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### Reading habits of adults: What drives the choice to read or not read?

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READING HABITS OF ADULTS

Reading habits of adults: What drives the choice to read or not read?

by

Jessica Annable

A Thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the College at  
Brockport, State University of New York, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Science in Education

May 12, 2017

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## READING HABITS OF ADULTS

### **Abstract**

Reading is an important skill that benefits every aspect of life. It is important for teachers to help children learn to read and learn to love reading forever. Using an interview, participants' perspectives were examined in order to collect qualitative data on adult reading habits

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### **Introduction**

Reading in its simplest form is decoding and interpreting written language. That written language can come in many different forms and complexities. For example, the name of a cereal, a newspaper article, a novel, a blog post, a status update on Facebook, a tweet on Twitter, text messages, e-mails, the list could go on and on. My point is, we all engage in some form of reading each and every day. If we have the capability to read, it is impossible NOT to encounter or engage in reading on a daily basis. However, there are individuals who choose to go above and beyond the everyday necessities of reading for a multitude of reasons and there are also individuals who choose to limit their reading to those chance encounters, and I want to know why.

Why do *I* read? I read because I like going on imaginary adventures, and traveling to different places through a good book. I read to exercise my mind. I read to learn. I read for entertainment. I read to escape reality. I read because I can. I read to enjoy the silence and solitude. Reading is an activity I can engage in every day for as long or little amount of time as I choose. It is a hobby that is not dependent on the weather or a specific location. There is always something new to read, and many books can be enjoyed more than once. It is a skill that I learned in my first few years of schooling, and it is a skill that I can continuously improve on. I value reading, and I do not take for granted the ability to do so. Why *wouldn't* I read?

### **Topic and Research Problem**

Reading is a skill that is fostered and developed in childhood. If it is nurtured and cared for, it grows into a habit in adulthood. If it is neglected, it is overlooked, forgotten, and ignored in adulthood. Before children even begin school, they are engaging in literacy activities, and developing emergent literacy skills. “Developing literacy skills is an achievement that, once

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accomplished, will benefit a person throughout his or her lifetime” (Bowman & Treiman, 2004, p. 295).

“Emergent literacy consists of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing, and the environments that support these developments” (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p. 849). Whether a child is successful in school, is “strongly influenced by the knowledge or skills that he or she has acquired before entering school. Thus, a child’s experiences as an infant, toddler, and preschooler are critical to the acquisition of a set of “tools” (or knowledge and skills) that the child can draw on to facilitate academic success” (Rhyner, 2009, p. 1). If a child does not develop these critical tools, they will face many academic challenges that may impede not only their learning abilities, but also their desire to learn into adolescence and adulthood.

Parents and teachers play a very critical role in setting the stage for the development of lifelong literacy skills. If they are not doing their part, children will struggle as adults, and we run the risk that they will actively choose not to participate in reading. Mansor, Rasul, Rauf, and Koh “found that the home is the main pushing factor that will first inculcate the literacy behavior during infancy, fostering the reading ability during childhood, promotes the habit into the teens and finally maintains the avidness towards adolescence” (2012, p. 361).

When it comes to adulthood, there are many individuals who still struggle with reading skills, and therefore avoid reading. However, there are also many individuals who have succeeded at reading throughout their lives, and simply choose not to read. “Scott (1996) defined aliteracy as a lack of reading habit especially in capable readers who choose not to read” (Nathanson, Pruslow, and Levitt, 2008, p. 314). “Aliterates typically suffer from a lack of engagement or intrinsic motivation to read, even when they are capable of successfully

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comprehending material” (Asselin, as cited in Nathanson, Pruslow, & Levitt, 2008, p. 314). If children spend their early years disinterested in reading, or completely overwhelmed with the task of reading, how likely are they to grow into successful adults who set aside time to engage in reading for pure enjoyment?

### **Rationale**

Reading is my favorite pastime, and I am often baffled at the lack of interest in reading I see in many of the children and adults I encounter. Reading is the basis of our education, and is linked to success in adulthood. From a home perspective, Anang (1982) found the following:

Children’s initial conceptions of reading and literacy and some generalized forms of reading instruction begin in the home and in the culture in which children spend their earliest years. Here children initially develop and modify their definitions about the function of literacy and its usefulness as well as their attitudes and motivation to learn to read and write. (p. 4)

From a school and educator standpoint, Chen (2008) found a significant relationship between teachers’ enthusiasm about books and adolescents’ love of reading.

In combining the role of home and school, Summers (2003) “found that men and women who were encouraged to read as children, were more likely to read in adulthood” (p. 245).

Although I do not currently have my own classroom, it is my goal to learn more about how early reading experiences impact adult reading habits so that I can be sure to enhance and adjust my teaching accordingly to offer positive reading experiences to all students. After all, they won’t be children forever, they’re going to grow up and need to be functioning and contributing members of society, and what part of adulthood does not contain the necessity of reading?

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### **Purpose**

In my study, I focus on what impacts an adult's choice to read or not read. As a substitute teacher, I visit multiple classrooms and multiple grade levels each week. I witness D.E.A.R time, and choice reading time in multiple different forms. Regardless of the grade level, one thing is always the same; students spend more time "book shopping" or pretending to read, than they actually do engaging in the reading process. I remember being a student and always thinking the time frame was never enough. I always longed for more time to be able to finish one more page, or finish a chapter. I always had a book of my own ready at a moment's notice for any free time, and to this day that is still true. My own positive experiences with reading in childhood have lent a hand to my choice to engage in reading as an adult. With that in mind, my goal is to answer the following questions:

### **Research Questions**

1. What impacts an adult's choice to read or not read for fun?
2. How might adults be impacted by reading experiences in childhood?

### **Literature Review**

The reasons for which we read are completely personal in nature and individually unique. They may stem from internal factors that benefit self or external factors in which we can gain something by satisfying others. This literature review summarizes key points associated with reading motivation and the self-determination theory.

### **Motivation**

There are an overwhelming number of leisure activities available for children and adolescents to participate in. Baseball, gymnastics, music lessons, dance, and video games, just

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to name a few, challenge teachers and parents to keep children motivated to read (De Naeghel, Van Keer, Vansteenkiste, & Rosseel, 2012). It is not uncommon for teachers to conduct a reading interest survey and/or a motivation to read profile at the beginning of the school year in order to gain insight into what types of books each student is interested in, and how motivated they are to engage in reading on their own. The results of these two instruments allow the teacher to gauge who will need the most assistance in selecting a good fit book, and who will need the most assistance activating their motivation to read. According to Gambrell (as cited in Marinak, Malloy, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2015), without attention to reading motivation, some students may never reach their full literacy potential.

Reading motivation can be defined as the “individual’s personal goals, values, and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading” (Becker, McElvany & Kortenbruck, 2010, p.774). Motivation to read is linked with achievement in reading. Individuals who have higher levels of reading motivation, read far more than individuals who have lower levels of reading motivation. It is important to concentrate on motivation in order to guarantee proficient, persistent, and passionate readers (Protacio, 2012).

Once the teacher is aware of the level of motivation of each student, he or she can decide whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivation will work best for each individual student. Intrinsic motivation to read is defined as the willingness to read because reading is satisfying or rewarding in and of itself (Schiefele, Schaffner, Moller, Wigfield, Nolen, & Baker, 2012). People who are intrinsically motivated engage in activities that interest them without receiving praise or reward. Sources of intrinsic reading motivation are internal and intangible. For example, an individual will choose to read because of the satisfaction derived from the reading material, out of curiosity for the reading material, for the challenge offered by the reading material, for the pure pleasure

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and enjoyment of reading, and because the reading material is meaningful to the individual (Becker et al., 2010). On the contrary, extrinsic motivation to read is directed toward obtaining external recognition, rewards, or incentives and is usually arranged by other people. Examples of extrinsic motivations to read are both tangible (e.g., money, Book It pizza coupons, candy, and prizes) and intangible (e.g., praise from others, good grades, avoiding punishment)(Becker et al., 2010).

It is argued that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can reinforce and encourage academic achievement and good behavior, but also eventually and unintentionally decrease the very behavior they are supposed to encourage (Hoffmann, Huff, Patterson, & Nietfeld, 2009). Alfie Kohn criticizes the use of rewards of any kind, arguing that teachers use rewards as a way to control student behaviors, which discourages students from taking academic risks and encourages students to behave in certain ways for the sole purpose of obtaining the reward being offered (Hoffmann et al., 2009). A study conducted by Deci found that intrinsic motivation for a task decreased over time when participants who were originally intrinsically motivated were given an extrinsic reward (money) to perform that task, and when given verbal reinforcement and positive feedback, intrinsic motivation for the activity increased (Hoffmann et al., 2009). On the contrary, Cameron and Pierce argue that reinforcement does not decrease an individual's intrinsic motivation regardless of whether the task is intrinsically motivating or not and that an individual's attitude is not negatively affected by rewards, and that external reinforcement such as verbal rewards or rewards dependent upon a specific level of achievement, positively affect motivation and attitudes towards tasks (Hoffmann et al., 2009).

Reading attitude is defined as the emotions related to reading which causes the individual to attempt or evade a reading situation (Schiefele et al., 2012). Every experience in school plays

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a shaping role in reading attitudes. “If schools fail to build bridges between various literacy practices inside and outside of school, and if they devalue learners’ cultural and personal experiences, preferences, strengths, and vulnerabilities, they risk creating disengaged readers for life” (Belzer, 2002, p.105). Reading attitude can develop and last a lifetime. Children who develop negative attitudes toward reading, generally carry those negative perceptions over into adulthood, and struggle to reverse it.

In terms of motivation to read, adults are not much different than children. Intrinsic and extrinsic factors motivate adults to engage in the reading process as well. An adult’s motivation to read is associated with the enjoyment of reading. If children are provided with positive reading experiences, and are able to identify factors that motivate them to read, it is likely that they will become adults who read. Motivators for reading tend to remain similar from childhood to adulthood, and by raising an individual’s awareness of such motivators, they will understand their purpose for reading (Kohn, 2010).

According to Huang, Capps, Blacklock, and Garza (2014), the number of college students who read for both recreation and mandatory academic reading has declined. Most children truly enjoy reading, but as they become adolescents, some may struggle to continue to enjoy reading. High school and college can really alter the course of a person’s reading enjoyment. This makes it a difficult recovery to become an adult who enjoys reading. Huang et al. (2014) discovered that college students spend more time reading for pleasure during vacations than when classes are in session. This boils down to the motivation of choice. When we can choose what we want to read, we are more likely to continuously engage in reading. When reading material is forced upon us for the sake of educational purposes we are reluctant to comply because it is not engaging for us (Belzer, 2002).

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Individuals' motivation to read is strongly influenced by their proficiency and the personal significance of the reading material (McGeown, Duncan, Griffiths, & Stothard, 2014). If a person perceives reading as valuable and important and has personally relevant reasons for reading, they are more likely to engage in reading in a more planned and effortful manner than those who do not find reading to be personally valuable (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996). There are a variety of ways that reading competence and a value of reading can be fostered in a school setting. For example, teachers can suggest books of particular interest that can be read with ease, interventions to promote reading engagement, experiences that highlight successful reading such as reading books to children in lower grades, and experiences that emphasize meaningful purposes for reading such as how to care for a class pet (Gambrell et al., 1996).

### **Self-Determination**

“Self-determination theory is concerned primarily with promoting in students an interest in learning, a valuing of education, and a confidence in their own capacities and attributes” (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991, p. 325). The self-determination theory is based on intrinsically motivated behaviors, meaning they stem from within the individual. A self-determined behavior's regulatory process is choice (Deci et al., 1991). Ideally, self-determination is instilled in the school setting by promoting a genuine enthusiasm for learning and accomplishment in students which leads them to “display greater flexibility in problem solving, more efficient knowledge acquisition, and a strong sense of personal worth and social responsibility” (Deci et al., 1991, p. 326). This makes students feel good about themselves and allows them to make decisions to satisfy their own needs while being attuned to and concerned with the world around them. These things help promote personal growth and adjustment (Deci et

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al., 1991).

Deci et al. (1991) have found that self-determined motivation has been linked to positive educational outcomes in early elementary students all the way up through college students. For instance, students who were more self-determined to complete school work, were more likely to stay in school than students who were not self-determined. They also reported that both elementary and college students who were more self-determined for doing schoolwork, showed greater conceptual learning and better memory than those who were not self-determined. Interestingly, it was mentioned that when elementary students were asked to learn material in order to be tested on it, they were less interested and had poorer conceptual learning than students who received no mention of a test.

When we promote a sense of choice, more self-initiation of behavior, and greater personal responsibility, children are led to types of outcomes that are beneficial to individuals and society. “Highly motivated readers are self-determining and generate their own reading opportunities. They want to read and choose to read for a wide range of personal reasons such as; curiosity, involvement, social interchange, and emotional satisfaction” (Gambrell et al., 1996, p.518). Self-determined children grow up to be self-determined adults who change the world.

### **Methodology**

By conducting this study, I found out what factors positively and negatively influence adults’ attitudes toward reading, and what drives their choice to read or not read. As a future educator, I was interested in learning about those factors that stem specifically from childhood experiences and what can be done during the early childhood school years to ensure reading is a lifelong pastime.

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### **Setting and Participants**

The setting for this study was in my own home, or the home of the participant, located in Western New York. The environment was relaxed and casual, and the exact location was decided by the participant, depending on where it was most convenient and comfortable for each individual.

The participants in this study are 11 of my family members, close friends, and co-workers. They are a mix of males and females, ranging in age from twenty years old to seventy-seven years old. They are college students, working professionals, and retired professionals, with various habits of reading. There is little diversity amongst the participants as they are all English-speaking, middle class, Caucasians. There is a wide variety of educational backgrounds amongst the participants. Some of them have a high school diploma, some have achieved an associate's degree, some are in the process of pursuing a bachelor's degree, some have achieved a bachelor's degree, some are in the process of pursuing a master's degree, and some have achieved a master's degree.

Bob

Bob is a retired 77-year old male with a high school education.

Pam

Pam is a 63-year old female with a high school education who works part-time.

Alex

Alex is a 20-year old male, working part-time while going to college full time to pursue a bachelor's degree.

Dee Dee

Dee Dee is a 52-year old female with a bachelor's degree who works full time.

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Clark

Clark is a 55-year old male with a bachelor's degree who works full time.

Betty

Betty is a 53-year old female with a high school education who works full time.

Max

Max is a 28-year old male with a two-year degree who works full time.

Ellie

Ellie is a 77-year old retired female with a high school education.

Macy

Macy is a 23-year old female who works part-time while pursuing her master's degree.

Daisy

Daisy is a 50-year old female with a master's degree who works full time.

John

John is a 56-year old male with a master's degree who works full time.

### **Positionality**

As the researcher, my own demographics are similar to those of the participants in this study. I am a 26 year old Caucasian female. I received my Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education and I am in the process of obtaining my Master's degree in Literacy Education. Currently, I am a substitute teacher with initial certification in Early Childhood Education (Birth-Grade 2), Childhood Education (Grades 1-6), and Students with Disabilities (Grades 1-6).

I believe that everyone should enjoy reading, and as an educator, I will aim to share and instill that passion in my students.

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### **Methods of Data Collection and Analysis**

In order to identify factors that influence adult reading habits, I conducted a qualitative study (Clark & Creswell, 2015) and collected data by interviewing each of the participants one-on-one. Based on my review of the literature, I created a list of questions that address early reading experiences as well as current reading attitudes and habits of the participants, which can be found in the appendix. These interview questions helped me as I explored my research questions, as they encompassed multiple influences of adult reading habits. The interviews were audio recorded, with permission from each participant. If permission was not granted, I took extensive notes during the interview. After each interview, audio recordings were transcribed, the audio file was deleted, and participants were assigned a pseudonym for confidentiality.

In order to establish trustworthiness for this study, I employed the practice of data triangulation (Clark & Creswell, 2015), as I interviewed many different individuals including men and women, college students, working adults, and retired adults. In doing so, I made sure to maintain the confidentiality of participants, and made sure all data were securely stored on a password protected computer. My analyses were confirmed by my research partner and my capstone project advisor.

### **Procedures**

Once I received approval of my research proposal, I began my study by conducting the one-on-one interviews. I set a timeline of six weeks to complete the interviews. After each individual interview, I transcribed the audio recordings, and promptly deleted the audio file. When I finished conducting all of the interviews, I began analyzing my notes using a grounded theory method of analysis (Clark & Creswell, 2015). Through constant comparison (Shagoury & Power, 2012) of my data, and coding my data for patterns in the data, anomalies in the data, and

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answers to research questions (Clark & Creswell, 2015) themes began to emerge. I assigned different colors to each theme and each time I noticed a particular theme in my notes, I highlighted it with the assigned color. I made a list of the similarities and differences noted from the interviews. During this process, I consistently met with my research partner and my capstone project advisor to discuss the collected data.

### **Analysis**

As I began coding my data, I focused on finding answers to each of my research questions. I quickly discovered multiple commonalities across the board which helped me to develop four overarching themes. These findings included: 1) knowledge is power; 2) perceived reading ability determines the extent to which an adult engages in the reading process; 3) early support systems in reading development influence us lifelong; and 4) no matter a person's age, a purpose for reading is necessary.

#### **Finding 1: Knowledge is Power**

Adults are active learners, and their thirst for learning never really ends. They find purpose in the reading they engage in. During each and every one of my interviews, each participant expressed the importance of reading. They each had their own individual explanations as to why, but I found knowledge to be the overarching theme. Participant responses included: reading gives us the ability to glean information and facts from a variety of sources, reading educates you more, everything entails reading, reading keeps you up to date on current events, reading keeps your mind sharp, reading develops learning skills, reading helps you understand and be aware of world news and local happenings, reading is everywhere in my life, reading is necessary in every aspect of our lives, reading exposes us to new things, and

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reading improves understanding. Participant 4 profoundly stated that “reading is extremely important both personally and in general as a learning tool. It allows you to gain different perspectives, expand understanding, and as a vital communication tool.”

When I asked how often each participant read, 72% said that they read daily. However, many individuals are not able to read as often as they’d like due to busy lifestyles. Macy said that she read daily, but she doesn’t get to read to the extent she would fully enjoy often enough. I asked why, and she said, “because of school, I usually read the most during the summer.” Clark is another participant who is not able to read as extensively as he would like because he works long hours. He reads when he gets home for as much time as his schedule allows.

The remaining 27% immediately responded with their limited reading time because they were focused so much on the fact that they don’t like to read, and why they don’t read, that they failed to consider what it is they DO like to read and DO have time to read every day. Alex said that he only reads when he has to, but I didn’t believe that. He is an avid user of social media sites, so I prompted him further on this, to which I discovered that he engages in daily “quick reading”. Max was another participant who stated that he only reads once or twice a month. Again, I didn’t believe this, prompted him further, and discovered he also engages in the daily “quick reading” offered by social media sites. Examples of “quick reading” include; text messages, updates on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media apps. Several participants also read every day for their jobs as well as their schooling, but didn’t initially include that type of reading into their response. Daisy was one of the few participants who acknowledged her constant reading required by her job. Macy and Alex are both college students, they did not bring up the daily reading brought upon by e-mail communications from professors because it is considered “required” reading. The only thing they can possibly gain from reading these e-mail

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communications is more homework or more stress, so they disregard it as a type of reading they engage in, because they are actually quite disengaged. The same situation applies to Pam, Dee Dee, Clark, Betty, Max, and John. They all receive written communications through their place of employment of which they are required to read. However they don't consider it the type of reading they enjoy, therefore it was not deemed as a critical piece of information within the interviews.

Everyone interprets reading material differently, but no matter how you look at it, all types of reading material will teach you something. Each participant views reading as a stepping stone to lifelong success. I found every person to be a self-determined human being. Some participants noted that as a child they were extrinsically motivated by free pizza through programs at their school, or to make their teachers happy. As adults, they are all intrinsically motivated to expand their knowledge to benefit themselves.

### **Finding 2: Road to Reading**

Perceived reading ability determines the extent to which an adult engages in the reading process. The participants who felt they were sufficient readers, were those who admitted to engaging in the reading process daily. The participants who felt they were insufficient readers, were those who admitted they rarely engaged in the process of reading. I asked the participants if they felt they were a good reader, which many struggled to answer. I got unique answers, as well as indirect answers. Each participant was modest about his/her reading capabilities, and none of them boasted to be the best reader ever. Most of them were aware of their challenges in being 100% successful readers, which said a lot for their personal awareness. I found three mini-themes within this finding: learning to read, good or bad reader, and reading material. They are all intertwined and affect each other.

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### **Learning to read.**

While it was challenging for participants to recall the exact moment they learned to read, and any major events that led up to that moment, they were able to remember specific emotions surrounding this learning curve. All of the emotions conveyed by each participant were positive in nature. Alex said, “reading was easy to pick up and continue to build up.” Betty said, “learning to read left an impression on me because I can still remember it in first grade. I remember I was a good reader.” Ellie said, “learning to read was fun and I had good teachers who inspired me to read.” John said, “I remember reading Dick and Jane books when I was in 1<sup>st</sup> grade.”

These positive emotions learning to read, lead participants directly toward their perceived reading ability. Each participant perceived themselves as a competent reader, based on the experiences instilled in them from their childhood. Some admitted their comprehension may be lacking, but they still felt they qualified as good readers.

### **Perceived reading ability.**

Eighty-two percent of participants felt they were proficient readers. Of the 82%, there were multiple variations of variables to their proficiency. Dee Dee said, “comprehension is still a problem.” Ellie said, “good, but not the greatest as I’m a slow reader and I have always had trouble remembering what I read.” Betty said, “I am a good reader, but I don’t retain what I read.”

Forty-four percent of the 82% were more confident and concrete in their responses to their reading proficiency. Clark said with certainty, “yes I am a good reader because I comprehend what is read.” Macy said, “I think I am a good reader. I always liked reading out loud in class. I am pretty good with pronunciation and I read at a pace that is not too fast or too

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slow.” Daisy said, “yes, because I read constantly for my job and as much as I can for pleasure. Also, I read very early and a lot during my developmental years.” Perceived reading ability directly affects the type of reading materials individuals choose to engage in.

### **Reading material.**

The content of what we read also makes a difference. Some participants don't engage with specific forms of text because they do not understand what they are reading, and will not comprehend for future reference. Pam said that she is a good reader “depending on what I'm reading.” Bob says that he “likes to read, but lacks patience and doesn't seem to retain characters and plots long term.” Therefore, he would prefer to read a newspaper or a magazine. I know he can retain information from articles he reads long term because we often discuss things he has read, and he is able to recite specific details. Adults are well aware of their competencies, and know whether or not reading a certain type of reading material will be worth their while. All participants except for Macy enjoy reading newspapers. All participants except for Pam enjoy reading magazines. All participants except for Bob enjoy reading books. Since Alex only engages in quick reading each day, I did not include him in this small piece of analysis. This means nine out of ten participants read at least two of the three most common forms of reading materials.

### **Finding 3: Role of Support System**

Reflecting back to childhood was a challenge for every participant, but it was extremely evident that the presence of early support systems in reading development influences us throughout our lives. Families offer us our first exposure to literature. They help instill an early interest into the world of reading, and where it can take you. The fondness of relatives and their shared love of reading is cherished for a lifetime. One hundred percent of the participants who

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were able to recall the role their families played, reported positive support systems. Bob recalled the influences of his grandma and aunt. Pam remembers reading with her sister. Ellie remembers her parents reading to her, and in turn, she began reading to her younger sister. Macy has fond memories of all the books she had in her bedroom as a child, and her parents reading them to her before bed, and eventually being able to read them to her younger brother. Daisy remembers reading being a valued part of each day in her home. John was provided books by his parents and was taught the importance of reading. Figure 1 displays the different family members whom participants had fond recollections of reading to or with during their childhood years.

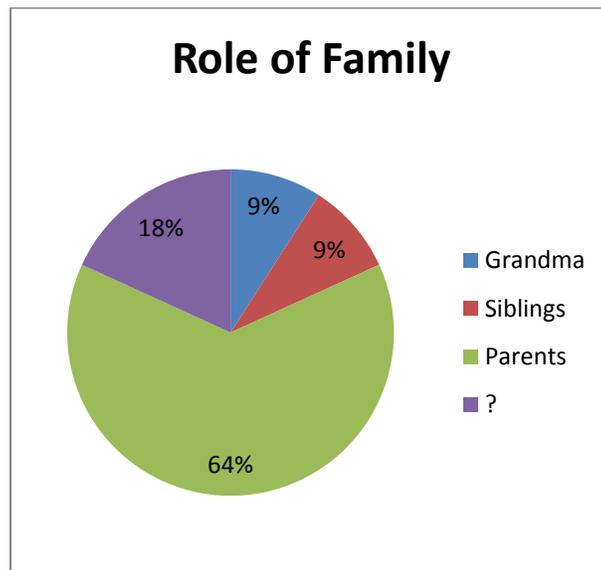


Figure 1 shows the different family members who participants associated with their early reading experiences.

Since children spend the most amount of time with their parents in their first four to five years of life, it is no surprise parents are the biggest influences on their children's exposure to reading and interests in reading.

School was the place where the necessary skills for reading were fostered and developed.

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Bob recalled teachers who “spent extra time tutoring me and showing faith in my abilities.” Max knew that his teachers “wanted me to develop an interest in reading.” Betty did not have any negative recollections of the roles her teachers played and therefore concluded that “it must have been good and they probably played the largest role.” She also still remembers learning to read in first grade and being in the highest reading group in grade school. Clark said that “teachers were the basis of learning. They played the most fundamental role.” Macy says that “my teachers played a large role. I remember all of my teachers having mini libraries in their rooms and there was always time set aside for group reading or independent reading during the day. It was important for students to know how to read so we could be successful in other subjects.”

These positive experiences both at home and school have led to the development of reading habits in these adults. On the other hand, Alex has negative memories from his school days and was only able to focus on the fact that teachers gave assignments. This negative mindset stems from those assignments and is detrimentally affecting his interest in reading as an adult. Figure 2 shows the number of participants who associated teachers with positive and negative emotions.

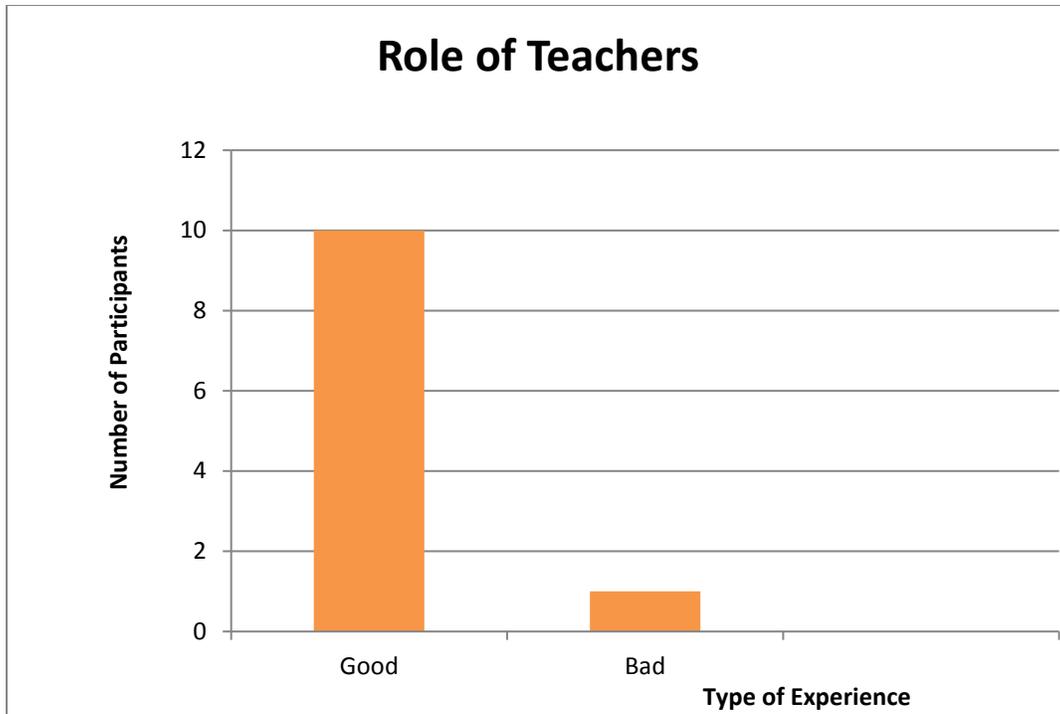


Figure 2 represents the type of experiences associated with teachers in childhood.

A teacher’s job is to teach specific skills and follow a designated curriculum. Most students are able to accept assigned reading materials, and enjoy choice reading on the side. For other children, they suffer as result of having their choices nullified. Their desire to read any sort of material decreases dramatically and their behavior toward reading is negatively impacted.

**Finding 4: Reading with a Reason**

Everyone has a purpose for reading what they read. Purpose is the reason for which something is done. Synonyms for purpose include motive, motivation, reason, and justification. When we are assigned reading by teachers or employers, we need to understand the purpose and its relation to our lives. Otherwise, there is no desire or motivation to make meaning. In their early years, participants’ purpose for reading stemmed from success in school, and pleasing their

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parents and teachers. In their current years, participants' purpose for reading stems from their personal interests and desired acquisition of knowledge.

### **Read to learn.**

We all read to gain knowledge of some sort, but what we want to learn is unique to each individual. For example, Max does not read very often, but does so in order to learn more about hunting and fishing. He becomes motivated to read because he is driven by a purpose to enhance his abilities within his hobbies. Betty and Ellie both read in order to learn more about current events locally and worldwide. John reads to learn new things, Bob reads to obtain information and facts, and Clark reads to expand his understanding.

### **Read to relax.**

Sixty-three percent of participants enjoy engaging in reading for its relaxation. Ellie summed it up well "there is nothing like a good book for its relaxation." Life gets stressful, sometimes we need to mentally remove ourselves, and for some, reading is that escape. Macy finds that "reading is a nice break from reality; it allows you to get lost in a storyline outside of your own life." Betty, Dee Dee, Clark, and Pam each cited stressful days at work as a prime reason for reading to relax. Reading allows their minds to be occupied by subjects that do not stress them further. Also, some participants are older, and their bodies do not allow them to participate in the types of activities that might also relieve their stress such as bike riding or jogging.

### **Choice vs. Because I said so.**

Choice is an important aspect of purpose. If we are told we must read, we want a choice in what it is we MUST read. We want to have control over our reading material, and we want to be the ones responsible for whether or not we enjoy a book. If we choose a book, and wind up

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hating it, the responsibility is on us. We are coming in with a different mindset when it is our choice, than if we are forced. We automatically hate an assigned text.

Dee Dee did not enjoy reading in school because she did not like reading for book reports and school work. Betty hated reading novels in junior and senior high because they were not her choice. A prime example of the importance of choice is Alex. He is the youngest participant, still harboring emotions towards reading from his elementary through high school education, and still quite fresh into his bachelor's program. He was very vocal about his disdain towards reading as a result of the meaningless reading assignments his teachers required of him. When we were discussing his reading experiences in childhood/school, he stated that what he remembered was "books I had to read not wanted to read." While he does understand the importance of reading, and how it "educates you more," he could not name any sort of reading material he engages in, other than quick reading such as Facebook status updates, Tweets, and text messages. He only reads when he "has to" and only as long as he "has to".

### **Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that impact an adult's choice to read or not read. This study was centered on the following research questions: 1. What impacts an adult's choice to read or not read for fun? 2. How might adults be impacted by reading experiences in childhood? Through these research questions, I concluded that adults who are motivated to read have specific intentions or reasons for reading (Schiefele et al., 2012). I also found that positive or negative experiences with the reading process in childhood directly impacted the types of interactions with reading in adulthood (Belzer, 2002).

## **Conclusions and Implications**

### **Conclusion 1: Adults read with a purpose in mind**

Schutte and Malouff (2007), found four basic purposes of reading: to gain knowledge, increase personal empowerment, participate in society, and be occupationally effective. I found that each of my participants had a purpose for reading. It is less effective to read something if you are told to read it. If what you are reading is not meaningful, you just read for the sole purpose of getting it done, not to engage with the text. According to Ryan & Deci (2000), people are curious, vital, and self-motivated. They are inspired, they strive to learn, extend themselves, master new skills and apply their talents. If you are reading to learn, your purpose is to get smarter, in general, and perhaps about a specific topic of interest. If you are reading for enjoyment, your purpose is to have fun and use your imagination. If you are reading to relax, your purpose is allowing your mind to escape the stressors of the day. If you are reading as a social aspect, your purpose is to talk with others about the same topic.

### **Implication 1: People are more likely to read when they have a purpose**

Children are not much different from adults in their need for a purpose. De Naeghel, Valcke, De Meyer, Warlop, van Braak, and Van Keer (2014) found the following:

The need for autonomy refers to the experience of a sense of choice and psychological freedom when participating in an activity, indicating that students feel that they are the initiators of their own behavior. Autonomy-supportive teachers dedicate time to listening to their students' preferences and interests, allocate time for students to work in their own way, give students' age-appropriate choices, and provide. (p. 1549)

Therefore as a teacher, I will feed off of student interests to give them a purpose for their reading. For example, a student recently traveled to Disney World, and is very fascinated with

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Walt Disney. I will tell that student I noticed that interest, and suggest he read a book about Walt Disney, and how his dreams became a reality.

### **Conclusion 2: Positive interactions with reading in childhood increase likelihood of reading as an adult**

Mansor, Rasul, Rauf, & Koh (2012) believe most avid readers began their reading habit very early because of conduciveness of home factors; parents who support the literary environments at home by reading to their children, watching less television, and having more children's books in the home. After some thought, each participant was able to identify a teacher, family member, or grade level in which they linked reading. It was challenging for some, but no one immediately remembered a negative source. Marinak, Malloy, Gambrell, and Mazzoni (2015) found:

Children who think of themselves as good readers tend to read more, thereby improving their reading performance through practice. On the other hand, children who perceive themselves as struggling readers tend to shy away from reading, which minimizes their reading practice and limits their reading achievement.

None of my participants had any bitter emotions about reading, but I truly believe if anyone had, their other responses would have reflected this.

### **Implication 2: Childhood experiences with reading last a lifetime**

While the childhood memories of my participants were not 100%, they still remembered key components. Childhood is not something we easily forget or escape, and it is so important for parents and teachers to offer positive learning experiences that will be remembered long term. "Promoting the value of reading requires deliberate actions, not just words. Simply telling

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students “Reading is valuable, and here’s why isn’t enough. Instead, children need peer and adult role models who don’t just ‘talk the talk’ but are ‘walking the walk’” (Marinak et al., 2015, p. 59).

Nathanson, Pruslow, and Levitt (2008) identify teachers as a focal point for motivation. As a teacher, I will make sure students have positive reading experiences in my classroom. I will be sure to always encourage students who are struggling with reading. I will share my enthusiasm for books and my passion and appreciation for knowledge. I will also create a feeling of excitement about the subject matter, content or skill I am teaching. One way in which I will foster this excitement for reading is by allowing my students to share their favorite books with one another. For example, they might take each other on book walks, and allow them the opportunity to introduce their favorite literature with their peers.

### **Limitations**

One specific limitation was memory. I asked questions that required memory into early childhood. Participants answered as best they could, but none of them had exclusive, vivid memories of this time in their lives. I was also limited in the diversity of my participants. They were family and friends, and they were all white, middle-class individuals.

### **Future Research**

For future research, I would consider using a larger sample size. I would also have participants track their daily reading in a reading log for exact amounts of time spent reading on specific reading materials. My participants gave an estimated amount of time and generalized reading materials. I would also consider a longitudinal study to track participants reading from childhood to adulthood.

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### **Overall Significance**

In order for adults to be successful lifelong, it is critical for them to establish an interest and ability to read in childhood. The results of this research have provided insight into the reasons for which adults read or don't read. The results of this study will lead to fostering how crucial it is for individuals to identify a purpose for their reading and desire to learn early on. This study will also inform parents and teachers of the importance of supporting children, encouraging children, and modeling skills for student success.

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**Appendix A**

J. Annable, *Reading Attitudes and Habits Interview Questions*

- 1.) Do you enjoy reading? Why or why not?
- 2.) What do you enjoy reading?
- 3.) How often do you read?
- 4.) For how long do you read in one sitting?
- 5.) What do you remember about learning to read?
- 6.) What were your reading experiences like in childhood/school?
- 7.) What role did your parents/family play?
- 8.) What role did your teachers play?
- 9.) Do you think you are a good reader? Why or why not?
- 10.) Is reading important? Why or why not?  
(To you, and in general)