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Whistle while you work: The impact of working in a children's museum on teenagers' self-confidence

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Abstract

Teenagers are often hired to work at children's museums, where they interact with visitors, play with children, and generally keep the museum operating day-to-day. Research shows that participating in programs in museums positively impacts teenagers, but there is little research on the impacts of teenagers working in museums. This study explored how working in a children's museum impacts teenagers' self-confidence. Surveys were completed by 12 teenagers who worked at one of two children's museums, and interviews were conducted with 7 of them as well as 2 museum directors who supervised teenagers. Results show that teenagers felt more confident overall, in their communication skills and in their job readiness skills. These impacts on teenagers' self-confidence were influenced by children's museums being a happy space, teens feeling a sense of accomplishment from their workspace, and from their coworkers and management. Findings from this research have implications for all museums that work with teenagers in supporting teens both within the museum and with their transitions into adulthood.

Keywords

teenagers; children's museums; self-confidence

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Introduction

Problem

For many museums, the floor staff are the individuals who interact with visitors the most throughout the day. They are the face of the museum. Specifically, in children's museums, these floor staffers are commonly high school students (U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2020). who facilitate positive experiences with visitors by playing with them, engaging with them, and answering their questions. In short, they keep the museum operational throughout the day.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, approximately 4.7 million teenagers aged 16-19 are employed. Of those 4.7 million teenagers, 14,000 work in “museums, art galleries, historical sites, and similar institutions” (U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2020). Current research examines how participating in specific teen-focused museum programs can impact high schoolers' personal, social, and cognitive development – but not on how *working* in a museum can impact teenagers' development. This article describes results from research that examined whether and how high school students feel their job in a children’s museum impacts their self-confidence.

Literature Review

Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is often used interchangeably with self-esteem, self-concept, self-certainty, or self-efficacy. In social psychology, though, these terms are viewed as static personality traits that do not change situationally (Gutowitz, 2021). A person’s self-confidence fluctuates over time and in differing situations. For example, a student may feel confident in math but not in science (Gutowitz, 2021; White, 2009). Although self-confidence is situational, it does impact a person’s overall well-being. Current research has found that self-esteem, self-concept, and self-certainty impact self-confidence, but they are not the same as self-confidence (Gutowitz, 2021). This study defines self-confidence as the ability to trust in one’s skills and beliefs (White, 2009; What is Self Confidence?, n.d.).

Possessing high self-confidence can lead to more positive outcomes in one’s future (Gutowitz, 2021). Studies have found that a person with higher self-confidence is more motivated, persistent, self-aware, has stronger social and decision-making skills, and is less likely to have depression or anxiety (White, 2009; Gutowitz, 2021). One study found that people begin developing their self-confidence as young as five years old (Cvencek et al., 2015). It is a concept that fluctuates

situationally, but there are ways to continue developing overall self-confidence. Many publications focus on mindfulness exercises, journaling, and affirmations (Gutowitz, 2021). A study on nursing students found that a person's confidence can become higher through knowledge, support, experience, and success (White, 2009).

On the flip side, low self-esteem directly correlates with higher rates of depression, anxiety, stress, and difficulty making decisions (White, 2009; Gutowitz, 2021). One study found that adolescents with low or decreasing self-confidence were more likely to show symptoms of depression as they age (Steiger et al., 2014). People who have lower self-confidence also have more difficulty making decisions and take fewer risks (Chuang et al., 2012). In addition, they struggle with making large purchases, life decisions, and motivation. Research has found that “low self-confidence makes it difficult to persevere when faced with obstacles and set ambitious goals” (Gutowitz, 2021, para. 17). This is often why those with higher self-confidence have higher-paying jobs and more stability (Gutowitz, 2021). Other factors that can negatively affect self-confidence include social media and gender (White, 2009; Jan et al., 2017). Studies indicate that women are more likely to have less self-confidence than men (White, 2009) and underdeveloped social skills (Manning & Ray, 1993).

High schoolers' engagement with museums

There have been numerous studies and evaluations on museum programs designed for teenagers (Linzer & Munley, 2015; Diamond et al., 1987, Dugedale, 2018). The scope of this research commonly involves questioning how museum programs affect teens' social and cognitive development as well as their future career choices. While they address pertinent topics that influence a high schooler's self-confidence, this research does not directly observe the concept of self-confidence development. For example, the Whitney Museum of Art looked at teen art programs' short and long-term impacts (Linzer & Munley, 2015). These impacts included “personal identity and self-knowledge, lifelong relationships to museums and culture, expanded career horizons, a worldview grounded in art, community engagement and influence” (p. 11). Linzer and Munley found that teen art programs positively impacted teenagers in the above regards. Although these topics influence self-confidence, the Whitney Museum of Art did not directly study the phenomenon of self-confidence.

Daniels's (2016) study compared various high school programs at nine separate art museums and found that many teenagers gained job

experience and mentorship that positively affected them following graduation. These museum programs encouraged high schoolers to continue their education and change the world in a larger sense. The research specifically focused on career development, and found that programs such as these “build a strong foundation of both personal and professional self-awareness, preparing [high schoolers] for the transition into adulthood” (p. 183). While self-awareness can positively increase self-confidence, it is crucial to note that they are two different ideas. Although the mentorship and career development these high schoolers received through their museum experience positively affected their self-confidence, the specific idea of self-confidence was not measured.

A common theme researchers examine in high schoolers' engagement in museum programs is their connection to visitors (Diamond et al., 1987; Dugedale, 2018). In the *Explainers* program at the San Francisco Exploratorium, the high school staffers work in a public-facing capacity. Their position means they functioned as informal teachers to the public (High School Explainers: About the Program, 2011). Research shows that being in a teaching position increases one's social development to communicate topics they are still learning about, admit ignorance, and still have the ability to explain topics at varying levels of understanding (Diamond et al., 1987). Consequently, the high school staffers developed the ability to successfully engage and educate museum visitors of all ages and backgrounds. Diamond et al.'s study portrayed how these programs positively impact social development and future careers, but not self-confidence directly.

As stated, very few research and evaluation studies have specifically studied how working in a museum space impacts high schoolers' self-confidence. However, some studies have examined related concepts, such as self-esteem, self-concept, self-certainty, and self-efficacy (Gutowitz, 2021). The study on the *Explainer* program at the San Francisco Exploratorium evaluated how it affected its high schoolers' future career choices and life post-high school. A part of this study discovered that students' self-esteem rose, finding that 50-80% of the *Explainers* felt a positive impact on their self-confidence, effectiveness in other jobs, and the ability to teach people (Diamond et al., 1987). While they were not the primary intention of the program, these outcomes had lasting positive personal effects on teenagers outside of the museum.

Dugedale (2018) conducted research on award-winning programs at three different historical museums: the New York Historical Society, Brooklyn Historical Society, and the Missouri History

Museum. The study concluded that many high schoolers felt their confidence increased due to their experiences in their museum program. Additionally, students reported that one of the many ways this newfound confidence manifested was a new “willingness to talk to people” (p. 47). Moments when teenagers talked with strangers, impacted their self-confidence in communicating with visitors. Dugedale’s research also found that teenagers were more confident in their “work” and in what they were “producing” (p. 46) and that they were more confident in their own “knowledge of how to do something or about a particular topic” (p. 46).

COVID-19 and labor impacts on high schoolers mental health

The world is adjusting to a post-pandemic lifestyle. This research was conducted in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is imperative to consider how COVID-19 impacted teenage employment and mental health, as it affected the results of this study. Research suggests that teens have more mental health problems post-COVID-19 (Rukmen & Slaughter, 2021). Unfortunately, this uptick is due to young people being furloughed, losing their jobs, and companies decreasing hours due to the pandemic. Job uncertainty is a leading cause of mental health problems, especially during a global crisis (Rukmen & Slaughter, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic led young people to experience either new or further declining mental health problems. These include anxiety, panic, and depression which are all common responses to uncertainty due to economic losses and strict social shutdowns due to the pandemic (Rukmen & Slaughter, 2021). Front line employees also have the stress of contracting COVID-19 while at work, creating a more anxiety-inducing workplace (Rukmen & Slaughter, 2021).

Study purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine how working in a children’s museum impacts teenagers’ self-confidence. It was guided by two research questions: 1) To what extent do high schoolers feel that working in a children’s museum influences their self-confidence? And 2) What is it about working in a children’s museum that they feel contributes to influencing their self-confidence? By better understanding how and why high schoolers work in children’s museums, the field will be more equipped to support its youngest employees.

Methodology

This study utilized a survey design paired, with data collected through online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews (Pickard, 2013).

Sample

Twelve teenagers participated in this study. They were recruited through two different children's museums, one (Museum A) a children's and science center located in a New England suburb with over 100,000 visitors per year, and the other (Museum B) a children's museum located in a city in the Pacific Northwest with over 100,000 visitors per year. In both cases, the researcher had relationships with either the museum supervisor or the teens themselves, and recruited study participants via social media, email, or through their museum director. All 12 completed an online questionnaire, while 7 participated in an interview.

Twenty-five percent (n=3) of teenagers had worked at the museum for less than one year, 8% (n=1) for two years, 42% (n=5) for three years, and 25% (n=3) for four or more years. Ninety-two percent of survey participants (n=11) identified as female, and 8% (n=1) as male. Teenagers ranged in age from 18-21. Six had graduated college at time of the study, and reflected on their time in high school when they worked at the children's museum. One participant was a senior in high school. Museum A and Museum B had differing titles for their floor staff. All positions had the high school students working on the museum's floor "resetting" (cleaning up) galleries, interacting with visitors, answering questions, or checking patrons in. Five of the teenagers worked at the front desk: checking guests into the museum, processing memberships, and handling cash transactions. In addition to teenagers, two museum staff who directly supervised teenagers at these two children's museums participated in the study.

Results

Data collection

Data were collected through online questionnaires and interviews. Participants were first asked to complete a ten-minute online questionnaire including three parts (Appendix A). The first part asked for demographic information. The second part pertained to the participants' growth in self-confidence at their workplace. Teenagers ranked themselves on scales based on how much they agreed with the statement. The 5-point scales ranged from "not at all" to "completely." Teenagers were also asked to rank how much they believed working in a children's museum impacted their self-confidence on a 7-point scale ranged from "not at all" to "completely." These statements focused on

whether the participants' increase or decrease in confidence affected their lives outside the workplace. The third part of the questionnaire used the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) to learn where participants' self-esteem landed currently. This section utilized a 4-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "completely."

Seven high school participants were also interviewed via Zoom (Appendix B). Those interviewed gave more in-depth insights into how working in a children's museum affected their self-confidence. The interview began with a grounding definition of self-confidence and two follow-up questions about moments the participant felt confident. The answers to these two questions did not need to relate to their work at children's museums. The interview then continued to ask the participant to give specific examples of when the subject felt confident in their work, moments where they felt their confidence grow, and how their increase or decrease in confidence affected their lives outside of their museum work.

The two Zoom interviews conducted with the teenagers' supervisors asked questions to gain insight into how they have seen high schoolers' self-confidence grow through their time working at their museums (Appendix C). These questions asked for specific examples of moments where supervisors saw teen staff become more confident over time while working.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed in two ways. The interview responses were coded, looking for common words or phrases that arose. These phrases included "overall" self-confidence, self-confidence in "communication skills," self-confidence in "job readiness" skills, creating "happiness" or a sense of "accomplishment," and coworkers and "management." The survey information was then coded to find the averages and the deviation of each scaled response.

All interviews were conducted and recorded via zoom. These interviews were then transcribed and coded using commonly used terms throughout the separate interviews.

1. To what extent do high schoolers feel that working in a children's museum influences their self-confidence?

Three dimensions of self-confidence were measured in this study: (a) overall self-confidence, (b) self-confidence in communication, and (c) self-confidence in job readiness.

a) Overall self-confidence

High school study participants were asked to rate on a 7-point scale the extent to which working in a children's museum positively affected their self-confidence overall. The mean rating was 5.25 with a standard deviation of 1.06. For the most part, high schoolers attributed this impact on their overall self-confidence to the positive experiences they had in their jobs. In the words of one high schooler,

"Just that it does. It definitely positively affected my confidence. And I'd say it was like, no matter what was going on in school or if I was just having a hard time, I think it was always a place where I felt like I could come in and feel like I was being successful."

Another participant summed up their experience by saying, "I love working at the museum. I love the memories I've made and experiences I've had. So, I think it's definitely had a positive impact on my self-confidence and my life." Yet another participant explained,

"When I started at the museum, I didn't like to ask for help. I was definitely more like, 'OK, I can figure this out on my own. I don't want to bother someone else. I can figure this out.' But now, I'll still try that at first, but then I definitely feel more confident asking for help or asking someone who would like, know better."

b) Self-Confidence in communication skills

All high schoolers (n=12) stated that working in a children's museum increased their confidence in their communication skills. Table 1 shows that, on average, high schoolers rated this increase a 4 or higher on a 5-point scale.

Table 1: High schoolers' ratings of whether working in a children's museum increased their communication-related self-confidence, where 1=not at all and 5=completely (N=12).

Item (Working in a children's museum has increased my confidence in...)	Median rating (scale 1-5)	Standard deviation
...talking to strangers	4.50	0.52
...talking to children	4.75	0.62
...how to communicate more effectively	4.00	0.74

Two main trends emerged in teenager’s explanations of how and why their children's museum job impacted their confidence in their communication. First, high schoolers felt that their job created spaces to practice their communication skills with strangers, including unknown callers, pizza delivery people, or other students in their classes. One teen explained that they get to "practice talking to strangers" while working at the museum, which has been "really beneficial." Another teen explained this idea further, saying,

"Before I worked at the museum, I was afraid to answer the phone. Like if an unknown number would call me, I would be like, 'No, I can't.' And then I remember one day, my manager was there at the front [of the museum] with me and was like, 'Next time the phone rings, you're answering it.' I was so afraid because I was like, 'What if I don't know the answer? How am I supposed to talk to this person?' I used to virtually order pizza, and now I call in an order or call the nail salon. I think just literally from working there; I've had so much more confidence with that...."

Another teen expanded on this idea by explaining that they now feel more comfortable "waving down the waiter, I guess, and a lot of my friends don't love doing that." This participant felt they could speak to strangers more easily after practicing at their children's museum. The idea of practicing talking to strangers at the museum was also

discussed by another participant who found it helpful to practice their English:

"...You know, English isn't my first language. Learning English was such a challenge. So even if I had all these ideas, it was always hard to explain them. So, from going to the museum, I felt like, 'OK, I have a set plan in my head on how to handle situations, how to adapt and still be creative,' which was nice."

A high schooler reflected on their experience in college and shared how talking to strangers in the museum made them more comfortable talking to strangers in their classes:

"For me, this is my first time on campus, and we don't have a lot of scenarios where we can meet new people. So, it takes a lot of initiative to go talk to a random person. And that's been very helpful for me because these people can help me with my homework. But just being able to engage with people that I don't know already, opening up my circle, I found, just in general, really beneficial for my daily life. And I think I became more confident in that from just talking to strangers at the museum."

Two teens in this study felt that they could now easily convey complex messages to children because of their work at a children's museum. One high schooler explained, "Working with children has definitely given me experience in understanding their viewpoint and creating ways for them to work on something." Another high schooler explained that working at the children's museum made it "easier to talk with children."

At the same time, teens acknowledged that they spent the majority of their time talking to adults in their museum job, often guardians of children. They said they often felt more confident communicating with professors, teachers, and other adults because they constantly talked with adults in their workplace. For example, one teen recalled,

"I feel like for me, because I have social anxiety, I'm definitely really nervous talking to adults or, you know, teachers or things like that. When I'm at work, talking with parents and also talking with my coworkers who are adults, I feel like this job has brought up my confidence in that area as well."

Another participant stated that communicating with parents while working at birthday parties increased their confidence:

"I felt like I got very good at communicating, especially when I worked birthday parties. I would work those days where it was really hands-on with these adults, a lot of communication with adults in a way where they'd like, take me seriously, which I don't know if I totally had, besides with maybe teachers."

c) Self-Confidence in job readiness skills

For all the teenagers in this study, their job at a children's museum was their first job. Table 2 shows that, on average, teens rated themselves a 3 or higher on a 5-point scale when asked about specific workplace skills.

Table 2: High schoolers' ratings of whether working in a children's museum increased their job readiness-related self-confidence, on a scale from 1-5, where 1=not at all and 5=completely (N=12).

Item (Working in a children's museum increased my self-confidence in...)	Median rating (scale 1-5)	Standard deviation
... problem-solving	3.25	0.83
...being in a leadership position	3.50	0.72
...working with a team	4.00	0.74

Three trends arose from high schoolers when asked about their job readiness skills. First, teens felt they practiced their time management skills through COVID cleaning necessities, checking guests in, and utilizing the timed ticket software. One high schooler explained this by saying,

"With COVID cleaning and stuff like that, we have all these things that we have to get done, and I'm constantly rearranging everything in my head to make it the most efficient way that I can do it. And, just thinking about that all the time and being like, OK, how can I

make this faster? What might be a better way to do this? Or what do I need to have with me to do this for admissions? We had a bunch of new things to do with COVID. We had a person doing parking that would ask people where they were coming from if they'd been out of state. And because we do time ticketing too, so did they make reservations? You have to be pretty organized to check the reservation and then do the actual transaction. And then a lot of days, if we're booked out, and people walk in, we can only take ten people per hour. But then we have to balance that with people canceling. So, it's hard to juggle everything. I think just working in that kind of a stressful situation where it's really busy".

Another high schooler shared that they got better at "balancing school, work, and homework." These teens were better able to manage their time because they had to keep track of their shifts at work.

Directors of the teen staff spoke about the importance of teaching time management skills, especially when it comes to creating a schedule and trading shifts when necessary. For example, one director stated,

"When we hire them [teens], we agree upon a set schedule. So, for example, for Teen 1... it's every Saturday. That's it. That's her schedule. For someone like Teen 2, who is balancing school and sports, it might be these four days of the week they're available, and I schedule them for three of them. But I get to pick what three they are. Then if they're unavailable on one of their normal days, it's their responsibility to go into [time off requestor] and request it off with as much time as possible. A minimum of two weeks' notice; if they don't get it in within two weeks, they don't get it. If the schedule is out, it's [the teen's] responsibility to trade a shift with somebody else on the team, which is another good skill... And just managing your own schedule and thinking ahead... it's just being aware of their commitments and balancing multiple commitments."

Teens also shared how they felt more confident being a leader because of their time at their museums. They stated that they felt more

confident delegating tasks or knowing when to ask for help. For example, one teen explained,

"I was someone that thought if I would take control of something, it was better... I really started to learn how to delegate. I started to learn when I needed to be like, 'Hey, I need you to come do this for me.' And the fact that I had established that people would trust me and listen to me."

Teens also acknowledged that they practiced their problem-solving skills by working at the front desk, finding lost children, or fixing a broken exhibit. One participant stated that they "faced a lot of problems on the desk that we had to creatively solve." One participant reflected on their experience and shared,

"There is a lot of small problem solving that is done twenty-four, seven. Days of just dealing with crying kids and lost kids and then also water, getting everywhere and, there's always so much going on that definitely multitasking and being able to think on my feet has definitely grown a lot, but I don't think you would really get at other jobs."

One teen also expanded on this idea by saying they felt more confident recognizing when a problem needed to be brought to a person with more authority. They stated,

"I can figure it out on my own or with the people around me and then if not like finding someone who has a better chance of knowing what to do, whether that's a teacher or like a secretary or just like a facilities person."

This teen felt that they learned how to problem solve by understanding they sometimes need to find someone more experienced than themselves to help.

2. What is it about working in a children's museum that they feel contributes to influencing their self-confidence?

In qualitative interviews with high schoolers, two trends emerged that explain what they thought it was about their museum job that contributed to their increased self-confidence: (a) creating happiness and a sense of accomplishment, and (b) coworkers and management.

a) Creating happiness and sense of accomplishment

All teens in interviews (n=7) stated that they enjoyed working in their children's museum. Teen participants cited that working with kids brought them joy and happiness and improved their mental health, influencing their self-confidence. Participants stated that even after working a full day of work and feeling tired, they were in a better mood after work. One participant explained,

"I love kids, or just the museum is just such a good place to see children figure things out and have fun. And that just puts me in a better mood, even if I have to work a full day and I'm exhausted, and it was a busy day, but I still have more energy and stuff when I come home, like, I'm just like, 'OK, I got this, I can go get something accomplished.'"

Another teen highlighted the importance of the physical environment in making them feel happy and confident:

"Well, being a children's space, it was very fun. Like, there's a lot, even if you're not like, actually doing the activities, it's just like a fun, colorful environment. And I feel like that's such a nice contrast to most high schools that are just like white, beige gray, like kind of gross and dingy."

Directors who hire teens also highlighted the importance of the joyful space of a children's museum because it is less intimidating than other workplaces. For example, one director shared, "With children's museums, I feel it allows a certain level of forgiveness... there's less risk-taking to build up that confidence. Playing with kids and talking to strangers at a children's museum is fun. It's less intimidating than a bank." This director shared that they see teens' confidence increase because the environment they work in is forgiving and fun.

Along with happiness, two interview participants stated that they felt accomplished something after a day of work or after a successful interaction with a child. One participant phrased it by saying, "When you're happier and when they're [the children] enjoying it too, you feel confident that you've accomplished something." Another teen participant explained that "hopefully at least I made someone's day better if I helped them with the museum or knowing that I like, had a good day of work and nothing went wrong." This sense of

accomplishment was a significant reason high schoolers felt their confidence increased.

Directors of teens highlighted the difference between work accomplishments and school accomplishments. One director stated that the benefit of working creates "tangible accomplishments." For example, teens are "rewarded with increased pay, increased responsibility, really tangible things," which increases confidence.

b) Coworkers and management

In interviews, high schoolers also talked about who inspired confidence in them from their children's museum. Every interviewed teen (n=7) was able to name one person whom they felt they connected with and who helped instill confidence in them. Participants used words such as trust, listening, and caring when describing those who instilled confidence in them. One participant explained how they felt about their manager:

"...She could trust me or not and gave me that position. And like, even though she probably got pissed at me some days, for the most part, I feel like it was a cool relationship to have. And by the end, I knew she really believed in me. She was like, 'No, you can handle this.' And that was so cool to be like, 'Oh yeah, I can do this.'"

Another high schooler explained how having someone who cared for them outside of work made them feel more comfortable in the museum. They said, "They [adult coworkers] had time to like, speak to you like it wasn't a bother. And they seemed more genuinely interested in [my] existence" Furthering this idea, another teen explained how they looked up to one of their managers and felt cared for by them:

"[My manager] tends to walk around a lot and check in with all the people on the floor, which not all of the managers do. They'll walk around and be like, 'Do you need anything?' But [my manager] will be like, 'Hi, do you need anything? How are you? What's going on?' We'll have a real conversation. Then also in the middle of the conversation, a kid will come over, and they will go back to kid mode and just interact with the kid like a good staff person."

Not all high schoolers had positive interactions with managers or coworkers. Two teens stated that they lost confidence in themselves

because they did not feel trusted or respected by their managers. One participant explained, "I was thrown into positions that I wasn't trained for, expected to do things I didn't know how to do." Another teen had a similar experience, stating, "I knew what I was doing, and I'd be coming in, and every single day there was something like criticizing about my work." Another participant stated that they did not feel respected by management or "were made to feel dumb" and were talked down to. Teens shared that they felt management would "openly show that they were annoyed by you asking" for help. One teen further explained,

"Some people in upper positions definitely like, scared me a lot. And like, that's where I would say some of my confidence was knocked down from so, yeah, I was definitely just like, was walking on eggshells with certain people."

Many participants discussed how respectful, kind, and caring management instilled more confidence in them than management, who was less trusting and talked down to the teenage staff.

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact children's museum employment has on teenager's self-confidence. It was driven by two questions: 1) To what extent do high schoolers feel working in a children's museum influences their self-confidence, and 2) What is it about working in a children's museum that they feel contributes to influencing their self-confidence?

Discussion

1. To what extent do high schoolers feel that working in a children's museum influences their self-confidence?

Most commonly, teens felt that their children's museum job improved their overall self-confidence, their self-confidence in their communication skills, and their confidence in their job readiness skills. These findings confirm previous research that found that teenagers in museum programs have easier transitions into adulthood and better trust in themselves (Daniels, 2016; Diamond et al., 1987).

Teenagers in this study felt that their self-confidence increased largely by learning how to communicate more effectively. All teenage participants stated that they could better talk to strangers, children, and other adults because they practiced these skills while at work. Directors of teenagers also felt that teens' communication skills increased, positively impacting teens' self-confidence. This finding adds

to the literature discussing teens' increased communication skills while in teen programs in museums (Daniels, 2016; Diamond et al., 1987; Dugedale, 2018). Diamond et al.'s (1987) and Dugedale's (2018) research both suggest that because teens are "informal teachers" on museum floors, their ability to communicate effectively becomes stronger due to consistent practice talking to children and adults. Teens in this study felt more confident in communicating their thoughts to teachers and professors because of their work at their children's museum. This finding supports Dugedale's and Diamond et al.'s research. Many teens in this study felt more capable of ordering pizza or booking a nail appointment over the phone due to their increased confidence in their communication skills.

This research suggests that teens gain more confidence in their workplace skills due to working in a children's museum, which increases their self-confidence. This increase in self-confidence is likely due to teenagers' need to creatively problem solve, manage their time, communicate effectively and be a leader while at work. This finding adds to the conversation in the literature that teenagers learn job place skills in museum teen programs (Diamond et al., 1987; Dugedale 2018). This finding also backs research conducted by Daniels (2016) that states teen programs enforce a positive "personal and professional awareness" (p. 183).

This research also suggests that working in a children's museum positively impacts teenagers' overall self-confidence. Diamond et al.'s (1987) research also found that students' self-esteem rose considerably during their time at the *Exploratorium*. Results from the teens who work in children's museums suggested that their overall self-confidence rose due to creating happy memories and working in a positive space. Research conducted by Linzer and Munley (2016) found that teens in art programs held a stronger personal identity and self-knowledge after they left the program. The teenagers in these findings also stated that they felt their over-all self-confidence grew due to working in their children's museum.

2. What is it about working in a children's museum that teens feel contributes to influencing their self-confidence?

Results from this study strongly suggest that management impacts teens' self-confidence. Many teenagers felt that having a positive mentor significantly increased their confidence and their manager served as this positive mentor. This finding relates to studies conducted by Daniels (2016) and research conducted by White (2009), suggesting

that mentorship or a strong sense of support in workplaces and programs positively affects teens. Some teens in this research had positive experiences that made them feel more confident both in their museum work and outside the museum. Others felt that management did not respect them, which decreased their confidence. Research conducted on teen museum programs also found that having strong and inspiring leaders to look up to creates a more positive experience for teen participants (Diamond et al., 1987). These findings may suggest something unique about working in a museum space as a teenager and museums' support (Diamond et al., 1987, Daniels, 2016, Dugedale, 2018).

All participants in this research cited feeling a sense of accomplishment and joy from their jobs. This sense of accomplishment is due to positive interactions with children, explaining an exhibit well, or communicating with a stranger effectively. Linzer and Munley's (2016) research at the Whitney Museum also found that teens felt proud of their success at the Whitney, which significantly increased their self-confidence. Linzer and Munley also found that teens felt like an asset to the museum. Teenagers in this research also cited that they felt successful after a day of work and were helpful to the museum. This sense of accomplishment influenced teens' self-confidence positively.

As discussed earlier, self-confidence fluctuates in differing situations and over time (Gutowitz, 2021; White, 2009). Results from this study show that some teens felt more confident in talking to children than adults or felt more comfortable working at the front desk than on the museum floor. This finding adds to the conversation in the literature that self-confidence can change situationally (Gutowitz, 2021). This research also suggests that teenagers felt much more confident in their jobs and communication skills after working at the museum for three-plus months.

Limitations

The most significant limitation of this study was the impact COVID-19 had on the number of floor staff children's museums could hire. This research was conducted when museums were just beginning to reopen and start the rehiring process after furloughing or laying off most, if not all, their floor staff. Due to state-mandated capacity limits and loss in revenue, children's museums could not hire as many teenagers as they had pre-pandemic. This meant many of the teenagers who participated were rehired or self-selected to return to

the museum. These teenagers may have already had a more positive experience in their workplace, thus causing a skewed response.

Further, as interview participants were self-selected, those who participated were more likely to feel comfortable reflecting on their experience and sharing it with a stranger than those who had a more negative experience. Another limitation of this study was the virtual nature of the survey and interview process. Virtual interaction can prohibit nuanced conversation and body language cues that can impact both response and interpretation of questions.

Lastly, the large majority of this study's participants were white or Caucasian women; this caused the findings to be hyper-relevant to a small, privileged population; therefore, it should not be extrapolated to reflect a wider audience's experience.

Implications

Research

This research study focused on understanding whether and how teenagers felt working in a children's museum impacted their self-confidence. Further research might examine potential variations across contexts. For example, how might working in different children's museum spaces impact teenagers' self-confidence? Do self-confidence impacts vary according to whether teens work in visitor services departments compared to the development offices or the education departments? As another example, does the size of the children's museum matter for teens' self-confidence? This study sampled participants from two similarly run medium-sized children's museums. Teenagers who work in larger children's museums may have a different experience than teens who work in smaller organizations. Furthermore, does the type of museum matter for a teen's self-confidence? Does working in other types of museums (art, science, history) also impact teenage staff's self-confidence?

Alternatively, further research might take a different perspective on this issue, focusing not on the impacts of employment on the teens but rather on the impact teens make on children's museums. As many children's museum's missions center around learning for kids of all ages, further research into the beneficial role of teenage staff from the viewpoint of children's museums will greatly impact the field.

Lastly, these results found that children's museums unintentionally teach job-readiness skills to teenagers. Further research may look at the long-term impact children's museums have on the professional

development of teenagers who worked in them. For example, how does working in a children's museum impact teenagers' career choices or life after high school?

Practice

This research is impactful for all types of museums that work with teenagers. Results suggest that teens greatly improved their job readiness and communication skills which are transferable to many other fields. Recognizing that museums teach these skills to teenagers can allow museums to be more intentional with how they train their teenage staff. Labeling these skills and supporting teenagers as they apply to college, work other jobs, or begin professionally interviewing can support teenagers after graduating high school and moving into the professional world. Results suggest that when teenagers label these skills, they recognize they are confident in performing them.

Lastly, the most significant takeaway from this research was management's impact on teenage staff's self-confidence. Children's museums can use this research to learn how to treat and talk to their teenage staff members with more respect and trust. Results noted that teenagers' self-confidence grew when they had positive mentorship. Even when mentors were not intentional, they still positively impacted teenagers, and teenagers felt seen and more respected by their museum. Asking how a teenager's day was or what they did during their week can make them feel listened to and cared for, which is key in building self-confidence. Treating teenage staff with respect and kindness allows them to be heard and feel included.

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Appendix

Appendix A

How Working in a Children's Museum Affects High Schoolers Self-Confidence?

This survey is for Catherine Garrett's research at the University of Washington. This survey should take no longer than ten minutes. Thank you for your time and thoughts!

Demographic Questions

If you do not feel comfortable answering these questions, please leave them blank.

What is your preferred gender identity?

What are your preferred pro-nouns?

How old are you?

Children's Museum

The questions are in regards to your work at your children's museum.

Please give a brief description of your job.

At what age did you start working at your children's museum?

15

16

17

18

How long have you been working at your children's museum? Or how long did you work at your children's museum?

Less than 1 year

2 years

3 year

4 or more years

Self-Confidence and working in a children's museum

The following questions will pertain to how you believe working in a children's museum has affected your self-confidence. On the scale from 1-5, where 1 is not at all and 5 is completely, please rate yourself. If a question does not pertain to your job please skip it.

Working in a children's museum has positively affected my self-confidence.

Not at all

Completely

1

2

3

4

5

Working at my children's museum has increased my confidence in my school classes.

Not at all

Completely

1

2

3

4

5

Working at a children's museum has increased my confidence in trying new topics or ideas.

Not at all
1 2 3 4 5
Completely

Working at my children's museum has increased my confidence in talking with children.

Not at all
1 2 3 4 5
Completely

Working in my children's museum has increased my confidence in talking with strangers.

Not at all
1 2 3 4 5
Completely

Working in my children's museum has increased my confidence in problem solving.

Not at all
1 2 3 4 5
Completely

Working in my children's museum has increased my confidence in being in a leadership position.

Not at all
1 2 3 4 5
Completely

Working in my children's museum has increased my confidence in asking questions.

Not at all
1 2 3 4 5
Completely

Working in my children's museum has taught me how to communicate more effectively.

Not at all
1 2 3 4 5
Completely

Working in my children's museum has increased my confidence in working with a team.

Not at all
1 2 3 4 5
Completely

Scale of Self- Confidence

Using the Rosenberg Self- Esteem Scale below please rate how strong you agree or disagree with a statement. Please try to answer these questions in regards to your work at your children's museum.

1- Strongly Agree

2-Agree

3-Disagree

4- Strongly Disagree

Rosenberg, M. (1965). Society and the adolescent self-image. Princeton, NJ: Princeton

University Press.

On the whole, I am satisfied with myself in my work.

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

At times I think I am no good at all at my job.

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

I feel that I have a number of good qualities that I use at my work.

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

I am able to do things as well as most other people that I work with.

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

I feel I do not have much to be proud of at my job.

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

I certainly feel useless at times while I am at work.

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others that I work with.

4. Do you feel that working at your children's museum has affected your self-confidence outside of your job? If yes, can you provide an example? If no, why not?
5. What is it about your job at the children's museum that you think has most contributed to your increased or decreased self-confidence, if any? Can you give me an example of that?
6. Who in your job most affects your self-confidence?
7. What parts of your self-confidence have been affected by your job? Can you give specific examples?
 - a. Can you provide an example of how working in a children's museum has increased your confidence in...
 - i. Your school classes
 - ii. Curiosity
 - iii. Trying new things
 - iv. Introducing you to new ideas or topics
 - v. Talking with children
 - vi. Communicating with strangers
 - vii. Problem solving
 - viii. Being in a leadership position
 - ix. Asking questions
 - x. Communicating effectively with others
 - xi. Working in a team
8. What aspects of your confidence have grown in your job, if any?
9. Has working in a children's museum affected your future life plans? Whether that is college or career focused?
10. Do you have any final thoughts you would like to share?

Appendix C

Personal Information: Directors

- Name/pronouns:
- Age:
- What is your job description?
- How long have you been working with high schoolers in children's museums?

Organization Information:

1. What jobs do you hire high schoolers mainly for?
2. What is your high school employees job description?
3. Why do you hire high school employees?
4. What do you believe high schoolers bring to the job?
5. How many high schoolers do you believe you hire per year?

Confidence Questions:

1. Do you believe that working in a children's museum affects high schoolers self-confidence? If yes, how? If no, why?
2. What do you believe your high school employees feel the most confident in performing in their jobs? Can you provide an example why?
3. How do you believe high schoolers confidence in their job's transfers to their lives outside of work, if at all?
4. What aspects of the job do you believe increase high schoolers self-confidence?
 - i. Their school classes
 - ii. Trying new things
 - iii. Introducing them to new ideas or topics
 - iv. Talking with children
 - v. Communicating with strangers
 - vi. Problem solving
 - vii. Being in a leadership position
 - viii. Asking questions

- ix. Communicating effectively with others
- x. Working in a team

5. Do you see your high school employee's confidence grow from the time they begin working at your children's museum to the time that they leave? Can you give an example?
6. What are some moments where you have seen a high schoolers confidence either increase or decrease?
7. What part of working in a children's museum do you believe is the most beneficial for your high schooler's confidence?