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Gift of the Gab:
Exploring the Audiobook and the Festive Direction
in the American Library

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Abstract

The audiobook, in its modern form, was created in the 1930s to assist the blind community, World War I veterans and others unable to engage in Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). This dissertation investigates exactly how the audiobook and, to a lesser extent, the podcast have been received and celebrated by the world of library and information science (LIS). Original to this dissertation are the concepts of a *festive direction* and a *clinical direction* in LIS which have shaped the collections of the American library. This alternative history of library science also explores how the fractured development of Christianity played a surprising role in shaping audio literature.

Underpinning this research is a survey of how American public and membership libraries are leveraging the audiobook and the podcast in order to diversify their services. Other prosocial actions are assessed in the institutional quest to attract and maintain patronage. This research will benefit library managers and catalogers in the American library who are attempting to *speak* to new demographics.
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Introduction

Background and Focus

The audiobook, in its modern form, was created in the 1930s to assist the blind community, World War I veterans and others unable to engage in Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). This dissertation will investigate exactly how the audiobook and, to a lesser extent, the podcast have been received and celebrated by the world of library and information science (LIS).

The reception of audio literature has not been free of controversy. The mode has loosened the mores of SSR within the public library and membership library (a privately funded library whose access is more restricted) and can be viewed as a leading indicator for the festive direction in library science. The data on its success is clear:

...the [audiobook] format generated $2.8 billion dollars in the United States in 2017 and this is an increase of up 22.7% over 2016, and with a corresponding 21.5% increase in units. This continues the six-year audiobook trend of double-digit growth year over year. (Kozlowski, 2019, 5th paragraph)

Beneficiaries of this increasing interest in audio literature include both retail outlets and municipal libraries. An Audio Publishers Association (APA) survey found that a large contingent of listeners (43%) had borrowed an audiobook title from the library and that more than half of respondents said the library had played

1 For a list of definitions with any unfamiliar terms, refer to Appendix A. This dissertation will use British spelling, terminology and punctuation while keeping the American library as a focus.
an outsized role in resource discovery (Young, 2019). This triumphant arrival of oral narrative in the programming and collections of the American public library and, to a lesser extent, the American membership library, is a celebration and advancement of what Walter Ong calls “Secondary Orality” (Ong, 2012).

The first audiobooks or “talking books” were played on phonographs via wax cylinders containing recorded speech (Rubery, 2016). From there talking books evolved several times: from the vinyl records of the 1930s to the near-invisible, streaming format of the 2020s. The lauded works of literature, along with other items of questionable caliber, have all been recorded. There is even an open source website called LibriVox where volunteers around the world can record any books in the public domain and try their skills as a narrator. Much of the audio literature today also includes an accompanying text, lending a dual modality to the experience.

Several of the researchers on the history and allure of the audiobook speak to its “in-betweenness” as a medium: in-between text and performance and in-between leisure and education (Rubery, 2016) (Have and Pedersen, 2016). The talking book, more importantly, is a very young invention, at least in comparison to paper texts. The Great Library of Alexandria, founded in the 4th century BCE, contained at its height nearly half a million papyrus manuscripts (Bawden and Robinson, 2012). The audiobook, meanwhile, in its popular form, is barely one hundred years old. It is actively forging its own categories: like a film sans visuals or a modern example of an ancient, oral tradition. Rubery (2016, page 11) stated that the audiobook’s “ambiguity has drawn hostility and defensiveness in equal measures from book lovers.”

A new technology always draws its naysayers. Socrates, who was firmly embedded in a brilliant oral culture, disparaged the act of writing and its finished project as
something whose etched words were doomed to repeat themselves ad infinitum, as he gripes in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (Durham Peters, 1999). Socrates too was as easily vexed by the practice of speechmaking and rhetoric during his time spent in Athens in the 5th century BCE. “Speeches not appropriate to audiences can bring dangerous harvests,” writes Yale Professor Durham Peters (1999, page 46). “For Socrates the specificity with which expression fits recipient is the criterion of goodness in communication” (Durham Peters, 1999, page 46). In the mind of the world’s most famous philosopher, communication was an act of responsibility between conversants, not a flowering of promiscuous forms.

Centuries later, the role of philosopher-knows-best would morph into librarian-knows-best. For in the earliest public libraries of England and Wales, librarians would often refuse to stock dime-store novels or “Penny Dreadfuls”, on the basis that it would degrade the taste level of the reading public (Richmond, 2017) (Anderson, 2016). That type of literary paternalism, however, soon faced democratic resistance. The “Penny Dreadfuls” were what the working classes desired to consume; the thought of access to literary melodrama ushered these eager readers through the library doors.

The talking book, however, is a revolution in format and delivery, not content. In studying the history and popularity of the talking book, two things have become clear. Firstly, audiobooks (or whatever their iteration at the time) have marked either a festive direction in library and information science (LIS) and/or a clinical direction in LIS as experienced through how or why the medium was employed. Secondly, these directions can manifest in ways that are supratemporal of “turns” or scholarly trends. A direction has its own affordances or possibilities/actions latent within an object, process or history of LIS. In the crudest of delineations, a festive direction has celebratory affordances within LIS and a clinical direction has compensatory affordances.
Take as an example the idea of vacation documents. Imagine two friends are planning a trip to France. Documents having a clinical direction would be essential, like a U.S. passport and a printed ticket for the flight. Documents of a festive direction would be any postcards purchased to send home to family. A document having affordances of both directions would be a printed or virtual itinerary: it would contain all the fun places and activities (festive) that the duo desires to experience as well as the important links and websites for hotels and restaurants (clinical). The latter examples are for the human necessities of sleep and nourishment (clinical).

Similar to *directions* is the concept of “turns”. In a conference presentation and accompanying paper, University of Toronto Information Philosopher, Jenna Hartel, went into further detail:

> What do I mean by ‘a turn’? Every so often within an academic discipline, a band of scholars will vigorously embrace a new set of theoretical or methodological commitments. These alternative visions typically critique the status quo and focus on a different research agenda or frontier. Such developments generate landmark publications, spawn special issues of journals, and shape the content of conferences. Turns can happen to a singular research area or in parallel across many disciplines. (Hartel, 2019, 2:30)

Audiobooks, to reiterate, do not fall into any one specific “turn” as they are considered innovative mediums with formats updated periodically.
Talking books inhabit the twilight between music and printed literature and between education and leisure, giving them both clinical or “compensatory” qualities (Have and Pedersen, 2012, page 80) and festive qualities that “promotes activity...and...is mentally engaging” (Have and Pedersen, 2013, page 132). Also known as an “a-book,” the audiobook has been disparaged at times as a literary shortcut, an easy way out of comprehending a text critically. This reproach has not dampened listener enthusiasm. Kozlowski (2019, first paragraph) states that “Audiobooks continue to be the fastest growing segment in digital publishing.” The modality is reaching new demographics, for the most vociferous listeners of audiobooks (those who have read four or more audiobooks in the past 12 months) are men at 56% (Anderson, 2017). This finding has consequences for the silent reading gap between boys and girls and between men and women.

For nonfiction subjects and newsy items, the preferred audio literary platform is the podcast. Michele Cobb, researcher for the Audio Publishers Association (APA), found that the podcast is a gateway to the audiobook. In one study, she discovered that respondents “who consumed both podcasts and audiobooks listened to twice as many audiobooks in the past 12 months as non-podcast consumers” (Anderson, 2017, twelfth paragraph). Thus the a-book and the podcast may be reaching populations who struggle with traditional reading styles.
Overall Research Aim

The overall research aim of *Gift of the Gab*, therefore, is to explore the festive direction and the clinical direction in library science, using as a motif and measurement the audiobook (and to a lesser extent, the podcast). From there, the aim will continue on to explore other festive phenomena in LIS.

The first step in the sequence is a deep assessment of the academic literature, mostly on media studies and sound studies, as evidenced in the Literature Review section. This will then be followed by an exploration of the audio literature collections of public and membership libraries in the United States.

Research Strategy and Individual Research Objectives

The research strategy of this dissertation was to test the academic against the practical. This involved a close reading of both the academic literature (textbooks and academic journal papers) and trade literature (trade journal articles related to the library workplace). This tack is more generally known as *desk research*.

The methodology behind the desk research includes content analysis (scouring websites and communications for data) and bibliographic analysis (determining and analyzing the central theories across the various disciplines discussed).

The aim was to measure the sounds studies and information behaviour philosophies in the literature against the collections and practices in the actual library. Additionally, with the talking book as a leading indicator for the festive direction of LIS, research was also launched into other prosocial events and practices of the American public and membership library.
The individual research objectives include the following:

*Introduce* new concepts into the field of publishing and library science, namely *the clinical direction* and *the festive direction*.

*Explore* the history and affordances of the talking book as a motif and as an example of a product existing within both a clinical direction and a festive direction.

*Query* two dozen American membership and public libraries on their current audio literature collections, current situations and future plans along with their more festive attractions.

*Highlight* the necessity for further discussions between academics and practitioners on ways to engage more audiophiles and other citizens who report trouble with SSR.

**Research Methods and Timescales**

The survey portion of this dissertation includes a six-minute questionnaire delivered to sixteen American membership libraries and eight of their public library system neighbors, for a total of twenty-four libraries *solicited*. From these twenty-four, sixteen libraries had completed the questionnaire (11 membership libraries and 5 public libraries), a response rate of 66%. The questionnaire (a copy displayed in Appendix B) was disseminated to library managers and other stakeholders on 28 September, 2020 and included a mix of questions seeking both quantitative and qualitative answers. Data was collected within a fortnight.

Enough time and space was granted for more open-ended, qualitative answers within the questionnaire. The outreach and inclusion of membership libraries was intentional; many of those institutions are quite old (by American standards),
having been founded before the first phonograph recording of Thomas Edison reciting “Mary had a little lamb” in 1877 (Rubery, 2016). Additionally, membership libraries have more freedom to be experimental in their collections and programming. They often lack, however, ample physical space and government funding, resources that would greatly enhance an audio literature collection.

Along with deep reading of academic literature and librarian trade publications, this dissertation has been energized through other forms of desk research like content analysis (the scouring of library websites and attendant data points) and bibliographic analysis (the scouring of bibliographies and reference lists). These types of analyses provided insight into the community of scholars and thinkers in the fields of sound studies and media studies.

**Value of this Research**

**This research is a marriage between the practical** (the realm of the librarian, the library, the user and the patron) **with the academic** (scholarly trends, information philosophy, information behaviour and sound studies). A few other researchers also bridge the practical-academic gap: notably Rubery out of London, England and colleagues Have and Pedersen out of Aarhus, Denmark.

**This dissertation advocates the use of audio literature as a means of leisure as well as of education.** Storytelling, fluency and listening are underestimated in the realms of education and, frankly, empathy-building. The spoken voice of audio literature plays a major part in “the para-social interaction” (Horton and Wohl, 1956) that was once reserved for television. In other words, the audiobook may act as a community elder with its storytelling and companionship: technology as companion and, sometimes, sage.
This research will also help illustrate new ways of thinking about the marketing and programming efforts of both the American public and membership library. Over the last two decades, the American library has been extremely bold and inventive in terms of design, collection, and programming but efforts for greater footfall could be even more dynamic (Kilduff, 2019). Leveraging the festive use of the podcast and audiobook may make libraries more attractive and help library managers make patrons out of non-patrons. Of course, many library managers would likely swoon at the chance to enhance their audio literature collections if institutional concerns like staff retraining and lack of space and funding were not such oppressive factors. Resistance to change within libraries is also an evergreen problem (Pagliero Popp, 2012).

Years of robust sales and loans of audiobooks prior to 2020 make a solid case that audiobook fandom will not wane anytime soon. If anything, the lockdowns surrounding COVID-19 may yet amplify demand for talking books. It is important, however, to view critically other avant-garde trends in entertainment and education that were supposed to be great disrupters but are still awaiting their crowns in media/education history. Virtual Reality (VR), for one, first emerged in the 1990s and was supposed to have many breakthrough moments but it still has only been marginally adopted (Jenkins, 2019). Fads in educational media too have yet to materialize. Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) were promised to be the big disrupter for indebted college students following the economic recession of 2008/2009 but the model has suffered from student attrition (Murray, 2019). The affordances of a new medium or format need to align with the circumstances of the user and the era. In the case of VR, users have reported struggling with a clunky headset and physical disorientation (Jenkins, 2019). The cost-free nature of MOOCs, ironically, may be a disincentive for students to complete their studies since there are no financial losses should students discontinue a course (Murray, 2019).
While audio-literary content can be acquired freely for users via the library, the retail arm of the industry remains viable. On the production end, practices have been transformative. Actors in New York, for instance, are finding considerable employment with audiobook narration alone (Kaufman, 2013). The New York Times found that “The field is so promising that drama schools, including prestigious institutions like Juilliard and Yale, have started offering audio narration workshops” (Kaufman, 2013).

New York is not the only winner. Established voices in Hollywood and London are being summoned to narrate their favorite books or to mimic the vocal likeness of one of the imagined characters. Examples include a gentle Andrew Scott narrating Joyce’s Dubliners or a wise Ian McKellan reading The Odyssey by Homer or a defiant Claire Danes reading The Handmaid’s Tale by Margaret Atwood (Rodarme, 2017).

By viewing their respective institutions through a festive lens, library managers can create programs and collections that are better able to reach a younger and more diverse demographic. Whereas the traditional view of information behaviour is that of an individual accessing a resource in order to reconcile a certain problem, other “parallel theories of joyful, playful knowledge seeking” abound (Peet, 2016, abstract). One information behaviour theory is the pro-social Information Grounds, which Karen Fisher helped champion. Information Grounds places learning at the heart of social interactions (Kilduff, 2019). Another model is Jenna Hartel’s Serious Leisure which places joy as experienced through hobbies at the nexus of information gathering. Hartel is a Canadian professor and information theorist who believes that the pleasant and the sublime should have a central place in library science (Kari and Hartel, 2007) (Peet, 2016). Both Fisher and Hartel have been figures of inspiration for this research.
Finally, the value of this research is to transform once and for all the inferior reputation that book lovers and the general public hold regarding the audiobook. By reviewing the audiobook’s rich history, lovers of literature will dispose of the stereotype of the audiobook as a format solely relegated to the sections of Self-Help and Business. The cutting-edge modality, after all, gave hope and comfort to countless in the blind and veteran community and launched a whole industry of narration and voice-over talent. The ear is just as much of a muscle as the eye. Listening, furthermore, can be a solemn experience.
Literature Review

A few texts were instrumental for this dissertation including Matthew Rubery’s *The Untold Story of the Talking Book*, Marshall McLuhan’s *The Medium is the Massage* and Walter Ong’s *Orality and Literacy [30th Anniversary Edition]*. The works of a dozen other writers and thinkers, mostly in Northern Europe and North America, also provided valuable insight, history and scholarship. The literature review divides the research into four separate camps:

1. The Toronto School Writings and Other High Theories
2. Audiobook-Specific Literature Both Academic and Popular
3. Academic Writings on the User and on Information Behaviour
4. Trade Publications and Current News

Two self-constructed parameters helped shape the literature collection:
- All materials needed to be published within the past twenty years (with a few exceptions) and
- All materials needed to be written in English or transcribable into English.

The starting point for the literature review was inputting keywords (*audiobook, auditory learner, audio literary*) in the EBSCO database of City, University of London’s Northampton Library. From there, after a few cornerstone texts were acquired, the dissertation followed the advice of Marcia Bates and the “berrypicking” information-gathering model that she devised. “Berrypicking” is a flexible, dynamic model that rests on the observations of the seeker rather than the affordances of the database (Bates, 1989). Bates stated that “berrypicking” is most appropriate when “the nature of the query” grows and evolves as new resources are gathered (Bates, 1989). For instance, this literature collection swerved from the self-constructed parameters because many of the great information philosophers
(like Socrates, McLuhan and Ong) preceded the twenty-year timeframe. Additionally, different resources beyond EBSCO were used to hone in on appropriate sources: bibliographies of cornerstone texts, for example, and academic notes taken in class during the postgraduate course. New leads were opened when a colleague or advisor mentioned a prominent author. Careful attention was paid to any author or figure who had been alluded to more than once. The Ex Libris journal database within City’s online library also yielded good results. Using different keywords like Sound and User Experience and Media led to more diverse findings.

**The Toronto School Writings and Other High Theories**

Marshall McLuhan and Father Walter Ong were the major thinkers who spearheaded the philosophies of media studies and oral culture, respectively. These 20th century scholars considered how various new forms of media (like radio and television) were supplanting old forms of storytelling (like the newspaper and paperback book). No other institution on the planet was as invested in studying the sundry new formats of the past century more closely than “The Toronto School” of which Ong and McLuhan belonged. Its long name was the Toronto School of Communication Theory at the University of Toronto. The school’s *belle époque* stretched from the 1930s through the 1970s, capturing the dynamic interplays of radio, film, and television and how they were shaping human perception and molding human society (The Toronto School Initiative, no date).

A Jesuit priest who had many academic interests and whose work was “deeply interdisciplinary”, Father Walter Ong explored what cultures had lost once orality was demoted and print became more widespread (The Toronto School Initiative, no date). His main thesis was disambiguating the mores between cultures of *Primary Orality* (pre-chirographic and pre-typographic) and the chirographic and typographic world of *Secondary Orality*, the contemporary culture which nearly all
of the modern world inhabits (Ong, 1982). The latter classification, *Secondary Orality*, is a system which begins to dominate towards the end of the 19th century, nearly half a millennium after Gutenberg (and, more importantly, Luther) had made document dissemination a widespread phenomenon.

The gap between the spoken and the written word has its provenance in the fractured history of Christianity. To hear Father Walter Ong explain it: the realm of the spoken word belongs to Catholics and the realm of SSR belongs to the Protestants (Ong, 1982). Of course this is a crude generalization but there are two major events that distill this difference in worship and practice. When the Second Vatican Council finalized its changes in December 1965, one of the largest disruptions was allowing the mass to be delivered in the local language. In doing so, the traditional Latin Mass was uprooted and nearly abolished (Lyman, 2015). Church service for Catholics became more democratic and comprehensible. Conservatives and nostalgic baby-boomers bemoaned the changes and felt that something magical had been lost (Lyman, 2015). There is currently an organized network of churches around the world that hold Catholic Mass in Latin.
One hallmark of identifying as a Protestant, of course, is to study and scrutinize the gospels privately or with fellow members of a bible study group. Martin Luther famously exploited Gutenberg’s 1440 invention of the printing press by copying and disseminating all of his (Luther’s) critiques of papal corruption at that time. To this day, Protestants and Protestant nations have higher literacy and education rates in countries where Catholicism is the official or de facto religion or denomination (Pillay, 2013).

*Primary Orality* is the paradigm of oral tradition cultures and usually applies to instances in history or prehistory. The Catholic Mass delivered in Latin, pre-Vatican II, is one sub-cultural example in the more recent past and included its
own set of peculiar choreographies. Ong, however, warned of the difficulty in cleanly defining Primary Orality because of the muddle of contemporary context. Describing the larger cultures of Primary Orality (in which reading and writing had been rare or nonexistent) would be akin to “rather like thinking of horses as automobiles without wheels” (Ong, 1982, page 12).

He stated that:

Indeed, language is so overwhelmingly oral that of all the many thousands of languages – possibly tens of thousands – spoken in the course of human history only around 106 have ever been committed to writing to a degree sufficient to have produced literature, and most have never been written at all...The basic orality of language is permanent. (Ong, 1982, page 7)

The audiobook of course would fall into the category of Secondary Orality (perhaps even a Secondary Orality exaggerated), as would television, radio and film or any media that follows a language's printed iteration. While the spoken word may seem ubiquitous in today’s world, it holds much less magic than it did in the world of our ancestors. Language in Primary Orality had an innate stickiness that was tied with a culture’s memory:

The fact that oral peoples commonly and in all likelihood universally consider words to have magical potency is clearly tied in, at least unconsciously, with their sense of the word as necessarily spoken, sounded, and hence power-driven. Deeply typographic folk forget to think of words as primarily oral, as events, and hence as necessarily powered: for them, words tend rather to be assimilated to things, ‘out there’ on a flat surface. Such ‘things’ are not so readily associated with
magic, for they are not actions, but are in a radical sense dead, though subject to dynamic resurrection. (Ong, 1982, pages 32-33)

Ong also posits that a speech is always hyper-localized in Primary Orality since the orator would be addressing whomever was within earshot (Ong, 1982). Because of technology’s abundance, anything uttered in today’s advanced Secondary Orality milieu is exponentially more promiscuous. There is no modern qualm about words reaching a global audience (in our capitalist system quite a few authors, narrators, and audiobook directors would like nothing better). But while Secondary Orality may be more worldly in its ambitions, it is a self-conscious mode, knowingly performing and interpreting material from a written text for the benefit of a highly literate audience.

Ong’s thesis advisor was Marshall McLuhan, likely the most colourful of the Toronto School personalities. McLuhan had a much more radical and experimental approach to new media. He preached that all mediums are extensions of man and that the medium itself is far more important than the content that the medium contains (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967). What hinders our development, McLuhan said (1967, page 63), is “an enormous backlog of outdated mental and psychological responses.” While oftentimes zangy and tangential, his tome, The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects, has incredible insights that takes the reader by surprise. In a nod to “Doubting Thomas" of the New Testament, who would only identify a resurrected Jesus once he saw and inspected the wounds, McLuhan (1967, page 117) stated that “We are so visually biased that we call our wisest men visionaries, or seers!” In the same passage he wrote that

Most people find it difficult to understand purely verbal concepts. They suspect the ear; they don’t trust it. In general we feel more secure when things are visible, when we can “see for ourselves.” We admonish
children, for instance, to “believe only half of what they see, and nothing of what they hear.” All kinds of “shorthand” systems of notation have been developed to help us see what we hear. (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967, page 117)

Yet, McLuhan seemed to celebrate the fact of the story before its confinement to the page and to SSR. His writings turn quite effervescent when he lauds the world of Homer’s oral tradition:

> These Bardic songs were rhythmically organized with great formal mastery into metrical patterns which insured that everyone was psychologically attuned to memorization and to easy recall. There was no ear illiteracy in pre-literate Greece. (McLuhan, , page 113)

McLuhan, like Ong, was another Catholic scholar at The Toronto School but was not so overt with his self-identification. McLuhan did see communication itself as a radical extension of Catholic imagination; *U.S. Catholic* even referred to him as both the unofficial patron saint of the internet and saint of the Catholic scholar (Feuerherd, 2017). McLuhan’s mystical approach to his studies “was heavily inspired by the Jesuit mystic, scientist, and theologian Teilhard de Chardin” (Feuerherd, 2017, 9th paragraph).

Chardin, a Jesuit who died in 1955, wrote about modern technology as “the nervous system for humanity.” Chardin was famous for his study of evolution, which he saw not as a threat to Christianity but as an unfolding of God’s creation. Modern communications, he wrote, was part of that evolutionary process. Well before television gained a foothold in modern life, Chardin wrote about the dawning of an age of
one civilization, a precursor to McLuhan’s global village. (Feuerherd, 2017, 10th paragraph)

Church leaders discouraged these trailblazing notions, fearing they would confuse the Sunday faithful (Feuerherd, 2017). His spiritual foundation aside, McLuhan could be festive to a fault, caught up in the era of 1960s abundance. At one point in his book he denigrates Thomas Edison for not foreseeing how the phonograph, the ancestor of the audiobook, would become a source of leisure and entertainment (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967). Edison instead was fixated on the clinical and business affordances of his new invention. These differing motivations speak to the men and their times. It is much easier for McLuhan to make that complaint in the 1960s when the economy was strong and the society experimental. Edison, meanwhile, was involved in the more advanced pursuits of the early-age Second Industrial Revolution of the late 1870s.
Inventor of the phonograph along with a number of other gadgets, Edison was obviously a key figure in the development of sound studies. As a branch of scholarship, sound studies can seem amorphous due to its sheer size and interdisciplinary nature. In the opening chapter in his book *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Production*, Jonathan Sterne asserts:

> Between about 1750 and 1925, sound itself became an object and a domain of thought and practice, where it had previously been conceptualized in terms of particular idealized instances like voice or music. (Sterne, 2003, page 2)

Sterne then continued on to label this period an “Ensoniment”, which is the sound equivalent to the Enlightenment. A professor at McGill University, Sterne, in his
writings, advocates the analysis of electronic sound formats and inventions as a way to make the sound studies field more comprehensible and concrete.

The thrust of his approach is to study the inventions like the telephone or phonograph in depth and to determine how these technologies “are associated with habits, sometimes crystallizing them and sometimes enabling them. They embody in physical form particular dispositions and tendencies” (Sterne, 2003, page 8). Like other sound studies scholars, he challenges the primacy and privilege of visual culture and its ties to modernity (Sterne, 2003).

It is certainly true that new forms of media have ushered in long-term values shifts in society once they are employed en masse. The rise of blogs in the early 2000s, for example, championed the values of expressiveness, individual opinion and hyper-localized reporting. Before that, the invention of the telephone evoked a type of magic trick which obliterated long distances. Yale University Professor of Media History, John Durham Peters, asserted spookily that the audiobook, in its first iteration as the phonograph playing wax cylinders, had the value of bringing back the dead and freezing their voices in perpetuity (Durham Peters, 1999).

Media of transmission allow crosscuts through space, but recording media allow jump cuts through time. The sentence of death for sound, image, and experience had been commuted. Speech and action could live beyond their human origins. In short, recording media made the afterlife of the dead possible in a new way. As Scientific American put it of the phonograph in 1877: “Speech has become, as it were, immortal.” That “as it were” is the dwelling place of the ghosts. (Durham Peters, 1999, page 144)
The above quote refers to Spiritualism, an occult form of Christianity that emerged in the 19th century, whose practitioners would hold seances and try to connect with loved ones departed. New forms of media like the photograph and the phonograph helped keep the deceased alive. Again Durham Peters (1999, page 142): “In sum, the new media of the nineteenth century gave new life to the older dream of angelic contact by claiming to burst the bonds of distance and death.”

Audiobook Specific Literature Both Academic and Popular

There are a number of scholars who choose to focus on the less eerie affordances of the audiobook. And while the scope of this dissertation is confined to the audiobook’s performance within the American library and market, a large proportion of high-profile sound studies researchers are based overseas: the UK, Sweden, and particularly, Denmark.

Two Danish academics from the University of Aarhus, Iben Have and Birgette Stougaard Pedersen, approach the digital book as an academic artifact as well as a user-friendly format. The two colleagues often chart the audiobook’s history while acknowledging it as a format/item that is “in-between”, meaning:

as a remediation of literature, that is, as another literary format, and...as an auditory mediated experience in everyday life comparable to the experience of music, radio, audio guides, or even audio therapy – a popular phenomenon that is part of digital, mobile audio culture in a mixed-media environment offering intimacy and sociability. (Have and Pedersen, 2016, page 5)

In their 2016 essay collection, Digital Audiobooks: New Media, Users, and Experiences, Have and Pedersen attribute “new portable delivery technologies and
distribution channels” as the reasons for audio literature’s proliferation (Have and Pedersen, 2016, page 4). The market is now inundated with MP3 downloads, streaming services and private audiobook vendors. Cataloguers and library managers have benefited greatly from the infinite storage capacity of cloud computing and the savvy of smartphone applications. One example is Libby, Overdrive’s library-user application, which grew quickly after it was rolled out in 2017. Since the start of local and national lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Libby has had another exponential growth spurt (Bullough, 2020). Libby’s interface gives equal treatment to both a-books and e-books; the only difference is the earphone icon to disambiguate them. This coupling of a-books and e-books dovetails with research from the 1990s showing that many of the same people who engage in SSR also read/listen to audiobooks (Kozloff, 1995).

The parameters of sound studies can only be measured as new gadgets are introduced into the marketplace and become part of the human habitual experience (Sterne, 2003). For every new technology and format, there is a shift in values when societies must ask themselves, according to Sterne (2003, page 337), “Why these technologies, now? What social forms, what social relations, do they encapsulate?”

In the 1930s, the talking book would have its popular debut as a heavy vinyl record on phonograph. Matthew Rubery makes this point in his seminal text, The Untold Story of the Talking Book, the only known history and survey of the audiobook in the UK and US. Like Have and Pedersen, Rubery viewed the audiobook as an “in-between” format and celebrated its appeal as such (Rubery, 2016).

Edison, aforementioned, imagined his new contraption as a way to capture speech; recording music was not a priority (Have and Pedersen, 2012). One obvious beneficiary of the phonograph was the blind community. The talking book allowed blind readers to enjoy stories independently, without the aid of a hired or volunteer
reciter. Calls were early and fierce from the blind community that the same type of books, namely popular and entertaining fiction, be available to blind readers as to the general public (Rubery, 2016). Thus while the blind community had a clinical appointment based on their inability to read books as the seeing public could, they soon clamored for more festive options once talking books became a reality.

Sympathy also arose for the small number of World War I veterans who had been blinded in battle:

There were estimated to be between 300 and 400 veterans who lost their sight during the First World War (or between 700 and 800 if less severe eye injuries are included) out of a total of 120,000 blind people in America. Yes the patriotic sentiment aroused by these figures, who had sacrificed their bodies defending the country, was crucial to obtaining federal support. (Rubery, page 63, 2016)

Strong personalities were also instrumental in advocacy for the talking book. Helen Keller and Robert Irwin were the force and liaison, respectively, behind securing federal funding for recording books in the early days of the 1930s. Keller, of course, was the indefatigable spokeswoman for the disabled community. Irwin was the executive director of The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), a non-profit advocacy organization (Rubery, 2016).

The Library of Congress (LOC) began recording books in part due to Keller and Irwin’s activism. By the 1990s, America’s federal library system boasted a catalogue of 40,000 audiobook cassette tapes; a separate private charity, Recording for the Blind, had amassed its own selection of 80,000 (Kozloff, 1995). From the start, LOC faced a limited budget for books to be recorded and held a paternalistic stance over which books blind individuals should read. Anything that had violent language or
smutty material took on a new alarm; hearing this type of literature seemed much more offensive than allowing people to consume it privately in SSR. Like in the worldview of Socrates, these naysayers made a point about the inexpert promiscuity of certain communication modes. Essentially, though, blind readers were held to a higher moral standard.

Factions within the blind community itself were quite divided on the matter of talking books. Braille readers were a small but privileged set who believed that talking books produced a debasing of literature. The fact remained however that a tiny but high-profile group of Americans had become blind during battle and who longed to read (Rubery, 2016). It was a very exciting time for the disability community even with the split in opinion. Rubery (2016, page 61) stated that “The first congressional hearing on books for blind adults began on March 27, 1930” and in October 1934, the LOC sent the first talking books to readers after funding was secured for talking books as part of the Pratt-Smoot Act. It was not a medium to benefit just the blind:

The audiobook has historically been associated with children or practices concerning either dyslexia or visual handicaps. Thus, the audiobook has been considered compensatory; it has been treated in terms of its ability to overcome various kinds of insufficiencies or difficulties. (Pedersen and Have, 2012, page 80)

So while the talking book had a magnanimous and patriotic start, the medium faced a lack of respect. Part of the disdain stems from the tyranny of the visual and the supremacy of textual, reading comprehension (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967). Other complaints follow:
To many, listening to audio books is a debased or lazy way to read, with connotations of illiteracy (only pre-literature children listen to stories); passivity (real reading entails self-construction of the narrative voice); abandonment of control (real reading involves pausing, skimming and savouring); and lack of commitment (real readers sacrifice other activities for their books). (Kozloff, 1995, page 83)

Fascination with the recorded, spoken word, however, emerged in highly-educated and underground circles. A generation or two later following the AFB’s earnest push to cooperate with the Library of Congress, the audiobook had its first festive wave. The Beat poets and writers of the 1950s would bring outrageous oral performance of literature to its coffeehouse heights, comparing the art of the spoken word to jazz performances. The Beats’ tradition of a playfulness with words, using everything from experimental rhyme schemes to random mantras and onomatopoeia, begged to be performed and recorded. So while government do-gooders and social justice advocates gave credence to the clinical benefits of the audiobook, it has been the private sector and the avant garde who had imbued the medium with a festive aura.

Listener taste, in the 1950s, was becoming more refined. One example was the pioneering company, Caedmon Records, founded by Barbara Holdridge and Marianne Mantell, two students who studied Greek at Hunter College in Manhattan (Kozloff, 1995) (NPR, 2002). The two specialized in recording classic and modern literature. The women of Caedmon Records pulled off one of the largest feats in audiobook history when Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas, almost by accident, recorded his famous “A Child’s Christmas in Wales,” for the label, giving Thomas (and Caedmon) overnight prestige (Rubery, 2016). It was also a seminal and festive moment for the format itself.
In 2002 a reporter from *NPR* had interviewed Barbara Holdridge:

This year is the 50th anniversary of Caedmon Records, the company Holdridge and Roney formed to record the spoken word performances of Thomas, T.S. Eliot, William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and other famous writers. The idea was a catalyst for today’s $2 billion-dollar audiobook industry. (NPR, 2002)

By the 70s and 80s, the audiobook found new audiences and new delivery methods. No long was the talking book just a high-brow literary event to be enjoyed in the parlor over cocktails. Increasingly, audiobooks were played as a distraction from the tedious work commute by car. Two large companies, “Books on Tape” and “Recorded Books”, both founded in the 1970s, marketed their items as a way to make the
morning and evening car commute a productive time (Rubery, 2016). The fact that carmakers were installing cassette players as part of the car’s dashboard hardware was a boon to business. Commuters no longer had to suffer traffic jams in silence; the commute became tolerable, even enjoyable.

With the curve in consumption, the talking book demographic now skewed more male, suburban and upper-middle class. Not only was the talking book now a player in “para-social interaction” (Wohl and Horton, 1956), a book on tape acted like a calming agent for road rage (and a clear, clinical success story). This iteration of the audiobook also hearkens back to McLuhan’s philosophy of the medium itself as a form of self-help.

**Academic Writings on the User and on Information Behaviour**

Treating the artist/writer/narrator as a close companion is central to the allure of audio literature. Researchers first posited this idea of “para-social interaction” when television started growing in popularity.

One of the striking characteristics of the new mass media - radio, television, and the movies - is that they give the illusion of face-to-face relationship with the performer. The conditions of response to the performer are analogous to those in a primary group. The most remote and illustrious men are met as if they were in the circle of one's peers; the same is true of a character in a story who comes to life in these media in an especially vivid and arresting way. We propose to call this seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer a *para-social relationship*. (Wohl and Horton, 1956, page 215)
Usually applied to television personae, the makings of a para-social relationship can also extend to audiobook narrators as the listener builds up fondness and admiration for the narrator and the narrator’s delivery. “When it comes to preferences about narrators, six in 10 audiobook listeners said they always or sometimes like to listen to a specific narrator” (BookNet Canada, 2020, page 25). The narrators capitalize on this by taking on a vocal persona that is unique to them: be it the classy, breathy tones of a narrator like Perdita Weeks of Madeline Miller’s novel *Circe* or the colorful versatility of a narrator like Eduordo Ballerini of Isabel Allende’s *A Long Petal of the Sea*. One researcher devoted her paper to audiobook siren, Julie Stevenson, a popular choice for the works of Virginia Woolf. Björkén-Nyberg (2016, page 76) writes “For me, her musical enunciation of the text works as a mood regulator and an anti-stressor.”

The audiobook narration phenomena has sparked a new industry of voice-over professionals, many of whom are actors in New York City finding commercial success by non-traditional methods (Kaufman, 2013). Careers have been launched with this festive direction in publishing, most notably Jim Dale and Stephen Fry, competing narrators of *Harry Potter* audiobook fame. Narrators even have their own awards ceremony called the *Audies*, the audiobook answer to the *Oscars* (Alter, 2013). The *Audies*, founded in 1996, has a fluid assortment of categories, some now defunct and some freshly created. Prominent Hollywood stars are finding opportunity also, like Colin Firth reading the works of Graham Greene or Nicole Kidman delivering a coy version of Woolf’s *To The Lighthouse* (Alter, 2013). There is speculation as to whether COVID-19 will encourage a further industry flowering of audiobook narration since it is socially-distant and far safer than stage work (no crowded audience required).

The collaborative effort to make an audiobook is a microcosm of the collaborative effort to build and staff a library. Many library managers had been doing much to
redesign their institutions’ collections and programs with a prosocial human touch (Khan, 2018) (Kilduff, 2019). The information behaviourist, Karen Fisher, a professor at the University of Washington, champions an information behaviour philosophy called “Information Grounds,” which emphasizes individual and group learning through group activity. The idea is that information-sharing increases exponentially as individuals congregate socially in a place like the public library. There are several components to her information behaviour theory. Information sharing is propelled by the diversity of various actors along with the physical design and construction of the library itself (Kilduff, 2019). But Information Grounds can also be discerned at the level of the item. While a paperback novel, for instance, incorporates the collaborative ideas of the author, the editor and the publisher, an audiobook contains the added inputs of a narrator and sound engineer. Information Grounds finds its success in the idea of the group project where everyone can contribute.

In library and information science, there have been a number of “turns” since the 1980s as laid out by University of Toronto professor, Jenna Hartel. A few of these turns include the “Affective Turn,” the “Cognitive Turn” and the “Embodied Turn” (Hartel, 2019). Turns in library science are research trends and best practices of a given era. This dissertation asserts that there is a supratemporal phenomenon overlooked in the field: that of directions. These directions stem from either a mindset of abundance (as with a festive direction) or stem from a place of lack (as with a clinical direction).

These ideas and categories can of course interact with the turns in Hartel’s paradigm. Consider the festive direction and its place within the purview/description of a “Socio-Cognitive Turn,” a philosophy that grew in prominence in the 1990s. The Socio-Cognitive Turn is one that “shifts attention from individual and internal knowledge structures to the outward and social
construction of knowledge within communities” (Hartel, 2019). A festive direction would then align with Hjorland’s Socio-Cognitive Turn whose phenomena is marked with “information embedded in social, organizational and professional contexts” (Hartel, 2019, video, 10:50). Karen Fisher’s Information Grounds would also fall within this pro-social information behaviour paradigm that places great emphasis on the community. These turns and behaviours, this dissertation argues, would be pro-social and outward-seeking, part of a festive direction.

The clinical direction in library science has more in common with a Cognitive Turn. This turn was spearheaded by Brenda Dervin in the 1980s (Hartel, 2019). A Cognitive Turn is centered on user need and it is here where library science has a negative bias. It entails that the information practices currently in place offered by the system are not enough to meet a user’s needs or a community’s needs (Hartel, 2019). A clinical direction assumes there is a disconnect or deficiency somewhere that needs to be addressed.

It is important to note that items having a clinical direction are not of the hopeless variety. They are just created to reconcile some identifiable need. Exam preparation materials, manuals, legal documents, birth and death certificates, dictionaries, atlases: these are library items that fit this category. Processes in library management can be of a clinical direction as well. Things like Feng-Shui, proper lighting and ventilation, wheelchair access in the library, adherence to opening hours: these are LIS protocols and considerations of a clinical direction.
The vast majority of fiction would be of a festive direction. A significant portion of nonfiction or at least nonfiction consumed in leisure, like biographies and alternative histories, would also be considered festive. Some types of literature, however, like early childhood education materials for kids, would have elements of both directions since the purpose is to teach basic literacy as well as to provide joy.

**Trade Publications and Current News**

Many librarians have written at length about their tactics in incorporating the audiobook into their collections. In fact there have been several reports in the U.S. and Canada tracking the popularity of audiobook sales and loans. Each year, interest in audio literature grows as formats continue to shrink and as storage continues to expand. Statistics of robust growth in audiobook purchases make the case that this is a format unlikely to falter any time soon (Anderson, 2017) (Catalano, 2018) (Kozlowski, 2019). Strong demand for audiobooks is also reflected at the local library too. *Library Journal* had queried 395 American libraries and

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<th>Directions</th>
<th>Festive Direction</th>
<th>Examples of Intersections</th>
<th>Clinical Direction</th>
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<td>Attributes/Key Ideas</td>
<td>social, leisurely, abundant</td>
<td>ideas both educational and entertaining or compensatory and enjoyable</td>
<td>serious, compensatory, utilitarian, lacking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples in LIS collections</td>
<td>most fiction, beach reading, manga, coffee table books, biographies, alternative histories</td>
<td>social narratives, citizen journalism, early childhood reading material</td>
<td>most types of nonfiction: textbooks, reference books, atlases, birth/death records</td>
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found that 86% of libraries reported an increase in their digital audiobook circulation from 2015 into 2016 (Library Journal, 2016).

Their February 2016 survey also asked about the platforms for digital audiobooks. The main one, not surprisingly, was Overdrive, serving 92% of the surveyed libraries (Library Journal, 2016). In English-speaking Canada, individual listeners of audiobooks were surveyed separately and a few clear preferences emerged. A non-profit organization, named BookNet Canada surveyed 500 audiobook fans and found that “92% of respondents listen digitally while 41% listen to a physical format” (BookNet Canada, 2020, page 3). Of particular interest is the tight correlation between podcast listeners and audiobook listeners. “We asked audiobook listeners if they listen to podcasts and a staggering 88% said they do” (BookNet Canada, 2020, page 9).

One easy affordance of the audiobook is that a listener may multitask while enjoying the story. The Canadian data did suggest that listening only was the preferred way to approach audiobooks (topping out at 38%) but other activities associated with audiobook reading prove popular, like commuting and doing housework (BookNet Canada, 2020). More people, for instance, are incorporating audiobook listening as an accompaniment to walks in their neighborhood (BookNet Canada, 2020). It is not hard to imagine that this co-listening/co-exercising mode has become routine during the pandemic of 2020.

While some genres afford a better listening experience over others, a listeners’ advisory in American libraries is still recommended and widely practiced. Listener tastes have grown more sophisticated since the boom of 1980s self-help and business “books on tape” phenomena.
The 2018 APA survey found the top genres for audiobook purchases are mysteries, thrillers and suspense, science fiction, and romance. Other top genres include humor, history, biography and memoir, classics, and fantasy. (Young, 2019, page 211)

The Canadian survey, additionally, had mystery/thriller emerging as audiobook fan favorite genre (BookNet Canada, 2020, page 12). The genre’s appeal has a precedent. On American radio in the 1940s, the wildly popular show, *Suspense* ran one thousand episodes before finally signing off in 1962 (Verma, 2012). The radio show included guest spots by such luminaries as Gregory Peck, James Stewart and Lucille Ball. It also delivered a gothic aesthetic and a bevy of housewife anxieties into the cultural mainstream (Verma, 2012).

**Further Discussion: Why the Festive Direction in Library Science?**

The strong currents of a festive direction in LIS have been in motion since the mid-1990s. The one “black swan” event of this progression is, of course, the pandemic and its global attendant lockdowns that began in March of 2020. This global emergency has the potential to catapult library science back into clinical mode, a methodology of responding to problems and deficiencies rather than working in an atmosphere of abundance. In the UK where this dissertation was penned, local libraries during 2020 adhered to strict rules around guest capacity, mask-wearing and hours of operation. Social events at libraries have largely been suspended or have moved on-line.

All libraries in the era of COVID-19 are facing difficult headwinds including possible closures, curtailing of hours, budget cuts, staff retraining, terminations and additional building safety inspections—true clinical responses in LIS. A clinical direction does not always dovetail with an economic recession or depression but the
direction is invoked (often unconsciously) when responding to a deficiency. Many of the traditional information behaviors in LIS work from this negative bias.

As gathered in the forthcoming survey, American libraries still have ambitious, festive plans even though present conditions are less than appealing. One reason why library science will continue in a festive direction is the ever-dissolving boundary between work and play and between education and leisure. These areas are where the audiobook excels in a festive direction.

Early recordings of books hemmed closely to the original text, with narrators tediously reading out every bit of front matter (Rubery, 2016). In a clinical way, the blind community wanted equal access to the text, including all of its mundane details. The LOC had resolutely stuck to its “straight reading” policy for decades, making sure that the totality of each book (even the front matter and bibliographic minutia) was plainly conveyed in recorded fashion. This was driven in part by a raucous segment of the blind community who eschewed embellishment since they considered themselves serious “readers” of talking books.

Over time, the sector grew and took more liberties. One explosive and festive watermark was the founding of Audible in 1995; this company saw a market opportunity to remake audiobook recordings and not shy away from the dramatic flourish (Rubery, 2016). Like Caedmon Records, who showed little remorse about creating abridged versions of historic literature, Audible and its rival, Audio Highway, sought to elevate recorded literature to an art form. Audible, of course, was purchased by Amazon in March 2008. The audio literature behemoth produces 10,000 titles per year and is assumed to be New York City’s largest employer of actors (Kaufman, 2013).
Another company, the famous Walt Disney Studios, capitalized on audio literature early on in a festive way. Instead of delivering cultivated literature for adults, Disney would release read-along/listen-along texts for kids, audio-literary versions of their animated films (Kozloff, 1995). The audio literature sector adhered less to the exact replications of books as new audiences were discovered.

Part of the festive direction in library science is not only welcoming new media but reinterpreting established media in a novel way. Scholars began to argue for the unique listening experience of the audiobook, especially in Europe:

Rather than comparing audiobooks with printed books, we wish to advance a position that regards audiobook reading as a special instance of mobile listening (comparable to music, radio, audio guides, or audio therapy) — as a popular phenomenon that is part of the digital, mobile audio culture in a mixed-media environment. (Have and Pedersen, 2013, page 132)

In an article in 2014, The New York Times had reported on one of the first ever made-for-audio audiobooks, a violent thriller named “The Starling Project” by American writer Jeffrey Deaver. The Times journalist wrote:

Some see the current audio renaissance as a modern version of the Golden Age of radio drama — a rare instance when technology is driving the evolution of an art form, rather than quashing it. Along with the surge in audiobooks, podcasts have become a surprising new form of popular entertainment, with some programs drawing audiences that rival those of cable shows. One standout example, “Serial,” a true-crime saga that re-examines the 1999 murder of a teenage girl in Maryland, unfolds in weekly episodes and has been
streamed or downloaded more than five million times since its introduction in October. (Alter, 2014, 10th paragraph)

The idea of the audiobook and podcast as festive tools in LIS does not confine them to the realm of recreation. Audio literature is also incredibly useful for young people in an academic setting and as an educational resource for individuals of any age. Part of the tyranny of the visual is this assumption that people learn best visually. A whole subset of young people, this dissertation argues, are auditory learners. This is one of the superb affordances of the audiobook and podcast.

Audiobooks can model reading, teach critical listening, build on prior knowledge, improve vocabulary, encourage oral language usage, and increase comprehension. Essentially, reading audiobooks supports the development of all four language systems; phonological, semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic. (Wolfson, 2008, page 106)

Audiobook listening presents a number of learning opportunities. According to researcher Frank Serafini:

audiobook listening can introduce readers to new literature and different genres, provide exposure to materials beyond their independent reading abilities, develop vocabulary, provide models of fluent reading, and promote struggling readers’ literacy development (if they listen while reading). (Moore and Cahill, 2016, page 4)

Audiobooks, too, offer listeners a unique form of mobility. Unlike print materials that require use of both the hands and the eyes, audiobooks require only the ears, and thus free the reader to move and multitask (Have and Pedersen, 2012). Furthermore, audiobooks add an aural experience, potentially altering the mood

The next chapter will look at how various American libraries consider the audiobook as a desired form of literature.
Survey

Survey via questionnaire was the second branch of research for this dissertation. Emailed with a link, the Qualtrics questionnaire gathered quantitative and qualitative data over the course of forty items. The average participation time ran approximately six minutes. The respondents self-identified as the appropriate authorities at each library/institution with titles like Head Librarian, Executive Director, Archivist and Special Collections Librarian, etc. Further email correspondence took place with a small handful of working librarians.

An effort was made to survey all sixteen full members of the Membership Libraries Group (MLG) in the United States. 68% or eleven of these membership libraries responded and completed the task. Membership in the MLG is contingent on specific criteria. According to one key stakeholder via email:

The MLG is an association, formed in 1991, that brought together the directors of the remaining membership libraries in the country. The exact number of institutions is somewhat different, depending upon how you define us. We consider the core MLG to be the remaining membership libraries that still have circulating collections and which are independently funded. (Waters, 2020)

The focus on the membership library was not haphazard. This type of institution is similar to the audiobook in the sense that both phenomena embody the state of in-betweenness, a recurring theme in this dissertation. Many membership libraries are housed in gorgeous, classical buildings and concentrated on America’s east coast. A large number were founded in the 18th and 19th centuries, preceding the establishment of their public library counterparts. Membership libraries incorporate that grey space between tourist hotspot and research institution.
An additional eight large public library systems were solicited, all of which are municipal neighbors to a few of the chosen membership libraries. Five out of eight participated in full, a 62.5% success rate. By the close of the survey, two out of three total libraries had completed the survey (16 out of 24), a respectable response rate given the uncertain atmosphere regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and attendant lockdowns.

**Data Collection Techniques**

In line with City, University of London policies on data collection techniques, Qualtrics was the service employed for the questionnaire. To make participation more robust, a total of four gift certificates of $25 each were promoted as part of a lottery. The assurance of anonymity was clearly advertised in the introduction letter and at the top of the survey. The goal was to ask a series of easy quantitative questions via checkbox selections (per the advice of Qualtrics) as a way to introduce the subject material to the participant. The latter half of the survey allowed for more qualitative answers regarding the festive feel of audiobook practices along with programs and events surrounding the spoken word. The survey design avoided leading questions. Completion rates were 100%. Answers were arranged neatly into graphs per the Qualtrics software.

The survey was disseminated on 29th September and a deadline for data collection was set for 14th October. From the twenty-four libraries solicited, fourteen had filled out the survey within the first twenty-four hours. Another reminder for completion was sent out on 7th October, one week before the survey closed.
Acknowledged Limitations

Global matters in 2020 certainly darkened the research environment (the trajectory of COVID-19 seemed to parallel the writing of this dissertation). On the other hand, it has been an opportune time, because of the extraordinary circumstances, to study behaviour modifications. Most in-person services, however, have been curtailed at these libraries, making observation an impossible research tactic. One such regret therefore, as a researcher, was not being able to physically view older forms of audiobooks on the shelves. Being “in-house” would have helped to view the audiobooks’ titles, genres and their physical conditions. The libraries themselves, of course, faced existential anxiety. In fact, many libraries had to shut their doors for several weeks, if not months, and at least one admitted to staff terminations (which may have affected survey participation rates).

There was an expectation at the dissertation proposal period, towards the beginning of this research, that public libraries would have a more comprehensive virtual audiobook collection than would membership libraries. The findings did reveal that to be the case. These public libraries, especially being located in major cities, are privileged in certain ways with more secure funding, greater space and additional staff. This is not an indictment of one model over the other. Both types of institutions, public and membership, have similar missions yet they each face different circumstances. The membership libraries’ classical and traditional taste and approach is congruent with a 2019 report of the MLG (Membership Library Group) annual meeting. At a follow-up foray in London, MLG librarians broke into small discussion groups and then reunited to share the most important roles and values of their institutions. The verdict found that the mission of each membership library had remarkable similarities from one institution to another.
Carolyn Waters of the *New York Society Library* described the discussion:

Words like “quiet,” “refuge,” and “haven” came up in all groups, and spoke to our belief that we would remain places where people could engage in deep thinking, concentration, work, and research. We see ourselves as gathering places for writers and readers and students/researchers. But we acknowledged that we could not be all things to all people, and that our strategy should focus on knowing who we are. While we all acknowledged that e-books and digital resources would play an even larger part in our purchases and programming in the future, we all focused on the importance of our physical book collections. We began our institutional lives with a book collection, which have grown in importance. We have thrived and prospered from our founding to today by sticking to our core as a lending library, and adapting for the times, or as financial needs dictate. (Waters, 2019)

**Findings and Results**

The methodology was launched to “Query two dozen American membership and public libraries on their current collections, current situations, future plans and audio literature collections along with their more festive attractions” as planned in the research objectives.

A few findings are noteworthy and deserve further scrutiny. The first was the resilience of these institutions during an unsettling time. COVID-19 may have disrupted services and programming but there were zero reports of services or collections having been fully eliminated. A large majority of libraries (12 out of 16) reported that their in-house social events had simply moved
on-line. The looming threat of institutional failure, more than six months into the pandemic, has been dismissed.

Table 3. Qualtrics survey question 43: How has COVID-19 affected the social events at your library?

Morale, surprisingly, has not been dampened in any measurable way with the restrictions of COVID-19. Eleven out of sixteen of the libraries surveyed reported morale as being on the positive end of the scale (slightly, moderately or extremely positive) during the autumn season of 2020. Just two libraries reported the current morale as neutral and three reported a current morale as negative. While self-described reports of morale with an American respondership may always lean positive due to a cultural bias, this batch of responses reiterated an earlier response which found that the COVID-19 economy has not been so dire as to indicate closures or mass eliminations of positions.
Table 4. Qualtrics survey question 49: Which selection below best describes the morale at your institution in Autumn 2020?

Although questions were phrased to be as non-leading as possible, it was still heartening to see higher-than-expected reports of morale at these institutions. This reflects how Kari and Hartel (2007, page 113) described librarians as the guardians of “the highest things ... that are both pleasurable and profound” instead of their traditional roles as stewards of problems that need to be addressed. “The trigger for informational activities” need not rest on a negative bias (Kari and Hartel, 2007, page 1132).

In terms of demographics, the age range of the typical library patron, not surprisingly, skews a bit older. A full 50% of libraries reported the average patron age to fall between 51 and 70 years of age. Research shows that retirement is one phase of life when library patronage is strong (Costello and Keyser, 2016). Free time, leisure and curiosity are appealing prospects for this cohort. “Many seniors note that they saw retirement as an opportunity to learn and experience
things” that were absent from their day jobs (Costello and Keyser, 2016, latter half of paper).

Table 5. Qualtrics survey question 8: What is the average age bracket of the typical adult (18 years-old or older) visitor/patron/guest?

Older adults and seniors, not being digital natives, may have a bit more reticence, however, in the technological realm. The ease of usability should be a priority in regards to website navigation and virtual audiobook collections. As Pagliero Popp puts simply (2012, page 85): “Users do not like library catalogs (and databases) that are hard to use.”

The responses find that younger adults seem to be missing from the library. Research shows that middle schoolers and grade schoolers do tend to show the highest levels of engagement over their older counterparts (Costello and Keyser, 2016). [Note that the survey question did not inquire about individuals who were younger than 18.] One caveat is that the elder, younger people who would tend to use a library service likely show patronage at their high school, university or
graduate school libraries where they have special access and a familiarity with resource delivery.

Compact Discs are still a very popular way to comprise an audiobook collection; 75% of libraries reported this. This high figure dwarfs a national survey of libraries from 2016 which found that 56% of audiobook titles were in CD format (Library Journal, 2016).

For virtual delivery service, one provider, Overdrive, was reported as the most prevalent choice. This also is the case in a 2016 national survey of American libraries which found that 92% of libraries use Overdrive (Library Journal, 2016). Overdrive has been given a boost with its friendly, e-book and a-book reader app, Libby. During one week in March with the first round of lockdowns, a quarter of a million Americans had downloaded the Libby app (Feldman, 2020).
Q20 - Which service does your library use for your virtual audio-literature collections? Check all that apply.

![Bar chart showing the services used for virtual audio-literature collections.]

Table 7. Qualtrics survey question 20: Which service does your library use for your virtual audio-literature collections?
One traditional accessory did not fare so well in this survey. **Headphones are an inexpensive bridge technology that do not take up a lot of file cabinet space but they are underutilized by the libraries queried.** Thirteen out of sixteen libraries do not keep any pairs of headphones available for in-house lending.
Geographically, the majority of the libraries surveyed are found within one region. A full 10 out of sixteen libraries reported their location as being in the northeast. The bulk of membership libraries are in venerable buildings in the oldest cities in the country, having been founded in the late 18th/early 19th centuries when such cities were at their wealthiest. New England and the northeastern United States is known for its ivy league schools and photogenic academic libraries. Treating libraries as tourist attractions is not a new phenomenon; there’s even a social media aesthetic called *Dark Academia* that falls within this category.
Table 9. Qualtrics survey question 4: In what region of the U.S. is your library located?

History has its advantages:

... despite the majority of the MLG libraries no longer being in their original buildings, 77% do still have premises that are registered as being of historic significance ... these buildings continue to be described as an integral part of their cultural offer. (Loach, Rowley and Griffiths, 2020, page 1)
Figure 5. Providence Athenaeum: Building View. Courtesy of the Providence Athenaeum.

Figure 6. Providence Athenaeum: Entrance View. Courtesy of the Providence Athenaeum.
More than a few notable public libraries across the globe have also garnered international attention for their dynamic designs (Kilduff, 2019) (Krueger, 2019). The American membership library, in particular, is known for its architectural diversity. Styles run from a 1921 Spanish Renaissance in San Diego’s Athenaeum Music and Arts Library (updated with frequent renovations over the century) to the 1845 Italianate Revival style at the Athenaeum of Philadelphia. The San Francisco Mechanics’ Institute sits in “its 1909 building, which was built in the beaux-arts architectural style” and designed by Albert Pissis, one of the city’s best architects at the time (Loach, Rowley and Griffiths, 2020, page 8). Architectural marvel is considered part of the festive direction in LIS.

Figure 7. Members’ Reading Room, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
Photo Credit: Tom Crane, Courtesy of The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
7 out of sixteen libraries have realistic plans to establish or continue a promotional podcast for their institution. Since 4 of the sixteen had already established a podcast or vlog, it can be deduced that an additional 3 libraries are going to start a podcast in the near future. This reiterates the finding that a podcast (or vlog) can serve as a gateway for the audiobook and for a virtual audiobook collection (Anderson, 2017). It is important to reiterate that 88% of audiobook listeners also listen to podcasts with 56% of audiobook listeners engaging with their favorite podcasts one or more times per week (BookNet Canada, 2020).

Table 10. Qualtrics survey question 31: Does your library have a vlog or podcast?
Table 11. Qualtrics survey question 40: Which plans/ideas below are realistic in the near future (either as new or continuing) of your library?

There was no evidence given, neither through questioning nor feedback, that any of the libraries surveyed had terminated a virtual audiobook collection service. 9 out of 10 libraries, in fact, had reported satisfaction with their general audiobook collection (which would include physical and/or virtual).

As for galas and fundraisers, nearly 50% of libraries use their own buildings as venues. This is a superb way for a library to leverage its historical space. Again this speaks to the cultural import of these institutions as destinations (Loach, Rowley and Griffiths, 2020). Many websites of the membership libraries advertise tours of the library buildings and this practice is increasing at the international level as well (Krueger, 2019).
Table 12. Qualtrics survey question 35: In 2019, did your library host or hold galas or fundraisers?

There is no shortage of creative ideas regarding events, fundraisers and programming at the libraries surveyed. Below are some of the more exciting entries:

Our annual gala is called, "An Evening at the Library". Last year we hosted young adult author Kekla Magoon. Evening at the Library is a catered event with live music and a silent auction. We have a beautiful 125 year-old granite building and it is wonderful to see it full of light, music and people during this annual celebration.

Our annual fundraiser gala normally correlates to an exhibition of our special collections. In 2019, we had an exhibition on Edgar Allan
Poe(Ravenous: The Enduring Legacy of Poe) and we loaned materials from an important collector in the U.S. (You can find more information here: https://providenceathenaeum.org/visit/exhibits/past-exhibits-2019/) The exhibit included an opening gala in the historic 1838 library building where Poe courted local poet, Sarah Helen Whitman. Guests were encouraged to dress in festive gothic attire, we had a special theatrical performance of The Raven, live music, thematic cocktails, and a special photo booth. It was a very successful event.

We have an annual fundraiser every December which is a gala dinner and awards ceremony. We honor an author whose novel has been adapted to film or television, we honor a publishing professional and we award our First Novel Prize to the year's best debut novel at this ceremony. It is usually a very large, well attended event.

The library hosts a gala each year with a different theme. 2019 was held at an oriental rug store and had a Middle Eastern theme with Turkish food, belly dancers, etc.

We host a "Novel Evening at the Beach" as our annual fundraiser.

Here are other festive events submitted by participating libraries that are not necessarily fundraisers:
Story telling festival fundraiser and other quarterly events (such as mid-list or relatively famous author talks) were held here.

We used to host a bicycle ride fundraiser as well as a spelling bee between library patrons and local authors. We also host a full range of children's events and an ongoing Humanities lecture series.

We had a public garden party last year to celebrate the restoration of our 1873 Gothic Revival fountain which is located on the street outside of the building. We closed off the road and had over 300 people attend. Special guests such as the Mayor were invited to speak, there was music, dancing, refreshments, and activities for kids. The event brought a lot of goodwill with the local community and the event was covered by the newspaper, the Providence Journal.

We host exhibitions featuring historical or interesting materials in our collection and have related programming from lectures to family activities to social events.

CinemaLit, which is a curated film series held about 35 Friday evenings/year

A mystery festival during which guests tried to solve a mystery within the library. A poetry festival combined with a poetry contest that celebrated poetry.
Live Musical Performances, Gala events, Movie Nights, Tours, Meetings etc.

I started as executive director in July 2019 and am unable to elaborate on programming created by previous executive directors; from my knowledge, most of it was standard lectures, occasional symposium. The two unique programs that we held were hosting musical programs several times per year in our reading room and regular afternoon movie viewings with a local renowned film critic. We continued the movie screening programs until the stay-at-home orders in March 2020. I started fall 2020 a partnership with a local chamber music management group to bring chamber music to the Athenaeum which has been well received, as well as our new partnership with Opera Philadelphia for group discounts and Athenaeum-specific programming.

We've added multiple new annual lectures, including Words & Music (a singer/songwriter performance); Memoir, and Science & Nature. We introduced an Artist-in-Residence program, and have expanded our offerings of discussions groups in quantity and genre.

My library is very active in programming. Our trivia night fundraiser was a big hit.
Conclusion

Although 2020 was a challenging year for library science and publishing, the trends of the field still point in a festive direction. With the lingering constraints of the COVID-19 economy, it is plausible that many universities, publishers and libraries may see a decrease in funding, business and support. Still, it is difficult to predict the exact fallout of this global “black swan” event. One thing that has been measured is the robust practice of virtual book borrowing during the first weeks of the March 2020 lockdown, at least in the UK. “Digital libraries across some parts of the country,” writes Bullough (2020) “have seen a 600 per cent plus increase in newly registered users since lockdown began.” A large portion of this demand, undoubtedly, was also for audiobooks. Applications like Libby, the e-book and a-book borrowing app for Overdrive, have made virtual lending possible. Libby is not the only option of course; libraries and guests/patrons also utilize Hoopla and 3M. As a new force in virtual lending, these apps have been a windfall for libraries, readers and listeners but they are seen as a financial threat by traditional publishers (Marshall, 2020). The cost of each copy of an e-book and a-book for a library to purchase is surprisingly high, more than double what an individual would pay in the marketplace (Marshall, 2020). Finances are often the main issue in library management; the recommendations below do not always humbly acknowledge this reality.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are to help American public and membership librarians provide better services. Recommendations are based on this dissertation’s research and survey and include personal observations on contemporary audio-literary practices. Many of these practices may already be employed at the
libraries surveyed. Some of these recommendations echo points raised earlier in *Value of this Research*.

From the survey it is clear that programming and events planning are both large components of the festive direction in library management. Diversity in collections and in services is also critical. The best *kind* of diversity is oftentimes technological in scope, bridging patrons with future practices.

**Diversifying the formats of audio literature is the first recommendation.** Public libraries, because of their more robust funding and ambitious public mission, are community hubs for all things innovative. There are a few methods for implementation should librarians take the approach of diversifying audio literature collections. Installing audiobook listening stations in libraries, for instance, may be one solution. The public library does not have to be an exact replica of an Apple Store but library managers may want to redesign a corner of the floor where patrons can test new gadgets or technologies like VR or video games (Krueger, 2019). One successful example of this was the 2016 renovation at the flagship location of the Boston Public Library. Boston’s main library was already bifurcated between a more classical, quiet reading/study wing and a more general-use and active wing. Following the renovation, the active wing now has several more festive areas including a high-tech corner where patrons may test new media like a 3-D printer (Kilduff, 2019).

The aim is to arrange collections and services in order to bridge individuals to the roles they may perform at a later date (new media examples are below). Some of these items have a practical bent for future careers. But other actions are geared towards molding good citizens.
Another recommendation from this research is for libraries to utilize the historic nature of their buildings. One way is for a membership library to purchase the building directly. San Francisco Mechanics’ Institute was able to secure this type of victory in a municipality where rents feel punitive. By doing so, the Mechanics’ Institute has been able to rent out office space to other literary outfits like Zyzzyva, the triannual literary arts magazine, and Liquake, the Bay Area’s literary arts festival organization (Shreve, 2015). The Mechanics’ Institute acts as a benevolent landlord to fellow organizations of the word and in doing so have created a cultural corridor, which fortifies the idea of their cultural import (Loach, Rowley and Griffiths, 2020). Not all membership libraries are in the position to purchase their building sites but it certainly gives these libraries a feeling of security, freedom and longevity.

Another recommendation is for libraries to launch a vlog or podcast for promotional purposes. As mentioned, the podcast and/or vlog can act as a gateway towards deeper engagement with audio literature (BookNet Canada, 2020). The podcast is the less expensive option to produce. Another advantage is that listeners can access a podcast while operating a vehicle (a vlog obviously requires visual attention). A number of industries, institutions and personalities have established podcasts as a way to market their brands or ideas. Some of these librarian podcasts are quite successful. Two of the most famous are The Librarian is in by New York Public Library and Dewey Decibel by the American Library Association (Hursch, 2018). Because there is so much overlap between podcast listeners and audiobook listeners, an added benefit is promoting and marketing audiobooks, specifically, on the podcast.

A new user of a virtual audiobook collection will need some guidance on how to handle the new media. One simple way is to place sticker instructions on the old media, namely audiobook CD cases. This method is inexpensive and easy to
implement. Even if a library plans on having a mixed (physical and virtual) audiobook collection, it is still best practice to let patrons know they have options. Another idea, therefore, is to pair a physical audiobook (CD) with its print equivalent (Young, 2019). Hand-written or printed notes called “shelf talkers” are also a known solution for new media. A “shelf talker” can also be placed under a print title, letting the patron know of its audiobook equivalent in another area of the library (Young, 2019). To reiterate an earlier important point by Pagliero Popp (2012, page 85): “Users do not like library catalogs (and databases) that are hard to use.” Capturing a patron’s attention at the traditional access point is wise.

Creating or joining a regional consortium is an inexpensive way for libraries to access virtual audiobook collections with little effort. The GMLC (Green Mountain Library Consortium) in the small New England state of Vermont is a collection of public library systems that have joined efforts to increase their purchasing power under one Overdrive account. The state’s only membership library, St. Johnsbury Athenaeum, is also part of this network, having access to the same virtual library as the state’s public libraries.

Reaching out to younger and more diverse patrons by embracing the tactile and experiential is a great way to increase patronage. Have and Pedersen (2020, page 413) determined that audiobook listeners are in general younger: “48% of all listeners are under the age of 35” and “more equally distributed between the genders.”

Movie nights and virtual reality trial rooms are two examples of activities both innovative and festive. San Francisco Mechanics’ Institute holds a regular social gathering called “Knit Happens,” in which participants sit in a circle and knit or crochet. This is one example of the new age of library services catching up with the
“Maker Movement,” a hands-on philosophy that encourages experimentation and practice:

Maker culture is a do-it-yourself (DIY) culture that emphasises creativity, experimentation and innovation, with a focus on technology. It empowers the individual to create and make, utilising an informal collaborative network for ideas and skills sharing...With the makerspace emphasis on technology, some libraries saw makerspaces as a means to engage with teenagers and younger adults, demographics which have traditionally challenged public libraries. (Nicholson, 2017, page 102)

Makerspaces meet high tech in many ways:

such as laser cutters, 3D printers and milling machines, as well as software for digital media creation, such as graphic design, video production and animation. Also commonly provided is software for basic programming like Scratch and Python. (Nicholson, 2017, page 102)

Makerspaces, in theory and practice, do not come cheap and may threaten the quiet oasis vibe of the smaller membership library. In the public library, however, the makerspace movement has gained momentum. Nicholson points to public library systems that have incorporated a slew of innovative services. Washington, D.C., for instance, has an “Espresso Book Machine, a machine that prints books on demand” (Nicholson, 2017, page 103). Denver, Colorado’s library hosts teen tech club meetings and provides equipment like “3D printers and sewing machines, design and electronics tools” (Nicholson, 2017, page 103). The library in Fayetteville,
Arkansas sounds the most appealing. Its “Creation Lab” gives teens and adults an opportunity to record their own podcasts (Nicholson, 2017).

The heart of this research is the idea of making the American public and membership library a more attractive destination. The library is a cultural treasure and all people should find resources there that entices them to return. This dissertation also speaks to the stakeholders, asking them to think about the direction of their institutions. A festive direction in library science does not just entail the inclusion of an audiobook collection. It’s also about the social philosophies and events and programming that makes users (especially new users) feel a part of the community.

As COVID-19 is finally managed or controlled, there could be a chance that LIS reverts to a clinical direction in which library management is aimed at finding solutions for a series of problems. Whichever direction that libraries choose, the audiobook will remain. As discussed, audio literature is now a mature enough sector to fully adapt to human affairs. The next phase of the talking book could involve a greater emphasis of the “para-social relationship” between man and media or a greater emphasis on the aesthetics of narration. A talking book does not exist in a vacuum nor is it static. As Durham Peters (2020, page 267) wrote at the end of his book: “All talk is an act of faith predicated on the future’s ability to bring forth the worlds called for.”

**Reflections on the Subject**

For us bookish types, written texts have always acted as para-social companions. Indeed, books were our very first friends. For although this dissertation is about audio literature, I have always been an avid practitioner of SSR. But I have a handful of friends and family members who are not readers. It always vexes me
when I meet people who have not read a book in a long time. But I also comprehend that SSR is not a natural inclination for many people. Men, especially, are not opening books as much as women are.

With this troubling observation in mind, along with the onset of COVID-19 and the staggered quarantines, I have found that, for me, the podcast/audiobook has become an even closer companion than the traditional book (and one that is far chattier). I observed also that I was not alone in listening more to my news and literature while in lockdown. As the pandemic was growing more ominous, I, like so many others I know, had also increased my computer time. Soon I began to wonder if other people in lockdown were experiencing a nagging sense of “screen fatigue.” As mentioned in the research itself, the beauty of the podcast and the audiobook is that the reader does not need to be glued to the media apparatus in order to receive the message or hear the story. One can give his eyes a break by washing the dishes or taking a stroll in the neighborhood while “reading” an audiobook. Soon enough, throughout the lockdowns, my household was listening to podcast episodes, audiobook chapters and radio dramas during meals, modern takes of Roosevelt’s “fireside chats” during the Great Depression. Hearing the story has the additional advantage of bringing people together.

The word _gab_ comes from an Irish/Gaelic word meaning _mouth_ (Farlex Partner Idioms Dictionary, 2017). The colloquialism _Gift of the Gab_ has a history in both Celtic, Anglo and American texts reaching back into the 18th century. Its popular meaning is “the ability to speak with eloquence and fluency” (Farlex Partner Idioms Dictionary, 2017). I used the phrase in the dissertation title as a nod to the idea of fluency. Pre-pandemic, there was quite a lot of discussion in the UK on the _loneliness epidemic_. In both the UK and US and across the western world there have been numerous reports of how social isolation can have damaging effects on physical and mental health. And I thought it deserved greater study. Thus, the
original idea for my dissertation was to follow the production and dissemination of documents from the newly-formed UK government working group called *The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness*. There is a dark and convoluted background to the formation of the loneliness commission so I encourage any readers to independently research the history of the movement. The commission’s basic premise is that there is an epidemic of social isolation across the kingdom in which many individuals from marginalized groups have few people that they trust much less communicate with and that there are a number of remedies that the government can apply to make life more tolerable for these individuals. Coverage of Brexit and of COVID buried mention of the loneliness epidemic, however, and I feared that social isolation was becoming a low-priority issue of the government. I imagined the commission’s work to be too aspirational in a time of emergency and I imagined there was not much of a paper trail to follow. So, after careful consideration, I had decided to focus on a dissertation topic that was more concrete. Still, the idea of the remedy of fluency seemed intriguing.

My own experience with the classic audiobook is somewhat limited. I identify more as a creature of the podcast, a medium which provides bite-sized conversations around themes and current events. Podcasts have an intimacy, levity and casualness that *speaks* to me. I find that listening to an audiobook requires long car-rides (difficult for people who do not drive). Listening to an audiobook in bed before falling asleep is a popular method of engagement but I personally don’t like operating a computer or i-Phone during the evening hours. Podcasts, in contrast, seem friendlier for daytime multi-tasking. Episodes are finite, hosts act like family members or teachers and each is built around a theme or particular subject.

It should be noted that I started to listen to more audiobooks as my research progressed. As a kid I would listen to the occasional Disney talking book and engage with its read-along text and pictures. Later on, as a teenager, one of my first jobs
was at a *Barnes & Noble* superstore in suburban Boston. One of the job’s main duties was to return unwanted items from the “slush pile” back to their respective shelves. Each section had its own look; many topical books evoking a certain emotion through popular colours, designs and fonts. The audiobook section, I recall, contained numerous talking books in CD format and even ones in cassette tapes (even as late as 1996!). The section covered the usual suspects of the era: the genres of Self-Help, Business and Foreign Language. There must have been works of fiction but I do not remember them. I do remember the section as having a reputation for being gangly, awkward and oversized. Additionally, each audiobook was expensive! (The going rate seemed to be upwards of thirty USD, vastly more expensive than the written counterpart).

And, yet, somehow audiobooks seem to have grown in sales and stature, especially since *Harry Potter* mania starting in the late 90s. Part of this is the extroverted, celebrity nature of the mode itself and, as covered in the research, the fact that the format has shrunk to near invisibility.

Lastly, for whatever reason, I enjoy trends and items that gain a respectful status after having been historically disparaged. What the podcast and audiobook teach us is that reading and learning does not have to be punishing. It is not a crime to be entertained and delighted.

**Reflections on the Process**

I have to admit that I am quite happy with how the whole process turned out. I have worked steadily on this dissertation from April through December and would accomplish a little bit of research and output each day. There was only one week in the summer which I took as annual leave. I adhered to the *spirit* of the schedule that I had prepared in the proposal. Working on this dissertation during the
The pandemic was actually a God-send as the scholarship kept me level-headed, productive and focused.

The few regrets I have regarding the dissertation are tied up with the circumstances of 2020. I had hoped to fly back to Boston, Massachusetts and do in-house visits to libraries in the New England region in order to meet librarians, peruse collections and take photos. Obviously, travel was ill-advised due to COVID. I had also wanted to hold periodic dissertation “salons” and study groups in-person as a way to keep in touch with my classmates. That too seemed ill-advised (another classmate has hosted regular Zoom study sessions but they held little appeal for me).

I approached the process in large, discrete portions:

1. Thinking about the content.
2. Researching the authors and building a library (lit review).
3. Reading and engaging with the material.
4. Writing up the bulk of the literary review.
5. Reaching out to possible survey respondents.
7. Launching the survey.
8. Incorporating the findings and penning the Methodology and Results chapters.
9. Penning the other chapters.
10. Edit, edit, edit.

Approaching the work and the sequencing of activities in a nearly militant manner helped me to carry on. I plan on continuing the habit of daily reading and writing for other projects.
Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the help of the City, University of London LIS 2019/2020 teaching staff including Professors Lyn Robinson and Deborah Lee and my dissertation advisors, Professors David Bawden and Joseph Dunne-Howrie. My family has also been instrumental and patient during this time along with my best friend and favorite editor and the person I can “gab” the most with: Mauricio Fernando Rojas.
# Appendices

## Appendix A: List of Terms and Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a-book</td>
<td>shorthand for audiobook available in many formats: CD, vinyl record or a downloadable MP3 or streamable version that plays on one's laptop or smartphone.</td>
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<tr>
<td>affordances</td>
<td>The American psychologist J.J. Gibson &quot;defined an affordance as a quality of an object that allows an individual to perform an action, as all “action possibilities” latent in an object&quot; (Have and Pedersen, 2013, page 129).</td>
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<tr>
<td>APA</td>
<td>Audio Publishers Association: the first and only not-for-profit trade organization of the audiobook industry in the United States.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Books on Tape</td>
<td>Founded in California in 1975 by Olympic gold medalist Duvall Hecht. Now an imprint of Random House, Books on Tape began as a direct-to-consumer mail order rental service for unabridged audiobooks on cassette tape.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caedmon Records</td>
<td>Founded in New York in 1952 by college graduates Barbara Holdridge and Marianne Roney, Caedmon Records was considered a pioneer in the audiobook business. It is now an imprint of HarperAudio.</td>
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<tr>
<td>clinical direction</td>
<td>In LIS, any item, document or process that remedies a human problem or addresses something in its state of lack.</td>
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<tr>
<td>e-book</td>
<td>shorthand for an electronic book that can be read on one's laptop, smartphone or reading device.</td>
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<tr>
<td>festive direction</td>
<td>in LIS, any item, document, event or process that celebrates the social and the aspirational. The festive direction signifies movement, free time and a state of plenty.</td>
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<tr>
<td>footfall</td>
<td>UK equivalent of &quot;foot traffic&quot; or the level of patronage in a business or institution. Footfall also has a secondary meaning of the sound of people taking steps.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Libby</td>
<td>a smartphone app for American libraries in which e-books and a-books are borrowed. Owned by Overdrive.</td>
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<td>LibriVox</td>
<td>a group of worldwide volunteers who read and record public domain texts creating audiobooks for download from their website and other digital library hosting sites on the internet.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LIS</td>
<td>aka library and information science, it is the multidisciplinary field of the library sector and includes publishing, information management, information knowledge, media studies, user experience, etc.</td>
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<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marshall McLuhan</td>
<td>A major figure and prolific writer of media studies who famously theorized that the medium of the message is more important than the content of the message.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media studies (or media theory)</td>
<td>A field of study that deals with the content, history, and effects of various media; in particular, the mass media. Major figures include Marshall McLuhan and other scholars at the Toronto School.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Membership library</td>
<td>An independent library in the US which had its roots as a place of learning for people (mostly men) in the trades starting in the late 18th century. About twenty membership libraries remain in the US. Members pay a nominal yearly fee. A membership library needs to have 1. a rotating collection and 2. independent financing.</td>
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<td>MLG</td>
<td>Membership Library Group: the association of membership libraries in the USA.</td>
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<td>Overdrive</td>
<td>The main digital distributor of e-books, a-books, magazines and streaming video titles. Overdrive is the most prominent service provider in libraries across the USA.</td>
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<td>Para-social interaction</td>
<td>The idea of media, especially electronic media, as a substitute for human relationships and company. First penned by Horton and Wohl in 1956 in regards to television.</td>
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<td>Penny Dreadfuls</td>
<td>Cheap popular serial literature produced during the nineteenth century in the United Kingdom.</td>
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<td>Podcast</td>
<td>An internet radio show that has grown exponentially in popularity over the last decade. Usually features a conversation between one host and one guest but can also be a monologue on a given theme or issue of the day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary Orality</td>
<td>According to Ong: societies that existed before the practice of reading, writing and literature. Societies that existed in the oral tradition.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Programming</td>
<td>Refers here to the scheduling and creation of events and happenings within the library not to be confused with the creation of computer applications.</td>
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<td>Secondary Orality</td>
<td>According to Ong: the state of societies continuing to use spoken language after having established a high degree of writing, literacy and literature.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSR</td>
<td>Sustained silent reading.</td>
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<td>The Toronto School</td>
<td>&quot;Active primarily from the 1930s to the 1970s, the so-called Toronto School of Communication Theory was instrumental in drawing worldwide attention to the provocative idea that technological engagement plays a fundamental role in the structuring of human perception and culture.&quot; (The Toronto School Initiative, 2020) Famous and associated members include Marshall McLuhan and Jesuit scholar,</td>
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<tr>
<td>vidcast</td>
<td>a podcast that also shows the screen videos of the conversants - shown regularly or episodically most likely via YouTube. Also known as a vodcast or video blog.</td>
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<tr>
<td>vlog</td>
<td>a video blog similar to a vidcast but usually involving one person as the solo host speaking directly to the camera. The more successful ones stick to a theme, are regularly episodic and include high-quality photos and video clips. Viewable on a platform like YouTube or Vimeo.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walter Ong</td>
<td>American Jesuit priest who was a prolific writer and considered the protege of Marshall McLuhan (McLuhan had served as Ong's dissertation advisor). Ong's most popular contribution was the idea of &quot;Secondary Orality&quot; (see definition above). &quot;Known for his work in Renaissance literature, intellectual history, and the evolution of consciousness...Fr. Ong's work was deeply interdisciplinary&quot; <em>(The Toronto School Initiative, 2020)</em>.</td>
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Appendix B: Qualtrics Survey

These first few questions inquire about your role and demographics and the background information of your library.

What is your job title?

What is your age range?

- 25 or under
- 26-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61-70
- 70+

In what region of the U.S. is your library located?

- Northeast
- Midwest
- South
- West

In which type of library do you work?

- Public
In 2019, what was the daily average number of "in-house" visitors/patrons/guests to your library?

- Unknown
- 10 or fewer
- 11 through 30
- 31 through 50
- 51 through 70
- More than 70

In 2019, what was the daily average number of visitors/patrons/guests to your library’s website?

- Unknown
- 10 or fewer
- 11 through 30
- 31 through 50
- 51 through 70
- More than 70

What is the average age bracket of the typical adult (18 years-old or older) visitor/patron/guest?

- Unknown
Does your library have a children's section?

- Yes
- No

These next few questions inquire about your library’s possible audio literature collections.

Does your library have an audiobooks collection, either virtual or physical or both?

- Yes
- No

Which forms of audio literature are accessible and/or available for loans?

*Check all that apply.*

- audio literature is not available
- audio literature via cassette tapes
● audio literature via CD-format
● audio literature via Playaways
● audio literature via downloads
● audio literature via a streaming service

How many headphones does your library loan out for "in-house" personal listening experiences?

● None. We do not stock headphones.
● Fewer than 5
● 5 to 10 headphones
● 11 to 20 headphones
● More than 20 headphones for loan

How often have ALL your headphones been completely loaned out?

● Never, because we do not stock them
● Rarely, if ever
● At least once a month
● At least once a week
● At points several days over the week
● All the time

Which service does your library use for your virtual audio literature collections?

Check all that apply.
- Does not have a virtual audio literature collection
- Overdrive
- OneClickdigital
- Hoopla
- 3M
- Axis360
- We use only one platform
- Other

Are you satisfied with the audio literature collection service?
- Very Unsatisfied
- Slightly Unsatisfied
- Neutral
- Slightly Satisfied
- Very Satisfied
- Not applicable

If you are not satisfied with your virtual audio literature service, may I have the reason?

What are YOUR opinions of audiobooks? Do you read or listen to them or reject them? Do you have any favorite authors/genres/narrators/books on audio? Please elaborate.

Powered by Qualtrics
These next few questions inquire about social events that happen within your respective library.

Throughout 2019, about how often did your library host spoken word events, conversational book club gatherings or author events?

- Never, because we did not host them
- Daily
- 2-6 times per week
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Yearly

Throughout 2019, were any of these events or talks recorded via audio or audio/video and available for public viewing and/or listening?

- Yes
- No
- No, because we did not host them

In 2019 did your library ever host a livestream author (or publisher) event where participants at home could submit live questions?

- Yes
• No

Does your library have a vlog or podcast?

• Yes
• No

About how often are vlog or podcasts episodes created and presented by your library?

• They are not created because we do not have a vlog or podcast
• Daily
• 2-6 times a week
• Weekly
• Monthly
• Quarterly
• Yearly

In 2019, did your library host or hold galas or fundraisers?

• Unknown
• Yes, within the library itself
• Yes, at an outside venue
• No, we did not

Anything that made them especially unique, thematic or festive? Please elaborate.
In 2019 and years before, did your library host or create any other activity that is unique and creative within your library beyond the ones mentioned?

- Unknown
- Yes
- No

If so, please describe these activities.

Powered by Qualtrics

These next few questions inquire about the current disruptions in library services due to COVID-19 and about your library’s future plans once the epidemic has been brought under global control.

Do you have plans to increase or start a collection once COVID-19 has been brought under control? Choose the answer that is most approximate to your library’s situation.

- Yes, absolutely
- Yes, once everything gets in order
- No, we are going to maintain status quo
- No, because we are worried about surviving

Which plans/ideas below are realistic in the near future (either as new or continuing) of your library. Check all that apply.

- A physical audiobook collection
- A virtual audiobook collection
● A podcast to promote your library
● A film and discussion night
● More in-house fundraisers with food and drink
● None mentioned here

How has Covid-19 affected the social events at your library? Choose the answer that is most approximate to your library’s situation.

● Nothing has been affected since we do not host social events
● They have been sustained with occasional disruptions
● They have moved on-line
● They have been dropped temporarily
● They have been dropped indefinitely due to a budgetary or other institutional crisis

Which selection below best describes the morale at your institution in Autumn 2020?

● Extremely positive
● Moderately positive
● Slightly positive
● Neither positive nor negative
● Slightly negative
● Moderately negative
● Extremely negative
Please elaborate on the response of the previous question.

Did you have any further comments or thoughts to add?

Thank you kindly for your time.
Appendix C: Dissertation Proposal

Gift of the Gab
The Rise of the AudioBook
and the Festive Turn in Library Science

Proposal

Introduction

Sales of audio-literary content have risen sharply over the last decade and a half (Rowe, 2019). Have and Pedersen (2020) call it a silent revolution in content delivery. Although literature first got its start with oral performance, Irvin (2009) argues the Audiobook has not received a lot of respect until very recently. The academic literature is still catching up to its popularity.

This dissertation, “Gift of the Gab”, will be an exploration into the rise of public and membership library holdings of “The Audiobook” across various municipalities in the United States and to see if loans are keeping pace with sales. I hope to uncover some data and opinions from literary industry insiders (Audiobook creators, librarians, cataloguers, fans, and consumers) in order to understand the allure of this spoken word format. In doing so I hope to highlight the format’s strengths and weaknesses. This research may aid librarians in crafting preemptive cataloguing policies to accommodate the changing tastes of their patrons.

“Gift of the Gab” will have a dual use as an industry survey and an academic exploration. One question throughout is to determine the consequences for library design, library content delivery, and the job responsibilities of the day-to-day librarian while we ponder the rise of the audiobook. My academic hypothesis is two-fold and more ambitious. I assert that cloud storage is just one aspect for the rise of the Audiobook; there’s also a more substantial rise in the value of performativity in the American sphere that is
giving the spoken form of literature (and its captive listeners) “its moment”. While “The Audiobook” would not fit into the orthodox definition of the oral tradition, it does speak to a verbal preference during a time of screen overload and visual fatigue. My data collection will attempt to look at the reasons why there has been this emergence as well as who the listeners and audiobook creators are. Furthermore, I hope to collect data to see if these patrons in question are reading as devoutly as they are listening. In a rudimentary survey of the literature, I am finding that there is not much written academically on the rise of the audiobook as much as there is for podcasting, orality, fluency and loquaciousness, all of which are intimate values and activities tied into the Audiobook.

Aims and objectives

The aims here are broad and academic. I will explore the answers of several questions related to the rise of The Audiobook. The survey setting will be the holdings and collections of public libraries and membership libraries in the UK and the US, in localities that vary by region, income level, education level, and density of population. Questions include:

What to make of the rise of the audiobook?
What are the elements and/or criteria of an attractive audiobook?
Is the rise of the audiobook a reflection of libraries becoming more boisterous?
How has listening to audiobooks affected styles of learning and comprehension?
Where do the responsibilities of librarians “meet” this new talkative format?
Is the podcast a competitor to the audiobook or do they work in tandem?
How do the audiobook and the podcast differ for all of the stakeholders?

The objectives will be more tailored and ultimately testable. I will hopefully discover:

-if loans of audiobooks are keeping pace with the increased sales of the format.
-the patterns of audiobook consumption.
-how cloud storage affects the library collection.
-the composition of the listeners of audiobooks and why they prefer this format over books.
-if audiobooks lend themselves to one type of genre over another? If so, why?

Scope and definition

I hope to collect data from a variety of public libraries and membership libraries in the United States. The number of libraries to be surveyed is 18. Locations of these libraries will take into account differing regions, populations, demographics, and levels of education and income. There will be a “scraping” of audiobook and library book data from the library websites as well as interviews with cataloguers, library managers, individual librarians, library patrons, and audiobook fans and consumers. I hope to interview officials and creators of a small handful of audiobook companies and their relationships with public and membership libraries.

This will be the main data set that I will work with but I am also hoping to add fields such as audio/visual equipment loans, books on CD versus digital holdings of audiobooks and any podcasts that may exist in promoting and marketing the libraries themselves.

The following 18 locations reflect my site list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Libraries in Major U.S. Cities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco Public Library, CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle Public Library, WA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boston Public Library, MA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership Libraries in Major U.S. Cities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics' Institute, SF, CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folio, Seattle, WA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston Athenaeum, MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesaurus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top Terms: Membership Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT: Subscription Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT: Members' Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT: Athenaeum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT: Mechanics’ Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT: Mercantile Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Libraries in Mid-Sized U.S. Cities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cincinnati Public Library, OH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charleston Public Library, SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providence Public Library, RI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Membership Libraries in Mid-Sized U.S. Cities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercantile Library, Cincinnati, OH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charleston Library Society, SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providence Athenaeum, RI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Libraries in Small Towns</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Johnsbury Public Library, VT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noel Wien Public Library, Fairbanks, AK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polk County Public Library: Columbia, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Membership Libraries in Small Towns</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Johnsbury Athenaeum, VT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Trigg Ester Library, AK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lanier Library, NC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research context/literature review

The literature on the audiobook falls into three camps: papers on the aesthetical performance aspects of the new medium (Thompson, 2019), (Dooley, 2014); avid promoters of the medium out of Denmark like Björkén-Nyberg, Have, and Pedersen; and then the generalist, overview writings of everyone else. The academic literature indeed is still catching up to its popularity. Part of the reason is that there is still a stigma attached to the audiobook, much like Plato fretted in Phaedrus to innovations around written text (Irwin, 2009).

The research on the audiobook is very light in absolute and relative terms in comparison to the medium’s very strong growth over the past decade or two. This in and of itself is worthy of attention. Is there a certain guilt by association involved with the audiobook? Do we demean its value because of the entertainment value involved? The audiobook was first strongly associated with the stereotype of the workaholic, high-income male listener in the 1980s. One survey out of Sweden, however, found that a solid 75% of audiobook listeners are female (Sandin, 2018). The format contains a lot of levity and demands collaboration around a number of different stakeholders. In my dissertation, I will be referring to a lot of parallel research in regards to orality, fluency, and cognitive education in the ways of auditory learners. I hope to synthesize these resources along with the findings in a number of trade journals on the audiobook in order to develop new knowledge about the rise of digital storytelling.

Methodology
The research will be based on a convenience sample of 18 libraries in the US. The locations of these libraries will fall into different categories based on region, population, population density, and income level. All 18 of the locations have been chosen for both having a public library as well as a membership library.

I will be searching for quantities of audiobook items on the libraries’ websites. Additionally, I will collect qualitative data via interviews and emails with librarians, cataloguers, and library managers. This will be a mostly qualitative data study with about 10% to 20% of my time spent working with quantitative data such as the ratio of audio holdings compared to the total items in a library’s collection.

I will also be conducting spoken and written interviews with Audiobook creators and fans of audio-literary content. The goal is to find twelve stakeholders to interview.

Each interview will be about 80% structured and 20% unstructured with a discrete set of prepared questions for each cohort (i.e. one for librarians, one for patrons/fans, and one for Audiobook content creators).

I also hope to design a brief questionnaire and am looking for one hundred respondents. These again will be stakeholders: librarians, audiobook fans, and audiobook content creators and performers. I am hoping to find out if there is “an audiobook type” much like there is “a theatre person”.

There will also be components of a selective literature review, webliometrics/bibliometrics, and a historical analysis on the library holdings of audio content. I will ascertain if there is any correlation with outside trends in the larger media markets, publishing world, and infosphere.

I hope to make use of a Delphi Study to determine if any particular genre of Audiobook is dominant, along with determining which users are borrowing digital audiobooks and if they spike at a certain time of year or after a certain type of event.
Dissemination

I plan on blogging and tweeting on the progress of the dissertation.

I plan on uploading to Humanities Commons when it is finished.

I will also make a PowerPoint version that I may present at conferences and symposiums.

I also plan on providing a link to the finished dissertation on LinkedIn.

Work plan

As an early morning riser, I plan on working at least 5 hours each weekday on my dissertation, from 7 a.m. until 12 noon.

The following is my work plan over the next seven months, starting June 1st and ending January 1st, 2021:

By June 1st:
- Submission of Formal Dissertation Proposal

By July 1st:
- Read and take notes on half of the academic literature in my bibliography.
- Devise correspondence scripts for the different parties I am trying to reach.
- Check in 2x with my academic advisor.

By August 1st
- Read, read, read.
- Take notes.
- Check in 2x with academic advisor.

By September 1st
- Send off initial queries for interviews to librarians, fans, and audiobook content creators and initial queries for questionnaires in progress.
• Kick off delphi study discussing some of the higher academic theories re: spoken word literature.
• Finish questionnaire and send off to participants.

By October 1st
• Keep detailed spreadsheets of subject response.
• Start to compile data.
• Read and write.
• Refine the delphi study; write up findings in an organized format.

By November 1st
• Clean out data set; omit any subjects who did not respond to my queries. Revise numbers, look at trends.

By December 1st
• Finish 1st, 2nd and 3rd drafts. Start on reflective essay.
• Check in 2x with my academic advisor.

By January 1st
• Have a final copy of the dissertation - have colleagues or professionals edit the final draft.
• Meet or Skype with academic advisor one last time.
• Submit final dissertation by 31st of December, 2020.

Resources

Almost 100% of the data collection will be via desk research. Interviews will be conducted virtually and held via Skype, Zoom, phonecall, or email.

I will use Qualtrics as advised by City, University of London in order to collect quantifiable data.

I will invest in four Amazon/Audible gift certificates (or something equivalent totaling $100) and use it as an incentive. Participants will be placed into a lottery in order to receive gifts.
Ethics

Briefly before each interview, I will briefly explain the nature of the research and my plans on disseminating the final product. All documents around permissions and disclosures will be provided before any data collection. I will adhere strictly to all ethical considerations around safety, confidentiality, and data security per the guidance of City, University of London.

I am only planning on interviewing fully-functional adults on their media and literacy consumption habits. There may be some talk around grief, loneliness, well-being, and income but nothing that would violate their privacy or comfort in any way.

In written and voice-recorded notes, I will give the accurate time, date, and location and the correct information of the person I am interviewing. To ensure the integrity of my data, I will use a coding system to link the identity of my interviewee with the content of her responses.

Confidentiality

None of the participants being surveyed or interviewed will have a name, address, or exact age attached to their published responses. I will simply categorize them by geographical region and their role in the audiobook ecosystem (i.e. “One Audiobook fan in New England said …”).

I only am planning on interviewing fully-functional adults on media and literacy consumption habits. There may be some data collected around employment and relationship status and income. Discussions around grief, loneliness, and well-being may come up as peripheral subjects but nothing that would violate their privacy or comfort in any way. Interview subjects are reminded that they can discontinue their participation at any time.
References


Saunders, G. (2017), *Lincoln in the bardo*. Available at: 
https://sfpl.overdrive.com/media/2715816 (Downloaded: 28 May 2020).


Appendix D: Ethics Review

Thomas Kilduff, Thursday, 28 May, 2020

Research Ethics Review Form: CityLIS dissertation projects

CityLIS students undertaking their dissertation project are required to consider the ethics of their project work and to ensure that it complies with research ethics guidelines. Usually approval will be given by the supervisor, but in some cases a project will need approval from an ethics committee before it can proceed.

In order to ensure that appropriate consideration is given to ethical issues, all students must complete this form and attach it to their dissertation proposal. There are two parts:

**PART A: Ethics Checklist.** All students must complete this part. The checklist identifies whether the project requires ethical approval and, if so, where to apply for approval.

**PART B: Ethics Proportionate Review Form.** Students who have answered “no” to all questions in A1, A2 and A3 and “yes” to question 4 in A4 in the ethics checklist must complete this part. The project supervisor has delegated authority to provide approval in such cases that are considered to involve minimal risk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A.1 If you answer YES to any of the questions in this block, approval will be needed from an appropriate external ethics committee for approval. Consult your supervisor if you think this may be the case.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delete as appropriate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1.1 Does your research require approval from the National Research Ethics Service (NRES)? e.g. because you are recruiting current NHS patients or staff? If you are unsure try - https://www.hra.nhs.uk/approvals-amendments/what-approvals-do-i-need/ | NO |

| 1.2 Will you recruit participants who fall under the auspices of the Mental Capacity Act? Such research needs to be approved by an external ethics committee such as NRES or the Social Care Research Ethics Committee - [http://www.scie.org.uk/research/ethics-committee/](http://www.scie.org.uk/research/ethics-committee/) | NO |

| 1.3 Will you recruit any participants who are currently under the auspices of the Criminal Justice System, for example, but not limited to, people on remand, prisoners and those on probation? Such research needs to be authorised by the ethics approval system of the National Offender Management Service. | NO |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A.2 If you answer YES to any of the questions in this block, approval will be needed from the Senate Research Ethics Committee. Consult your supervisor if you think this may be the case. Delete as appropriate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<p>| 2.1 Does your research involve participants who are unable to give informed consent? For example, but not limited to, people who may have a degree of learning disability or mental health problem, that means they are unable to make an informed decision on their own behalf. | NO |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Is there a risk that your research might lead to disclosures from participants concerning their involvement in illegal activities?</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Is there a risk that obscene and or illegal material may need to be accessed for your research study (including online content and other material)?</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Does your project involve participants disclosing information about special category or sensitive subjects?</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For example, but not limited to: racial or ethnic origin; political opinions; religious beliefs; trade union membership; physical or mental health; sexual life; criminal offences and proceedings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Does your research involve you travelling to another country outside of the UK, where the Foreign &amp; Commonwealth Office has issued a travel warning that affects the area in which you will study?</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please check the latest guidance from the FCO - [http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/](http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/)*

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**Foreign & Commonwealth Office**

The FCO promotes the United Kingdom’s interests overseas, supporting our citizens and businesses around the globe. FCO is a ministerial department, supported by 10 agencies and public bodies.

[www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)
2.6 Does your research involve invasive or intrusive procedures?  
*These may include, but are not limited to, electrical stimulation, heat, cold or bruising.*  
**NO**

2.7 Does your research involve animals?  
**NO**

2.8 Does your research involve the administration of drugs, placebos or other substances to study participants?  
**NO**

A.3 If you answer YES to any of the questions in this block, then approval will be needed from the Computer Science/Library and Information Science Research Ethics Committee (CSREC). Consult your supervisor if you think this may be the case.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Does your research involve participants who are under the age of 18?</td>
<td><strong>NO</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Does your research involve adults who are vulnerable because of their social, psychological or medical circumstances (vulnerable adults)?</td>
<td><strong>NO</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This includes adults with cognitive and / or learning disabilities, adults with physical disabilities and older people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Are participants recruited because they are staff or students of City, University of London?</td>
<td><strong>NO</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, students studying on a particular course or module. If yes, then approval is also required from the Head of Department or Programme Director.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Does your research involve intentional deception of participants?</td>
<td><strong>NO</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Does your research involve participants taking part without their informed consent?</td>
<td><strong>NO</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Is the risk posed to participants greater than that in normal working life?</td>
<td><strong>NO</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Is the risk posed to you, the researcher(s), greater than that in normal working life?</td>
<td><strong>NO</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A.4 If you answer YES to the following question and your answers to all other questions in sections A1, A2 and A3 are NO, then your project is of minimal risk.

*If this is the case, then you can apply for approval through your supervisor under PROPORTIONATE REVIEW. You do so by completing PART B of this form.*

*If you have answered NO to all questions in the checklist, including question 4, then your project does not require ethical approval. You should still include the form in your dissertation proposal.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 Does your project involve human participants or their identifiable personal data?</td>
<td><strong>YES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, as interviewees, respondents to a survey, or participants in testing.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**PART B: Ethics Proportionate Review Form**

If you answered YES to question 4 and NO to all other questions in sections A1, A2 and A3 in PART A (checklist) of this form, then you should complete PART B of this form to submit an application for a proportionate ethics review of your project. Your supervisor has delegated authority to review and approve this application under proportionate review. Your proposal, including this ethics application, must be approved by your supervisor before beginning the planned research.
If you cannot provide all the required attachments (see B.3) with your project proposal (e.g. because you have not yet written the consent forms, interview schedules etc), you must submit the missing items to your supervisor for approval prior to commencing these parts of your project.

Your supervisor may ask you to submit a full ethics application through Research Ethics Online, if they are unable to give approval.

### B.1 The following questions must be answered fully.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES/NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Will you ensure that participants taking part in your project are fully informed about the purpose of the research?</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. Will you ensure that participants taking part in your project are fully informed about the procedures affecting them or affecting any information collected about them, including information about how the data will be used, to whom it will be disclosed, and how long it will be kept?</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3. When people agree to participate in your project, will it be made clear to them that they may withdraw (i.e. not participate) at any time without any penalty?</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4. Will consent be obtained from the participants in your project?</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent from participants will be necessary if you plan to involve them in your project or if you plan to use identifiable personal data from existing records. “Identifiable personal data” means data relating to a living person who might be identifiable if the record includes their name, username, student id, DNA, fingerprint, address, etc. If YES, you must attach drafts of the participant information sheet(s) and consent form(s) that you will use in section B.3 or, in the case of an existing dataset, provide details of how consent has been obtained. You must also retain the completed forms for subsequent inspection. Failure to provide the completed consent request forms will result in withdrawal of any earlier ethical approval of your project.</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5. Have you made arrangements to ensure that material and/or private information obtained from or about the participating individuals will remain confidential?</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### B.2 If the answer to the following question (B2) is YES, you must provide details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES/NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Will the research be conducted in the participant’s home or other non-University location?</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If YES, you must provide details of how your safety will be ensured.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## B.3 Attachments

All of the following documents must be provided to supervisors if applicable. If they are not available when the proposal is submitted, they must be approved by the supervisor later.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details on how safety will be assured in any non-University location, including risk assessment if required (see B2)</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Details of arrangements to ensure that material and/or private information obtained from or about the participating individuals will remain confidential (see B1.5)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any personal data must be acquired, stored and made accessible in ways that are GDPR compliant.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Full protocol for any workshops or interviews**</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant information sheet(s)**</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent form(s)**</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire(s)**                                            sharing a Qualtrics survey with your supervisor is recommended.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic guide(s) for interviews and focus groups**</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Permission from external organisations or Head of Department**</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. for recruitment of participants</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>


Dervin, B. *et al.* (2006) ‘Reports of the demise of the "user" have been greatly exaggerated: Dervin's sense-making and the methodological resuscitation of the user – looking backwards, looking forward’, *Proceedings on the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 18 October. DOI: 10.1002/meet.1450420159.


Hartel, J. (2019). Turn, turn, turn. In *Proceedings of CoLIS, the Tenth International Conference on Conceptions of Library and Information Science*, Ljubljana, Slovenia,


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