



Museum Visitor Studies, Evaluation & Audience Research

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Audience Research

Young Adult Study

Prepared for the
Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum of Art
Boston, MA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the support of a Wallace Excellence Award, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (the Gardner) contracted with Randi Korn & Associates, Inc. (RK&A) to study its young adult visitors. The study is part of an initiative to engage young adults between 18 and 34 years old, and to create conditions for a compelling experience at the Gardner that will foster continuing relationships with the Museum. Key findings are summarized below. Overall, these findings have three major implications:

- ◆ Young adults crave an environment that allows them to be social and feel comfortable and relaxed. The Gardner created such an environment through its *After Hours* program.
- ◆ Young adults, particularly those in the Millennium Generation, value peer group experiences because they like learning and sharing ideas as a group. The works of art in the Gardner provided stimulus to tighten and solidify peer groups.
- ◆ Word of mouth is still the best method of advertising for museums; however, the current generation of young adults' modes of communication often involve technology and is fast-paced.

The findings discussed here are among the most salient. Please read the body of the report for a more comprehensive presentation of findings.

Data for this study was collected from in-depth interviews with 55 groups of young adult visitors (184 individuals) between 18 and 43 years of age.* After the interview, each participant completed a one-page questionnaire to collect demographic information as well as information about respondents' typical museum visitation. All data was collected between November 2007 and May 2008 during *After Hours*, a late night event at the Gardner held on the third Thursday of the month.

FINDINGS: QUESTIONNAIRES

- ◆ Of 184 respondents, 79 percent (145 respondents) were female and 21 percent (39 respondents) were male. Respondents' median age is 26, and the mean age is 27.
- ◆ Most respondents identified themselves as Caucasian/Euro-American.
- ◆ Just over one-third of respondents listed a BA or BS degree as their highest educational achievement, while a significant percentage of others had completed a Master's Degree, some graduate work, or a doctoral degree.
- ◆ Most respondents had visited an art museum in the last 24 months, and more than one-half had visited three or more times. Almost two-thirds of respondents had not visited the Gardner in the last 24 months
- ◆ Just over one-third of respondents were visiting the Gardner with two other people, while almost one-third were visiting with three other people.

* While the target age range was 18 to 34, RK&A did not ask for the interviewees' ages before the interview. Therefore, a few interviewees are older than target age range.

- ◆ When asked about their typical visit to art museums, the majority of respondents said that they visit art museums with friends.

FINDINGS: INTERVIEWS

PLANNING THE MUSEUM VISIT

- ◆ When asked what made them come to the museum that evening, nearly all interviewees named *After Hours*. Of these, many came for music and/or activities offered that evening.
- ◆ More than half of interviewees based their decision to visit the Museum on previous positive experiences at the Gardner or through word-of-mouth recommendations.
- ◆ More than half of interviewees coordinated their plans through email, and several interviewees used multiple methods such as emails, phone calls, text messages, and face-to-face conversations.

ACTIVITIES VISITORS PARTICIPATED IN DURING THE VISIT

- ◆ Most interviewees participated in some type of organized activity of which many named listening to music.
- ◆ Most interviewees also described the less structured activities they had been engaged in at *After Hours* such as simply walking around or having alcoholic drinks.

MOST ENJOYABLE ASPECT OF THE VISIT

- ◆ When asked about the most enjoyable aspect of the visit, most interviewees named something relating to the environment or atmosphere of the Museum. Many spoke generally of enjoying the ambiance, atmosphere, or feeling of the Museum, and several named the architecture, lighting, and/or general noise as something they enjoyed.
- ◆ About half of interviewees said they enjoyed a particular aspect of *After Hours*. Of these, many said they liked the music or concert, and others said they enjoyed the art, objects, and learning about the art and Isabella Gardner.

COMPARING THE GARDNER TO OTHER ART MUSEUMS

- ◆ Nearly all interviewees mentioned something about the atmosphere of the Museum being somehow unique or different from other art museums. Of these, many described the Gardner environment as more intimate, relaxed, and/or accessible.
- ◆ Several interviewees said the atmosphere was unique in that it was “homey,” specifically because it was the home of Isabella Stewart Gardner.*
- ◆ Slightly more than one-third of interviewees described the difference in the Gardner Museum in terms of its unique features, such as the architecture, lighting, and “charming” aesthetics, and another one-third of interviewees described the difference in the Gardner in terms of its social nature, saying the Museum was more “interactive” and “alive” than other art museums.

* While several visitors compared the Museum to a home, note that the galleries of the Gardner Museum were never Isabella Stewart Gardner’s home. She resided on the fourth floor of the building.

THE MUSEUM ENVIRONMENT'S AFFECT ON EXPERIENCES WITH ART

- ◆ Interviewees were asked how the museum environment affected their experience looking at the art, and many of them alluded to the intimate, casual atmosphere, saying it made the art feel more accessible, like they were in some one's home.
- ◆ Several interviewees mentioned the lighting, and more than half of these interviewees liked the lighting at *After Hours* stating that it made the Museum "cozy."
- ◆ Several interviewees noticed that the Gardner does not provide wall labels. A little more than half of these interviewees liked the absence of labels because it allowed them to construct their own interpretation and made the Museum feel more like a home.

VISITING ART MUSEUMS IN A GROUP VERSUS ALONE

- ◆ Most interviewees said they did things as a group at *After Hours*, and some interviewees said they enjoy visiting art museums in general as a group.
- ◆ When asked to think about how their experience at the Gardner that night would have been different if they were alone, several interviewees said that it would be uncomfortable and intimidating, mostly in reference to *After Hours*.

ATTRACTING YOUNG ADULT VISITORS

- ◆ When asked to identify what the Gardner should do to attract other visitors like themselves, several interviewees said to host events like *After Hours*, and some of the interviewees suggested holding *After Hours* more frequently.
- ◆ Overwhelmingly, interviewees said good old fashioned "word-of-mouth" (whether electronic or face to face) is still the best way to attract visitors.
- ◆ When asked their opinion of the Gardner using social networking sites to lure visitors, many interviewees agreed that it was a good idea, and some suggested Facebook.

COMMON GROUND: WHAT ART MUSEUMS OFFER AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCES SOUGHT

- ◆ When asked to identify the common ground between what art museums offer and the social experiences interviewees value, many named the stimulating environment.
- ◆ Several interviewees said that the common ground was the social nature of the event. In particular, some interviewees said the chance to mingle and meet new people.

DISCUSSION

Art museums nationwide typically draw older adults, often 55 years and older. Young adults in their 20s and early 30s have been a difficult audience to attract and maintain, and many art museums have begun exploring ways of attracting this particular demographic. The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, through funding from the Wallace Foundation, initiated a multi-year campaign intended to engage audiences in the target age group of 18 to 34 years old, and to create the conditions for a compelling experience in order to foster continuing relationships with the Museum. As part of this initiative, Randi Korn & Associates conducted a six-month study of young adults visiting the Museum's *After Hours* events. Through in-depth interviews of young adults visiting the Gardner in groups of three or more, this study uncovered much about this audience, and the findings have significant implications for forging relationships with this age group.

As the Gardner Museum reflects on the findings summarized in this report, RK&A has developed the following discussion questions related to the Museums' initiative to build relationships with young adults. The questions are informed by our analysis of the data, knowledge of the Gardner, and broad experience with institutions nationally.

WHAT CAN THE GARDNER LEARN FROM YOUNG ADULTS' EXPERIENCES AT AFTER HOURS TO MAINTAIN A RELATIONSHIP WITH THIS AUDIENCE?

Findings from interviews with young adults who attended the Gardner Museum's *After Hours* event reveal much about *who* this audience is and *what* they value from both social outings and art museums. Though more than half of the interviewees had not visited the Gardner in the past 24 months, they were not novice art museum visitors. More than half had visited an art museum three or more times in the last 24 months, indicating their comments about the Gardner are grounded in comparable experiences. Most notably, young adults talked about their visit to the Gardner in terms of the "atmosphere," most often describing it as "casual," "intimate," and "comfortable," and many even went so far as to say that in comparison, other art museums feel much more sterile. They said the comfortable atmosphere made the art seem more accessible, as if they are looking at art in someone's home*. A number of aspects of the Museum and event contributed to the creation of this atmosphere, with interviewees naming the open courtyard, lighting, and absence of labels, but also the drinks, music, and conversational chatter that filled the space. Young adults described their experience at the Museum in a nonchalant fashion, saying they had spent time "wandering around" or "looking around," and during the interviews, they continued their social experience, talking back and forth and joking as they answered the interview questions.

This finding, that visitors value a comfortable museum environment is not completely unique. For example, a small study of arts education university students found that one of the two primary factors impacting the students' museum experience was the museum environment. In particular, results indicated that students' most positive experiences occurred when they were in a relaxed, unhurried environment (Henry, 2008). Moreover, young adults' responses regarding their experiences in the Gardner mirror results from a study about *adult* leisure time activity. Marilyn Hood (1983) identifies six

* While several visitors compared the Museum to a home, note that the galleries of the Gardner Museum were never Isabella Stewart Gardner's home. She resided on the fourth floor of the building.

characteristics that are fundamental to adults' choice of leisure time activity, one of which is feeling comfortable and at ease in one's surroundings.

Nevertheless, these findings are actually quite remarkable when one considers that the environment of the Gardner is quite formal—it is housed in a 15th-century Venetian-style palace and filled with ornate artwork from three centuries; it would *not* be surprising for people to find the Museum anything but “casual,” but this was not the case. Instead, the various elements of *After Hours* transformed the Gardner into a comfortable, intimate party in a spectacular setting. For young adults in this current study, comfort came in the form of a relaxed, leisurely visit surrounded by beautiful art, interesting architecture, and the soothing chatter of others around them.

These findings have implications beyond *After Hours*. In particular, the findings suggest that young adults crave an environment that allows them to be social and feel comfortable and relaxed, something that can guide the Gardner and other museums as they attempt to develop a younger audience. Of course, not every day in the Gardner can feel like a party the way that *After Hours* does, and other art museums should not necessarily try to replicate the Gardner's *After Hours*, as each one has unique value and offerings. Nonetheless, in thinking about their normal operating hours, the Gardner, and other art museums in general, can begin to define and experiment with what a social, comfortable experience might look and feel like in their particular environment.

HOW DOES VISITING IN GROUPS IMPACT THE YOUNG ADULTS' EXPERIENCE IN ART MUSEUMS?

Though the young adults in this study are quite similar to the typical art museum visitor in terms of gender (mostly female) education levels (high number of graduate degrees), and race and ethnicity (Caucasian), they are noticeably different in terms of who they visit with. For this study, RK&A purposely interviewed groups that included three or more young adults visiting the Museum together. Indeed, findings show that the young adults in this study prefer to visit art museums in groups of friends. In contrast, findings from recent audience studies in three art museums—in which the median age of visitors was older than 39—show that visitors most typically visit alone or in pairs (RK&A 2008, RK&A 2007, RK&A 2005). Visiting in groups is not a surprising phenomenon among the young adults in this study, many of whom qualify as “Millennials” or “Generation Y”—those born between 1982 and 2002.* In a book titled, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, the authors, Howe and Strauss, list seven distinguishing characteristics of this age group, one of which is that they are “team-oriented” with an “emphasis on group learning [and] tight peer bonds.”

In the Gardner study, young adults said they enjoyed visiting the museum as a group because they liked sharing ideas and asking questions of each other. In talking about the works of art, these visitors emphasized the importance of the group looking and sharing ideas about the art, specifically for socialization. In fact, when asked to consider the common ground between what art museums offer and the leisure experiences they value, young adult interviewees most often mentioned stimulation and social environments, and most frequently, in tandem. Interviewees described the art and the environment—stimulation—as points of departure for conversation and, in a way, it served to tighten peer bonds. A couple interviewees described art as “ready-made conversation starters.” One interviewee, for example, expressed the value of meaningful social experiences, explaining that art museums provide ideal spaces for individuals to have such

* According to Howe and Strauss, Millennials are the generation born between 1982 and 2002, although these years are not yet definitive as researchers are still identifying and defining the trends and patterns of this generation.

meaningful conversations. As shown below, this interviewee went on to say that the environment at art museums can help take social experiences to another “level of intimacy.”

I think it, [the Museum], is a protected space where it’s okay and sort of necessary to talk about ideas when [normally] you kind of have to break a lot of ice over beer or something to get to that point. But those are sort of the most valuable things in friendships—just get to the meat of issues. And I think in an art museum [you] have some nice segues into that through the art whereas it can take you hours to get to that level of intimacy just in an ordinary gathering. Not that we’ve really gotten that far yet here tonight, but I think we will. [25-29]

While this response exemplifies a utopian view of the art museum as a forum for discussion, other responses were equally enthusiastic about socialization. For example, interviewees spoke light-heartedly in the interviews, joking and making sarcastic remarks. These interviewees relished the casualness of being with friends in an environment where they could simply speak their mind, not worrying about whether they made a silly comment.

(How, if at all, did visiting with friends alter your experience here tonight?) As opposed to being here with say my dad, definitely. I think you discuss art in a different way if you’re here with your girlfriends that you’re close to and you can say anything in front of [them]. You can act stupid in front of [them] and forget how to calculate Roman numerals. [27-30]

Other interviewees spoke of socialization in more pragmatic terms. A couple interviewees cited the museum as an ideal site for networking, which according to one interviewee, is “the biggest thing” for young professionals. They value experiences that nurture the group and peer relationships, a key factor for the Gardner to consider as it moves forward in designing experiences and programs to attract young adults.

WHAT ROLE DOES AND CAN TECHNOLOGY PLAY IN ATTRACTING YOUNG ADULT VISITORS TO THE MUSEUM?

Findings show that interviewees most often decided to visit the Museum based upon word-of-mouth recommendations. Interviewees also expressed that word-of-mouth is the best means to attract visitors like themselves, even when asked specifically about how *technology* could be used to attract young visitors. These findings complement findings from an exit survey administered this year, which reported that 56 percent of *After Hours*’ guests heard about the event through word-of-mouth (Edgers, 2008).

But what defines word-of-mouth recommendations? For example, an individual in the Millennial generation may say they “talk” to someone when they really mean they exchanged text messages or emails. Similarly, word-of-mouth recommendations could be in the form of text messages, ims, e-mails, or messages on their Facebook profile. Most young adults have grown up with technology and embrace it whole-heartedly. It is quite plausible that they do not see any difference between face-to-face communication and communication via technology. For the most part, the current generation of young adults is fast-paced and transition frequently between multiple forms of communications depending upon availability and need. RK&A commends the Gardner for ardently pursuing knowledge about their young adult visitors’ technological needs and catering to them through various social networking sites.

The Gardner should continue efforts to understand this generation because it will be fruitful in cultivating and fostering relations with young adult visitors. The current young adult population, the Millennials, are continually transforming just as rapidly as technology changes. In addition they are, as Howe & Strauss (2006) observe, “active users of culture” and not “passive consumers.” Millennials demand more from cultural organizations, “and what [they] want, more than anything else, is to be challenged and surprised” (Sandow, 2008).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Continue to host *After Hours* and similar events to attract and retain young adult visitors. As per the request of interviewees, the Gardner should consider hosting *After Hours* more frequently and starting the event later in the evening to better accommodate young professionals who work until 5:00 PM.
- ◆ The Gardner has an opportunity to develop other programs, events, and visiting conditions (perhaps smaller in scale than *After Hours*) that offer an atmosphere similar to *After Hours* for young adult visitors. For instance, the Gardner may consider offering small group tours during normal operating hours; tours would be intimate and would allow participants to share ideas.
- ◆ Consider ways to encourage mingling among visitors at *After Hours* events. Some interviewees expressed that they had hoped there were more conversations across groups, noting that at *After Hours* most visitors stay in the groups with which they arrived. Young adults across the country have expressed similar desires. In her master’s thesis, Courtney Spousta (2000) explores the rise in programming for young adults, mostly single, in art museums across the country, and advocates the need for these types of programs. The Gardner should experiment with different strategies to encourage cross-group interaction, recognizing that some strategies may fail and others will succeed; the process should be iterative, and both failures and successes will help inform and refine future programming.
- ◆ Continue efforts to deepen an understanding of young adult visitors. Consider further research to explore the findings of this study in more depth or breadth. For greater depth, consider a small qualitative study to explore the ways small peer groups of young adults make meaning from works of art. Or, for breadth, conduct a large-scale quantitative study of young adults in art museums to provide findings that can be generalized to the field at large.
- ◆ Consider further research to elucidate if and how technology is fostering relationships with young adults, aside from attracting them. As the Gardner proceeds to learn about its young adult visitors, one consideration is the difference between audience development and advertising. Quoted from Matt Lehrman, “Let’s admit the ugly truth: advertising isn’t audience development” (Lehrman, 2008). Technology can be used for both advertising and audience development, and may do both simultaneously.

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INTRODUCTION

With the support of a Wallace Excellence Award, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (the Gardner) contracted with Randi Korn & Associates, Inc. (RK&A) to study its young adult visitors. The study is part of an initiative to engage young adults between 18 and 34 years old, and to create conditions at the Gardner for a compelling experience that will foster this group's relationships with the Museum.

This report explores the attitudes of young adult visitors in the target age range. Data were collected from in-depth interviews with young adult visitors in social groups of three people or more and a one-page questionnaire administered to interviewees.

Specifically, this study's objectives are to:

- ◆ Explore how group dynamics determine the art museum visitors' experience;
- ◆ Understand how groups of young adults experience the Gardner;
- ◆ Identify what young adults value in the Gardner environment;
- ◆ Explore what young adults experience in the Gardner;
- ◆ Understand how young adults make sense of the Gardner (how it fits into their sense of themselves as individuals and as a social group);
- ◆ Explore how young adults view, look at, and experience works of art;
- ◆ Identify the ways in which the Gardner provides young adults with an experience that is different from what they experience in other art museums; and,
- ◆ Explore young adults' use of Web 2.0 and how the Museum can adapt its Web site to young adults' use of this new technology.

METHODOLOGY

RK&A collected data for this study between November 2007 and May 2008 at *After Hours*, an evening event held at the Gardner on the third Thursday of each month. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from young adult visitors between 18 and 43 years old* in social groups of three or more people.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Qualitative data were collected from in-depth interviews with young adult visitors. All interviewees were intercepted at the Gardner during *After Hours*. Most interviewees were intercepted mid-visit, and approximately one-quarter of visitors were intercepted upon exiting.† The interview guide is included in Appendix A. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to facilitate analysis.

* While the target age range was 18 to 34, RK&A did not ask for the interviewees' ages until after the interview. Therefore, a few interviewees are older than target age range.

† Most visitors to *After Hours* leave during the last hour of the event. To optimize the number of interviews completed, mid-visit interviews were conducted in addition to exit interviews.

Interviews are useful because they provide information from a participant’s point of view. In-depth interviews encourage and motivate interviewees to describe their experiences, express their opinions and feelings, and share with the interviewer their ideas and experiences and the meaning they construct from them. In-depth interviews produce data rich in information because interviewees talk about their experiences and ideas.

QUESTIONNAIRES

After the interview, all interviewees completed a one-page, standardized questionnaire (see Appendix B) to collect information about interviewees’ demographic characteristics, professional experience, and museum-going habits.

DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING METHOD

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Visitors’ responses to interview questions were analyzed qualitatively. That is, the evaluator studied the data for meaningful patterns and, as patterns and trends emerged, grouped similar responses or behaviors. Trends and themes within the data are presented in thematic sections, and, within each section, findings are reported in descending order starting with the most frequently occurring. This report uses verbatim quotations from interviews (edited for clarity) to give the reader the flavor of participants’ experiences, and to illustrate their ideas as fully as possible. In some cases, multiple speakers are quoted in one excerpt so an asterisk appears to indicate a new speaker. Within quotations, the interviewer’s comments appear in parentheses. Included in brackets following the quotations are the age range of the group with which the respondent visited.*

While most interview questions asked about the Gardner in general, many interviewees responded to the questions regarding the Gardner at *After Hours* since interviews were conducted during the event. In reporting findings, the evaluator explicitly states “the Gardner” when discussing the Museum in general and “*After Hours*” when discussing the event. In some instances, it is difficult to determine whether the interviewees refer to the Gardner or *After Hours*, and in other instances, the interviewees discuss them as one and the same. In these instances, the evaluator has been cognizant of the various interpretations and has tried to report the findings to accurately reflect interviewees’ intentions.

QUESTIONNAIRES

The questionnaire data are quantitative and were analyzed using SPSS 12.0.1 for Windows, a statistical package for personal computers. Frequencies and percentages are calculated and displayed in tables. The findings are reported in thematic sections, and, within each section, findings are reported in descending order starting with the most frequently occurring.

FINDINGS IN THIS REPORT ARE PRESENTED IN TWO MAIN SECTIONS:

- 1.
- 2.

* A single age is recorded if all interviewees in a social group were the same age.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS: QUESTIONNAIRES

RK&A administered a one-page questionnaire to interviewees after the group interview. Each of the 184 interviewees completed a questionnaire (see Appendix A for the questionnaire). Findings are presented in the following section.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Of 184 respondents, 79 percent (145 respondents) were female and 21 percent (39 respondents) were male (see Table 1). Respondents ranged from 18 to 43 years old (see Table 2). Approximately 32 percent of respondents were between the ages of 24 and 26, 20 percent between 27 and 29, 15 percent between 21 and 23, and 14 percent between 30 and 32. The median age is 26, and the mean age is 27.

TABLE 1

GENDER

GENDER (n = 184)	%
Female	79
Male	21

TABLE 2

AGE

AGE (n = 183)	%
18-20	4
21-23	15
24-26	32
27-29	20
30-32	14
33-35	8
36+	8

CULTURAL IDENTITY

Most respondents (79 percent) identified themselves as Caucasian/Euro-American (see Table 3). Few respondents identified themselves as Asian/Pacific Islander/Samoan/Native Hawaiian, etc. (11 percent), Hispanic/Puerto Rican (5 percent), and Black/African American (2 percent), and no respondent identified himself or herself as American Indian/Alaskan Native.

TABLE 3

CULTURAL IDENTITY

CULTURAL IDENTITY (<i>n</i> = 181)	%
Caucasian/Euro-American	79
Asian/Pacific Islander/Samoan/Native Hawaiian, etc.	11
Hispanic/Puerto Rican	5
Black/African American	2
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0

EDUCATION

Respondents' educational attainment was high (see Table 4). Just over one-third (34 percent) listed a BA or BS degree as their highest educational achievement, while a significant percentage of others had completed a Master's Degree (26 percent), some graduate work (17 percent), or a doctoral degree (14 percent).

TABLE 4

HIGHEST DEGREE OF EDUCATION

HIGHEST DEGREE OF EDUCATION (<i>n</i> = 181)	%
BA/BS	34
Master's Degree	26
Some Graduate Work	17
Doctoral Degree	14
Associates/Some College	4
High School or Less	3
Trade School/Other	1

ART MUSEUM VISITATION

Most respondents had visited an art museum in the last 24 months (see Table 5). One-third (32 percent) had visited a museum once or twice in the last 24 months, and more than one-half had visited three or more times (60 percent).

TABLE 5
NUMBER OF VISITS TO AN ART MUSEUM IN THE LAST 24 MONTHS

NUMBER OF VISITS TO AN ART MUSEUM IN THE LAST 24 MONTHS (<i>n</i> = 184)	%
None	8
1-2	32
3-4	30
5+	30

Almost two-thirds of respondents (60 percent) had not visited the Gardner in the last 24 months, while almost one-third (32 percent) had visited the Gardner once or twice in the same time period (see Table 6).

TABLE 6
NUMBER OF VISITS TO THE GARDNER IN THE LAST 24 MONTHS

NUMBER OF VISITS TO THE GARDNER IN THE LAST 24 MONTHS (<i>n</i> = 184)	%
None	60
1-2	31
3-4	6
5+	3

VISITING MUSEUMS IN GROUPS

Just over one-third of respondents (34 percent) were visiting the Gardner with two other people, while almost one-third (30 percent) were visiting with three other people (see Table 7).

TABLE 7
NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN VISITING GROUP OTHER THAN RESPONDENT

NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN VISITING GROUP (<i>n</i> = 180)	%
2	34
3	30
4	16
5+	17

When asked about their typical visit to museums and cultural institutions, the majority of respondents (71 percent) said that they visit with friends, while 29 percent said they visited with family, 22 percent said they visit with a significant other, and 19 percent said they visit alone (see Table 8).

TABLE 8
GROUP COMPOSITION OF TYPICAL VISIT TO MUSEUMS AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

GROUP COMPOSITION OF TYPICAL VISIT TO MUSEUMS AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS (n = 184)	%
With friends	71
With family	29
With significant other	22
Alone	19

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS: INTERVIEWS

RK&A conducted in-depth interviews with 184 visitors—145 females and 39 males—in 55 groups. Interviewees were between 18 to 43 years of age^{*}; the mean age was approximately 27.

PLANNING THE MUSEUM VISIT

When asked what made them visit the Museum that evening, not surprisingly, nearly all interviewees named *After Hours* or some aspect of the event (see the first quotation below). Of these, many said they came for the music and/or various activities offered that evening (see the second quotation). Some said they came for the food or alcoholic beverages associated with the event, and others mentioned that the discounted pricing attracted them (see the third quotation). A few said they came to socialize with friends (see the fourth quotation).

Actually, we wanted to come in the day[time], and we saw, they actually have *After Hours*, so we'll stop by then. [24-26]

We've wanted to come [to the Gardner] for awhile, and then found out about the live music so [that was] just more of a reason to come. [24]

It's a \$5 thing; it's very attractive. [22]

They decided that we should come out, and we haven't hung out in a while so this [*After Hours*] is a good way to get us all together. [24-26]

When asked how they decided to visit the Museum that evening, more than one-half of interviewees based their decision to visit on a previous positive experience at the Gardner (see the first quotation below), or from a recommendation from someone who had had a positive experience at the Gardner (see the second quotation). Of these interviewees, some were repeat visitors, a few were members, and others were first-time visitors. On the other hand, about one-quarter of interviewees said that they had been attracted to the event by some form of advertising, mostly the Gardner's Web site (see the third quotation) or some other social networking site—such as Daily Candy—and a couple of interviewees saw a flyer for the event. A small portion of interviewees said they came to the Museum that night as part of an organized social event, such as through the Junior League or on a date (see the fourth quotation, next page). The remaining responses were idiosyncratic, ranging from wanting to appreciate the ambiance to looking for something “different to do.”

We've been coming [to *After Hours*] since September, so since it started. It's great fun, and it's a good way to experience the Museum. [29-43]

I've been hearing about the third Thursday, [*After Hours*], all year from a friend. So I'm here. [27-29]

I was looking around [the Internet]—and I knew that the Museum of Fine Arts did a First Friday—so randomly last weekend, I happened to be looking at the Gardner Museum [Web] site and found that they did something on Thursday. [30-32]

^{*} The target age range was 18 to 34. RK&A interviewed some visitors that were above the target age range if they were visiting with people in the target age range.

We're actually in the Junior League of Boston, and they had an area event here [at the Gardner]. [30]

More than one-half of interviewees coordinated their plans through e-mail. A few received an e-mail about the event from the Gardner. Several coordinated their plans using a combination of methods: e-mails, phone calls, text messages, and face-to-face conversations.

ACTIVITIES VISITORS PARTICIPATED IN DURING THEIR MUSEUM VISIT

When asked what activities they had participated in since being at *After Hours*, interviewees named a variety of things. Interviewees most often named some type of organized activity associated with the event. Of these, many named listening to music—the courtyard music and the concert (see the first quotation below). Some talked about listening to lectures (see the second quotation), others said they had done an activity in the garden (see the third quotation), sketched (see the fourth quotation), or spoke to staff, such as an Ask Me volunteer (see the fifth quotation).

We listened to the some of the jazz through the doors, and we heard some of the courtyard players. [19-20]

I was really interested in hearing the talk about Isabella Gardner's portrait. It really helps bring things together for me [be]cause there's so much going on. [32-35]

We walked out in the garden, and we saw the demonstration. [29-43]

Well, the drawing activity helped us look at different pieces or captured the art as opposed to wandering around. [28-34]

There was the Ask Me lady [volunteer] that was helping us identify an artist and talking to us about a painting. I just felt like that was great because if she wasn't there, then we wouldn't have had the opportunity to really discuss that. [24-25]

Further, most interviewees described the less-structured activities they had been engaged in at *After Hours*. About one-half said they had been walking around and soaking up the atmosphere (see the first quotation below). About one-half also said they had had an alcoholic drink. Several of these described the social nature of their visit, saying that they had been conversing with people, and a few mentioned that they were limited in where they could go in the Museum by their drinks (see the second quotation).

Yep, we walked around. We didn't sit in on any discussions or tours, but we just did our own touring. [24]

We just wandered around this first floor, and because I'm still drinking, we've not been allowed to go upstairs. [30]

MOST ENJOYABLE ASPECT OF THE VISIT

When asked what they enjoyed most about their time at the Gardner that evening, interviewees gave many responses. Most named something related to the environment or atmosphere of the Museum. Of

these, many spoke generally of enjoying the ambiance, atmosphere, or feeling of the Museum. Several others were more specific in their discussions of the environment, naming the architecture (see the first quotation below), lighting, and/or general noise (see the second quotation) as enjoyable. Further, several interviewees specifically described the atmosphere as intimate, personal or accessible, and one said she enjoyed the fact that the evening would have been typical for Isabella Gardner and her guests (see the third quotation).

Well I'm an architect so I love just the building itself. The space is amazing and the Asian architecture is just so rare in Boston, so it's just this great little gem they got here. [23-24]

For me, I think it's the chatter. I don't remember museums being this active, and that's kind nice to just be able to roam about. . . to have this kind of noise, and the music too, is really nice. * Well and if it was really quiet, the music was not playing, several people would whisper if they have to say something, so quiet. [32-35]

I just think the whole event is spectacular. It's such a good idea because I think it's so cool to do what Isabella used to do. She used to have functions like this all the time, so that's the part that I'm reveling in—feeling like I'm back there and a part of it. And being in her home and being able to stroll along the courtyard and have a little cocktail. [28]

About one-half of interviewees said they enjoyed a particular aspect of *After Hours*. Of these, many said they liked the music or concert, and others said they enjoyed the art, objects, and learning about the art and Isabella Gardner.

A small portion of interviewees said their most enjoyable experience that evening was socializing with friends (see the first quotation below). Other responses were idiosyncratic.

Just really the overall atmosphere, you know, having a glass of wine and talking with your friends and walking around and seeing the building. [23-24]

COMPARING THE GARDNER TO OTHER ART MUSEUMS

When asked how their experiences at the Gardner compared to their experiences at other art museums, most interviewees provided more than one answer. Nearly all mentioned that the Museum's atmosphere was somehow unique or different. Many of these described the Gardner's environment as more intimate, relaxed, and/or accessible—some used the event at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA) as a counterpoint (see the first quotation below). A few said that the Gardner is more relaxed because the art is accessible, and thus, they spend more time in the Museum (see the second quotation). One interviewee described movement through large museums as “robotic,” while at the Gardner, the interviewee described movement as languid—“you mosey about” (see the third quotation, next page). Another stated that the casual environment provides the opportunity to interact with the works of art (see the fourth quotation).

Well for tonight's event, I could compare it to the MFA. They [MFA] have their [mfa] *firstfridays*, and I feel it's much more relaxed here [at the Gardner], much more comfortable, and much more intimate. [24-26]

I think the art [at the Gardner] feels more accessible than in some museums where you stand back and you just pass it by. . . . it just makes you feel a little bit more comfortable

and relaxed, so then you're more likely to maybe spend a little bit more time or ask someone a question or talk about it. [24-26]

(Do you think if these artworks were displayed at another museum, how, if at all, would it be different in terms of the way you experienced the art?) We'd look at it very quickly and move on to the next piece. It's sort of robotic at big museums, but here it's much more relaxed. You kind of mosey about. [24-25]

Good to have an experience be more casual when interacting with the environment—that's something I like about it. It's not a big, still museum—serious people go [there] and look at a painting and think about it and then move on. [At the Gardner] you get to interact with your environment. [22-25]

Similarly, several interviewees said the Museum's atmosphere was unique in that it was "homey." These people said that the Gardner was much different than other art museums because it was Isabella Stewart Gardner's home.* A few said that they felt like they were "transported back in time" (see the first quotation below). A couple interviewees said that because the Museum was a household, they inquired more about the choices Isabella made in collecting and displaying the works of art (see the second quotation).

It's so like, I don't want to say homey—it's not cozy necessarily, but it's so eclectic and interesting. I feel like there's something unique around every corner, whereas at most art museums the walls are very flat and the exhibit is very contrived. Here I can almost imagine what it would be like to either be living here or just be here. You're kind of transported back in time a little bit when you're here. We were saying that you feel like you leave the outside world when you're here, and you step into a different world, and you forget about your normal life. [24-25]

Well it just makes you realize that this is someone's home; it makes you question the choices of pieces that are here. Anytime you go into anyone's home, you're like, "Why did you buy that? What were you thinking like?" So it's all these layers. There's all this art that represents history, and then there's a home that represents a period of history so it's just heavily layered. [25-30]

Slightly more than one-third of interviewees described the difference in the Gardner Museum in terms of its unique features, such as the architecture, lighting, and "charming" aesthetics (see the first and second quotations below). Some of these described the Museum as "pretty" and "having character."

I'm a big fan of lighting. Lighting will seduce me into doing just about anything. I mean, the light in here is like a mosaic, and just that it has a cozy feel to it rather than some places that have kind of stark [lighting]. [24-27]

I thought it very relaxing and just the lighting and with the musicians in the foyer over there, it was very inviting, you know, I just, I felt very comfortable [to] just, you know, mill around and take it all in, so as we [were] saying as soon as we walked in, it was just really remarkable. [24-27]

* While several visitors compared the Museum to a home, note that the galleries of the Gardner Museum were never Isabella Stewart Gardner's home. She resided on the fourth floor of the building.

Another one-third of interviewees described the difference in the Gardner Museum in terms of its social nature, saying the Museum was more “interactive” and “alive” compared with other museums. A few provided examples specific to *After Hours*, mentioning the music and staff (see the first quotation below). A few said the Gardner is less “sterile” than other museums and more accessible (see the second and third quotations).

Well this [Museum] is so much more—it felt so much more interactive. . . . At the concert there was like a little session at the beginning where the musician introduced himself and there was a man asking if we’d ever been here. . . . Then, there was the Ask Me lady [volunteer] that helped us identify an artist and talk[ed] to us about a painting. I just felt like that was great because if she wasn’t there, then we wouldn’t have had the opportunity to really discuss that. [24-25]

I think this museum feels really different from other ones like the Harvard [Art] Museum or the Museum of Fine Arts because it doesn’t have this pristine feel where you’re walking in a sterile environment. This feels a lot more organic, almost like a greenhouse that we’re walking in. So things are a lot more alive. [25-31]

Yeah, [the Museum]’s much more accessible as opposed to like a sterile, very structured, museum environment. * Just that it feels very warm and approachable as opposed to a museum where you feel like you have to go around and look at each painting or piece of art. [23-24]

A few interviewees talked about the Gardner being different because there are no wall labels, with some enjoying this aspect and others wishing there had been labels. One interviewee acknowledged that a lack of labels makes the museum seem less like a museum which can be confusing (see the first quotation below).

I kind of like that there weren’t labels because it made it more real, I was going to say it’s less of a museum. . . . I really see how [that] confused people. [26-29]

Finally, a few interviewees said that the Gardner feels more manageable than other museums, stating that the Gardner’s size allowed them to see everything in one visit (see the first quotation below). Nevertheless, a few said that each time they visit the Gardner they always see something new (see the second quotation).

I would say it’s more manageable. . . . so you kind of get the satisfaction of saying, “I walked through the whole thing.” [22]

You can go through [the Museum] in one hour and then feel like you haven’t seen everything. . . . Basically, you can come back to [the Museum] several times and see different pictures every time. [26-29]

MUSEUM ENVIRONMENT’S EFFECT ON EXPERIENCES WITH ART

Interviewees were asked how the museum environment affected their experience looking at the art, and again, many of them alluded to its intimate, casual atmosphere, repeating that they found the Museum cozy, accessible, and relaxed. Some liked that works of art were everywhere, and it was not obvious what was or was not art (see the first quotation below). Similarly, a few said that because the Museum

was a residence, works of art are part of the atmosphere, and not behind barriers (see the second quotation). One of these interviewees stated that “you can almost touch it” and “they trust that you aren’t going to grab anything” (see the third quotation). A few interviewees said that because it is a household, they imagine what it would have been like to be there at the turn of the century (see the fourth quotation).

It’s nice because it’s not like you’re going into a museum where it’s obvious where all the art is. I feel like a lot of the art in this Museum is almost hidden to most people because they don’t take the opportunity to look around or when going up the staircase, look at the wall. No one looks at the wall. [24-26]

It’s art, and it’s not behind glass. It’s sort of out on the wall, just part of the atmosphere. [29-43]

It’s all open. It’s like you can almost grab it and touch it; they trust that you’re not going to grab anything. You feel like you’re in someone’s household almost. [24]

Imagination-wise it’s just so cool picturing it, [the Gardner], back in the turn of the century... and picturing people actually hanging out here at somebody’s private residence. [24-34]

Several interviewees mentioned the lighting when asked about the Gardner’s environment. More than one-half of these interviewees liked the lighting at *After Hours* because it made the Museum “cozy” or made the experience feel more original (see the first quotation below). Less than one-half of interviewees commenting on the lighting said that it was too dark in the Museum, noting that the lighting reflected off the paintings and made it difficult to read (see the second quotation).

We had discussed how the lighting and everything makes you feel like you’re back when all the paintings were created. So I think that adds to the whole originality almost. [18-20]

I was trying to read the letters, but it’s difficult to read, even seeing the book that’s over ... you can barely see them with the lighting. [23-27]

Several interviewees noticed that the Gardner does not provide wall labels. A little more than one-half of interviewees who mentioned wall labels said they liked not having them because it made them think (see the first quotation below) and allowed them to look more objectively at the works of art (see the second quotation, next page). One interviewee positively compared the absence of labels to “putting together a puzzle” (see the third quotation). Less than one-half of interviewees who mentioned wall labels commented that they wanted them because they sought more factual information (see the fourth quotation).

I liked how you don’t have artifact labels. That makes you really think and wonder where it’s from. . . . But it’s kind of nice to just do less reading sometimes—visually take it all in. [24]

When I heard that there were no labels on any of the paintings, I was really excited because we were talking earlier, thinking that people tend to react differently if they know the artist, especially if it’s somebody particularly famous. They might be more apt to see things in the painting that they wouldn’t see if it was somebody else. I like looking

at paintings and not have any clue where it came from. So you're just looking and appreciating the art for what it is. [24-25]

You get to put together a puzzle . . . rather than [having] a bunch of curators [do that], and that's fun. [24-26]

Well, I just wish there was more explanation of what the pieces are because I was looking at these things, and it's obviously something I should know more about, but there wasn't anything to explain it. [18-20]

A few said the Gardner's environment was overwhelming because of how the art is displayed. A few others said that the social aspect surrounding *After Hours* distracted them from looking at art (see the first quotation below).

The environment is almost distracting from [the looking experience]. For me personally, I've been more focused on the social aspects than the art. But maybe that'll change once we shift gears. [27-34]

VISITING ART MUSEUMS IN A GROUP VERSUS ALONE

VISITING ART MUSEUMS IN A GROUP

When asked whether they participated in activities as a group or alone at *After Hours*, most interviewees said they did things as a group. Several said they separated briefly then regrouped. A few of these described visiting the Museum as groups of independent individuals who visited the same room, but then "did our own thing as we went along." Some interviewees said they particularly enjoy visiting art museums in groups. A few of these liked sharing ideas and asking questions, while others said that when in a group, they look at and discuss works of art they may not have looked at otherwise (see the first quotation below). One interviewee described experiencing works of art in a group as more rewarding than doing so alone (see the second quotation). Another interviewee said that she discusses works casually with a group of friends (see the third quotation).

For example, if you are alone, you look at [a work of art] and then just go. Sometimes you might miss particular paintings or objects that are there. But, if you're with friends, if you pass something, your friends may find it. They say, "Hey, did you see that one?" Then I have to check it out. [I] come back, and then we can discuss it. [24-33]

I think part of the fun is sharing the art, and so part of the fun is looking at something with somebody and then seeing their opinion, having your own opinion, and comparing them. I think that makes it a more rewarding experience for both. [25-29]

(How, if at all, did visiting with friends alter your experience here tonight?) As opposed to being here with say my dad, definitely. I think you discuss art in a different way if you're here with your girlfriends that you're close to and you can say anything in front of [them]. You can act stupid in front of [them] and forget how to calculate Roman numerals. [27-30]

VISITING ART MUSEUMS ALONE

When asked to think about how their experience at the Gardner that night would have been different if they were alone, several interviewees—mostly in reference to *After Hours*—said that it would have been intimidating. These interviewees said that it would have been uncomfortable to attend *After Hours* alone because it is a social event in which people are already in groups (see the first quotation below) and it feels like a date atmosphere (see the second quotation). A few said they would not come to the Museum alone.

It also seems like for this particular event, most people are here with groups or with someone, so if I was here by myself, I might have felt intimidated or uncomfortable approaching people because they seem to be in groups already. [27-30]

(How do you think your experience tonight would have been different if you were alone?) It feels like there's a lot of socialization going on, and being alone, it would have felt strange. *Tonight, in this particular environment, it feels like a date night. . . . I might have picked up a bartender. [25-29]

Several interviewees commented on the amount of time they would spend in the Museum if alone. Approximately one-half of these said they would spend less time in the Museum if they were alone (see the first and second quotations below) while approximately the same number said they would spend more time in the Museum if they were alone.

I think that [alone] I wouldn't take the time to necessarily look at certain pieces that someone else in the group stops to look at. . . . I would quickly pass over. I'm more inclined to actually take a closer look because someone else is taking interest in it. [27-30]

I probably would have moved through quicker [if alone], and I'm not saying that's a better thing. It's nice [that] we have different tastes in art. What I might find interesting they might say, "We'll look at this too." And [they] show me other things I probably wouldn't have stopped to look twice at. [19-20]

A few interviewees distinguished between visiting an art museum alone and attending an event alone, stating that they would visit a museum alone but not attend an event alone (see the first quotation below). Correspondingly, a few distinguished between visiting an art museum alone during the day and alone at night, stating that they would visit alone during the day but not at night (see the second quotation).

If I was going to an event, I'd go with a group. If I was going to see the museum, I'd go by myself. [30]

I probably wouldn't come alone to a museum at night. I would come to a museum by myself any day, but I probably wouldn't come by myself at night. [36-39]

A few said that visiting the Gardner alone would have been less fun; in jest, one interviewee stated that "I probably wouldn't have told as many jokes out loud." A few others said they would have paid more attention to the art.

ATTRACTING YOUNG ADULT VISITORS

When asked to identify what the Gardner should do to attract other visitors like themselves, several interviewees said to host events like *After Hours* (see the first quotation below), and some of these suggested holding *After Hours* more frequently (see the second quotation). Several suggested that the Gardner host more concerts and music events, while several others suggested that the Gardner advertise more, specifically at T stations, local schools, and universities. A few said that affordability is attractive; these interviewees mentioned that discounts for students (see the third quotation) and for non-profit workers (see the fourth quotation) would be appealing. A few mentioned later hours, and a couple suggested that the Museum should start *After Hours* even later to accommodate professionals who work until 5:00 P.M.

I've been in Boston for eight years and *After Hours* is a fantastic idea. I mean, this is probably one of best things the Museum has done to get these people here. [31-35]

We [have] been to other museums that do this [*After Hours* type of event] on a weekly basis, every Thursday night. This is [on] a monthly basis right now, but maybe you could work into it. [24-26]

This is going to sound really bad, but [*After Hours*] is affordable, and we are always looking for cheap things to do. . . . The \$5.00 ticket for a college student is really good [compared to] when I paid, like, \$23 to go to the Boston Science Museum yesterday. [19-20]

I mean, I know there's the plus package with the music, but for some of us who work for not-for-profit organizations, maybe there could be a communal discount or something like that because it would nice to enjoy [*After Hours*], but, at the same time, \$23 [is expensive]! [32-37]

TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL NETWORKING

RK&A asked interviewees about the use of technology and social networking sites like Facebook as means for marketing to young adults. Overwhelmingly, interviewees said good old fashioned "word-of-mouth" is still the best way to attract visitors. One interviewee explained that word of mouth is so important because it creates certain amount of exclusivity versus advertising which can draw in the masses-in other words, word of mouth ensures that events like *After Hours* remain special and to a certain extent, private (see the quotation below). Not all interviewees were specific about whether they meant face-to-face "word-of-mouth" or electronic word-of-mouth.

I always think you should keep it word-of-mouth, personally, just because you'll get a certain type of visitors. * Whereas if you mass advertise, you might get a mass influx of people you would probably not want to have in your museum, especially on Thursday nights. [20-37]

When asked their opinion of the Gardner using social networking sites to lure visitors, many interviewees agreed that it was a good idea, and some suggested Facebook. Many, but not all, of these responses were prompted by the interviewer mentioning Facebook specifically. Of these, a few were not familiar with Facebook but had heard about it (see the first quotation below). A few did not use Facebook, or said they were too old for Facebook. A few others said that Facebook attracts a younger crowd, and one did not suggest Facebook, saying that it has been overdone (see the second quotation). A few interviewees each mentioned Going.com and MySpace.

I heard by hearsay, [that] Facebook has this thing where they put ads up on your page based on where you say you are. I don't know how it works but it happens. [25-29]

I am [on Facebook] like six times a day, but I have very mixed feelings about using Facebook as a marketing method. It's broaching a point of being overdone so I probably wouldn't do it. [25-30]

COMMON GROUND: WHAT ART MUSEUMS OFFER AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCES SOUGHT

RK&A asked interviewees to identify the common ground between what art museums offer and the social experiences they value. Many interviewees said the common ground was the stimulating environment, describing such elements as the art, the music, the history, the culture, and the conversation (see the first quotation below). A few of these said a museum provides “ready-made conversation starters” (see the second quotation), and one described an art museum as a “protected space” for conversation (see the third quotation).

Yes, it's more stimulating than just going to a club. That's [because] the music [is] in the background, and you're able to have a conversation here. [31-35]

I would say that it is easier to talk to your friends. It's like ready-made conversation starters, like the artwork itself. [25-30]

I think it's a protected space where it's okay and sort of necessary to talk about ideas when [normally] you kind of have to break a lot of ice over beer or something to get to that point. But those are sort of the most valuable things in friendships—just get to the meat of issues. And I think in an art museum [you] have some nice segues into that through the art whereas it can take you hours to get to that to the level of intimacy just in an ordinary gathering. Not that we've really gotten that far yet here tonight, but I think we will. [25-29]

Less than one-half of interviewees spoke about the common ground generally, simply stating the Gardner Museum is “different.” Several of these mentioned that they had been seeking new social activities (see the first quotation below), and a few said *After Hours* is different from a typical bar or club (see the second quotation).

My male friends start[ed] talking about wanting to do social events that are a little bit different than the norm so wanting to get away from the regular bar culture and actually want[ing] to do things that are more conducive to conversation and meeting different types of people. I think that this [*After Hours*] is great because it's a little bit off the beaten path. It's not your stereotypical bar or stereotypical night event. But that's why I think it's so marketable because a lot of people are looking for something that connects people, which is not working, and which is getting to know people. [22-25]

We were saying this is nice because it offers the bar scene, but at the same time, it's not a bar. It's not your typical after work bar, so it's great. It's something different, and I can definitely imagine inviting other friends to come to this. [25-40]

Several interviewees said that the common ground was the social nature of the event. In particular, some of these said the event provided the chance to mingle and meet new people (see the first quotation below). A few wished *After Hours* was more social (see the second quotation). One mentioned the importance of networking to young professionals (see the third quotation).

I think the fact that it allowed us to mingle, talk, and drink were basic common ground between all of us, and it allows us to still hang out. [23-27]

I would also say that we were hoping that this would be more of a social, mingling event. It turned out. . . [that] people seem to stay with their own groups, and so I think that was a little bit of a disappointment. . . . Well you know that everyone's coming out for this reason, and it seems more like people come, have a drink, and talk [with their group], which is fine, but it was a little bit different than we were expecting. [22-25]

I would say the biggest thing in the young professional world is the social time in networking. This event, actually, is very conducive, and has the potential to be very conducive for that. [22-25]

APPENDICES

REMOVED FOR PROPRIETARY PURPOSES