involved and think about social justice in the future.

Inspiration (Defining 'Motivational Social Activism Narratives')

"Social activism narrative" is not a common term, and I pieced together my own definition for this research: any work of fiction (book, video game, television show, interactive fiction, etc.) that centers around a social justice issue, imagines a world where young adults are revolutionary heroes, and depicts the characters fighting to make change in their society, often but not always via protests (adapted from Ventura, 2011; Winters, 2019). Because this was a working definition, throughout the study I encouraged my research partners to contribute their own opinions about what defined a social activism narrative and what made a social activism narrative motivational for the participants. *WSTDOF* inspired the participants to create a digital poster showing reasons why people would immigrate to Canada and ways to help newcomers. Jane and Violet had specific ideas about wanting to raise money and awareness for immigration rights that were rooted in the discussions we had surrounding *WSTDOF*. Conversely, *MIA* and *Flygirl* did not inspire any specific ideas. The most obvious difference between the two categories is that *WSTDOF* is fantasy while *MIA* and *Flygirl* are historical fiction, and so we

specifically discussed that difference. I believe that ultimately asking about the difference between their genres was the wrong question; our discussions about the differences between fantasy and historical fiction reinforce other differences between *WSTDOF*, *MIA*, and *Flygirl* that influence how inspirational the participants found them. The participants' explanations of why they were inspired suggest that a social activism narrative is more inspirational when teens choose to read it and it is enjoyable enough for them to want to read the whole thing, when teens have enough context and prior knowledge to understand the issues depicted in it and relate them to real-world issues, when the characters are personally relatable, and when the characters take direct action.

Choosing What to Read (Enjoyability)

Choosing a book to read was a significant factor for whether it was inspirational for the participants of this study. Both Violet and Jane said in their debrief interviews that choosing what to read was important to them because they wanted to read books that were relevant to them; indeed, all the participants chose books from the sections of the list I provided them (Appendix D) relating to issues they had already identified as their areas of interest. This had an impact on whether they were able to find inspiration or motivation in the text. For instance, Violet didn't feel inspired to do anything by *Flygirl* because they hadn't chosen it and didn't enjoy reading it; the fact that they only read about two chapters of this book obviously influences their opinion of it—it is near impossible to be inspired by something you haven't read.

Choice was also specifically important in the context of this library program, as Jane and Violet chose books for us to read with the intent of making connections from the text to the real world. In the post-program debrief interviews, Jane said she chose *Flygirl* because she likes historical fiction and thought we could relate its plot to current events like Black Lives Matter,

and Violet said they picked *WSTDOF* because they like fantasy and wanted to see how the worldbuilding was done in relation to our society. Neither of them intended to use the books to escape the real world; instead, Violet's and Jane's engagement with the text fit into Howard's (2011) social reasons for reading: understanding of the world (such as past events or current social issues), social conscience and empathy, and empowerment (strong beliefs and the confidence to act on those beliefs). Both of them enjoyed reading the books they chose, but Jane wasn't as happy with her choice because she found it difficult to identify connections to current events like she wanted to. She was more inclined than Violet to try and come up with a social justice action based on *Flygirl*; she said it "kind of" inspired her but didn't give her any specific ideas. Jane's reaction to *Flygirl* indicates that choice is just one factor of inspiration.

Choosing what book to read also contributed to whether the participants were well-informed about the issues depicted in the book and thus able to have detailed conversations about it. For example, as detailed in Chapter 3, our discussions of *MIA* and *Flygirl* were not nearly as in-depth because we did not have context or knowledge to draw on. Therefore, they did not provide much inspiration for actions. This was especially the case with *MIA*, which Noah chose for us to read. When we had finished it and I asked if they were inspired by it, Violet said it was harder to find inspiration from this book. Jane suggested we do something related to veterans, and I said we could do that but pointed out that the book isn't really about veterans, that's just one of the things we already know about our society that somewhat relates to the events of the book. I asked if their being unsure meant that they weren't really inspired by the book, and they both said yes. My own reaction to *MIA* likely shaped how the participants reacted in this regard; I also didn't enjoy reading this book and found it difficult to come up with discussion questions for the group about it. I did my best to allow the participants space to express their own

opinions—which they did, as both Violet and Jane said they liked the book even after I said I didn't—but my encouraging them to take the lead during the discussions was undoubtedly different from our discussions about *WSTDOF*, for which I had many questions prepared. Violet, Jane, and I didn't select *MIA* to read and also didn't have the context required to have discussions about it, making it less inspirational for us.

Reading Nonfiction (Understandability)

Having fulsome discussions about various social justice issues that appear in a text, grounded in our experiences and knowledge of the real world, was vital to feeling inspired, and thus motivated, to conduct a social justice action. For example, Violet and Jane agreed to include a summary of how *WSTDOF* affected them regarding immigration on the poster we made; Violet specifically wanted to do this because they felt that hearing other people's opinions is how we can convince others to think about it. Violet's observation was directly related to earlier discussions about Dani's character arc depending on her learning things from and talking to other characters. In addition, Jane pointed out that specifically because *MIA* and *Flygirl* take place in WWII, the challenges and problems the characters face aren't as prominent today: "Obviously racism is still a problem, but it's a completely different situation than World War II." This was a generalizing statement on Jane's part; indeed, she had already identified ways that the racism we read about in *MIA* was present in today's society by pointing out that people still stereotype based on race as it relates to global events like war and pandemics. However, Jane's generalization makes clear that historical fiction was easier for her to distance from current events because she didn't have knowledge of exactly how those power structures, especially those related to racism, exist in our world today. Unlike a metaphorical fantasy novel, the events

of the book don't provide a rich landscape for interpretation because they are so specific to the time period.

Jane also noted that *WSTDOF* was her favourite that we read because it was easy to make connections to several issues in the world. Violet also said that it's better in terms of motivation for books to have more than one issue—if there's only one, it might not motivate anyone in a library program like this one, but if it has more than one, one might catch everyone in the group's eye, like immigration in *WSTDOF* did for us. As I discussed in Chapter 3, the presence of multiple issues in *WSTDOF* also contributed to Violet's and Jane's abilities to understand power structures they didn't necessarily relate to because they intersected with power structures they already understood. Overall, it was less about fantasy and historical fiction being different genres, and more about how these specific books were and were not able to provide inspiration based on the prior knowledge that Violet and Jane brought to them.

Despite our sporadic use of nonfiction in the program itself, Violet and Jane were confident that nonfiction was essential to understanding issues in fiction, and they consistently drew upon knowledge about the world that they already had from incidental news consumption, other media, and formal education. For instance, when I emailed the group ahead of our session about *Flygirl* with a few news articles about current events relating to racism and some historical facts about racism in the military in Canada, Violet mentioned she had read multiple news articles about the military other than the ones I shared with them, but couldn't necessarily produce a specific one to cite. Considering that youth often engage in partial news consumption by reading only headlines and pictures, as well as double-checking their news sources on multiple platforms (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, & Matassi, 2018), and there is a wide variety of source, content, and exposure of youth to news (Cortesi & Gasser, 2015), this incidental

knowledge is easy to explain. Even though we didn't integrate the nonfiction into the program in a consistent way, Violet said in our debrief that they thought they would have learned less in the program if we didn't also read nonfiction. They asserted that reading nonfiction was what enabled them to compare the books to reality and make connections. Jane echoed this argument, saying that the news articles I shared with them in relation to *Flygirl* made her think about the book a bit differently; she also thought it was interesting how she could see elements of the book in the news articles and how it's possible to read social activism narratives and then relate them to the real world.

Jane and Violet found reading nonfiction important for their interpretations of the fiction we read, but they didn't necessarily feel the need to do it in the program itself because they felt that, for the most part, they already understood enough about current events to make connections. For example, I felt that one of the most significant interactions we had with nonfiction resources was looking them up to include on our poster about immigration. We made a long-list with resources, facts, and statistics that myself, Violet, and Jane found, and then worked together during the program to narrow them down to what we included on the poster. However, in the debrief session, Jane said she didn't think doing research about immigration for the poster changed her thoughts about *WSTDOF* specifically. She pointed out that she had already been able to find similarities regarding the characters going through the same things that she knew real-world immigrants were, but that doing further research meant she was able to more clearly relate the connections she had already made. Similarly, she said reading about racism in Canada didn't change how she thought about *Flygirl*, except that she thought a little more about how much harder it is for women of colour in society. In both cases, these are significant exceptions; as I and my participants have already argued, it is vital to have outside

knowledge and experiences with which to interpret and understand a text. If we had all understood more about racism in the context of WWII and how it translates to present-day, then we might have been able to glean more inspiration, and thus motivation, for social justice actions from *MIA* and *Flygirl.* Reading nonfiction that specifically relates to a certain fictional text can only increase the capacity for that interpretation and understanding.

Thus, Violet and Jane make clear that it is vital for a library program like this one to include some discussion of nonfiction sources in order to inform what social justice actions could be taken. Based on how we used nonfiction sources in our book club, I believe library programs need not do this formally; instead, they could choose to ask the participants to draw upon the many sources they encounter in their lives and share their own knowledge in a more abstract sense like we did. This approach would better serve a program that is structured in a way that ensures at least some of the participants are well-versed in the issues that appear in whatever media the group is reading, especially if that media contains multiple social issues and can be more metaphorically connected to current events. However, a more formal inclusion of it, such as requiring everyone to read the same articles, is an excellent avenue to ensure that everyone in the program is on the same page and to strengthen the connections the participants are able to make on their own. This is a good approach when the participants have less knowledge and experience to bring to the discussions already and would work well in a program that is especially focused on educational aspects and/or is focused around reading nonfiction or historical fiction. Either way, nonfiction cannot be entirely ignored when designing a program centred around social justice.

Personal/Emotional Responses to the Books (Relatability)

The participants' inspirations for social justice actions was influenced by how personally relatable a book was. Relatability stems from how well the reader is able to understand what the characters are experiencing and how the characters react to the situations they're placed in. It relies upon the reader having experience and/or knowledge to draw on to expand the meaning of the text. For instance, Violet and Jane both said they personally related to *WSTDOF*'s main character, Dani. Violet said that she's more like Dani in that she always tries to think if it's a good idea or not to do something: "If I was in a situation where, let's say I was going to be involved in a protest because it's something very important to me, but wasn't sure [...] if I should be standing up for it or not, for safety, for example. It would probably take me awhile to warm up to it at first, but eventually I would be able to do it and I would try my best to help the cause as much as I can." Violet is likely drawing from her own experiences considering attending Black Lives Matter protests that took place in Camrose that summer. Similarly, Jane stated that she related to Dani because she also relies more on thinking than feelings the way Dani does and "would like to help with causes, like important causes, and protests and stuff like that." Violet said that Dani always thought about whether she would be safe because her whole life was on the line: "Even if my whole life wasn't on the line, per se, in the way hers is, I'd think about whether I'd be safe or not before I even thought about doing it." Jane and Violet were able to draw connections between themselves and Dani because they have an idea of what Dani is struggling with, understand what it is like to be a teen who relies more on their thoughts than their feelings, and have reflected on their own motivations to get involved with social justice issues.

Jane and Violet stated that they were emotionally affected by the depictions of injustices in the books we read, as well as by injustices in real life, and those reactions affected their

motivation to get involved. They agreed that it was easier to use fantasy to make connections to the real world, but for different reasons: Jane preferred the emotional distance of fantasy while Violet felt more emotionally connected to fantasy. Jane said that *WSTDOF* wasn't set in our world and so was more of a metaphor, which made it easier to draw connections, while *Flygirl* and *MIA* showed real life events. Violet said that she often notices when reading that she gets more inspired by fantasy stories, because with fiction "it's easier to connect as well, and I feel like a lot of people have become desensitized to nonfiction just from seeing it so much." Jane added: "Also I feel like with fantasy novels, it's like, you can talk about it and read about it, and it doesn't make you feel bad because you know that these situations aren't real." Violet seems to be saying that she feels less emotionally affected by historical fiction and nonfiction because she has already been so overwhelmed by the bad things in the world, while Jane implies that she feels more emotionally affected by real-life events and prefers to have the emotional distance that fantasy provides. In both cases, Jane and Violet's assertions highlight the idea of fiction being a "safe space" to work through issues (Richardson & Eccles, 2007), suggesting that historical fiction might be one step too close to real life to truly provide that safe space. I believe the connections that Violet and Jane were able to make between all three books and the real world, as well as how they consistently expressed a desire to use the books as inspiration even when it was difficult, show that they are emotionally affected by social justice issues regardless; it is more a matter of whether they enjoyed reading the books enough to get through them and draw inspiration from them. The difference between nonfiction (or fiction based in real events) and fiction in terms of emotional effects requires more in-depth analysis and would be a good area for further exploration.

Characters Modelling Direct Action

One of the key parts of my definition of "social activism narrative" is that the characters must be fighting to make change in their society. This can be fulfilled in a myriad of ways, from very obvious rebellion to the everyday existence of marginalized people. Because *WSTDOF* falls on the "explicit rebellion" side of the scale, we had fewer discussions about what makes *WSTDOF* a social activism narrative. However, we did talk about what motivates the main characters to participate in that rebellion. In the book, Dani feels guilty about being happy about her relationship with Carmen when there's so much that's bad going on in the world, and Carmen tells her that "the joy is what keeps us strong and reminds us we have something to fight for" (Meija, 2019). I asked if the participants had any thoughts about how this part related to us as activists. Violet responded that happiness is what motivates people, so Dani may have felt guilty for her happiness, but it was motivating to her to get to the point where everyone else could be happy and not in danger as well. Jane added that Dani probably felt guilty because of the emotion, since she's a Primera, and Carmen could help her because, as a Segunda, she knows how to deal with feeling emotions and feeling bad about her emotions. These are both relevant observations that explicate what "social activism" means in the context of *WSTDOF;* this book centres around social justice because the characters take direct action in an effort to fight against power structures in society rather than trying to live within them. Violet and Jane identified that connection and happiness were essential to social justice, because the former provides a support system for social justice work and the latter is the ultimate goal of social justice movements.

If achieving happiness for all is a motivation for and a goal of social justice, then it follows that achieving happiness for yourself as a marginalized person is an important step in that process. Violet and Jane identified that the protagonists of *MIA* and *Flygirl* were trying to

make change by overcoming systemic barriers, as opposed to trying to break down those barriers entirely. Asked how *MIA* could be considered a social activism narrative, Violet said that the activism comes in based on what's going on the world in the book; the characters stereotype Japanese-Americans because of the events of the war, and working against that is a form of activism. Jane added that *MIA* is a book about how war affects how people think about other countries and races; Jay wouldn't have had the same character arc if there wasn't a war with Japan. Similarly, Violet said that *Flygirl*, like the other books we read, has to do with social activism because of the inequalities it depicts: namely, Ida Mae being a Black woman who wants to be a pilot but cannot without lying because systemic racism doesn't allow Black Women Airforce Service Pilots. Jane agreed, pointing out that the book talks about how Black women struggle in different fields, especially those dominated by men. Violet argued that the WASPs in *Flygirl* are working towards girls like them being able to be pilots, and thus working towards equality by being allowed to do things that normally they aren't. Jane said she thinks it is activism to overcome boundaries set by your gender and skin colour. Violet agreed, stating that it's social activism because of the things you have to do and the work you put in to get the job. Therefore, despite *MIA* and *Flygirl* not depicting the protagonists directly engaging in social justice actions, the participants agreed that they could still be considered social activism narratives because of the personal struggles the protagonists go through.

Because I thought that direct action was much more obvious social activism and that these books might not really fit my initial definition of social activism narratives, I was a little surprised that Violet and Jane immediately asserted that they were social activism. However, I do agree with them; individual journeys are important in terms of learning about structural inequalities, and existence as a marginalized person is a form of resistance. While I believe

social justice movements need to focus on dismantling power structures rather than trying to operate within them—the difference between equity movements and justice movements—there is value to individuals using the power afforded to them to make change, as well as to individuals overcoming boundaries and thus showing that those boundaries need not exist. Thus, while *MIA* and *Flygirl* might not have been explicitly about social justice, making them less able to provide inspiration for social justice actions, they were about social activism, which made them good tools for learning about the issues depicted in them.

Even though Violet and Jane thought that they could be considered social activism narratives, the fact that the characters didn't make any explicit changes to their society meant that there was no guiding examples of action to be gleaned from the events of the books. When I asked why we might feel like it's so much easier to connect to real life and to actually do something about it when we look at fantasy fiction, Violet again identified the lack of direct action as the actual difference. Violet said that even though *WSTDOF* was "almost realistic other than a few things, with fiction you get attached to how they live and relate it to how you live because you're curious about their life. And then you compare/contrast to your real life situation—once you clue into 'oh, that type of stuff happens in our world, but no one does anything about it like they do in the story', because in most stories they do try." Violet's statement here suggests that some of the lack of inspiration stemming from *Flygirl* and *MIA* came from the fact that Jay and Ida Mae aren't involved in any acts of social justice. Instead, their stories are ones of social activism as an individual. Violet and Jane were able to recognize how the issues in *MIA* and *Flygirl* existed in our society, but they didn't learn from the books how they might work against them on a grander scale than individually. Ultimately, *MIA* and *Flygirl* were less inspirational than *WSTDOF*, as none of us immediately thought of a directly-

related action we could take, which also made it necessarily less motivational because the inspiration didn't increase our level of motivation. A lack of inspiration to be found in a social activism narrative is not necessarily a bad thing depending on the goals of a social justice program; for instance, if our goal had been simply to learn more about social justice issues, *MIA* and *Flygirl* would have been good books for that purpose.

Outcomes of the Program: Education and Confidence

The discussion of the factors of inspiration above are not to say that there is no value in social activism narratives that are not enjoyable, easily understood, personally relatable, and/or don't have characters who take direct action; rather, the value of them is different. Jane and Violet identified outcomes of the program in their debrief interviews which highlight education and confidence as important factors in motivation. Their statements indicated that reading the books was less of a factor in their motivation to conduct social justice actions than their prior experience and the program itself. I initially got the impression from our discussions that Violet and Jane felt they were obligated to conduct a social justice action based on every book, and I leaned hard on ensuring they knew that wasn't the case. Based on Jane's reaction after the program, when she said she wished we'd spent more time on social justice actions, I think this was a miscommunication stemming from my being so caught up in the specific research questions. I wanted to know if the books motivated the participants, but they already came to the program motivated and so weren't as concerned with being motivated by a specific book. Thus, it is likely that Jane didn't feel obligated to conduct social justice actions, she just wanted to do so regardless of what we were reading. Instead of gleaning motivation from the books we read, Violet and Jane stated that they used the library program to gain deeper understandings of the issues we discussed and the confidence to express their opinions and get involved in the future.

Asked what motivated them to participate in making the poster about immigration rights, both felt that it was important to raise awareness: Jane said it was important for people to know about those sort of issues and that she felt more educated about the subject after, and Violet said the poster helped them feel more accomplished because they knew they could help. Jane said she was motivated by the program to do more social justice actions, but not really by the books, and she had about the same level of motivation after the program as before. Violet differed slightly, saying that the books and the program worked together to motivate her, as she needs something to push her to read. Violet thought the program itself was interesting because they've always liked looking into social justice topics and what teens can do considering their age—especially since "I know I'm technically not an adult and most people don't listen to people who aren't adults." Violet's comments highlight why having a social justice program specifically for teens is so important: it provides a place where teens are taken seriously and given the opportunity to think through and reflect on social justice issues in a space that doesn't judge them for grappling with the implications of these power structures for what may be the first time. Thus, the program was effective in its goal of education and empowerment of its participants, even when the books themselves weren't inspirational.

The program's teen-centred approach (Agosto, 2019) emphasized listening to teens and providing them the opportunity to learn about the things they were interested in rather than assuming adults know best what media is "high-quality". It moves away from a library-centred focus, which assumes that using the library is inherently good and that increased use is a goal in and of itself. The program also mirrored the social justice symposium Hoopes (2018) describes as being successful in providing relevant education about social justice and activism because teens were involved in planning it. Violet's assertion that they learned ways to know how to help

with social justice from the program and realized that they don't have to be in a group to contribute to social activism suggests that this approach positively influenced the participants' level of motivation. I will discuss the success and failures of the participatory research and the program's design in more detail in Chapter 5. Additionally, Violet and Jane feeling more educated after the program means that, like the adolescents in Moeller, de Vreese, Esser, & Kunz's study (2014), it is likely that their internal political efficacy increased through interactive practices, especially related to collecting and sharing nonfiction resources for our immigration poster (Appendix H). Moeller et al. (2014) argue that even sharing a post with peers is an interactive practice; to make the poster, my participants were even more involved than that, as they wrote about the inspiration they gleaned from *WSTDOF*, collected resources that provided facts about immigration to Canada, and compiled links to ways people could help newcomers. Being a part of the message construction and raising awareness about a topic important to them made Violet and Jane feel more confident about doing similar things in the future. As I outlined in the research design, I wanted to empower teens to learn about and acknowledge social justice issues, especially by giving them practical ways to work against power dynamics that negatively affect them. Violet and Jane's assertions that they learned from this program suggest that I succeeded in this goal.

Summary

Our discussions of motivation as it relates to social activism narratives revealed that it is useful for a text to provide some sort of inspiration for social justice actions, as inspiration is a factor of motivation. Discussions of a text are a result of both the text and what its readers bring to it, and so discussions become more rich, and thus provide more inspiration, when books are enjoyable, understandable, relatable, and model direct action. Being able to choose what to read

helps with the books being more enjoyable because the reader is interested in the topics the book addresses. It also helps provide a richer landscape for interpretation and inspiration if a book depicts many social issues in a way that makes drawing more abstract connections between the book and the real world possible, as was the case with *WSTDOF*. Books that focus on internal character journeys, like *MIA* and *Flygirl*, are social activism narratives because the characters work to overcome boundaries, but they aren't social justice narratives because the characters do not take direct actions to remove those boundaries entirely, which makes it more difficult to draw inspiration for social justice from them. Similarly, it takes more work to find inspiration in historical fiction because it is necessary to provide context to understand what connections might be drawn to current events. Thus, books that depict internal character journeys and/or historical events are useful tools for education and deepening understanding; education is a different, but just as important, factor in motivation as inspiration. Ultimately, Violet's and Jane's motivations to conduct social justice actions were most affected by factors that weren't inspiration from the books, such as having a support system for social activism and their own desire to strive for happiness and equality for all. Thus, the library program best served its participants as a learning opportunity and a place to find that support system. Jane and Violet were already motivated individuals looking for ways to get involved, and the program provided them with tools, knowledge, and confidence that they might use to continue doing social justice work.

Chapter 5: Successes and Failures of the Program and Participatory Research

This chapter discusses themes related to what went right and wrong over the course of the program, as well as the influence of participatory research on the process of making decisions about the program and the reactions and experiences of the participants. These themes largely emerged from my post-program debrief sessions with Jane and Violet, which revolved around the survey questions in Appendix G, as well as from some of the events I recorded in my fieldnotes. The themes are as follows:

- program benefits/strategies
- program challenges/improvements
- flexible decision-making in participatory research
- influence and opinions of participatory research

As identified by Violet and Jane, the major benefits of the program and the strategies that worked well revolved around the collaborative nature of the program and being given choices within a predetermined structure. The challenges the program faced were related to it being conducted virtually, balancing the priorities of multiple participants, and the time constraints on both the program and the participants' lives in general. The participatory nature of the research meant that my goal was to ensure collaboration remained at its centre (Dennison & Stillman, 2012; Stoecker, 2012), and I found that flexibility was key in this regard. Finally, the teens appreciated being asked for their opinions and having those opinions incorporated as much as possible in an effort to centre their voices (Agosto, 2019; Moeller, Pettee, & Leeper, 2011; Crawford Barniskis, 2013), as they felt that including more opinions makes for better research.

Program Benefits/Strategies

There were a number of strategies we decided to use to structure the book club that worked well and had tangible benefits, mostly related to the participants being given choices and being able to work together. At our initial program planning session, each participant picked a

favourite option from the list of social activism narratives I provided (Appendix D), and we decided to all read each of their choices. Violet pointed out, and Noah and Jane agreed, that if everyone read them, it would help them understand each book, and they could all work together to define the main points. This turned out to be true; both Jane and Violet thought the best part of the program was analyzing the books and relating them to real-life events. As Violet put it, "I think getting to compare and contrast the problems in the books to real life problems was my favourite as I got to hear how others made connections as well." Working together to make connections strengthened their understandings of the texts we read. The positive effects of this strategy reflect Crosthwaite's (2015) findings regarding youth forming a supportive community of readers and achieving deeper understanding of narratives through discussion with their peers. Crosthwaite's study was done in the context of a Grade 4 classroom over the course of a year, and her participants also changed their opinions over time and exposure to social justice literature. It is notable that a short-term voluntary library program for older youth that wasn't focused on education had similar results, and it warrants further research into library programming over a longer period of time and/or with a focus on education.

In addition, our strategies for how we worked on the immigration poster (Appendix H) worked well because of the groupwork element. As I detailed in Chapter 2, we decided on the topic together, compiled research and write-ups we did on our own on a shared Canva document, and then worked on actually assembling the poster together during program sessions. I shared my screen in the Google Meet call, and we talked through the choices we were making. Even though the participants could have edited the Canva document on their own outside of the program, it is notable that they chose not to, instead preferring to work together to make choices. After the program was over, Jane said it was good that we worked on the poster together and also

separately. She thought that when we worked together, it was easier to make one general theme for the poster and put all our ideas together. Violet also said that they felt like working with people is easier because they're not very confident; for instance, when she looks for information, she feels like it isn't accurate, but since we were working together, other people in the group could check it. They were a little worried about bringing the information to the group, but it helped when I confirmed that they had found an accurate website and there were similar answers from other websites. Once again, working together helped the participants to feel more confident in their own understandings of the issues we discussed and to express their opinions coherently.

Finally, Jane and Violet were enthusiastic about being included in the program design; they said planning the program was fun, and they would do it again. They both added that they would participate in a similar program again. Jane said she likes normal programs where everything is already planned as well, but she thinks it's cool to give suggestions. Violet thought it helped make a better program because she feels like when groups are fully planned, it has a different vibe to it—depending on the type of program, it's a little more exciting when she gets to provide her input. Violet pointed out that when you get the chance to help rather than being told, you'll be more interested, especially when the library staff say something like, "here are options, what are your opinions?" Both Jane and Violet appreciated helping with the program, but their comments suggest that they prefer being presented with options rather than being asked to start from scratch when designing a program because they don't have the time or expertise to know how to start with a blank slate. This was a little surprising to me because participatory research and teen-centred approaches emphasize participants being experts on their own needs (Agosto, 2019; Dennison & Stillman, 2012; Stoecker, 2012), and so I thought the participants might have more explicit ideas to bring to the table. However, this approach also worked well for

me in both a research capacity and a library program capacity. My participatory research method was already flawed in that I had come to the participants with my research problem in hand (Stoecker, 2012), and it worked out well that the participants only wanted to modify it slightly by adding nonfiction but were otherwise willing to follow my lead. It would have been ideal to know that would be the case going into the program, as I would have spent more time preparing detailed options for the participants to choose from, but I had spent enough time considering options generally that it wasn't difficult to do on the fly. In her case study about teens participating in public library art programs, Crawford Barniskis (2013) found that teens wanted to engage civically and with library programs, but only if their opinions were taken seriously and the ways they were asked to do so acknowledged that they have limited time. Similarly, the book club positively affected how empowered to engage politically Violet and Jane felt; they repeatedly expressed their appreciation for being listened to and being given a place to gain more confidence in themselves. To an extent, they were able to act on their desire to become civically engaged with the support of this library program, especially when I provided structure and helped collect outside sources instead of expecting them to spend their limited time doing all the work themselves.

Program Challenges/Improvements

We faced a number of challenges throughout the program, mostly related to it being virtual and to timeline constraints. Even where things went well, Violet and Jane had ideas for how the program could have been improved. From the very first session, conducting the program via Google Meet resulted in some stilted and awkward conversation. I had my video on in all the sessions, but everyone else joined with video turned off and never turned it on. The participants also always kept their mics muted, as per the ground rules in Appendix A, even though I

mentioned a few times that I wasn't terribly worried about it since there were only four of us and invited them to stay unmuted and interrupt me if they wanted to. By the end of the program, Jane and Violet were a little less stringent about their mics being muted. When I asked in the individual debriefs why they never turned on their videos, Jane and Violet said it was because nobody else did. The lack of video and their muted mics meant that whenever I asked if they had questions or wanted clarification about anything, I couldn't gauge how they were reacting and felt a little out to sea. This was a difficult obstacle to overcome, and I would recommend that virtual programs encourage teens to turn on their cameras if they are willing and able. Access to technology is a limitation of this approach and video should not be required, but if circumstances mean you are providing virtual programming, I believe it is worth extending the invitation to turn on cameras while explaining why it might help create a more positive experience for everyone. Additionally, in the first few sessions especially, the participants seemed hesitant to answer questions and didn't talk directly to each other. All of these problems eased a little bit the more virtual time we spent together, but the program definitely lacked a sense of casual community and opportunities for us to do more actively collaborative work. Jane and Violet agreed that if we had done the program in person, we would have worked together more. In general, however, they enjoyed the synchronous discussions. Jane thought talking in person would have made the discussion easier. Violet thought it was hard to say if the program would be better in person, because some programs are better in person and some aren't. They thought this one probably would have been better in person, because they like being in person, and they would have had more guts to ask questions. A virtual program requires a lot of guidance from the facilitator, and though I was actively involved in leading the discussion and repeatedly encouraging the participants to ask questions, I was just as new to it as they were. Based on my participants'

responses and suggestions, I would incorporate more casual get-to-know-you elements to every session, more constantly model how to express confusion about the material we read, and consistently ask questions rather than trying to allow the participants to lead as much. I believe all of these changes would lean into the parts of the program that Violet and Jane found engaging and fun, and thus improve upon the parts that they didn't enjoy or get as much out of.

Both Violet and Jane had suggestions regarding changing how they picked what to read. Jane thought it would be better if they got a list of books like the one I provided but then had a while to look through it, because it felt like it was rushed to do it during the program session. Violet loved the list and said participants should definitely get time to talk about their interests and pick a book based on what they like. She agreed that a little more time with the list would have been good. They also suggested that if two people pick books on the same topic, one is encouraged to pick a different topic so there is more variety. Jane and Violet's preference for being able to pick from a list reflects the literature that argues that teens should be allowed to choose what to read themselves, and that doing so means they will more readily be able to actively engage with them (Becnel & Moeller, 2015; Bodart, 2006; Boyd & Darragh, 2019; Howard, 2011; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Taylor, 2011; Wilhelm, 2016). Jane also thought it would make it better if everyone had read a different book and then they all discussed it, though she acknowledged that they consciously made the choice not to do that. Violet also echoed this sentiment when they said that they found all the books other than *Flygirl* interesting and acknowledged that other people like that kind of book, and that's something you have to understand when doing programs with other people. I found that a risk with participatory research and program design is that sometimes no one knows what the best choice actually is until they've experienced the program. This is, however, also the case when library staff make

decisions about a program they've never done before and is why public libraries almost always evaluate their programs after the fact. In this case, the participants were fully aware of the experimental nature of the program and were able to be critical of their own choices.

We originally planned to read a book per week; the participants were confident that they could finish in that time. In reality, they usually managed to read the first quarter for one meeting and the rest for the next. Jane thought this ended up being enough time, describing it as a week to read about half of a book. Violet preferred how we ended up doing it to the original plan, but they would have liked more time to read. She suggested that we could have actively planned more checkpoints, such as reading a quarter, halfway, and then to the end, and therefore discussed how our opinions of the books changed at each checkpoint. I agree with Violet's suggestion; the participants were often confident about what they wanted or had time to do and then didn't fulfill their own expectations. The study was able to give them the space to reflect on those choices and come up with ways to change the program design to work better for them in the future. I believe that building in space to be flexible, but still letting the teens decide on the checkpoints, would help to continue to provide that space and acknowledge that a public library program is meant to be fun and voluntary.

As I detailed in Chapter 4, the program was ultimately about more than providing motivation to conduct social justice actions; it also provided opportunities for education and building confidence. Jane's and Violet's ideas for other programs libraries could provide that would interest them and/or help them get involved with social justice underscore this potential. Jane and Violet both suggested a program like the one we did, but with other media like movies. Jane also thought that good library programs could focus solely on either reading books or social justice actions rather than both—even though she did think that it was better to do them together.

Violet specifically noted that they thought that it would be good to have a program that eliminated the reading element, because they feel like people wouldn't normally learn about charities without being told to. Violet felt that if the group could help out a charity or do something similar, that would be fulfilling. Violet and Jane both focused on wanting to conduct social justice actions, further highlighting that they were already motivated to do so when they joined the program; while they did learn from the books and mostly enjoyed the process of doing so, they didn't need to read books in the program to be motivated.

The intent of this library program was to generate action, but it being a library program at all turned out to be a significant limitation of what we could do. For instance, the director of CPL said no to holding a fundraiser to raise money for an organization that supports newcomers. This was frustrating for me, as my teen-centred approach meant that doing my best to say yes to all of the ideas my participants had was at the heart of my research design, and Jane specifically expressed on multiple occasions that she wanted to do a fundraiser. At the time, I assumed the director's choice not to let us do so had to do primarily with technology and time restraints. However, while I was writing up my findings, the director of CPL told me that she said no to this idea because, as a public library, she wanted to be very careful to walk the line between providing opportunities for all and supporting one specific group. Had I known this was the primary reason and had more time and energy to do so, I would have pushed back on this decision, as this is the exact problem, based on librarianship's commitment to intellectual freedom, that I was hoping to address with this program. The director implied that the library would somehow be able to maintain neutrality regarding immigration rights if we did not do a fundraiser, but the choice to not do so is itself biased toward upholding the status quo. My research is based on my firm belief that libraries cannot be neutral, and they should be spaces for

social justice because we have a responsibility to use the structural power afforded us to support specific groups that are marginalized by society. If it was hard for me to argue with the director when it wouldn't have been risking job security for me, then it follows that it would be harder to push back as library staff with even less time and energy than I had, which speaks to how libraries replicate hegemonic power structures and that structural change needs to come from the top. It was frustrating to not be able to support marginalized groups to the fullest extent possible, and it reveals that we have much work to do to shift the landscape of librarianship to foreground social justice.

Flexible Decision-Making in Participatory Research

As I noted in my research design, remaining open to the study changing based on my research partners' opinions and desires was important to me, as I wanted to maintain the participatory nature of the research by engaging in self-evaluation throughout and making collaborative adjustments based on my participants' priorities (Stoecker, 2012; Somerville, 2014). Thus, I made an effort to ask my research partners for said opinions and priorities as often as possible. The most significant example of my research changing was the fact that the participants felt it was important to add reading nonfiction to the research questions. While this didn't change the core of the research, it did add an extra element to it that would not have been possible if I hadn't considered the participants to be research partners who had equal say in determining what we wanted to find out. Violet and Jane's choice to modify an existing question exemplifies how my research partners preferred to make smaller changes to the research rather than large ones. Indeed, though my participants expressed appreciation for being asked for their opinions, they most often seemed content when given some predetermined structure. Where I didn't have a structure planned, we tended to choose whatever the first person to express even a

loose opinion said. For instance, when I asked if they all wanted to read the same thing together or read separate things, all the participants said they didn't mind either way, but Jane added that she thought it would be nice to read the same thing and discuss it, which is what we ended up doing. The participants were willing and able to express their priorities when they had them, but more often they didn't have the expertise, desire, or time necessary to contribute to the research process and were therefore content to let me take the lead.

Sometimes our decisions ended up being changed later on, as was the case with the time we allotted to read each book and the order in which we read them. As mentioned in the "Program Challenges/Improvements" section, we planned to read the entirety of the books and then discuss, but when Jane and Violet had only read *WSTDOF* to chapter 12 and chapter 7 respectively for the first session, we agreed that we would talk about what we thought so far and compare our thoughts when we finished. This meant we had to add on a few extra program sessions because each book took two sessions to discuss rather than the one we had planned. Being open to plans changing required flexibility from everyone involved, which was largely possible in the context of this program because I was able to schedule around the participants' availability and didn't have many other responsibilities or restrictions in the way that a library staff member might. My flexibility was important to maintaining the participatory nature of the research, but Violet's and Jane's reactions to it suggest that it would be just as possible to make teens feel involved in the planning process of a library program while being more rigid in structure than this program was. For example, it wouldn't be overly important to be able to reschedule every session, but it is important to make sure the program is about topics the teens are interested in. My data showed that sometimes the teens chose to engage with the research process, as when modifying the research questions and designing the program, and sometimes

they didn't, as when given the opportunity to provide feedback on the data analysis. It was important to Jane and Violet to feel included, and when they expressed that they felt included, it was because they were offered flexibility and the ability to make decisions. More evidence would better articulate how including teens' opinions and being flexible affects library programming and participatory research projects with teens, but I found that if teens are involved in creating expectations, then they will be more familiar with them and feel as though the expectations take into account their opinions. Thus, having pre-planned expectations and structure is not a bad approach as long as there is space for the participants to critique and change the expectations to better suit them.

Ultimately, the fact that they engaged with the research process at all when provided with the opportunity is more important how they did so. Violet's statement in our debrief that "most people don't listen to teens" was echoed by the literature I read, which focused on including teen voices in library programming and research (Agosto, 2019; Crawford Barniskis, 2013; Hoopes, 2018; Moeller, Pettee, & Leeper, 2011) and acknowledging the contributions youth can make in terms of civic action (Richards-Schuster & Dobbie, 2011). It is this lack of regular consultation with teens that I think shapes how they responded to being asked for their opinions. On top of not being used to being asked for an opinion, they didn't have the frameworks or experience to begin to formulate one and relied on my relative expertise to help them do so. They seemed to be aware of their own limitations in this regard and appreciated when I was able to explain why and how I thought we should do things so that they had more context to brainstorm ideas and make decisions in. While there is a significant lack of evidence-based research into YA services (Bernier, 2019), Hoopes (2018) and Crawford Barniskis (2013) found many of the same things I did when they involved teens in planning social justice programming and designing research: the

teens liked being involved to the extent that their busy lives allowed, were enthusiastic about having their opinions heard and validated, and wanted adult support in making decisions.

Influence and Opinions of Participatory Research

As detailed in my definition of participatory research in Chapter 2, there were significant flaws in my participatory research design borne from my own priorities as a researcher; my research partners were not involved in many aspects of the research process, such as defining the research problem, designing instruments for data collection, or writing up the findings. While it wasn't a hands-on approach the way it would have been if they identified themes themselves, I did invite them to be involved in the data analysis by asking them to read over the themes and coding. While I didn't follow best practice for participatory research, this worked well for both myself and my participants; neither of us had the time to spend on iterations of community consultation or collaborative data analysis. My participants were less interested in actual research processes and more interested in having their thoughts taken seriously. For instance, they were enthusiastic about the research question "How does acting as collaborators to design the library program and choose what to read affect the experience of the young adults participating in the program and their reactions to the media they read?" because they were excited to have their opinions considered, and Violet and Jane felt the same way by the end of the program. Jane thought it was cool to be part of the research and help form the library program. She said that she learned about the research process and was excited to see the data analysis; though she never responded when I shared it with her, she very well could have read it and went with the "silence as approval" method I provided. Violet said she thought being a research partner is easy because there are technically four people participating rather than one. They said that when you get to discuss your ideas for research projects, it gets more ideas out there than doing it yourself or

watching someone else do your thinking for you. She said she had learned through school that the way to get the most information is to get the most opinions you can. Violet also felt like they learned a little bit about the research process—she didn't realize there were so many aspects to research projects "because at school it's just like 'Google this, put it on a piece of paper.'" She was also looking forward to seeing the data analysis, and she was the only participant to respond to my emails sending them the themes I had identified.

I agree with Violet's sentiments about getting the most opinions possible; I believe my research is richer for having asked for the participants' opinions. Constantly thinking about how to include them and preserve their authentic voices meant I could foster a welcoming space and factor their thoughts into every aspect of my thesis. While it made it more difficult to write my data analysis because I wanted to preserve what they had actually said while still bringing in my own perceptions and interpretations of the situation and critical analysis, walking the line between these things helped my arguments become more coherent. It would be impossible for me to avoid bringing my own biases into the analysis regardless, and I feel that acknowledging that from the very beginning and being very clear about the separations between my thoughts and the participants' only strengthens my research. Ultimately, using a participatory research approach seemed to positively affect the participants' opinions of being in the study, mostly because they appreciated being asked for their opinions. This says less about how effective participatory research might be when it involves teens and more about how teen-centred library program design and research helps teens feel more involved in library services that are for them.

Summary

One of the primary goals of this research study was to ensure it followed a teen-centred and participatory approach by listening to teens and validating their experiences and

perspectives. This goal was a success, as my research partners sometimes engaged with the research when given the opportunity, and more importantly, they repeatedly expressed their appreciation for being asked for their perspectives and having those perspectives validated. The flexibility required to effectively conduct participatory research is likely to be easily translated to a professional library context, as the participants preferred to be given choices rather than asked to come up with ideas from scratch without any guidance. Working together to make decisions about the program, collaboratively making the poster about immigration rights, and reading texts together helped the participants to feel more confident and gain a deeper understanding of the issues we discussed and books we read. The community we built would likely have been even stronger and felt more comfortable had we been able to conduct the program in person. Since Jane and Violet felt that there are many fun ways a program with similar themes to this book club could be designed, it would be prudent to do more initial consultation with teen patrons before starting a program, especially since this program was lacking when it came to balancing the interests of multiple participants and delivering on all their expectations. Ultimately, it is ideal to give teens the opportunity to make their own choices about library programs that are for them, as long as they are given ample time to consider those choices carefully, a structure to make them within, and a support system of adults who will take on the work they don't have time to do themselves.

Chapter 6: Conclusion & Practical Recommendations

From a teen-centred approach (Agosto, 2019) and with the theoretical bases of reader-response theory and critical ethnography as theory, I conducted a participatory case study at the Camrose Public Library (CPL). My intent was to discover what relationships there might be between reading young adult social activism narratives, teens' motivations to conduct social justice actions, and public library programming for teens. This is a salient question in the field of LIS because social justice is a relatively recent addition to the thriving debate between social responsibility and intellectual freedom that has permeated the field of librarianship since at least the 1960s, and social justice is especially under-discussed in the context of young adults and YA services (Bernier, 2019). While some academic and professional literature has been published on the subject of social-justice-related YA programming, it often does not include any discussion of YA literature; furthermore, it often either doesn't include teens in the planning of that programming (such as Lewis, 2019a; 2019b, 2018) or fails to detail how teens felt about being consulted regarding a program's design and report on what the teens got out of the program at the time (such as Hem-Lee & Evans, 2018). I felt it was important to centre my study on the lack of YA fiction in social justice programming because research in the field of YA literature shows that teens use what they choose to read—regardless of its genre as assigned by the publishing industry or library collections—for identity-seeking, including forming opinions on current events. My participants chose the books we read based on their own interests, and as detailed in Chapters 3 and 4, their relationship to the books they chose shaped their understanding and recognition of injustices in fiction and reality. In addition, teens learn about social justice issues from various forms of media, fiction and nonfiction, and interactions in their daily lives.

To investigate how all these things might work together, I recruited three teens (Jane, 14, she/her; Noah, 14, he/him; and Violet, 17, she/they) to be my research partners and, with them, co-designed the CPL Social Justice Teen Book Club, which met via Google Meet over two months in the summer of 2020. Together, we read and discussed *We Set the Dark on Fire* (WSTDOF) by Tehlor Kay Meija (2019), *Missing in Action* by Dean Hughes (2010), and *Flygirl* by Sherri L. Smith (2009), considering the themes of social justice that were in the books in terms of real-world current events and what sort of activism we could engage in ourselves during the program. We were inspired by *WSTDOF* to create a digital poster about immigration rights in Canada (Appendix H). I consulted my research partners at each stage of the research process to ensure I expressed their opinions accurately when I wrote up my findings, and I debriefed with them individually after the conclusion of the program in order to determine how they felt about the process.

My findings were shaped by the methodological and theoretical frameworks I used, which were selected, in turn, because of biases and values I already had. Choosing to make my research participatory shaped my findings because I was focused on presenting what my research partners said as authentically as possible in order to address the lack of teen voice in LIS research (Moeller, Pettee, & Leeper, 2011; Crawford Barniskis, 2013). Despite my approach being flawed because my participants were not involved in formulating the research problem, I invited them to collaborate with me as much as possible, and I presented where they chose to take me up on my invitations and where they didn't. My data analysis prioritized accurately reflecting what they told me about their thoughts and behaviours. My findings are thus shaped by a separation between what my participants said and what I thought, as well as a focus on translating my data into action-oriented practical recommendations. Similarly, using critical

ethnographic methods meant that I thought constantly about the power structures affecting my participants, especially the power I was and was not affording them myself. It meant I tried to approach my own detailed recording of an experience as if it was unfamiliar to me, and using critical ethnography as theory meant I attempted to expose and disrupt power relationships that I and my participants experienced rather than simply describing them. Finally, reader-response theory shaped every aspect of my findings because I approached them with the assumption that readers actively participate in making meaning from texts and that is impossible to divorce our own values from our readings of a text. I encouraged my participants to think about how they actively engaged with the text and what values they brought to it, and my findings reflect that.

In general, this case study fills a gap in evidence-based research into YA services (Bernier, 2019), and its findings agree with the limited amount of prior research into social-justice-related teen library programming, participatory research with teens, and the benefits of a teen-centred approach: the participants appreciated being listened to and felt included when given the opportunity for flexible decision-making (Agosto, 2019; Hoopes, 2018; Crawford Barniskis, 2013). My research found that, on their own, neither social activism narratives nor library programs motivate teens to conduct social justice actions; instead, they contribute to a network of learning opportunities and information that leads to teens becoming motivated to make a difference in their communities. This finding was evidenced by Violet and Jane coming to the library program precisely because they were already motivated to conduct social justice actions, and I found that they were able to find more inspiration, and thus motivation, from the books we read when they had prior knowledge and experience that helped them interpret the books in terms of current events. Thus, public libraries can provide teen programming that uses social activism narratives and collaborative discussions to teach teens more about social justice

issues, show them how to get involved in social justice movements, and instill in them the confidence to do so. As detailed in Chapter 4, the ability of libraries to accomplish this rests on a symbiotic relationship between inspiration, education, confidence, and motivation. For instance, rich discussions of a text help it to provide inspiration, and rich discussions rest on how much knowledge the readers are able to bring to the text. The more knowledge the reader has, whether that comes from prior experience or education within the program, the more confident they become. Having inspiration, education, and confidence leads to increased levels of motivation, while already being motivated leads to a desire to acquire more inspiration, education, and confidence. The following sections explicate these relationships further and summarize my findings as they relate directly to the research questions I posed.

How might reading social activism narratives and discussing them in the context of real-world issues affect young adults' thinking about and motivation to conduct social justice actions?

The answers I found to this question were influenced strongly by who my participants were; the program recruited similarly-minded teens who were looking for a place to get involved. As discussed in Chapter 3, Violet and Jane easily recognized power dynamics in the books we read because they were already somewhat disillusioned with our society and felt there was a need for social justice actions. Our discussions of the books we read made clear that teens constantly transact with the structures of society and media objects within it—they bring their own values to the text and take away new insights and strategies. This finding expands on YA literature research into the effects of reading on youth identity formation, teens' capacity to actively engage with texts, and the ways in which they selectively use prior experience and knowledge to expand the meaning of texts they read (Becnel & Moeller, 2015; Bodart, 2006;

Boyd & Darragh, 2019; Howard, 2011; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1995; Taylor, 2011; Wilhelm, 2016). My participants enjoyed engaging in the process of drawing connections between the fiction we read and the real world, and they felt they learned from discussing those connections with each other. They were most able to make connections when they already had prior knowledge and experience; for example, they were able to explain the power dynamics of gender much more easily than those of race. Because of the context needed to understand them and relate them to current events, social activism narratives are just one tool that library programs can use to engage with social justice in the real world. Providing an encouraging space to share information and experiences, ask questions, and learn how to approach social justice issues should be the primary goal of a teen library program about social justice. I found these elements most important because of the ways Violet and Jane took advantage of a space to have discussions and deepen their understanding. When they didn't understand an issue, they asked questions about it and were able to draw connections using the answers. They stated that they were motivated to conduct social justice actions by the program and by reading because it gave them a place where they were encouraged to do so. However, they needed to first be influenced by other factors, such as reading news media and their own lived experience, to get to a place where that encouragement was most effective.

For the participants in this case study, social activism narratives were most inspirational when they were enjoyable to read, understandable, personally relatable, and involved characters taking direct action because these elements fostered the ability to make connections to the real world. As argued in Chapter 4, the participants felt that discussing social activism narratives in the context of the real world is important, and having that real-world context is vital for deeper understanding of the issues presented in the book, but it doesn't inspire direct action. Rather,

reading about direct action conducted by relatable characters inspires direct action. While Violet and Jane felt that internal struggle against societal structures was a form of social activism, they found reading about characters undergoing that kind of emotional journey more difficult to translate into inspiration for their own actions. This stems from the distinction that these types of books are social activism narratives in that the characters try to overcome the ways that power structures oppress them, but they are not social justice narratives because the characters do not directly try to change those power structures. Thus, they serve as better tools for education than they do for inspiration. Education is also a vital factor of motivation, and it is just as important to provide space for this first step in getting involved with social justice.

How does acting as collaborators to design the library program and choose what to read affect the experience of the young adults participating in the program and their reactions to the media they read?

Acting as collaborators to design the library program had a positive effect on the young adults participating in the program; the participants expressed that they felt appreciated and heard when they were asked their opinions. My findings expand on a long history of youth community engagement and youth activism that has prompted some librarians and LIS scholars to encourage other librarians to work directly with youth when designing services and programs for them (Agosto, 2019; Coats, 2019; Lesko, 2019; Males, 2019; Rothbauer, 2019). As argued in Chapter 4, choosing what to read was important for the participants and made the reading experience more enjoyable for them. Enjoyability is a key element of a social activism narrative being inspirational because it contributes to the reader already having context for and investment in the issues present in the book. Additionally, collaborating helped the participants to feel a little more like they were on equal footing with each other and with myself as the program leader, and

that helped them to develop the confidence and comfort level needed to share their opinions. Our discussions were thus able to help foster a deeper understanding of the issues they centred around. Collaboration was also crucial because it necessitated at least some level of flexibility, which is important when it comes to setting clear expectations for the teens participating in the program. Violet and Jane most preferred to be given choices and the time, context, and support system to make effective decisions between those choices. Collaboration and choice are important because they instil a sense of community in the program, something that myself and the participants felt we could have done even more effectively had we been in person and/or did more in-depth icebreaker activities. Furthermore, in this program, the participants were never challenged by any significant disagreements or negative consequences. Disagreement might have led to even more positive opportunities because of participants being pushed out of their comfort zones and being forced to learn more, or it might have led to more negative effects like a lack of desire to participate because the decisions were too difficult to make or compromises were unsatisfactory. Indeed, some negative consequences of collaboration could be the reason why Noah stopped participating in program sessions, though I can't say for sure whether that is the case. Overall, the data I collected indicated collaboration worked well in the context of this case study.

How can public libraries create spaces where young adults can learn about and enact social justice actions through reading?

The participants stated that they felt the program was a learning opportunity and provided them with the tools and confidence for social justice work. This was, in part, the case because of the specific books we read. *WSTDOF* provided a rich landscape for discussions of multiple issues that Violet and Jane understood well, and *MIA* and *Flygirl* provided opportunities for them

to learn about social issues they were interested in but knew less about. The learning opportunities also stemmed from the collaborative nature of the program; thus, there are many ways that a public library could create this kind of space, such as only reading books, only conducting social justice actions, learning about charities, watching movies instead of reading, or anything else youth might be interested in. It would, therefore, be best to consult with interested patrons before designing a program and to remain flexible throughout.

While flexibility was particularly important in the context of this case study, a similar library program could be less flexible, as the participants in this study preferred being provided with choices rather than a blank slate. As argued in Chapter 5, flexibility is important when it comes to helping teens feel included; choices should be provided along with time to consider them and ample explanation of the rationale behind them. Expectations that are not flexible should be explicated in-depth as well so that teens understand why they exist and feel supported in achieving them. The concept of providing choices, explaining context, and being flexible is echoed in literature about YA library programs, YA literature, and youth civic spaces. Ventura (2011) argues that youth require better knowledge about their capacity to contribute to social justice, which providing them with context and education helps with. Similarly, Hoopes (2018) encourages librarians to develop the confidence of youth when it comes to social justice by listening to teens, talking about local issues with them, and modelling activism. Additionally, Boyd & Darragh (2019) believe that YA literature can encourage social action projects when students are provided opportunities to choose what to read and what actions to take. My findings also fit into the framework for creating youth spaces provided by Richards-Schuster and Dobbie (2011), which includes providing dedicated adult allies, facilitating critical education and building skills for action, and integrating action and reflection. Overall, creating this kind of

space revolves primarily around providing the teen patrons with lots of time and space to consider their choices carefully and making clear that they have an adult support system throughout the program. The following are practical recommendations for teen library programs about social justice based on these findings, provided in a more condensed format for clarity.

Practical Recommendations

1. Provide options of reading materials, organizations, and/or issues to discuss that are grounded in direct action. These might include:
    a. fantasy that can be related to the real world and current events through metaphor,
    b. contemporary fiction or nonfiction that is personally relatable to the participants in your program,
    c. historical fiction or nonfiction where the featured characters or people make a tangible change to society,
    d. local organizations that are already doing work in your community,
    e. and any combinations of the above.
2. Prioritize giving the teens choices as opposed to a blank slate, and give them lots of time to consider their options.
    a. Do initial consultations with teen patrons to determine what kind of program they might be interested in. Ask what issues they're interested in, what kind of media they like to consume, what values they already hold, and what program format would work best.
    b. Come to the program with options for structure, reading material, and/or activities prepared and allow the program participants to vote on their favourites. If

possible, provide the options and have them vote at the next session so they have time to think about it.

   c. Bring discussion questions to the program sessions. Let them pick which they want to discuss, and leave space at the end for them to expand on what they've already said or ask more questions.

3. Foster collaboration and community-building during the program.
   a. If the program is virtual, encourage participants to turn on their cameras if they are willing and able.
   b. Integrate fun and casual get-to-know-you activities into every program session.
   c. Let the participants express their opinions of a text based on what they already know. Ask them why they think something and what might have influenced that opinion. Provide them with space to share resources with each other.
   d. Encourage the participants to ask questions about things they don't understand. Do the research to find the answers together.
   e. Work together on any social justice action you do. Be honest about how much time and resources you have to complete a task, and encourage the teens to do the same.
4. Be flexible and prepared to change directions.
   a. Provide context for your decisions and expectations — always, but especially when you're not going to be flexible about them.
   b. If reading longer texts, set checkpoints for reading. Allow more time than your participants think they need, and be prepared to move checkpoints.

c. Try to include different ways to engage with the program. Instead of allowing the majority to make a choice for everyone, integrate everyone's preferred methods of engagement.
d. Ask for feedback from the participants after every session, and if a choice isn't working anymore, don't be afraid to change the structure of the program to reflect that.

Limitations of the Study and Areas for Further Research

This research study was, like all research studies, necessarily limited in its scope. Some of its limitations stemmed directly from conducting the research during the COVID-19 pandemic, including not being able to have an in-person program, not having access to library materials, not being able to recruit participants who didn't have access to technology or a quiet place to join a video call, and recruitment strategies not including through schools or directly through library staff. My study had a very small number of participants, and those participants were limited to being from the area the Camrose Public Library serves. The time allotted to conduct the research was also very compressed, with data collection taking place over about two months. Additionally, two of my limitations stemmed directly from the reasons I wanted to undertake the research in the first place. The first was the tension between the values of intellectual freedom and social justice in librarianship; the director of CPL chose not to let us fundraise for an organization that supports newcomers in an attempt to uphold the neutrality of the library, which limited how well the program could support social justice. The second was the lack of evidence-based research into YA services and programs, which meant that there were not many roadmaps for me or my research to follow or a significant breadth of literature to base my opinions and approaches on. This compounded the already-present and necessary limitation of

myself as a researcher bringing my own biases and perspectives to the research design, as well as my own lack of experience as a teen library programmer.

This study prompts further research in a variety of areas, primarily in LIS, but also in the study of YA literature, critical youth studies, and social justice in general. Similar research about teen library programs, reading, and social justice that encompasses a wider diversity of teens from different backgrounds and with varying opinions would help to further explicate my findings regarding youth bringing their outside knowledge to the texts they read. The differences between the effects of nonfiction or historical fiction and fiction when it comes to inspiring and motivating social justice actions by youth could be further explored, as could the differences between social justice and social activism narratives. The emotional effects of different genres of social justice and social activism narratives would also be an area for further research. A longer-term study would be useful to document how the perspectives of youth are affected by social justice library programming over time. Research could also be done surrounding different types of social justice teen programs, such as those that are based on education rather than action or those that include reading media other than books. Finally, a study into any of these areas that was more comprehensively participatory, from formulating the research problem to writing up the findings, in the ways that mine failed to be would help to expand my findings regarding the effects of collaboration and participatory research.

In conclusion, I want to express how much doing this research has emphasized to me that undertaking work related to teens and social justice is necessarily difficult but ultimately rewarding, no matter how big or small. It requires commitment, effort, and resources. It stands to reason, then, that encouraging teens to take social justice actions and facilitating the space and support they need to do that might be too big a goal for one person or one institution. After all, it

turned out to, in some respects, be too big of a goal for this case study. Thus, a library professional or LIS scholar might also just take a first step: having teens learn and think about issues. Maybe that looks like chatting to teens in your library, recommending them YA social activism or social justice narratives, or reading evidence-based research about YA services yourself. Maybe it looks like continually bringing up social justice values and teen-centred approaches in staff meetings until someone listens and new policies get written. Though it starts there, this isn't change that can be undertaken individually; it will take many voices speaking up and supporting each other. While I will absolutely preach all day about burning down fences and making structural change from the top, sometimes we only have the capacity to do one thing. We should still do that one thing to the best of our ability, whatever it might be.

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Appendix A. Participant Information Letter and Consent Form

INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Educating and Empowering Teen Activists in Public Libraries:
A Case Study of the Impact of Reading on Young Adult Social Justice Actions

Research Investigator: Jennifer McDevitt
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mcdevitt@ualberta.ca

Supervisors:
Dr. Danielle Allard
allard@ualberta.ca
Dr. Jonathan Cohn
cohn@ualberta.ca

Background

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a young adult between the ages of 13 and 18 who lives in the area that the Camrose Public Library serves.

The results of this study will be used in support of my thesis.

Before you make a decision, I will go over this form with you. You are encouraged to ask questions if you feel anything needs to be made clearer. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Purpose

This research centers around library programs and social activism narratives. Social activism narratives are any work of fiction (book, video game, television show, interactive fiction, etc.) that centers around a social justice issue and depicts the characters fighting to make change in their society. Social justice issues include things like climate change, discrimination on the basis of any aspect of identity (including gender, race, sexual orientation, or age), internet access, and any other major societal issue youth in general, and you as a participant specifically, might be interested in and/or affected by.

This study wants to find out how libraries could use social activism narratives in their programs to connect with teens and help them to actively create change in their communities. I hope to find out how reading social activism narratives and talking about them with people their own age affects teens. I also want to find out if fiction influences teens' motivation to actively perform social justice actions—for example, participating in social media campaigns or writing letters to the government.

I hope to provide librarians with a way to create spaces for teens informed by a better understanding of how youth reading behaviour and social justice are related. I hope this will help staff at libraries make better teen programming. I also hope myself and my participants will have made a difference in the Camrose community and/or broader society through social justice actions.

Study Procedures

The commitment for this research has five parts. All meetings will be via Google Meet. The first part is an initial individual meeting with me to go over this consent form, the ground rules for participation, and the confidentiality agreement.

The second part of the research is a session, about 1.5 hours long, during which all participants will be able to provide their input on the research questions and discuss their interests. From there, the group will plan a virtual library program. The program will feature reading and discussing social activism narratives and, potentially, doing related social justice actions.

The group will decide the format of the program, how many sessions of the library program there will be, the length of each session, what social justice issues we will discuss, and what the group will read. We'll also discuss the possibility of creating a group chat for discussion between sessions. If there are any disagreements that we can't talk out throughout this decision-making process, we'll conduct anonymous votes, and I will break any ties.

The third part of the research is the library program itself. Time commitment will be decided on by the participants. You will be expected, but not required, to come to every program session. You can attend using your choice of video, voice, and/or text chat.

The fourth part of the research is a survey and individual interview. The survey will be a Google Form about your experience creating and participating in the program, which will take 10-20 minutes to complete. The individual interview will be with me over video, audio, or text chat. We will discuss your survey answers, which will take no longer than 1 hour.

The fifth part of the research is data analysis. Throughout the first three parts, I will be recording the sessions and taking notes, which I will use to identify themes and come up with potential answers to the research questions. I will email you my analysis at least four times—including the final draft—throughout this process so that you can provide feedback and approval. This is to make sure you have input on the themes selected and that I don't misrepresent you. I will clearly tell you when I need feedback by before I will assume your silence is approval. You will be able to ask me for more time if you need it.

The first three parts of this research will take place over no more than three months—June to August 2020. The analysis will happen from September to December 2020, and you will receive the final draft for approval in March 2021.

You can be as involved or not involved with the various parts of the research as you choose. For instance, the amount of feedback you provide on the analysis can be in-depth or simply “yes, this is fine” or “no, I don’t agree with this part.”

Ground Rules

The following are the ground rules you must respect throughout the study.

- Follow videoconferencing etiquette.
    - Mute your mic when you’re not speaking. You may unmute when prompted by Jennifer.
    - Allow others to speak without being interrupted. Raise your hand in the chat by typing “o/” if you have something to say aloud.
- Respect everyone’s thoughts, opinions, and contributions.
    - We have a variety of ages and life experiences in the group. They are all valid, worthwhile, and helpful for us to learn from. Share your own experiences from your perspective, and listen to others without judgment.
    - All questions are good questions. Don’t laugh at or otherwise mock a fellow participant.
    - Don’t assume one person speaks for an entire group, and don’t assume you can speak for an entire group.
- Come prepared to learn together.
    - We will start at a beginner’s level with every issue and topic we discuss. If you know a lot about something, be patient while others learn, and share your knowledge with the group. If you don’t know much about something, be patient with yourself and ask questions.
    - Sometimes learning is uncomfortable. Acknowledge that and lean into it instead of avoiding it.
- Respect the boundaries of others.
    - Give others space to speak without forcing them to. Ask questions without expectation or judgment.
    - Use kind language. If someone lets the group know they’re uncomfortable with a certain word, respect that by not repeating it.
    - Do not use slurs.
- Follow the law.
    - We will discuss social change within the guidelines of provincial and federal laws.
- Have good intentions and assume others do as well.
    - If you believe someone is breaking a ground rule, assume that they did not intend to, and gently remind them using language like, “When you said X, I felt that you were breaking Y rule.” Explain yourself, and allow the other person to explain as well.

- Everyone makes mistakes. If you unintentionally break a rule and are asked to stop, try to be understanding and not defensive. Ask questions to help you move forward without making the same mistake again.

If you break a ground rule, you will be reminded of it and explicitly told what you did wrong. If you break the same rule in the same way three times, I will remove you from that day's meeting. If you continue to do so at the next meeting, I will ask you to leave the study.

Benefits

You will not personally benefit from being in this study.

I hope that the information I get from doing this study will help library workers better understand how to engage with teen patrons and provide library programming about reading and/or social justice.

Risk

We will be discussing issues of marginalization, discrimination, and/or oppression on the basis of aspects of identity (like race, sexual orientation, age, etc.) and difficult issues that often appear in YA fiction (like sexual assault, gun violence, etc.). These topics might be stressful or difficult for you to talk about. As stated above, you don't have to participate in any conversation you don't want to.

There may be risks to being in this study that are not known. If I learn anything during the research that may affect your willingness to continue being in the study, I will tell you right away.

Cost of Participation

Participating in this study will cost your time, as outlined in the study procedures above. You will also need technology to participate, including an Internet connection and an email address where I can send you the analysis to approve.

You will not be expected to purchase any reading material for this study. While designing the program, the participants will collectively select a format that allows for reading different things if necessary, as well as by selecting material that we can all access through Camrose Public Library and/or that you already have read or own.

Remuneration

You will receive a $15 digital gift card (from your choice of Steam, Indigo, or Spotify) on completion of the individual survey and one-on-one interview with me. If you withdraw from the study before that is completed, the amount of the gift card will be prorated to the time you left the study.

Voluntary Participation

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. The participation is completely voluntary, and you do not have to answer any specific questions or participate in any specific discussions.

Even if you agree to be in the study, you can change your mind and withdraw at any time. If you withdraw anytime before my analysis is complete, I will remove the data collected from your individual survey and interview from my dataset, and I will not include any mention of you from my notes or audio recordings in my analysis or final results. If you withdraw after my analysis is complete, I will continue to use the data I collected from you. I will let you know when analysis is about to be completed, and you will have one week to withdraw.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

I will help you select a pseudonym and set up a sock email account with that name, which you will use to join the group discussions on Google Meet in order to protect your identity.

I will use this research in my thesis, research articles, and presentations. You will not be personally identified in any of these cases or any other case of sharing this research. I will refer to you by your pseudonym and leave out any identifying information.

Data will be kept confidential. Google Meet encrypts all meeting data, including saved recordings, and does not sell user data. You can read more about their security and privacy here.

Myself, my supervisors, and the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board will have access to the data. It will be kept on a password-protected laptop and on Google Drive's encrypted cloud storage. Study data, including personal information about you, will be securely stored for a minimum of 5 years after the study is over. After 5 years, your personal information and the audio/video recordings will be destroyed.

While I will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of what is discussed during the pre-session and the library program itself, I cannot guarantee that other participants will do the same. Please respect the confidentiality of other participants by following the rules set out in the confidentiality agreement that follows.

You will receive a copy of the research findings, as detailed in the Study Procedures section above.

The only exception to this promise of confidentiality is that I am legally obligated to report evidence of child abuse or neglect.

Contact Information

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact Jennifer McDevitt: mcdevitt@ualberta.ca.

The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can call (780) 492-2615. This office is independent of the researchers.

Confidentiality Agreement

I agree to maintain the confidentiality of the information discussed by all participants and researchers during this study. I will not repeat anything said during the study to anyone outside the sessions. During sessions, I will only refer to participants by their pseudonyms, even if I happen to know their real name. I understand that a mild offense (such as referring to participants by their real names during a session) will result in a verbal warning, while a serious or second offence (such as discussing what happened in the sessions with non-participants) will result in being asked to leave the study.

Consent Statement

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form. I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

_____	_____
Participant's Name (printed) and Signature	Date
_____	_____
Name of Person Attesting to Participants' Ability to Consent (printed) and Signature	Date
_____	_____
Name (printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	Date

In the absence of a signature, you must provide oral consent and oral agreement to confidentiality, both of which I will record in my field notes and/or in the recording of a Google Meet call. You will still receive a copy of this consent form.

Appendix B. Recruitment Materials

Facebook/Instagram Photo & Copy:

Are you a teen ages 13-18? Want to spend less time being bored at home and more time getting valuable research experience for your resume? Join Jennifer McDevitt, a University of Alberta graduate student, as a research partner and participant. You'll be designing a virtual program for teens through the Camrose Public Library centred around social justice and reading. Get more information by emailing mcdevitt@ualberta.ca.

The University of Alberta Research Ethics Board has approved this research study, ID Pro00101151.

Template Email for Sending to Schools/Community Groups

Hello [name/group],

My name is Jennifer McDevitt, and I'm pursuing my Master of Library and Information Studies and Master of Arts in Digital Humanities degrees at the University of Alberta. As part of my program, I'm doing research at the Camrose Public Library for my thesis about the effect of reading and public library programming on teens engaging in social justice actions. I'm specifically looking for teens 13-18 to be my research partners.

[FOR SCHOOLS: I'm hoping you could distribute the attached poster and information sheet to your students in that age range. If you have online synchronous meetings, I would also love to attend and talk to your classes about my project myself if that's something you're open to.]

[FOR GROUPS: I understand from [insert source] that you might have teens in your group that would be interested. Would you be willing to distribute the attached information to them? If you have any online synchronous meetings, I would also love to attend and talk to them about the project.]

The University of Alberta Research Ethics Board has approved this research study, ID Pro00101151.

Thanks so much for your time!

Cheers,

Jennifer McDevitt
she/her
MA Digital Humanities/MLIS Candidate
University of Alberta
Amiskwaciwâskahikan | ᐊᒥᐢᑲ·ᒋ+ᐋ·ᐢᑲ"ᐃᑲᐣ | Edmonton

Recruitment Poster

TEEN READING & SOCIAL JUSTICE PROJECT

MAKE AN IMPACT. BE A RESEARCH PARTNER.

Want to make a difference in your community but not sure how?

Help design a virtual library program for teens where we talk about fiction, social justice, and how we can create change from our homes.

FOR MORE INFO:

Jennifer McDevitt
mcdevitt@ualberta.ca
780-888-7260

Pro00101151 The University of Alberta Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

WHO YOU ARE

- 13-18 years old
- interested in reading and/or social justice issues like climate change, racial justice, LGBTQ2S+ issues, etc.

WHAT YOU'LL DO

- be a research partner
- help plan a virtual library program for teens about reading and social justice
- read and share your opinion on books, TV, video games, etc. about social justice issues that are important to you
- make a difference to your community and to society by getting involved
- talk about your experience with all the above

WHY DO IT?

- great experience for your resume
- hang out with friends

Pro00101151 The University of Alberta Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Appendix C. Outline for Initial Individual Sessions

- Briefly introduce myself and my motivations for doing this project
- Go over consent form
    - Check that they self-identify as 13-18 and living in the Camrose area
    - Ask if they understand and if they have any questions after every section
- Ask them if they're able to print and sign the consent form. If yes, give them a deadline to do so. If no, ask them to verbally consent, and I'll write it down in my field notes.
    - Also ask their parent/guardian to attest to their capacity to consent.
- If they consent, ask them what they'd like their pseudonym to be. Make them a sock GMail account with said name and email them the details, including how to reset their sock account's password.

Appendix D. List of YA Social Activism Narratives

racism/immigration rights

- Dear Martin by Nic Stone (police brutality, Black Lives Matter)
- The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas (police brutality, Black Lives Matter)
    - also a movie
- All American Boys by Jason Reynolds (police brutality)
- American Street by Ibi Aanu Zoboi (immigration)
- The Sun is Also a Star by Nicola Yoon (racism, romance)
- Yes No Maybe So by Becky Albertalli, Aisha Saeed (racism, local activism, romance)
- The Rock and the River by Kekla Magoon (historical, Civil Rights Movement)
- Dear White People (TV show/movie)

Indigenous rights

- 7 Generations by David Alexander Robertson, Scott B. Henderson (historical, Canadian Indigenous protagonists)
- Surviving the City by Tasha Spillet (Indigenous, Missing and Murdered Women & Girls)
- This Place: 150 Years Retold (dystopia, Indigenous)

surveillance/dystopia

- Little Brother by Cory Doctorow (surveillance)
- The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins (dystopia, surveillance, class divide)
    - also a movie
- Internment by Samira Ahmed (dystopia, Muslim-American internment camps)
- Feed by MT Anderson (dystopia, surveillance)

climate change

- The Marrow Thieves by Cherie Dimaline (dystopia, climate change, racism, Canadian Indigenous protagonists)
- Orleans by Sherri L. Smith (dystopia, climate change)
- War Girls by Tochi Onyebuchi (scifi, climate change)
- The Carbon Diaries 2015 by Saci Lloyd (climate change)
- Want by Cindy Pon (scifi, class divide, climate change)

war/anti-war

- Code Name Verity by Elizabeth Wein (historical, WWII)
- Chains by Laurie Halse Anderson (historical, American Revolutionary War)
- Missing in Action by Dean Hughes (historical, WWII)
- Flygirl by Sherri L. Smith (historical, WWII, racism)

sexism/sexual assault/patriarchy

- The Burning by Laura Bates (sexism, sexual assault)
- Watch Us Rise by Renee Watson, Ellen Hagan (sexism, sexual assault, social justice club)
- The Female of the Species by Mindy McGinnis (mystery, rape culture)
- Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson, Speak: The Graphic Novel (contemporary, rape culture)
- Not So Pure and Simple by Lamar Giles (toxic masculinity, sexism)
- Girls of Paper and Fire by Natasha Ngan (fantasy, f/f romance, sexual assault)

disability

- Unbroken: 13 Stories Starring Disabled Teens
- You're Welcome Universe by Whitney Gardner

LGBTQ2S+

- Like a Love Story by Abdi Nazemian (historical, AIDS crisis, LGBTQ protagonists)
- Draw the Line by Laurent Linn (contemporary, activism against homophobic hate crime)
- Two Boys Kissing by David Levithan (AIDS crisis, activism)
- We Set the Dark on Fire by Tehlor Kay Mejia (fantasy/dystopia, f/f romance)
- Shine by Lauren Myracle (mystery, hate crime)
- Lies We Tell Ourselves by Robin Talley (historical, racism)
- Dreadnought by April Daniels (fantasy)

homelessness

- No Fixed Address by Susin Nielsen
- No Place by Todd Strasser

Appendix E. Research Session One Outline and Discussion Questions

- Housekeeping as in Appendix C
- Introductions/Icebreaker
- Project Overview Recap
    - Key definitions: social justice, social activism narrative
- Discussion Questions
    - Do you agree with these research questions? What would you change about them, if anything?
    - What social justice issues are you interested in?
    - Have you already read any social activism narratives? Did you enjoy them?
- Program Decisions
    - Do you all want to read the same thing?
    - What do you want to read?
    - How many sessions do you want to do?

Appendix F. General Structure of Program Sessions

- Housekeeping
    - "This session is being recorded."
    - "As always, you're not required to participate in any part of this discussion. You can participate using any combination of audio, video, chat. You can turn your camera and/or microphone off at any time using the buttons at the bottom of the screen. You can always leave or mute your speakers and email me to request that I let you know when we're done discussing any particular topic."
    - "Also, a reminder to respect the confidentiality agreement and to follow the ground rules, which are: Follow videoconferencing etiquette, respect everyone's thoughts, opinions, and contributions; come prepared to learn together; respect the boundaries of others; follow the law; have good intentions and assume others do as well. The link to the full rules along with the warning system is in the chat."
        - Link in the chat to the full versions.
- Ask participants to provide general topics they want to discuss that session.
- Discussion of the readings
    - Participant-led/provided discussion questions
    - Discussion of how the participants can apply the themes in the reading material to their own lives
- Discussion of social justice actions
    - Discussion of how the participants might translate the activism we read about to their own actions
    - Practical plan for if any of the participants want to actually do so
- Final thoughts and plans for next session

Appendix G. Post-Program Individual Survey Questions

Educating and Empowering Teen Activists in Public Libraries - Post-Program Individual Survey

This survey is intended for you to reflect on your experiences throughout the research study. Your answers will not be anonymous, as we will discuss them together in your individual interview. You can think of this survey as a place to brainstorm and write down your initial thoughts, even if they aren't fully formed. There are no wrong answers. You can edit your answers up until our individual meeting.

By answering the questions and hitting the "Submit" button, you're consenting to having your answers used in this study.

* Required

Email address *

Your email

How did you feel about helping plan the library program?

Your answer

Do you think the program went well?

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, I didn't like it and it wasn't what I expected	○	○	○	○	○	Yes, I liked it and it was what I expected

Why or why not?

Your answer

What was the best part of the program?

Your answer

What was the worst part of the program?

Your answer

Would you participate in a program like this again?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Definitely not	○	○	○	○	○	Yes, for sure

Why did you choose the book you did for us to read?

Your answer

Were you happy with your choice? Why or why not?

Your answer

Would you change anything about the program? (time it took, how we selected material to read, general format, how I led the discussions, etc.)

Your answer

What would you suggest librarians who want to run a similar program do the same or different?

Your answer

What was your favourite thing about the books you read?

Your answer

What was your least favourite thing about the books you read?

Your answer

Did reading/researching about immigration rights in Canada for the poster we made change the way you thought about WE SET THE DARK ON FIRE at all? If yes, how so?

Your answer

Did reading about racism in Canada in relation to FLYGIRL make you think differently about the book or about society at all? If yes, how so?

Your answer

If you contributed to the poster about immigration, how did that make you feel? Why did you decide to participate? If you didn't, why not?

Your answer

Are there any social justice actions you would've liked to do that you feel you didn't get a chance to?

Your answer

Are you motivated by this program and/or by the books we read to continue being involved in social activism?

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Yes, definitely

Why or why not?

Your answer

How have you felt so far about being included as a research partner? (being asked for your input on the research questions, having the research process explained as we go, etc.)

Your answer

Is there anything else you'd like to share and/or discuss about your experience with me?

Your answer

Suggest some times (between September 15-October 3) you'd be available to meet with me to discuss this survey. I'll email you to follow up. *

Your answer

Where would you like your $15 gift card from? *

- ◯ Spotify
- ◯ Steam
- ◯ Indigo

Submit

Appendix H. Refugee & Newcomer Rights Awareness Poster

Refugee & Newcomer Rights Awareness

by the Camrose Public Library Social Justice Teen Book Club

Inspired by *We Set the Dark on Fire* by Tehlor Kay Mejia

In this book, you view the struggles the main character Dani goes through trying to keep a secret about where she is from. She is an immigrant from the other side of the wall in her world. Dani's parents threw everything away to give their daughter a chance at a good life, so not only was she working hard to ensure she gets a shot at the life her parents dream for her but she must also let nothing slip about who she really is to ensure her and her family remain safe.

We were inspired by We Set the Dark on Fire to make this poster and raise awareness about immigration. In the book, the island is separated into three areas. One area is where the rich and powerful live; the people who control the island. The next two sections are where the lower class live. There are people who live outside and inside the wall. The people on both sides of the wall are poor, but the people on the outside are poorer because it is impossible to grow things on their land. The people on the outside are shunned and ignored by the rich, and it is illegal to cross the wall. The main character of the book, Dani, crossed the wall illegally with her family when she was a baby. Her parents wanted to give her a better life, so they got her fake identification papers so that she could get an education and live among the rich. There's an organization in the book called Laz Voz who are fighting for the rights of the poorer people in the society. One of the characters in the organization was born outside of the wall as well. His father was very sick and needed treatment so his family tried to cross the wall but his father was shot.

While reading this, we saw many ways to connect this to our world today. A lot of immigrants are hated and often struggle to get a chance at a safer life after leaving their original home due to how everyone often views them. What most people probably don't realize is that most people who migrate do so because they were in an unsafe or dangerous environment. Immigrants are often deprived of opportunities like Dani would have been if her parents hadn't made her fake papers.

Think about you and your family in their shoes - picture being in a situation where you could die any moment due to the environment or current standings in your country. You would want to take your family somewhere safe, right? So you would migrate somewhere safer just like anyone would. So instead of hating on immigrants, give them a chance at having a safer life rather than making it impossible for them to escape the feeling of danger.

Facts about Immigration

- "Refugees are forced to flee their homes while economic immigrants have the ability to chose where and when to move. Canada recognizes this by having completely separate programs for refugees and economic immigrants" (Citizens for Public Justice).
- Immigrants are less likely than born citizens to commit crimes.
- Immigrants don't overrun population.
- Immigrants mostly migrate legally, not illegally.
- Immigrants more often make more jobs by opening businesses and chains.
- Refugees leave their countries to escape an unsafe environment.
- Irregular entry is not illegal; asylum seekers can legally cross the border to make a refugee claim.

Sources:
https://www.adl.org/resources/fact-sheets/myths-and-facts-about-immigrants-and-immigration-en-espanol
https://cpj.ca/refugee-myths/

How You Can Help

- Donate to or volunteer with a non-profit that helps immigrants
  - Canada Newcomers & Immigration Association - http://www.cannia.ca/
  - Canadian Council for Refugees - https://ccrweb.ca/
  - Rainbow Railroad - https://www.rainbowrailroad.org/
  - Immigrant Services Calgary - https://www.immigrantservicescalgary.ca/
  - Central Alberta Refugee Effort - http://immigrant-centre.ca/
  - Edmonton Immigrant Services Association - http://www.eisa-edmonton.org/
- Join a program that helps refugees by helping them learn conversational English or study for their citizenship test

Sources:
https://www.cbc.ca/life/culture/6-ways-to-support-new-refugees-to-canada-1.5183311