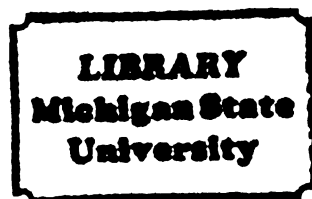






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Habits, Attitudes and Experiences:
A Study of Secondary Students' Reading
presented by

Charles Joseph Steltenkamp

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of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in English

Marilyn Wilson
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HABITS, ATTITUDES, AND EXPERIENCES:
A STUDY OF SECONDARY STUDENTS' READING

By

Charles Joseph Steltenkamp

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

1992

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ABSTRACT

HABITS, ATTITUDES, AND EXPERIENCES: A STUDY OF SECONDARY STUDENTS' READING

By

Charles Joseph Steltenkamp

This study investigated the reading habits, attitudes, and experiences of a group of high school students and explored the following questions: What do high school students read for school assignments and for leisure reading? Within a random sampling of students, which would be considered especially proficient and enthusiastic readers? What factors in a fuller context of reading--family, friends, school, outside influences--contribute to proficient and enthusiastic reading habits? A review of major research was conducted, focusing on contexts, achievement, and interests of high school readers.

A survey of five high school English classes was conducted: three sections of honors and two sections of regular literature and composition classes. These survey forms were analyzed and discussed. Fifteen students were selected for follow-up interviews based on their questionnaire profile as proficient, enthusiastic readers. Their responses were then analyzed.

Overall, the findings suggest that the students have frequent interaction with print, particularly magazines. The high-achieving readers interviewed have a positive and consistent home influence toward reading. This influence has fostered enjoyment and personal initiative for reading. In addition, these students have found a similarly supportive reading atmosphere among their friends. Although some of

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them expressed ambivalence about the constraints of their school reading environment, they generally found that it stimulated further reading interest through exposure to literature and peer discussion. They indicated that positive social experiences with reading among family and friends have helped them adjust to classroom reading demands.

In engaging with text, the students could readily conceptualize current knowledge of the reading process. They have developed extensive prior knowledge in their reading experiences and have used it for subsequent transactions with text. They also show tendencies to read according to a transmission model, with less engagement and a stronger focus on gaining information.

The researcher concluded that the high-proficiency students were affected by a variety of influences to varying degrees. The study demonstrates the importance of examining this broader reading context in order to better create positive influences for all student readers. Future research must also address these contexts in attempts to advance reading theory and pedagogy.

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To Professor Clinton S. Burhans, Jr.
Teacher and Friend

and

To my parents
Delores M. Steltenkamp and Francis M. Steltenkamp, Jr.
They were readers

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To my helpful
Melissa Scie
Mrs. Linda Pa

To my support
Mr. and Mrs.
Steltenkamp I

Finally, to m
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To my supportive friends and family: Mr. Paul Blake, Mr. Dan Willenborg, Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Richards, Mrs. Catherine LaPrairie and Mr. Frank M. Steltenkamp III.

Finally, to my wife Susan and son Michael: they make everything worthwhile.

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter

I. INTRO

Goals
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vi
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE	1
Goals of This Study	2
Research on the Reading Process	4
Research on Reading Interests, Attitudes, and Experiences	7
Research on Reading Interest as Related to Reading Achievement	16
Research on Metacognition	21
Summary	22
Departures from Existing Research	23
II. METHODOLOGY	27
Subjects	28
Materials	28
Procedures for Data Collection	34
Dependent Measures	36
Design of the Study	37
III. STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS	41
Reading Habits	41
Reading Attitudes	63
Reading Contexts	73
Summary	79

IV. STUDY

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APPENDIX A: S
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APPENDIX B:

APPENDIX C:

LIST OF REFE

GENERAL REFE

IV. STUDENT INTERVIEW RESULTS	83
Reading Experiences	84
Reading and Self-Esteem	88
Family Reading Habits and Influence	96
Friends' Influence on Reading	102
Other Influences	105
Reading and School	108
Reading Preferences	119
Turning Points	122
Influences on Reading Habits and Attitudes	125
Reading and Social Processes	129
Student Responses and the Reading Process	136
Summary	141
V. DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	144
Reading Initiative	145
Conceptualizations of the Reading Process	146
Reading as a Social Process	148
Conclusions	151
Future Directions and Pedagogical Implications	155
APPENDIX A: STUDENT READING QUESTIONNAIRE, STUDENT CONSENT FORM, AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONSENT FORM	159
APPENDIX B: STUDENT BOOK TITLE LIST	166
APPENDIX C: SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	169
LIST OF REFERENCES	173
GENERAL REFERENCES	177

Table

1. Student O
(Part

2. Student O
(Part

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LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Student Questionnaire Responses (Part I: Reading Habits)	42
2. Student Questionnaire Responses (Part II: Attitudes about Reading)	46
3. Student Questionnaire Responses (Part III: Reading Contexts)	54

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In The Aims of Education, Alfred North Whitehead (1929) stated, "There can be no mental development without interest. . . . without interest there will be no progress." Indeed, student interest in reading in particular has long been a focus of concern in this country.

This concern arises from students leaving school with limited reading abilities as a result of limited reading backgrounds. A widespread and troubling assumption is that students will read only when they have to and even then perform the task without any particular efficiency or pleasure. Unfortunately, the 1988 National Assessment of Educational Progress echoes this view, stating that "by the time they near high school graduation, students seem to have very little to do with reading activities beyond those required in school" (36).

If this trend is real, then we are faced with a bleak prospect for our nation's literacy. Yet does this trend include the "best and the brightest?" Are there no students who are not only successful and proficient in their reading habits but also enthusiastic as well? The hope that such proficiency and enthusiasm may exist seems implied in the reading objectives for the 1990 National Assessment of Educational Progress: "Students who value reading and think of themselves as readers are likely to continue to read after they leave school, and thus experience continuing opportunities for personal growth and fulfillment through reading" (40). Consequently, I will attempt to find out the characteristics of these successful readers and what has contributed to their proficiency.

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Goals of This Study

To answer the question of how these students acquired this proficiency, there are several issues which will be investigated in this study:

- 1) Within this student population, what are the qualities of a proficient and successful reader?
- 2) What factors in a broader context of reading--family, friends, school, other influences--contribute to the success of these readers?
- 3) What is the reading self-image of these students and how is it shaped?
- 4) What value do these students attach to their reading abilities in regard to other aspects of their lives, such as potential in college and in the professional world?
- 5) What experiences have they had which they believe to have shaped their positive attitudes toward reading, including any turning points?
- 6) How do they conceptualize current knowledge about the reading process?
- 7) Compared to the widespread view that high school students do little reading--a view presented in the 1979-80 National Assessment of Reading and Literature and in the 1988 National Assessment of Educational Progress, for instance--how much reading do proficient high school readers actually do?

To answer these questions, this study will survey the reading attitudes, assumptions, and experiences of a selected group of presumed high-ability 11th and 12th grade students. This group was chosen from a larger cross-section of students who completed the survey. The purpose

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of focusing on this smaller group of higher-motivated students is to take a more in-depth look at this particularly successful segment of the student reading population. Previous studies, while examining a broader spectrum of students than is done here, fail to scrutinize the valuable experiences of those students who have demonstrated an especially high enthusiasm for reading. These experiences--particularly as they are revealed in personal interviews--can provide insights into the various contexts which have fostered such reading proficiency and thus suggest research directions to encourage these contexts. In examining these students, the study will:

- 1) Examine the broader context of their reading development and experiences, including home, peers, and school.
- 2) Identify their attitudes toward their reading experiences throughout their lives and particularly during their high school years.
- 3) Identify factors they believe to be important in forming their positive attitudes toward reading.
- 4) Provide a picture of the extent to which these successful students value reading and identify significant factors which contribute to this success.
- 5) Identify the ways in which these readers conceptualize what is now known about the reading process.
- 6) Identify the amount and type of reading which these students do.

These goals were met through examining the responses to questionnaires distributed to three advanced and two regular literature and composition classes at Troy High School. Fifteen students were then selected for in-depth interviews based on their questionnaire profiles

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The results may add to the conclusions of previous studies--to be discussed shortly--which sought to define the characteristics of successful readers and provide interesting implications for what can be done to stimulate positive reading experiences for other students.

Research on the Reading Process

In order to have a context in which to discuss the habits, attitudes, and experiences of high school readers, we must first examine the basic processes with which proficient readers in general appear to approach text.

Current reading theory indicates that a typically "proficient" reader will approach the reading task with both tacit and conscious theoretical assumptions. Several researchers have provided valuable explanations of schema theory or, more simply, theories about "prior knowledge." The reader's overall schema (or schemata) is a construct presumed to include an internal cognitive map of knowledge which can be modified by experience. A specific part of this construct is brought to bear on what is being perceived. Included in the reader's prior resources will be such necessary contextual features as relevant conceptual knowledge, knowledge of how stories work, and social knowledge. Ulric Neisser (1976) writes, "The schema accepts information as it becomes available at sensory surfaces and is changed by that information; it directs movements and exploratory activities that make more information available by which it is further modified" (54). Schemata are, as David Rumelhart (1980) calls them, the "building blocks" of cognition. Processing a text will rely on the reader's past experiences and prior knowledge, which are idiosyncratically organized

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and structured. This knowledge and experience, along with the reader's own perception of it, will vary among individuals, who in turn will apply it in a variety of ways to different reading situations.

Yetta Goodman (1980) describes how readers select "the most significant graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cues and predict what they believe subsequent graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic structures are going to be. No reader uses all of the available cues" (6). As this predicting goes on, prior knowledge is used to confirm meaning, while new knowledge is shaped that will be used both in the current reading situation and in future ones. Goodman and Frank Smith (1971, 1975, 1988) point out that efficient use of schema facilitates the understanding of these key elements of textual comprehension.

Whatever the purposes for reading, the reader must still draw on prior knowledge. Louise Rosenblatt (1978) makes this clear in her discussion of efferent and aesthetic readings, for example, where both are subject to the reader's individual schema. Whether focusing on practical meaning in an efferent reading or artistic experience in an aesthetic one, the reader must draw on relevant schemata and in turn influence future knowledge, creating a consistently dynamic transaction between reader and text. In this transaction, Rosenblatt explains, "the elements or factors are, one might say, aspects of a total situation, each conditioned by and conditioning the other" (17).

Smith, Neisser, and Rosenblatt have explained that information for which the reader does not perceive a need will likely be ignored. Such information may have already been assimilated into the schemata, and by ignoring it the reader may concentrate more fully on processing that which will effectively update or change the existing cognitive map

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brought to the reading act, as Rosenblatt illustrates in her transactive model.

As a result, if seeking comprehension is the goal of the reading act, then the reader may be changed by the information which is received. Neisser points out that the change is not a matter of making an "inner replica" where none existed before, but of altering the perceptual schema so that the "next act" will run a different course. In essence, this "new" knowledge will become prior knowledge for subsequent reading acts and hopefully facilitating further comprehension. "Because of these changes," he writes, "and because the world offers an infinitely rich texture of information to the skilled perceiver, no two perceptual acts can be identical" (57). This is a similarly important point for Rosenblatt, who believes the text may facilitate as many unique readings as possible.

It is evident that multiple behaviors occur during the reading act. Kenneth Goodman's (1970) model of the reading process, for example, details the "starting, checking, comparing with known alternatives, recycling and, where possible, the comprehension and storing of informational data when success is achieved" (ix). The Goodmans' work with miscues indicates that even when these processes are inexact, they are far from random: they reflect the reader's unique textual and non-textual experiences. The reader will employ psycholinguistic strategies in each reading situation, drawing on a personal conceptual background while reevaluating it and adding to it.

Experienced readers tend to evaluate their own progress in light of the purposes for which they are reading. Moreover, a proficient reader will be aware of these factors and be able to exercise some control over

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them. This cognitive monitoring, or metacognition, is the act of perceiving the cognition of the text as it occurs. Readers who exercise this strategy are actively engaged in gathering and evaluating information for importance and reliability, deciding on its validity as it is being processed. They can also use this processing skill to check their own comprehension when they perceive it breaking down and thus take corrective action toward understanding.

Research on Reading Interests, Attitudes, and Experiences

Related previous research indicates ample precedent for a study of students' reading interests, attitudes and experiences. This research presents a varied and extensive picture of student readers, and serves as a basic context for the findings presented in this study. The most significant research studies are presented here in chronological order.

Dean C. Andrew and Curtis Easley (1959) analyzed the reading interests of approximately 500 students in seventh through twelfth grade in Taylor, Arkansas. Their findings suggested that the students in the survey found books and magazines much more interesting than newspapers. However, while books held a predominant interest for eighth- and ninth-grade students, the reverse was true for twelfth-grade students. For them, there was a predominant interest in fiction, and Andrew and Easley's study indicated that "the reading interests tend to follow a developmental pattern, with autobiographies and comics holding greater interest for the younger students and interest in history and fiction increasing as students advance in age" (497). The study also shows a distinctly positive relationship between the number of books in the home and reading achievement, leading the researchers to confirm the findings of previous studies which asserted the importance of the home reading

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J. Harlan Shores (1964) reports on a nationwide sample of 6,614 high school students in grades ten, eleven and twelve from the nine census areas. These students were given open-ended questions in an inventory which sought information about the students' reading interests and reference behavior (such as looking up information for their own interest needs outside of school). Basing his conclusions on the percentage of total student response to each question, Shores states that "most high school students want to read literature (57 per cent) and especially fiction (49 per cent)" (537). He found that the students in this study were most interested in mystery stories, followed by "adventure, novels not specified as to type, romance, science fiction and sports fiction" (538). In addition, he asserts that interest in reading was not strong in the physical and applied sciences at any grade level. He does conclude, however, that teachers normally underestimate students' reading interest in the social sciences, particularly in reading about history. Shores also refers to an interesting finding by Simpson and Seares (1965), which found that some of the reading selections least-liked by a sampling of Junior high students included those considered to be well-written by adult critics (524).

Harlan Hansen (1969) investigated the "influence of the home literary environment on a child's independent reading attitude" (17). Hansen admits that the home's importance on a child's reading has long been accepted, yet little has been known about how this environment affects growth patterns. Studies regarding the relationship between the home environment and reading have determined the status of the family by measuring the father's occupation and education, family income, type of

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dwelling, etc. They have determined reading ability by a reading achievement test. Hansen points out that family status does not adequately explain the considerable range of individual differences, nor does it give any meaningful direction as toward "how the home environment can be modified to produce desired growth results" (17). Furthermore, he asserts that if the goal is to have the student do more reading, then a reading achievement test score is only one of the variables. He insists that neither family status characteristics nor such tests account for "the observed variance in reading attitude or interest" (17).

Hansen's questionnaire measured the home literary environment within four areas: availability of literary materials in the home, amount of reading done with the child, reading guidance and encouragement, and parents as models of reading examples. The questionnaire was given to a sample of forty-eight fourth-grade students from a mid-Wisconsin community which had urban, suburban, and rural sub-groups. He found that the father's occupation and education alone showed no significant relationship to reading attitude. Furthermore, he insists, while intelligence is directly related to reading test achievement, it was not found to be a valid predictor of reading attitude.

Hansen states that, in fact, the home literary environment reveals "the only significant contribution" to independent reading (22). He warns that parents and teachers must not assume that parents' occupations or high incomes alone will ensure a stimulating literary experience for children. Instead, parents and teachers must focus on what is done in the home environment. He also makes an important

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suggestion regarding questionnaires then in use, that "a more definitive measure of the volume and depth of independent reading is needed because of the problems of pupil reporting, size of books, size of print, the ratio of print to pictures, and how much of each book is actually read" (22).

James R. Squire (1969) summarized the existing major research into student readers' attitudes toward reading. While he admits that the research shows attitudes to be "unique, personal, and highly unpredictable," it also shows certain common characteristics (523). Intelligence, for example, was not a significant factor in affecting the reading preferences of a majority of readers. Research has shown that the aesthetic quality of a selection "does not necessarily stimulate positive reader reaction" (526), reflecting the findings of the Simpson and Seares study, cited previously.

George W. Norvell (1973) surveyed the reading interests of almost 5,000 young people aged 12 to 15 from schools in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Illinois, Ohio, and New York. He investigated the extent to which gender, age or maturity, intelligence, and special interest factors, such as humor and adventure, are significant factors in determining reading preferences. Norvell found that intelligence is a less significant factor than he first thought, as the content of stories--rather than their literary quality--are equally appealing to weaker and brighter students. Age, similarly, has a minimal influence, as changes in reading preference from year-to-year between grades 8 and 11 were usually gradual and small.

Regarding the effects of gender on reading genre, both sexes equally liked the novel, play and short story, while girls greatly

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favored poetry. Girls also favored animals, mild child adventure, magic and fantasy, romantic love, adult adventure, school life, war, self-improvement, and occupations. Boys favored special interest factors such as animals, outdoor adventure, mystery, sports, travel, exploration, biography, occupations, and war. Challenging the notion that the highest-interest titles have questionable literary quality, Norvell states unequivocally that it is possible to provide a high-quality curriculum based on the titles thoroughly enjoyed by students.

Amiel T. Sharon (1973) examined the reading habits of adults through a national sample of 5,067 adults. Sharon's study concentrates on the functional literacy of the respondents, on the ability and frequency of their reading habits, and not as various researchers had, on their disabilities or limitations.

Sharon's goal through his interviews is to determine what is being read: "by whom, for how long, and for what reason, and to determine how reading fits into people's daily activities" (147). He concludes that "a substantial portion of the waking hours of many persons is spent in reading," and frequently during daily activities (168). The average adult in this study spent one hour and forty-six minutes reading on a typical day. Most of this time was spent on newspapers, magazines, and job-related materials. In breaking down the respondents into various categories, Sharon found that forty-five percent read for two hours or more. Males read slightly more than females, persons with much formal education read more than those without, young adults tended to read more than older adults, and more reading was done on a weekday than on a weekend. He does note that eighty-two percent of the adults read during

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their recreational time. After categorizing the respondents according to a socioeconomic scale, Sharon also concludes that "Persons with high socioeconomic status tend to read more of all kinds of printed matter than those with low status" (173).

Kathleen Lampert and Edna Saunders (1976) attempted to find the significant factors causing a difference between the categories of "reader" and "non-reader." They administered a survey to 340 students in a suburban Boston high school to determine the relative time per week students spend using various media (newspapers, television, magazines, and books). The community in which the study took place was an "affluent, though not socio-economically homogeneous one, whose residents have a high degree of involvement in education . . . over 80% of the students experience some form of post-secondary education" (34).

Lampert and Saunders found that the labels "reader" and "non-reader" may reflect more reader self-perception than measurable skill differences. While there was not a large enough difference to reach statistical significance, students who were categorized as "readers" in the study reported being read to more when they were young and also reported more books being brought into the home by their families and more family discussion of all media. The researchers conclude that in their study population, the basic distinction between "reader" and "non-reader" exists in attitudes toward reading rather than in their skills or activities, which are most commonly used to distinguish the two. Yet, they assert, since reading skill and attitude interact "in a variety of ways," both must be considered when considering improving the curriculum (38).

The National Assessment of Reading and Literature (1979-80)

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questioned 29,000 nine-year-olds, 41,000 thirteen-year-olds, and 36,000 seventeen-year-olds in advantaged and disadvantaged urban and rural communities throughout the United States. The researchers found that the students considered themselves good readers, and that their tastes had evolved: while the nine-year-olds preferred reading about real events and real people, the teenagers read fiction, with the older teenagers reading more current newsmagazines and editorial essays than the younger ones. About 10% of the students in each age group did not read in their spare time. Overall, the students reported that they liked reading less as they had gotten older, and a substantial number preferred watching movies or television to reading. While they seemed to feel that reading is valuable for information, they showed only a "moderate interest" in it as a source of enjoyment for themselves (11).

Vincent Greany (1980) investigated the relationship between the amounts of leisure time students spent reading and the amount of time spent doing other activities. He surveyed fifth-graders in a sample of Irish primary schools. The students kept a diary of how they spent their leisure time for three days. His results are widely varied: 44% of the pupils in the study did not read books during this allotted time, while 6.4% of the students devoted at least three hours of their leisure time to book reading. Of the total amount of time students spent reading during their leisure time, 62% was devoted to books, 31% to comics, and 7% to newspapers. He found that on the average, the students in the study devoted 79 minutes or 5.4% of available leisure time to reading, and that the amount of time reading books was positively associated with reading achievement.

John T. Guthrie and Mary Selfert (1983) examined the daily reading

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habits of adults in four occupational groups. Their study "intended to quantify their reading activities and addressed the question: How can the reading actions of people be described?" (499). They personally interviewed seven individuals in the community of interest, including a custodian, editor, postal clerk, secretary, and a family of two parents and three children. These subjects were asked about their habits in reading newspapers, books, magazines, and brief documents. Guthrie and Selfert found that the median amount of time spent reading by wage earners was about 2.6 hours daily, including reading the newspaper, books and magazines, and a wide variety of work-related materials. The women in the study read for approximately one hour per day more than the men. The researchers also report that individuals whose education went beyond high school read significantly more than those whose education did not go beyond high school.

Members of all the occupational groups reported reading daily for job-specific reasons, with those in the professional/managerial category reporting the largest volume of daily reading. There was also a clear difference in the purposes for which the different groups read: for example, the professional/managerial group reported a high incidence of reading brief documents, while the skilled crafts workers group reported a high frequency of reading news and business materials. The researchers concluded that individuals "acquire and extend" their reading abilities in distinctive occupational contexts, and that the impact of these contexts needs to be considered in reading research.

Fran Lehr (1985) reported the results of a Book Industry Study Group survey on American reading habits. The survey results are very optimistic, stating that 96% of Americans read books, magazines, and

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newspapers. This figure represents an increase of 15 million people over the number of readers in the 1978 survey. Magazine circulation has been up 92% since 1954, and though the number of daily newspapers has been falling, "as many as 100 million Americans read a paper daily. Further, newspaper readers are found in 75% of all U.S. households" (171). However, the study also shows that "while adults are reading more, young people aged 16-21 are reading less. The proportion of that age group who are readers declined from 75% in 1978 to 63% in 1983, a trend which the survey acknowledges might have 'serious consequences'" (171).

Richard C. Anderson, Paul T. Wilson and Linda G. Fielding (1988) studied the out-of-school activities of 155 fifth-graders, having them keep a record on activity forms of how many minutes per day they spent on a wide range of out-of-school activities. They found that reading books is a "significant predictor" of reading growth and is not only a reflection, but also a cause of reading proficiency. The researchers found that 5.4% of available leisure time is spent reading, and that the amount of time reading books is positively associated with reading achievement. As several other studies have suggested, there is a negative relationship between reading achievement and television viewing beyond ten hours a week.

G. Robert Carlsen (1988) collected and reported on student reading autobiographies from students at the Universities of Iowa, Colorado, Texas, and Hawaii, and East Tennessee State University. Their autobiographies contain responses to such questions as "What do you remember about reading? Who, if anyone, had been important in developing your attitudes toward reading? When and where did you read?"

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The respondents were "overwhelmingly librarians or English teachers or were in training to become one or the other" (x). Carlsen eschewed any sort of statistical analysis, asserting that "The responses were so freewheeling that counting and figuring percentages did not reveal the real impact of the study" (xiii). His collection of responses now number in the thousands and span from the mid-1950's to the mid-1980's.

The responses are grouped in various categories, from learning to read to impressions of teachers. The section entitled "Reading Habits and Attitudes" relates such common experiences as extensive summertime reading, various forms of clandestine reading both in school and at home, and widely differing systems of choosing reading materials, including reading the books on library shelves in alphabetical order. Many respondents mention sensory experiences (food, music, places, etc.) as a crucial part of meaningful and pleasant reading memories. Interestingly, a number of the responses mention a concern with reading ability. A common insecurity is that they are reading too slowly or too superficially. Carlsen found that, although the titles read by young readers had changed, the individual responses to reading throughout the years had stayed consistent and largely positive.

Research on Reading Interest as Related to Reading Achievement

Other significant research related to this study has focused on students' reading habits and attitudes, but more specifically in relation to reading skills and achievement demonstrated through standardized tests of reading ability. These tests have been criticized for possibly measuring more accurately the reading comprehension of their writers rather than the comprehension of the students answering the questions. With this criticism in mind, we may still use this

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research as a context for the present study, particularly for the insights regarding the relationship between reading practices and achievement.

James Maxwell (1977) studied the reading progress of Scottish students from ages 8 to 15 based on the Edinburgh reading test (testing Vocabulary, Comprehension of Essential Ideas, Use of Context, etc.). Maxwell states that "The attainments covered by the Edinburgh Reading Tests extend somewhat beyond a strict definition of reading as such and include some elements of general language" (11). He finds that while poor readers still read comics more than anything else, they increase their consumption of magazines and newspapers as they move into secondary school, though the number of titles mentioned was still significantly less than half of those mentioned by good readers.

Overall, Maxwell found that as the students got older, there was a pronounced decrease in the amount of time spent in leisure reading, particularly in book reading. Within this trend, however, girls read more than boys and also read more books. He also asserts that students' reading attainment was influenced significantly more through such factors as the reading environment in the home--particularly the encouragement to read--and socioeconomic background than through teaching practices. In his study, for example, children from working-class homes did not spend as much time on leisure reading as children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. An important finding is a positive relationship between time devoted to book reading and reading attainment, leading Maxwell to make the recommendation that "the teaching of reading in both primary and secondary schools should be accompanied by judicious interest by teachers in pupils' leisure

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reading, regardless of its literary quality" (143).

Alan Purves (1983) reports on the results of a study done by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. The study was conducted in fifteen countries and with some 72,000 students in grades 4, 9, and 12. These students were given tests which evaluated open-ended and multiple-choice comprehension questions, reading speed, background, and interests. Purves found that high-achieving students in the study also demonstrated high reading interest. These students, he said, were also busy with larger-than-average amounts of homework, and were from home environments with easy access to books as well as encouragement for intellectual growth. He also asserts that students with low scores in tests of reading comprehension and understanding of literature tended to be from environments which lacked exposure to stimulating reading material, suitable adult language modeling situations, and incentives to read and perform well in school.

The Reading Report Card (1984) describes the trends in reading through four National Assessment tests, evaluating some 251,000 students from 1971 to 1984. In the different studies, students were asked to identify concepts in materials ranging from simple sentences to complex passages on specialized topics in science or social studies. Student responses ranged from multiple-choice answers to written interpretations of what they had read.

The study reports that students of every age in the 1984 study were reading more proficiently than those in the 1971 study, yet the nine- and 13-year-olds did not show improvement from 1980 to 1984. This halted the upward trend in performance at these ages in the 1970's.

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Only about five percent of the students at age 17 had what the researchers consider advanced reading skills and strategies. It also claims the most significant influences on reading proficiency to be parents' level of education, amount of reading material in the home, and negatively, the amount of time watching television. "At all three ages," it states, "students from homes with an abundance of reading materials are substantially better readers than those who have few materials available . . . [and] students whose parents have a post-high school education read substantially better than those whose parents have not graduated from high school" (7). The figures also showed an overall decline in available reading materials in the home, possibly reflecting a national trend toward using other media, such as television, for leisure and for obtaining information. For all three age groups, six or more hours of television viewing per day is "consistently and strongly related" to lower reading proficiency (7).

In a related study, Herbert J. Walberg and Shlow-ling Tsai (1984) examined the relationship between reading achievement and factors in learning. Using regression analysis, they analyzed the scores of 2,890 13-year-old students from the National Assessment of Educational Progress on 24 factors, singly and as a set. The main purpose of the study was to investigate "the possible diminishing returns of reading achievement to investments in quantity of time spent on various verbal activities" (442). Consequently, the researchers tested the possibility of diminishing and negative returns to time. They found a strong association between time spent on out-of-school reading and reading achievement. Furthermore, Walberg and Tsai believe that student achievement in reading is jointly influenced by a number of factors

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rather than by "a single dominant one," and future research must address this influence (450).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (1988) surveyed the reading achievement of some 13,000 students in grades 4, 8, and 12 across the nation. The students answered multiple-choice and open-ended questions in response to a variety of literary and informative passages. In addition, the students provided information regarding their reading experiences both in and out of school.

One disturbing finding was that while the average reading proficiency increased substantially from grades 4 to 8, it increased less dramatically from grades 9 to 12. Furthermore, students reported doing very little reading in school and for homework, and their interest in books seemed to decrease as they progressed through school: only half of the twelfth-grade students reported reading for fun at least once per week. The more proficient readers in this study reported home and school environments which emphasize reading and academic achievement and greater access to reading in the home.

There was also a clear relationship in all three grades between the parents' level of education and the students' reading proficiency. The report states that "Students who reported that at least one parent had graduated from college averaged from 27 to 37 points higher in reading proficiency than did those who reported that neither parent graduated from high school" (16). While older high school students read very little beyond what is required of them in school, those students who report reading fiction and non-fiction during their leisure time have higher proficiency scores than those who did not engage in such outside reading.

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Research on Metacognition

Metacognition is the ability to think about and control one's own learning. These mechanisms can involve a reader's combined efforts of checking, planning, monitoring, testing, revising, and evaluating as reading occurs (Baker and Brown, 354). It may be a significant factor in reading success for the more proficient students as their ability to monitor their own reading processes may dramatically improve their engagement with text.

D. L. Forest and T. G. Waller (1979) evaluated the extent to which third- and sixth-grade students could confidently evaluate their understanding of their reading. They found that the older and better readers were more successful at evaluating their progress than the younger and poorer ones. This general result has been found in several other studies, including Baker (1979), Baker and Anderson (1982), and Cross and Paris (1988). Overall, better and more mature readers, in addition to having increased awareness of their success or failure in comprehending, also dealt more effectively with cognition problems.

Ruth Garner, Shirley Wagoner, and Terrie Smith (1983) studied the differences in metacognitive strategies between good and poor readers. In this study, these strategies are specifically defined as looking back in the text sample to improve comprehension. Studying the fifteen highest and fifteen lowest performers of a sixth-grade sampling, the researchers found significantly higher instances of metacognitive behavior in the higher group.

Suzanne Wade and Ralph Reynolds (1989) assert that metacognition involves task awareness, strategy awareness, and performance awareness and can be improved through classroom instruction. They define task

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awareness as what to study in a particular learning situation. Strategy awareness allows one to decide how best to learn, and performance awareness is whether or not and to what extent learning has taken place.

Garner (1987) sums up the convergence of the most recent research: "Young children and poor readers are not nearly as adept as older children/adults and good readers, respectively, in engaging in playful activities either to make cognitive progress or to monitor it. Younger, less proficient learners are not nearly as 'resourceful' in completing a variety of reading and studying tasks important in academic settings. The correlational data are quite clear" (59).

Summary

Several important trends emerge from this body of research. Many of these trends have come to be commonly accepted within reading research. While this study will reinforce elements of this knowledge, it will also make significant departures from it, as I will point out in the next section.

1) Even though there is early interest, overall, student interest in reading declines from when they enter school to the end of their secondary school years. This point has been reported in several studies, including the 1988 National Assessment of Educational Progress.

2) Students who do show an active interest in reading show a preference for magazines and books, particularly fiction. This preference is especially pronounced in their outside reading choices.

3) There is a strong correlation between the home reading environment and student reading interest and achievement. Several studies have shown that students that come from active home reading environments will be more likely to become active readers themselves.

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However, the home reading environment has been demonstrated to be a more influential factor than socioeconomic status in stimulating reading.

4) Although it has some validity in predicting reading performance, student intelligence (as determined through standardized testing) is not a significant factor in predicting or evaluating student reading preferences.

5) Socioeconomic status tends to correlate with the frequency and range of student reading, particularly reading as a leisure activity. As a result, types of leisure reading become narrower and amounts tend to decrease as socioeconomic status decreases.

6) The amount of time students spent on reading, both in and out of school, was positively associated with reading achievement. Clearly, students who enjoy reading and do more of it will be more likely to score higher in tests of reading performance.

7) Older and better readers more commonly utilize effective metacognitive strategies in their reading. This phenomenon may occur as a result of school training, but more often through repeated experiences with self-monitoring in order to improve comprehension problems.

Departures from Existing Research

There are several key areas not commonly addressed in the existing research:

1) Current research typically does not specifically highlight proficient readers. Although these readers are usually present in randomly selected groups, they are not examined for their unique and interesting characteristics. Current research commonly examines low-, average-, and high-level readers. However, the effort is primarily at differentiating these groups, and seldom focuses in-depth attention on

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2) While there is abundant theory and research about home influence on reading, this research is often done without a case-study focus. Consequently, comparatively little has been revealed on the actual contexts in which this home influence occurs.

3) Largely as a result of this lack of case study, the existing research shows a lack of retrospective questions about their early experiences as a means of gaining insight into student habits and attitudes.

4) The research primarily examines the commonalities of student reading experiences rather than interesting differences among them.

Consequently, there are several ways in which the present study will depart from and add to the existing body of research. Normally, the student populations of the existing studies only contain random numbers of high-ability or advanced students, defined either by achievement scores, course placement, or self-perception. This study will examine questionnaire responses from two regular and three advanced literature and composition classes. As a result, these advanced students will comprise slightly more than half of the questionnaire sampling. Such a sampling will facilitate a closer look at students who have achieved relative success and interest in reading. Certainly, proficient and enthusiastic readers are present in regular English class sections. However, including advanced students in this study increases the probability of finding particularly competent readers for the interview group.

Previous research commonly addresses the impact of the home literacy environment. In this research, the home impact is largely

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examined through questionnaires which usually seek standard information about such areas as reading materials in the home, parents' education, and amount of time spent reading at home. From this data, theories are formed about the impact on individual students.

This study will also examine the home literacy environment, yet in more case-study, qualitative terms. Through personal interviews, the students are able to provide a more thorough, in-depth look at their reading situations. Furthermore, these reflections will be presented here in the students' own words, providing a more revealing insight into their experiences. Moreover, previous studies scarcely address other reading influences such as friends and teachers. These elements will also be addressed through interviews and first-hand student responses.

Students in this study will be asked about specific reading experiences which have contributed in a particularly positive or negative way to their reading habits and attitudes, despite the accepted fallibility of memory. These "turning points"--which may occur at times ranging from pre-school through high school--appear to be potentially crucial factors in reading development, and are commonly neglected in existing research.

The current study will address how enthusiastic readers come to acquire a positive self-image and what specific influences contribute to this perspective. Rather than examining these readers in a single category as is commonly done, this study will seek meaningful individual differences among the students' experiences. Guthrie and Siefert have pointed out the efficacy of this approach, stating that "Efforts to describe reading activities quantitatively have emphasized summary statistics and population generalizations rather than exploring the

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uniqueness of individuals or groups" (506). Moreover, it has been suggested in several previous studies that rather than looking for one single factor, different factors should be examined.

This study will provide an in-depth look at several contextual factors affecting the reading behaviors and attitudes of several proficient student readers. Such a comprehensive examination of the student reading environment--and particularly of high-achieving students--has valuable implications for both reading theory and pedagogy. There is widespread agreement that a more comprehensive view of successful student reading attitudes and experiences is important, one which goes beyond the relatively narrow confines of the home or school environment. While these two particular areas will be addressed, they will be examined in conjunction with other factors which appear to consistently affect student reading.

A comment by Harlen Hansen (1969) perhaps sums up the value of this study's objectives: "Little research has been done which investigates what factors in a child's life significantly affect his attitude toward reading and his ability to read. Rather than ask 'where is he?' the question we should ask is 'what caused him to be where he is?' An answer to this question may give insights both into understanding the problem of the reluctant reader and in preventing the reluctant reader of tomorrow" (19).

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CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

This study will survey the reading attitudes, assumptions, and experiences of a selected group of presumed high-ability 11th and 12th grade students. The study will:

- 1) Present a picture of what and how much these successful students are reading, both in and out of school.**
- 2) Identify what their attitudes toward their reading experiences have been throughout their lives and particularly during their high school years.**
- 3) Identify factors which they believe to be significant in forming their positive attitudes toward reading, including family, peers, school, and other outside influences, such as turning points which have had an impact on their reading.**
- 4) Provide a picture of the extent to which these successful students value reading and to identify significant factors which contribute to this success.**
- 5) Examine to what extent these readers conceptualize current knowledge of the reading process in their own experiences with text.**

Such results may shed new light on previous studies which sought to define the characteristics of successful readers and provide interesting implications for what can be done to stimulate positive reading experiences for other students.

In this study, a selection of students completed a questionnaire which asked them about their reading attitudes and experiences. After the questionnaire was scored, the fifteen highest-scoring students were

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interviewed for more in-depth responses.

Subjects

The subjects of this study are 11th and 12th grade students at Troy High School in Troy, Michigan. Troy is an upper-middle class suburb located approximately 25 miles north of Detroit. The student body is predominantly white, with approximately 75%-80% of the annual graduating class going on to higher education.

The students participating in this study are from two sections of 11th grade literature and composition classes, and three sections of 12th grade advanced literature and composition classes.

Materials

The research tools for this study consist of an initial questionnaire and follow-up interview questions (see Appendix A). Each questionnaire contains a cover sheet which explains the nature of the study to the students and assures them of the confidentiality of their answers. The cover sheet also reminds the students of the need for their honesty in responding to the questions.

The questionnaire consists of four parts. Part I attempts to ascertain what kinds of reading the students have done in the month preceding their completion of the survey and what their purposes were in doing this reading. They were asked to list the titles or subject areas of these reading materials, and could choose from several categories of magazines which were listed. In addition, space was provided for them to name other types or titles not listed.

The students were also asked how much and how frequently they read for school and for leisure. This section included questions on which school subject areas were read for most frequently and which of these

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subject areas were preferred by the students.

The purpose of this section was first to determine whether or not the students did any reading during the prior month. Once this was established, the subsequent questions sought such information as:

1. What particular books and magazines (both types and titles) are being read.
2. The extent to which students read for enjoyment in their spare time.
3. The extent to which students read for school assignments, both out of academic demands and out of personal preference.

The answers to these questions should establish a general profile of the students' current propensity toward reading. Previous studies have indicated a particular student interest in magazine and newspaper reading (Andrew and Easley (1959), Sharon (1973), and Lehr (1985), to name a few.) This reading interest is also one which will be examined in this study.

Part II of the questionnaire focuses on the readers' attitudes and habits through a series of statements in which they are asked to initiate a range of opinions from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." The first part presents the students with a list of statements regarding reading. Examples of these statements are: "Reading is a useful activity;" "When I really enjoy reading something, I try to get friends to read it;" and "Most of my friends like to read." The students are asked to respond to each statement by indicating whether they strongly agree, agree, have no opinion, disagree, or strongly disagree. The responses to these statements should indicate the students' reading habits and attitudes toward reading. In addition,

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these questions also seek information about the overall reading environment of the students, such as their family and friends' reading habits and attitudes.

This list of statements also includes five statements representing negative reading attitudes or habits, such as "Outside of school, I am seldom encouraged to read," or "I usually don't read unless I have to." These statements appear intermittently among the positive statements, and are intended to help the students provide a consistently accurate response.

To help determine their reading self-image, Part II also asks the students to rate themselves as readers, their understanding or comprehension compared to other students, and their rate or speed of reading compared to other students. In each of these categories, they are asked to rate themselves as excellent, above average, average, below average, or poor.

Part III asks the students about their different purposes for reading. They are asked to respond to statements such as, "I read for relaxation and personal enjoyment or as an escape," and "I read to study for personal and academic advancement." The students indicate whether the reasons for reading are "Very Unlike Me" to "Very Like Me" on a scale of 1 to 5. These responses should indicate the most common and least common purposes for reading among the students in the study.

Part IV asks the students open-ended questions regarding reading acquisition and effective reading strategies. They are asked to answer as honestly and as thoroughly as they can to the questions: "What do people do when they read?" "When you are reading and you come to something you don't know, what do you do?" "What do you think makes a

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person a good reader?" "How did you learn to read?" and "How can you tell that you are (or are not) a good reader?" These questions were adapted from a "Reading Interview" questionnaire originally developed by Carolyn Burke and modified by Marilyn Wilson (1990).

These open-ended questions give the students the opportunity for more developed and specific response. The responses can provide an important profile of how each student understands and practices the reading process. Moreover, their answers can indicate to what extent current reading theory is being reflected in their comments about reading behavior.

The second stage of the research process involves a personal interview with selected students who have completed the questionnaire. This selection process will be addressed in the following section, Procedures for Data Collection. The interview is intended to allow the students to provide more detailed responses regarding their reading attitudes and experiences.

The first question is deliberately broad: "Tell me as much as you can about yourself as a reader. What do you remember most about your reading experiences?" This question is intended to allow the students to respond in any direction they wish, including as much information as they can in presenting a picture of themselves as readers. Such an opening may be more likely to put the student at ease in the interview situation by allowing them greater freedom when answering the question. The subsequent interview questions are used in order to elicit information about particular topic areas.

Three questions focus on the students' self-esteem as it is related to their reading experience: 1) "How do you compare yourself as a reader

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to other people your age?" 2) "How does your image of yourself as a reader affect your image of yourself as a person?" 3) "What value do you attach to your reading ability with regard to success in college? With regard to getting a well-paying job?" The responses should indicate whether or not these selected readers make any conscious connections between their reading achievement and their overall self-image. The questions also attempt to find out how these students see themselves as readers compared to their peers, and also how they view reading in relation to intelligence and later success in school and the workplace. These two areas may be useful in portraying the conscious significance of reading for these students, and are areas given virtually no attention in prior research.

Two interview questions relate specifically to the readers' families. The students were asked, "How has your family influenced your reading attitudes and habits?" This question probes students' perceptions of their families' influences on reading, from a pre-elementary period up through high school. Their responses may be important in relation to previous research which has addressed the impact of the home reading environment on student reading, such as Easley (1959) and Hansen (1969), both of whom asserted the importance of the home influence on reading habits. The second question in this section, "Tell me all you can about your family's reading habits and attitudes," aims at establishing a profile of each reader's family reading practices. Such a profile may make for interesting comparisons with the students' current reading habits and attitudes.

One question deals with the influence of friends: "Going back as far as you can remember, how have your friends influenced your reading

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attitudes and habits?" The responses to this question may prove particularly important because the influence of friends on student reading is a research area previously neglected. Another question asks about the extent to which any other outside sources have influenced the student: "What other influences do you see on your reading outside of your family and friends, like a particular teacher, librarian, reading program, etc.? How did this influence you?"

Three questions deal specifically with the students' school reading experiences. The first is very broad: "Tell me as much as you can about your experiences with reading in school." This request is intended to give them as much possible latitude with their answers, in the hope of eliciting the most memorable or influential incidents. The second question in this section, "What specific reading activities in school, both positive and negative, have influenced you?" deals more directly with the effects of reading pedagogy on their reading habits and attitudes. The third question asks them to make a judgment regarding their school reading: "Have you found that your experiences with reading in school have made you want to read more or less and why?"

To determine the approximate division of their reading time, the students were given the following question: "Given these categories: pleasure reading, reading for school, reading for news or information, and reading for instructions on a task, how would you rate the percentage of time you spend on each?" Since the students are not required to keep logs or any other empirical data regarding time spent reading in these areas, their responses will be estimates. Nevertheless, these estimates may indicate where they focus their reading efforts.

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The final interview questions address students' overall reading influences. They are asked, "Can you remember any 'turning points'--in or out of school--which significantly influenced your feelings toward reading? If so, when was it and what happened?" Case-study research on reading (Carlsen (1988) in particular) has indicated frequent responses when readers of all ages have reached such a turning point, for better or worse. A particular teacher, a classroom situation, or the example of a parent or sibling all may stimulate a particularly lasting impression about reading. Individual interview responses--rather than statistics--are more likely to reveal important similarities which can be significant for further research.

The last two questions both point toward largely the same response: "Why do you think you are the kind of reader you are today?" and "What do you think have been the most significant factors which have influenced you as a reader?" These questions ask that the students draw together their response from the previous questions toward a clear conclusion about their reading habits and attitudes.

Procedures for Data Collection

This study was conducted during May and August of 1991 at Troy High School. Before the research began, the materials and procedures were reviewed and approved in writing by the school principal, Mr. Larry Boehms. These procedures were also formally approved by UCRIHS review.

The questionnaires were administered to five high school English classes: two regular 11th grade literature and composition classes, and three 12th grade advanced literature and composition classes. These two types of classes contained students with a variety of reading abilities, and were chosen with the assumption that readers with the strongest

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Before the questionnaires were distributed, the two teachers who taught these classes were instructed on the nature of the research and questionnaire. They were instructed to have students participate only on a volunteer basis during class time, and also to remind the students participating that the questionnaire would have no bearing whatsoever on their grades or class standing. Furthermore, the teachers were asked to repeat aloud to the students that their complete honesty was crucial in responding to the questions.

Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that even with verbal and written requests for honesty, some students will be prone to give responses which seem "correct" or "more acceptable" under the circumstances. Such a phenomenon is bound to exist in any research response situation, and must be considered in the resulting data in this study.

To assure the anonymity of each participant, each questionnaire cover sheet was numbered correspondingly to the first page of questions. Before any scoring, each cover sheet was separated from the questionnaire by the teachers administering them. Consequently, the questionnaires were scored without the identity of the student being known.

After the questionnaires were scored, the fifteen highest-scoring questionnaires were separated. The number-coded cover sheets were compiled separately and those students were contacted by phone. Students' questionnaires were matched to their identifying cover sheets only when they agreed to participate in an interview. The identities of

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those students who completed questionnaires but were not interviewed remained anonymous.

Dependent Measures

For each of the profile questions in Parts I, III, and IV, objective responses were compiled and percentages were figured based on the number of response both overall and within a type of course (regular vs. advanced). Subjective answers were grouped according to similar types of responses. These answers were also given a percentage based on their appearance in all questionnaires and within a particular course.

Part II, the section focusing on attitudes and reading habits, was the section by which the students were assigned scores and selected for interviews. This section provided for the most objective evaluation and also the most consistent picture of the students' habits and attitudes. The questions asked for response to both positive and negative statements about reading. For the positive statements (e.g. "I like to read"), the scoring was as follows: Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, No Opinion = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly Disagree = 1. For the negative statements, such as "I think reading takes too much time and concentration," the scoring was: Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, No Opinion = 3, Disagree = 4, and Strongly Disagree = 5. By this scoring, the highest possible score was 100, the lowest 20.

This section also included three questions which asked students to rate themselves as readers, their ability to understand or comprehend compared to other students their age, and their rate or speed of reading compared to other students their age. These questions also helped to indicate students' perception of their own reading abilities in relation to their peers. The responses were scored as follows: Poor = 1, Below

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Average = 2, Average = 3, Above Average = 4, Excellent = 5.

Consequently, the highest possible score was 15, the lowest 3.

Combining these two areas provided the raw scores by which the fifteen highest-scoring students were selected.

Design of the Study

This study involves the opinions and recollections of a group of upper-level high school students. Although their objective responses will be tallied and reported, the primary findings will come from the interview responses, which allow for much more spontaneity and specific explanation. A similar study, which examined the reading biographies of 110 10th and 11th grade students, was done previously by Steltenkamp (1989) entitled, "Where Are They Going, Where Have They Been: A Survey of High School Students' Reading." The students answered separate questionnaires regarding their pre-elementary, elementary, junior high, and high school reading experiences. In this study, 71% of the students surveyed claimed to like reading while currently in high school. This was also a dramatic increase over the number of students who reported enjoying reading previously in their school years. Magazines and popular fiction comprised the majority of their reading. These students also reported decisive improvement in their reading habits and attitudes when they were given the freedom to choose their own reading material.

The case-study approach used here has precedents in other studies. G. Robert Carlsen and Anne Sherrill, in Voices of Readers, similarly sought responses from several hundred adults regarding their reading patterns. Explaining their methodology, Carlsen and Sherrill write, "This is not a statistical study. The responses were so freewheeling that counting and figuring percentages did not reveal the real impact of

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the study . . . As a result, we had to generalize instead of count" (xiii). They add that the responses of these adults "do not tell it all, but they tell the things that are probably of greatest importance to each of them" (xiii). In addition, Janet Emig used this approach in her landmark study on the writing process, The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders (1971). Emig states that "Case study has long been a mode of inquiry within the physical, biological, and social sciences" (2). She cites such precedents as the work of Sigmund Freud and Bruno Bettelheim, as well as studies in reading by Helen M. Robinson and Jean Piaget. In her study, Emig asked eight twelfth-graders of average and above-average ability to give biographies of their writing experiences and to compose aloud three themes while being tape recorded and personally observed.

Permission to conduct this study at Troy High School was given by the Principal, Mr. Larry Boehms. Two teachers at Troy High School each agreed to administer the questionnaires in their classes: two regular sections of 11th grade Literature and Composition and three sections of 12th grade Advanced Literature and Composition.

After both teachers were advised on administering them, the questionnaires were distributed to the students on May 23, 1991 during the students' regular English class period. The students who participated in the study were given as much time as they needed to complete the questionnaire. Upon receiving each questionnaire after the student completed it, the teachers detached the cover sheet with the student's name on it and placed each of these in a separate envelope, which was sealed before being returned. Consequently, the identities of the students were kept confidential unless they agreed to be

interviewed.

A total of 96 questionnaires were completed and returned. Upon completion of the scoring and compiling of responses, the fifteen questionnaires with the highest scores from Part II were selected for further study. The numbers of the questionnaires were listed and matched separately with the identifying cover sheets. These students were contacted by phone and informed that their responses were selected for further research through a follow-up interview. After they agreed to be interviewed, the students' questionnaires were then matched with the cover sheet which specifically identified their responses.

The interviews were conducted in an unoccupied office within the main office at Troy High School during August, 1991. This site was chosen because of its neutral nature for both the interviewer and students. At the beginning of each interview, the students were told again about the nature of the research project, and reminded of the importance of their frankness in answering the questions. The students were told that their interview answers would be tape recorded and transcribed, and that any reference to their particular responses in the dissertation would be by first name only.

For each interview question, the students were given as long as they wanted to respond. The questions were repeated verbatim when the students requested it. When the students became hesitant or lost their train of thought during a response, the interviewer made attempts to draw out their responses primarily through repeating their last response or asking open-ended questions, such as "Is there anything else you can tell me?" At the conclusion of each interview, the students were also asked if anything else had occurred to them since they answered one

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question or if they had any further questions. If not, the interview was concluded.

The third chapter will address the objective responses to the questionnaires. These responses will be tabulated and discussed. The fourth chapter will examine the interview responses in detail. Finally, the fifth chapter will consist of the study's conclusions and implications.

CHAPTER III

STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS

In order to establish a broad data base of the students' backgrounds, the questionnaire was designed to elicit information about their reading habits, attitudes, and experiences. It combines objective questions, statements to which the students could respond, and open-ended questions. A total of 96 students completed questionnaires from the five classes. The following percentages will be based on this total, including students who did not respond to particular questions. Certainly, these results must be regarded with a degree of caution. Even though the students were reminded of the importance of honest answers several times, they are still likely to have answered some questions with what they believe will be desirable responses. This is an unfortunate reality of research involving anonymous questionnaires, but one which hopefully has been lessened in effect by repeated reminders to the participants about giving honest answers. The responses to each question are presented in graphs beginning on the next page.

Reading Habits

Part I of the questionnaire asked students about their reading habits over the prior month. For the first two questions, "Did you happen to read any magazines?" and "Did you happen to read any newspapers," 98% and 93%, respectively, responded that they had. An overwhelming majority demonstrates a surprisingly high incidence of interaction with print, even though some periodicals are geared to a lower reading level.

Table 1
Student Questionnaire Responses

Part I

Reading Habits

N=96

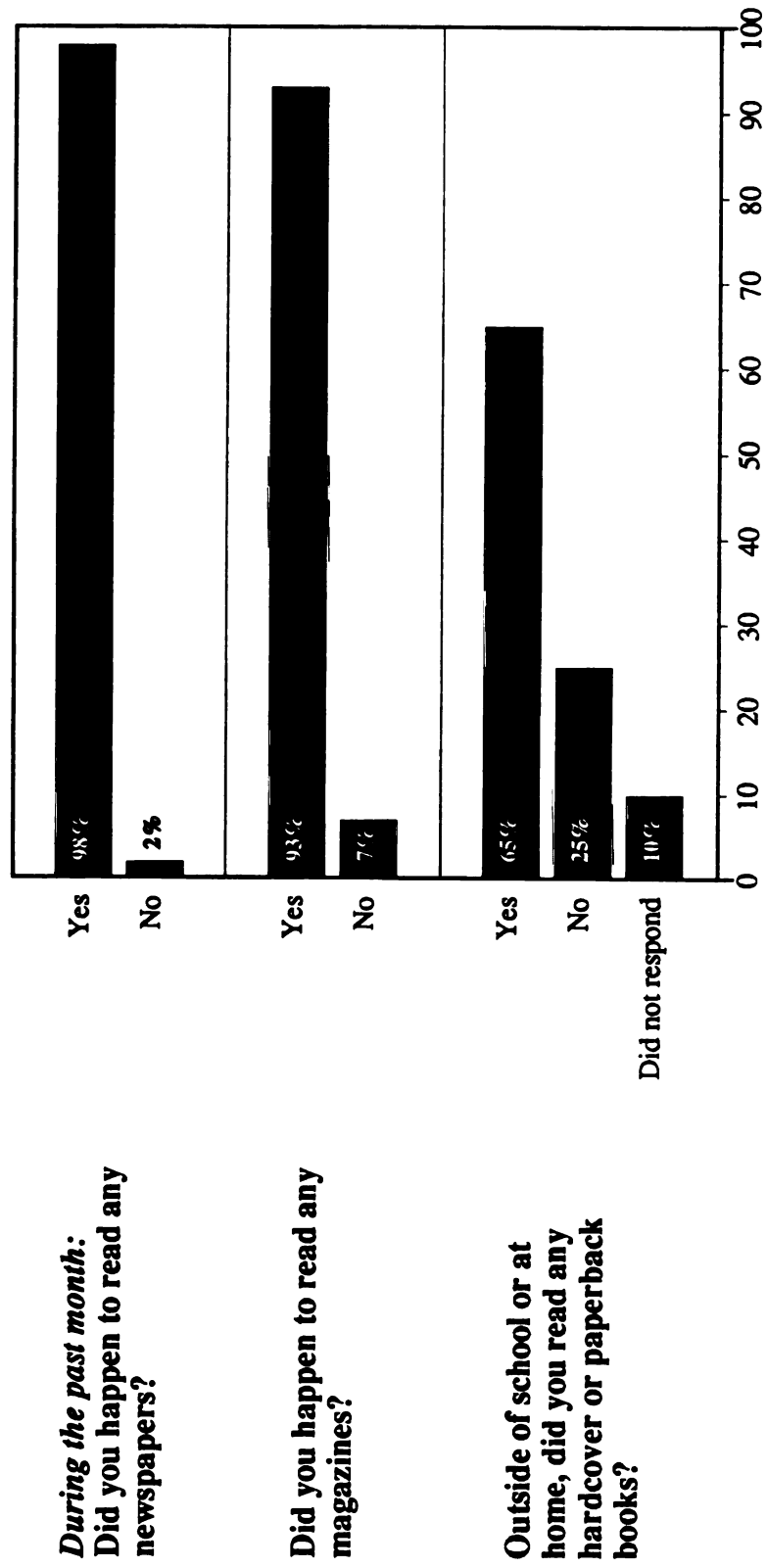


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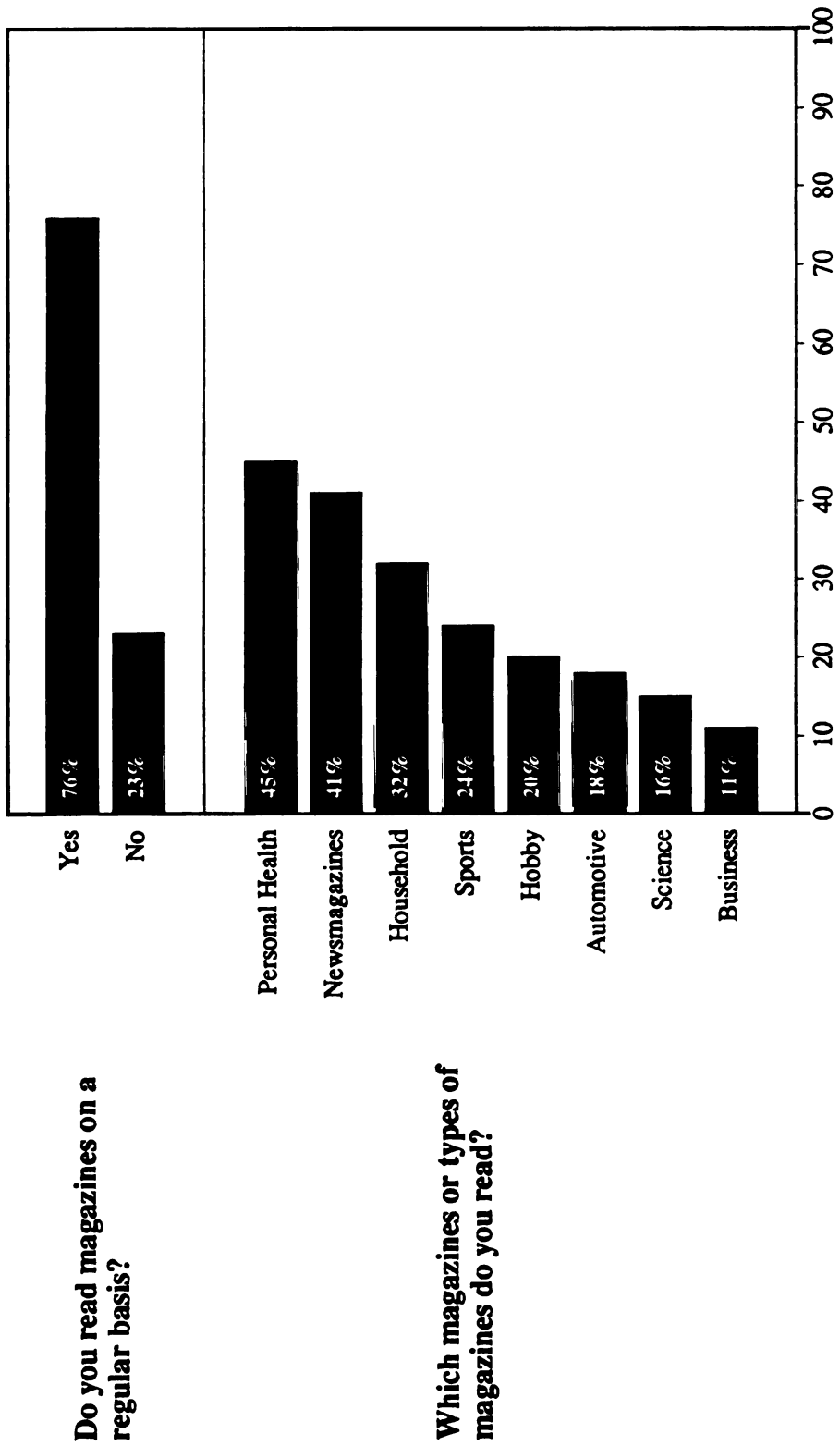


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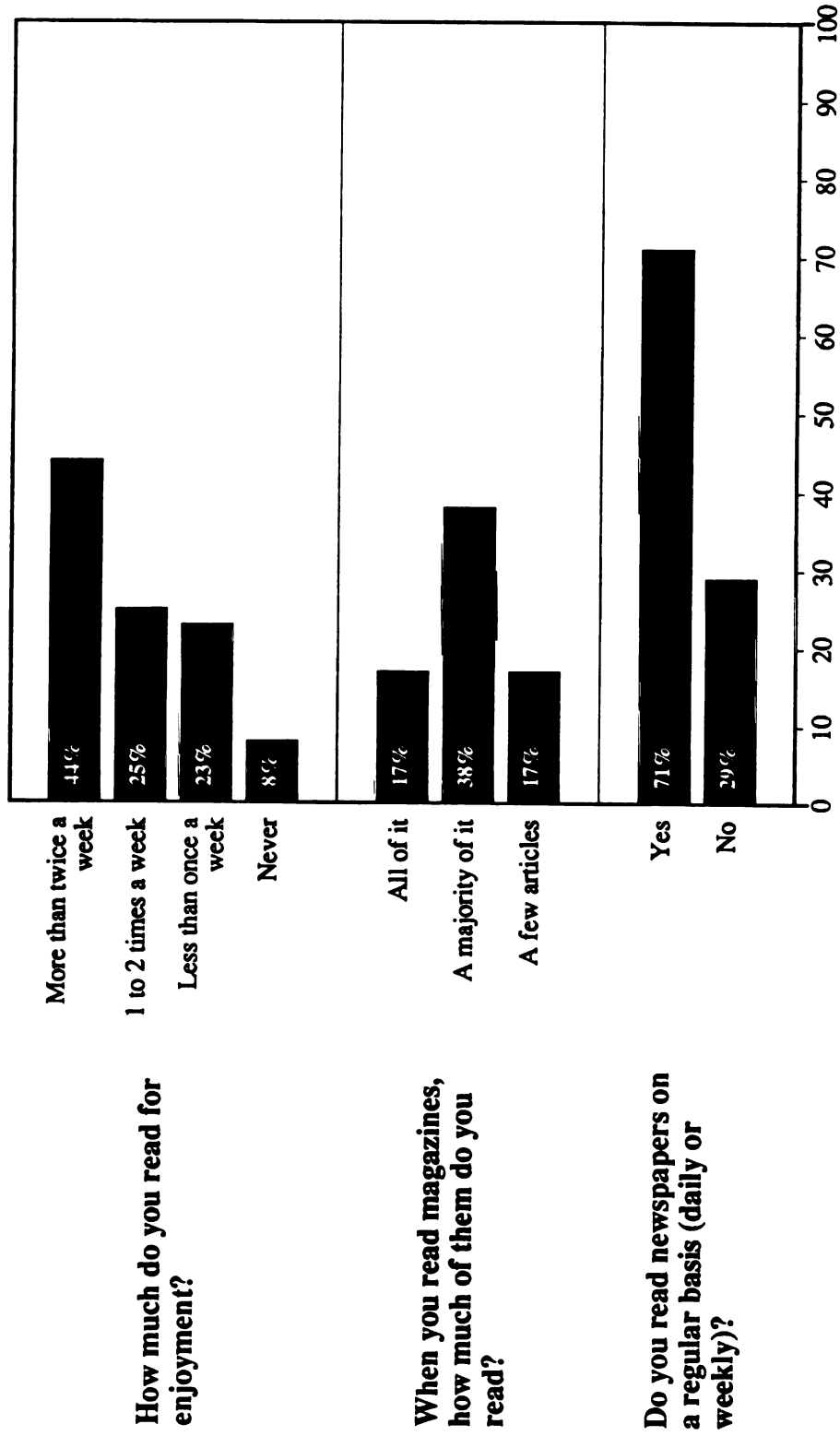
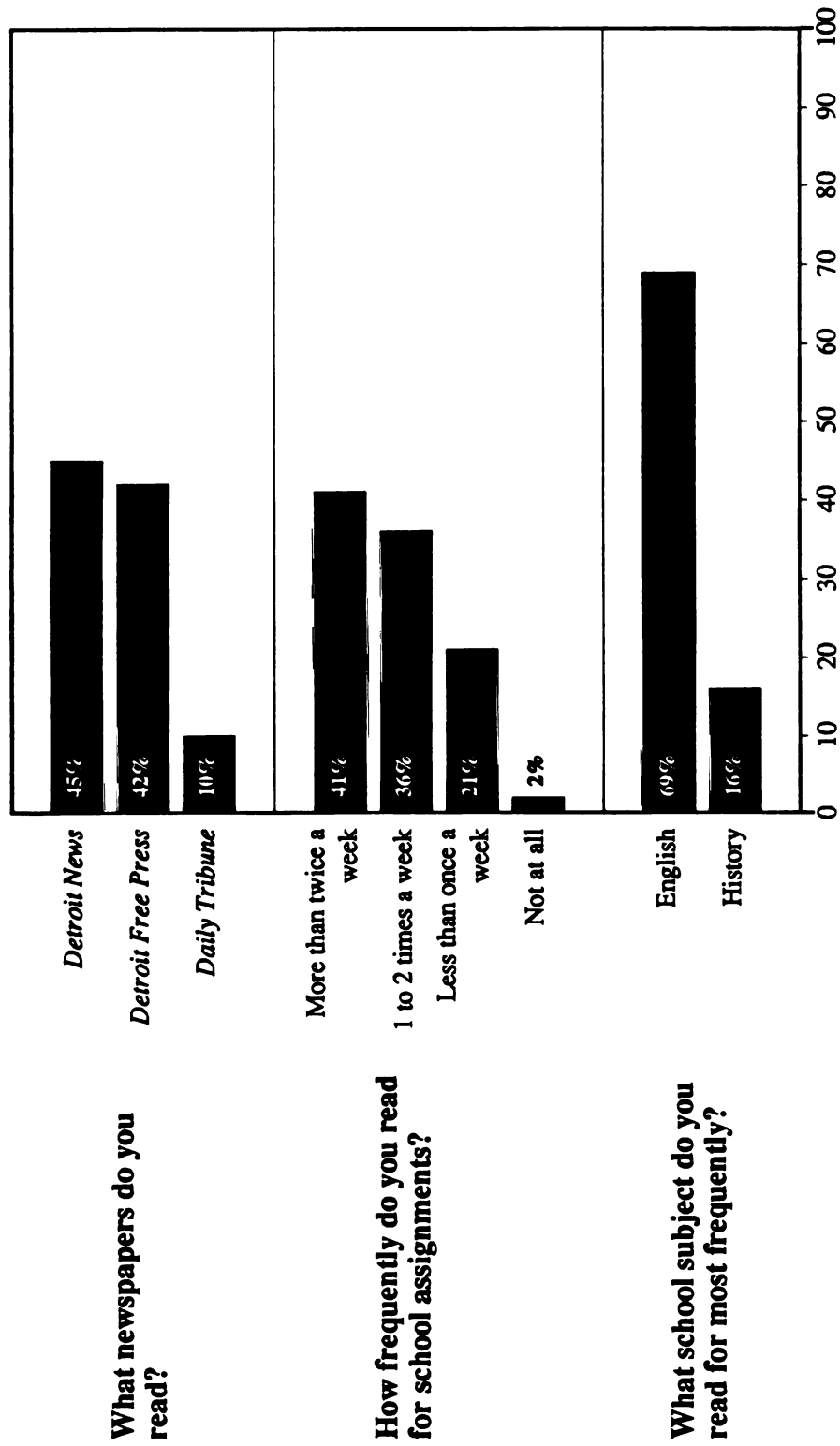


Table 1 (con't.)



For which school subject do you *prefer* reading?

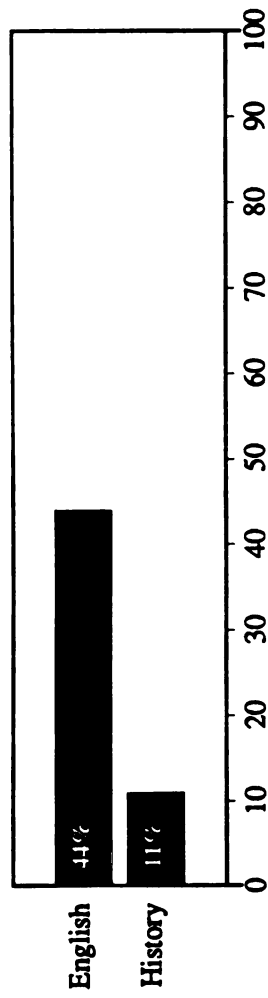
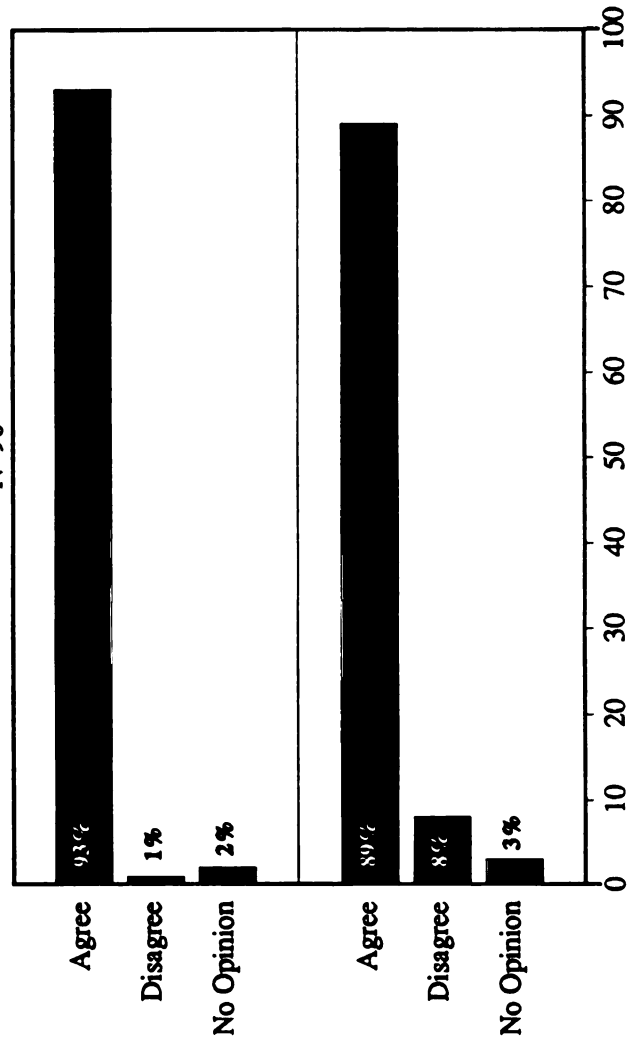


Table 2

Part II

Attitudes About Reading

N=96



Reading is a useful activity.

I like to read.

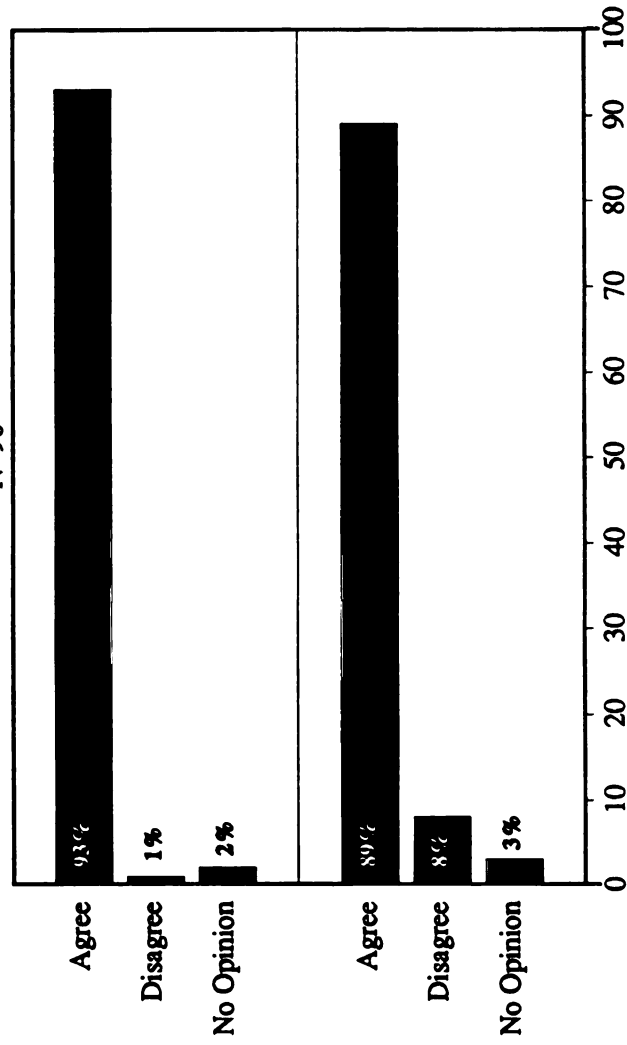
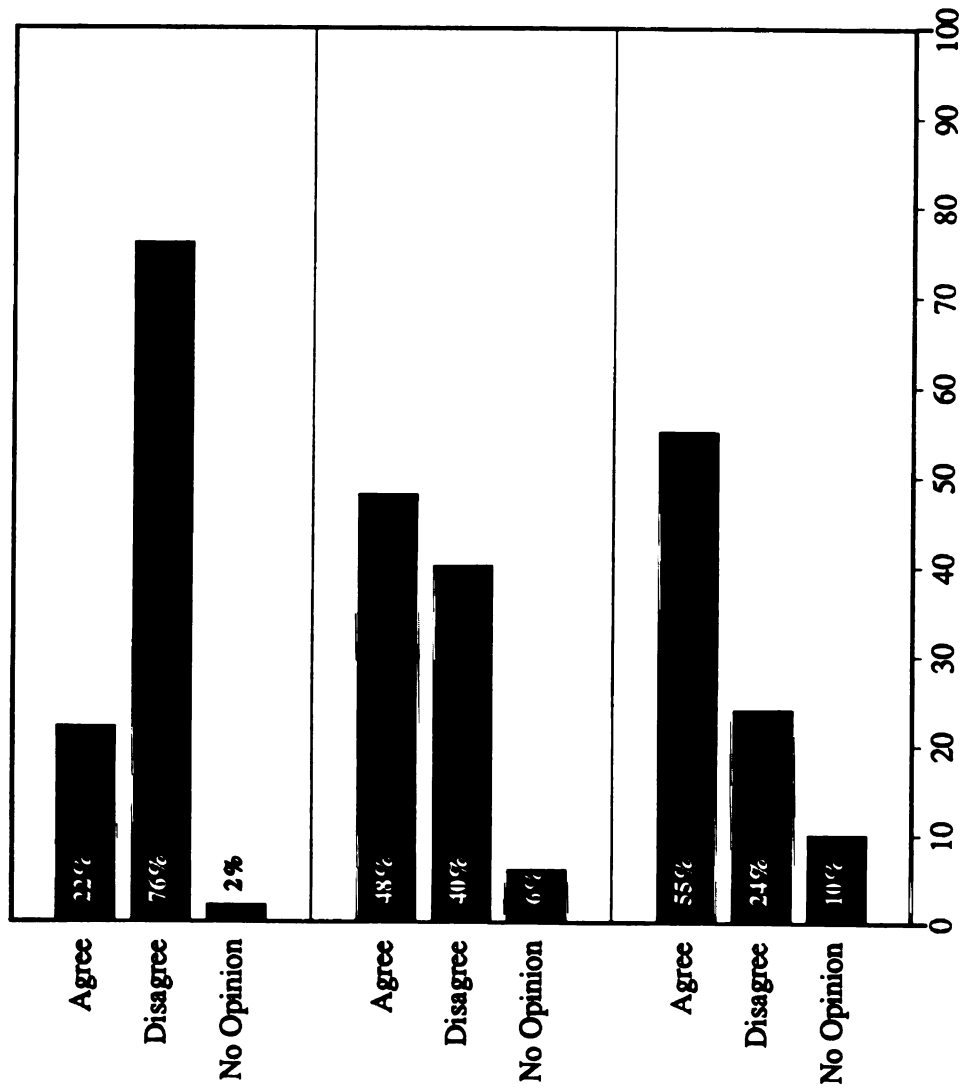


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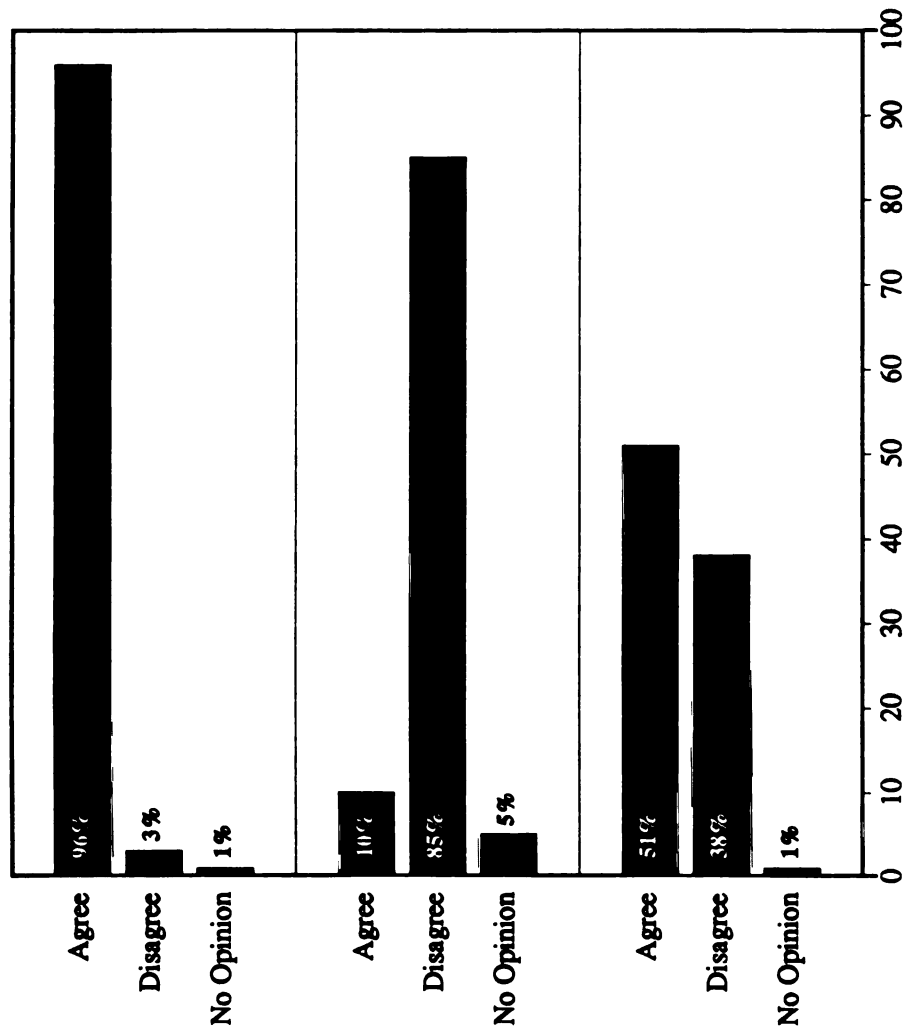
My friends would be surprised to see me reading a book that is not required for class.

When I enjoy reading something, I try to get friends to read it.

Most of my friends like to read.

11-11-11

Table 2 (con't.)



I leaf through magazines or paperback books when I am in a checkout line or waiting in a doctor's office.

I think reading takes too much time and concentration.

Even though I am a busy person, I always somehow find time for reading.

Table 2 (con't.)

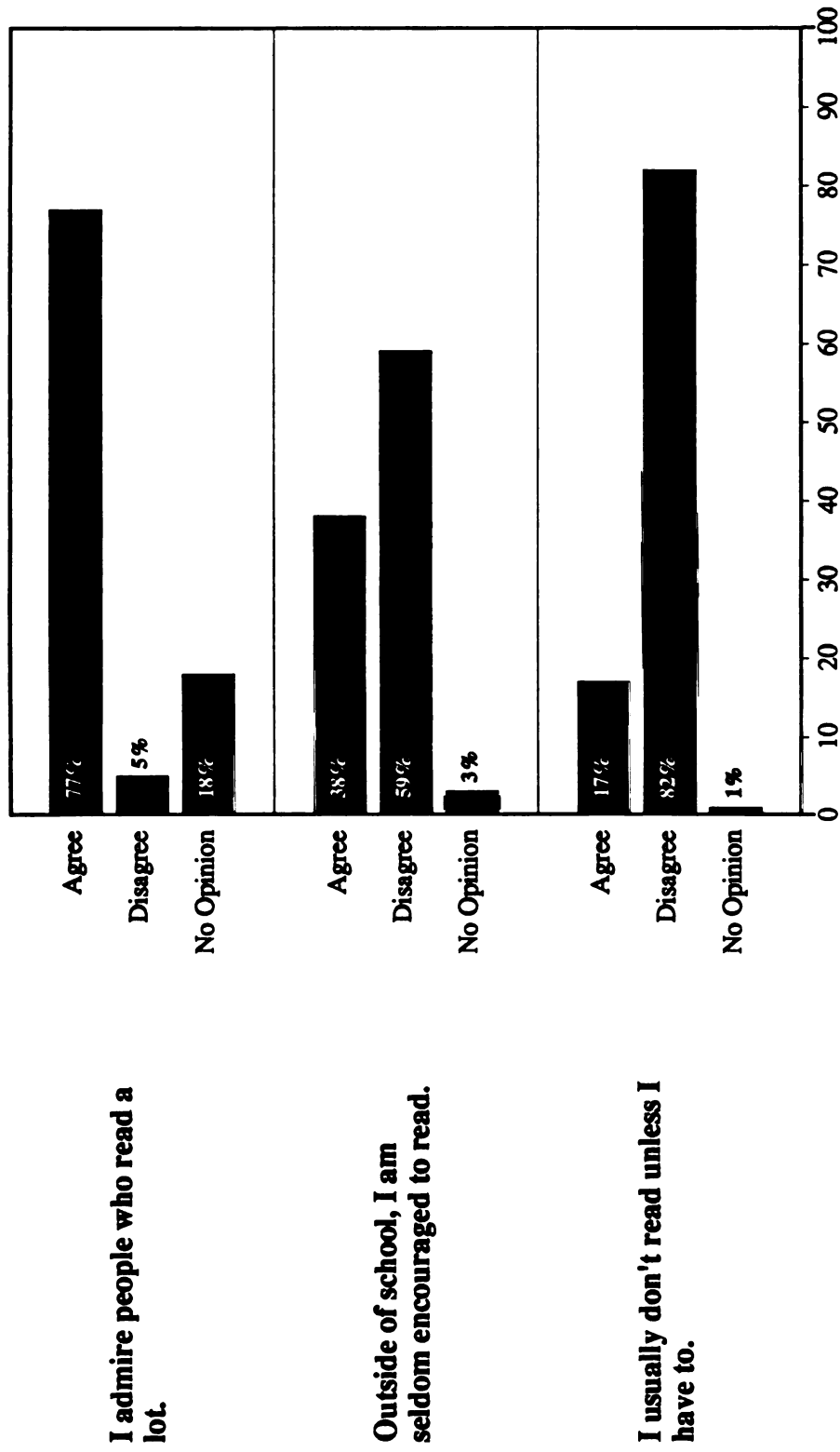


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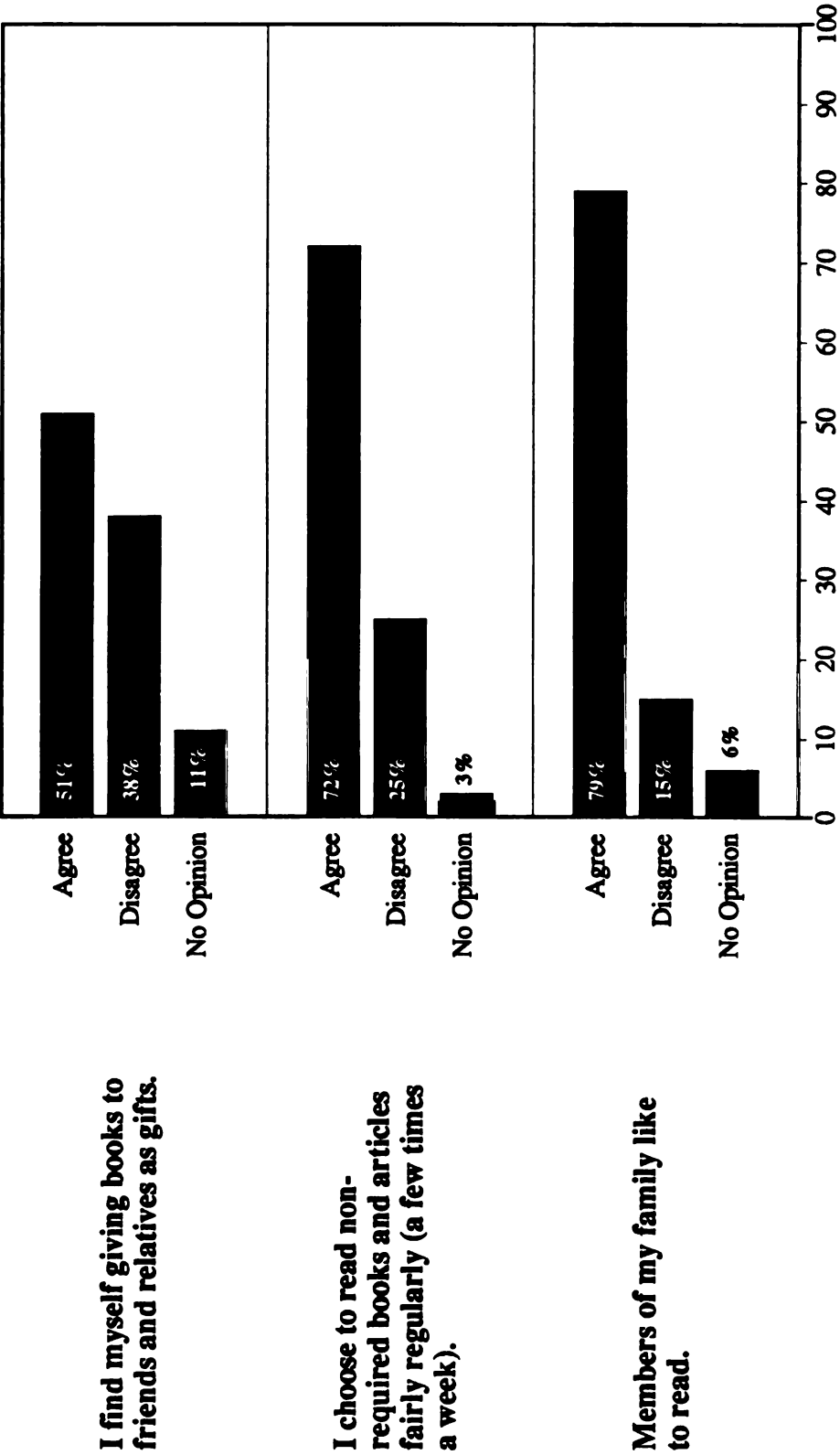


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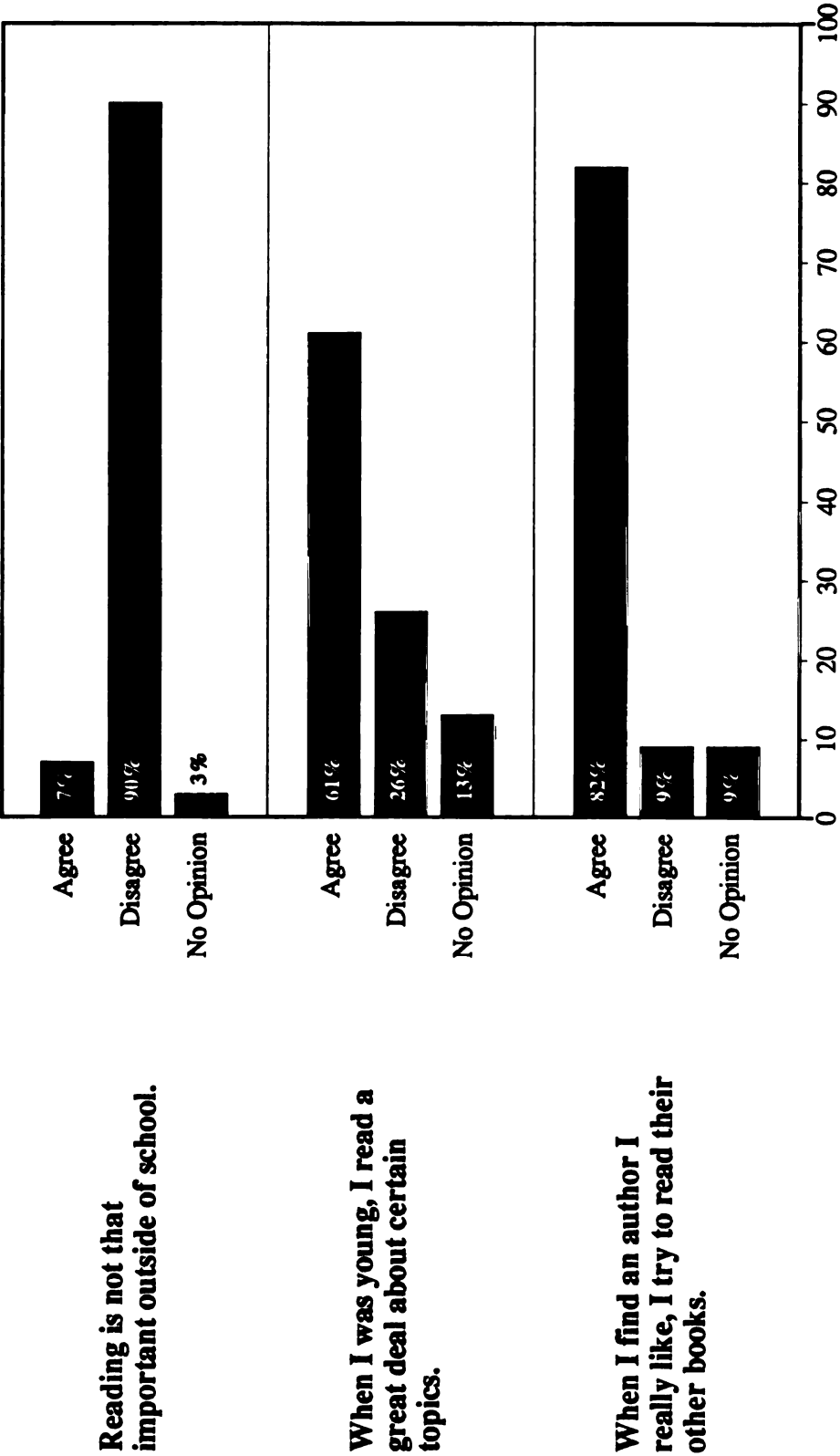


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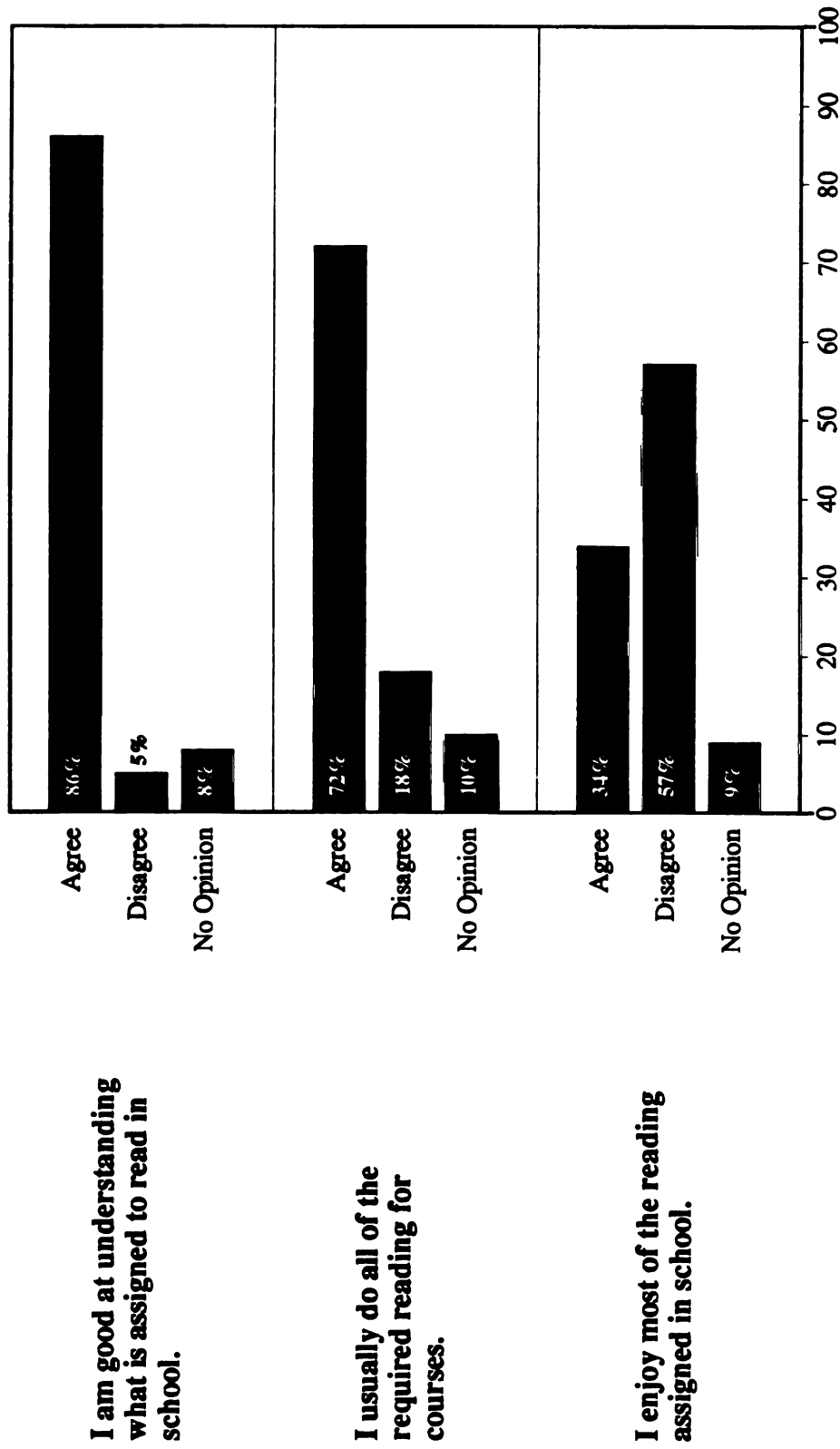


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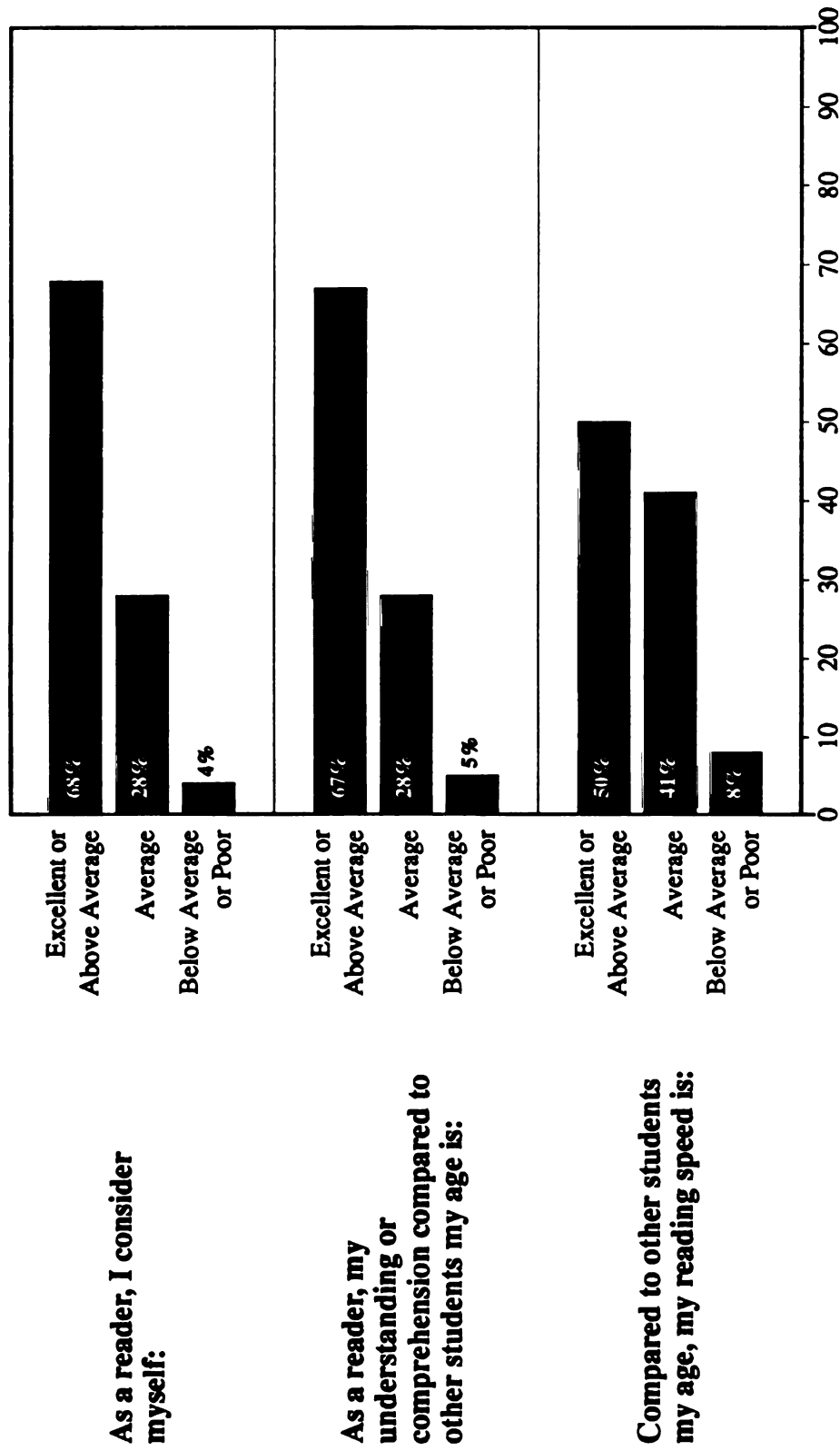


Table 3

Part III

Reading Contexts

Rate each statement on a scale of 1 (Very Like Me) to 5 (Very Unlike Me).

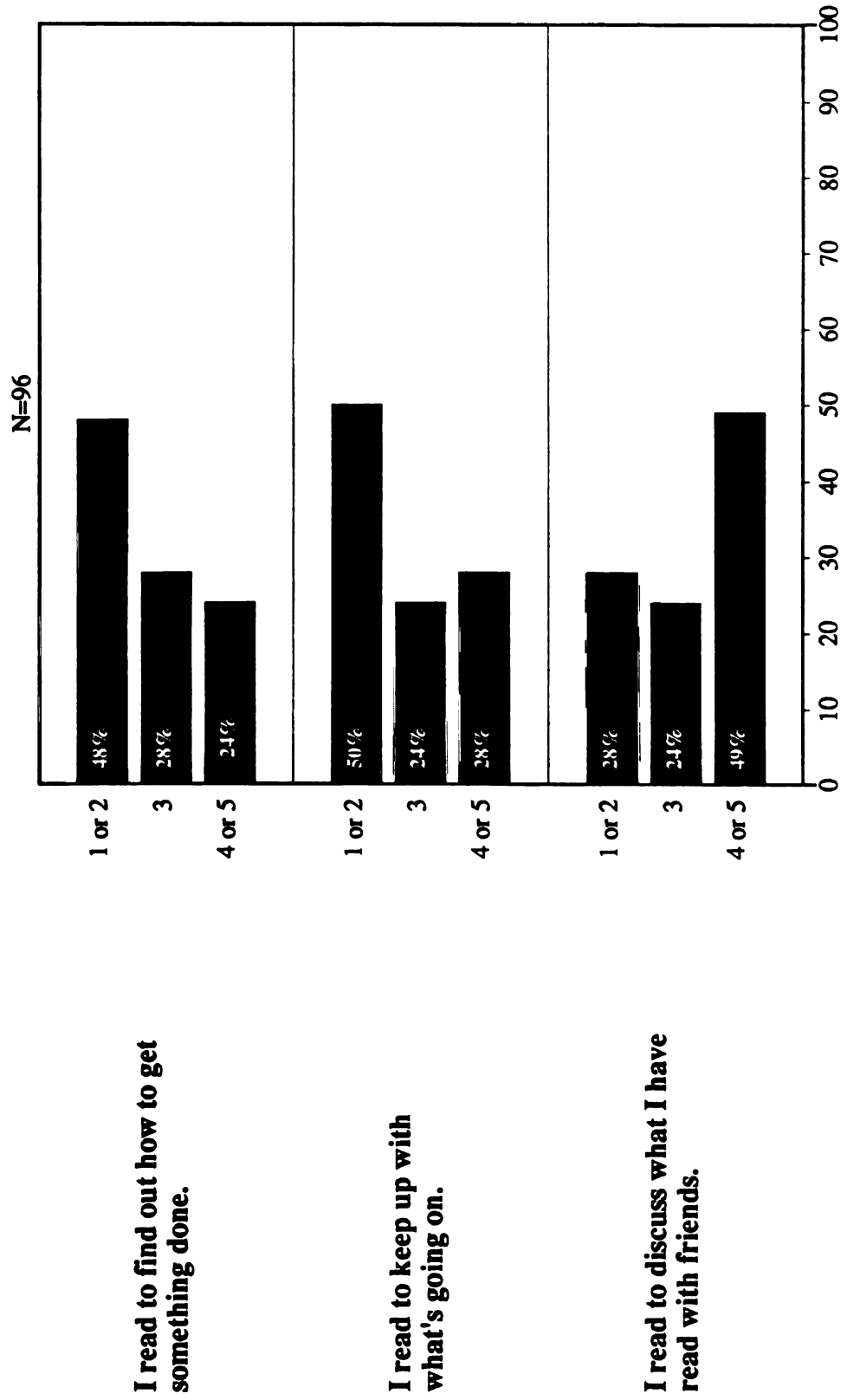
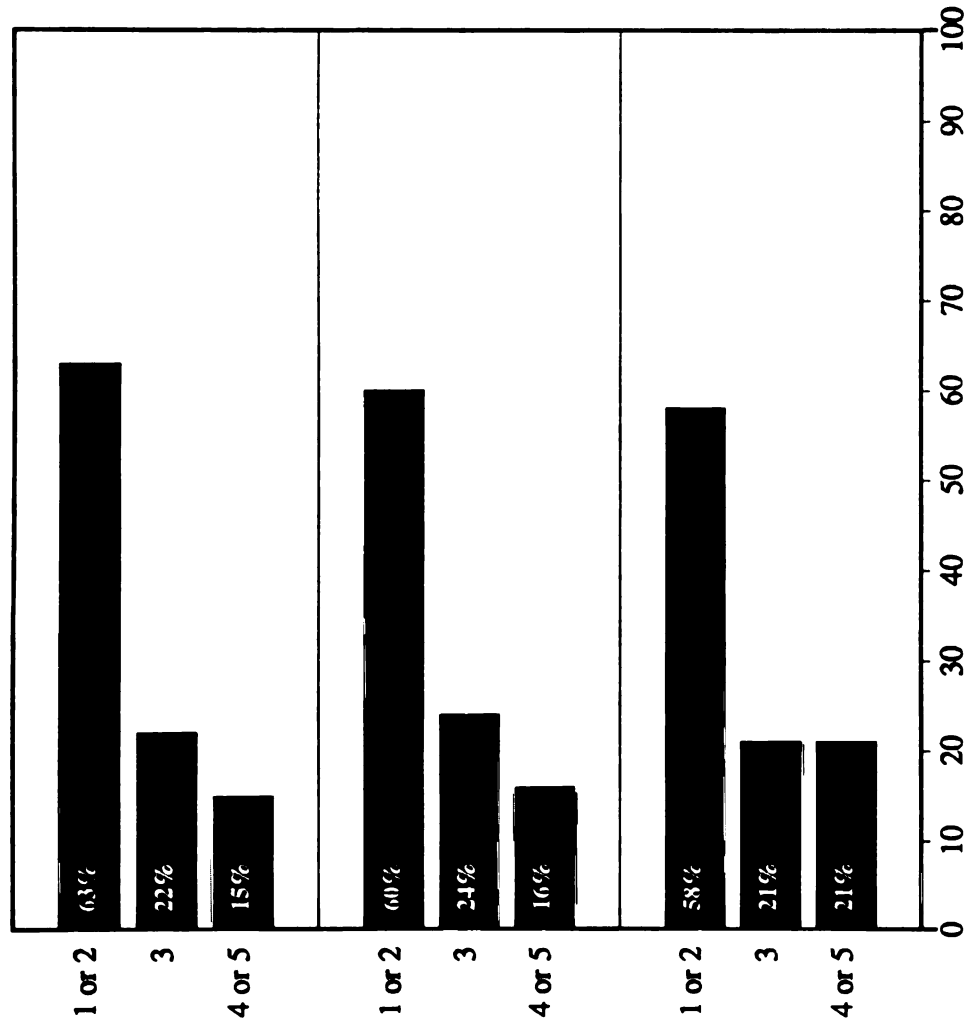


Table 3 (con't.)



I read for relaxation and personal enjoyment or as an escape.

I read to study for personal and academic advancement.

I read to get information about my hobby.

A high frequency of magazine and newspaper reading among students has been cited in several previous studies. For example, in a study of 844 secondary students, Bank (1985) found that newspapers were listed as the most important kind of volunteer reading by 67.5% of the students. While the students favored novels for voluntary reading, newspapers were second in popularity. The frequency in this study also concurs with the findings of Sharon (1973). He examined the reading habits of a national sample of 5,067 adults and concluded that the majority of adults in the study spent most of their reading time on magazines and newspapers. In addition, Lehr (1985) stated that 96% of Americans read magazines and newspapers. Thus, the percentages in this study largely agree with prior conclusions regarding magazine and newspaper reading.

Response to the third question, "Outside of school or at home, did you read any hardcover or paperback books?" was decidedly different: 65% responded that they had, while 25% responded that they had not and 10% did not respond. Even with the promising 65% figure, fully one-third of the students did not choose to read any books during this time, even though they were reading magazines and newspapers during the same period. In this study, the higher frequency of reading magazines and newspapers versus books is a departure from the results of a study done by Andrew and Easley (1959). In their study of the reading interests of 500 seventh- through twelfth-graders, the students found books and magazines much more interesting than newspapers: a trend that is clearly not reflected here.

One reason for the students' preference for newspapers and magazines may be that they come to negatively associate book reading with assigned school reading. Furthermore, their book reading is not

likely to be directed much outside of school, whereas magazines and newspapers--by virtue of consistent, relatively predictable content and lower pricing--are more readily accessible. Another factor may be that the shorter length of reading material found in magazines and newspapers often demands less concentration over a shorter period than book reading. These factors would make it plausible that periodicals are more desirable for students with increasingly fast-paced lifestyles.

The fourth question asked the students the titles of the books they had read during the past month. They listed a variety of titles, the complete list of which may be found in Appendix B. These titles were then categorized according to genre.

Not surprisingly, the highest single category with 23 titles was popular fiction. This included such titles as Dances with Wolves, My Name is Alice, One, and Trinity. This trend concurs with the findings of Andrew and Easley study, which found the 500 students in their survey of 7th through 12th grade predominantly interested in fiction. Shores (1964) had a similar conclusion about a nationwide sample of 6,614 high school students. He asserted that "most high school students want to read literature (57 percent) and especially fiction (49 per cent)" (537).

An equally popular genre for the students with 22 titles mentioned was horror/suspense. Authors such as Dean R. Koontz, V. C. Andrews, and Stephen King were frequently mentioned, along with works such as The Bad Place, The Bourne Identity, It, and Presumed Innocent. As highly visible as these titles are, both in school libraries and in the general population, it is somewhat surprising that this was not the most popular category.

American and world literature titles were virtually equal with 18 and 17 titles, respectively. American literature titles included The Catcher in the Rye, A Farewell to Arms, A Separate Peace, and To Kill a Mockingbird. The most frequently-mentioned title in this category was The Sound and the Fury, largely because it was required reading for the students in the honors sections during the period covered in the questionnaire. These students were also given a list of titles for optional reading, some of which were listed in their responses. These titles included Look Homeward, Angel, My Antonia, and On the Road.

While it is predictable that students would have read works of American literature which are assigned or optional reading in a course, that half of these titles were not part of assigned coursework indicates that students are still discovering canonical works. Clearly, the students are realizing the value of these works as a positive reading experience. At the same time, they are ignoring any stigma which may be attached to preferring such books as outside reading. In fact, these figures suggest that peer involvement in this reading may be occurring, a point which is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Titles in world literature included Brave New World, The Canterbury Tales, Madame Bovary, and Sons and Lovers. The most frequently-mentioned work was Turgenev's Fathers and Sons, which was also required reading for the honors students. Other required titles mentioned were Alice in Wonderland and Siddhartha, and optional titles included Crime and Punishment, The Picture of Dorian Gray, and Wuthering Heights. With the exception of De Profundis and The Jungle Book, all of the other titles

listed in this section were either required or optional reading for the honors students. Such a trend suggests that while there has been exposure to internationally-known works, it has been primarily through coursework and almost exclusively by the students in honors English sections.

Nonfiction was the next category with 12 titles listed. Among those titles were The Dry Years, The Doors, Accounts of Holocaust Victims, and The Autobiography of Malcom X, the last two of which were listed as optional reading in the honors sections. The absence of sports titles from this list is unusual. Gallo (1983) reported on a survey of over 3,000 students in elementary and secondary Connecticut schools and found that sports was the overwhelming favorite of male readers no matter what the grade level. While the students did mention reading sports magazines, there was no mention of book titles in this area.

Drama followed with eight titles, including Arsenic and Old Lace, As You Like It, and A Streetcar Named Desire. Waiting for Godot was the title mentioned most often, again because it was required reading for the honors English students. The infrequency of students reading drama concurs with other studies on student reading preferences such as Norvell (1973) and Gallo (1983), and is perhaps because the genre is based on performance.

There were also eight Fantasy/Science Fiction titles mentioned by the students, such as The Temptress, Kindred Spirits, and The Dragonlance Chronicles. This was also somewhat of a surprise, as this genre, like suspense/mystery has maintained strong popularity among students for quite some time. Following

Fantasy/Science Fiction was Poetry, with only two titles listed:

Selected Poems of Joyce Carol Oates, and Virtuoso.

The students were then asked how many books they had read during the past month. Ninety percent of the students responded, with an average of 2.6 books per student. While the focus of this study is not to compare the responses of the two types of classes, for this question, there was an interesting divergence between the students in the regular literature and composition classes and those in the honors sections. In the regular classes, the students reported an average of 1.6 books read during the past month, while the honors students reported 3.4 books--more than twice the number. This disparity may come from a more demanding reading load for the honors students both in their English class and in their other classes, or from a generally higher propensity toward reading: one which might have directed them toward an honors English class in the first place.

When asked how much they read for enjoyment in their spare time, 44% of the students answered that they did so more than twice a week. Along with the 25% who reported reading for enjoyment 1 to 2 times a week, this shows a high percentage of students making time for leisure reading. Nearly one-quarter of the students--23%--reported reading for enjoyment less than once a week, and 8% responded that they never do. Even with this rather high figure of 69% reading in their spare time, this percentage is a drop from Sharon's study (1973), where 82% of the surveyed adults read during recreational time. However, the percentage of students who report doing outside reading in this study is a dramatic increase over the 1988 NAEP Report. In that study, which assessed the reading habits of 13,000 students in grades 7 through 12, only 50% of

the twelfth-grade students reported reading for fun at least once a week. It must be mentioned, however, that the NAEP Report reflects a much broader cross-section of students throughout the country than does this study, and this disparity is a probable factor in the differing results.

A total of 76% of the students reported reading magazines regularly, on a daily or weekly basis. This percentage agrees with the findings of the National Assessment of Reading and Literature (1979-80) where similarly, a majority of 36,000 seventeen-year-olds reported regular magazine reading. Given the choice of various types of magazines, 45% of the students in this study chose personal health magazines. This is a curious preference--perhaps one which accurately reflects the recent societal concern with personal health and appearance--and one which does not appear as the leading choice in previous studies of reading habits.

The next most frequently-mentioned type was the newsmagazine, chosen by 41% of the students. This was followed by household (32%), sports (24%), and hobby magazines (20%). Other magazine types with lesser mention were automotive (18%), science (15%), and business (11%). When they read one of these magazines, 17% of the students reported reading all of it, while 38% report reading the majority of it. Seventeen percent read a few of the articles.

With a total similar to magazines, 71% of the students read a newspaper on a daily or weekly basis. While the students were not asked how much of these newspapers were commonly read, the titles were evenly distributed between reading the Detroit News (45%) and the Detroit Free Press (42%). Ten percent read the Daily Tribune, while

less than ten percent of the students variously mentioned papers such as the Observer-Eccentric, The Wall Street Journal, and The New York Times. Once more, despite the widely-accepted lower reading level of newspapers and many popular magazines, the responses show that the majority of the students in the survey were active in reading. Furthermore, their choices show an eclectic range of topic areas.

The students were then questioned about their habits and attitudes regarding school reading. When asked how frequently they read for school assignments, 41% responded that they read more than twice a week. Thirty-six percent read one to two times a week, while 21% read less than once a week. Two percent reported not reading for school assignments. Almost one-quarter of the students, then, read for school once a week or less. It is not known whether these students are simply not assigned outside reading, or manage to get along in school without reading what is assigned. Based on the rather high percentage of students who report doing assigned reading regularly, the latter seems to be a more likely scenario.

Sixty-nine percent of the students named English as the subject they read for most frequently. This figure far outdistances History, named by only 16%. Other subjects, such as Science, Biology, and Government, were each mentioned by only 5% or fewer students.

Interestingly, English was named four times as frequently as History as the subject area for which they preferred doing the reading (44% vs. 11%). Once again, other subjects were mentioned by no more than 7% of the students. They had similar responses as to why English was their preferred subject for reading. Twenty-nine percent of the students wrote that their reading assignments for English class were

interesting and/or enjoyable. "I like reading stories," and "I read books that were much more interesting than technical reading" were common responses for this area.

Each of the other response categories were mentioned by less than 10% of the students. Although they are interesting reasons, they were mentioned infrequently. These categories were: 1) Novels are preferred, 2) Reading novels is preferable to reading textbooks, 3) English class provides greater exposure to interesting reading, and 4) English class provides greater freedom of choice for reading. Clearly, the students' English classes seem to provide them with the type of reading they practice and prefer in their everyday lives.

In summary, Part I reveals the following trends about the students' reading habits and attitudes:

1) The majority of students read books, though not as regularly as magazines and newspapers.

2) Their favorite type of book reading is popular fiction and suspense.

3) The students read an average of 2.6 books during the month surveyed, and the honors students reported reading twice as many books as the regular students.

4) The majority of students read for enjoyment in their spare time, and read for school assignments at least 1-2 times per week.

5) The students preferred reading for English class more than their other class reading, particularly compared to reading textbooks.

Reading Attitudes

In Part II of the questionnaire, the students were given statements about reading habits and attitudes and asked to respond whether they

strongly agree, agree, have no opinion, disagree, or strongly disagree. These five categories give the students a greater sense of control over their response choices. In this discussion, however, these categories will be condensed into three broader categories: agree, disagree, and no opinion. As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, five of the statements in this section regard reading and its value in a negative fashion. These statements were inserted throughout the section in an attempt to keep the students alert and consistent in their responses.

"Reading is a useful activity" drew a response of 93% agreement, while only 1% disagreed and 2% had no opinion. Four percent of the students did not respond to this question. Clearly, whether it be for efferent or aesthetic purposes, to use Louise Rosenblatt's terms, the students at least claim that reading has some value in their lives. Eighty-nine percent of the students agreed with the statement, "I like to read." Eight percent disagreed, and 3% had no opinion. These figures indicate that the large majority of the students surveyed are not only recognizing a usefulness to reading, but also stated that they enjoy it.

The responses painted an interesting picture of the students' emphasis on reading in situations involving their friends. Seventy-six percent of the students disagreed with the statement, "My friends would be surprised to see me reading a book that is not required for class," the first of the statements of a more negative nature. This would indicate that three-quarters of the students are comfortable with their identities as readers. Interestingly, 22% of the students agreed with the statement, and 2% had no opinion. This relatively high figure

indicates that while these students may recognize the value of and enjoy reading, it is not something they do much outside of classroom assignments. Including the presence of friends in the question may indicate that they do not share much of their reading pleasure with peers. Furthermore, these students may not see their friends as valuing reading, and thereby maintain a "covert prestige." This concept, originated by William Labov in his studies of the linguistic habits of New York City youths, is defined by Walt Wolfram as "Language forms or patterns that are positively valued in a local setting or by a special group, despite the fact that these items are socially stigmatized in a society at large" (301). In this situation, the term may apply to the practice of students who--even though they are avid readers--claim to do little reading as a way of maintaining prestige within a nonstandard context.

That these students are not particularly interested in sharing their reading experiences is demonstrated in this section through the statement, "When I enjoy reading something, I try to get friends to read it." Forty-eight percent of the students agreed, while 40% disagreed and 6% had no opinion. Six percent of the students did not respond. While slightly less than half of them would try to get their friends to read, an almost-equal number would not. Interestingly, only 55% of the students agreed that "Most of my friends like to read." Twenty-four percent of them disagreed with this, while 10% had no opinion and 11% did not respond. Such a small majority is unusual compared to the largely positive overall response to reading by the students.

These figures may indicate that, ironically, many of the students in this survey who enjoy reading have friends who do not. It is also

possible, however, that in normal social contacts, the students here are unaware that their friends enjoy reading and thus assume that they do not. Another possibility is that they do not believe there will be much status gained among their friends by being an enthusiastic reader.

The response to the statement, "I leaf through magazines or paperback books when I am in a checkout line or waiting in a doctor's office" indicates that they will turn to reading in short-term waiting situations or out of boredom. Ninety-six percent of the students agreed with the statement, while only 3% disagreed and 1% had no opinion. Another implication of this response is that it demonstrates the success of marketing magazines in places where people will most likely be bored or waiting, such as checkout lines and waiting rooms.

The next negative statement drew a stronger response than the previous one. Eighty-five percent of the students disagreed with the statement, "I think reading books takes too much time and concentration." Ten percent agreed, and 5% expressed no opinion. This response would support earlier claims of active reading habits and indicates that even while the students show a strong propensity toward magazines and newspapers, they are not averse to book reading.

The response was more divided over the statement, "Even though I am a busy person, I always somehow find time for reading." Fifty-one percent of the students agreed, while 38% disagreed and 1% had no opinion. Despite their professed interest in reading, only a slim majority makes time for it when schedules are filled. This trend is consistent with the findings of Maxwell (1977). In his study, amounts of leisure reading decreased as the students got older and busier. Thus, the 15-year-olds--the oldest students in his study--showed a

marked decline in leisure reading. Such a trend comes as no surprise considering the distractions associated with high school years: concerns over college, relationships, extracurricular activities, etc., not to mention the standard distractions from reading such as television and music.

Nevertheless, the students reinforced their belief that reading is valuable, as evidenced by their response to "I admire people who read a lot." Seventy-seven percent agreed, while only 5% disagreed and 18% expressed no opinion. Once more, even though they do not always make the time for it themselves, the students still indicate a belief that reading is important. Again, such responses must be considered warily. While answering in this fashion, the students may also believe this to be a more acceptable survey response, thus perhaps only paying lip service to the importance of reading when they are otherwise occupied.

In response to "Outside of school, I am seldom encouraged to read," fifty-nine percent of the students disagreed with the statement, while 38% agreed with it and 3% expressed no opinion. A majority, obviously, are encouraged to read outside of school. However, the 38% agreement seems surprisingly high in light of the generally high interest in reading the students demonstrated in earlier questions. Such a percentage suggests that many students come to value reading without the strong home/external influences previously thought to be crucial in stimulating reading interest.

For example, a study by Hansen (1969) on the home influence on children's independent reading attitudes concluded that this home literary environment revealed "the only significant contribution" to independent reading (22). Working with fifth- through eighth-grade

students, he disagrees with the common conclusion that socioeconomic factors wield the greatest influence on reading habits and attitudes. His conclusions support the idea that it is what parents do which is more crucial in stimulating reading than what they are. The Reading Report Card (1984) and Maxwell (1977) both reached conclusions similar to Hansen's. Both studies suggested that students' reading attitudes are significantly shaped by home encouragement: a trend which is also evident in this study. However, it is interesting to note that a substantial number of students here mention that they are not encouraged to read at home, while they have already indicated a high interest level through earlier questionnaire responses.

This self-directed reading interest indicated by the students is confirmed by their response to the statement, "I usually don't read unless I have to." Eighty-two percent of the students disagreed with this, compared to only 17% who agreed and 1% who had no opinion. Certainly, a large majority of these students see reading as a task which is not limited to classroom assignments. Such enthusiasm, however, does not extend as significantly to gift-giving: 51% agreed with the statement, "I find myself giving books to friends and relatives as gifts." Thirty-eight percent disagreed, and 11% expressed no opinion. Of course, such decisions are a matter of personal preference, and the slim majority indicates that--as they have indicated previously--many of the students are not interested in sharing their reading interests with others.

Seventy-two percent of the students agreed with the statement, "I choose to read non-required books and articles fairly regularly (a few times a week)." Twenty-five percent disagreed, and 3% had no opinion.

This agreement would support their earlier responses of a largely active interest in reading and a habit of making time for it in their lives outside of school.

Though a relatively high number of students indicated that they are not encouraged to read outside of school, 79% agreed with the statement, "Members of my family like to read." Fifteen percent disagreed, and 6% had no opinion. Such figures indicate that while active encouragement to read may be inconsistent, students are still exposed to the example of family members enjoying reading. Thus, such indirect encouragement and exposure to reading may help to improve their attitudes toward it.

An impressive 90% of the students disagreed with the statement, "Reading is not that important outside of school." Seven percent disagreed, and 3% had no opinion. Once more, the students claimed to value reading beyond their school environment. We must remember that what they profess to believe and what they actually do may not be synonymous. Nevertheless, the attitude revealed here shows a marked difference with the findings on reading of the 1988 National Assessment of Educational Progress, where the students reported doing very little reading in school and, as was mentioned previously, 50% of the 12th grade students reported reading outside of school only once a week or less.

Sixty-one percent of the students agreed with "When I was young, I read a great deal about certain topics." While it is not a conclusive picture of their early reading habits, this response nonetheless indicates an early interest in reading. Despite the fact that there is a relatively high current interest in reading, as demonstrated by the responses to earlier questions, 26% of the students disagreed with this

statement and 13% had no opinion.

"When I find an author I really like, I try to read their other books" was agreed to by 82% of the students. Nine percent disagreed, while nine percent had no opinion. Again, a substantial number of them enjoy their reading enough to pursue it further on their own.

The students in the survey are secure about their school reading, evidenced by an 86% agreement with the statement, "I am good at understanding what is assigned to read in school." Only 5% disagreed, and 8% offered no opinion. This is an especially important figure, as a comfortable school reading situation may improve their overall reading attitude. This particular idea will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter, where the students who were interviewed discuss the impact of school reading on their outside reading.

A large percentage of the students--72%--agreed to the statement, "I usually do all of the required reading for courses." Eighteen percent disagreed, and 10% had no opinion. Such agreement reinforces their earlier responses, which indicate a positive disposition toward doing school reading.

In contrast to their professed willingness to do their assigned school reading, a mere 34% of the students agreed to the statement, "I enjoy most of the reading assigned in school." On the other hand, 57% of the students disagreed, and 9% had no opinion. While a substantial number of students admit that they do their school reading and feel they do it well, apparently it is with little enthusiasm.

Three statements at the conclusion of Part II ask the students to rate themselves as readers on a scale from poor to excellent. The first statement was, "As a reader, I consider myself" Twenty-six

percent of the students considered themselves excellent readers. Forty-two percent considered themselves above average, while 28% listed average, 4% listed below average, and none listed themselves as poor readers. A combined total of 66% of the students seeing themselves as above average or excellent readers would indicate a generally positive self-image among the students participating in the survey. This result is consistent with the National Assessment of Reading and Literature (1979-80), where the researchers found that the students in the study--numbering over 100,000--considered themselves good readers. While the percentage of confident readers in this study is promising, it is also somewhat predictable, as students with much lower reading self-esteem would not have been likely to participate in the survey.

Nevertheless, in relation to this positive self-image in reading, Lampert and Saunders (1976) conducted a study to determine significant factors causing a difference between the categories of "reader" and "non-reader." They surveyed 340 students in a suburban Boston high school, and determined that these labels reflect more reader self-perception than measurable skill differences. The "readers" in their study appeared to be distinguished "first of all by an interest in, or tolerance for, print material which requires sustained attention" (36). Furthermore, despite the skill differences among them, the "readers" in this study reported being read to more when they were young, having more books brought into the home, and having more family discussion of all media. These same characteristics of enthusiastic readers will be examined closely in the present study, particularly through the student interviews in the next chapter.

The students were also asked to respond to, "As a reader, my

understanding or comprehension compared to other students my age is"

Interestingly, there was virtually the same combined total of students choosing "Excellent" or "Above Average" as the previous statement: 67%. Once again, 28% of the students listed themselves as average, and 5% chose below average. None of the students listed their understanding or comprehension as poor. These responses strongly suggest that, to their credit, the students view comprehension as the basis of successful reading.

When asked to rate their reading speed, however, their responses changed dramatically. Seventeen percent of the students thought their speed was "Excellent," while 33% rated themselves as "Above Average," for a combined total of 50%. Forty-one percent of the students thought themselves to be average, and 8% believed their reading speed was below average or poor.

These last two responses have interesting correlations with the work of Carlsen (1988). In this study, a relatively high 67% of the students believe their understanding or comprehension to be good. Conversely, Carlsen's study mentions that a frequent insecurity of college-age and adult readers is their reading ability. Furthermore, these same readers mentioned concern or insecurity about their reading speed, a situation which largely agrees with the responses here. While Carlsen admits that he did not collect statistical data, his research was conducted on thousands of case studies over some thirty years, suggesting that noticeable trends such as these would have occurred consistently over that period.

To summarize, Part II suggests the following trends about the students' survey responses:

1) A large majority of the students claim to enjoy reading and to see it as valuable in their lives.

2) Even though they read outside of school, the students do not read as frequently when they are busy with other activities.

3) Despite their own willingness to read, the students seldom share reading with their peers.

4) A majority of students claim that they receive encouragement to read from their families, and almost all of the students say that their families like to read.

5) The students claim to do their assigned school reading and are confident about their comprehension of it, even though most of them indicated that they do not enjoy it.

6) The students completing the survey considered themselves to be good readers.

Reading Contexts

In Part III of the survey, the students were given various reading contexts and were asked to rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 5, from "Very Like Me" to "Very Unlike Me." These statements were meant to elicit reactions which could profile the different purposes of student reading and the extent to which these different purposes occur. The first statement was, "I read to find out how to get something done." Forty-eight percent of the students chose 1 or 2, 28% chose 3, and 24% chose four or five. These figures indicate that while the students clearly read for tasks both in and out of school, it is not the most frequent type of reading they do, either through necessity or choice.

There was a similar response among students reading for news or current events. This is shown through their responses to, "I read to

keep up with what's going on." Fifty percent choose 1 or 2, 24% chose 3, and 28% chose 4 or 5. Though slightly more students agreed with this statement than the previous one, slightly more also disagreed. This suggests a slightly stronger propensity for both informational reading and shorter works, as also seen in the number of students reading newspapers and newsmagazines.

Once more, the responses demonstrate that the students are not particularly interested in sharing their reading responses with friends. "I read to discuss what I have read with friends" had only 28% respond to 1 or 2, while 24% responded to 3, and 49% responded to 4 or 5. As was seen in the responses in Part II, the students' reading habits are not directed toward interaction with their friends.

Not surprisingly, the highest response to 1 or 2--63%--came to the statement, "I read for relaxation and personal enjoyment or as an escape." Twenty-two percent chose 3, and 15% chose 5. Clearly, the students see themselves as readers most strongly through their reading for entertainment or escape. This shows a marked change from the results of the National Assessment of Reading and Literature (1979-80), where the researchers found that the students showed only a "moderate" interest in reading as a source of personal enjoyment (11).

In the NARL study, the largest percentage of students--nearly 92%--reported reading most frequently for information. Even though they acknowledged reading for a variety of reasons, such as promoting personal growth or being valuable for the culture, the students preferred "utilitarian, practical reasons over reasons having to do with personal growth and pleasure" (10). For the students in this study, the opposite was true. While they reported reading for utilitarian

purposes, such reading was their next-to-last last preference. Clearly, they have developed an active interest in reading beyond everyday informational purposes, realizing a greater value in it for enjoyment and personal growth.

Similarly, the students in this study report a substantially higher interest in reading for enjoyment than the students in the 1988 NAEP report, where the students reported reading magazines and newspapers most frequently and primarily for news and information. Though the cross-section of students is much larger than the one studied here, they reported seldom reading books or stories for personal enjoyment. The report states that "40 percent reported that they never read stories or novels or only did so on a yearly basis" (37).

In response to the statement, "I read to study for personal and academic advancement," 60% chose 1 or 2, while 24% chose 3, and 16% chose 4 or 5. Again, a predictably high response when the core of their schooling involves reading. This figure also comes with little surprise as the high school which they attend maintains a comparatively high degree of academic competition.

Fifty-eight percent of the students chose 1 or 2 for the statement, "I read to get more information about my hobby." Twenty-one percent of them chose 3, while 21% chose 4 or 5. Not surprisingly, a small majority of students find the reading associated with their hobbies to be the most interesting.

In summary, Part III showed the students to have read most frequently for relaxation or escape, followed by personal/academic advancement, and then for hobby information. Their clear preference for reading as relaxation or escape demonstrates a strong interest in

reading outside of school, an interest which will be examined through the interviews in the next chapter.

The final section of the questionnaire, Part IV, gave the students five open-ended questions, in order for them to explain more fully their reading attitudes and experiences. Furthermore, these questions were intended to elicit the students' underlying assumptions about the reading process. These assumptions may provide further understanding as to why the students respond to reading as they do.

This discussion will focus on only the most common responses for each question, responses which have been paraphrased for the purposes of collation and classification. As a result, when they can be reasonably computed, the percentages will not total 100%, as responses mentioned very infrequently were not included in the results.

The first question was, "What do people do when they read?" Hopefully such a question will indicate how students approach their own reading; whether, for instance, they commonly emphasize comprehension, phonics, word recognition, etc. The most frequent response was that readers "Stimulate their minds and imaginations," mentioned by 21% of the students. The next most-frequent response was "Relax" and/or "Escape," followed by "They put themselves in the story." Clearly, the dominant belief is that reading is comprised of a dynamic interaction with the text. The majority of responses all pointed toward the reader having an active role in the interaction through creating mental images from the words in context. Not one student mentioned sounding out words or simply recognizing spellings. Their responses here were consistent with their earlier ones in the questionnaire, citing a clear emphasis on reading as a means of recreation and imagination.

There was a somewhat surprising response to the question, "When you are reading and you come to something you don't know, what do you do?" The largest number of students (33%) responded with "Look it up in a dictionary." It must be reiterated that such a time-honored response may be the result of trying to impress the researcher. Nevertheless, the students identified this as their most common--albeit impractical--habit. It is extremely unlikely that so many students would do so.

Nearly as many students (30%) said that they skip over what they do not understand. While doing so may not elucidate their reading in the same manner as looking up definitions of unknown words, ultimately the students may understand the troublesome text through later contextual clues. It is probable that they have come to understand this concept through practice even though it may not be overtly validated in the classroom. Furthermore, this strategy is much more of a believable practice than searching a dictionary.

"Looking for contextual clues," in fact, was the next most popular answer (28%). This practice was also supported by eighteen percent of the students, who answered that they "Reread" when they do not understand something. Eighteen percent of the students said that they "Ask someone else." It is interesting that such a dramatic number of students by this point in their lives have internalized a traditional practice such as looking up unknown words. A greater percentage of students, however, obviously do not have the same reliance upon particular words and prefer to find meaning through context at the expense of understanding all the words on a page.

The next question was "What do you think makes a person a good

reader?" Such a question should allow students to express what they value and believe is a good reader, whether or not they consider themselves as such. Not surprisingly, the largest response (31%) was for "Ability to comprehend." The next most-frequent answer (21%) was "Reading a lot," followed by "Enjoyment" (15%). This emphasis on understanding, frequency, and enjoyment is consistent with the attitudes expressed earlier in the questionnaire through the objective questions and statements. Other responses with only minimal mention were: "Cares about reading," "Speed," and "Choosing challenging books." These last two were surprising in their infrequency, as a long-standing stereotype of a "good" reader is one who can read difficult books quickly. In addition, it is interesting that they do not see reading speed as a significant concern here, yet they mention it earlier in the survey as a point of insecurity. This may suggest that while the students are concerned about their reading rate, it is not a concern connected to the quality of their reading.

The students were also asked, "How did you learn to read?" Interestingly, the responses were equal between "At school" and "With parents" at 44%. Many students included particularly vivid memories of both experiences. Several students recalled having their parents read to them, whether as a nightly habit or reading some memorable work, such as The Bible. Similarly, other students would credit a kindergarten or first grade teacher--and frequently recall their name--with teaching them to read. Only incidental mention (less than 3% each) was given to phonics, reading with a sibling, or learning alone. It must be pointed out that such a high response to learning to read at school does not preclude these same students from having an equally influential learning

experience at home. In fact, research has suggested that students such as these--who have had initially positive school reading experiences--were likely to have had similarly positive experiences at home prior to beginning school.

The final question of the survey asked the students, "How can you tell that you are (or are not) a good reader?" Once more, the largest response (46%) was for "Comprehension." Their response reinforces what they had indicated previously: the students judge successful reading through understanding the material. Speed and enjoyment were distant second and third choices, being mentioned by 9% and 8%, respectively.

Summary

The overall student responses to the questionnaire suggest the following trends:

1. Virtually all of the students reported reading newspapers and magazines. They prefer local newspapers and personal health and newsmagazines.

2. Two-thirds of them read books for enjoyment outside of school at least once a week. When they do so, they prefer popular fiction and works of horror/suspense. Although they report reading works of British and American literature, it is predominantly through having it assigned to them in an English class.

3. They read an average of 2.6 books during the survey period. Students in the honors sections, however, averaged reading over twice the number of books as students in the regular English sections.

4. Three-quarters of the students read for school assignments at least once per week, and an equal number of students report reading most frequently for English assignments. English was also the clearly

preferred subject area for school reading.

5. Virtually all of the students in the survey stated that they like to read and that they believe reading to be a useful activity. While they will turn to reading out of boredom, they do admit that making time for reading is not a high priority when they are busy.

6. Reading has ambiguous social significance for them: an equal number would share as would not share their reading with their friends either through discussion or recommendations.

7. The majority of students are encouraged to read at home, and a larger majority reported that members of their family like to read.

8. They normally do the required reading in their courses and are confident in their ability to understand it, although a majority of students reported not enjoying their assigned reading.

9. The students in the survey have a high self-image as readers, particularly about comprehension. They have substantially lower confidence in their reading speed, however.

10. The most common purposes for reading were relaxation or escape, followed by personal and academic advancement, and information about a hobby.

11. The students see reading as a dynamic interaction between the text and their own mental images and experiences. This point is reiterated by their belief that a good reader--whether it is themselves or someone else--is defined by an ability to comprehend text, read a great deal, and enjoy what is read.

12. They credit learning to read equally between their parents and school experiences.

The survey results here suggest that the students have a frequent

interaction with print. They prefer to read magazines and newspapers on a regular basis, and this is a profile which fits most existing research on student reading habits. Although the students in this survey do not report reading books as frequently as magazines and newspapers, they do report reading books outside of class frequently, particularly for escape and relaxation: a trend which is more promising than those reported in most prior studies. Their primary outside-reading choices of popular fiction and horror/suspense confirms the findings of previous studies which examined reading preferences. Though they report a fairly high incidence of reading canonical works, it is done because of school assignments.

In school, the students generally do their assigned reading--a finding which largely disagrees with previous findings. Studies on school reading have not significantly addressed student attitudes toward it. Not surprisingly, this survey shows that even though students will do their school reading, they generally do not enjoy it. They do, however, have confidence in their reading abilities, and measure their reading success through comprehension.

This study departs from similar previous studies most dramatically in that it addresses a broader context of high school student reading: personal attitudes and experiences as well as those regarding home and school. Prior research has tended to focus primarily on one factor and then generalized about the correlation with the others. Furthermore, this study addresses the reading habits and attitudes of higher-achieving students, a segment which is seldom singled-out in other studies.

The following chapter will address the responses of students who

were interviewed for more in-depth information on their reading habits, attitudes, and experiences. The students interviewed were chosen according to their responses in the survey which demonstrated them to be the most prolific and enthusiastic readers. By selecting and interviewing them about their experiences, we can work backward to examine the factors which have contributed to their current positive attitude toward reading and thus examine their reading backgrounds more fully.

CHAPTER IV

STUDENT INTERVIEW RESULTS

After the questionnaires were scored, the top fifteen students were chosen for interviews based on their profiles in the questionnaire as the most enthusiastic and proficient readers. The interviews were conducted in order to gain more in-depth information about the students' reading experiences, and the development of their reading through the influence of their families, friends, and school. It is from this point that we may work backward from their responses toward significant influences which led them to their high status as student readers.

The student responses to the interview questions revealed the following about their varied experiences:

- 1) They enjoyed early success in and enthusiasm for reading, and have maintained it throughout their high school years.
- 2) They have maintained a high reading self-esteem, and recognize that self-esteem carrying over into their everyday lives.
- 3) Their families have taken an active role in modeling positive reading behavior and encouraging it in the home.
- 4) The students recognize the positive influence of friends and other non-family sources, such as librarians and teachers.
- 5) Overall, their school experiences have had a positive impact on their experience with and exposure to reading.
- 6) They attribute their strong propensity toward reading primarily to the influence of their families, their classroom experiences, and their history of favorable experiences with reading.

I made an effort in this chapter to present the student responses

in their own words; consequently, the student responses reproduced here have been edited sparingly and only to maintain the continuity of the answer. This allows us to hear their voices about their experiences, a technique used quite effectively in Carlsen's Voices of Readers (1988).

As with the questionnaire responses, there exists the possibility that student responses can be shaped out of a desire to give what they perceive to be a "correct" or "right" answer. In anticipation of this, the questions often attempt to get at the same information through different avenues; some questions may be repetitive, yet they seek to ensure consistent responses throughout the interview.

Reading Experiences

The interviews began with a general question: "What can you remember most about your reading experiences?" This question was deliberately broad for several reasons. First, it allowed the students to answer in any manner they wished; they were free to choose the direction of their response. Hopefully then, they could begin the interview situation with relative ease. Second, it allowed some insight into their first reaction to their reading experiences. Often first responses are fascinating about meaningful experiences: they can be revealing since the students may not have prioritized their answers yet. Nevertheless, the first question did provide for a fascinating variety of response.

Four of the students answered this question with comments about their current reading habits:

Rose - Before my senior year, I tried to read a lot of classics and they got really boring, some of them . . . I usually read in strings or something that can keep my interest. I read magazines a lot. I don't know if I read a

lot but I read when I have time. I remember being a member of the Troy book club . . . I went to the library a lot when I was little.

Lee - I read a lot on impulse. When I find something that is interesting, I pretty much won't put it down until it is finished. The reading I have been doing lately has been out of guitar magazines, sports magazines, and humor magazines . . . I like to read but lately I've been pressed for time.

Aveek - I used to read a lot of classics, but now I'm into bestselling novels. I read a classic now and then, but it is when someone mentions it to me. I used to like to read Shakespeare, but that was more of something that was programmed into my mind to read. After a while I noticed that there were some other books that were a little more interesting . . . Now I tend to pick out books by who the author is.

Joe - My reading experiences have been pretty good. I like to read fiction, though every now and then I'll read a biography. I just finished one on Adolph Hitler and one on Little Richard. Mostly I read fiction, though, especially horror writers like Stephen King and Dean R. Koontz.

These accounts are typical of the variety of student reading experiences. From Shakespeare to guitar magazines, their choices alternately reflect hobbies, casual interests, and academic conditioning. Other students choose to comment on the influence of reading in their lives.

Neal - Books influence the way I think and act; they are also a major force in my personality. Reading magazines have been important, too. I like to keep current on various things: that is the main thing that reading does for me.

Kelli Ann - I know that I'm a very good reader. When I read, I tend to put my whole self into it . . . For me it is an escape almost, just to go and be someone else. You will learn so much from reading. I know that is why I was smart in school: not super-smart, but above-normal because I had read so much. When I was younger, my mom would make me read instead of watching T.V..

Valerie - I like to find things out. Not so much sit down with a book and read for a couple of hours, but I read when I can. I usually read magazines or newspapers, anything that I read is usually quick . . . If I read a book, I really get into it so I can absorb everything. Anything that has strong characters or suspense I can identify with. I like to see

things because I'm a visual student. I like to read things I can get interrupted with, that way I can get more practical information . . . It's good to read newspapers and magazines because you learn a lot. During the school year, I don't do a lot of free reading, because I have to read so much for school.

These responses are telling in that these students see a much broader implication for reading in their lives. Not only do they perceive it as a valuable recreational activity, but also as a means of intellectual and academic development.

The other students responded by telling about their background as readers. Even though these are an interesting variety of accounts, there is a consistent mention of positive early experiences with reading:

Dawn - All along I have been a pretty good reader . . . I had really excellent teachers: I think I really got a strong foundation. I especially remember in fourth grade: for a half-hour each day, the kids got to pick the material they wanted to read and the teacher read along. I really enjoyed it. I know my mom has really encouraged me because she reads a lot . . . I had a really good foundation and a lot of encouragement to read.

Jason - I started to read when I was five or six. My sister learned before I did; that's probably why I learned to read . . . I read a lot more when I was younger. I peaked in junior high--it filled the void. Lately, I don't read as much: there isn't enough time. There are other activities that are higher priority. But I do read the paper every day or magazines. Generally, I read things all the way through . . . What I read now are novels and that sort of thing.

Karen - I have always loved to read. I enjoy the classics because I like to study the style, to see what people have done before. When I was younger, I liked reading because it gave me new experiences. Every time you read a book, you live with the character and it's almost like you are there. If I get bored or if I need to cool off, I just reach for a book. In the summer to pass the time it was always my favorite thing to do.

Tara - I used to read a lot with my parents when I was younger; they insisted on anything. They just told us to enjoy what we read. They never pushed me at all. I hate watching T.V., so I always read books.

Vin - I started off in kindergarten: my parents made me learn the alphabet. My parents, especially my mom, used to read to me all the time. In kindergarten, I got up early on Sundays to get the newspaper first and get the comics. I started from there with Encyclopedia Brown and the Hardy Boys. I finished off all the mysteries, then in about fourth or fifth grade I moved up to Agatha Christie and her stuff. By that time I got into Reader's Digest condensed books. I would read those cover-to-cover and the authors I liked I would look up their books. I would also take a look at the bestseller list because I had a few favorite authors on the list. I would then start reading those. That is mostly what I've been reading. I read the Time and the Reader's Digest we get at the house and I read the newspaper from cover to cover.

Erin - I remember learning how to read. In elementary school, I always read. Through high school I did, too.

Kim - I remember in 5th grade, you got to split into the more advanced reading class. I thought that was so cool because you could answer all the questions and remember all the details. I read all the time; my mom makes me read all the time to my little brother. She would buy me books and I couldn't go outside until I read so many pages. I think she really got me into it. One thing I'm doing now that's fun is to read books that I can't understand at all and then research them. I think that's really fun.

These students present a view of reading at its best: it is challenging, fun, and stimulates their imaginations. While their reading tastes evolve, their personal value of it has remained constant. In addition, the reading experiences presented here show a strong home influence on early reading. Whether it is being read to or simply being encouraged to read, the students describe an active parental impact on their reading habits and attitudes. This significant point will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter.

Furthermore, their accounts relate a mutually positive relationship between reading and school: these students recognize the advantage of reading toward their schooling, and likewise see the benefit of school experiences toward their reading. As with the family influence, reading and school will be addressed subsequently in this chapter. Nonetheless,

these trends give an interesting glimpse of those areas most important to students.

Reading and Self-Esteem

I also asked the students about the extent to which their reading habits and attitudes affect their overall self-esteem. Considering the evolving self-images that high school students hold, they are intensely interested in how they compare with their peers. From clothing to grades, they scrutinize themselves as closely as they do their classmates. Similarly, their reading habits are another yardstick by which they measure themselves against their friends and acquaintances.

Consequently, in order to assess their self-esteem regarding their reading, I asked the students: 1) To compare themselves as readers to their peers, 2) To compare their self-image as a reader to their overall self-image, and 3) To describe what value they attached to their reading abilities with regard to success in college and getting a well-paying job.

Three of them thought themselves to be "average" when asked, "How do you compare yourself as a reader to other people your age?" This is a curious response, since they were selected for an interview by being clearly above average in relation to the reading habits and attitudes of their peers. The three students had these comments:

Rose - A lot of my friends read a lot more than I do. I'm probably an average reader. Some of my friends . . . are always reading while I don't necessarily have the time. I think I read slower on tests so I know that I'm understanding it . . . I think that I'm normal in reading for pleasure. When I know I have to understand it or answer questions on it, I'll go slower.

Neal - I've had a slight eye problem . . . [reading] gives me a headache after a while. But if it is interesting, I keep reading it . . . I'm sure I read a lot more than other people but I don't read as much as many other people, too. Somewhere

in the middle

Pat - I don't think of myself as a reader as such because I've been reading since first or second grade. During first grade my teachers were concerned that I was going to have a reading disability. So my parents really made me read for the first couple of years I was in school. After that it has just become a habit: when I see something that looks interesting, I read it. I don't think of myself as somebody who reads a lot. It is just something you do daily like brushing your teeth or combing your hair.

Rose combines reading speed and frequency in her comparison of herself to others, while Neal only considers frequency. Both of them see others reading more frequently than they do, and, despite their own proficiency, use this to place themselves as "average" readers. Even though both were within the top 10% of their graduating class and this study, they nonetheless gauge themselves against students they perceive as doing more reading than they do.

Pat's comments are especially interesting in that he has internalized his reading habits to the point where he makes no conscious comparisons to others. He has established a frequent reading pattern so early in his life that he has come to view it casually as a daily routine.

The rest of the students, however, consider themselves superior to their peers as readers. They believe this superiority to be based on various factors. Like Neal and Rose, several other students use the quantity of their reading as a primary means of comparison:

Tara - I think I read a lot more than a lot of people because they don't have the tolerance for it. I find it better to read things and imagine it for myself . . . I have my own pictures and I'm a very imaginative person . . . I just love books for that reason. I make time for it: I read more during the school year than in the summer because I put the homework aside and read what I want to read. I put a lot of things aside if I get into a really good book.

Vin - I would rate myself fairly high as a reader. I know my

friends and I know they don't spent as much time reading as I do.

Aveek - I think I read more than other people. [My friends] tend to stick to the school reading. I do go back to classics sometimes. I read a lot.

Kim - Compared to other people that are more or less acquaintances who aren't really interested in it or do it because they have to, or even just read a certain part . . . I feel that I'm one step ahead of them because I have more knowledge.

Joe - I think I read little bit more. It interests me and stimulates me. It is really easy for me to get wrapped up in a good book . . . probably because of a good imagination.

Jason - I suppose I'm higher than average in the amount I read . . . It isn't highbrow stuff, but not necessarily the comics . . . As far as my friends are concerned, I'm reading about the same stuff they do. I don't read as much as I should. I've got friends that go through 500-page books in a week. I just don't do that anymore.

For these people, reading is something they do more of than their peers. Consequently, they have come to realize an advantage in experience, whether it is in knowledge, imagination, or discipline. Conversely, other students take pride in the kinds of reading they did compared to those around them. Their responses suggest more of an awareness of what they read:

Karen - It may sound stereotypical, but more girls read than guys. That's what I've found. I'd like to think that I'm an above-average reader. When I talk to people about the books I read, sometimes with a friend, they have never heard of it or they don't read much. They also don't really want to talk about the reading.

Lee - Basically I'm above-average. I'm able to read pretty difficult stuff . . . I have only come across a few people that read a lot more than I do. People aren't reading; I do read a lot more than other people.

Some of the students combined factors in their responses, such as comprehension and reading speed.

Dawn - I think I read a lot more than a lot of people my age [because they] have not gotten a strong foundation in reading

. . . I think I'm an above-average reader but not an excellent reader. I retain a lot of what I read and I enjoy it. I don't think I have as strong a vocabulary as I could . . . I have to look more things up than most people.

Valerie - I have always felt I was a really slow reader . . . [though] I usually understand everything I read. I felt my speed was up to par and so was my comprehension. When I look at my standardized test scores, I score in the top. That helps me put things into perspective compared to the norm. You see yourself as just average when really you are above average . . . That's why I thought I was a slow reader because I have to think about it and visualize it . . . I'm getting more out of it. I think I'm a good reader because if I read something, I know I understand it and I get everything that I can out of it. I'll also apply to my own life or incorporate it into my ideas . . . It isn't as important the amount of reading or how fast you read it but how much you get out of it

Kelli Ann - I tend to read faster and comprehend more than people my age. When I read, I can see symbolism and I can pick up on it. I have always done really well in reading discussions. The kids in my classes would tend to tell me that I was a 'know-it-all.' It just clicked with me. I just read so much for so long because growing up that is all I did during the summer . . . one summer I read over one hundred books . . . I would surprise myself with what I would know after I would read a book. I tend to read faster from habit; I have never taken a speed-reading class. I tend to categorize it better and file it, simply because I have done so much of it.

Erin - I always liked reading books. Some people read real slow, and they don't read books or anything . . . I consider myself an above-average reader. A lot of my friends are, too.

To see whether this propensity for reading carries over in their general self-esteem, I asked the students, "How does the image of yourself as a reader affect the image of yourself as a person?"

Rose - I think there is a correlation. If I read more I usually feel better about myself because you know that you are doing something that is increasing your knowledge.

Karen - I hope that it makes me a better person. I feel more open-minded and well-rounded. I feel like I'm exposed to a lot of different ideas.

Kelli Ann - I think it makes me feel better about myself in that in order to escape, I'm not going to head for a bar: I'll pick up a novel . . . I like to read Shakespeare; this summer

I read two plays and you feel so intelligent. You see so many takeoffs on it in cartoons; commercials make fun of it. To read the original stuff makes you feel smart.

Kim - It helps me in conversations. I was just with a girlfriend and we would talk about things that reminded us of certain books . . . I just do it because I like it. I don't take it as anything else except that I'm learning.

Tara - I feel like I have a lot more to contribute in conversations. The books I read reflect the way I am in a lot of ways. I read a lot of classical books and I read a lot of other things just because I want to make myself a better person. I am familiar with a lot of different topics.

Lee - I think I can come across as knowing a little more. I'm pretty good at trivia . . . sometimes I come across like I know a lot. That's what my image could be. My reading has helped that image and I think it is a positive thing.

Vin - Since I read a lot, I'm confident of the things I say. I read a lot of nonfiction because of when I was a debater and would read the material before speaking. I've built up my speed and I absorb it pretty well.

Aveek - Reading has helped my vocabulary and my reading skills, like on the SAT where it isn't very hard for me to read through it quickly.

Erin - I feel better when I'm using my brain. That helps me when I'm reading--it's better than sitting idle.

Neal - What I read is usually pretty hard stuff, so it kind of makes me feel better about myself when I am reading a higher level than most people.

Valerie - When you are with the same people all the time, like in honors classes, you don't think about it. You just do it because that is what you're expected to do. You don't see yourself as smart or as an intellectual until you get with other people . . . When you find out that you are a good reader and a good speaker, that is where your self-esteem comes from.

Joe - I have tested way above grade level for a long time. I am kind of used to it; it is nothing that I really think about anymore.

These students relate both internal and external reinforcement from reading. Their internal satisfaction comes from factors such as handling challenging reading and broadening their ideas or opinions. It

is interesting, however, that some of them see their outward behavior also reflecting their higher reading activity. For example, these students mentioned handling themselves in conversations more effectively, and appearing to be generally more knowledgeable.

Two students expressed a varying opinion regarding their self-image as it is related to their reading ability. Instead of having a high self-image that is reinforced through reading, they suggest that their identities themselves are shaped through their reading:

Jason - I suppose what you read characterizes who you are. I don't think I'm a person who would read books on organic farming. I read what is interesting to me, which is what I guess most people do . . . I have a bunch of friends who are science-oriented: that's all they read. I guess that sort of defines who they are.

Pat - I like books that are not considered in the mainstream. I think that's reflecting the fact that I'm not necessarily mainstream . . . That's where my interest lies, not where everybody else lies. Sometimes I go to the library and I'll pick out a book no one has heard of by an author that no one's heard of. I'll read it just because it sounds interesting. Most people go to the bookstore and they will pick up something like Danielle Steele or Tom Clancy: something everybody reads. Popular authors don't necessarily appeal to me.

I then asked them, "What value do you attach to your reading ability with regard to doing well in college and with regard to getting a well-paying job?" Their responses showed a consistent awareness of its importance for both college and work.

Rose - When I go to college I know I'll have to be reading more than I did in high school. I'll have to read more carefully and spend more time on it. I think it has a lot to do with being successful in college and getting a well-paying job. I'm confident in my reading abilities and those areas but I just need to read more.

Neal - It's sort of like a direct communication with brilliance when you start reading classics . . . As far as other kinds of reading, it is just information. It's knowledge and it's power . . . by following its theme and understanding why it's being written. That definitely helps

In a successful life.

Dawn - I think because I'm a good reader, school is easier for me. I have a longer attention span and a desire to study . . . I think because of that, I will do well in college. I think it is important that you are a good reader in terms of getting a good job. If you are working in an office, you'll have to read a lot.

Jason - I think it is necessary to absorb information. The primary media is the written word . . . You are asked to read 200 or 300 pages a week in college, depending on what field you go into. But if you are going to be a stockbroker or a doctor or a scientist, there is a lot of reading involved. If you can't do it, you are obviously not going to be proficient at it.

Karen - I think it should help me out more, especially with college because the more you read, the bigger vocabulary you will have. You learn to figure out words from the context and it helps you to understand things better. I haven't really thought about the value of my reading ability toward a well-paying job. I guess it might help depending on the job.

Lee - I think you have to be able to remember what you read . . . that all correlates with your studies. A lot of studying is reading the textbook to find the inside stuff, not just what they outline . . . The more you read, the more you can write.

Pat - I think that is probably the one reason I do well in school is because I can read well. I figure in college that's the one thing that will get me through more than anything else is the fact that I can read something real quick and get the major points out of it without having to go over it. I think in a job as well because sometimes you can't read everything, you have to skim it and find what is important, then focus on the important things.

Tara - I know in a lot of college classes my sister had, she had to read these long novels and if you enjoy reading them, then you probably do better in school. I think in reading books it shows a lot of patience.

Valerie - Definitely . . . Reading correlates with communication and speaking skills and just being able to relate to people is important. If you can communicate well then you will succeed in life and [an employer] will be more likely to pick you over someone else.

Vin - The fact that I read a lot is going to help me in college; I can read the textbooks faster and get the notes . . . It will help me get better grades to that extent . . . As far as getting a well-paying job, almost everything is based

on the mental stuff and you have to skim right through the memos and get right to the important points.

Aveek - I feel that I could read almost anything without too much problem. As far as a well-paying job, I see reading as a necessity.

Erin - Considering that all I hear is that you have to read a lot in college, it will be a definite advantage. I read a lot throughout school. I think that it will help me be successful in college. If I do well in college, then it will help me get a good job.

Kelli Ann - I think that my reading ability will help me in college . . . the enthusiasm I have for reading will make me enthusiastic for learning. As for a well-paying job, I haven't decided what I want to do yet. Even if I ended up in something I didn't really enjoy, I could use reading as an escape and wouldn't get frustrated.

Kim - From reading so much in school, I can retain a lot more information. Trying to remember everything has helped me a lot with reading and studying ahead. It might have some impact on getting a well-paying job, but I don't see any. It depends on the job.

Joe - I attach a high significance to reading because I know that there will be a lot of studying and research that I will have to do. All that will be for the line of work I hope to get into. I have really read an awful lot and it helps me store away reading material.

Clearly, the students are keenly conscious of the importance of reading in their college and professional careers. Most likely, this has been reinforced through their awareness of a competitive academic environment and job market. Most of the students claim to approach those challenges with more confidence because of their higher aptitude toward reading. This confidence is not surprising, since it has been developed over years of past success in schooling, success which they acknowledge has come largely through their successful reading experiences.

In considering the role of their reading proficiency compared to their peers, their self-images, and in their future endeavors, the

students expressed the following:

- 1) Though some consider themselves average, most of the students believe their reading habits and attitudes are superior to those of their peers.
- 2) Their high self-images as readers have a positive effect on their overall self-images.
- 3) They recognize the importance of fluent reading habits in college and the professional world and believe that their higher reading aptitudes will help them in these areas.

Family Reading Habits and Influence

The family can be more influential than any other single factor in a child's reading habits and attitude development, particularly in early childhood. Consequently, to establish a picture of the reading habits and influences of these students' families, I asked each student, "How has your family influenced your reading habits and attitudes?" and "Tell me all you can about your family's reading habits and attitudes."

While there was a very frequent mention of family influence on reading, the students' responses did divide between more direct influence by parents and siblings and more indirect influence: specifically, modeling reading behavior in the home. The students who describe a more direct influence of their families responded as follows:

Rose - My dad is always saying, 'Turn off the TV and read anything. General knowledge is the best thing you can have.' So he is always reading. My mom reads a lot, too, but she is really busy studying to be a nurse. I guess that's why we always went to the library as a family, because my parents read so much.

Neal - My mom taught me to read when I was real young. I kind of picked up on it. They have been encouraging me on it ever since then: 'Read a book instead of watching TV, but I don't listen enough probably. They have had a big influence on my reading.

Lee - My dad is always talking about how it is good that I read because he didn't read much as a kid. My mom helps because sometimes when I don't have the money to buy the books I want, she'll buy them for me. My sister reads a lot also. She and I read more than my parents.

Aveek - My father is really big on classics. That's what really set me into them. He told me which books were good when he read them in his college days. So he would recommend a book to me and I would read it.

Erin - My mom and dad always encouraged me to read. Since then I just got into the habit of reading. In kindergarten, we had cards of words to learn and my mom would help me go through them. She helped me learn to read.

Kim - I think that they are very encouraging, mostly my mom and especially when I was younger. They used to make me read when I was younger . . . She not only made me read but asked me questions about what I read. My whole family is a bunch of readers and we all exchange books.

Dawn - Both of my parents like to read a lot. When I was young my mom used to read to me. Now she reads a book and she'll say it's really good, then she'll give it to me to read. My mom has really encouraged me.

Joe - My mother reads often. She goes through a couple of books a month. My sister is also a big reader. My dad reads quite a bit. They have always encouraged me to read instead of watching TV or doing something that isn't very productive. They have always been big advocates, very supportive of the books drives and things like that.

It is interesting that some of the students mention their parents telling them to read instead of watching television. Even though other students do not mention that particular detail, it is more than likely to be a situation found among all of these students and their parents. Nevertheless, the active involvement of the parents described here takes a variety of forms: specifically encouraging their children, suggesting reading material, and discussing or comparing reading experiences.

The other students mention a similarly strong family influence, though other responses tend to describe a more indirect encouragement, particularly through family members modeling good reading habits and

attitudes:

Jason - I started reading because my sister did. I was a year and a half older and she was three. I thought, well, maybe I should start to read. My parents never pushed me . . . My parents read a lot, certainly more than I do. My mom reads all the time, reads just everything. My dad reads a lot too; more issue-oriented stuff, as opposed to my mom who just reads to read. I was never encouraged not to read, but here was never a big push.

Karen - Well, my mom has influenced me. Even though I have gotten away from it, I don't read as much as I used to. But she was always there: she would always take us to the library and let us sign out books.

Tara - Everyone in my family reads a lot. We really always have . . . when we are done with a book, we put it on a bookshelf and then someone else will read it. It produces a lot of discussions. My stepfather just bought a book called Crossing the Safety. I was the first person to read it; I was really excited about it because it had this beautiful language so I told my mom about it and she read it. Then we all sat at the table and had this big discussion about it.

Valerie - It's strange because my family has four daughters and they're all smart. I'm the third one, so it's like my parents never put pressure on us, but it was there. None of it was ever said. You just go with the flow. My sisters are both really strong readers and really smart people. Then there is interest there because you see your older sibling reading and you want to do it. My parents are always reading in the morning: newspapers and magazines and a lot of that; they don't usually read books. That's what you see and they haven't ever really encouraged me to read. It was like they didn't have to: that was just what was done.

Vin - My mom started me reading pretty early. My dad reads everything: he brings home papers and magazines and stuff. That's helped a lot because I have seen him reading, so I started reading. When I'm reading my parents don't bother me . . . When I was in fourth or fifth grade they didn't like me going to bed late, but if I was reading they would just let me read . . . I like reading. They have done a pretty good job of reinforcing that.

Kelli Ann - We are all readers, all four of us . . . I can't tell you how many times the TV has been off and the four of us are just reading together. My parents have always encouraged it. They read to us out loud when we were younger and took us to the library and treated that as a special occasion. They love to read just as much as I do.

Pat - Other than in elementary school, when they had a strong

influence, nothing whatsoever. My parents don't read very much; they used to read a lot but now they don't. My one brother is sort of into books, but not as much as I am, and my other brother doesn't read at all. The only influence [my parents] might have is when they order Time or National Geographic and I read those.

This last response was particularly interesting in its departure from the others: even though he is an enthusiastic reader, Pat claims that his parents have no influence on his reading habits and attitudes. However, his earlier responses point to his parents' early involvement with his reading as being crucial in establishing his current interest, despite their not choosing to be active readers now.

Even though the responses are generally separated into direct and indirect influence, of course it does not mean that parents who encouraged their children directly did not model reading, nor that those who modeled reading did not actively encourage their children to read. It is rather likely that both types of behavior occurred among these parents. Either way, the accounts present an overwhelmingly important influence of family in establishing effective reading habits and attitudes.

In order to gain elaboration on the prior responses, I asked the students to tell all they could about their family's reading habits. Like the previous question, the responses portrayed the students' home environments as places which fostered reading as a regular and positive life habit:

Rose - My brother reads a lot now, though he didn't when he was younger. He is always reading magazines and the newspaper. My sister just studies a lot; she doesn't read anything for enjoyment. She is a biology major and just reads textbooks.

Neal - My mom just finished her doctorate a few years ago and has had to read a lot of textbooks. She is a teacher and has to read up on all the things she has to teach: it's a lot. My

dad doesn't read quite as much because he works so many hours. But my mom is always reading.

Dawn - My mom reads more than my dad. My dad likes to read mostly sports books, adventures, and mysteries. My sister is going to be a freshman in high school. She doesn't really enjoy reading just because she hasn't had the foundation in reading. It is harder and more work for her. It's not enjoyment when she reads: it's work.

Karen - My mom reads a lot. My sister is a year younger than me and reads constantly. My youngest sister doesn't read as much as she should. My dad doesn't really read; he doesn't like to.

Lee - My sister has been reading a lot of novels. My mom lately has been reading; since she is going to dental school, she reads dental journals. My dad reads computer manuals. That's his whole job: it revolves around computers.

Pat - My parents think that we should read a lot; they don't tell me much, but they do tell my little brother because he doesn't read at all. They don't really push it with me anymore, probably because I do so much on my own that they aren't concerned about it.

Tara - My sister reads a lot of books about political issues. She talks to me about them and then I usually get interested in them . . . so she has influenced me. My dad reads a lot, and so does my mom: she usually reads things after I read them; if I say they're good then she'll read them. We all read. I'm not sure what started it.

Vin - My dad reads a lot because he travels; he tries to keep up on what's going on so he reads the Wall Street Journal and other business magazines . . . My mom doesn't read quite as much. She got us reading but she herself doesn't really read. She'll read Time and she'll read selected pieces in Reader's Digest. My brother will read comics and mysteries. He doesn't read as much as I do.

Aveek - My mom usually reads the newspapers and some books and novels. She also read a lot of books in my native language, Bengali. My father also reads novels. He is more into John Updike. Sometimes a novel that he read a long time ago, he'll read again. He's not too much into entertainment books. He usually sticks to the classics.

Erin - My mom always has a book: she is always reading a book. My dad reads a ton of magazines: business magazines, the Wall Street Journal, and he usually has a book with him. My sister is younger but she reads a lot. I guess we all do.

Kelli Ann - I read just about a mixture of my mom and dad.

Dad reads big, thick, detailed novels that are intelligent. Mom does too, but she likes them because her life is so mundane. She likes romances, but we don't read trash. It is all good literature. She tends to read the lighter stuff and the poetry. When she reads, she'll sit down and read it straight through. My dad reads to relax; he reads every day. It will take him a month to read a book but they are thick. He will stop us all and read us two pages that we just have to hear. My brother likes to read too. During rainy days and cold winter months, it is something that we probably take for granted. We don't even think about it, we just read.

Kim - My mom always has some type of novel or Reader's Digest. My stepfather reads up on current events, like with newspapers and Time. I never see him reading anything for just enjoyment. My little brother, who's fifteen, doesn't read much at all unless he has to.

Joe - My mom was an average student in high school and she really started reading later on in life. My dad doesn't read as often but finds it relaxing. Still, it's something that my parents have really nailed into our heads.

Like the previous descriptions of family influences on reading, these accounts of family reading habits show an extremely high level of reading activity in the home. Even when there is mention of one sibling or parent who does not read as frequently, there are still other family members who are active readers.

Through the student descriptions of family influences and reading habits, the following trends emerge:

1) The students recognize a strong influence from their families in establishing their own reading attitudes and habits.

2) The families, and parents in particular, have taken an early, active, and consistent role in establishing a positive reading environment. Several students mention individual family members who are not active readers, though they apparently do not detract from those students' reading habits.

3) The families have influenced the students interviewed by such direct means as encouragement to read, trips to libraries, and

suggestions about reading material. They have influenced the students indirectly through maintaining their own reading interests and modeling reading consistently in the home.

Friends' Influence on Reading

Yet another important context for student reading is the impact of friends. In the surveys discussed in the previous chapter, the students described a relatively infrequent interaction with friends over reading. Whether it is because those students did not associate with interested readers or because reading and discussing reading were not comfortable social activities between them, the survey responses did not reveal reading as much of a common interest among the students and their friends.

However, such was not the case with the interview group of students: those selected with higher motivation and broader experience than the rest of the students in the study. As part of the inquiry into the broader context of reading for these students, I asked, "Going back as far as you can remember, how have your friends influenced your reading habits and attitudes?"

Interestingly, only four of these students claim not to have been significantly influenced by their friends:

Karen - They never really affected my reading. I remember in middle school everyone was reading romances, but I never would. Every once in a while if a friend would suggest a book I'd read it.

Tara - I don't think they really have very much.

Lee - A lot of the guys I've been hanging around with lately are musicians and that's why I have been reading guitar magazines . . . They don't look down on me when I read something, not that I would feel bad about it, anyway. A lot of people I work with don't read. That doesn't stop me from reading.

Vin - They really haven't influenced my reading habits. I have had a few friends who have introduced new authors to me. I'll pick it up and read it: I've had a few friends like that. I know a few people who would tell me a few good books for facts and stuff. Outside of that, I think it's been mostly on my own

Karen and Lee in particular chose not to let friends affect their reading habits: they cling to their own preferences. Clearly, all four have established their own identities as readers, and are not dramatically encouraged or deterred by their friends.

Conversely, several of the students interviewed recount positive experiences regarding friends' influence on their reading:

Valerie - I had this one friend when I was younger and she had this thing--it was more to show off--that she was reading really fast. We would go to the beach and read and I remember one day she read like 25 pages in five minutes. She was really just flipping the pages. She was the only person from my childhood that knew that reading was important and she really got into it. It was a positive influence because it motivated me. My best friend now used to read Sweet Valley High books, and I would read all of those . . . Those two are the ones that influenced me the most.

Aveek - My friends also read a lot, and that's good. I don't think they read as many classics as I do. When my friends read a book, they usually recommend it to me. They will tell me about it, whether it is good or bad. In a way, that helps their experiences, too. When my friends and I go to the book store to pick out books, it usually is the entertainment and sports books.

Erin - One of them would read a book and say it was good. Then we would all kind of trade it around through my friends. My friends have somewhat influenced my reading attitudes. Back then the books were real interesting. Each of us read it and it was fun!

Kelli Ann - When I was younger, books were a major part of the friendship. I was very shy and withdrawn and books became my friends in a way. My mom was always good about it. She would say that it wasn't real life, that books are fine but you have to go out there and live. My friends never really made fun of me, though. The older I get, the more I see my friends enjoy reading. I have a lot of friends that read daily and it is no big deal.

Kim - I remember my friend Dawn in sixth grade. We read all

the Sweet Valley High books. She first got them and passed them around and that's when we started to read actual books. That's when I first started to go to bookstores and I had never been there before.

Joe - I have a couple of friends like me and they read a lot. I've seen them reading and we have talked about books before. It was really kind of stimulating to talk about the same books that we have read and things that we learned from the books. It really does lend itself to be a stimulation of reading. It has value because you can get someone else's point-of-view on it. Going back, there hasn't been much of an influence from friends. It didn't really start until middle school.

For these students, the interaction with friends sparked an increased enjoyment of their reading experiences: in some cases--like Valerie's and Kim's--these interactions can be turning points. In two other instances, the interaction with friends over reading evolved from negligible to more dynamic:

Rose - When I was younger, my friends didn't read that much. Then they were a negative influence. Just because they were doing what normal kids do. Obviously, it was more exciting for them to play baseball than to read a couple of chapters. I was more of a bookish kid, I guess, and you tend to gravitate to those who share your interests. By the time I was in high school, most of the people I associated with were more in my mind frame. Friends would suggest books and that sort of thing. So I guess they encouraged me.

Pat - I don't think my friends have had a real big influence on my reading habits until recently . . . Last summer, a bunch of my friends got together and we started to read books together, sort of 'the great intellectual awakening.' It seemed like all of the sudden everybody was interested in writers like Faulkner and Hemingway. Everybody got really interested in these big novels of the great writers . . . we would just start talking about the books . . . I would say maybe five of us. I guess what happened was everyone felt compelled to argue what they felt was right and that makes it interesting.

Reading has long fulfilled certain individual needs, yet it has a unique quality in that it can also provide a viable social context. For the students interviewed in this study, friends often provide valuable reinforcement for reading interests. Their responses may be summarized

as follows:

1) Unlike the majority of students completing the survey, only a few students interviewed thought that their friends exerted little or no influence on the development of their reading interests.

2) For the majority of the students interviewed, friends have provided a consistent and valuable influence on positive reading habits and attitudes.

3) The majority of students have friends with whom reading may be shared and commonly enjoyed.

4) The influence of friends can evolve: as the students' identities as readers develop, they are more likely to become acquainted with other students with similar reading interests and attitudes.

Other Influences

Along with family and friends, reading can be influenced by other factors: a librarian, a particular teacher, even a favorite author. No matter what the source, readers are often beneficiaries of a spark of interest which may come from unpredictable places. In order to see what outside factors affected the interviewed students, I asked, "What other influences do you see on your reading outside of your family and friends, like a particular teacher, librarian, reading program, etc.? How did this influence you?" While only one student could not name any outside influences, the others had definite examples.

Not surprisingly, a few students named a library or a particular librarian as a positive influence. Considering the profile of strong parental involvement in their reading attitudes, the library is a likely place for the students to develop their interests. In one case, it was both a source of influence and a source of employment:

Rose - I will always remember this one librarian. I think she still works there in the children's section. She used to come to Schroeder Elementary and would give talks and I would always go there. I think that I still see her, but I remember her. Not so much the book club as she was a significant influence.

Jason - I remember always going to the library in first or second grade. We always read books during the summer.

Vin - I used to work in the library, so I would be shelving books and books that would look interesting, like their title or authors I haven't read, I would set aside and check them out and read at home. I've gotten some good books to read through some of my teachers. Outside of that, it's basically been the Reader's Digest Condensed Books. If I like an author I'll go and find their stuff . . . Just going around the library you find books that interest you. Time and Newsweek sometimes have book reviews.

For other students, influence came from a particular reading experience; they were affected by reading material itself:

Neal - I guess my parents and people I have read about would be the biggest influences . . . When I'm reading, I'm often reading about some interesting person from a long time ago--Einstein or something like that--their habits and what they did. Then you have to realize that they got where they were because they gathered enough information through reading and other things to do it and that really motivates me to reading a little more.

Tara - I read a lot of book reviews and that influences me. If it looks good to me and I've heard of the author and the review they give it, not necessarily the criticism, just to see what the book is about. I would be tempted to go get it. For about two years I've done that. In magazines like Vogue, plus I talk to people a lot. I go to the bookstore and ask them what's the best.

Kelli Ann - A lot of it was the type of books I read. I didn't read the popular books, I read anything from the 1950's. That's where I get a lot of my morals from. I read the old books because they were clean and good stories. The kids were more believable. I read all the children classics that have been read through the centuries. I don't know if it made me want to draw more from history than anything because that is what gave me my strong moral values . . . My teachers were also very lenient in letting me read what I wanted. One got me more into modern fiction, to show me that there are some good things out there.

Pat - Probably the strongest outside influence was the

role-playing game, "Dungeons and Dragons" because there was a lot of text in it and some of it was really thick text and I had to read through it. It started when I was in elementary school and I was reading a text that was designed for high school students. I could understand half of it, but it forced me to get used to the big words and made me look them up. A lot of it was reading for information and it gets to learning more and more.

These responses reinforce the value of the vicarious experiences that readers enjoy. The students suggest that not only are the experiences valuable in themselves, but they also stimulate further personal and reading growth.

Other students point to school experiences and particular teachers as having had a positive influence on their reading. That these students recognize teachers as helpful is not surprising: the students had already established themselves as interested readers and were more likely to accept suggestions from teachers or recognize greater exposure to reading material.

Karen - Mostly my teachers because once in a while they would give a list of classics and I would go to that. If I saw some of the books on the list at the library, I would pick them up. Books have influenced me. Sometimes if I like an author's books, I would go pick up another by the same author.

Lee - Basically it's just something I like to do. I've had English classes that were helpful because I read things that I wouldn't have known about. In that way, I've been exposed to other things.

Valerie - When I was younger, I was really close to my teachers and I made it important . . . In elementary school, we had things like we were supposed to read so many books and do little reports . . . I know that they were important and I always did them. I was kind of shy when I was younger and the teacher made a good impression on me. That was something important to do: to do what you were supposed to and impress your teachers.

Aveek - I went to the library and I had a list of classics. Now I just go straight to that. [My senior English teacher] made out a huge list of the books we had to read and ones she recommended. If I go to the library and see a book and I remember that it's on the list, I might try it.

Kim - I can't remember the teacher, but I remember being in an English class and having read a brief summary about a book and then looking in the book for other books that the author has written, just because I'm a curious person.

Joe - Teachers mostly; a lot of teachers have asked us to read certain literature or told us about it. That really interested me. Then I would read it and find that it was really interesting. That goes back as far as 7th grade, when I would get some really great teachers that I really respected a lot. They would tell me about certain books and it would be better than watching T.V.

For this group of enthusiastic readers, there are positive outside influences other than parents, siblings, and friends. These influences served to foster the growth which had already begun for them. The students' responses suggested that:

1) Librarians and library visits can provide positive forces in developing and maintaining students' reading habits.

2) Reading material itself can provide incentive toward more and better reading experiences when the students find personally enjoyable works. These need not be canonical works to provide this stimulus.

3) Teachers can exert a positive influence over student reading habits and attitudes through such means as suggesting works to which students otherwise may not have had exposure.

Reading and School

For many students, school is the critical part of their reading experiences. It is there that they are alternately encouraged, required, and evaluated over their reading. Even though some students have negative experiences there, the school cannot be ignored as a place of often profound influence on student reading habits and attitudes. To gain a sense of this effect on the students in this study, I asked, "Tell me as much as you can about your experiences with reading in

school."

A few students cited particular works which made an impression on them. Most of them, however, gave a rather broad overview of their school reading experiences. The experiences mentioned most frequently were from high school, presumably because they were more recent.

Overall, however, the responses were positive:

Rose - In high school, there was quite a bit of reading. It is easier to read when you are with a class, reading the same thing. If you don't get it, you can ask. I read The Sound and the Fury this year and I was so confused . . . If I was reading that on my own I couldn't have done it . . . I remember reading The Outsiders and then watching the movie. I remember reading The Diary of Anne Frank: that was really interesting. In sixth grade, I did have a reading class. Sixth grade still felt like a lower level of reading. I guess it was a good experience. I think that we should have read more novels because they go through them really slowly. I was only advanced starting in 9th grade. I think they should try to get students to read more. It doesn't seem like they are doing that. I think that if they pushed more, we could have read more.

Neal - Well, I think it's been pretty good. Elementary school was actually pretty good for that level. Then middle school was nothing . . . In high school, I think we had a pretty good reading curriculum. We read Steinbeck and Catcher in the Rye, even Asimov and things like that. I took a science fiction reading course. I think it was a pretty good curriculum in high school and I learned quite a bit in high school in reading.

Dawn - In third grade I moved here from New York City. I remember that year I had a lot of trouble because a large part of third grade was phonics and with punctuation, there was a lot of stresses and stuff. The teacher thought I was being a smart aleck and saying all these things wrong because I was so far off that it was impossible to understand the words . . . In sophomore and junior years I had more encouragement to read the classics. There was a lot of focus on the reading. Last year was great: I loved my senior English class.

Jason - In first grade I was fairly shy. The teachers thought I was slow, so they had me tested and I scored fairly well. So they put me in the gifted classes. When I came here my records didn't come, so I started in a lower reading group and it was significantly below what I had been doing before I came there. My mom made me get retested and I moved out of that group. If it wasn't for my mom, I could have just as easily

stayed there. I was very quiet; I would finish the work in five minutes and everyone else would be working on it. It wouldn't say that school calls on me to read more, aside from the required reading.

Karen - In high school, most often I liked the books we were assigned to read. It always seemed to happen when you had to read something, I never wanted to. They would say to read so many pages a week; I never did that, I usually ended up reading the whole book right before the test. I think it was because I would want to read it all together. For me that was better.

Lee - A lot of my reading experiences have been in school, sitting with a magazine under my desk . . . In preschool, I had to memorize 'T'was the Night Before Christmas.' I've been reading all the things that everyone else has been reading and lately I've been trying to read the stuff that everyone hasn't been reading . . . textbook reading time should be reserved for the class period because you are more in focus with the book . . . Lately, I like poetry a lot more. A lot of the reading activities have been pretty positive for me, though in 9th grade we had to analyze it. It was just not fun. In the last couple of years it hasn't been all analysis: it has been experiencing it, looking into it. That kind of opens it up . . . you are reading it for what it is. That part is more interesting to me.

Pat - In middle school, it was kind of a joke because they had us reading these skimpy little novels. Whenever we did read them, I would finish the novel in a week and then for the next six weeks I would just sit in class and fill out the questions. Even in high school, even in advanced English class, I didn't read some of the books and I could still pass the test . . . We would spend time talking in class, but is it over what the two or three people who read the book had to say, while the rest of us had a paper last night so we didn't read the book. So we just let those two or three people talk and the teacher's happy . . . Even then I would finish the book before everyone else. Then I wouldn't have to do anything for the rest of the quarter because the quarter is based on the book and I read the book.

Tara - This past year, we had so many books that we had to read. I have a hard time reading two books at the same time. Fathers and Sons, I hated that book. I read it and got through it the night before the test. I depends: sometimes you are given books that I would not normally read. I never read a lot of classics before this year. . . I like using literature as it reflects on history. It interests me just to read pieces of a time period. I had never been exposed to that before school.

Valerie - If we had to pick books, I usually would pick books

that were relatively at an advanced level. Your teacher would be proud of you and that was important. I remember the little reading groups they would hook you up with. I was always in the honors English and reading.

Vin - Most school books are quite boring and uninteresting. There are some good ones: Merchant of Venice I really liked: that's my favorite Shakespeare play. There have been a few good ones, but I have switched schools a lot, so I get a lot of repeat books. Middle school was probably the best time: they had the most interesting books . . . Once I hit high school, the stories weren't that great. I read, I read it fast, and got it over with.

Aveek - I believe there was a good variety of reading in school. Sometimes you can get too overloaded with classics. If you keep reading them it gets a little boring. Occasionally we could pick out a bestseller and I liked that. We had this thing where we would all bring in this bestseller and we would read for ten minutes and then pass the book back. We would move the book around so we could see what bestsellers we liked, and I'm sure we could have done that with classics, too. I really feel that opened things up more than just plowing through books.

Kelli Ann - I went to a private school, and when we were done we could always read a book. At Troy High, I met a lot of teachers who would let you read whatever you wanted. I found the staff to be very lenient. My Junior English teacher got me into modern fiction, to show me there is some good stuff out there. I think that we need to read more classics, though You can't just assume that when you come here, you have already read Shakespeare.

Erin - I liked most of my reading experiences in school. The books that were assigned to us through high school, I don't even know if there was one I didn't like. The books that I read on the side, like this past year because I had AP English, I enjoyed. When I was little, we just had to pick books and read them.

Kim - I would always try to read fast because everyone else does and they could get the information first. I'm always trying to beat everyone so I knew it first. Everything revolves around reading. In History class, I used to make myself read ahead so I wouldn't be lost in the lectures.

Joe - Reading in school used to be a pain. It was boring and not very interesting. As we have come into more progressive stories, like Shakespeare which I really like, the more controversial, it has become more interesting. I never really liked poetry, but some of the stories later on have really interested me.

Once again, given that these students were chosen to be interviewed on the basis of a strong interest and aptitude in reading, it is not surprising that their school experiences would be, with a few exceptions, positive ones. Although there was some variance in the responses, some points came up frequently:

1) The students appreciated and largely enjoyed the greater exposure to reading demanded of them in school.

2) They were frustrated by the slower pace of an entire class reading a book at the same time. They preferred their own reading pace, which was frequently faster than their classmates.

3) Their negative school reading experiences included lessons in grammar and phonics, analyzing poetry, and tests over novels.

Clearly, the reading fluency which these students have established in their homes and among their friends has contributed to positive school reading experiences. Even the negative experiences have secondary emphasis to the better ones. The students' responses show that they have brought an open and enthusiastic reading outlook to their school environment, and in turn that environment has been largely beneficial toward their further growth.

To elicit information about more specific school reading activities, I asked, "What specific activities with reading in school have influenced you, either positively or negatively?" As with the previous question, their responses were many and varied. Even though some students responded first with a "pet peeve," virtually all of them could name at least one activity which had a positive influence on them.

Rose - Reading The Sound and the Fury was a negative experience. I was so confused. I remember in second grade with the head phones, that was pretty positive. That was something I looked forward to, going to the phonics center and

reading.

Neal - A positive influence for sure was writing analyses of the works we read in class. I can't think of any negative reading experiences.

Dawn - I like when teachers give you the opportunity to choose whatever you want to read. They will give you a large list of things to choose from. But I hate it when you are given a specific book and everybody has to read it and you have to read so many pages. I hate that because you feel like you are being forced to do something. I like to sit back and relax and take my time. I don't like to have the book done by this date. I like to have more freedom and just read at my pace.

Jason - I always remembered that the reading questions were so basic. I think the SAT reading was so flush, it had nothing to do with understanding the concept . . . I think the reading lists that they gave to kids is a good idea . . . I always hated learning grammar and that sort of thing. The higher up you get, the better the memories. It wasn't as basic as earlier stuff. You learn more about literary devices and that sort of thing. You can analyze the stuff better.

Karen - Probably reading out loud in class was a negative activity. I think the reading discussion groups were a positive activity.

Pat - I thought reading in school was a big waste of time because people didn't do it really, or they would hold the book in front of them and sleep with their eyes open. I think it's better to do it at home: there aren't as much distraction, and you can get comfortable. One good thing in school was reading plays; I really enjoyed that because you can't read plays by yourself, but in groups reading a play can get you a feel for what is going on and you also have to pay attention.

Tara - I hated reading out loud in class. It bothers me to hear someone else's voice when there is something else going on in my mind, or doing it myself and making sure I pronounce the words correctly. I forget what I'm reading. I liked the classes when every Friday we would bring in a book and just read, undisturbed. I liked that in school. That is relaxing after a busy day to just read. It didn't matter what you were reading.

Valerie - In 5th grade we made our own books. That was great because you saw what it was like to be an author. Speaking was hard for me and still is in groups. I liked my 7th grade teacher. We did a lot of vocabulary building. We would have lists of vocabulary from the books we were reading in class. These were words we already saw in context and we would fit them in and everything made so much more sense that when they

Just give you sheets of vocabulary words to memorize and they don't mean anything. I also liked writing about the books; it helps you break down the book into separate components. I thought class was bad when all you were doing was rejuvenating the facts. Role playing was good, too. When I was in 5th grade, we had a panel of characters and we did an interview. I enjoyed that. We would also do commercials and we would be a certain character in the book and promote it.

Vin - I enjoyed reading books for term papers. We got to choose the books and did the reading independently, but the reading was interesting. As far as a negative, I guess I don't like poetry. I always thought it was boring.

Aveek - I'm not really a fan of book reports. The teacher suggesting books to students was good. I liked that because otherwise, we didn't have much to go on. I like to know about it first so I have something to go on.

Kelli Ann - My elementary and middle school years were pretty much just read the books and do the book report. It was high school when they made you start dissecting the book and make you think about why they did things. I do remember sophomore year reading Lord of the Flies. We went through everything because it was so symbolic, but I also thought it got carried away. My most negative experience would have to have been discussions where the class would agree on a point and the teacher would say no, you're wrong. They tend to have pat answers rather than discussions. They were never open to new ideas or insights. It was also positive because it made me sit down and dissect it. I am really thankful to my teachers for teaching me to find the symbolism. They did drill it into me but I think that it could've been a little more open-ended.

Lee - I like projects sometimes. I remember in 9th grade I read Tom Sawyer and made this project. I had to make little boats and get little dolls. Reading activities like that I liked. Lately, I like poetry a lot more. A lot of the reading activities have been pretty positive for me . . . Over the last couple of years it hasn't been all analysis, it has been experiencing it, looking into it. That kind of opens it up; you aren't reading to find curvy lines over it. You are reading it for what it is. So that part is more interesting to me.

Kim - The biggest thing I can remember is going into the higher reading group.

Joe - Back in elementary school those book drives were fun to read and entertaining. That played a part in my reading. Throughout the middle years there were many reading activities. Then through high school, the research papers have been very interesting. The research part--the reading--was

the best part.

Despite their high predisposition toward school reading, the students could recollect specific reading activities which they found to be negative experiences. These activities included:

- 1) Particular works of literature which were confusing.
- 2) Having to read in class and reading at the same pace as classmates.
- 3) Formal study of grammar.
- 4) Reading out loud in class.
- 5) Studying poetry.
- 6) Writing book reports.
- 7) Teacher-dominated discussions of literature.
- 8) Vocabulary lists out of context.
- 9) Close reading/analysis of literature.

On the other hand, they also mentioned several positive activities.

These included:

- 1) Writing analyses of literature.
- 2) Choosing their own reading material.
- 3) Having recommended reading lists.
- 4) Close reading/analysis of literature.
- 5) Reading plays in class.
- 6) In-class reading.
- 7) Vocabulary exercises in context.
- 8) Researching a topic of their own choice.
- 9) School book drives.
- 10) Placement in a higher reading group.
- 11) Group discussion.

Ironically, "reading in class" was mentioned as both a positive and negative activity. The student who enjoyed it found it relaxing, while the one who disliked it found it a waste of time. Similarly, vocabulary exercises were listed as both a positive and a negative activity by the same student, with the explanation that it was acceptable within the context of reading, but not so when it was presented by itself. In addition, "close reading/analysis of literature" appears in both lists. The students seem to have ambivalence about formalized interpretation. While some enjoy it as an intellectual challenge, others have trouble adjusting to interpretive constraints which may not be present in their individual transactions with text.

Interestingly, the students' negative responses are all related to aspects of reading which are peculiar to the school environment: tests, phonics drills, formal grammar study, and reading pace set by others, for instance. It is clear that they most dislike activities which do not occur in the natural act of reading. Consequently, it is no surprise that they have an ambivalent response to school reading, considering that it seldom reflects the reading fluency they have grown to enjoy on their own.

The activities regarded as positive reveal a preference for more independent reading and response. While activities such as group discussions and reading plays in class necessitate the participation of other class members, they still allow students an opportunity to demonstrate a knowledge of or sensitivity to literature.

These responses follow naturally into the next interview question: "Have you found your experiences with reading in school have made you want to read more or less and why?" A crucial implication of school

reading activities is whether or not students are actually encouraged to continue reading and enjoy it. While it may not be realistic that each student will find all school reading enjoyable, it is important that the negative activities do not draw students away from reading. This is no less important for the enthusiastic students interviewed here.

Of those students, none answered that school reading experiences made them want to read less. Three students, however, differed from the others in their responses. None of these three believed that school had any significant effect on their habits and attitudes, and one expressed reservations about his classroom experiences:

Vin - I don't know. Basically, I was reading a lot before the school reading program. I can't say if it has made me read more or if it is just a habit.

Jason - I don't think it affected me either way. I'm trying to think if I have ever read anything in class and was encouraged. Probably for book reports because they force you to find something. Maybe that way I found an author I liked.

Pat - I don't think it had any effect on me either way because what I read at home and what I read at school were completely different. I was disenchanted with situations where we were supposed to be interpreting literature and had no clue. The teachers always know the books so they know if you're right or wrong. I didn't like being called wrong even when I had points to support my opinions.

Pat's frustration is likely to be common among many high school students. Fortunately, it seems not to have discouraged him from maintaining a high interest in reading. The other students expressed a more favorable reaction:

Rose - Probably more, especially when they give you a list of books. You can go through them and usually check off a whole lot.

Neal - Definitely has made me want to read more. As I learn more from reading, I know I should be reading more . . . I think I'll be reading a lot more in college and I want to. I think that is mainly because of what I've learned so far, through reading and the courses.

Dawn - I think last year I read a lot and I hadn't read that many classics. I experienced reading a lot of different authors I never would have even thought about . . . Yes, I have read more from the experiences in school.

Karen - It has made me want to read more . . . Because in school was the first place we started to talk about books. Talking about the book with the teacher was always positive.

Lee - They have probably made me want to read more. Like sometimes a teacher will mention an idea and I'll think that it's interesting. Then I'll go check it out. Not all things they mention I'll want to read. But that has opened my eyes a little bit. It has helped me to read more.

Tara - It has opened my eyes to a lot of things like classics. I would have never wanted to read them. I read a lot of contemporary works. For me to now look at all of these books that were written fifty or sixty years ago and they have the same ideas as today but from a different perspective. This year it forced me to read all of these outside novels. That had to be of value.

Valerie - I would say definitely more. Just by being exposed to all of that stuff like a lot of the classics, and then I see things I would really like to read . . . Through my experiences I have been opened up to a lot of new authors and new styles. It has encouraged me to read newspapers more. I like to understand the people and the times.

Aveek - Through the positive experiences, it has made me want to read more. The novels that I learned about or just exchanging novels has made me want to read more. Or, when somebody refers to a book I haven't read, that makes me want to read it.

Erin - More. I don't just like sitting there with nothing to do.

Kelli Ann - More, though it depends on how I react to the author. Like Steinbeck: I can recognize his writing, but I just don't like his style or themes. I won't go into more of it and Dickens is the same way. I do like Shakespeare. Faulkner, I will read more of. It's totally a personal thing, not how it is taught.

Kim - I think they have made me want to read more. When I was younger, they pick out things that were more enjoyable, and make it sound like more fun. Being able to answer the questions was really cool because I knew it and I read it.

Joe - They have made me want to read more. I know now that there is more out there to read. In English class, I'm being

confined to American Literature right now, but now I do realize that there are other people out there. There are modern works or just other stuff that I haven't read by the same authors.

The students cited many of the same reasons here as in their previous responses over positive school reading experiences. In particular, they expressed a recurring enthusiasm for greater exposure to authors and literary works. This exposure has clearly stimulated their reading interests. Like many high school students, those interviewed here did not like all of their school experiences in reading. Nonetheless, they believe these experiences have improved their reading attitudes and habits.

In summary, the students interviewed show a diverse range of experiences in school reading. They brought to these experiences a decidedly solid foundation of reading from home and other outside influences, a foundation which they believe was improved through schooling. While some credit individual teachers with inspiring their progress, most of the students point to increased exposure to literature and higher expectations of them as readers as factors crucial to their reading growth. In addition, their responses indicate an interest in sharing their reading experiences and joining a community of interpreters.

Reading Preferences

Given that these students are able and enthusiastic readers, in what areas do they devote their reading time? Even though they have given a preliminary picture of the importance of school and leisure reading in their lives, I asked them to estimate the percentage of time spent in four general reading categories: pleasure, news or information, school, or directions on a task.

Despite being asked to base their percentages on a 100% total, few of them did so. Furthermore, several students gave separate responses based on whether or not they were in school. As a result, basing their responses on statistical averages is nearly impossible. Nevertheless, their answers do provide an interesting picture of how they spend their reading time.

Rose - Reading for pleasure is probably 50% In the summer It's different. Reading for school during school is 65% Then pleasure reading would be 10%. School takes up all of my time. Reading for news or information would be maybe 10%. I don't think that I really read for instructions on a task: probably only 3%.

Neal - I'd say I spend about 75% in reading for school. For the rest, information maybe 20%, pleasure tends to go along with school. I would rate that 50% to go over 100%, but I get a lot out of reading and things that are interesting. The things at school I read are interesting.

Dawn - I would say about 50% for pleasure because I love to read. Then for school, last year we read a lot so 30% of my time. For news, I only read a newspaper sometimes. I don't really read any instructional books.

Jason - Probably 5% for task reading, 30-40% on information, 20-30% for school work, and the remainder for pleasure.

Karen - Reading for pleasure is what I do mostly: 70%. School equals 30%. News or information equals 35%. I do read the paper. Reading for instructions on a task would be 10%.

Lee - Reading for pleasure would be 80% over the summer. That's basically what I do. Reading for instructions would be 1% because sometimes I'll build a grill at work or something. Reading for news or information would be mixed in with pleasure reading, since I'm always reading the paper. When I'm in school, school pleasure reading is 25% and school reading is 75%.

Pat - I usually don't read many instructions because I like to figure things out for myself . . . For news or information, 75 or 85%, because I read the paper with breakfast and a about ten pages of Time every morning. The rest would probably be all pleasure. I've worked a lot this summer, but last summer I went through 30 or 40 novels. Even during the school year, I read a lot.

Tara - Fifty percent of my time is reading for pleasure. Then

15-20% for school, depending on when I have to read it by. I read the newspaper every morning, though not all of it. Probably 6 or 7% for news and information. For tasks, not very much.

Vin - I spend about 75% of my time reading for pleasure. About 25% of my time reading for news and information. Only about 5% of my time reading for school. I normally don't read any instructions for tasks. I would rather figure it out for myself.

Aveek - Probably 5% for reading on a task, 30% on reading for school. Then 30% for news and 30% for pleasure.

Erin - Except for reading for directions, I read equally between the other three: about 33% between school, information, and pleasure.

Kelli Ann - I spend about 75% of my time reading for pleasure. I tend to write papers on things that interest me, so reading for work--a paper or something--I almost consider reading for pleasure. Only a small percentage--probably less than 5%--in reading for directions. I don't read how-to books. I tend not to read for news or information: only about 15-20% for that. That's one of my weaker areas because I don't like to get depressed by the things I read in the newspaper.

Kim - When I'm in school, 80% would be for information. I have to try really hard for the grades I get, so I don't have much time for a novel. Out of school, pleasure reading would be 90%. Below 5% for pleasure reading.

Joe - Reading for school would have to be the highest: 50%. Reading for pleasure would be about 30%, the other two would be about 10% each.

While the time percentages named by the students vary considerably, they do show some consistent trends:

- 1) Even during the school year, only a few students spend the majority of their reading time on school reading.
- 2) The students spend the majority of their time on pleasure reading, even when they have school reading demands.
- 3) While a few students had percentages over 30%, the rest read for news or information far less than either school or pleasure reading.
- 4) The students seldom read for instructions on a task.

Their responses suggest once more their preference for independent reading. Though some students dedicate themselves to school reading when necessary, the clear practice is to read primarily for pleasure whenever possible. In doing so, they are also reflecting their valuable earlier experiences with choosing their own reading materials.

Turning Points

Considering the number of factors which affect an individual's reading patterns, it is likely that a turning point of some sort has occurred at least once. It can be for better or worse, dramatic or subtle; it can involve family, friends, books, or school. No matter where or when, it is unique and usually memorable. Despite the large role it can play in the context of reading, it has been virtually ignored in research about reading habits and attitudes.

This can be an especially interesting idea for the enthusiastic readers in this study. Having already established a solid early foundation in reading, what could persuade them either positively or negatively? To find out, I asked them, "Can you remember any 'turning points'--in or out of school--which significantly influenced your feelings toward reading? If so, when was it and what happened?"

While most of the students had to think it over, each of them could pinpoint at least one incident. Their responses vary in intensity, yet reflect the same crucial influences which have been previously mentioned: families, friends, and all levels of school.

Some of the students acknowledge the impact of their families at key periods:

Rose - I think when my sister told me to read the classics, so we went to the library. This wasn't too long ago: maybe three years ago. I checked out classics and I just didn't get through them, even though I tried. I consider that a turning

point because after that I thought that books were really important. I think it was because she had just taken her English Advanced Placement class. She was probably trying to gear me toward it and she thought I would do better.

Jason - I guess when I started to read because of my sister, that was a turning point and a starting point. Obviously, when you get older you have more control over what you read. To have the money or the transportation to get it plays a part.

Lee - In 7th or 8th grade, my cousin and I were on vacation together. He had a lot to overcome because he had always done poorly in school. So he put it upon himself to read a lot . . . I would be with my Walkman but then I would take one of his books. That was a turning point when I got into it, especially suspense and Stephen King. I always considered myself a good reader, but that is when I started reading a lot.

One student saw a difference in his reading habits during a dating relationship:

Pat - I think it was when I was dating one girl. When we were just talking about novels, it went from something I did by myself to something we would both read and then argue about it later. Then it flowed into more of a group activity from last year to this year: everybody was doing it.

For the others who mentioned a turning point, however, it came at or because of school. In this first instance, school was the place for a turning point both for the better and for the worse:

Dawn - I would say in fourth grade. That was the biggest because the teacher pulled me aside and said that he knew I was having problems adjusting and things like that. Then I had a positive attitude toward reading and English because I used to hate the subject. Then through middle school and high school I got really discouraged because I wasn't happy with the teachers. I was always in classes where I felt I was being held back. That is why last year I took the Advanced Placement class. I thought that would be better for me and that was a large turning point because then I loved English. Before I had such a negative attitude and so that was a big turning point.

For the other students, however, school is a place where an enthusiasm for reading could be learned or discovered:

Joe - There was a book that I read in either 6th or 7th grade

that really turned me on to reading called Under the Influence by W. E. Butterworth. I liked it so much that I read three more of his other books. It really turned me on to reading. I started to read for enjoyment and I got a lot more out of reading.

Kelli Ann - In 7th grade, I switched from a small private school with 17 kids in my class to my middle school with 200 kids in my class. So when I switched there there was this big worry because I was a 4.0 student. I got there in the middle of the semester and they were reading Old Yeller in the 7th grade. They gave it to me and they only had two more chapters. I took it home and read it in one night and the next day had all the answers. That is when I realized I was above average, when I realized I read something in two days and it took the class a month.

Karen - In 10th grade, we were reading The Glass Menagerie. I thought that was so interesting how the author symbolized things. It got me excited about reading. This is the first time I can really remember in class discussions all the different elements and how they came together. That got me really excited about reading more plays.

Aveek - I would say during my 11th grade honors English class. During that class I read a lot of stuff that I had never read before. As I read that, I also read more classics . . . During school I read more, even if it wasn't in the curriculum.

Neal - Probably in the 11th grade because of History class. It was because I was so shocked to see exactly what happened in history. All the mistakes that were made and all the things we should do differently, and that's what really motivated me. I asked myself, 'What am I doing?' I should be reading and finding out what I can do to contribute. And so I ended up trying to avoid past mistakes by learning as much as I can about them.

Two students found their reading habits developed as escape from their everyday lives:

Tara - Probably when I got to high school and I was having a lot of problems in my private life. I would read books and it didn't matter. I would get into my books and nothing else would matter.

Vin - I suppose when I was in India. They get out of school in May and go back in June. My cousin would be in school and there would be nothing for me to do but read. I guess I got used to it, then started to enjoy it. I was reading in English.

While these students all show an early interest in reading through their previous responses, many still experienced key moments which were instrumental in maintaining their positive reading habits and attitudes. Some were changed through a good classroom experience, others through exposure to a particular work. Even though they show themselves sensitive to changes in their habits and experiences, they are largely undeterred from a strong reading proficiency.

Influences on Reading Habits and Attitudes

One of the key questions of this study is, "How did the most enthusiastic and prolific student readers get that way?" Their responses to previous questions already give a sense of their perspectives toward reading. Yet, in order to measure the consistency of their responses as well as to help gather a final comprehensive view of their reading context, I asked them, "Why do you think you are the kind of reader that you are today?"

A few students credit their habits and attitudes to personal prerogative:

Neal - It's just the way I wanted to be. This is what I feel my place in society is, to do as much as I can.

Lee - Because I'm willing to read. I know a lot of people that look at it as a burden. I don't see it that way. In high school, the one thing I hated was groaning in class. Everyone groaned at reading assignments and it got to be so ridiculous . . . I liked to read so it wasn't a big deal.

Tara - Because I'm really imaginative; I like to use my imagination. I like to picture things in my head. Sometimes they give you the prompt, but you have the entire story made up in your head as it appears to you.

These responses are interesting in that these students, in their earlier responses, describe an equally vital influence from home, school, and friends. They particularly reiterate their high self-esteem as readers,

as they have clearly realized an initiative toward active reading.

Other students express similar sentiments about their own willingness to read as being crucial, yet mention it along with similarly important factors:

Rose - Probably from family and a little from school. If your family pushes you to read, you're going to read. I think because my dad was always insisting: read, read, knowledge. That was the main thing, especially during the summer. I think that it was family more.

Dawn - It is due to a few teachers that I have had and my mom encouraging me. My friend that suggested books and just all different people. I think my mom and my fourth grade teacher would be the biggest influences.

Jason - Just my interests and my central group. It sort of blends itself toward the type of person I am . . . The type of people I hang around are the type who tend to share their feelings about the things they read . . . They read something and they tell me and I'll read something and I'll tell them. We are the type of people who give books as gifts. I'd say that influences me.

Karen - Because that's what I did with most of my time. Probably my mother and the teachers in school. Just because I have always liked it and it's been a good way to pass the time.

Pat - Probably just because I read a lot. Just by my friends getting into reading and just reading a lot. My interest has evolved and my interest is in what books I select and the books affect how you think.

Valerie - I think it has a lot to do with the classes. There is such a difference in a person's self-esteem, their outlook. When I'm with a group of people who I see as better than me, I strive harder . . . I think I'm a better reader now because of the classes I have been in and because they encourage that and that was expected from you. If I were in a lower class, then I think that my reading ability would be far less.

Vin - My parents started me off in reading. I basically picked up on it and enjoyed it . . . I read cover to cover. It doesn't matter if I don't like it.

Aveek - I think it is because earlier, I was exposed to entertainment-type novels. So now I'm reading more of those. If I was exposed to all kinds of writing earlier, I think it would be better; you would like to read more . . . I think the variety is important.

Erin - Because when I was little I was always encouraged to read. I was always reading and it stuck with me.

Kelli Ann - I think it was partly because my parents were always reading and I was always reading when I was little. That has a lot to do with it: it was engraved in my brain . . . When you practice a lot at doing something you get good at it and want to do it more.

Kim - I just think because all my friends read. My family's reading all the time. I want to be able to understand a lot of things.

Joe - My parents never pushed me to read: they encouraged me. They would just encourage me to the point that I enjoyed it but didn't feel obligated to read. When I started to enjoy the books is when I started to understand them and I wanted to read more.

The students reiterate here the earlier point that family, friends, and teachers all play a vital role in stimulating positive reading habits and attitudes. Their responses reveal that each student is influenced by these different factors to various degrees, both directly and indirectly.

The final interview question seeks much the same information as the previous one: "What do you think have been the most significant factors to influence you as a reader?" This repetition is deliberate in order to allow the students to clarify or extend their previous explanations if they feel it is necessary.

Rose - I guess my family again, and my dad the most.

Neal - I guess again the gaining of knowledge: it's the means to a much greater end. That has probably been the force behind why I've wanted to read.

Dawn - I just think it is easy for me. I have a long attention span and I like to see things from other people's perspective.

Jason - Probably my success at it at first. You have to know a fair amount of information. If you are ignorant, it shows fairly soon.

Karen - It would probably be my mom.

Lee - A lot of parents would say lights out, but my parents would let me read for another half-hour. On long trips too, and being able to get books. Being able to sit down on a Saturday and not do any work.

Pat - A lot of my friends who were a year older than me had an effect because they got to the advanced reading before I did. When they would talk about it I would get interested in it . . . because they were older they would be getting into this stuff before I was and that influenced me.

Tara - Being brought up in the atmosphere of it . . . School could be a factor. School opened up my mind to a lot of new things.

Valerie - I think it has been the people I've been around. It wasn't a certain author or reading style: it wasn't a material thing. If you are with people who are always reading, that's how you are going to be.

Vin - I suppose because my parents didn't let me watch a lot of T.V. while I was little. They would let me watch a little. I went to bed and always had the choice of sleeping or reading and I always chose reading. That is one factor . . . I just had a lot of time on my hands so I would read.

Aveek - I made a real effort because of the SAT test. They said you should read . . . I started to read a lot when I was exposed to writers like Sidney Sheldon. That kind of reading still included classics for me. It was also helpful when different teachers recommended different books.

Erin - I would say it probably just went back to when I was in elementary school. Everyone was reading books like Judy Blume and Beverly Cleary. They were really interesting and I wanted to read them. I just read a whole bunch and got really interested in reading.

Kelli Ann - Besides my family, the books I've read and the time I've given to reading them. Where I live, I think we have such a good library. I have any book that I've ever wanted. My lifestyle--having leisure time to read--plus having the resources have been important.

Kim - I think it was when my mom demanded and demanded that I read. I proved her right by doing it. With school, if I read ahead it was very helpful, even if I didn't like what I was reading.

Joe - My family is definitely one of them. Being introduced to some really good authors. Teachers have really shown me a lot as far as literature goes. I have really opened my eyes

to all of the information.

These responses added consistency to their prior answers, both in the previous question and in the earlier ones. Once again, the family is mentioned prominently as having early and direct influence on establishing positive reading habits. Similarly, peers and friends play an integral part of this development, along with school to a lesser degree. However these positive habits and attitudes are initially shaped, their experiences demonstrate a dynamic effort to maintain and improve them.

Reading and Social Processes

Another key issue regarding the influence of family and friends is the extent to which the students view their reading as a social process which defines and adds legitimacy to their reading experiences. Their classroom reading, for example, may differ from everyday home reading to take on more critical qualities, such as identifying and responding to symbols. It is in response to this social milieu that students can broaden their individual experiences with text. In fact, several responses indicate that through their family, friends, and classes, the students enter into an interpretive community similar to that described in Stanley Fish's work.

Fish believes that texts acquire relevance only within the context of the reader's experience with them; for the students in this study, that context is their family, social, and school reading environments. In his collection of articles entitled Is There a Text in This Class? (1980), Fish asserts that the reader in transaction with the text is the one who "makes" literature. In his words, "the reader's response is not to the meaning: it is the meaning" (3).

However, he is careful to make the assertion that each reader does not create literature "in any old way," but rather as "a member of a community whose assumptions about literature determine the kind of attention he pays and thus the kind of literature 'he' 'makes'" (11). Thus, the act of "recognizing" literature is neither constrained by the text nor is arising from an arbitrary will, but rather occurs through the reader from "a collective decision" by a community which creates guidelines and abides by them (11).

We may see this phenomenon occurring with the students in this study through examining four representative students and their key responses.

Although she gets frustrated by a lack of common reading with her peers, Karen nonetheless uses reading as a basis of comparison within her social setting: "It may sound stereotypical, but more girls read than guys. That's what I've found. I'd like to think that I'm an above-average reader. When I talk to people about the books I read, sometimes with a friend, they have never heard of it or they don't read much. They also don't really want to talk about the reading." Her sentiments are echoed in the initial questionnaires by a relatively low number of students who shared reading with their friends. As her response demonstrates, her peers have either not read the same works, or are not comfortable with discussing reading as part of their social setting. Nonetheless, she is still able to acknowledge her own habits as beneficial: "I hope that it makes me a better person. I feel more open-minded and well-rounded. I feel like I'm exposed to a lot of different ideas."

Like many of the other students, she sees her reading shaped

through a parental influence: "Well, my mom has influenced me . . . she was always there: she would always take us to the library and let us sign out books." However, this enthusiasm does not apply to her entire family; while she reports that one sister reads "constantly," "my youngest sister doesn't read as much as she should. My dad doesn't really read; he doesn't like to." Even with other family members who are not as enthusiastic about reading, she has developed a strong identity of her own. This is demonstrated further in her description of how her friends have influenced her reading: "They never really affected my reading. I remember in middle school everyone was reading romances, but I never would. Every once in a while if a friend would suggest a book I'd read it."

However, Karen's experience evolved through the social interaction about reading in school: she asserts that her teachers helped to shape her reading "because once in a while they would give a list of classics and I would go to that. If I saw some of the books on the list at the library I would pick them up." She disliked reading aloud in class; this is a fairly common response, particularly as such an activity forces more emphasis on correct performance than on comprehension. Yet, she calls reading discussion groups a "positive activity." She claims that her school reading experiences have "made me want to read more . . . Because in school was the first place we started to talk about books. Talking about the book with the teacher was always positive."

Karen describes an entrance into an interpretive community. Despite any hesitation among her friends, she is finding a context in which she can define and enrich her reading experiences. In fact, she cites this social context as a turning point in her enthusiasm for

reading:

In tenth grade, we were reading The Glass Menagerie. I thought that was so interesting how the author symbolized things. It got me excited about reading. This is the first time I can really remember in class discussions all the different elements and how they came together. That got me really excited about reading more plays.

Furthermore, she credits these same factors as being the most influential in her current reading proficiency.

In Jason's case, for example, his reading experiences were initiated out of feeling competition with his sister. He claims, "I started reading because my sister did. I was a year and a half older and she was three. I thought, well, maybe I should start to read." His sibling's experiences gave him incentive to read, not to mention adding a new legitimacy to the experience.

Interestingly, as he grew older, Jason's view of reading became more individualistic, viewed as a basis for personal identity:

I suppose what you read characterizes who you are. I don't think I'm a person who would read books on organic farming. I read what is interesting to me, which is what I guess most people do . . . I have a bunch of friends who are science-oriented: that's all they read. I guess that sort of defines who they are.

Yet, Jason both associates himself with a social core of readers, while at the same time pointing out his departure from them: "I suppose I'm higher than average in the amount I read . . . It isn't highbrow stuff, but not necessarily the comics . . . As far as my friends are concerned, I'm reading about the same stuff they do. I don't read as much as I should. I've got friends that go through 500 page books in a week. I just don't do that anymore."

Like Karen, he sees this social context as the critical factor for his own reading identity. His comments indicate that as his reading

interests and social circles develop, they juxtapose into a dynamic basis of activity:

[My interests and my central group. It sort of blends itself toward the type of person I am . . . The type of people I hang around are the type who tend to share their feelings about the things they read about . . . They read something and they tell me and I'll read something and I'll tell them. We are the type of people who give books as gifts. I'd say that influences me.

For Kelli Ann, this social process has begun from her first experiences with reading. Her description of her family defines her surroundings clearly as a community of interpreters: "We are all readers, all four of us . . . I can't tell you how many times the TV has been off and the four of us are just reading together. My parents have always encouraged it. They read to us out loud when we were younger and took us to the library and treated that as a special occasion. They love to read just as much as I do." In her life, as in Karen's and Jason's, reading has taken on validity and importance through its practice in this cooperative atmosphere.

Thus, it is no surprise when school further defines her personal proficiency:

I tend to read faster and comprehend more than people my age. When I read, I can see symbolism and I can pick up on it. I have always done really well in reading discussions. The kids in my classes would tend to tell me that I was a know-it-all. It just clicked with me. I just read so much for so long because growing up that is all I did during the summer . . . one summer I read over one hundred books . . . I would surprise myself with what I would know after I would read a book. I tend to read faster from habit; I have never taken a speed reading classes. I tend to categorize it better and file it, simply because I have done so much of it.

Even facing the chagrin of her peers, Kelli Ann still recognizes her part in this viable interpretive community as it shapes and reinforces her own reading identity. Now, it is clear that she has simultaneous

developed a role both as a reader and as a member of a social circle which accepts and fosters her as such:

When I was younger, books were a major part of the friendship. I was very shy and withdrawn and books became my friends in a way. My mom was always good about it. She would say that it wasn't real life, that books are fine but you have to go out there and live. My friends never really made fun of me, though. The older I get, the more I see my friends enjoy reading. I have a lot of friends that read daily and it is no big deal.

In Pat's case, the social context proved to have a dramatic impact on his reading. In one response, he describes resisting books which have popular appeal:

I like books that are not considered in the mainstream. I think that's reflecting the fact that I'm not necessarily mainstream . . . That's where my interest lies, not where everybody else lies. Sometimes I go to the library and I'll pick out a book no one has heard of by an author that no one's heard of. I'll read it just because it sounds interesting. Most people go to the bookstore and they will pick up something like Danielle Steele or Tom Clancy: something everybody reads. Popular authors don't necessarily appeal to me.

In terms of individual reading preference, he is largely unaffected by peer choices.

School, similarly, did not positively influence his reading:

I don't think it had any effect on me either way because what I read at home and what I read at school were completely different. I was disenchanted with situations where we were supposed to be interpreting literature and had no clue. The teachers always know the books so they know if you're right or wrong. I didn't like being called wrong even when I had points to support my opinions.

In this case, the classroom did not provide a satisfactory setting for engaging with literature. Unfortunately, this teacher-centered approach that he describes is far too common in school, and largely serves the same purpose it seems to here: to alienate readers by rejecting their contributions to a individual and group reading processes.

However, in subsequent responses, Pat presents a picture of a much more dynamic reading interaction within a different social milieu:

I don't think my friends have had a real big influence on my reading habits until recently . . . Last summer, a bunch of my friends got together and we started to read books together, sort of 'the great intellectual awakening.' It seemed like all of the sudden everybody was interested in writers like Faulkner and Hemingway. Everybody got really interested in these big novels of the great writers . . . we would just start talking about the books . . . I would say maybe five of us. I think what happened was everyone felt compelled to argue what they felt was right and that makes it interesting.

On his own, he has entered into and helped to shape an interpretive community. As a result, it has helped him to pursue his own reading in a dynamic fashion, but also to have reinforcement from peers in doing so. For example, he describes when he and Jason, who was also interviewed for this study, sought a particular book:

Jason and I would start to hunt down a copy of Lair of the White Worm by Bram Stoker. We spent about six weeks trying to track it down. Even Wayne State said they had it, but when we went there, they didn't have it. It wasn't checked out and it wasn't on the shelf. I don't know, it was just strange. I think what has happened, going through English classes and just having busywork, we get interested in what we are actually talking about. Questions that we can't necessarily answer, but not what everyone else says.

Ultimately, Pat sees this social interaction with reading as the most critical influence in his reading: "A lot of my friends who were a year older than me had an effect because they got to the advanced reading before I did. When they would talk about it I would get interested in it . . . because they were older they would be getting into this stuff before I was and that influenced me."

In summary, reading is not simply an intellectual process for the students, but a social one as well. Through their social structures, their reading develops, changes, and finds its meaning through various communities of readers.

Student Responses and the Reading Process

The responses of these four students also help us infer about their individual application of the reading process. It is clear that the students commonly adhere to a transactional view of reading: they bring their own experience and knowledge to bear on the text in order to create meaning. Even when they do so unconsciously, their discussion clearly indicates that they have regular and dynamic interaction with text. Conversely, their comments also indicate that they sometimes follow a transmission model when they read: in doing so, they have less personal engagement with the text. Meaning is more of a phenomenon which is received from text rather than individually created. In this sense, students may be more passive in their reading as they strive for fundamental information from the text.

Karen's responses indicate that she has long seen engagement with text as a crucial factor. She responds,

I have always loved to read. I enjoy the classics because I like to study the style, to see what people have done before. When I was younger, I liked reading because it gave me something new: it was almost like a new experience. I always thought of reading as being exciting: every time you read a book, you live with the character and it's almost like you are there.

Her comments here demonstrate her transaction with text. Clearly, she has established schema which help her approach and comprehend new reading situations. Interestingly, her comments indicate both an awareness of particular textual features in reading for style, and similar attention to broader aspects of her reading. Her interaction with the text is dynamic: she sees the possibilities of the text as something "exciting," which also leads her to create "a new experience"--an imagined world realized through the text. Consequently,

she will bring this new meaning to bear on subsequent reading situations.

Karen's comments also relate some of her experiences to a transmission model. With regard to her reading, she says, "I feel like I'm exposed to a lot of different ideas." Concerning reading and her future success, she states, "I'll have a large vocabulary and I'll be able to write in a more sophisticated manner . . . Because the more you read, the more vocabulary you will have. You learn to figure out words from the context. It helps you to understand things better." In these remarks, she indicates less of an active transaction with text where she is helping to create meaning; instead, she is indicating more of a passive receiving of information--however beneficial--from her reading.

Nevertheless, like many of the other students interviewed, Karen is engaging herself with literature: "In high school," she recalls, "most often I liked the books we were assigned to read . . . They would say to read so many pages a week, but I usually ended up reading the whole book right before the test. I think it was because I would want to read it all together. For me it was better." Her comments also suggest her preference for reading the works as a whole rather than in fragments as the classroom assignment requests. This suggests the need to respond to the whole work in a fuller context in order to better create a reading transaction.

As it was mentioned earlier, Karen's enthusiasm for reading reached a positive turning point when she enjoyed reading The Glass Menagerie in a tenth-grade English class. She describes how she "thought that it was so interesting how the author symbolized things . . . That is the first time I can really remember in class discussing all

the different elements and how it came together." Once more, through her comments she demonstrates a dynamic reading transaction. She creates meaning through her own knowledge being integrated with the textual features in the reading act. However, she also reveals how the social context of the class discussion influences her closer reading of the text. While her comments suggest a close reading for traditional literary elements, she suggests that the classroom sharing both enables such a reading and makes it more enjoyable.

Similarly, Jason's comments also indicate a tendency to follow a transmission model of reading. Discussing the impact of his reading in college and in a profession, he states,

I think it is necessary to absorb information. Primary media is the written word . . . You are asked to read 200 or 300 pages a week in college, depending on what field you go into. But if you are going to be a stockbroker or a doctor or a scientist, there is a lot of reading involved. If you can't do it, you are obviously not going to be proficient at it.

He clearly has internalized the importance of reading proficiency for his future endeavors. However, it is interesting that he views this reading primarily as gaining information, rather than an active--and perhaps enjoyable--creation of a literary experience.

However, he also comments on other reading which has involved more of a transactive approach: "The higher up you get, the better the memories. It wasn't as basic as earlier stuff. You learn more about literary devices and that sort of thing. You can analyze the stuff better." In approaching his reading he understands the necessity and value of his own contribution. He believes that his success as a reader is due to his early enjoyment of it, but also that "You have to know a fair amount of information. If you are ignorant, it shows fairly soon." Clearly, he sees the importance of prior knowledge as a way of gaining

access to the text. Furthermore, his comments indicate that he believes his own schema are extensive enough to allow him this access. Like Karen, he also sees a need for reading whole works order to gain a better sense of that work's meaning: "But I do read the paper and magazines every day. Generally, I read things all the way through . . . What I read now are novels and that sort of thing."

In her comments, Kelli Ann regards her own reading with a conscious combination of transmission and transactive approaches:

I know that I'm a very good reader. When I read, I tend to put my whole self into it . . . For me it is an escape almost, just to go and be someone else. You will learn so much from reading. I know that is why I was smart in school, not super smart but above normal because I had read so much. When I was younger, my mom would make me read instead of watching television.

In her transaction with text, Kelli has even shaped her moral outlook. When she was asked what has had the strongest influence on her reading, she responded:

A lot of it was the type of books I read. I didn't read the popular books; I read anything from the 1950's. That's where I get a lot of my morals from. I read the old books because they were clean and good stories. The kids were more believable. I read all the children classics that have been read through the centuries. I don't know if it made me want to draw more from history than anything because that is what gave me my strong moral values . . . My teachers were also very lenient in letting me read what I wanted. One got me more into modern fiction, to show me that there are some good things out there.

Like Karen, Kelli Ann remarks that school has helped to shape her reading experience. Even though she became impatient with situations where the teacher asserted authority over interpretation, she nonetheless has developed her habits to enable confident and informed reading:

My elementary and middle school years were pretty much just read the books and do the book report. It was high school

when they made you start dissecting the book and make you think about why they did things. I do remember sophomore year reading Lord of the Flies. We went through everything because it was so symbolic, but I also thought it got carried away. My most negative experience would have to have been discussions where the class would agree on a point and the teacher would say no, you're wrong. They tend to have pat answers rather than discussions. They were never open to new ideas or insights. It was also positive because it made me sit down and dissect it. I am really thankful to my teachers for teaching me to find the symbolism. They did drill it into me but I think that it could've been a little more open-ended.

She also indicates that she is applying her own reading experiences toward subsequent choices. When she was asked whether school inspired her to read more or less, she responded: "It depends on how I react to the author. Like Steinbeck: I can recognize his writing, but I just don't like his style or themes. I won't go into more of it and Dickens is the same way. I do like Shakespeare. Faulkner, I will read more of. It's totally a personal thing, not how it is taught."

Like the other students, Pat sometimes places emphasis on gaining information through reading with a minimum of engagement with the text. He acknowledges this transmission approach as a helpful factor in school:

I think that is probably the one reason I do well in school is because I can read well. I figure in college that's the one thing that will get me through more than anything else is the fact that I can read something real quick and get the major points out of it without having to go over it. I think in a job as well because sometimes you can't read everything, you have to skim it and find what is important, then focus on the important things.

Pat's description of his reading matches Louise Rosenblatt's efferent reading stance, a situations where "as the reader responds to the printed words or symbols, his attention is directed outward, so to speak, toward concepts to be retained, ideas to be tested, actions to be performed after the reading" (24). However, Pat believes the strongest

Influence on his reading development has been the transactive experiences through a role-playing game involving extensive reading:

Probably the strongest outside influence was the role-playing game, Dungeons and Dragons because there was a lot of text in it and some of it was really thick text and I had to read through it. It started when I was in elementary school and I was reading text that was designed for high school students. I could understand half of it but it forced me to get used to the big words and made me look them up. A lot of it was reading for information and it gets to learning more and more.

It is interesting that this game involves both transactional reading--aesthetic, in Rosenblatt's terms--where the reader must help to create experiences through the text, and transmission or efferent reading, where the reader largely accepts information with less personal engagement. His comments throughout the interview suggest that he has learned to use both of these approaches effectively toward fluent reading.

Summary

Fifteen students were selected for interviews after displaying a high level of active interest in reading on a questionnaire. Their questionnaire responses indicated that they not only have enthusiasm themselves, but also live in environments which similarly promote positive reading habits and attitudes.

During these interviews, I asked the students about the broader context of their reading: their own attitudes toward it, the influence and reading practices of their families and friends, their schooling experiences, and their own reading habits.

The major points of their responses may be summarized by the following:

- 1) The students consistently reported positive early experiences with reading.

2) They describe a definite direct and indirect influence from their families toward stimulating their reading habits and attitudes.

3) They maintain high self-esteem as readers, seeing themselves as reading more challenging material more frequently than their peers.

4) They see their high self-esteem in reading as being beneficial to their overall self-image.

5) They see a definite positive correlation between their reading habits and attitudes and their potential for success in college and getting a well-paying job.

6) There was an equal distribution between friends who did and did not influence the students' reading experiences.

7) The students were frequently influenced positively by someone outside of their family or friends, such as librarians, teachers, and individual works read.

8) Overall, they found their school reading experiences valuable, particularly the greater exposure to literature. They reported frequent frustration at being limited by the slower pace of class reading assignments.

9) Overall, their school reading experiences were positive enough to inspire more reading.

10) They devote the majority of their reading time to pleasure reading. Some of the students reported a higher percentage of school reading time during the academic year, yet devote an equally substantial amount of time to leisure reading outside of school.

11) Most recognize a significant "turning point" in their reading habits and attitudes. These instances are consistently positive, and come about primarily through the influence of family members or

teachers.

12) A few students credit their own desire as the strongest influence on their reading habits and attitudes, yet a greater number recognize their families as the most influential, followed to a lesser degree by their peers.

13) They are actively engaged in a social process by which their reading is shaped and influenced.

14) Their reading follows both a transactional model, in which they bring their own knowledge and experience to the text in order to create meaning, and a transmission model, in which they read with less personal engagement with the text in order to largely gain information.

In the next chapter, these findings will be discussed in relation to the initial goals of this study and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study began with a broad question: how did proficient, enthusiastic high school student readers get that way? This question, of course, has other questions involved with it: What and how much are they reading? What are their self-images toward reading and how are they shaped? What is the reading atmosphere in their homes? What has been their experience with reading in school and how has it affected their overall reading habits and attitudes? To what extent has reading also become a social process for them among their peers? What other significant influences on their reading success do these students recognize? How do their responses fit current knowledge about the reading process?

This study, then, takes an in-depth look at the broader context of these readers, including characteristics of their home, school and social settings. Through examining their responses about their reading histories, we can work backward toward a holistic ethnographic profile. We can then identify which factors contribute to shaping successful student readers.

The answers come from the students themselves, both through questionnaires distributed to a random student population within Troy High School, and through interviews of the fifteen students who were selected on the basis of their responses to the questionnaire. Certainly, what students claim to do and what actually occurs can be inconsistent, so any conclusions must be approached with a degree of caution. Nevertheless, we can make some reasonable assumptions based on

the responses discussed earlier in this study.

Reading Initiative

The students in this study, particularly those who were interviewed, read much more and exhibited a much greater interest in reading than the students profiled in both the 1979-80 National Assessment of Reading and Literature and the 1988 National Assessment of Educational Progress. As I have already mentioned, both of these studies address a broader cross-section of students than this study does, yet the results here also present important insights into student reading.

The ninety-six students participating in this study reported reading an average of 2.6 books during the previous month, in addition to frequent magazine and newspaper reading. Furthermore, the students in this study expressed a predominant interest in reading for pleasure and personal growth.

While the NARL did not specifically examine amounts of book reading, the overall results indicated that the students surveyed had a minimal interest in reading beyond informational purposes. In fact, the students listed reading books or magazines as the least preferred activity when given a choice of alternatives, such as going to a movie or watching television.

In the NAEP, for example, only slightly over one-quarter of the students reported reading a single story or novel in a month's time. While the students had a higher incidence of reading magazines and newspapers, even this occurrence was lower by over 10% compared to the students in this study.

The most dramatic differences occurred between the results of these

two studies and the fifteen students interviewed as proficient readers in this study. In addition to reading magazines and newspapers, these students had read an average of 4.2 books during the previous month: they averaged reading a book per week. As I discussed earlier, some of their optional choices included canonical works of British and American literature. Such reading choices indicate not only a high propensity for reading, but also a willingness to explore challenging works. Moreover, the interview responses of the students in this study revealed a dramatically higher interest in reading for pleasure and self-exploration than the students in either the NARL or the NAEP.

Conceptualizations of the Reading Process

The accounts of their varied and extensive reading indicate that the students interviewed in this study have built up impressive prior knowledge which has made them more adept at subsequent reading acts; moreover, their ongoing experiences with reading have facilitated increasingly challenging texts and amounts of reading.

The students focus on comprehension when they read. They maintain an active engagement with text; they frequently mention reading in order to gain vicarious experience. Furthermore, they are consciously active readers: they are aware of bringing their own experience to bear on the text in order to create meaning. One of the primary reasons for this engagement is the development of their schemas during their early and extensive exposure to reading at home.

The more proficient students indicate in their interviews that they are better able to handle their school reading situations because of this early and consistent reading fluency. Although there are ambivalent responses to analytical readings in school, these students

are nonetheless confident in their analytical abilities.

We may also infer from their comments the use of a transmission model of reading in various circumstances. Their responses suggest that they approach text in this fashion when they are reading for information or for short-term evaluation in the classroom, such as for comprehension tests. In these circumstances, they tend to engage the text less and maintain a more objective distance, deliberately making themselves more passive receivers. Their primary emphasis in these circumstances is retention rather than aesthetic enjoyment.

Clearly, they have developed prior affective knowledge about the value of reading through their experiences at home, in school, and with peers, leading them to maintain a high interest in reading. Family discussions and mutual reading interests have fostered a viable reading community in virtually all of these students' homes. Their positive attitudes and extensive reading experience through their lives have been brought to bear on subsequent reading situations, allowing them to maintain their interest and enthusiasm toward it and making reading a valued part of both family and friendships. This is a central point for studies by Alexander and Filler (1976), and Cooter and Alexander (1984), both of which address the role of reader interest and attitudes. Cooter and Alexander state that "how learners feel about the information being processed affects their learning and later utilization of that information" (99).

The proficient student readers in this study show an effective conceptualization of the reading process. They use their prior knowledge as a primary means of comprehension, and are adept at constructing meaning. Furthermore, they apply this comprehension as part of their

subsequent reading transactions. They are also able to distance themselves from the text in order to facilitate a faster and more passive reading. Their attitudes toward reading show a positive predilection which enhances their reading acts in varying contexts.

Reading as a Social Process

As it has been already mentioned, the students interviewed in this study also have developed their reading competency through the social influences of family, friends, and school. This is another dramatic contrast to the results of the 1988 NAEP. That study cites one-third of the high school seniors never engaging in social interaction about books with their friends. In this study, for instance, the proficient readers frequently report extensive and beneficial discussions about books with peers. While this is a select group of readers, it does indicate some encouraging instances of peer interaction about reading.

In their family atmospheres, the students interviewed have particularly developed their interest and enjoyment for outside reading, most of which is done for leisure; this is evidenced by the titles listed for reading outside of school. In this context, they are free to choose what they want to read and are encouraged to read what they choose. Though a few students report being encouraged to read "classics," the primary emphasis at home is on enjoyable interaction with print. As a result, the students tend to do more outside/leisure reading than school-related reading.

Another reason for their extensive outside reading can be as an escape from the largely structured, formalized approach to literature found in school. Several of the students--even though they liked the exposure to canonical works they might not otherwise have

read--complained about the limitations of content and pace in assigned school reading. Furthermore, they are frequently disenchanted with the interpretive authority of the teacher. Their frustration over having their personal transactions with texts contradicted or overruled is yet another example of their active and meaningful engagement with reading. Consequently, those students in less supportive circumstances are more likely to seek their reading experiences outside the classroom.

It is not surprising that those who reported positive classroom experiences did so largely within the context of a supportive, helpful peer reading community. Many students relate that this community is crucial to their enjoyment of school reading; their enthusiasm is fostered by positive sharing of their reading and interpretive experiences.

Their school reading takes on more formal constraints. The students mention close reading and structured analysis as the frequent primary mode of classroom reading. However, even when the students may be creating meaning as readily as they do in their leisure reading, they are often limited in their expression of it by teachers or peers. Such negative experiences risk making students assenting rather than critical readers by reducing their confidence in their transactions with text. As a result, their responses may tend to appease their teachers or interpretive communities with unoriginal yet safe readings.

Nevertheless, their positive reading habits and attitudes have partially been fostered through their school experiences; their family influences have also been critical. It is not surprising that they report disliking traditional pedagogy which asks them to study grammar or write book reports, assignments which apparently do not challenge the

growth or creativity arising from their literacy experiences.

Furthermore, the students' natural reading processes are not being stimulated by these activities which only occur in school.

Yet they also relate favorable school episodes which allow them independence in choosing reading material and expressing its meaning to them, much the same as they reported doing at home. In addition, they recognized the value that school provided them in opportunities to broaden their reading experiences through required reading and suggested reading lists. Despite having had negative reading experiences in school, these students agreed that their school experiences have made them want to read more. This attitude suggests that well-established aptitudes allowed these students to tolerate less challenging school assignments while maintaining their enthusiasm for reading.

Several of the students interviewed claim that their reading growth has been influenced by friends through competition or through socializing about common reading interests. This factor, virtually ignored by previous research, adds a positive dimension to their reading. As a result, their reading fluency improves when it is integrated with and supported by the peer relationships which are so critical in the students' social development.

An interesting and contrasting finding emerged from the overall sampling of 96 questionnaires. Even though students maintain positive attitudes about reading, they do not have significant interaction about reading with their friends. One possibility is that these students see reading as having personal value yet have not experienced it as having social value. Considering their ambivalent attitude toward school reading mentioned in Chapter 3, perhaps their classroom reading

experiences with more formalized study has not inspired interest or confidence enough to make them want to share reading interests with friends. Lacking the same enthusiasm as the higher-proficiency students interviewed here, these students may be faced in the classroom with lower expectations of expressing their reading transactions. Consequently, this lack of response can carry into their social milieu.

Conversely, the highly proficient students from the sampling have a different experience in sharing reading with friends. Their interview responses indicate membership in a much more dynamic, helpful interpretive community both in and out of school. As a result, they see their reading development within a viable social context. This is not surprising, considering the consistently positive home environments from which they come. Furthermore, even though they do not always like their school reading situations, they find peer interaction over reading stimulating and helpful enough to maintain it in non-classroom settings.

Another cause for this outside interaction is their high reading self-image. Through the confidence they have gained in their home reading environments, they feel more at ease with expressing their opinions within an interpretive community of peers.

Conclusions

These readers are positively affected by a strong and consistent home influence on their reading development. I expected a positive home influence based on previous research on high-achieving readers. However, I did not expect this influence to be as considerable as these students relate. Their earliest memories are of reading at home with their families, indicating that these parents are providing an environment of extensive literacy long before these students have any

formal school training. The parents play a key role in building prior knowledge in the students. As a result, the students use this broad context of positive reading experience toward creating new meaning with text.

The parents have created this environment through active participation in reading with their children, modeling reading themselves, and providing access to reading material in the home. Just as crucial is the fact that there is a broad selection of this reading material: the students report the presence of various newspapers, magazines, and books in the home at all stages of their reading development. Such active encouragement to read also positively affects the siblings of the students interviewed here and helps to create a literate family environment.

This environment clearly contributes to an early positive experience with school reading. The students coming from these homes report an early enjoyment of reading in school. In addition, they are equally aware of their own advanced achievement in reading, which in turn stimulates their positive attitudes toward it. These findings reflect those of Lampert and Saunders (1976). They found that the higher-achieving of two groups of readers in their study

report being read to more when they were young; they also report more books being brought into the home by their families and more family discussion of all media in the home. These differences are not large enough to suggest statistical significance; rather, they reflect the student's own view of himself in relation to reading (36).

Bloom (1964) and Hansen (1969) also addressed this issue, as both of them reiterated through separate studies the importance of a positive home literary environment on shaping subsequent student reading habits and attitudes.

Perhaps the most important element of this home influence, however, is its consistency. The students report direct and indirect encouragement not only early on, but continually throughout their lives by such means as book clubs, summer vacations, public and family libraries, and family book sharing. Judith Langer reiterates this point:

Because better readers report reading more frequently and have access to a greater variety of reading materials, it is important to encourage young children to engage in a variety of reading experiences. Considering the seeming decline in reading as they grow older, it may be equally important to continue support for reading experiences as students progress through school (37).

This important element of consistency directs the students' positive reading attitudes perhaps as much as their own motivation to read. The most encouraging result is that these students' interest in reading did not diminish throughout their high school years. In fact, the most common response was that it increased. While there are other key factors which facilitated their positive growth--personal initiative, friends, and teachers--it is the steadiness of the home influence which became crucial. This consistency is particularly important during the high school years, when parents could easily take a student's successfully established reading patterns for granted.

As these students have matured, they have noticed their superiority to their peers as readers, which in turn has developed their own self-esteem. This high self-perception is reflected in a variety of ways. First, these students describe successful school careers, particularly in English classes. This point is also evident in the fact that with one exception, all of the students selected for interviews came from honors sections. Second, their confidence has extended toward

their future endeavors, as they realize their advantage in pursuing higher education and desirable jobs. Lampert and Saunders found similar characteristics in the higher-interest students in their study, stating that these students "enjoy reading, but also identify it closely with educational achievement and future success. They seem typical of the students for whom the English curriculum is designed . . ." (37).

Even with the strong impact of family and friends, these students also cite positive influences such as particular teachers and reading material itself. In fact, it is these outside influences which stimulated whatever turning points occurred among these students, virtually all of which were positive. Such a result does not automatically imply that they had unpleasant prior reading experiences. Instead, it suggests that they are interested in improving their reading experiences and sensitive to inspiration to that end. They have established an affinity for reading which they seek to maintain.

Some of the students credit their own initiative with being the most significant influence on their reading habits and attitudes. However, the predominant response to this question was the family, both as individuals and as a broader reading context. Reflecting their earlier responses, the students mention how their extensive reading has been an integral part of their family lives. Harlan Hansen (1969) addresses this the importance of this point: "Public school could well consider the relationship between the home environment and later reading patterns. This could first result in in-service programs which would involve the teacher in identification and measurement of the home environment. Secondly, teachers can apply this knowledge to provide for a continuation of the best of the home literary experiences, to attempt

to make up for those which have been lacking, and to better understand the problems of the reluctant reader" (23).

One major step toward accomplishing this goal is to implement classroom activities which build upon the natural and valuable reading processes which are practiced in leisure reading. Consequently, such traditional and school-specific activities such as formal grammar study and vocabulary memorization must be reexamined as a viable means of stimulating reading interest and aptitude.

Future Research Directions and Pedagogical Implications

There are several areas addressed in this study which could be explored in further research. Additional research may examine the degree to which lower level, average, and proficient readers approach reading according to what is known about the reading process. In doing so, we may see which reading paradigms are assumed either consciously or tacitly in varied student reading practices. As a result, pedagogy may be directed toward improving these practices starting with their current habits.

While I did not ask the students directly about conscious or unconscious metacognitive strategies, I had expected them to at best discuss or at least make reference to their self-monitoring strategies during their reading acts. This was not the case, however. Nevertheless, this still remains a viable research area. An interesting question, along the same lines as the present study, is to what extent do these proficient readers exercise effective metacognitive strategies? How are their approaches different from those of other, more mainstream student readers? Does their metacognitive proficiency play a major role in their higher ability and increased enthusiasm as readers? Granted,

this research would not be easy; it would require students to reflect on their reading acts much more assiduously than usual. However, the answers to questions like these may help develop pedagogy to improve student metacognitive strategies.

Further research is needed which examines the relationship between reading attitudes and reading behavior, and which addresses the contribution of positive reading attitudes to subsequent reading behavior and achievement. Consequently, such conclusions may expand the pedagogical implications and explore ways in which the school may intervene in providing a viable, supportive reading climate which raises the students toward the level of the enthusiastic readers described here.

More in-depth inquiry is needed into the positive and negative influences on student readers not as proficient as the readers interviewed in this study. Such an inquiry may be helpful in revealing at what point and to what extent these students are influenced differently from the higher-interest, higher-achieving groups. For example, the positive and negative reading influences from school need to be explored for average readers as well.

Reading habits and attitudes must be examined in a holistic context: the same methods which are applied here can also be targeted toward average and below-average students in order to find out which influences mentioned here are lacking from other reading environments. There are several factors which contribute to positive reading experiences, and these factors work together in a complex variety of ways. Instead of isolating single factors, such as test scores or socioeconomic levels, these multiple influences must be taken into

consideration together. While this type of research may be more time-consuming and inexact than other empirical studies, nonetheless it will provide a more thorough picture of both effective and ineffective student reading contexts.

More research must be done on the role of peers in influencing reading habits and attitudes. In this study, for example, there is a disparity between the social reading experiences of the students surveyed overall and those higher-proficiency students interviewed. While the general survey reveals an ambiguous social response to reading, the students interviewed describe a much more active and viable social experience through reading. Such a situation asks whether the school atmosphere helps or hinders such interaction and for which students. Consequently, classroom practices must be examined in order to foster sharing situations which may develop more positive and dynamic peer interaction over reading.

Students interviewed in this study cited turning points in their reading habits and attitudes at various times. While their experiences have been largely positive, more research could be done as to how these turning points affect other students. In particular, students who experience turning points which discourage their reading must be examined. Through this research, critical situations which tend to have a negative effect on student reading may be isolated and effectively addressed in the classroom.

Pedagogical research must continue to find methods which allow teachers to provide reading contexts which are more personally meaningful, just as the home experiences of these students have been. A constructive, supportive attitude toward various readings must be

modeled by the classroom teacher and encouraged in students. Only then can students learn to facilitate the positive peer interaction over reading which the proficient students in this study cited as being so beneficial.

Clearly, research must continue to bear out that students' attitudes toward reading have an important bearing on their reading behavior. This study demonstrates the importance of developing positive reading attitudes early, and maintaining a consistent emphasis toward lifelong enjoyment of reading.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
STUDENT READING QUESTIONNAIRE
STUDENT CONSENT FORM
ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVAL FORM

APPENDIX A

STUDENT READING QUESTIONNAIRE

Part I

Please think over the last month, since 4/23/91.

1. Did you happen to read any magazines? Yes No

2. Did you happen read any newspapers? Yes No

3. Outside of school or at home, did you read any
hardcover or paperback book (even if you did not
finish it)? Yes No

4. If you have read a book, what was the book
about? _____

What was the title, if you can remember? _____

5. During this past month, how many other books have you read or
begun to read? _____

What were their titles or topic areas? _____

(You may use the back of this sheet if necessary.)

6. How much do you read for enjoyment in your spare time? (Put a
check before the right answer.)

____ Never
____ Less than 1 time a week
____ 1-2 times a week
____ More than 2 times a week

7. Do you read magazines regularly--on a daily or weekly
basis? Yes No
(If no, please skip to question #9. Go on to question #8.)

8. If you read magazines regularly (on a daily or weekly basis), which
of the following types of magazines do you read?

Newsmagazines, such as Newsweek or Time Yes No

Household or family magazines, such as People,
Good Housekeeping, or Reader's Digest. Yes No

Sports publications, such as Sports Illustrated Yes No

Personal health, self-improvement, or fashion

magazines	Yes	No
Hobby magazines	Yes	No
Automotive magazines	Yes	No
Religious or church magazines	Yes	No
Science magazines	Yes	No
Business or trade magazines	Yes	No

Others: _____

How much of these magazines do you normally read?

☐ All of it.
☐ The majority of it.
☐ A few articles.
☐ Not more than one article.

9. Do you read at least one newspaper regularly (on a daily or weekly basis)? Yes No

What are the titles of the newspapers you read regularly? _____

10. How often do you read for school assignments?

☐ Never
☐ Less than 1 time a week
☐ 1-2 times a week
☐ More than 2 times a week

11. What subject area do you read for most frequently? _____

12. What subject area do you prefer reading for the most?

_____. Why? _____

Part II:

Please indicate how you feel about each of the following statements by indicating whether you: strongly agree, agree, disagree, or have no opinion.

13. Reading is a useful activity.

14. I like to read.

15. My friends would be surprised to see me reading a

book that is not required for class.

16. I leaf through magazines or paperback books when I am in a checkout line or waiting in a doctor's office.

17. I think reading books takes too much time and concentration.

18. Even though I am a busy person, I always somehow find time for reading.

19. I admire people who read a lot.

20. Outside of school, I am seldom encouraged to read.

21. I usually don't read unless I have to.

22. I find myself giving books to friends and relatives as gifts.

23. I choose to read non-required books and articles fairly regularly (a few times a week).

24. When I really enjoy reading something, I try to get friends to read it.

25. Members of my family like to read.

26. Reading is not that important outside of school.

27. When I was young, I read a great deal about certain topics.

28. I am good at understanding what is assigned to read in school.

29. When I find an author I really like, I try to read their other books.

30. I usually do all the required reading for courses.

31. Most of my friends like to read.

32. I enjoy most of the reading assigned in school.

33. As a reader, I consider myself

Poor___ Below Average___ Average___ Above Average___ Excellent___

34. As a reader, my understanding or comprehension compared to other students my age is

Poor___ Below Average___ Average___ Above Average___ Excellent___

35. As a reader, my rate or speed of reading compared to other students my age is

Poor___ Below Average___ Average___ Above Average___ Excellent___

Part III

Please indicate whether the following reasons for reading are "Very Unlike Me" to "Very Like Me" on a scale of 1 to 5.

36. I read to find out how to get something done.

Very Like Me Very Unlike Me
 1 2 3 4 5

37. I read to keep up with what's going on in the world.

Very Like Me Very Unlike Me
 1 2 3 4 5

38. I read to discuss what I have read with friends.

Very Like Me Very Unlike Me
 1 2 3 4 5

39. I read for relaxation and personal enjoyment or as an escape.

Very Like Me Very Unlike Me
 1 2 3 4 5

40. I read to study for personal and academic advancement.

Very Like Me Very Unlike Me
 1 2 3 4 5

41. I read to get more information about my hobby.

Very Like Me Very Unlike Me
 1 2 3 4 5

Part IV

Please answer the following questions as honestly and thoroughly as you can.

42. What do people do when they read?

43. When you are reading and you come to something you don't know, what do you do?

44. What do you think makes a person a good reader?

45. How did you learn to read?

46. How can you tell that you are (or are not) a good reader?

Dear Students:

I am asking you to answer some questions about the reading that you do in school and at home. Your participation in this study will add to our understanding of the assumptions, experiences, and attitudes about reading of high school students.

As you complete this questionnaire, please remember that there are no right and wrong answers. As long as you are responding to the questions honestly, your answers are correct.

Your answers and your participation in this study will not affect your grade in this class. If you do not wish to participate, please tell your teacher now. If you wish to participate, please sign your name on the bottom part of this sheet. After you have completed this questionnaire, you may be contacted at a future date, to respond to additional questions. Your answers will be kept confidential.

Thank you for your help!

Mr. Charles Steltenkamp
Troy High English Department

=====

Name _____

Class _____

Teacher _____

Dear Parent:

As part of a doctoral dissertation in English, I am attempting to find out about secondary students' experiences, attitudes, and assumptions about reading. Your child has completed an initial questionnaire, and has suggested a high involvement in reading through his/her answers. In order to gain more extensive information regarding these responses, I would appreciate your permission to conduct an interview with your child, lasting approximately one (1) hour.

Individuals will not be requested to use their names or any other identifying information and all results will be strictly confidential. The interview will be tape recorded and transcribed, after which the tape will be erased. Participation is strictly voluntary, and has no bearing on your child's academic standing.

By allowing your child to take part in this study, you will be helping to provide important research data concerning secondary students' reading. Your cooperation is helpful and greatly appreciated.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at 689-0644 between 7:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.

Sincerely,

Charles J. Steltenkamp

I give my permission for this questionnaire to be administered to 11th and 12th grade students during their English classes. It is understood that all results will be strictly confidential. If I have any questions about his study I may contact Mr. Steltenkamp (689-0644) or Dr. Marilyn Wilson (517) 355-1634.

Date

Signature of Principal

APPENDIX B

STUDENT BOOK TITLE LIST

APPENDIX B

BOOK TITLES LISTED BY 96 STUDENTS

(Numbers in parentheses indicate additional times mentioned.)

American Literature:

American Psycho
America's Best Stories of 1989
Babbitt
Catcher in the Rye. The
Clan of the Cave Bear. The
Farewell to Arms. A
Flappers and Philosophers
Look Homeward, Angel
My Antonia
Old Yeller
On the Road
Saroyan, William (Stories)
Separate Peace. A
Sound and the Fury. The (29)
Temple of my Familiar
To Kill a Mockingbird
Up the Down Staircase
Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance

World Literature:

Alice in Wonderland (2)
Bible
Brave New World
Canterbury Tales. The
Clockwork Orange. A
Crime and Punishment
De Profundis
Fathers and Sons (20)
Foucault's Pendulum
Jungle Book. The
Madame Bovary
Picture of Dorian Gray. The
Prophet. The
Siddhartha
Sons and Lovers
Wilde, Oscar
Wuthering Heights

Drama:

Arsenic and Old Lace
As You Like It
Barefoot in the Park

M. Butterfly
Phantom of the Opera. The
Streetcar Named Desire. A
Taming of the Shrew. The (1)
Waiting for Godot (13)

Horror/Suspense:

Bad Place. The
Bourne Identity. The
Bourne Supremecy. The
Bourne Ultimatum. The
Coma
Dawn
Dark Half. The
Flowers in the Attic
Four Past Midnight
Heaven
It
Masters of Deceit
Misery
No Deals
Nobody Lives Forever
Pet Semetary
Presumed Innocent
Seeds of Yesterday
Silence of the Lambs
Stand. The
Talisman
Ten Little Indians

Non-Fiction:

Accounts of Holocaust Victims
Autobiography of Malcom X
Doors. The
Dreams
Dry Years. The
ESP
Growing Deeper
Life of Jimi Hendrix. The
Man of the House. The
Risky Times
Search. The
Snakes

Popular Fiction

Bean Trees. The
Blue Bedroom. The
Dances with Wolves
Dancing in the Dark

Day of the Cheetah. The
Endearment. The
Fever
Godfather. The
Joshua
Lady of Hay. The
My Name Is Alice
Naked Came the Stranger
One
Outlaws
Red Dragon. The
Secrets of the Morning
Tracker. The
Trinity
Triplets
Walking Across Egypt
Whispered Kisses
Whispers in the Wind
Wideacre

Fantasy/Science Fiction:

Dragonlance Chronicles. The
Dune
Kindred Spirits
Rama II
Rendezvous with Rama
Temptress. The

Poetry:

Selected Poems of Joyce Carol Oates
Virtuoso

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE STUDENT INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

RESEARCHER: What can you remember most about your reading experiences?

JOE: My reading experiences have been pretty good. I like to read fiction, though every now and then I'll read a biography. I just finished one on Adolph Hitler and one on Little Richard. Mostly I read fiction, though, especially horror writers like Stephen King and Dean R. Koontz.

(R): How do you compare yourself as a reader to other people your age?

(J): I think I read little bit more. It interests me and stimulates me. It is really easy for me to get wrapped up in a good book. I don't know exactly what it is, probably because of a good imagination.

(R): How does the image of yourself as a reader affect the image of yourself as a person?

(J): Fiction doesn't affect me as much as nonfiction. The biographies create a sense of realism: it brings things back down to earth. So it is the content vs. the ability to read. I have been reading things for a long time and I have tested way above grade level for a long time. I am kind of used to it; it is nothing that I really think about anymore.

(R): What value do you attach to your reading ability with regard to doing well in college and with regard to getting a well-paying job?

(J): I attach a high significance to reading because I know that there will be a lot of studying and research that I will have to do. All that will be for the line of work I hope to get into. I have really read an awful lot and it helps me store away reading material.

(R): How has you family influenced your reading habits and attitudes?

(J): My mother reads often. She goes through a couple of books a month. My sister is also a big reader. My dad reads quite a bit. They have always encouraged me to read instead of watching TV or doing something that isn't very productive. They have always been big advocates, very supportive of the books drives and things like that.

(R): Tell me all you can about your family's reading habits.

(J): My mom was an average student in high school and she really started reading later on in life. My dad doesn't read as often but finds it relaxing. Still, it's something that my parents have really nailed into our heads.

(R): Going back as far as you can remember, how have your friends influenced your reading habits and attitudes?

(J): I have a couple of friends like me and they read a lot. I've seen them reading and we have talked about books before. It was really kind of stimulating to talk about the same books that we have read and things that we learned from the books. It really does lend itself to be a stimulation of reading. It has value because you can get someone else's point-of-view on it. Going back, there hasn't been much of an influence from friends. It didn't really start until middle school.

(R): What other influences do you see on your reading outside of your family and friends, like a particular teacher, librarian, reading program, etc.? How did this influence you?

(J): Teachers mostly; a lot of teachers have asked us to read certain literature or told us about it. That really interested me. Then I would read it and find that it was really interesting. That goes back as far as 7th grade, when I would get some really great teachers that I

really respected a lot. They would tell me about certain books and it would be better than watching television.

(R): Tell me as much as you can about your experiences with reading in school.

(J): Reading in school used to be a pain. It was boring and not very interesting. As we have come into more progressive stories, like Shakespeare which I really like, the more controversial, it has become more interesting. I never really like poetry, but some of the stories later on have really interested me.

(R): What specific activities with reading in school have influenced you, either positively or negatively?

(J): Back in elementary school those book drives were fun to read and entertaining. That played a part in my reading. Throughout the middle years there were many reading activities. Then through high school, the research papers have been very interesting. The research part--the reading--was the best part.

(R): Have you found your experiences with reading in school have made you want read more or less and why?

(J): They have made me want to read more. I know now that there is more out there to read. I'm being confined to American Literature right now, but now I do realize that there are other people out there. There are modern works or just other stuff that I haven't read by the same authors.

(R): If I give you a list of some different categories, give me a percentage of the time spent on each: reading for pleasure, reading for news or information, reading for school, or reading for directions on a task.

(J): Reading for school would have to be the highest: 50%. Reading for pleasure would be about 30%, the other two would be about 10% each.

(R): Can you remember any "turning points"--in or out of school--which significantly influenced you feelings toward reading? If so, when was it and what happened?

(J): There was a book that I read in either 6th or 7th grade that really turned me on to reading called Under the Influence by W. E.

Butterworth. I liked it so much that I read three more of his other books. It really turned me on to reading. I started to read for enjoyment and I got a lot more out of reading.

(R): Why do you think you are the kind of reader that you are today?

(J): My parents never pushed me to read: they encouraged me. They would just encourage me to the point that I enjoyed it but didn't feel obligated to read. When I started to enjoy the books is when I started to understand them and I wanted to read more.

(R): What do you think have been the most significant factors to influence you as a reader?

(J): My family is definitely one of them. Being introduced to some really good authors. Teachers have really shown me a lot as far as literature goes. I have really opened my eyes to all of the information.

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