

The logo for the Society for the History of Children and Youth (SHCY) features the letters 'S', 'H', 'C', and 'Y' in a bold, sans-serif font. The 'S' is red, 'H' is orange, 'C' is teal, and 'Y' is yellow. The letters are set against a white background with a subtle drop shadow.

SHCY

Survey Report—2017

society for the history of children and youth

P. Ryan
March 2018

From July through September 2017, the *Society for the History of Children and Youth* circulated a survey through global electronic networks. The 229 scholars who completed the questionnaire reside on all continents (save Antarctica). They reported working across the cycle of academic life from graduate school through retirement. Among them, 115 are current SHCY members; 114 are not members. Sixty-seven attended the 2017 conference at Rutgers-Camden, but a majority (162 persons) did not.

The survey was designed to gather information about those researching childhood and youth historically. What were they doing; what did they want? This report offers an analysis of our findings, and it outlines how the society is responding to them. The main-body of the report summarizes who works in the field and what interests them. Then, it provides an assessment of the three primary ways the Society engages scholars: our conferences, our journal, and our website.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Much of what the survey found will be unsurprising to those who have been involved with the development of the Society. We live and work across a diverse spectrum of places, but we are employed within the hierarchy of the Academy and come to our work as trained historians and literary scholars. Our scholarly networks are global, and they have linguistic frontiers rather than national ones. That said, even with an English-language questionnaire, more than one-fifth of the respondents say they write or teach regularly in a language other than English.

No one region, period, topic, or approach defines the interests of the majority, outside our common concern for children and youth. Unsurprisingly, a large proportion of those surveyed reported interest in North America and Europe, and most of us work on the period since 1800. Interest in gender and education was notably strong. Some might be surprised by the large minority of scholars who study children's literature, and the sizable proportion trained in literature, languages, and the humanities.

As expected, the survey revealed a strong association between dues-paying membership and other indicators of engagement. Unfortunately, the majority experience exclusion for financial reasons. Respondents said they want more opportunities to meet with colleagues and present their work at events closer to their homes. As important as the large, international biennial conferences have been, alone they do not meet the needs of most working in the field.

The survey demonstrated that the *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* is highly respected, and that it has a strong readership among SHCY members. There was not a clear demand for expanding the Journal's annual output, but respondents do support improving the Society's digital presence. Relative to the Journal, SHCY's website is not well regarded and it has yet to become a forum for circulating substantive content.

RESPONSES TO FINDINGS

The survey confirmed familiar challenges and opportunities. The responses the Society has developed over time, as well as new attempts we are making are listed below. The main body situates these responses relative to an analysis of the survey. This is intended to clarify the issues we face, encourage discussion, and foster creative approaches in the future.

Response 1. Facilitate events and create volunteer opportunities to encourage diverse international representation, participation, and membership in the Society.

Response 2. Welcome and strengthen contributions to the history of education and the history of other professions/institutions that are organized around childhood and youth.

Response 3. Recognize and respond to the economic difficulties faced by students and temporary, sessional faculty in the university system.

Response 4. Provide opportunities for regional, topical, and theoretical working-groups, while maintaining the Society's mission to facilitate an intelligible international, interdisciplinary field of childhood and youth history.

Responses 5, 6, and 7. In accord with SHCY by-laws, require membership for biennial international conference participation, but facilitate and sponsor more frequent events which grant small benefits (reduced fees) for members.

Response 8. Support JHCY's continued success and editorial transition.

Response 9. Improve the substantive digital presence of the Society, and create online opportunities for members to participate in the field.

***Mission Statement:** SHCY was founded in 2001 to promote the history of children and youth. The organization supports research about childhood, youth cultures, and the experience of young people across diverse times and places. We foster study across disciplinary and methodological boundaries, and provide venues for scholars to communicate with one another. The Society promotes excellence in scholarship is open to all individuals as well as to cultural and educational institutions.*

I - A PROFILE OF THE FIELD

QUESTION: WHERE DO RESEARCHERS WHO STUDY CHILDHOOD HISTORICALLY RESIDE?

ANSWER: EVERYWHERE, BUT SHCY'S PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS ARE MOST EXTENSIVE IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING PARTS OF THE WORLD.

A majority of those surveyed reside in **Canada and the United States (56%)**, while 21% reside in Europe, and 12% in Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific. All other global areas accounted for 11% of respondents.

If our communication networks (as measured by survey reach) are global (44% from outside the U.S. and Canada), they are strongly represented by regions where English is one of the dominant languages. That said, 21% of the respondents reported that they regularly teach or write in a language other than English.

***Response 1:** The Society is holding SHCY 2019 in Sydney and SHCY 2021 in Galway. These efforts are balanced by joining with other scholarly organizations to create opportunities for researchers to present on both North American coasts in 2018 and 2020.*

With this diversity acknowledged, it is worthwhile to note a strong relationship between North American residence and Society membership. More than two-thirds of American and Canadian scholars reported being SHCY members; the figure is between one-third and one-quarter for Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific.

QUESTION: WHAT DISCIPLINARY OR PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IS COMMON?

ANSWER: WE ARE ACADEMIC HISTORIANS AND LITERARY SCHOLARS.

Almost two-thirds of those surveyed were **trained as historians (65%)**. There is another modal point around children's literature. Among 22 disciplines and professions listed, the survey identified only 4 areas of study outside of History above the 2% threshold: Literature & Languages (11%); Interdisciplinary Humanities (6%); Education (5%); and Anthropology (2%).

The fact that one in six respondents were trained in literature, languages, and the humanities seems notable, given the orientation of childhood and youth historiography around schooling, social policy, families, and the law. Yet, only a handful of surveys were returned from people trained in sociology, political science, social work, or law. Maybe this says more about how the information pathways are shaped in the childhood studies, than it does about the spectrum of historical research actually being done on childhood and youth – but this too would be an interesting possibility.

***Response 2:** The bridge between History and Literature should be nurtured, but we hope to strength other interdisciplinary linkages – especially (given our stated interests) with the profession of Education. We are currently collaborating with the History of Education Society, and welcome the development of working-groups in Education.*

QUESTION: WHAT PROFESSIONAL STATUSES ARE HELD BY RESEARCHERS?

ANSWER: MOST ARE TENURED/TENURE TRACK FACULTY OR GRADUATE STUDENTS.

Tenured and Tenure-Track positions (49%) were held by almost half of the respondents, and these persons were approximately twice as likely to be members. The next largest groups may include respondents who occupy multiple categories: Ph.D. Candidates and other graduate students (20%); part-time sessional faculty (10%); full-time temporary faculty (8%). While emeritus, retirees (7%) and independent scholars (7%) were two other numerically common statuses, only three secondary teachers and three museum professionals responded.

All the professional statuses listed were checked, yet the vast majority of us (over 90%) occupy some point in the pathway of academic life as shaped by university hierarchies. Whatever critique might be offered about this hierarchy, the survey reached and was responded to by academics who work within its terms. Practitioners who work directly with children and youth are very rarely members.

Response 3: We recognize difficulties faced by students and newly minted PhD's in the university system. Currently we offer a sliding dues scale, travel bursaries to conferences, and locate events at universities which offer reasonable or varied accommodations.

II - AREAS OF INTERESTS

QUESTION: WHAT HISTORICAL REGIONS AND NATION STATES DRAW THE MOST ATTENTION?

ANSWER: EVERY MAJOR GEOGRAPHIC AREA OF THE WORLD CULTIVATES INTEREST FROM RESEARCHERS IN THE FIELD.

The questionnaire asked researchers to check up to six research interests from a list of 38 geographic regions and nation states. To be sure, the **United States was checked by 38%** and Europe by 30% of those surveyed (the U.K 25%; N. America 17%, Australia 10%, Canada 10%). But, **31 of the remaining 32 areas or states** drew responses from anywhere from 1-8% of those surveyed.

QUESTION: WHAT TIME PERIODS ARE STUDIED MOST?

ANSWER: IF THE SURVEY REACHED SCHOLARS OF GEOGRAPHICALLY DIVERSE INTERESTS, THEIR TEMPORAL FOCUS IS LARGELY CONFINED TO THE LAST TWO CENTURIES.

When allowed to pick two from a list of nine periods, about half of those surveyed indicated interest in the **19th-century**; and about two-thirds an interest in the **20th-century**. These selections were more than twice as common as other period frameworks. That said, almost one-fifth (18 %) checked the category “Modern – 1500 to present”; and the same proportion selected Post-WWII. Smaller proportions (7%) selected “Early-Modern – 1450-1750” or the 18th-century. Less than 2% study ancient or medieval periods.

QUESTION: WHAT INTERESTS AND APPROACHES ARE MOST COMMON?

ANSWER: WE HAVE DIVERSE INTERESTS, BUT GENDER AND SCHOOLS ARE TOUCHSTONES.

We are interested in everything from “play and recreation” (32 responses) to “biopolitics and disciplinary techniques” (12 responses). Thirty-four of forty-two listed areas of interest were picked by at least 10 scholars, and **no area was left empty by all survey-takers.**

The diversity of our interests is undoubtable, but the data is muddled by the way we posed the question. The survey piled too much into one list asking researchers to indicate 6 choices among 42 areas of interest across institutions, groups, categories, genres, events, methods, and theories. Diffusion was almost predetermined by the structure of the question. That said, separating the responses into *ex post facto* categories yields some suggestive comparisons.

institutions and policies **Schools/education (47%)** was picked far more often than other institutional areas: welfare/poverty (23%); labour/economy (12%); health/medicine (12%); law (10%).

identity formations, states of being, and cultural groups **Gender (54%)** was much more important to researchers than the other two elements of the identity-politics trinity (race

23%; class 23%). Following suit, **girlhood (23%)** drew more interest than religion/ethnicity (15%); and, **sexuality (14%)** was selected much more often than disability (6%).

activities, events, situations, relationships, and movements A half-dozen terms fielded about one-seventh of all responses: **generational/family relations (17%)** and **war/revolution (16%)**; but these two were only slightly more common than **youth political movements, colonialism, play and recreation, and consumer culture.** Far fewer selected migration, peer culture and friendship, performance arts, or slavery.

types of evidence, texts, and methods **Children’s literature (25%)** was select most often here. While **oral history and memory (16%)**, **material culture (16%)**, **children’s writing (10%)**, **film and visual culture (10%)** showed well too.

theoretical or analytic frameworks These were selected least, but they were also at the bottom of a very long list. Among them, **discourse analysis, literary criticism, history of ideas, sensibilities, emotions, governmentality, and biopolitics** hovered around **5-10% each.** These phrases registered significantly more interest than actor-network theory (less than 1%), quantitative analysis (2%), or architecture and spatial analysis (2%).

Response 4: *Researchers in childhood history carry varying assumptions, interests, and questions. This makes common debates more difficult and more interesting. To the degree that the Society is dedicated to fostering a more intelligible field of childhood and youth history, it should maintain common forums such as the international biennial conferences; the journal; the website. But, it should also respond to the practical and intellectual needs (indeed the existing efforts) of regional, topical, and theoretical groups to organize themselves and produce their own questions and debates. We are doing this by inviting members to form networks and working-groups under the SHCY umbrella.*

III - CONFERENCES

QUESTION: DO OUR BIENNIAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES FACILITATE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE FIELD BEYOND THE EVENTS THEMSELVES?

ANSWER: YES.

Seventy-three percent of those who have attended at least one of the nine biennial SHCY conferences, said they **were current SHCY members**. This was almost triple the membership rate (26%) among those who have yet to attend a conference. This fits with the policy of linking conference participation to organizational membership, which we reaffirmed at the Rutgers-Camden meeting.

SHCY members are almost twice as likely to express interest building SHCY **networks and working-groups**, and they are more than twice as likely to say they will attend our upcoming conferences in **Sydney (2019) and Galway (2021)**. They are **15-times more likely to have read the Society's journal (JHCY)** and they are **10-times more likely** to say that they **examine nearly every issue**. The two groups have an equally high opinion of the Journal, but members (79%) are more than twice as likely as non-members (37%) to say **they would pay more (5-10 USD)** to meet operating expenses.

Admittedly membership is as much an effect, as a cause, of engagement. If there is a reciprocal relationship between the two, the operative question becomes: **where is our opportunity to influence that cycle? Answer: requiring membership for conference participation**. When the Society deviated from requiring membership for conference participation, it lost one-third of its membership in a four-year period. We currently rely on 207 members to fund our efforts. The findings of the survey strongly

support the idea that rebuilding our membership should be a focus of our efforts in the coming years.

Once a conference delegate becomes a member, the Society places a copy of the Journal into their hands six times over the next two years. **Given that 93% of them rate JHCY as 'excellent' or 'very good,'** it seems reasonable to conclude that readership will increase their propensity to continue to belong and participate over the long-haul. In fact, **over 90%** of those surveyed who reported attending any of the first four biennial conferences **are still members today (ten years later)**. This is from a sample that is only 50% members.

Response 5: Pursuing policies designed to increase conference participation with required membership, while maintaining the accessibility of the field to those with fewer economic and institutional resources might seem at odds. Yet without access to external sources of funding, the Society can only reduce costs for those who need it, by gathering membership dues from those with the ability to pay.

QUESTION: WHAT HINDERS CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION AND WHAT MIGHT REMOVE THESE OBSTACLES?

ANSWER: TRAVEL EXPENSES ARE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT BARRIER TO SHCY CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE; RESEARCHERS SAY GREATER TRAVEL FUNDING, AND OPPORTUNITIES TO MEET CLOSER TO THEIR RESIDENCE WOULD MAKE THEIR PARTICIPATION MORE LIKELY.

One-third (34%) of those working in the field report that conference costs under \$1,000 USD are prohibitively high for them. Another third face economic exclusion (a total of 68%) whenever costs rise to \$1,500 USD. Only one out of eight (12%) researchers say that total conference costs up to \$2,500 USD are non-prohibitive for them. And, only one out of twenty (5%) might be called 'fully funded' for these activities.

Where researchers are positioned within the hierarchy of the academy, frames what conferences they choose to attend. **For most, the decision is economic.** When asked to order 8 factors that determine their conference choices, **59% selected cost** as either the first (38%) or second (21%) most important. Cost was even more than important than the **topical relevance (32% and 14%)** of the event for their interests. The third most important factor, **proximity (13%, 33%),** is obviously related to cost. None of the other factors were particularly important in the decision-making process (friendship - 9%, 13%; career - 2%, 10%; host reputation - 3%, 6%; accessibility - 1%, 1%; touring - 1%, 1%). Though, each of these five factors may merit consideration by organizers for other reasons.

When we asked those who had not attended a SHCY conference what we could do to make the even more attractive, they reiterated the above findings. Some said they would be moved by **topically specific events** within childhood and youth history - which might be organized by SHCY working-groups or networks. As a whole, they repeatedly named their needs for **better funding, lower costs, and closer proximity.**

QUESTION: DO EFFORTS TO INCREASE MEMBERSHIP AND CONFERENCE ACTIVITY CARRY RISKS?

ANSWER: YES, BUT IT SEEMS UNWISE AND INCONSISTENT WITH OUR MISSION TO IGNORE SURVEY RESPONDENTS; AND MUCH OF THIS IS ALREADY UNDERWAY.

Direct profits from our conferences were produced by the policy of charging a fee in lieu of membership for delegates. And these profits have helped fund our efforts to make our services more accessible. Yet, trading membership for conference profits seems like a poor long-term strategy due to the relationships between membership, participation, and identity. And they are less reliable because they also depend upon fund-raising and institutional support that has been secured by past organizers. Each conference will vary.

Response 6: While maintaining the large biennial international conference, SHCY should plan and support smaller regional conferences and other events in collaboration with organization holding similar interests. We are actively working on ways to do this and invite future opportunities.

Researchers in the field are asking for more events tailored to specific regions, approaches, and questions. The travel costs of conference participation are less negotiable than other elements of a trip, such as lodging or meals. The most direct way to alleviate this barrier to participation is to hold events at more locations, more often. This might also result in some topically, regionally,

theoretically specific events produced by SHCY's emerging working groups and networks.

There are reasons to be concerned that increased frequency of events will reduce participation, and for wondering whether events removed from places where SHCY has previously succeeded will continue to succeed. **65%** of those surveyed said they were **extremely unlikely (32%) to attend, or probably would not (33%) attend the 2019 SHCY biennial conference in Sydney**. Nine out of ten of these persons, named travel costs as a reason.

This said, there are also reasons to believe SHCY can continue to succeed in its effort to build a well-connected international field of study. Among those **who attended** the last biennial event in New Jersey (67% of all survey respondents), **50% of them said they were extremely likely to go to or probably would go to Sydney; and 77% of them said the same about traveling to Galway in 2021.**

We can also reasonably hope for continued success because the population of childhood history researchers working worldwide in English far exceeds the numbers who have

previously attended SHCY events, read JHCY, or considered becoming a member of the Society. Half of our survey respondents are not members, half have only 'sometimes' or 'rarely' read JHCY. **H-Childhood alone circulates notices to about 1,800 addresses; SHCY currently has 207 members.** We have room to grow.

Finally, the world is not waiting on SHCY. Venues for networking, presenting, and publishing work in childhood history internationally is booming as is evident in several CFP's posted on H-Childhood or SHCY

website every month. Extending beyond the biennial conference framework, and expanding our efforts to become an **umbrella organization** for childhood history seems merited.

Response 7: The hosts of SHCY 2019 in Sydney have raised funds and made decisions to help make our first Australian conference more accessible to distant travelers. We are also pleased to have provided small grants to upcoming events in China and Sweden. The organizers of these events know well what it means to make long journeys. Their efforts are allowing the Society to pursue its mission of fostering global conversations about children and youth

IV - JHCY'S READERSHIP

QUESTION: WHAT IS THE OVERALL RATING OF THE JOURNAL?

ANSWER: THE JOURNAL HAS AN EXCELLENT REPUTATION AND IS STRONGLY SUPPORTED.

Fifty percent of those surveyed rated the journal "excellent," and the other half rated it "good to very good." **No one thought the journal merely "fair to good" or "poor."** 62% of respondents said they would pay a small surcharge to support the Journal (only 11% saying they would not).

QUESTION: WHAT IS THE REACH OF THE JOURNAL'S READERSHIP?

ANSWER: IT IS MOST READ AMONG HISTORIANS RESIDING IN NORTH AMERICA, BUT DIFFERENCES IN INTERESTS AND PERIOD DO NOT APPEAR TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH REPORTED READERSHIP.

Scholars residing in the U.S. and Canada say they read the journal "frequently," (25%) or "nearly every issue," (32%) about twice as often as those from other parts of the world. Among other regions with large representation, the proportions were: Continental Europe (17%/13%); U.K. & Ireland (14%/14%); Australia, NZ, and the Pacific (25%/7%). This may be due N. America's higher rates of membership, and receipt of the journal in the mail.

Trained historians (53%) report reading the journal in the 2 highest categories more often than those trained in Literature & Languages (27%) or Education (20%). Understandably, graduate students (73%) reported the highest rates of reading the journal frequently or nearly every issue. While Part-Time sessional

faculty had the least time for the Journal (26%/13%).

QUESTION: DO SCHOLARS WANT THE JOURNAL TO EXPAND FROM 3 TO 4 ISSUES ANNUALLY?

ANSWER: NOT REALLY.

46% responded 'maybe,' while 38% 'yes,' and 16% 'no.'

QUESTION: DO SCHOLARS WANT THE JOURNAL TO INCREASE ITS DIGITAL PRESENCE AND LINKS TO SHCY WEBSITE?

ANSWER: YES.

77% responded 'yes,' while only 3% said, 'no.' (20% maybe). Support for a greater digital presence was strong and evenly distributed across **all regions**, and among **members and non-members**. Majorities favour it among **all status groups**, but the support among graduate students (90%) was markedly higher; emeriti and retiree support was as 64%.

Response 8: *The Journal is in good hands. The Society is facilitating a sound transition between the editorships of James Marten and Linda Mahood. It will continue to financially support and hear the needs of the Journal, but the Journal's operation and development will continue to be matters for the Editor and the Editorial Board to consider and act upon.*

V - DIGITAL PRESENCE

QUESTION: WHAT IS THE OVERALL RATING OF SHCY'S WEBSITE (NOT H-CHILDHOOD)?

ANSWER: SHCY'S WEBSITE HAS A RELATIVELY WEAK REPUTATION AND DOES NOT DO VERY MUCH FOR SCHOLARS.

The finding that a majority (**54%**) of scholars rate the website “**fair to good**” – which is a 2 on a 4-point scale – should be read in light of their much more positive evaluations of the other things the Society produces. Not one scholar rated the Journal that low. And not one graduate student (a group that places the most importance on this area) rated the website “**excellent**”; only 5% of all respondents did.

QUESTION: WHAT WEBSITE ACTIVITIES DO SCHOLARS USE?

ANSWER: SHCY WEBSITE PRIMARILY SERVES AS AN ELECTRONIC BULLETIN BOARD.

The survey was not well constructed in this area, because it collapsed ‘use’ reporting into

‘value’ assessment; it also placed the past usage and future aspirations into one question.

That said, **far more scholars** say they use/value SHCY website for **announcements**, than for substantive scholarly content. Interestingly enough, graduate students and doctoral candidates say they (30%) ‘often’ use SHCY’s Tweeter feed; that was double the reported rate for tenure-track and tenured faculty.

QUESTION: WHAT FUTURE/PAST WEBSITE ACTIVITIES MIGHT/HAVE SCHOLARS FIND/FOUND MOST USEFUL?

ANSWER: THERE IS AN INTEREST IN A STRONGER DIGITAL PRESENCE, BUT PRODUCING SUCH THINGS HAS PROVED DIFFICULT.

A large majority of the field says they would like a stronger digital presence. Most members say they have or think they would use **commentaries and interviews (77%)**, or **news digests (75%)**, or **short lecture video series (69%)**, or **even online conferences (58%)** if we could develop them. Be this as it may, consistent high-quality online-publications have proved difficult to mount.

Response 9: *The survey confirms a general challenge in creating substantive scholarly exchange outside the traditional frameworks of in-person conferences and peer-reviewed publications. We are taking steps to do better.*

The Society funds a digital fellow working with a SHCY Online Editor. An entirely redesigned site will be launched in an online magazine format in the Fall of 2018. Our goal is to build a non-peer reviewed space for scholarly exchange, a repository for online teaching and research resources, and a place to circulate notices. This will depend on your contributions. Calls for submissions are on the way!

SHCY Officers

President

Patrick Ryan, 2017-2019

VP-President Elect

Tamara Myers, 2017-2019

Secretary-Treasurer (appointed)

Kriste Lindenmeyer, 2011-Present

JHCY Editor (appointed)

James Marten, 2017-Present

Executive Committee At-Large Members

2017 - 2021

Valeria Manzano

Kristine Moruzi

Emma Alexander

2015-2019

Kristine Alexander

Paula Fass

David Niget

Ishita Pande

Mary Hatfield (Student Representative)