An Exploration of the Leisure Reading Habits and Attitudes of Eighth-Grade Students

Karissa Alice Covert
The College at Brockport, kasanty@bataviacs.org

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An Exploration of the Leisure Reading Habits and Attitudes of Eighth-Grade Students

by

Karissa Alice Covert

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A thesis submitted to the
Department of Education and Human Development of the
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An Exploration of the Leisure Reading Habits and Attitudes of Eighth-Grade Students

by

Karissa Alice Covert

APPROVED BY:

Advisor

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Date

Director, Graduate Program

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Date
# Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction ................................................................. 1

Chapter Two: Literature Review ......................................................... 5
  Terms and Definitions for Leisure Reading ....................................... 5
  Theories about Leisure Reading ..................................................... 7
  Theories on Motivation and Leisure Reading ..................................... 8
  Benefit of Leisure Reading ............................................................. 11
  Influences on Leisure Reading ....................................................... 14
  Time Spent Leisure Reading ........................................................... 16
  Common Factors Found: Readers .................................................... 18
  Common Factors Found: Non-Readers ............................................. 20

Chapter Three: Methods ................................................................. 23
  Participants .................................................................................... 23
  Instruments .................................................................................... 25
  Procedure ..................................................................................... 28
  Data Analysis ................................................................................. 29

Chapter Four: Findings ................................................................. 31
  Theme One .................................................................................... 32
  Theme Two ................................................................................... 35
  Theme Three ................................................................................ 36
  Graph One .................................................................................... 37
  Theme Four ................................................................................... 38

Chapter Five: Conclusions ............................................................ 42
  Discussion ..................................................................................... 45
  Future Research ............................................................................ 49

References ....................................................................................... 52

Appendix A: Survey ............................................................................ 56

Appendix B: Interview Questions ..................................................... 59
Chapter 1: Introduction

Reading is one of the most central components of a child’s education. Success in all of the content areas taught at each grade level relies heavily on reading abilities. Although reading in school is important, many benefits result from children reading during their leisure time outside of school. Studies have shown that leisure reading increases fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, cognitive development, verbal skills, content knowledge, and much more (Shelfebine, 2000; Worthy, 2002). Studies on the benefits of leisure reading are vast, and the general growth that results from leisure reading has not been disputed. Stanovich (1993) summarized it well when he wrote “it is through reading that much of the world is opened to students” (p.33).

It is widely known that reading plays an important role in the education of our children. The act of reading results in learning. Unfortunately, children are not choosing to open books and read. This epidemic extends across the United States, over all the age groups. Simply put, students are spending very little of their leisure time reading (Strommen & Mates, 2004). Time spent leisure reading drops dramatically as children enter adolescence. A national study by the Endowment for the Arts (2007) found that fifteen through twenty-four year olds are only reading an average of eight or nine minutes per day. Spending eight or nine minutes reading each day is not enough. As children enter adolescence they are choosing not to read, causing their reading skills to suffer. The National Endowment for the Arts (2007) found in their national survey that about one-third of high school seniors are not reading proficiently. This study also reported that more than one half of the below-
basic readers were not in the work force. Reading proficiency is essential for school success as well as success in the workforce. If students keep choosing not to reading during their leisure time, student reading proficiency rates will most likely continue to decline.

The purpose of my study was to explore common factors that may have contributed to young adolescents developing or not developing a love for reading. In order to do this, I developed three research questions.

1) How many eighth grade students in my study identify themselves as readers or non-readers?

2) For those who identify themselves as readers or non-readers, what are some common factors reported including friends, family, reading habits, and leisure activities?

3) Are there any differences between the social environment of readers and non-readers?

Through a primarily qualitative study (which also includes some quantitative measures) I questioned eighth grade students about their leisure reading attitudes and habits. My goal was to identify those who engage in leisure reading and those who do not. With this information, I looked for common factors to see if there were any trends among either group (readers or non-readers) which may have contributed to those in that group choosing or not choosing to read leisurely. The findings and implications from this study would benefit those in the education field including teachers, librarians, principals, parents, and students.
A need for my study was developed when Strommen and Mates (2004) wrote that recent studies have not addressed the love of reading or factors that may contribute to young people choosing to read for leisure. Also, Nippold, Duthie, and Larsen (2005) wrote that little is known about students’ views on reading for pleasure. In my study I questioned students about their leisure activities, social influences, and reading attitudes using Wigfield and Eccles’ (1992) theory of subjective task values as a theoretical framework. The theory of subjective task values involves motivation and different incentives that individuals have for doing different activities.

In my study I used the terms leisure reading, readers, and non-readers. Leisure reading is the reading students do by choice, whether it is informational or for pleasure (Cullinan, 2002). As students engage in leisure reading, they are spending time with a text because they want to. Students engage in this act of leisure reading on their own accord, not because their teachers assigned it to them (Hughes-Hassell & Lutz, 2006). Some terms which have been used interchangeably with leisure reading in past studies include voluntary reading, spare time reading, recreational reading, extracurricular reading, independent reading, self selected reading, and free reading (Cope, 1997; Cullinan, 2004; Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Watkins & Edwards, 1992). The term ‘readers’ was defined in a study by Strommen and Mates (2004) as students who reported reading to be a consistent, pleasurable, recreational activity which was a part of their daily lives. They also identified non-readers as those who
hardly ever or never choose reading for pleasure. In my study, the following terms and definitions of leisure reading, readers, and non-readers were used.

*Leisure reading* - time spent reading materials which were not assigned by anyone else.

*Readers* - those who report themselves to leisure read consistently (a minimum of three hours per week) and also identify themselves as someone who likes to read.

*Non-readers* - Non-readers will be defined as those who report themselves to read for leisure less than three hours per week, and/or report themselves as someone who does not like to read.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Leisure reading is an important part of academic achievement. As I reviewed the literature on this topic I found a large number of studies reported multiple benefits found when students spent time leisure reading. As I reviewed the literature on the leisure reading habits of students I discovered time spent leisure reading declined dramatically during the middle school years (Newkirk, 2008). Since leisure reading is such a strong component of academic growth, I grew concerned. This led me to wonder; what are some common factors among readers and non-readers that may contribute to some having a love for reading, and others not? I found friends, family, reading habits, and leisure activities were common themes that emerged in the literature when researchers questioned students about their leisure reading habits and activities. Many studies also noted teaching implications based on their findings which may help increase leisure reading in students.

After reviewing the literature I found eight common themes that emerged repeatedly including terms and definitions for leisure reading, theories about leisure reading, theories on motivation and reading, the benefits of leisure reading, influences on leisure reading, time spent leisure reading, common factors found: readers, and common factors found: non-readers.

Terms and Definitions for Leisure Reading

Leisure reading is the reading students do by choice, whether it is informational or for pleasure (Cullinan, 2002). As students engage in leisure reading,
they are spending time with a text because they want to. Students engage in this act of leisure reading on their own accord, not because their teachers assigned it to them (Hughes-Hassell & Lutz, 2006). Since this type of reading is self prompted, it is also defined as recreational and pleasurable reading which could include fiction or nonfiction (Moyer, 2007). Strommen and Mates (2004) defined 'readers' in their study as students who reported reading to be a consistent, pleasurable, recreational activity which was a part of their daily lives. Various terms have been used in the literature and in schools to indicate leisure reading. Some of these terms include voluntary reading, spare time reading, recreational reading, extracurricular reading, independent reading, self selected reading, and free reading (Cope, 1997; Cullinan, 2004; Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Watkins & Edwards, 1992).

Even though there are great differences in the literature about terms used for leisure reading, the definitions are very similar. Strommen and Mates (2004) identified non-readers as those who hardly ever or never choose reading for pleasure. Like Strommen and Mates (2004), Cullinan (2000) recognized non-readers in his study as 'alliterates'; those who have the ability to read but choose not to. I found in the literature that it is important to define how readers and non-readers will be identified. In my study I will define leisure reading as time spent reading materials which were not assigned by anyone else. As Cullinan (2000) and Strommen and Mates (2004) did, I will also recognize and define those who are readers and non-readers in my study. Readers will be defined as those who report themselves to leisure read consistently (a minimum of three hours per week) and also identify
themselves as someone who likes to read. Non-readers will be defined as those who report themselves to read for leisure less than three hours per week, and also report themselves as someone who does not like to read.

*Theories about Leisure Reading*

As I reviewed the literature I found that there were limited studies that addressed the love of reading (Strommen & Mates, 2004). This may be the cause of a very limited amount of theories about education and leisure reading (Moyer, 2007). Morrow and Young (1997) included in their study Teale’s (1984) theory of natural literacy development. This theory states that the whole act of reading, mediated by others, leads to literacy development. A reader needs to engage in multiple texts in various contexts in order to grow as a literate person. This theory would include the act of leisure reading as one of the contexts necessary for growth and development. Children who choose to read a variety of texts in the context of pleasure reading are participating in one very important part of the whole reading process.

Morrow and Young (1997) also wrote about Holdaway’s (1979) developmental learning theory. Holdaway wrote that the process of becoming literate included a rich learning environment full of abundant materials, individualized activities, as well as peer and adult interactions around texts. Although this theory does not address leisure reading specifically, it does include individualized reading activities as a necessary component of literacy development. Leisure reading can be enhanced with abundant materials made available to students, as well as peer and adult interactions.
The incidental information acquisition theory states that students pick up knowledge incidentally through reading and that knowledge or information can be used to serve a purpose at a later date (Moyer, 2007). This theory indicated that reading can lead to a wealth of schema for students to have and use throughout their educational learning and life experiences. The acclamation of schema through participating in reading as a leisure activity is a great benefit for the students’ educational growth.

The limited theories about leisure reading indicate a need for further studies. Leisure reading can be connected to parts of many theories, but in my review of the literature I did not find any theories about why some students engage in leisure reading and others do not. This led me to seek out more literature in search of theories which can be used as a theoretical framework for my thesis study. I began searching motivational theories because motivation is at the heart of the issue of whether or not students read.

*Theories on Motivation and Reading*

Many theories exist in literature about motivation and how motivation influences learning. While searching for theories about motivation I was looking for theories that dealt specifically with reasons or causes for motivation to accomplish or not accomplish activities. A study by Wigfield and Eccles (1992) as cited in Wigfield (1997) highlights a theory of motivation called subjective task values. This theory states that different incentives cause students to do different tasks. Subjective task values include the interest value, utility value, and attainment value. The interest
value is a motivational incentive based on how much the student likes or is interested in the activity. The utility value is the usefulness of the activity. How important an activity is to a student is called the attainment value. The importance of reading theory is similar to the attainment value. This theory states that those who read do so because they feel reading is an important act in which to partake in (Eccles et al., 1983) as cited in (Wigfield, 1997). Based on my review of the literature I found that students who read do so for very different reasons (Cullinan, 2000, Johnsson-Smaragdi & Johnson, 2006; Strommen & Mates, 2004). Most of the reasons given by students could be categorized into the three main values (interest, utility, and attainment) included in the subjective task values theory. However, the causes of the formation of the motivational values are not included in this theory.

Wigfield (1997) wrote about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is the motivation that comes from oneself causing a student to want to complete an activity. Oldfather (1992) as cited in Wigfield (1997) theorized that the continuing impulse to learn is the reason for some students' intrinsic motivation to read. The continuing impulse to learn is the “intense involvement, curiosity, and search for understanding” (p. 61). Extrinsic motivation comes from others possibly in the form or rewards or assignments. Wigfield also wrote about reading compliance which is defined as extrinsic motivation, occurring when others assign reading as a goal for students. When reading further about theories around motivation I used intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as a lens to view and categorize.
Alexander and Filler (1976), cited in Wigfield (1997) wrote a theory which connected motivation and reading. This theory described the attitudes about reading that students feel, such as whether or not a student finds enjoyment in reading. The attitude the student has leads to the amount of motivation he/she has to participate in the activity, therefore affecting the amount of time he/she participates in the activity. These theorists found that the time reading and motivation for reading is grounded in the student’s attitude towards reading. This is most appropriate for leisure reading, which is not enforced by anyone and must be a voluntary act one partakes in due to intrinsic motivational factors.

One reason as to why some students may have a positive attitude towards reading and be intrinsically motivated to spend a lot of time leisure reading could be the flow experience. The flow experience is when an individual loses all track of time and self because he/she is absorbed in an activity, such as book reading (Csikszentmihalyi, 1978) as cited in (Wigfield, 1997). Newkirk (2008) more recently described a feeling like the flow experience when he wrote in his study of leisure readers that “anyone who enters the meditative ‘zone’ of reading will want to return to it...students who have never experienced this inner theater are puzzled by the loyalty of readers” (p. 21).

These theories describe the attitudes and feelings about reading, but still do not get towards the purpose of my thesis study, which is to identify what makes some students chose to read for leisure, and others to not. Wigfield (1997) wrote that there are social reasons for reading and the reading meanings are sometimes shared and
gained among friends and family. Strommen & Mates (2004) wrote that the motivation for readers comes from families who value the entertainment and enjoyable experiences that reading brings. Likewise, Cullinan (2000) wrote that an interaction with parents and family members around print affects literacy development.

In my study all of the theories found relate very closely to leisure reading and the motivational causes for students to participate or not participate in that activity. I will be using the subjective task values, attitudes about reading, social reasons for reading, and others as the theoretical lens to frame the methods, analysis, and implications of my thesis study.

Benefits of Leisure Reading

The benefits of leisure reading are vast and great. In reading the literature I found that numerous studies reported the benefits of leisure reading. Both qualitative and quantitative studies have reported correlations between success in school and the amount of time spent leisure reading (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007). Engaging in leisure reading fosters students development of a sense of individual self as a reader (Wutz & Wedwick, 2005). Johnsson-Smaragdi and Johnson (2006) wrote that leisure reading stimulates the imagination, power of insight, and emotional intelligences such as empathy when students identify with characters. Worthy (2002) also wrote about whole student growth in the area of cognitive development as a benefit of leisure reading.
More specific areas of student growth were also included in the literature. The amount of time students spend leisure reading was found to relate to students' reading rate and fluency (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Moore et al., 1999; Shefelbine, 2000; Worthy, 2002). Students' ability to comprehend texts was also found to increase as the amount of time students spent leisure reading increased (Johnsson-Smaragdi & Johnson, 2006; Moore et al., 1999; Worthy, 2002). The benefit of leisure reading increasing vocabulary was written about the most in the literature. Vocabulary and word knowledge was reported to increase as a benefit of leisure reading (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Moore et al., 1999; Shefelbine, 2000; Worthy, 2002). Anderson and Nagy (1992) reported book reading to result in 4,000 to 12,000 new words learned each year. Nagy & Herman (1987) as cited in (Nippold et al., 2005) found in their study that 15,000 to 30,000 new words are learned each year if a student reads twenty-five minutes per day. Writing skills were also found to be among the benefits of students engaging in leisure reading (Block, 2001; National Endowment for the Arts, 2007). Another important factor of literacy development is verbal skills. Studies have found that verbal skills of those who leisure read frequently were enhanced in the areas of expressing oneself and communicating (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Johnsson-Smaragdi & Johnson, 2006; Shefelbine, 2002). Along with fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, writing skills, and verbal skills, studies have found that a student's knowledge base or scheme grows as a result of leisure reading (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Shefelbine, 2000). Stanovich and Cunningham (1993) reported that their study found the
knowledge level of readers who read frequently to be 200-400% higher than those who read less than frequently. Much of students’ knowledge of the world comes from leisure reading.

With all of the benefits of leisure reading found and reported in the literature, it is not a surprise that those who consistently leisure read experience higher levels of academic success (Shefelbine, 2000). Those who read for pleasure consistently score higher on reading tests, comprehension tests, and have a higher grade point average (Block, 2001; National Endowment for the Arts, 2007). Even more specifically, Cipielewski & Stanovich (1992) concluded from their research that readers of a wide variety of materials, who read consistently, scored ten to fifteen percentile points higher on reading achievement standardized tests.

As the benefits of leisure reading are vast, it is not surprising that the consequences of not participating in leisure reading are detrimental. Those who do not engage in leisure reading are in academic jeopardy (Worthy, 2002). Students’ learning in all areas of the curriculum is negatively impacted by a difficulty to read or reluctance to engage in leisure reading (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007). The negative consequences of not participating in leisure reading carry throughout the student’s adult life. A nation-wide survey conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts (2007) reported more than half of the below-basic readers are not in the workforce. More than ever, adolescents entering adult society will need to read and write (Moore et al., 1999). We are living in a society full of print and new literacies
and the benefits of leisure reading for students who will soon enter that society are enormous.

The review of the literature on the benefits of leisure reading confirmed the hypothesis I had that leisure reading is an extremely important part of a student's academic growth. The downward decline of leisure reading, beginning in the middle-school is certainly something to cause alarm. The benefits reported including fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, writing skills, verbal skills, and schema are consistent throughout the studies and not challenged by other studies. However, few studies address why some students' leisure read and others don't, or how to create readers. In my research study I will be questioning readers and non-readers to identify common factors with the implication of using this information to create more readers so they can reap in the benefits of leisure reading.

*Influences on Leisure Reading*

Through reviewing the literature I have found many influences on students’ leisure reading. These influences can be either negative or positive and promote or hinder a student’s time spent leisure reading. Students’ attitudes or perceptions towards leisure reading influence leisure reading time and achievement (Moore, et al., 1999; Strommen & Mates, 2002). Community norms and society attitudes as perceived by students have an effect on student attitudes towards leisure reading (Johnsson-Smaragdi & Johnson, 2006; Strommen & Mates, 2004). Adult influences on leisure reading were among the most common found in my review of the literature. Adult influences are a determining factor of student reading attitudes and
habits (Snowball, 2008). These interactions with adults around print affect literacy development (Cullinan, 2000). Those students who are readers reported to have learned that reading can be entertaining and enjoyable from their families (Strommen & Mates, 2004). A home environment that promotes reading and parental support encourages literacy development (Johnsson-Smaragdi & Johnson, 2006; Strommen & Mates, 2002). A survey administered by Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) reported that 70% of students felt their leisure reading habits were influenced by their parents, 63% reported teachers to influence their reading habits, and 40% reported librarians to influence their leisure reading habits (some students selected multiple choices). Watkins and Edwards (1992) also found that teachers significantly influence the amount of time students participate in leisure reading. Surprisingly, Strommen & Mates (2004) reported in their findings that peer group approval did not have a big influence on whether or not students engaged in leisure reading.

Some influences were reported to have a negative impact on student reading habits. The classroom environment can have a positive or negative influence on literacy development (Morrow & Rand, 1991). Newkirk (2008) came to the conclusion in his study that the decrease of reading in middle school may be because of the loss of the nurturing elementary environment. Another example of a negative school influence found was that student motivation to leisure read decreased when they constantly had assignments connected with reading (Worthy, 2002). Outside the classroom, Johnsson-Smaragdi and Johnson (2006) stated in their study that visual media use such as watching television threatens books and reading.
Multiple studies reported the influences on leisure reading. Very few consistencies were found in the literature as to the main influences on reading. Further investigation in my study will help determine what influences my students to partake or not partake in the activity of leisure reading. I will be looking at media influences such as television viewing, student attitudes towards reading, family environment, peers, teachers, as well as parental influences which was the most common influence found in the literature.

**Time Spent Leisure Reading**

The benefits of leisure reading were found in the literature to be numerous and wide spread. There is very little dispute among professionals about leisure reading and how it positively impacts the whole student. Unfortunately, students spend very little time leisure reading (Strommen & Mates, 2004). Few students engage in reading during the school year, and even less engage in summer leisure reading (Hughes-Hassell & Lutz, 2006). Calkins (2001) wrote that students need a minimum of thirty minutes a day to read. Although the amount of time students spend leisure reading is low, the problem increases even more as students’ age. The time spent leisure reading declines in adolescents (Cullinan, 2000). The age of young adolescence marks the beginning of a downward trend in academics (Worthy, 2002). Time spent leisure reading drops as students enter middle school, and the decline is even more significant among boys (Newkirk, 2008).

The reason for this decline of time spent leisure reading as students enter middle school may be due to students’ attitudes about reading in general declining
around the middle school years (Moore, et al., 1999). Rich (2007) as cited in Padak and Rasinski (2007) found in his study that 43% of fourth graders said they read for fun, compared to 19% of eighth graders. The low percentage of those who read for fun indicates a problem since attitudes motivate time spent on an activity. Watkins and Edwards (1992) conducted a study on 463 students enrolled in grades three though six at a suburban school. The researchers sent an extracurricular log home for parents to fill out about their students’ extracurricular activities and the time spent on each one. The log was to be filled out each day, and was signed and returned each month over the course of one year. The researchers found that students spent an average of four to five minutes per day reading, and spent an average of 180 minutes per day watching television. More recently, the National Endowment for the Arts (2007) found from surveys that fifteen to twenty-four year olds spent an average of seven minutes per weekday and ten minutes per weekend or holiday reading. This study also found that the same age group spent an average of two to two and a half hours per day watching the television.

However the results are read, they are cause for alarm. Students will not gain from the benefits of leisure reading if they are only reading five or ten minutes per day. The amount of time spent watching the television in comparison to the amount of time spent reading aligns with Johnsson-Smaragdi & Johnson’s (2006) findings which reported media influences as a threat for books and time spent reading. The drop in adolescents’ time spent leisure reading and attitudes towards leisure reading
re-enforced my beliefs that the reading habits and attitudes of middle school students needs to be studied.

Some of the studies reported in this section warrant critique. One study (Rich 2007, as cited in Padak and Rasinski, 2007) which reported time spent reading included in their limitations section that the school had a school wide SSR (sustained silent reading) program, and that the time students spent during SSR was included in their reporting of time spent reading. The time spent leisure reading by choice, may have been much lower. Also, the study by Watkins and Edwards (1992) recorded a zero for any student who failed to return the extracurricular log. Although they did a member check and the school teacher indicated that the students who did not return the log were most likely not reading at home, the results may have been skewed with the zeros averaged into the time students spent reading and participating in other activities. In my study I will be asking my rural eighth grade students to self report that average amount of time per week spent participating in leisure activities. While reviewing the literature I have not found any studies which focus on the leisure reading attitudes and habits of rural middle school students. The average time spent reading may be differ from the norm for this specific group.

Common Factors Found: Readers

Moyer (2007) interviewed readers and found that the majority of readers reported a lack of television watching. Moyer concluded that people who watch a lot of television are less likely to engage in leisure reading regularly. This contrasts with a study by Strommen and Mates (2004) who found no differences between readers
and non-readers' time spent television viewing and/or participating on other extracurricular activities. Therefore, little time spent television viewing can not yet be concluded as a common factor among readers.

Students surveyed in a study by Lesesne (2006) overwhelmingly said that choice for reading materials led to the motivation to read more. Many teens enjoy reading when they find materials that they like and are interested in (Snowball, 2008). The top materials reported to be ‘liked’ by teens include magazines, newspapers, and novels (Hughes-Hassell & Lutz, 2006). Similarity, Snowball (2008) found that students reported to enjoy reading novels, biographies, newspapers, magazines, and online material. There were some differences found in Snowball’s study between boys and girls and choice materials. The majority of boys reported to enjoy reading sports magazines, and the majority of girls chose fashion/beauty magazines as favorites. Cullinan (2000) reported that girls read for personal reasons. No matter which genre, book ownership was found to increase reading motivation (Lesesne, 2006). Those who were classified as readers reported to frequent libraries or booksellers (Strommen & Mates, 2004).

A family influence on readers was the most common factor found in my review of the literature. The amount of success in school literacy programs was found to be strongly linked with experiences at home (Morrow & Young, 1997). Strommen and Mates (2004) found that most readers had a reading ritual such as reading at bedtime. Moyer (2007) interviewed readers and found that 100 percent reported to have read since childhood, and that they came from a family of readers.
Reading within the family is common amongst readers who like to read (Snowball, 2008). One activity that occurred commonly in the homes of readers was family talks about books during and after reading. The talks were reported to increase the connection with the books, therefore increasing motivation to read (Lesesne, 2006).

Strommen and Mates (2004) surveyed 151 students in a suburban school. Twelve of the sixth and ninth graders who were classified as readers from their responses on the surveys were interviewed. Those interviewed reported that readers regularly interact with others in social circles about books. Peer group approval was not a big issue for readers. For each student interviewed, the pattern of reading and interacting around texts with others was always established within a family of readers.

The most common factors reported among readers in the literature I reviewed was text choice and social environment, most specifically family. Little research has been done about the common factors of young people who read recreationally (Strommen & Mates, 2004). In my study I have created a wide range of survey and interview questions which may highlight more common factors among readers.

**Common Factors: Non-Readers**

While reviewing the literature I found a few common factors among non-readers and reasons why they did not partake in leisure reading. The most common factor was time. Over half of the non-readers in a study by Strommen and Mates (2004) claimed that they were too busy to spend time reading. Other time demands such as playing video games, spending time with friends, and school work were reported as either preferred or necessary (Hughes-Hassell & Lutz, 2006). More time
was spent watching the television among non-readers (Johnsson-Smaragdi & Johnson, 2006).

Another common factor was attitude. Students’ attitude towards reading declines as they age because the amount of homework increases, as well as the amount of work connected to reading. Students view reading as work due to the assigned readings and homework connected with those readings (Newkirk, 2008; Hughes-Hassell & Lutz, 2006). Non-readers report reading to be too slow, too boring, and too detailed (Strommen & Mates, 2004). A more general reason for these attitudes among readers may be due to the way our society portrays and views reading. Johnsson-Smaragdi and Johnson (2006) found that a decrease of book reading among boys was found to be partially caused by our society viewing and projecting book reading as feminine.

A final common factor found among non-readers was low reading skills. Many non-readers report that they don’t understand what they are reading (Strommen & Mates, 2004). Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) surveyed 583 urban students and found that 29% of students classified as non-readers reported themselves as having trouble reading.

The most common factors found as possible causes for students not reading were attitudes, time demands, and reading difficulty. I was surprised that I did not find lack of social influences such as coming from a family of readers as a factor. Most of the studies I read reported family environment, more specifically parents, as being the most common influence on reading as well as the most common factor.
reported among readers. In my study I will ask the participants questions about their family environment (as well as parental influences) and see if common factors among non-readers emerge.

Conclusion

Leisure reading is at the heart of education. The terms and definitions used for leisure reading vary, but the overall benefit of leisure reading on education stands strong. Through reviewing the literature I found an enormous amount of studies reporting the various benefits of leisure reading. Although not many theories existed that specifically addresses leisure reading and education, theories centered on motivation were vast. Through my literature review I found that motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, was at the core of the issue as to whether students leisure read or not, and why. Common factors among readers and non-readers were found and a few were widely reported. The common themes of family, time, attitude, and ability appeared throughout the subcategories of my literature review. The time spent leisure reading as reported by various studies in this literature review was disconcerting. The decline of attitude and time for leisure reading in the middle years was reported in many studies. In my study I will use the theories around motivation as a theoretical framework. I will further study influences, time, attitudes, and common factors of middle school rural students' leisure reading.
Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction

The purpose of my study was to explore common factors that may have contributed to young adolescents developing and maintaining a love for reading. I addressed this goal by surveying and interviewing students about their leisure reading habits and attitudes, as well as their social environment.

Questions

I created three research questions which were addressed in my study: 1) How many eighth grade students in my study identify themselves as readers or non-readers? 2) For those who identify themselves as readers or non-readers, what are some common factors reported including friends, family, reading habits, and leisure activities? 3) Are there any differences between the social environments of readers and that of non-readers?

Participants

The participants in my study were selected from a rural community located in Western New York. Based on the Census report (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), the socioeconomic status of the area was mostly middle class with an average annual income of about 42,000 dollars. The occupational make-up varied, consisting of mostly electrical, equipment, and mechanic careers for males, and cashier, administrative support, and educational careers for females. The population of the two towns combined (which make up the school district) was about 5,000.

According to the 2000 Census report (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), the student population at the middle-high school consisted of 630 students. The middle-high
school included grades six through twelve. The school was of a low ethnic diversity, with 95.9% of the students reported as being white/Caucasian, 1.1% Black or African American, 0.9% Hispanic or Latino, 0.9% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 0.2 Asian, and 1.0% two or more races. The student to teacher ratio was 11.3 and 173 students received either a free or reduced lunch.

The eighth grade English classroom being used in this study was led by a female teacher who had been teaching just over ten years. The classroom walls were lined with twelve bookshelves holding books of a wide variety of genres. The students were encouraged to check out these books and read them during their leisure time. The desks were lined in pairs facing a white board and SMART Board.

Classroom instruction usually began with a whole group lecture and then was followed by either partner or individual work. Some examples of literacy practices included read-aloud, writing workshop, and partner reading.

For my study I selected one eighth grade class. I selected this class because it was the largest. The class consisted of twenty students, eleven boys and nine girls. After obtaining written permission from the middle school principal and the eighth grade English teacher, I sent a letter home with each student informing them and their parents about the nature of my study. Each parent was presented with a consent form, and each student was presented with an assent form. All students were reassured that their participation in the study would remain confidential, and their answers would remain anonymous. No students were pressured to participate, and all students were assured that their participation was completely voluntary. As a non-participant in the
classroom, I came into the class to administer the surveys and then pulled out students for a short period to the school library in order to complete the interviews. After the survey was analyzed, I randomly pulled from a hat the names of ten students who returned the consent and assent forms to participate in an interview.

The sample who returned signed assent and consent forms included eighteen total student, eleven males and seven females. The ethnic composition of the sample included Caucasian/White (16) and Native American (2). The students randomly selected for the interviews included seven males and three females.

*Instruments*

The survey (see Appendix A) I used in my study was self created so that I could tailor the questions to fit my own research purpose. I have used my three research questions as a guide in creating the survey. The survey consisted of eight yes/no questions, six multiple choice questions, three Likert type questions, and nine short answer questions. The twenty-six total questions were administered by me on May 7, 2009. The questions were formatted to obtain information about the students' subject task values in the area of leisure reading (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992 as cited in Wigfield, 1997). The three values that make up the theory of subjective task values including interest values, attainment (or importance of the task) values, and utility (usefulness) values serve as the theoretical basis for the questions that ask about students' interest in leisure reading, feelings about importance of leisure reading, as well as why they participate or do not participate in leisure reading. Strommen and Mates (2004) concluded from their study that home environment, students' attitudes,
and students' perceptions about reading are the three major predictors of whether or not students participate in leisure reading and why they do or do not. Therefore, some questions were formatted to ask about students' attitudes and motivations around leisure reading. The remaining questions ask about gender, ethnicity and other demographic information.

Once I began administering the surveys, I reminded the students that the survey was completely voluntary and their answers would remain anonymous. I read over the short directions printed on the survey as well as each question aloud to the students. I then administered the survey to the eighteen students who returned both the assent and consent forms. The students had the entire forty-five minute class period to complete the survey. The students were instructed to turn their paper over when they are finished. Once everyone was finished I collected the surveys.

The semi-structured interview (see Appendix B) was created in direct relation to my research questions. Each question in the interview addressed one or more of my research questions, and created a closer look into my topic. The interview was semi-structured to allow for prompting and follow-up questions. I began the interview by asking the student if he/she likes to read. If the student answered no, I continued by asking questions two through fourteen. If the student answered yes I asked questions fifteen through thirty-five. The questions were formatted to reveal information about the common factors in the readers or non-readers life including family, text choice, extracurricular activities, and other motivational factors. Strommen and Mates (2004) conducted a study with a purpose similar to mine but
differing participant demographics. In their findings they reported that readers commonly frequent libraries or bookstores, have a reading ritual, and regularly interact with others around texts, with the pattern always being established within a family of readers. For non-readers, Strommen and Mates reported that the students had trouble reading, found reading to be too boring or slow, and/or claimed to be too busy to read. The results from this study address my own purpose and therefore the interview questions I created were formatted to address and question some of the same themes.

After administering the survey I began interviewing the students a week later. I randomly select the participants by pulling from a hat the names of ten students who returned the consent and assent forms to participate in an interview. I choose to select ten students to interview because it would represent just over half of the participants’ survey answers. In Strommen and Mates (2004) study, the purpose and methods match closely to my own. Since they surveyed 151 students in their study and interviewed twelve of the 151 students using a semi-structured interview, I believe that interviewing the ten students in my study yielded sufficient data to be analyzed. The purpose of Moyer’s (2007) study was also alike to mine, and in this study Moyer interviewed seven participants. Each interview participant was pulled from a study hall class for fifteen to twenty minutes. If the student chose to participate, I took him/her to a private room in the library and conduct the semi-structured interview which was audio taped. The students were again reminded of the anonymity, and were asked to not discuss the questions and answers with other students until all ten
students have been interviewed. Interviewing each of the ten students individually allowed for the students to answer honestly without worrying about social acceptance.

Procedure

First I met with the middle school administrator explaining my thesis project and asked for written consent. After IRB approval was received, I explained my thesis project to the eighth grade ELA teacher and asked her to sign a consent form for the use of her students from one of her class periods. Once consent was given, I very briefly explained to the ELA class where I was from, what I would be doing, and issues of consent and confidentiality. Students were also assured that their participation was completely voluntary. I sent a consent form home with the students and asked that it be returned within a week, along with their own assent form if they wished to participate in the study. Eighteen signed forms were collected which included seven females and eleven males. I then spent one class period administering the surveys. The following week I began pulling students out to the library for about fifteen minutes for the semi-structured interview who were randomly selected as part of the focus group, wished to participate, and handed in a consent and assent form. The interview process took two weeks.

Limitations

The limitations of this study relate to the type of instruments being used. In order to answer my research questions as best as I can, I chose to create my own survey and interview questions so they would relate directly to my research topic. Also, the data being collected relied heavily on student trust and reliability, as the
students are asked to report on their own behaviors. The small sample size was another limitation.

Data Analysis

I began an early analysis of the surveys as soon as they were completed. This included asking questions of the data and writing my early learnings and questions in a research journal. I then coded the surveys based on the type of questions such as demographic or questions about family influences. The survey data from readers and non-readers was compared using the constant comparison method. Once common themes emerged from the data I summarized, charted, and categorized the data into thematic groups. I then looked over all the survey data again using a negative case analysis. Finally, I took my findings back to the members and completed a member check. I then created excerpts, charts, tables, percentages, and graphs to report my data.

While I conducted the series of individual audio taped interviews with the participants I began an early analysis of the data. This included reviewing the audiotapes and creating an index using the time counter on the recorder. As I did this I kept a research journal, taking notes on tone, facial expressions, pauses, and other data that I gathered during the interview with each student. Next I transcribed the audiotapes and used the transcripts to find themes. The coded data from the transcripts was analyzed using the constant comparison method. As themes emerged I charted and categorized the findings. Negative case analysis and a peer check were used.
While I was analyzing the data from the surveys and interviews I looked across the two side by side. I was looking to see if common themes emerged from both data sources and used cross comparison to check for trustworthiness and consistency. All data was analyzed to see if themes, idea, and findings were answering my research questions.
Chapter 4 - Findings

The purpose of my study was to explore common factors that may have contributed to young adolescents developing or not developing a love for reading. In order to explore the common factors which may contribute to students developing or not developing a love for reading, I created the following research questions.

1) How many eighth grade students in my study identify themselves as readers or non-readers?

2) For those who identify themselves as readers or non-readers, what are some common factors reported including friends, family, reading habits, and leisure activities?

3) Are there any differences between the social environment of readers and non-readers?

For this study eighteen students completed a survey which I created. The survey consisted of twenty-six total questions including eight yes/no questions, six multiple choice questions, three Likert type questions, and nine short answer questions. Eleven males and seven females completed the survey. After the completion of the survey I then randomly selected ten students to participate in a semi-structured interview. Seven males and three females were selected. Each interview lasted about twenty minutes and the students were asked between ten and twenty questions.

I analyzed the data by beginning an early analysis of the survey data once they were collected. I then transcribed the interview audio tapes and cataloged the
transcriptions. I cross compared the interview transcriptions looking for themes. I
analyzed the survey data by charting the questions and answers. I then coded the
categories and used the constant comparison method to find emerging themes. Once
themes arose from the survey and interview data I looked across the data and my
journaling of the analysis for triangulation. I then conducted a negative case analysis
on my data to see if any themes should be challenged or re-thought. Four themes
were found of the data and a member check found the themes to be consistent with
the data.

Research Question 1: How many eighth grade students in my study identify
themselves as readers or non-readers?

Six out of eighteen participants in my study identified themselves as readers
by indicating that they read often, like to read, and have a love for reading. Five
females and one male comprised the reader category, and each wrote on the survey
that they read more than three hours per week, love to read, and like to read. For my
research question number one I uncovered the theme that readers love reading.

Theme 1: Readers Love Reading

Those who liked to read were asked why and responded on the survey with
answers such as “I like to read because it feels like I’m in another place, like I’m the
main character.” The reasons provided by students such as this one match the ‘flow
experience’ which was put forth by Csikszentmihalyi (1987) as cited in Wigfield
(1997) and concluded that readers like to read because they lost all track of time and
self due to being absorbed in the text. Newkirk (2008) also wrote of this experience saying that “anyone who enters the meditative ‘zone’ of reading will want to return to it...students who have never experienced this inner theater are puzzled by the loyalty of readers” (p 21). The ‘flow experience’ was also found from participants’ interview answers. When one participant was asked why she liked to read she responded by saying “Sometimes it takes you out of the world so you don’t have to deal with your problems.” A humorous account of the ‘flow experience’ came from a female participant when I asked her when she likes to read. She replied by saying “Well, whenever I can. Whenever I have a book. I read all the time, study halls, when I’m at home...whenever I can. In between periods walking down the hallways [laugh] which usually gets me into trouble bumping into people.” Responses from survey data and interview data both showed that readers enjoy the ‘flow experience’ that occurs when they are reading.

Much like Stromman & Mates (2004) found in their study, non-readers indicated that they do not like to read because it is too boring, too slow, or too detailed. On the survey, non-readers were asked to describe why they do not like to read. Some answers included “I would like to read but I never have the time or patience” and another wrote “it’s a waste of my time.” During the interviews when I asked a male participant who stated that he did not like to read why he thinks some people read a lot he responded by saying “cause they are bored.” I then asked the same participant why he does not like reading and he said “I don’t have time for it
and I don’t like it because...I just don’t.” Non-readers on the survey and interviews commonly replied that reading is boring and that they don’t have the time to read.

The average amount of time spent reading by eighth grade students in my study was 4.6 minutes per day. This data is almost identical to that of Watkins & Edwards (1992) study which found that the participants in their study (grades 3-6) read an average of 4-5 minutes per day. The National Endowment for the Arts (2007) concluded similar findings that 15-24 year olds read an average of 7 minutes per day. During the interviews readers stated that they read as much as three hours per day and a little as forty-five minutes per day. Non-readers stated that they did not read at all.

Research Question 2: For those who identify themselves as readers or non-readers, what are some common factors reported including friends, family, reading habits, and leisure activities?

Readers are surrounded by books in their homes and visit bookstores and libraries often. Readers also talk about books with others, most often family members. Those who identified themselves as readers spent their leisure time differently than those who identified themselves as non-readers. Some of those differences included time spent with family, time spent on homework, and time spent with friends. In relation to my research question number two I uncovered two themes; readers are immersed in books and talk about books, and readers’ leisure activities differ some from non-readers’ leisure activities.
Theme 2: Readers are Immersed in Books and Talk about Books

Readers in this study were surrounded by books and book talk; they visit the bookstores and libraries often, own many books, and talk about books often with family members. Of the ten students who were interviewed 100% who said they love reading also visit bookstores or libraries often; 100% of non-readers said they do not go to the bookstores or libraries often. One male non-reader who was interviewed was asked if he goes to the library or bookstore and replied by saying “Not very often. I go to the library if I need a book for school.” On the contrary, a female reader replied to the question by saying “Oh ya, I love going to the bookstores and libraries because you can just sit there and read.” A male reader who was interviewed responded by saying “Umm, not the library. I can’t stand borrowing books...I have to buy them because I read it and think I want to own this book!”

Holdaway’s (1979) developmental learning theory concluded that the process of becoming literate must include a rich learning environment full of abundant materials, individualized activities, and peer and adult interactions around texts. In my study I found that all readers and non-readers indicated during the interview that they own some of their own books. However, readers’ descriptions about how many books they own indicated an abundance rather than a few or some. For example, one female reader was asked if she had any books in her home and said “oh...so much. My mom tells me I can’t get anymore and I always go and buy some more. We have like six bookshelves full and then we have shelves all over the house piled with books.”
When students were asked during the interview who inspired them to read, each reader responded that a family member of the same gender not only inspired them to read, but also often talked about books with him/her. Four out of seven readers who were interviewed said they became readers in the past year because of a family member of the same gender recommended a book that got the student ‘hooked.’ One male responded when asked who inspired him to read “My brother told me about these books and I wanted to read them. We talk about like what’s going on in the books.” Another male also indicated that his family talks about books often when he said that “my family reads a lot. We like a lot of the same books and share things that we read with each other.” Lesesne (2006) wrote that book talk within the family raised students’ motivation to read. The study also found that 100% (six out of six) of readers came from a family of readers. In this current study, it was also found that 100% of readers not only came from a family of readers, but also talked about books often, visit libraries or bookstores often, and own many books.

Theme 3: Readers’ Leisure Activities Differ Some from Non-readers

Participants taking the survey were asked to read over a list of fourteen leisure activities and mark on each if they participate in this activity often, sometimes, or never. The participants were then asked to write three of the activities that were their favorite as well as how much time they spend per day on each activity. The percentage of students (readers and non-readers) who indicated that they participated in each activity was then placed into a graph (see below). The data showed that readers and non-readers spend their leisure time differently. The difference were
most apparent in the areas of TV viewing, spending time with friends, spending time with family, and working on homework.

Leisure Activities - Percentage of students who said they participate in activity often

(Graph 1)

Readers reported to spend more time on homework and chores and less time watching TV than non-readers. Seventy-five percent (nine out of twelve) of non-readers wrote that they watched TV often, and 16% (one out of six) of readers watched TV often. Moyer’s (2007) study found similar results; readers do not watch TV often. Johnsson-Smaragdi and Johnson’s (2006) study also found that TV viewing threatens book reading.

Of the participants in the study, 83% (five out of six) of readers said that they spend time doing homework often, and 33% (four out of twelve) of non-readers said they do homework often. Another difference found among readers and non-readers was time spent on chores or jobs. Sixty-seven percent of readers said they do chores
often (four out of six), and 33% (four out of twelve) of non-readers selected chores as an activity that they do often. Non-readers spend more time with friends 67% (eight out of twelve) verses 33% (two out of six) readers who indicated that they often spend time with friends. Twenty-five percent of non-readers (three out of twelve) indicated that they played video games often compared to none (0) of the readers. No major differences were found for any other leisure activity including listening to music, working on the computer, and playing sports.

*Research Question 3: Are there any significant differences between the social environment of readers and non-readers?*

From the interview and survey data I found that those who identified themselves as readers also discussed reading as a family event, and that family members were the ones who inspired them to read. Readers also used the term ‘we’ often when talking about their reading communities. Those who identified themselves as non-readers referred to readers as ‘they’ or others. In relation to research question number three I uncovered the theme of reading being a family event and that readers belong to a ‘club’.

*Theme 4: Reading is a Family Event and Readers Belong to a ‘Club’*

All readers reported to spend a lot of time with family members who influenced or inspired their reading habits. One hundred percent (six out of six) of readers wrote on the survey that they spent time with their families often; 67% (eight out of twelve) of non-readers spend time with their families often.
Snowball (2008) wrote that adult influences are a determining factor of students reading attitudes and habits. When students were asked in this study during an interview who inspired them to read, the four male readers responded grandfather, father, brother, and step-dad. The three female readers responded sister, sister, and mother. All readers in my study were inspired to read by a family member of the same gender. Unfortunately, I was unable to find any literature that related to this finding.

Strommen & Mates (2004) found that motivation to read came from families who value the entertainment and enjoyment that reading brings. Likewise, in this study readers reported the same motivational factors. When students were asked during an interview how reading is viewed in their family, one female reader responded “Oh it’s a very big thing. We all like to read!” Another example of a student in this study who found motivation to read from a family member said his influences were from “mainly my brother because my brother and my cousin Matt got me hooked on the Halo books because he is a Halo nerd and I actually got the book for Christmas but I didn’t think much about them because I don’t usually read but a couple weeks after I got it I got so hooked on it and I got the rest of the series and was hooked.”

Cullinan’s (2000) study found that interactions with family members around print affect literacy development. Many readers in my study also claimed to interact around print with family members often. When readers were asked when they started to love reading, all referred to a family member’s influence. One female wrote that
“in February my sister had a bunch of friends over and told me to go read this book [Twilight] and I loved it!” Another reader (male) replied with a similar answer when he said that “about a year and a half ago my brother gave me some books to read and then I read the whole series.”

Those who are readers in this study reported to belong to a reading community. Others who do not like to read or do not read often refer to readers as in the term of ‘others’. Wigfield (1997) wrote that there are many social reasons for reading and also that meanings from texts are gained and shared among readers. When students were asked how reading was viewed in their family one reader responded by saying “…my mom reads a lot and so does my Grandpa, I guess we’re all readers.” Another reader said “my family…we are all like big reading people.” One reader said that “my mom, dad, brothers…all of us read. It was just kinda always there.”

Stromman & Mates (2004) found that peer influences on reading attitudes and habits are not large, and this study found the same results. There were no substantial differences between readers and non-readers peer influences and peer habits/attitudes about reading. However, family influences were significant. Non-readers who were asked in an interview how their family viewed reading responded by saying “my sister and my mom read a lot” or “my mom reads a lot.” When non-readers were asked why they think some people read a lot, they responded by saying “they are bored”, “maybe they want to learn”, or “they have a lot of free time.”
Summary

Six out of 18 participants in the survey indicated that they are readers. Seven out of ten participants in the interview indicated that they are readers. The average amount of time spent reading among all of the survey participants was found to be 4.6 minutes per week. This data matched past studies closely.

In this study readers reported that they visit libraries or bookstores often (100%) and non-readers do not. When participants were asked about owning books readers responded that they have an abundant amount of materials which matched past theories that readers are surrounded by books. All readers said they were inspired to read by a family member of the same gender. One hundred percent of the readers also reported that they talk about books with family members.

Readers participate in the same activities as non-readers, with a few exceptions. Readers reported to spend very little time watching TV, and 75% of non-readers reported that they watch TV often. Readers also spent more time on homework, chores, and with family. Non-readers spent more time than readers with friends and playing video games.

Those who are readers reported belonging to a community of readers. Many were recently inspired to read based on a recommendation made by a family member. Evidence did not show any effects of peer reading attitude/habit on readers or non-readers. The majority of readers reported to read because they enjoy the 'hooked' or 'flow' experience. Most non-readers reported that they did not read because of lack of time, interest, or patience.
Chapter 5 - Conclusions

Literacy skills are essential to function in our society. Research has shown that leisure reading increases comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency (Worthy, 2002). Those who do not participate in leisure reading are in academic jeopardy. The purpose of my qualitative research study was to explore common factors that may have contributed to eighth grade students developing (or not developing) a love for reading. I was interested in exploring factors such as friends, family, reading habits and views, and other leisure activities to see if common factors between those who leisure read and those who do not leisure read emerge. Strommen and Mates (2004) wrote that recent studies have not addressed the love of reading, or factors that contribute to young people reading recreationally. I selected to work with eighth grade students since studies show that independent reading declines rapidly when students enter middle school (Newkirk, 2008). Professionals will benefit in understanding what factors may influence one to engage in leisure reading since those factors could possibly be enhanced or replicated in school to stimulate a love of reading for more students. Data were collected through surveys and semi-structured interviews, both created by me so that I could tailor the questions to answer my research questions.

During my analysis I found that four major themes emerged. The themes were: readers love reading, readers are immersed in books, readers' leisure activities differ some from non-readers, reading is a family event and readers belong to a 'club'. These five themes addressed my three research questions which were:
1) How many eighth grade students in my study identify themselves as readers or non-readers?

2) For those who identify themselves as readers or non-readers, what are some common factors reported including friends, family, reading habits, and leisure activities?

3) Are there any significant differences between the social environment of readers and non-readers?

For research question one I found that six out of eighteen participants identified themselves as readers based on my definition of leisure reading. In this study leisure reading was defined as time spent reading materials which were not assigned by anyone else and included those who reported themselves to leisure read consistently (a minimum of three hours per week) and also identified themselves as someone who likes to read. The average amount of time spent reading for all the participants in the study was 4.6 minutes per day. This data matched previous research done by Watkins & Edwards (1992) who found that the average amount of time spent reading per day by students grades 3 to 6 to be 4.5 minutes. Another study by the National Endowment for the Arts (2007) also found that the average time reading per day for 15-24 year olds in their study was 7 minutes.

The second and third themes that were found addressed my second research question. The data showed that the reading habits of readers and non-readers in my study differed. One hundred percent of readers said that they visited the library and/or bookstore(s) often, and one hundred percent of non-readers said they did not
visit the library and/or bookstore(s) often. The results of this study also showed that readers owned many books and that one hundred percent of readers reported to talk with family members of the same gender about the books they read. This data matches the developmental learning theory by Holdaway (1979) which stated that the process of becoming literate included a rich learning environment full of abundant materials, individualized activities, and peer and adult interactions around texts.

The data showed a few difference between readers and non-readers in this study and the amount of time spent on certain leisure activities. In this study, the readers reported to spend more time on homework, chores, and with family. Non-readers reported to spend substantially more time than readers watching TV, playing video games, and spending time with friends. Although most non-readers in my study and in a study by Stromman & Mates (2004) said that they do not read because of time constraints there were no differences found for the amount of time spent on leisure activities for both readers and non-readers in this study.

Differences were found between the social environment of readers and non-readers in this study (research question three). All readers in this study reported to spend a lot of time with family members who influenced or inspired their reading habits. Most readers who were interviewed said they became readers due to family member influences. Those who influenced readers to read were always family members of the same gender of the reader.

Another social difference found during this study was that those who read report to belong to a reading community. Participants who were readers said talked
about their families by saying “we are like big reading people” or “I guess we’re all readers.” Those who were non-readers referred to readers in their family as ‘others’ by saying “my mom reads a lot” or “maybe they read because they are bored.”

**Discussion**

The purpose of my study was to explore common factors that may have contributed to young adolescents developing or not developing a love for reading. From my data collection and analysis I found that very few participants in my study were readers. Those who were readers reported a few differences, most especially reading habits and social environment, from non-readers.

When addressing research question number two (common factors including friends, family, reading habits, and leisure activities between non-readers and readers) I found a few differences. I was surprised that the data did not show any differences for the friendship category of readers and non-readers. Some readers reported that their friends read often and some said their friends did not read. The same held true for non-readers. There did not seem to be any significant peer influences on the participants of my study’s reading habits and attitudes. This finding matched Stromman & Mates’ (2004) study which also found that peer influences on reading are not large. This finding surprised me because after working with middle school students I believed that peer friendships and groups would play a larger role in whether or not students choose to read. In the past I have observed groups or cliques of students carrying books and reading in class, while other cliques did not. I also read a study by Berndt, Laychak, and Park (1990) which reported their findings that
peer relationships influenced academic achievement. Although participants in my study did not report peer influences on their reading habits or attitudes, I believe the relationship between peer influences and reading needs further study.

The factor of family played a significant role on the participants developing or not developing a love for reading. Readers spent more time with their families than non-readers, and reported that family members influenced them to read and talk often about the books that they are currently reading. All of the readers interviewed reported to be influenced or inspired to read by a family member of the same gender. Some of the readers said they recently became readers when a family member suggested to book to read. Johnsson-Smaragdi and Johnson (2006) wrote in their study that the home environment have proved to be extremely important for children and adolescents' interest in book reading. They also stated that analysis of their longitudinal data had shown that children's reading habits are founded during the preschool and early years. If reading habits and attitudes are founded during the early years, then the role of family literacy is large. This would explain why readers reported to be part of a reading community at home as well as having been influenced to read by family members.

The implications of these findings for my work as a teacher are large. Many past studies including Snowball (2004), Stromman & Mates (2004), Lesesne (2006), and Cullinan (2000) have found that families play a large role in students developing a love for reading. As teachers we need to relay this information to the parents and families of our students. When students enter the adolescent years, reading begins to
decline rapidly (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007). Parents need to be made aware of benefits of reading and the great influence that they have over their child(ren)'s reading habits. Family events such as incorporating DEAR time into the evening routine or visiting the bookstores or libraries often would most likely result in children reading more frequently. Although most non-readers in this study said they were too busy to read, I agree with a statement made by a reader in this study who said “you can always make the time.” One way communities encourage family reading is through reading programs at libraries. Most local libraries provide summer reading programs for students and parents to attend. As teachers, we are responsible for letting parents and students know when events such as summer reading programs occur though handouts, newsletters, and discussion. Another way to promote family literacy would be to invite parents into the classroom to read aloud to students or to send books home with students to read with their families. Teachers should always be looking for handouts about fun and interactive read aloud ideas to be sent home. It is important that teachers and parents team up to provide students with strong literacy experiences at home and at school. Morris and Kaplan (1994) as cited in Cullinan (2000) developed a program to increase independent reading among middle school students. Part of this program included inviting parents to come to school and participate in discussion groups about books that their children choose to read. Morris and Kaplan found that these book discussions between parents and children continued at home long after the program ended.
I believe that this does not put school ‘off the hook’ though. As teachers we do not have control over the families of our students or their leisure activities. It is our responsibility to become a family of readers for our students who do not have that environment at home. Studies have shown that creating a rich learning environment full of texts, book talk, and peer and adult interactions around texts develop a love for reading (Holdaway, 1979; Cullinan, 2000). Talking to students about the enjoyment of reading, setting up book clubs, and having peers recommend texts to others are three ways that teachers can help students begin to love reading.

The leisure activities of readers and non-readers in this study differed some. Readers spent more time with their families, doing chores, and working on homework. Non-readers spent more time watching TV, playing video games, and spending time with friends. Johnsson-Smaragdi & Johnson (2006) also found that visual medias such as video games and TV viewing threaten books and reading. As teachers we have limited control over the leisure activities of our students but we should find ways to work this to our benefit. Many students in this study who were non-readers reported that they read books if they really liked the movie. Finding books that relate to movies and video games that interest our students may be one way to help them find texts that they enjoy reading. Another possibility would be to inform the students of national ‘turn off the TV week’ and talk about possibilities for other ways to spend their leisure time. I am unsure of why readers spend more time than non-readers working on chores and homework but assume that the family influences and family value are the cause.
Research question three addressed the social environment of those in my study. I found that the readers in my study talked about their families and reading in the term of ‘we’ and non-readers talked about readers in the term of ‘they.’ Readers seem to belong to a community and feel to be part of that community of readers. One male reader said “…my mom reads a lot and so does my Grandpa, I guess we’re all readers.” The non-readers reported that their mom’s read often or that no one in their family read often. I believe that creating book clubs in the classroom and creating a reading environment would help those non-readers to feel that they are part of a reading community. Newkirk (2008) wrote that one reason why middle school students do not read as often as elementary students may be caused by the lack of a ‘nurturing’ environment in the middle school. Morrow and Rand (1991) wrote that “the design of classroom environments can positively influence literacy development” (p. 396). In order to create a reading community where students feel that they belong and are encourage to dialogue about reading, teachers need to be readers themselves. Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) wrote that teachers need to display what they are currently reading, join book discussions often, and become readers themselves. As teachers become active members of this reading community, they are also providing an adult role model for reading which could positively influence student reading.

Future Research

In this study I found that family influences play a large role in students developing or not developing a love for reading. Although this has been reported in
past studies, very few studies have looked into gender of the family members who influenced the students. In this study I found that one hundred percent of readers reported to have been inspired to read and talk about books often with a family member of the same gender. It would be interesting to see if future studies find similar results.

A study by Johnsson-Smaragdi & Johnson (2006) reported that society projects reading as feminine and that results in a decline of male readers. Although I did not research this question, all but one of the male participants taking my survey reported to be non-readers. The four males who reported to be readers during the interviews also reported to be influenced to read by another male in their family such as a cousin, brother, step-father, or grandfather. I wonder if most males who do not have male reading influences within their family view reading as feminine and therefore do not participate in the activity. During an interview, one male said “my mom and sister read but they read girly stuff.” It would be beneficial for teachers to select materials which interest male readers, using interviews or conversations to find interests. Other ideas for male readers may be to create a male book club or to invite males and fathers into the classroom to talk about their own reading habits and interests.

Ralph Fletcher is one author who has written a considerable amount about boy readers and how to teach boys reading and writing. In book Boy Writers: Reclaiming Their Voices (Fletcher, 2006), Fletcher wrote a considerable amount about boys in the literacy classroom. When Fletcher began exploring the topic of boy writers he
noticed that boys were disengaged during writing workshop. After much observation and research, Fletcher included tips for teachers to help boy writers find motivation. Many teachers limit boys’ writing, especially topic choice such as violence and humor. Fletcher challenged teachers to allow violence (to a degree), give boys more choices for topic to read and write about, and try to understand and look for humor in their writing. Fletcher also wrote about how handwriting sometimes hinders writing, and to let boys supplement writing with pictures whenever possible. For reading, Fletcher wrote that school and classroom libraries should include many genres of books that interest boys including humor, war, graphic novels, action, and fantasy. As teachers, it is important to remember to create classrooms which honor and engage both genders.

More studies need to be done investigating why students who enter adolescence face a sharp decline in reading habits and attitudes. The benefits of reading are reported on often, but the reasons for the decline in reading are not. Although I found some common factors between readers and non-readers in this study, I was not able to find cause for the rapid decline in adolescent reading habits and attitudes.
References


Appendix A

Survey
(This survey is being used for the purpose of a thesis study for The College at Brockport. All of your selections will remain anonymous and the information you give cannot be connected to you in any way.)

Directions: For each question please select the choice that best fits your answer. If a choice is not given, please write your answer on the space provided. All the questions about reading are asking about leisure reading habits. This means the time spent reading material that was NOT assigned by someone else.

1) Gender: □ Male □ Female

2) Ethnicity: □ African American □ Latino/Latina □ Native American
□ Caucasian/White □ Asian □ Other

3) What do you like to read? (Check all that apply) □ Fiction/Novels □ Newspapers
□ Magazines □ Online Material □ Comic Books □ Non-fiction/Specialty Books
□ Other (please list) ____________________________________________

4) About how much time per week do you spend reading something that was not an assigned reading?
□ Under 1 hour □ 1-2 hours □ 3-5 hours □ 6-10 hours □ 11-20 hours
□ More than 20 hours

5) Name one thing you read in the past week, if any:
_________________________________________________________________________________

6) Do you like to read? □ Yes □ No □ Sometimes

7) If you do not like to read, why not?
_________________________________________________________________________________

8) If you do like to read, please explain why.
_________________________________________________________________________________
9) Would you say that you have a love for reading?  □ Yes □ No

10) Please mark each of the nine activities below with an O if you do it every day, an S if you do it at least three times per week, or an N if you never do it.

□ Sports □ Reading □ Television/Movie Viewing □ Listening to music
□ Spending Time with Friends
□ Using the Computer □ Video Games □ Talking/Texting on Phone
□ Spending Time with Family
□ Chores/Jobs □ Outdoor Activities □ Homework
□ Shopping □ Religious Activities

11) Please choose your top three favorite activities from the list in question number 9. List each of the three activities and write about how much time a day you spend on each of those activities.

Choice One: ___________________________ Average time spent per day on that activity: __________

Choice Two: __________________________ Average time spent per day on that activity: __________

Choice Three: _________________________ Average time spent per day on that activity: __________

12) Do you read for fun?  □ Always □ Most of the time □ Sometimes □ Not usually □ Never

13) Do you read to learn?  □ Always □ Most of the time □ Sometimes □ Not usually □ Never

14) Are people who read cool?  □ Always □ Most of the time □ Sometimes □ Not usually □ Never

15) Please explain why you think people who read are or are not cool.
16) Does any family member of yours read often? □ Yes □ No

17) Do any of your friends read often? □ Yes □ No

18) Why do you think your friends do or do not read often?

19) Do you have any brothers or sisters? □ Yes □ No

20) When you were a child did your parents read to you often? □ Yes □ No

21) How often did your parents read to you? □ Every day □ A few times a week
□ Less than twice a week □ Not Sure

22) Do you think that you are a good reader? □ Yes □ No

23) Please explain why you do or do not think you are a good reader.

24) Do you have any difficulties reading? □ Yes □ No

25) If you answered yes to question number 24, please explain.

26) Please finish the three sentences below:
Readers read because

I think reading

Reading is

😊 Thank you for participating in the study. 😊
Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview

1) Do you like to read?

*If no, ask questions 2-14. If yes, ask questions 15-35.*

2) Do you think you are a good reader?

3) Why do you think some people read a lot?

4) Why don’t you like reading?

5) How is reading viewed in your family? Is anyone in your family a reader?

6) What are a couple of your favorite things/hobbies?

7) Have you ever read any books or reading materials about that?

8) Do you have any books or reading materials in your home?

9) Do you own any books or reading materials of your own?

10) Is there anything you can think of that might help you enjoy reading more?

11) Do you go to the library or book stores?

12) Who is in your immediate family that lives in your home?

13) What do your parents do for a living?

14) Could you tell me about a typical day of your life?

*If answered yes to question #1…*

15) Do you think you are a good reader?

16) Why do you like to read?

17) What do you like to read?

18) When do you read?
19) About how much time do you spend reading?
20) Where do you like to read?
21) What are some of your favorite things/hobbies?
22) Have you ever read any books or reading materials about that?
23) How is reading viewed in your family? Is anyone in your family a reader?
24) Did anyone inspire you to read? Who? How did he/she inspire you to read?
25) What activities do you participate in?
26) Do you go to the library or book stores?
27) Do you have any books or reading materials in your home?
28) Do you own any books or reading materials of your own?
29) Who is in your immediate family that lives in your home?
30) What do your parents do for a living?
31) What do you think might help those who say they don’t like reading, to enjoy it more?
32) When did you start to love reading?
33) Have you ever not liked to read?
34) Could you tell me about a typical day of your life?
35) Do your friends read?