From 5th grade to Waiahole:
An analysis of a brief survey of the library use and information needs of five people in my community

For my library user survey, I interviewed an eleven year-old in 5th grade, a 21 year-old college student from Japan, a 27 year-old graduate student studying art, a 23 year old unemployed, recent college graduate, and a farmer in his mid-fifties. Each person had different information needs, and some used a library more than others.

Reading Habits:

Except for the 11 year-old, all survey participants spend approximately 3 to 6 hours per week reading. Their reading interests varied, ranging from newspapers and magazines to non-fiction books and different fiction genres. The 11 year-old is an avid reader, estimating 23 hours per week. Although this is an extremely small sample for a survey, I think the trend that children between 4th-6th grades spend a greater amount of time reading than teens and adults is accurate. Two of the survey participants listed reading as a hobby, and all mentioned that they read because it was either fun, relaxing, or they gained knowledge.

Library-use Habits:

All of the survey participants had examples of information they needed recently. Three of the participants are students, thus their information needs focus on school assignments and research. The two participants that were not students needed information for personal interests or work related material. To find the needed
information, three of the participants used a library, although two also used the Internet from home. The two participants that did not use a library relied on the Internet, as well as other people, for their source of information.

When asked about the first place they went to in order to seek information, only one participant mentioned the library. One participant did not visit a library or a library’s online catalog once in the last year. Those who went to the library the most were students.

Those who did not use a library frequently stated that other information avenues were more convenient (internet, phone, etc) or that they did not feel that the public library had sufficient resources. It seemed that the inconvenience of the physical act of visiting a library was the strongest reason for not going. The two participants who used academic libraries had specific comments about how to improve their library, citing the need for comfortable couches, a warmer temperature, and more audio carrels.

**Computer-use Habits:**

Three of the five surveyed own a personal computer, although the two who don’t own a computer have access to a family member’s computer. Three use the Internet, specifically the search engine, Google, as the first place they go to find information. This survey shows the large role that the Internet plays in information seeking behavior.

**Conclusion**

As a future public librarian, I was disappointed with the results of this survey. As a library user, I was surprised that someone could go a whole year without once stepping into a library, but I know that there are probably many more in my community that rarely
use a library. On the other hand, I know many other people use libraries frequently, even those who are not students.

The survey sample was too small to make any generalizations about the library use and information needs of my community, but it is significant that most participants relied heavily on the Internet for their information needs. Although people will always have information needs, the convenience of the Internet makes it a much more desirable source to turn to immediately. Of course, not all information needs are met by the Internet, and the library is usually the next place to turn to. Although all of my survey participants had access to the Internet at home (if not on their own computer, then on a family member’s), it cannot be overlooked that many people go to the library specifically to surf the web. As an intern at the Hawaii State Public Library, I noticed that the computers designated for Internet use were always occupied.

For further research, it would be interesting to see if people thought that the library was an important place for a community, especially those that rarely use a library.