


8-1997

A Survey of Middle School Students' Leisure Reading Attitudes and Habits as Related to Gender

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A Survey of Middle School Students' Leisure Reading Attitudes and Habits
as Related to Gender

Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the
Department of Education and Human Development
State University of New York
College at Brockport
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Education

by

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August 1997

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Abstract

This study looked at the relationship of gender to leisure reading in middle school students. The study used 190 students from 6th-8th grades who resided in Monroe County, New York. Of those 190, 97 were female and 93 were male. A survey was used to measure the reading attitudes and behaviors of the students. It was divided into 3 sections: 2 sections were open-ended statements and 1 section was a Likert-type scale. Answers were analyzed in terms of those that showed either a positive or negative attitude toward leisure reading. The total percentage of students from each grade that liked to read and did not like to read did not differ greatly from 6th-8th grades. But, when looking at the percentages by gender, a slight shift occurred for females and males who liked to read. The percentages of females decreased with each successive grade level while the male percentages increased. Females outnumbered males for those who liked to read. Even among their own gender, more females liked to read than didn't; yet the opposite existed for the males - more males did not like to read than males who did. Females, overall, appeared to be more positive in their attitudes toward leisure reading and held more positive self images of themselves as readers than their male counterparts. Many students who did not like to read expressed mixed feelings about their attitudes toward leisure reading.

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CHAPTER 1

Statement of the Problem

Most are probably familiar with the U.S. Army's television commercial slogan to "be all that you can be." Educators may add "If you want to be all that you can be, start reading now."

There is a growing concern in our society, though, that people, and children in particular, are not choosing to read for pleasure. This concern over aliteracy includes people in and out of the education field. Barbara Bush, as First Lady in the late 1980s and early 1990s, made literacy her champion project during her public years. She brought the importance of reading to the public eye in a way educators hadn't. Richard Riley, U.S. Secretary of Education in the 1990s, also strove to push for literacy programs and challenged this nation to become better and more frequent readers. Today, even television commercials are done by actors who stress to parents to read to their children. There is definitely a concern for the problem of aliteracy and it stems from the President's office on down.

Leisure reading has been shown in studies to positively affect children's test scores, reading comprehension, and academic improvement (Lamme, 1976; McCoy, Larson, & Higginson, 1991; Walberg & Tsai, 1983; Whitney, 1996; Winchock, 1995; Worthy, 1996). Reading keeps people knowledgeable and informed, thereby helping them make wiser decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their communities. A nation of mostly

aliterate or illiterate people opens the doors to many dangers from outside and within.

Nowell, a technical writer, wrote eloquently in the November/December 1995 issue of *Teaching PreK-8* of his feelings about the importance of reading. He found that reading was able to fire up his imagination, drive his ambitions, and inspire his life. He reads technical books as part of his job; nonfiction to learn things that make his life better, easier, and because he can reach his own conclusions; novels for fun and recreation. He also reads newspapers, magazines, food labels, and advertising. Books, he believes, have helped make him who he is. Books have helped him cope better with the world, its people, its problems, and with the future.

Despite our knowledge of the importance of reading, research and history have shown that with aging a steady decline in reading occurs across both genders. There is so much competition these days for the students' leisure time. So many activities vie with reading that many studies show reading ranked near the bottom of students' chosen activities (Heather, 1982; McCoy, Larson, & Higginson, 1991; McEady-Gillead, 1989; Moffitt & Wartella, 1992). Competition comes from after-school clubs, television, sports, electronic age, friends, and homework. With a more current awareness of the importance of leisure reading, continuous study of the reading patterns and habits of our young people is warranted.

There are many questions to look at. Who are the readers? What are they reading? What variables play significant roles in why children

read, e.g., socioeconomics, home literary environment, reading ability, parents' reading habits, school/teacher influence? How much are they reading compared with other leisure activities? Why do they read - motivating factors? How often are they reading? What effect does gender play in this scenario? Research has touched on all of these and rightly so for they all help give us a picture of the leisure reader. To understand the leisure reader is to help others become lifelong readers.

Elementary schools have been the most active supporters of encouraging lifelong reading habits. Many programs such as Drop Everything and Read, Sustained Silent Reading, literature-based programs, and a whole language philosophy of teaching have been implemented by many schools that are searching for ways to make reading more enjoyable and meaningful. What is happening, though, is that this effort is not usually being followed up in the middle and high school grades.

There appears to be a lack of research done at the middle and high school levels concerning the issue of leisure reading. Many studies are done at the elementary level because that is considered by many to be the peak years for leisure reading (Heather, 1982; Greaney, 1980; Lamme, 1976). There is a definite decline in leisure reading as the children progress from the elementary schools to the middle schools and higher (Anderson, Tollefson, & Gilbert, 1985; McCoy, Larson, & Higginson, 1991; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995). This decline occurs in both genders, but gender is still an important issue to study.

Females have consistently outranked males in the amount of leisure reading done (Anderson, Tollefson, & Gilbert, 1985; Greaney, 1980; Hansen, 1969; Schulteis, 1990; Stone & Wu, 1993; Taylor, 1982). Attitudes toward reading apparently play a significant role in determining who the leisure reader is. Females tend to have a more positive attitude toward reading. This is important to note, for to reach the male children population, we will need to understand how attitude and motivation influence the leisure reading habits. It would also be important to remember that although more females may read, and read a larger amount than males, both genders' leisure reading declines with age and grade level (Anderson, Tollefson, & Gilbert, 1985; Heather, 1982; McCoy, Larson, & Higginson, 1991; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995).

There is current research available that is bringing good news. Some researchers are finding that reading is not necessarily declining and that males are just as interested in reading as their female counterparts (Moffitt & Wartella, 1992; Parker & Paradis, 1986). This is exciting and bears further studies.

With the advent of so many literacy programs at the elementary level, and the lack of studies at the middle school level and higher, it is important that research continue to look at the leisure reading of middle school students and what role gender plays.

Need for the Study

The use of leisure time has become a topic of increasing interest to certain educators - particularly literacy educators who want to explore the growing aliteracy among our youth. There is concern about young people's choices of leisure activities and how gender affects those choices.

Research has shown that adolescents do pursue reading as a leisure activity, but this pursuit is relatively minor compared with other activities such as playing sports or watching television (Heather, 1982; McCoy, Larson, & Higginson, 1991; McEady-Gillead, 1989). Also, females and males do rank reading differently on their interest scales, with females more likely to engage in reading than males (Anderson, Tollefson, & Gilbert, 1985; Moffitt & Wartella, 1992).

Historically, research has overwhelmingly shown that females in our culture engage in leisure reading more often than males and have a more positive attitude toward it (Anderson, Tollefson, & Gilbert, 1985; Hansen, 1969; Greaney, 1980). Yet, even the research shows a decline in leisure reading among both sexes throughout the advancing grade levels. By the middle school years, there is a noticeable drop in the amount of leisure reading done by both genders, which ought to be a warning to educators.

More recent research, however, have findings that indicate no statistical difference in genders choosing to read for pleasure at the middle school age (Moffitt & Wartella, 1992). These discrepancies in research

findings highlight the need for continued, current research to evaluate the effect of gender on middle school students' leisure reading.

Definitions

- Aliteracy* A condition where a person is literate (able to read and write) yet chooses, for the most part, not to read.
- Leisure* Free, unoccupied time during which a person may indulge in rest or recreation of his or her choice.
- Leisure Reading* Reading that is done for pleasure alone; it is not reading for school assignments. Reading materials in this study are not discriminated. They may include magazines, books, and newspapers.

Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitations that may have affected results. What degree and importance they played is not known.

- This study involved students in a small geographical area of the United States: western New York. Although the students came from different social, racial, and economical backgrounds, they were concentrated in one county of the state.
- The number of students used in the sample population, compared to the total population, is small. While this study may not be representative of the United States at large, it should be compared with

similar studies conducted in other parts of the country. Identifying common trends may then be done.

- The students' literary backgrounds, home environments, or reading skills were not evaluated nor taken into consideration. These topics have been shown in other studies to either directly or indirectly affect the reading habits of children.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

A Look at Leisure Reading

Richard Riley (1996), U.S. Secretary of Education, in his Third Annual State of American Education Address in 1996, challenged America to become a nation of readers. He felt that America must teach its children good reading habits. Riley also noted, though, that reading is much more than just a skill. "It allows us to learn the wisdom of the ages, to see beauty in a line of poetry, even as we test the new ideas of our times. To read Jefferson is to be engaged with the very spirit of our democracy. To read the poetry of Maya Angelou is to capture the surging spirit of a rising and hopeful America" (p. 3). From the President's Secretary of Education on down, America's literacy is a hot topic and a concern for many of us. Getting our children, especially, to become lifelong readers and to enhance their reading skills becomes a necessary effort for all of us.

Nurturing of reading as a lifelong activity is often an objective of primary schools (Greaney, 1980). Not only is reading in the school important, but the focus lately seems to be on whether or not children choose to read for pleasure outside the classroom. There is a general agreement among educators and researchers that reluctant readers tend to gradually lose some academic ground because wide reading is related to increases in general knowledge and reading skill development (Lamme, 1976; McCoy, Larson, & Higginson, 1991; Walberg & Tsai, 1983; Whitney,

1996; Winchock, 1995; Worthy, 1996). Since there is a strong correlation between quantity of reading and reading achievement, students should be encouraged to engage in leisure reading. At what age reading habits are considered ingrained and what effect gender has are matters of debate if looking at research studies.

Independent reading practices are fairly well established by fifth or sixth grade (Hansen, 1969; Neuman, 1986). By this time, the reading pattern has been established in the form it will most likely take in later years. Greaney (1980), on the other hand, stated that it is toward the end of the elementary school years that U.S. and British children experience the "reading craze" years. This is the peak time for leisure reading. Lamme (1976) wrote that researchers claim the reading craze years occur between the ages of 10 and 13. Heather (1982) gathered from her study of 60 British 13- to 15-year-olds that reading habits are established before the teenage years. Although most children begin their school years intrinsically interested in reading, many show a steady decline in leisure reading as they progress through school (Whitney, 1996; Worthy, 1996).

Link's (1984) investigation of 30 fourth- through ninth-grade gifted students in Texas, though, found that they had a very positive attitude toward reading. Another study, Parker and Paradis (1986), also reported an increase in positive attitudes in elementary students. While other studies showed leisure reading declining and attitudes becoming more negative, Parker and Paradis found in their study of 134 first- through sixth-grade students that there was a significant difference for attitude

scores between grades four and five. "In the intermediate grades, reading attitude scores had a significant increase from grade four to five with no apparent change from grade five to six. . . . The change in attitude appeared more related to an increase in positive attitudes toward nonclassroom reading than to any change in classroom reading" (p.315). Attitudes often, but not always, affect behaviors; in the case of leisure reading it appears to be a significant influence.

Heather's (1982) two-year study (1979-1980) of 60 British 13- to 15-year-olds indicated that most young people do read, probably more than teachers realize. Although there was a consistent overall decline in the average number of books read per student, the decline was not accompanied by a decrease in the number of pupils who read books. This meant that the overall amount of time spent reading decreased, but Heather noted that "this was not a steady decrease as at various times . . . many of the pupils said they were spending more time reading" (p.3). In fact, there were even more pupils who started reading during the study than those who stopped reading. There were many different reasons given by the students to account for the changes in reading habits.

Walberg and Tsai (1983) extended the analysis of the 1979-80 U.S. National Assessment of Educational Progress data to the case of reading achievement and attitude among 17-year-olds. To the variable "Enjoy Reading," 53% responded that they enjoyed it somewhat and 41% enjoyed it very much. Only 5% responded that they did not enjoy reading at all. Students say they enjoy reading but the amount of reading done can vary

greatly. It is important to know if the number of children who engage in leisure reading dwindles with age or if it is the amount of time spent leisure reading. Research has been conducted on many of those factors that influence leisure reading - motivation, attitudes, and reading interests for examples.

Many research studies are done at the elementary level, especially at the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades, when leisure reading is considered at its peak by many. Whitney (1996), in her study of 53 Canadian fifth-grade students over a 3-week period, reported a significant correlation between positive attitudes toward leisure reading and amount of time spent leisure reading. Over a 17-day period, collecting data through student diaries, personal interviews, and measuring instruments, Whitney gathered information on students' use of free time, particularly reading. Leisure reading material included books, magazines, newspapers, mail, and comics. Twenty-seven frequent readers (16 girls, 11 boys) spent an average of 34 minutes per day reading (5% of free time) and 26 infrequent readers (16 girls, 10 boys) spent an average of 6 minutes per day reading (4% or less of free time). Limiting the material to only books revealed that frequent readers averaged 23 minutes per day while infrequent readers averaged 4 minutes per day.

Greaney's (1980) study of 920 Irish fifth-grade students looked at the relationship between the amount of time devoted to leisure reading and a series of variables - two of them being gender and age. Students revealed that on three different days in a one-week period they spent an average

total of 60 minutes (5% of free time) engaged in leisure reading. Greaney also found that much more time was spent reading books rather than comics, while little time was spent reading the newspapers. Females were discovered to devote more time to books than males. Gender was one of the strongest independent relationships with book reading.

In the United States, Neuman (1986) also completed a study with fifth-grade students and found that, overall, the students read an average of 2.33 ($SD = 1.15$) books per month. When Neuman looked at it by gender, females read more than males (2.6 vs. 2.02 respectively). The last three studies mentioned cover three countries and a span of 16 years amongst them, yet the results are similar. {It should be noted that many of the research studies measure leisure reading in a variety of ways. Some use the number of books read in a specific time period while others prefer to use the amount or proportion of free time that is spent reading. This makes comparing studies difficult. Also, there is no industry/professional standard that advocates just exactly how much reading is considered desirable or effective.}

It has been determined that students' leisure reading behaviors depend heavily on attitudes toward reading. Research studies have shown that, in general, as children progress through the primary grades to the middle school and higher the amount of leisure reading decreases and attitudes become increasingly negative (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995). Anderson, Tollefson, and Gilbert (1985) investigated reading attitudes among 276 gifted students in grades 1 through 12. These

students reported reading an average of nine books per month, with primary students reading an average six times as many books as senior high students and twice as many books as intermediate and junior high students. Significant differences in attitudes toward reading were observed for this sample of gifted students. Students' responses suggested generally favorable attitudes toward reading. Females as a group reported more positive attitudes than did their male counterparts. The trend was that primary students had the most positive attitudes and each advancing grade had less positive attitudes.

McCoy, Larson, and Higginson (1991) administered a survey to 159 seventh- and eighth-grade students ranging from remedial to gifted. This study also surveyed 100 college students about past and present leisure reading habits. The responses of both middle and college students revealed a significant decline in leisure reading at the seventh- and eighth-grade levels that continued for the older students. Although middle school students reported a decrease in reading at their level, 75% still reported a continued interest in leisure reading. Yet again, reading was their lowest ranked recreational activity. What is interesting to note, also, is that an overwhelming majority of the college students recalled enjoying leisure reading during childhood but subsequently experienced a decreased interest in reading.

On a historical note, things haven't changed all that much over the years. The number of readers and amount of reading has experienced a decline, but some find it isn't by much. Gender is still a significant factor in

the amount, type, and attitude toward leisure reading. Hansen's (1969) study of 48 fourth-grade students and the impact of home literary environment on reading attitudes showed that girls had a significantly more positive reading attitude than boys. In 1983, according to a comprehensive, once-a-decade survey of U.S. teens, 13-17 years old, sponsored by the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (1996), only 49% claimed reading as a frequent pastime. In 1996, 43% claimed reading as a hobby. This study also found that females had a more positive attitude than males - 56% vs. 30%, respectively. More girls read for pleasure and spent more time reading than boys - 4.6 vs. 2.6 hours/week, respectively.

Leisure readers tend to be female, middle class, in upper elementary grades, and proficient in reading (Neuman, 1980). Although many studies have established a correlation between reading achievement and reading ability and the positive relationship between amount of reading and reading achievement, it would be incorrect to assume that all good readers are avid readers (Heather, 1982; Lamme, 1976; McEady-Gillead, 1989; Neuman, 1980). Even for the fluent reader, poor attitude may affect leisure reading.

Attitudes have been regarded as learned inclinations that exert influences on our responses toward things, people, or groups (Kelly, 1995). Influences from society, culture, and/or religion affect individual

attitudes. Gender attitudes are usually viewed as products of the socialization process and therefore viewed as modifiable behaviors.

Gender Plays a Role

Gender attitude is a social and cultural construction and not simply a biological given (Cherland, 1994). It can not be assumed that gender preferences for certain activities are natural. That is why gender differences in reading should not go unexamined. Children “read” the world around them. They construct their sense of self through interactions with the world (Cherland, 1994). Gender plays an important part in this self concept. Currently, there is an increase in research on gender throughout the disciplines, education included. Understanding how children see themselves, and why, helps educators understand why children read or fail to read - and what part gender plays (Cummings, 1994).

Researchers have tried to explain the differences between females and males in forming their attitudes toward reading (Stone & Wu, 1993). Cultural expectations for the female and male roles are felt to affect attitudes toward reading (Cummings, 1994; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth 1995; Winchock, 1995). American cultural expectations for the male role, unlike some other cultures, interfere with the acquisition of reading and writing skills. The traditional roles of women and men in society have negative consequences especially for males when it comes to leisure reading. Mazurkiewicz, in 1960, published the results of his study on

social-cultural influences on a person's attitude toward reading (Winchock, 1995). He found that fathers and sons viewed reading as mainly a feminine activity.

Cummings (1994), in her study of 11th graders in a rural section of Maine, found that traditional female/male roles were firmly entrenched. Both sexes saw one sex (their own or the opposite) as innately more intelligent. Students felt that ability in reading or math was dependent upon one's sex. Males performed more strongly in math while females outscored males consistently in reading. Although this particular study was from a rural area where traditional gender roles are still in heavy existence, other studies have acknowledged that leisure reading attitudes are significantly affected by gender.

In a nationwide survey of reading attitudes of 18,185 students from first through sixth grades, McKenna, Kear, and Ellsworth (1995) found the main effect of gender on attitude was statistically significant as was the interaction between grade level and gender. Females had more positive attitudes toward leisure reading at all grade levels than males, a gap that widened with age.

Gender has a strong independent relationship with book reading (Anderson, Tollefson, & Gilbert, 1985; Greaney, 1980; Moffitt & Wartella, 1992; Neuman, 1986; Stone & Wu, 1993; Taylor, 1982; Whittemore, 1992). Whittemore (1992) surveyed 449 seniors and sophomores to determine their reading interests. A chi square analysis indicated that there was a highly significant relationship between reading frequency and

gender. Fifty-five percent of the females compared to 31% of the males read one or more books a month.

In a study of 478 Northern Ireland children between 11 and 13 years old, Taylor (1982) found that girls averaged 3.6 books per month to 3.1 books for the boys. At the youngest level, there was a significant difference ($p = 0.05$) in the amount of reading between girls and boys, but there was no significant difference at 12 or 13 years old. Each age level for girls showed a steady decline in the number of books read. The boys, on the other hand, showed an increase in the number of books read from 11 to 12 years old - only to drop to its lowest number at the 13-year-old level.

Schultheis (1990) explored the relationship between gender and reading preferences in 110 eleventh-grade students. She also confirmed the assumption that females spend more of their leisure time reading than do males. Females averaged 21 hours of reading per month during the school year and increased to 38 hours/month during the summer. Males, on the other hand, averaged 15 hours/month during the school year and 17 hours/month during the summer. Once again, the pattern of females outreading the males in terms of amount of time and numbers of books is proven.

What should be noted in these studies is that in most instances leisure reading declined as age and grade level increased. Although females consistently outread males and held more positive attitudes toward reading than males, female numbers also declined with age and

grade increases. Some investigations reported that the gap between females and males in the amount of reading widened with age. Others, like Moffitt and Wartella (1992), gave a more positive scenario.

In their study of 414 high-school students, they found that leisure reading was a relatively popular practice for both females and males, with 78% reporting they read for pleasure. The percentage of readers to nonreaders increased with each grade level. Reading actually went up with each successive grade level. There was a statistical significance in comparing readers to nonreaders by gender. There were more female readers (85%) than male readers (65%). Moffitt and Wartella (1992) suggested that female and male readers spent equal amounts of time reading. This finding is supported by the statistical insignificance of the chi square analysis. Females, though, still came out slightly ahead. The largest female percentage group, 36%, recorded an average reading time of 90-300 minutes a day; this was followed closely with 34% averaging 35-85 minutes. The largest male percentage group, 43%, read an average of 0-30 minutes a day, followed closely with 30% averaging 35-85 minutes a day.

How children view themselves, their gender roles, affects their attitude toward leisure reading. Culture plays an important role in this. Gender attitudes are not biologically inherent (Cherland, 1994). Even today, we are trying to change views of female and male roles. The women's movement, technological advances, military admittance standards changes, and more all help our society view gender roles in a

new way (Winchock, 1995). We view ourselves as an enlightened society, yet research continues to show that reading is still viewed by females and males as a feminine activity. With attitudes like these still prevalent, leisure reading, particularly for males and adolescents in general, will continue to experience a decline. It seems appropriate to aim to make reading more inclusive and universally appealing.

CHAPTER III

Design of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of gender to leisure reading in middle school students.

Subjects

The subjects were 190 middle school students from grades six through eight that resided in Monroe County, New York. Of those 190, 97 were female students and 93 were male students. The students came from two school districts, one rural and one suburban. The suburban district middle school housed about 1,000 students grades six through eight. The rural district school was a combined middle-high school that housed about 900 students from grades seven through nine.

Materials

A survey was developed by the researcher to measure the reading attitudes and behaviors of the students (see Appendix). The survey was divided into three sections: two sections were open-ended statements and the third section was a Likert-type scale with 11 statements to which students responded. Three answers were provided: "Just like me," "Somewhat like me," or "Not like me."

Methodology

The survey was read orally to students in their English classes and instructions were given. The survey was then filled out silently by the students. Students were told that the surveys were confidential; no teachers would be reviewing them. Students were also informed that there were no right or wrong answers and to answer as honestly/accurately as possible.

Analysis of Data

The survey was divided into three sections: two sections were open-ended statements and the third section was a Likert-type scale with 11 statements to which students responded with "Just like me," "Somewhat like me," or "Not like me." The statements provide both qualitative and quantitative data that were divided by gender and grade, and percentages were given for the open-ended statements. Answers were analyzed in terms of those that showed either a positive or negative attitude toward leisure reading.

CHAPTER IV

Analysis of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of gender to leisure reading in middle school students.

Findings and Interpretation

Surveys were sent to a suburban middle school and a rural combined middle-high school in two school districts. Of the 211 returned surveys, 190 were usable. The sixth-grade students were from the suburban district only. These numbered 39 students: 22 females and 17 males. The total sample from seventh grade was 65 students: 37 females and 28 males. The sample from eighth grade was 86 students: 38 females and 48 males.

The survey used (see Appendix) was divided into three sections: Section I required the students to select which statement fit them best and respond to it. They were asked to choose from "I like to read because . . ." or "I don't like to read because" If they responded to "I don't like to read because . . ." they also needed to answer the statement "I would read more if . . ." All students were asked to answer "Make three statements about leisure reading." All surveys were divided into either "Liked to read" or "Didn't like to read" categories.

Survey Section I. Table 1 shows the breakdown by class and gender of those students who liked to read and those who didn't. A total of 59% of the sixth grade responded that they liked to read. Of that 59%, 74% were female and only 26% were male. On the flip side, 41% of the sixth grade responded that they didn't like to read. Of that 41%, 31% were female and 69% were male. Another view of this is to look at the numbers by gender only. A total of 17 girls out of 22 liked to read - that is 77% of females who liked to read compared to 23% who did not like to read. Thirty-five percent of the males liked to read compared to 65% of the males who did not.

The numbers were similar for the seventh grade. A total of 60% of the class responded that they liked to read. Of that 60%, 69% were female and 31% were male. This left 40% of the class responding that they didn't like to read. Of the 40%, 38% were female and 62% were male. By gender alone, 73% of the females liked to read compared to 27% that didn't and 43% of the males liked to read compared to 57% that didn't.

The eighth grade responded with 59% of the class liking to read - 61% female and 39% male, and 41% responding that they don't - 20% female and 80% male. Again by gender alone, 82% of the females liked to read compared to 18% that didn't and 42% of the males liked to read compared to 58% that did not.

Table 1

Number and percentage of students in each grade who fell into the two reading categories.

Grade	Liked to read			Didn't like to read		
	Females no. (%)	Males no. (%)	Total (%)	Females no. (%)	Males no. (%)	Total (%)
6th	17 (74)	6 (26)	59	5 (31)	11 (69)	41
7th	27 (69)	12 (31)	60	10 (38)	16 (62)	40
8th	31 (61)	20 (39)	59	7 (20)	28 (80)	41

The total grade percentages of those students who liked and didn't like to read remain very close in numbers: 59%, 60%, 59% and 41%, 40%, 41%. But, when gender percentages were examined, a shift was noticed. The percentage of females who liked to read (calculated as the number of females out of all those students who liked to read) dropped with each successive year - from 74% to 69% to 61%. The males' numbers actually increased with each grade level - from 26% to 31% to 39%. Although still far behind their female counterparts, the shift upward for those males who liked to read can be viewed as a positive sign. The question remains why the female percentages dropped with each grade.

The gender difference in those students who did not like to read was not as steady across the grade levels. The female percentages increased from sixth to seventh grade (31% to 38%), only to have dropped in eighth grade (20%). The male percentages dropped from sixth to seventh (69% to 62%), only to have increased in eighth (80%).

The females still outnumbered the males in those who liked to read by a large margin. Even amongst themselves, more females in any given

class liked to read than didn't. The boys who didn't like to read, unfortunately, still outnumbered those boys who liked to read.

When tabulating the qualitative responses of why students liked or not liked to read, it was found that many answers were similar from grade to grade and could therefore be assigned to categories for easier study. Table 2 provides a look at how the students who liked to read fell into the different categories. Six categories were established: (1) *Enjoyment*. These remarks often included it is fun, likes to do, exciting, and provides enjoyment. (2) *Cognitive stimulation*. These responses were more detailed and told of students who felt reading was magical, it took them to different places, and provided adventures. Often, the students felt as if they were part of the story. It required imagination and thinking. (3) *Escape*. This is when students specifically mentioned that they use reading as an escape from their daily routine or worries. It was for them a means to get away from it all for a while. It served a specific purpose. (4) *Learning*. Many students connected that leisure reading also helps them educationally. It may help with vocabulary or increase their overall grades. Others just saw the overall education/knowledge reading different stories could bring to their background. A couple equated reading with writing better. (5) *Relief from boredom*. These students' responses often stated that reading was something to do when they were bored or had nothing else to do. It was a good time filler. (6) *Calming/Relaxing*. Some students used the phrases calming or relaxing as a reason for reading. This was different from those students who wrote that they read to relieve boredom

or to escape trouble or worries. Some wrote that they enjoyed reading before bed, that it helped them unwind from the day.

For the sixth and seventh graders who liked to read, the top three categories were the same. The majority read for enjoyment, the next category was for cognitive stimulation, the third was for learning. By eighth grade, 47% read for enjoyment, 16% read for cognitive stimulation, and the third category changes to 12% reading to relieve boredom. Note the large jump in percentage from sixth to seventh grade, though, for reading to relieve boredom - from 4% to 15% and then stays pretty steady for eighth grade.

Table 2

Reasons by categories why students across grade levels and gender liked to read.

Categories	6th grade			7th grade			8th grade		
	Females no.	Males no.	Total %*	Females no.	Males no.	Total %*	Females no.	Males no.	Total %*
1. Enjoyment	5	2	30	9	4	33	13	11	47
2. Cognitive stimulation	3	2	22	7	3	26	4	4	16
3. Escape	2	1	13	3	0	8	3	1	8
4. Learning	3	1	17	3	4	18	3	2	10
5. Relieve boredom	1	0	4	5	1	15	5	1	12
6. Calming/relaxing	3	0	13	0	0	0	3	1	8

* Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Categories for those students who did not like to read were easily assigned also (Table 3). The more popular responses to the statement “I

don't like to read because . . ." follow. (1) *Boring*. This was by far the largest category among grade levels. (2) *Takes up too much time*. While seemingly similar to boring, these comments included those students who felt they were slower readers and were frustrated with the amount of time it took to read and get through a book. Others were also frustrated if they could not finish a story in one or two sittings. There was a definite lack of patience in the tone of these responses. Others just felt it was a waste of their time. (3) *Prefer other and/or more active activities*. This response covers a few different reasons. A few students admitted that they just can not sit still for very long and find concentrating very difficult to do. Yet others admit they would prefer to be doing more physically active activities. Some just respond that they would much rather be doing something else - with nothing specific mentioned. (4) *Lack of interesting reading material*. There were those students who felt that there was not a variety of reading material that interested them or lack of material covering a specific area, such as sports for example. Yet others wrote that the writing was dull, not active enough, not interesting enough. (5) *Don't have enough time*. This category covers those students who wrote that they did not have enough time in their day for leisure reading. Some mentioned sports, music, and homework as taking up their time. It was referenced that there was not enough unstructured, free time available to use for reading.

By an overwhelming majority in each grade and by both genders, 50% of sixth graders, 58% of seventh graders, and 49% of eighth graders all agreed that leisure reading was boring. Most students did not elaborate

on this on the survey. Far behind the category boring, “It’s a waste of time/takes too much time” came in second at 19% for sixth grade and 20% for eighth. For the sixth graders, this tied with the problem of finding interesting reading material. The second most popular category for the seventh graders was preferring to do other activities at 15%.

Table 3

Reasons by categories why students across grade levels and gender did not like to read.

Categories	6th grade			7th grade			8th grade		
	Females no.	Males no.	Total %*	Females no.	Males no.	Total %*	Females no.	Males no.	Total %*
1. Boring	4	4	50	6	9	58	4	13	49
2. Takes up too much time	0	3	19	1	1	8	1	6	20
3. Prefer other activities	0	2	13	1	3	15	1	2	9
4. Unable to find interesting books.	1	2	19	0	3	12	0	2	6
5. Not enough available time	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	9
6. Gives headaches.	0	0	0	1	0	4	0	1	3
7. Problem visualizing or following story	0	0	0	1	0	4	0	1	3
8. Answer not legible	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3

* Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Those students who did not like to read were asked to complete the statement “I would read more if” The responses to these were varied and personal and were a little more difficult to categorize (Table 4). The more popular categories were as follows. (1) *If there were more*

interesting books available. All grade levels overwhelmingly responded with this statement. This range covered having books that interested someone's specific taste, for example, a sixth grade girl wishing there were more stories about girls playing sports to wishing for more pictures in the books. (2) *If there was more available time.* As mentioned previously, students felt they did not have enough time to leisure read. Some students found it difficult to find quiet, uninterrupted time for reading. (3) *If there were shorter books.* This was a response from all grade levels also, but no elaboration was given on any of the surveys. (4) *If reading was more fun or exciting.* Again, there was little to no detail provided to expand on this.

Table 4

Responses of most students who did not like to read to the statement "I would read more if. . . ." *

Categories	6th grade			7th grade			8th grade		
	Females no.	Males no.	Total %	Females no.	Males no.	Total %	Females no.	Males no.	Total %
1. More interesting books.	4	5	56	7	9	62	2	12	49
2. Had more time available.	1	0	6	0	2	8	2	5	20
3. There were shorter books.	0	1	6	0	1	4	1	0	3
4. If it was more fun.	0	0	0	1	0	4	0	1	3

* Additional reasons were cited individually by students.

Once again, an overwhelming majority of students in each class and from both genders reported that they would read more if there were more interesting books available to them: 56% of sixth graders, 62% of seventh graders, and 49% of eighth graders. What needs to be recognized is that this does not automatically signal a dearth of good, interesting literature available to this population. It may mean these particular students had little desire to search materials out, may not have had the ability to get/purchase/loan out reading material, or may not be knowledgeable of current literature/authors that would be of interest to them. In other words, they may have only lacked the skills to search and find reading material. This could be remedied by educators and the community.

In response to "Make three statements about leisure reading," the tone of the statements was often reflective of their position of liking or not liking to read (Figure 1).

Figure 1. A sample of students' reflections on leisure reading.

Liked to read

Leisure reading is fun.
It lets me use my imagination/go to different places.
It is something most of my family enjoys.
Helps me learn about new places/world/people.
It is relaxing.
Leisure reading can be done anywhere, anytime.
It's hard to stop once I start.
I should finish more books that I start.
It takes me away from my problems for awhile.
It helps us with our writing and speech.

Didn't like to read

It's a waste of my time.
It is boring/puts me to sleep.
I'd rather be watching TV.
Leisure reading is ok if you have a good book.
I like to read magazines/sports articles.
I hate it.
I only read comics, I hate books.
I don't do it, should do it.
It's hard to concentrate on what I'm reading.
It is stressful.

Survey Section II. When asked in Section II of the survey to choose what they would read, there were a variety of answers given (Table 5). They ranged from specific authors to general genre types, and many students supplied more than one type. Whatever was listed was accounted for. For both sixth- and seventh-grade female and male students who liked to read, mysteries was the top choice. The sixth-grade total percentage was 35% and the seventh-grade total percentage was 31%. The eighth graders veered from this. The girls (39%) top choice was horror/scary novels and the boys (35%) top choice was science fiction novels.

For those students who did not like to read, it was interesting to note that the females across the grade levels were in agreement and the males were fairly close in agreement. The majority of sixth grade girls (40%) chose mysteries, while the majority of the boys (36%) chose sport biographies. In the seventh grade, the majority of females (30%) chose mysteries, while the majority of the boys (25%) chose sports magazines.

By eighth grade, the majority of females (43%) chose mysteries and the majority of the boys (39%) chose magazines.

The variety of answers given and the spread of numbers shows that choice of reading material is as personal as each individual and can change with age and tastes and moods.

Table 5 Students' reading material choices by grade and gender.

Categories	6th grade			7th grade			8th grade		
	Females no.	Males no.	Total %	Females no.	Males no.	Total %	Females no.	Males no.	Total %
				<i>Liked to read</i>					
MAGAZINES	2	1	13	3	2	13	2	2	8
Sports	0	1	4	0	2	5	0	0	0
Hunting	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0
Comics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	6
NEWSPAPER	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
POETRY	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
BOOKS/NOVEL	0	1	4	2	0	5	0	0	0
Mystery	6	2	35	8	4	31	9	4	25
Romance	1	0	4	2	0	5	3	0	6
Horror	3	1	17	7	1	21	12	4	31
Cont. fiction	0	0	0	3	0	8	0	0	0
Sci. fiction	0	0	0	0	2	5	0	7	14
Fiction	1	0	4	2	0	5	4	1	10
Comedy	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	1	4
Horse/Animal	2	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fairy tale	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Adventure	1	1	9	0	0	0	1	4	10
Fantasy	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	10
Sports	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	1	2
Classics	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Nonfiction	0	0	0	0	1	3	6	4	24
Biographies	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	4
				<i>Didn't like to read</i>					
MAGAZINES	1	2	19	2	3	19	1	11	34
Sports	0	0	0	0	4	15	0	0	0
Hunting	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Comics	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	1	3
NEWSPAPER	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0
BOOKS/NOVEL	0	3	19	1	0	4	0	0	0
Mystery	2	0	13	3	2	19	3	6	26
Romance	0	0	0	2	0	8	0	0	0
Horror	1	2	19	0	0	0	2	3	14
Cont. fiction	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Sci. fiction	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	5	14
Fiction	1	0	6	0	0	0	1	0	3
Comedy	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0
Horse/Animal	0	0	0	1	0	4	0	0	0
Action	0	0	0	0	2	8	0	0	0
Adventure	1	0	6	1	0	4	0	3	9
Sports	0	4	25	0	1	4	0	2	6
Picture books	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0
Nonfiction	0	0	0	0	1	4		0	0

The next statement the students were asked to complete relied solely on the accuracy of memory to estimate how many books they read in a typical month. The margin of error was much greater for this statement than all the others as it required a quantitative answer, but was not based on factual accounting or record keeping. There was no limit or explanation as to what type or length of book was indicated by the statement. There was no way of telling what the students counted as books. It could cover younger children's shorter story/picture books to lengthy novels.

Table 6 shows the breakdown of grades by gender and by those who did and did not like to read and the number of books they read in a month. If a student gave a range of numbers that crossed more than one range in the table, the higher number of books given by the student was used. For example, if a student responded that she/he read 2-4 books, that response was recorded in the 3-5 range in the table.

It is very interesting to note that there was not a large discrepancy in answers between those who liked to read and those who did not. It was anticipated that the number of books read by those who liked to read would have been much larger by all grade levels, and especially for females. Females who liked to read did outnumber the males in the number of books read for sixth and eighth grades but not for seventh. In sixth grade, 41% of females (the majority) read 3-5 books a month; 50% of males (the majority) read 1-2 books. In eighth grade, females who liked to read again outread males. Thirty-nine percent read 3-5 books a month while 45% of the males read 1-2 books. But in seventh grade, there was a

flip. The majority of females who liked to read, 41%, read 3-5 books a month, while a full 50% of the males who liked to read read 3-5 books also.

Across all grade levels and gender, the majority of those students who did not like to read unanimously fell in the 1-2 books a month range (Table 6). Note that for both sixth and seventh grades it was the males who now had the higher percentage reading in this range. The females were more scattered over higher-number ranges. This signals that although not a majority, more females were reading more books than males, even though this was the category of not liking to read. Sixty percent each of sixth- and seventh-grade girls fell in the 1-2 books range compared to 91% and 100% for sixth- and seventh-grade boys, respectively. For eighth grade, the females had the highest percentage in the 1-2 books range. Seventy-one percent of the eighth-grade girls compared to 61% of the boys fell into this range.

Table 6

Estimated number of books read in a typical month by grade and gender.

No. books/month	6th grade*			7th grade			8th grade*		
	Females no.	Males no.	Total %	Females no.	Males no.	Total %	Females no.	Males no.	Total %
	<i>Liked to read</i>								
0	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	0	2
1-2	2	3	22	10	2	33	8	9	33
3-5	7	1	35	11	6	44	12	7	37
6-8	1	1	9	1	1	5	3	1	8
9-11	2	0	9	2	1	8	4	2	12
12-14	0	0	0	1	0	3	1	0	2
15-20	2	1	13	1	1	5	0	0	0
21-30	1	0	4	1	0	3	1	0	2
	<i>Didn't like to read</i>								
0	0	1	6	0	10	38	2	9	31
1-2	3	10	81	6	6	46	5	17	63
3-5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
6-8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3

* 6th grade - 1 female recorded 1,000 books and 1 female recorded 75 books; 8th grade- 1 male had no answer and 1 female had a count of 31⁺ books.

The next statement on the survey asked the students what their attitude toward reading was. The comments were scored as either positive or negative or combination, and the results by grade, gender, and liked or didn't like to read are given in Table 7. All students across the grades who liked to read responded very similarly, with 82% of the sixth-grade girls, 93% of the seventh-grade girls, and 77% of the eighth-grade girls making only positive comments about their attitude. For the boys, 83% of the sixth, 83% of the seventh, and 85% of the eighth graders made only positive comments about their attitude.

Twelve percent of the sixth-grade girls and 17% of the boys who liked to read made what can be construed as both positive and negative

comments. For the seventh-grade girls this was 7% and for the boys it was 17%. Sixteen percent of the eighth-grade girls who liked to read also made a combination of positive and negative comments as well as 5% of the boys. This included comments such as reading is good but can be boring sometimes.

For those who did not like to read, 20% of the sixth-grade girls, 40% of the seventh, and 43% of the eighth made only negative comments when responding to this statement. These percentages of negative comments increase with each successive grade level. Does this signal that as the students who already have given mixed to negative feelings about leisure reading get older their feelings towards reading are more firmly established as negative? When combined with the decreasing percentages of girls who liked to read, this seemed to be the case for the females more than for the males.

For the boys, 91% of the sixth graders, 75% of seventh, and 79% of eighth made only negative comments about their attitude toward leisure reading. Forty percent, the majority, of sixth-grade girls who did not like to read made a combination of both negative and positive comments and one female (20%) did not answer. Fifty percent of the seventh-grade girls and 43% of the eighth also made a combination of positive and negative comments. The boys' results for a combination answer fell as 9% sixth graders, 6% seventh, and 21% for eighth.

The percentage of females who did not like to read and possessed the most negative attitudes continued to increase with each successive

grade level - from 20% to 40% to 43%. Yet, these numbers were not the majority of females in their respective classes. The majority of females gave a combination of positive and negative comments about their attitudes toward leisure reading. This was not the same story with the males.

Compared to the boys who did not like to read, the female percentages and where they fell offer more hope that these students may be able to be encouraged to become lifelong readers. That 40% of sixth-grade girls who did not like to read gave both positive and negative comments compared to solely negative is a cautiously hopeful sign as well as the 20% that gave only positive comments, yet chose the statement "I don't like to read because . . ." in Section I of the survey.

Table 7

Students' comments about their attitude toward leisure reading scored as positive, negative, or a combination.

Comments	6th grade		7th grade		8th grade	
	Females %	Males %	Females %	Males %	Females %	Males %
			Liked to read			
Positive only	82	83	93	83	77	85
Negative only	0	0	0	0	3	0
Combination +/-	12	17	7	17	16	5
Don't know	6	0	0	0	0	5
No answer	0	0	0	0	3	5
			Didn't like to read			
Positive only	20	0	10	19	14	0
Negative only	20	91	40	75	43	79
Combination +/-	40	9	50	6	43	21
No answer	20	0	0	0	0	0

Survey Section III. Section III of the survey consisted of 11 statements about reading. The students had to decide how true each statement was for them personally. They then had to choose a response of “Just like me,” “Somewhat like me,” or “Not like me” (Tables 8-13).

Each statement gave information on the students’ attitudes or reading behaviors. The statements “I often choose to read in my free time,” “If I had to choose 4 things to do in my free time, reading would be one of them,” and “I see myself continuing to read for pleasure as I get older” contain similar positive information about reading habits that when looked at together should have elicited similar replies from the students. Ideally, it would be hoped that those students who liked to read would overwhelmingly respond with “Just like me.”

Expecting the majority of responses from those students who liked to read to have been “Just like me” for the statement “I often choose to read in my free time,” the actual response of 59% sixth-grade females, 67% seventh, and 48% eighth for “Somewhat like me” was surprising. The majority of males also followed this course with 83% of the sixth-grade males, 58% of the seventh, and 80% of the eighth responding with “Somewhat like me.”

The majority of these same students, though, agreed as “Just like me” that they saw themselves continuing to read as they got older: 71%, 59%, and 68% of sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade girls, respectively; 50%, 50%, and 65% of sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade boys, respectively. There was a large drop in percentage of females from sixth

graders to seventh graders: 71% to 59%. The females once again lead the males in those who saw themselves as lifelong readers.

There is no professional benchmark as to what amount of reading or attitude toward reading is considered “good” or beneficial or common for the positive attitude leisure reader. Many times in this survey, 50% or less is a majority number for students who see themselves positively as a leisure reader. These majority percentages of 50% or less are not necessarily encouraging. Higher percentages would be nice to see. Or, are these good numbers to see at this age level? What is the point at which educators feel the numbers are too low, the problem of losing leisure readers too threatening?

To get an idea of the students’ views of themselves as readers, the statements “I am not a good reader” and “I do not enjoy reading because it is too difficult for me” may be looked at together. The responses of sixth graders who liked to read were actually scattered across the table for these two statements. The girls overwhelmingly chose “Not like me” for both statements, 94% and 100%, respectively. The boys were not so confident of their reading ability as the girls appeared to be. Only 50% denied the claim that they were poor readers, and 50% felt that they did not enjoy reading because it was too difficult for them. Another 50% of the boys responded with “Somewhat like me” for not enjoying reading because of its difficulty. These figures cause some wonderment since these were the students who labeled themselves as liking to read, and for the most part had a positive attitude toward reading.

The seventh- and eighth-grade girls who liked to read responded with an 89% and 87% majority, respectively, of “Not like me” for the statement “I am not a good reader.” The majority of boys’ responses to this statement were: 58% seventh graders and 70% eighth graders with “Not like me.” The fact that figures as low as 58% and 70% are being seen from those who liked to read should be noted. The females also had a higher number than the males who disagreed with the notion that they were not good readers. This coincides with the figures showing the females to have a more positive attitude toward reading (choosing “I like to read because . . .” in Section I).

What is interesting to note for those students across the grade levels and gender who did not like to read is that the majority of them chose “Not like me” for the statement “I do not enjoy reading because it is too difficult for me.” These percentages were: females - 80% sixth graders, 80% seventh, and 100% eighth; males - 55% sixth graders, 69% seventh, and 64% eighth. The females disagreed with a larger majority than the males across the grade levels. The majority of females and males did not agree that the reason they did not enjoy reading was because it was too difficult for them. Reading skills did not appear to be their main reason for not reading. This is supported by the responses in Section I of students who chose and answered “I do not like to read because . . .” (Table 3).

In response to the statement “I am not a good reader,” the percentages of those students who did not like to read were more scattered across the table and varied from grade to grade and by gender

from grade to grade. The majority of sixth-grade girls, 60%, and eighth-grade girls, 57%, did not agree with this statement. The majority of seventh-grade girls, 80%, chose "Somewhat like me." The majority of sixth-grade boys, 73%, also chose "Somewhat like me" for this statement. The majority of seventh-grade boys, 50%, and eighth-grade boys, 39%, though, disagreed with the statement.

The rest of the percentages of students who did not like to read were close behind in the other responses. Nine percent of sixth-grade boys, 19% of seventh, and 29% of eighth fully agreed that they were not good readers. These percentages increased with each grade level. Yet, when looking at the opposite end, the expected reduction in percentage of students from sixth to eighth grade who did not agree that they were poor readers did not appear - from 18% sixth-grade boys to 50% seventh grade to 39% eighth grade. Instead of becoming completely negative in their self assessment as good or poor readers, many students, both female and male, found themselves in middle ground - the "Somewhat like me."

Table 8

Results of Section III in the survey; responses of sixth graders who liked to read to 11 statements about attitude and behavior toward leisure reading.

Statement	Just like me		Somewhat like me		Not like me	
	Females %	Males %	Females %	Males %	Females %	Males %
	<i>Liked to read</i>					
1. I often choose to read in my free time.	41	17	59	83	0	0
2. I read the newspaper.	6	50	47	0	47	50
3. I talk w/friends about some of the books I've read.	35	17	35	50	29	33
4. I enjoy reading books of my choice.	88	83	12	17	0	0
5. I am not a good reader.	0	17	6	33	94	50
6. I do not enjoy reading because it is too difficult for me.	0	0	0	50	100	50
7. I see myself continuing to read for pleasure as I get older.	71	50	29	33	0	17
8. If I had to choose 4 things to do in my free time, reading would be one of them.	35	33	53	67	12	0
9. Reading is important for my education and well being.	82	33	12	67	6	0
10. I often see my mother reading a book.	82	50	18	33	0	17
11. I often see my father reading a book.	47	50	35	50	18	0

Table 9

Results of Section III in the survey; responses of sixth graders who did not like to read to 11 statements about attitude and behavior toward leisure reading.

Statement	Just like me		Somewhat like me		Not like me	
	Females %	Males %	Females %	Males %	Females %	Males %
	<i>Didn't like to read</i>					
1. I often choose to read in my free time.	0	0	60	36	40	64
2. I read the newspaper.	0	9	60	73	40	18
3. I talk w/friends about some of the books I've read.	0	0	60	9	40	91
4. I enjoy reading books of my choice.	40	27	60	64	0	9
5. I am not a good reader.	0	9	40	73	60	18
6. I do not enjoy reading because it is too difficult for me.	0	9	20	36	80	55
7. I see myself continuing to read for pleasure as I get older.	0	0	40	45	60	55
8. If I had to choose 4 things to do in my free time, reading would be one of them.	0	0	40	9	60	91
9. Reading is important for my education and well being.	80	45	20	36	0	18
10. I often see my mother reading a book.	40	36	40	9	20	55
11. I often see my father reading a book.	40	27	60	18	0	55

Table 10

Results of Section III in the survey; responses of seventh graders who liked to read to 11 statements about attitude and behavior toward leisure reading.

Statement	Just like me		Somewhat like me		Not like me	
	Females %	Males %	Females %	Males %	Females %	Males %
	<i>Liked to read</i>					
1. I often choose to read in my free time.	33	25	67	58	0	17
2. I read the newspaper.	19	50	44	33	37	17
3. I talk w/friends about some of the books I've read.	19	0	59	50	22	50
4. I enjoy reading books of my choice.	93	75	7	25	0	0
5. I am not a good reader.	4	0	7	42	89	58
6. I do not enjoy reading because it is too difficult for me.	0	0	0	0	100	100
7. I see myself continuing to read for pleasure as I get older.	59	50	41	42	0	8
8. If I had to choose 4 things to do in my free time, reading would be one of them.	56	42	33	42	11	17
9. Reading is important for my education and well being.	67	50	33	50	0	0
10. I often see my mother reading a book.	48	42	37	42	15	17
11. I often see my father reading a book.*	30	8	37	33	33	50

* One male did not respond to this statement.

Table 11

Results of Section III in the survey; responses of seventh graders who did not like to read to 11 statements about attitude and behavior toward leisure reading.

Statement	Just like me		Somewhat like me		Not like me	
	Females %	Males %	Females %	Males %	Females %	Males %
	<i>Didn't like to read</i>					
1. I often choose to read in my free time.	0	0	50	25	50	75
2. I read the newspaper.	10	6	30	56	60	38
3. I talk w/friends about some of the books I've read.	0	0	30	0	70	100
4. I enjoy reading books of my choice.	60	19	40	38	0	44
5. I am not a good reader.	10	19	80	31	10	50
6. I do not enjoy reading because it is too difficult for me.	0	13	20	19	80	69
7. I see myself continuing to read for pleasure as I get older.	0	0	80	25	20	75
8. If I had to choose 4 things to do in my free time, reading would be one of them.	0	0	30	13	70	88
9. Reading is important for my education and well being.	20	6	70	75	10	19
10. I often see my mother reading a book.	50	63	30	31	20	6
11. I often see my father reading a book.	20	38	40	25	40	38

Table 12

Results of Section III in the survey; responses of eighth graders who liked to read to 11 statements about attitude and behavior toward leisure reading.

Statement	Just like me		Somewhat like me		Not like me	
	Females %	Males %	Females %	Males %	Females %	Males %
	<i>Liked to read</i>					
1. I often choose to read in my free time.	42	20	48	80	10	0
2. I read the newspaper.	19	35	55	50	26	15
3. I talk w/friends about some of the books I've read.	19	10	48	65	32	25
4. I enjoy reading books of my choice.	90	90	10	10	0	0
5. I am not a good reader.	0	10	13	20	87	70
6. I do not enjoy reading because it is too difficult for me.	0	0	3	15	97	85
7. I see myself continuing to read for pleasure as I get older.	68	65	26	30	6	5
8. If I had to choose 4 things to do in my free time, reading would be one of them.	48	45	32	45	19	10
9. Reading is important for my education and well being.	65	60	26	30	10	10
10. I often see my mother reading a book.	39	70	35	20	26	10
11. I often see my father reading a book.	26	15	42	50	32	35

Table 13

Results of Section III in the survey; responses of eighth graders who did not like to read to 11 statements about attitude and behavior toward leisure reading.

Statement	Just like me		Somewhat like me		Not like me	
	Females %	Males %	Females %	Males %	Females %	Males %
	<i>Didn't like to read</i>					
1. I often choose to read in my free time.	0	0	0	39	100	61
2. I read the newspaper.	0	25	43	54	57	21
3. I talk w/friends about some of the books I've read.	0	7	0	14	100	79
4. I enjoy reading books of my choice.	43	39	57	61	0	0
5. I am not a good reader.	14	29	29	32	57	39
6. I do not enjoy reading because it is too difficult for me.	0	7	0	29	100	64
7. I see myself continuing to read for pleasure as I get older.	0	7	57	36	43	57
8. If I had to choose 4 things to do in my free time, reading would be one of them.	0	0	0	18	100	82
9. Reading is important for my education and well being.	43	11	57	75	0	14
10. I often see my mother reading a book.	71	43	14	29	14	29
11. I often see my father reading a book.	0	14	57	25	43	61

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of gender to leisure reading in middle school students.

Conclusions

The total percentage of students from each grade that liked to read and did not like to read did not differ greatly from sixth to eighth grade. There was some stability among these grade levels, as if the preference of students for like or not like had been established by this time. But, when looking at the percentages by gender, a slight shift occurred for females and males who liked to read. The percentages of females who liked to read decreased with each successive grade level while the male percentages increased.

The implications of these findings suggest that while females have long dominated the leisure reading arena over their male counterparts, it would be premature to say that females are out of the danger zone. It would be prudent to know why female students who enjoyed leisure reading decreased in numbers as they got older, while the males were shown to actually increase. Females still outnumbered males for those who liked to read versus those who didn't. Even among their own gender,

more females liked to read than didn't, yet the opposite existed for the males - more males did not like to read than males who did.

For those students who did not like to read, the pattern among the grade levels was not as straightforward. The female percentages went up from sixth to seventh grade, only to decrease in eighth grade. The male percentages run opposite. They went down from sixth to seventh grade, only to increase in eighth.

Noting the middle position many of these students, particularly females, took in the final section of the survey toward reading attitude gives hope that these students, at least at this point in their lives, have not completely hardened themselves against leisure reading. A window of opportunity to reach these students and make a difference still exists and is open, if only a crack.

The survey results for why students liked to read were similar among the grades and gender. Enjoyment was the first choice for the majority of females in each grade. This was foremost the reason females like to read. Reading for cognitive stimulation was the next reason most common among the females across the grades. The majority of males also chose to read for enjoyment. For the sixth-grade males, this tied with cognitive stimulation; for the seventh, this tied with learning. For the eighth grade, enjoyment was first with cognitive stimulation coming in second.

The most overwhelming reason students did not like to read, across grade and gender, was that leisure reading was boring. No argument there. The vast majority of these students did not mention their reading

skills. They did not consciously connect their attitude and preferences to their ability or skill.

These responses by students who did not like to read coincided with their answers to “I would read more if . . .” Again, there was no majority mention of “I would read more if I could read faster/better/comprehend more.” Reading skills were just not the focus of the majority of these students, at least not consciously.

The majority of those students who did not like to read said they would probably read more if there were more interesting books available to them. This was the majority response across grade levels and gender except for the eighth-grade females. For them, this tied with wishing there was more time available.

As to what students would choose to read, mysteries was the winner with sixth and seventh graders who liked to read, both females and males. The majority of eighth-grade girls chose horror as their first choice and the boys chose science fiction. Mysteries was also the favorite for girls across all grades who did not like to read. The boys who did not like to read chose sport biographies, sport magazines, and magazines in general. Magazines were more popular for the boys. Sports tended to be a popular topic for those males who did not like to read.

The section of the survey that required estimating the number of books students read in a month’s time was probably the most subject to the question of validity. Personal experience by this author with her own daughter’s response to this survey showed the student to be way off the

mark in estimating how many books she read. She underestimated herself by quite a bit and she knew she was “guess”timating. How many others did the same? Future research needs to have documentation to make accurate or reasonable conclusions from a question like this.

But, based on what these students in this survey supplied, females who liked to read outread males in both sixth and eighth grades in the number of books read in a month’s time - three to five. At the seventh-grade level, the majority of girls and boys both read three to five books a month. For those who did not like to read, the majority of females and males in both sixth and eighth grades and the majority of females in the seventh grade read one to two books a month. The majority of seventh-grade boys read zero books. The point to be made here is: Is this very much of a difference from those who like to read? Is more expected from those who like to read? OR, is a positive attitude toward leisure reading more of a promise of future readers than how much students read?

When answering the 11 statements in Section III of the survey, the females appeared to be more positive in their attitudes toward reading and held more positive self images of themselves as readers than their male counterparts. The males were more likely to question their reading skills, even those held positive attitudes toward reading. Yet, both females and males who liked to read had a positive image of themselves as lifelong readers.

The attitudes of the students in this survey who did not like to read were interesting. The majority of sixth-grade females and males did not

see themselves as leisure readers as they got older. The seventh- and eighth-grade females, though, responded more ambiguously to the statement "I see myself continuing to read as I get older." They responded with "Somewhat like me." The majority of the seventh- and eighth-grade males, though, held a negative image of themselves as future leisure readers. Despite the fact that the number of females who liked to read decreased with each successive grade level, the number of females who did not like to read remained less antagonistic in their attitudes and self images than did males who did not like to read.

Implications for Future Research

Future research could explore more fully the students' perceptions of boring - especially those students who have a dislike of leisure reading. None of these students elaborated on what they meant by boring. It can be a convenient catch-all phrase that covers a number of reasons why leisure reading is not pursued. Possibly a small group oral session where the researcher is able to ask questions and draw out students would elicit more information than a written survey.

If the majority of students who did not like to read were not reading because they could not find interesting material raises the question if this was related to poor reading skills or poor skills in searching out interesting reading material? Did the lack of desire interfere with finding the reading material that is available to them? Did those students who liked to read have the same problem finding interesting reading material? Could it

honestly be said that there is a lack of interesting children/adolescent literature available to the public market? These are questions for future research.

When looking at what type of literature students choose to read, future research may want to ask - Is sports a popular topic because it is what is important to most boys of this age at this time in their lives? Is it that they can relate sports articles/books with their personal, present schema? What students are interested in reading can be helpful to teachers and specialists who are trying to entice the reluctant reader. Since the majority of the students in this survey did state that it was a lack of interesting reading material that kept them from reading, it is important to find out what it is they want to read. The answers to what students like to read are as varied and as personal as the people themselves.

For future research, a long-term study of students from elementary grades through high school, even into adulthood, would give the best information as to the cycle(s) involved in the leisure reading. Are there "dry" cycles in a person's lifetime when reading is not necessarily an important part of the leisure time? Can some people who did not like to leisure read when they were young come to enjoy it as they mature and age? Are children's reading habits truly ingrained by the end of the elementary years as some researchers suggest, or by the middle school years as others suggest?

What role does gender play in the attitude toward leisure reading? This survey has shown that while gender differences do occur, they are

not always consistent from grade to grade or within the same gender from year to year. The majority of females in this survey outread males, held more positive self images of themselves as readers than males, and for the most part saw themselves as either somewhat or definitely continuing to read as they got older more often than males. Yet, the percentage of males who claimed to like to read showed improvement from year to year in this survey. It is important to capitalize on whatever was happening to those males that lead them to improve their attitude toward leisure reading.

Implications for the Classroom

What this survey has shown is that leisure reading at the middle-school level was fairly steady for those students who already had a positive attitude toward it. There was a slight shift in the numbers when looking at them by gender, though. Yet, the numbers for those who did not like to read were not so steady. They appeared to go up and down by grade and gender. The attitudes of these students were not quite stamped in stone.

This can be a positive thing for classroom teachers. It gives a window of opportunity to reach those students who are not quite sure reading holds any personal rewards for them. With the participation of the school and community and parents through a variety of programs and ideas that foster leisure reading, students who are at risk may be touched.

Many educators at the middle-school level lament the fact that they have so little time each day with their classes. Often, the class periods are

40 minutes - leaving little time for programs such as Drop Everything and Read or free time to discuss books the students may be reading or for the teacher to share personal reflections of books enjoyed or book clubs attended or writing done as a hobby. The curriculum is loaded, and there are only so many minutes in a class day. Also, many teachers question if these discussions or programs have any effect.

The school building set-up at the middle level does not lend itself to classrooms filled with racks of books, magazines, and newspapers that invite a student to read. Many times, teachers share a room or they are moving from room to room. The classrooms in many of these buildings are a far cry from the inviting, exciting classrooms at the elementary level. There is little on the walls or bulletin boards to stimulate anyone's imagination.

The middle and upper grade level administrators and staff must see the need to continue the fostering of leisure reading. It is especially important for that population of students who do not possess positive attitudes toward reading. Despite the fact that many educators feel that it is too late at this stage to make a difference in students' reading habits, current research is suggesting that this may not be true. The negative attitudes these students may possess is not necessarily set in stone. It may not be too late to make a difference. It is the responsibility of each educator to always strive to bring the best out of each student and to foster the love of reading and learning - throughout their school years, not just at

the elementary level. It's often true that the vegetables we despised eating as children gradually taste quite good as we grow older.

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APPENDIX

Middle School Survey on Leisure Reading

Leisure reading for this survey refers only to free-choice reading that is nonschool related.

Please circle.

Female Male

Please fill in the blanks.

Grade _____ Age _____ School _____ District _____

Section I. For the first 3 statements, please choose the ones that fit you and answer as honestly as possible. Please answer statement # 4.

1. I like to read because

2. I don't like to read because

3. I would enjoy reading more if _____

4. Make 3 statements about leisure reading.

Section II. Please complete the sentences as honestly as possible.

1. If I were to choose something to read it would most likely be a _____

2. In a typical month, the number of books I would read is _____.
3. My attitude toward reading is _____

Section III. Please read the statements and circle the response that fits you best.

- | | | | |
|---|--------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1. I often choose to read in my free time. | Just like me | Sometimes like me | Not like me |
| 2. I read the newspaper. | Just like me | Sometimes like me | Not like me |
| 3. I talk with friends about some of the books I've read. | Just like me | Sometimes like me | Not like me |
| 4. I enjoy reading books of my choice. | Just like me | Sometimes like me | Not like me |
| 5. I am not a good reader. | Just like me | Sometimes like me | Not like me |
| 6. I do not enjoy reading because it is too difficult for me. | Just like me | Sometimes like me | Not like me |
| 7. I see myself continuing to read for pleasure as I get older. | Just like me | Sometimes like me | Not like me |
| 8. If I had to choose 4 things to do in my free time, reading would be one of them. | Just like me | Sometimes like me | Not like me |
| 9. Reading is important for my education and well being. | Just like me | Sometimes like me | Not like me |
| 10. I often see my mother reading a book. | Just like me | Sometimes like me | Not like me |
| 11. I often see my father reading a book. | Just like me | Sometimes like me | Not like me |