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Abstract

Numerous studies have been conducted in the past on the decline in amount of time students spend reading for leisure as they age. However, few studies have explored the specific factors that influence how middle school students select leisure reading materials. The purpose of this combined, qualitative and quantitative study is to explore the leisure reading habits of grade 8 students in order to explore the specific factors that influence middle schools students when they select leisure reading materials. Additionally, the study aims to determine if there are significant differences in how male and female students select their reading materials. Findings will then be used to determine ways in which to create a library program and environment that caters to the unique needs of the patrons it serves. A sample population of 25 students, 11 of whom were male and 14 of whom were female, participated in the study. Mixed-gender focus groups were created, each consisting of five students, who were posed with a scenario related to their book selection process. Following discussion of the scenario, participants completed a five question survey asking them about factors that influence their selection of leisure reading materials. Upon completion of the study, the researcher found that students' selection of leisure reading materials is influenced largely by social and visual factors. Only minor differences were noted between the selection practices of male and female participants.

MIDDLE SCHOOL LEISURE READING SELECTION: INFLUENCES DURING

SELECTION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL LIBRARY PROGRAMS

A Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the

Division of School Library Studies

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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Jessica A. Elliott
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This Research Paper by: Jessica A. Elliott

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has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Approved   Graduate Faculty Reader

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Date Approved   Graduate Faculty Reader

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Date Approved   Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

ABSTRACT

Numerous studies have been conducted in the past on the decline in amount of time students spend reading for leisure as they age. However, few studies have explored the specific factors that influence how middle school students select leisure reading materials. The purpose of this combined, qualitative and quantitative study is to explore the leisure reading habits of grade 8 students in order to explore the specific factors that influence middle schools students when they select leisure reading materials. Additionally, the study aims to determine if there are significant differences in how male and female students select their reading materials. Findings will then be used to determine ways in which to create a library program and environment that caters to the unique needs of the patrons it serves. A sample population of 25 students, 11 of whom were male and 14 of whom were female, participated in the study. Mixed-gender focus groups were created, each consisting of five students, who were posed with a scenario related to their book selection process. Following discussion of the scenario, participants completed a five question survey asking them about factors that influence their selection of leisure reading materials. Upon completion of the study, the researcher found that students' selection of leisure reading materials is influenced largely by social and visual factors. Only minor differences were noted between the selection practices of male and female participants.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"There is no such thing as a child who hates to read; there are only children who have not found the right book." This quote, attributed to Dr. Frank Serafini, Associate Professor of Literacy Education and Children's Literature at Arizona State University, states one of the core beliefs of teacher librarians: there are books of interest for every student. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL, 2007) affirms the importance of reading in their common belief that reading is a window to the world, meaning that reading and knowledge can lead to endless possibilities for students. In order for teacher librarians to foster a community of readers in their schools, they must be able to guide students in finding the right books for them. However, as students become older, extracurricular activities and more rigorous curriculum demand their attention, causing a drop in time spent reading for leisure, as well as diminished face-to-face interactions with teacher librarians. Thus, teacher librarians must make the time they have with their students effective, and a key component of this process is being aware of what influences students when selecting books for leisure reading. This awareness of how to best guide students towards reading materials ensures students will have the most appropriate reading materials for their specific interests and academic needs.

Problem Statement

In recent years, technology use has become more prevalent among students of younger ages. This includes use of cellular phones and tablets for reading purposes. With this increased use of technology in schools, some students have become less motivated to check out books from the library, as it is more convenient to simply

download or search the Internet for material to read. "Technology is playing an increasingly significant role in kids' lives, and it's changing the nature of how kids read and our definition of what is considered reading" (Staff, 2014, p. 24). The increased use of technology can lead to decreased use of libraries and less interaction with teacher librarians who can aid students in selection of interest and reading level appropriate reading materials. Lagarde and Johnson (2014) confirm this, stating that staff and students who are able to access the Internet through devices see less of a need to visit libraries. This dilemma compounded with the fact that reading for pleasure drops by 50% in middle school due to more demanding curriculum and extracurricular activities necessitates the teacher librarian's role in encouraging students to read (Gander, 2013).

The convenience of technology use to access reading materials and demanding school and activities schedules, however, cannot overshadow the importance of visiting a physical library space and interacting with a teacher librarian. The AASL's (1999) Position Statement on the Value of Independent Reading in the School Library Program reiterates this in stating that students must have contact with adults who are positive reading role models in order to become life-long readers themselves. Teacher librarians can conference with students about books individually, deliver book talks to classes, facilitate book club groups, and lead other activities to foster an appreciation of reading. While these are not impossible to do via the Internet, face-to-face interactions and contact help teacher librarians build relationships with their students and expand their reading horizons to include authors, genres, or styles of writing students may not select on their own.

While past research has focused on factors that impact students' motivation to read, there is a lack of information regarding specific programs and methods that can be implemented to encourage leisure reading as students become older. To make contact with students meaningful, teacher librarians must explore and be aware of how to create opportunities to encourage interaction with students, both in the library and out of the library. This already occurs in a variety of ways including, but not limited to, one-on-one conversations, book talks, book club groups, and appearance/placement of books in the library. However, teacher librarians must strive to develop innovative ways to connect students with reading materials that go beyond what is already being done. Teacher librarians and classroom teachers may benefit from this research through its ability to add to their awareness of how to best aid their students in selecting reading materials.

Summary of Problem Statement

An increase in the use of technology devices for reading is leading to decreased use of school libraries and less student interaction with the teacher librarian in selecting leisure reading materials. This decrease in use of the school library and interaction with the teacher librarians in turn leads to less time reading.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore various aspects that influence students when selecting leisure reading materials.

Research Questions

1. What influences middle school students when selecting leisure reading materials?

2. What are differences in how middle school girls and boys select leisure

reading materials?

3. How can librarians use knowledge of how middle school students select leisure reading materials to create a library program/space appropriate to their clientele and aid students in selecting reading materials?

Assumptions/ Limitations

One assumption of this research project is that some students do not utilize the library and the teacher librarian when selecting leisure reading materials, thus limiting themselves in terms of authors, genres, or the styles of writing that they read. A second assumption is that some teacher librarians may not be aware of all of the influences that lead to students selecting particular books for leisure reading. A third assumption is that librarians who are aware of what influences students' selection of leisure reading materials can use this knowledge to better cater their library program and physical library space to best meet the needs of the students they serve. This project was limited to only eighth grade students at a middle school in a large central Iowa suburban district.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to determine aspects that influence students when selecting leisure reading materials. In addition to identifying influences on students' reading material selection, the study will also discuss implications and next steps that teacher librarians can enact in order to best meet the needs of the students they serve. Research previously conducted concerning this topic fell into the following categories: reading attitude of middle school students, decline in leisure reading in middle school, and learning preferences of male and female students.

Reading Attitudes of Middle School Students

Reading attitudes of students vary amongst grade levels. Bleidt (2011) conducted a study to explore middle school students' perceptions concerning their school library as far as usefulness. Additionally, Bleidt wanted to determine how middle school students utilized the school library and what factors led to student success. Ten, high-need rural South Texas middle schools participated in the study. Students who participated were predominantly Hispanic and included 755 male students and 754 female students between the ages of 11 to 15 years old. The *Student Interest, Motivation, and Library Use Survey* was administered to students online over a two week period of time. Survey items included how often students used the school library, both with and without their class, what they used the school library for, and perceptions of individual students regarding the school library's usefulness. Bleidt found that students use the library for a variety of purposes, the top three being to read books, use the computers, and check out

fiction books. Results also showed that the majority of students felt the library played a critical role in their learning, but that further research needs to be done to explore options of how to make school library programs better meet the needs of the students they serve.

Further exploration of middle school students' reading attitudes was completed by Kelley and Decker (2009). Their study sought to determine levels of reading motivation of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students and how these impacted student achievement. The study concentrated on 1,080 students at a large, suburban middle school in Central Florida. Participants took the Motivation to Read Profile, which was slightly adapted from the original version to better assess middle school students. The profile was completed in students' language arts classes over a two week period of time. Topics explored through the profile included how often students read, their friends' perceptions of reading, how often they shared books with friends, their perceptions of libraries, and their reactions to teachers asking them questions about the books they are reading. Answers from the study were then compared to the students' reading scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. The study found that students' self-concepts as readers were similar across sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, but that the value students placed on reading decreased significantly from sixth to eighth grade. It was also found that the value placed on reading varied by gender. Female students said reading was very important and that they constantly shared what they were reading with others, while male students said it was "sort of" important and did not often share what they read with others.

Similar to Bleidt (2011) and Kelley and Decker (2009), Hughes-Hassell and Lutz (2006) also conducted research to gain a better understanding of leisure reading habits

and preferences of middle school students. Their study analyzed the results of a survey administered by a librarian in a middle school in a large city in the Northern United States that primarily served low-income African American students. A total of 214 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students participated, 44% of whom were male and 53.7% of whom were female. Four students did not specify their gender. The survey taken was a modified version of the Teen Read Week Survey that had been administered by Smart Girl and YALSA since 1999 and included questions about how students obtained reading material and who encouraged them to read. Analysis of the data gathered showed that 73% of students who participated read for leisure. Hughes-Hassell and Lutz also found that students felt their friends, parents, and teachers encouraged them to read and helped them locate sources of reading material more often than their teacher librarian. Additional findings showed a need to promote reading with boys in particular.

Decline in Leisure Reading as Students Age

As students become older, the amount of time they invest in leisure reading seems to decrease. This is due in part to students' attitudes towards reading, as discussed in the previous section, as well as other factors. Snowball (2008) conducted a study to explore the phenomenon of a drop in reading interest as students become older. To do so, she gathered information regarding the reading habits of teenage students, as well as their views on libraries. The study was conducted at seven different metropolitan high schools in Perth, Australia. Focus groups of five to seven students were selected from each school for a total of 41 participants. Participants participated in discussions guided by questions provided by the researcher, as well as other topics that naturally arose as they were talking. Provided discussion questions included the following questions:

·   Is reading enjoyable?

·   What do you want to do in your spare time?

·   Where do you get your reading materials?

Snowball found students rarely chose to read for leisure in their spare time due to being busy with other school or extracurricular activities. Participants also shared that they were more likely to read if it was supported by family and that they do not usually go to the library for their reading materials.

Bokelman (2005) also researched the reasoning behind a drop in student reading interest as individuals become older. Through her work, she sought to determine factors affecting the decline in reading by looking at previous research conducted by others. She summarized the finding of various research studies conducted on student reading motivation between the years of 1997 and 2007. The studies she analyzed focused primarily on the roles of ability, social aspects, and behavioral aspects on students' motivation to read. Bokelman found that ability level was a large factor in students declining interest in reading. Students who have not built confidence in their reading abilities and developed strategies to comprehend texts show a more rapid decline in leisure reading interest. Much like Snowball's (2008) findings, Bokelman also noted that interest in leisure reading drops as students age due to increasingly busy schedules and interest in other forms of entertainment.

Senn's (2012) exploration of a decline in reading interest focused primarily on male students. Her research sought to determine why boys are, in general, more reluctant to read when compared to their female classmates. The findings Senn presented were based on a summary of research related to reading motivation of male readers conducted

between 1996 and 2009. Studies summarized explored various factors that impact motivation. Factors most commonly noted were biological differences, confidence, gender stereotyping, and a lack of materials that are appealing to male readers. Senn also discussed strategies and particular titles of texts to which male readers may positively respond.

Learning Preferences/Differences of Male and Female Students

To best meet the needs of students, information must be known not only about reading attitudes and motivational factors affecting students, but also differences that may be seen amongst the different genders in regards to reading. Ahanbor and Sadighi (2014) conducted a study to examine possible trends in learning styles and strengths in multiple intelligences that may be found in relation to each gender and how these impact student learning. They conducted their survey in four high schools located in Shiraz, Iran. Two of the schools consisted of all male students; the other two schools consisted of all female students. Thirty students were then randomly selected from each school for a total of 60 male students and 60 female students. Participants in the study completed two questionnaires. One was the Perceptual Learning-Style Preference Questionnaire that was slightly adapted and the other was a basic multiple intelligences questionnaire. Results from the questionnaires found no major differences in linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, body-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and naturalistic intelligences. Findings did, however, suggest significant differences in intrapersonal intelligence.

Logan and Johnston (2010) looked more specifically at gender differences in reading attainment. They conducted a review of previous studies related to this topic that occurred between 1968 and 2009. Areas of focus included: (a) behavioral and motivational factors, (b) cognitive abilities, (c) brain activation while reading, (d) strategies, and (e) learning styles. Overall findings showed that in all areas, with the exception of reading strategies, female students seemed to be better equipped for success in reading in school.

While differences in reading preferences may have been more evident in the past, Brendler (2014) explored a recent shift in reading behaviors amongst males and females, as well as possible explanations as to what caused this shift. Brendler's research analyzed studies conducted between the years of 1980 and 2013 that focused on the role of cultural expectations for gender and the impact they had on students' literacy. Findings showed literacy rates of males increasing due to a change in gender expectations, as well as changes in how writers address teen readers. An explanation for this change could be that fantasy genre novels are currently popular; such novels are futuristic in their views and portrayal of society, with past gender roles not evident within the story themselves.

Summary

Numerous studies have been conducted in regards to teenagers' reading attitudes and the motivation to read. While some studies show gradual shifts in the reading attitudes of older students, a majority shows there is still a significant decline in the amount of leisure reading in teenage years. The main reasons for the decline in interest include increasing

involvement in social and extracurricular activities, lack of interesting materials, and lack of confidence in reading abilities. The current study will explore specific aspects that influence middle school students when selecting leisure reading materials. Bokelman (2005) suggested further exploration of ways in which librarians and teachers can encourage reading in older students. Therefore, the current study will also focus on identifying what individuals and methods of book promotion grade 8 students prefer and respond to most favorably when choosing leisure reading materials to inform efforts to keep students engaged in leisure reading as they become older.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

While many studies have been conducted exploring a decline in the amount of time students spend reading for leisure as they enter high school, few studies have focused on the specific factors and influences that impact how middle school students select leisure reading materials. Through this study, the researcher explored the leisure reading habits of grade 8 students in an effort to answer the following questions:

1. What influences middle school students when selecting leisure reading materials?

2. What are differences in the ways middle school girls and boys select leisure reading materials?

3. How can librarians use knowledge of how middle school students select leisure reading materials to create a library program/space appropriate to their clientele and aid students in selecting reading materials?

Research Design

A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods was used to complete this study. The first portion of data collection was qualitative and occurred through focus groups, in which participants were posed with a scenario related to selecting new leisure reading materials. Qualitative research allows researchers to

determine reasons and motivations behind particular participant behaviors and note any trends in participant thoughts and behavior. Wildemuth (2009) notes one of the strengths of focus groups as allowing the researcher to directly observe the similarities and differences in participants' views through the conversations that take place. In some circumstances, focus groups are used as a solitary method of data collection. However, "they are a much stronger research tool if used in combination with other methods such as in-depth interviews, direct observation, or surveys" (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 243). For this reason, participants also took a short survey upon completion of the focus groups.

Additional data was gathered using a quantitative, survey research method. Quantitative research allows researchers to gather data points from a larger sample of participants in order to form generalizations about a larger population. Using a survey data collection method further supported the purpose of the study, as it "…enables researchers to statistically 'estimate the distribution of characteristics in a population,' based on a sample that is only a fraction of the population" (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 256). Furthermore, Wildemuth (2009) explains "survey research supports the collection of a variety of data, including the beliefs, opinions, attributes, and behaviors of the respondents" (p. 256). A limitation with survey research is that some participants may misinterpret questions. An assumption was that there would be differences between the responses of male and female participants.

Procedures

Data Sources

The researcher developed a scenario to pose to participants, as well as open-ended survey questions related to selection of leisure reading materials that were discussed and administered in focus groups comprised of grade 8 students. While the researcher is a grade 8 language arts teacher, participants were students who were enrolled in another grade 8 language arts teacher's class. The middle school at which the focus groups took place is one of two middle schools in a large, midwestern district. The students who participated represented a portion of the nearly 700 eighth grade students enrolled in the district.

Students in one class of a grade 8 language arts teacher were invited to participate in the study through email. Before research began, the researcher acquired approval from the University of Northern Iowa's Institutional Review Board. Once approval to complete the study was granted, parental permission was obtained through a recruitment email (see Appendices C and D) and students completed an assent form (see Appendix E). A total of 25 students participated, 11 of whom were male and 14 of whom were female. Five focus groups consisting of five students were formed with both male and female students in all groups. Focus groups were moderated by the researcher and took place over the course of a week during silent reading time, lasting approximately 15 to 20 minutes. This ensured students did not miss any classroom time during which direct instruction may have been given.

When developing focus groups, researchers must "carefully consider what question [they] are asking with [their] study and what kinds of answers will be useful to [them]" (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 243). Wildemuth (2009) also suggests developing a moderator's guide to help discussions stay on track in order to gain usable data. With these guidelines in mind, the researcher developed a guide detailing the scenario to be presented to participants, as well as follow-up questions and space to record additional topics of discussion that may arise during group meetings.

When developing the follow-up survey for focus group participants, the researcher considered Wildemuth's (2009) statement that "a good survey is appropriately brief and simple to complete, both in terms of wording and organization so as not to demand too much effort on the part of respondents" (p. 257). Following these guidelines, the survey consisted of five questions/prompts. Survey questions/prompts focused on gathering data about most common library usage times, what students wish to experience when visiting the library, and who/what influences students' selection of reading materials. Participants took the survey immediately following the scenario discussion using an iPad. A copy of the focus group scenario is included in Appendix A and a copy of the follow-up survey is included in Appendix B. The researcher took notes of students responses during focus groups for later analysis. Students were only identified by gender.

Data Analysis

For this study, the researcher used a deductive content analysis method to analyze data gathered. This method allowed the researcher to analyze data "…for both

descriptive and comparative purposes" (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 261). The findings of the study were then generalized to describe a larger population and will be utilized by teacher librarians and classroom teachers to aid their students in selecting leisure reading materials and promote reading in their schools.
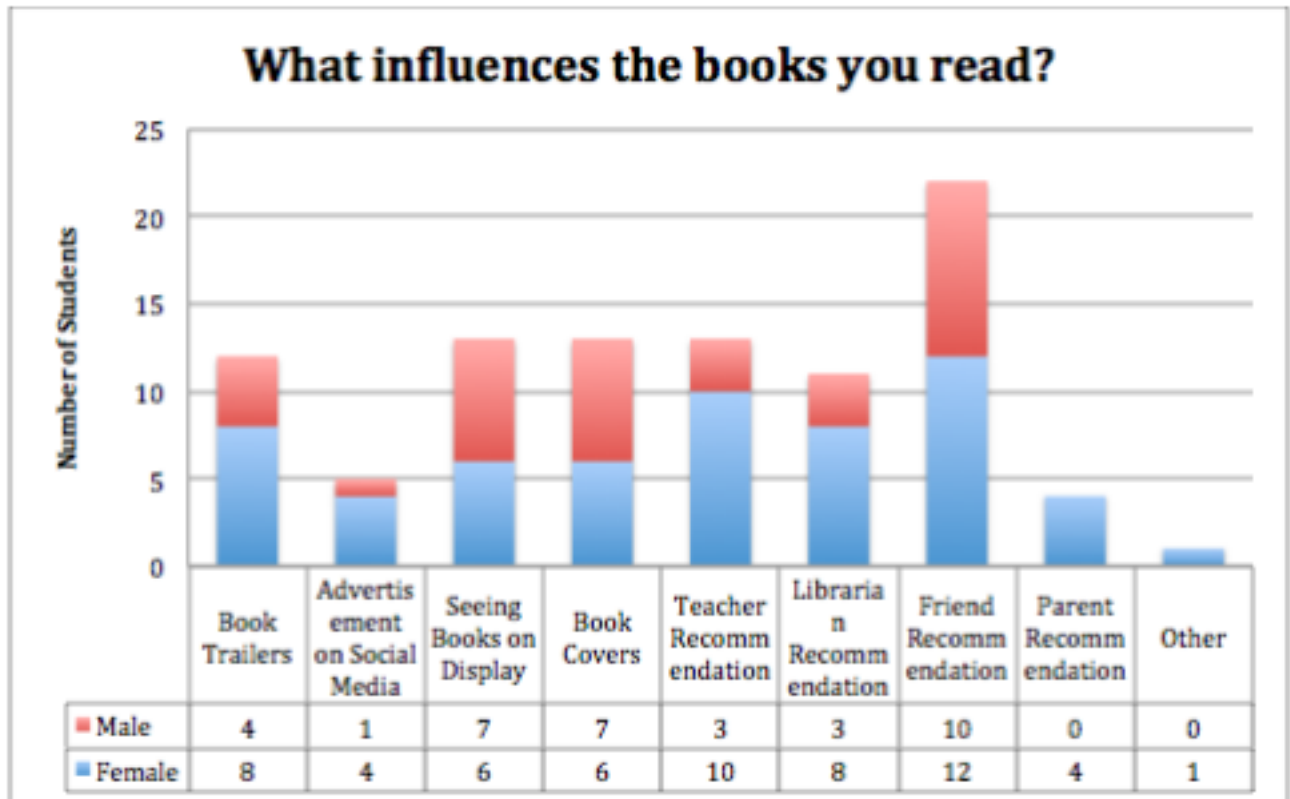
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

As students become older, more rigorous curriculum and increased involvement in extracurricular activities tends to lead to a decrease in time spent leisure reading. The purpose of this study was to explore the various factors that influence middle school students when selecting leisure reading materials.

The population of this study consisted of 25 grade 8 students enrolled in a large, midwestern school district. The district contains two middle schools; therefore, the participants of this study represented the roughly 700 total grade 8 students enrolled in the district. Permission was obtained from the parents of students in one grade 8 language arts teacher's class, as well as assent from the participation students. Five groups comprised of five students each were then formed. Each focus group met once for approximately 15-20 minutes. During this time, participants responded to a scenario question and then completed a follow-up survey.

Factors Influencing Leisure Reading Material Selection

Discussions with focus group participants, as well as survey responses, yielded many factors that influence what middle school students select to read for leisure. Figure 1 shows results from a survey question asking participants to select all factors that impact the materials they select to read, allowing them to select more than one factor. An option was also left to add additional influences.

Figure 1

Factors Influencing Book Selection

What influences the books you read?

	Book Trailers	Advertisement on Social Media	Seeing Books on Display	Book Covers	Teacher Recommendation	Librarian Recommendation	Friend Recommendation	Parent Recommendation	Other
Male	4	1	7	7	3	3	10	0	0
Female	8	4	6	6	10	8	12	4	1

Peer recommendations were noted as the most powerful influence, with 22 participants saying this was something that impacted what they read. This represents 88% of the sample population. Following peer recommendations, recommendations from classroom teachers, seeing books on display throughout the library, and selecting books based on the appearance of their covers were the next strongest factors with 13 students, or 52% of the sample population, considering these to influence them in selection of their leisure reading materials. The later two factors, selection based on displays and covers of books, were reiterated in all focus group sessions with students. Students stated when

needing something new to read, they often like to go to the library, walk around, and pick up books that catch their eye. Some students stated they would check out a book solely based on appearance of the cover or the fact that it was on display. Five students, 20% of the sample population, said after being visually attracted to a book they would also open the book and read a few pages to see if it was of greater interest to them.

Additionally, survey results showed that 12 participants, 48% of the sample population, choose books based on video trailers created to advertise books. Eleven participants, 44% of the sample population, sought verbal recommendations from the librarian when needing something new to read. But while less than half of the participants said they would talk to the librarian about book suggestions, almost every participant in every focus group agreed that they enjoy when librarians have a "Top Picks" or "Books I Enjoy" display and often select books from these. This suggests students want librarians to recommend books, just not necessarily in a verbal manner.

Low on the list of factors influencing selection of leisure reading materials were advertising on social media (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) and recommendations from parents, with only five and four participants, respectively, noting these as something that influenced what they selected to read. During focus groups, participants also mentioned use of Destiny Quest, a library interface tool that allows students to search, rate, and review books available in their library. However, all participants agreed that this social media-esque tool had been more popular when they were in grade 6. Some still used it in grade 7, but no participants were still using it in grade 8. Reasons for this decline in use were attributed to lack of class time spent accessing Destiny Quest together, as well as novelty of the tool wearing off. The 'Other' factor one participant

submitted through the survey was selecting books based on movies coming out in theaters. This was a factor discussed more during focus groups by over half of participants who said they often like to read books that are being adapted to film before watching the movie.

Another question asked through the survey was what time participants were most likely to visit the library. Participants selected only one answer for this particular question. Figure 2 shows responses to this survey question.

Figure 2

Times Most Likely to Visit Library
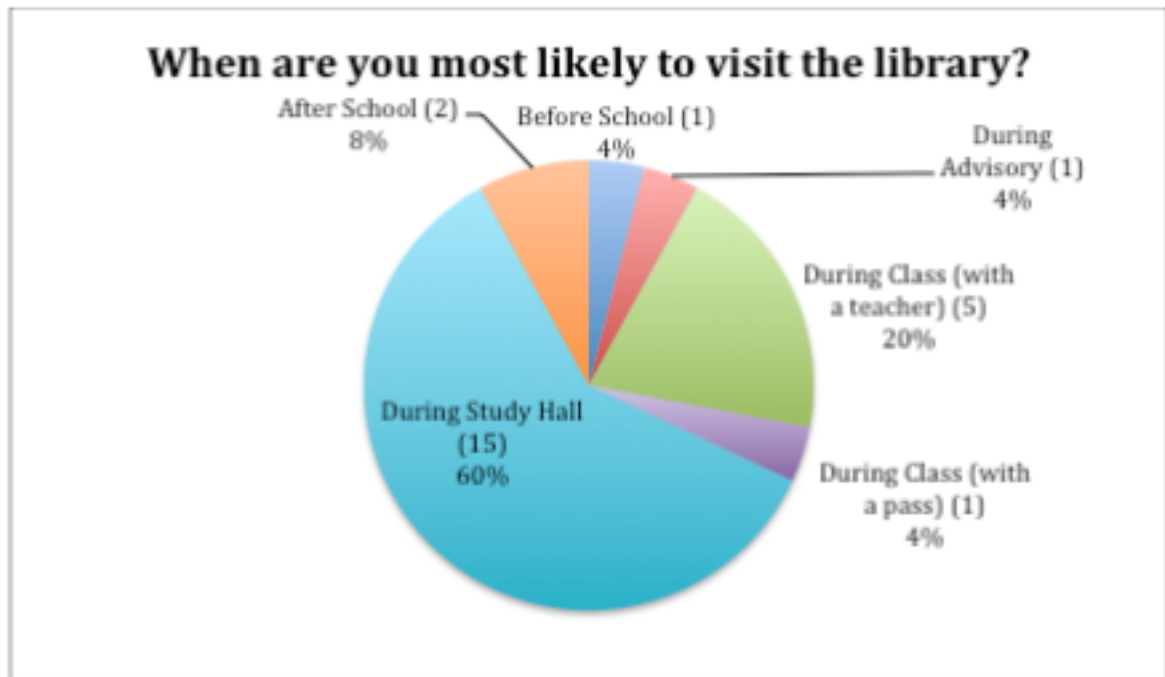
Results of this question showed that study hall was by far the time during which participants were most likely to visit the library with 60% of respondents utilizing this

time to select reading materials. This suggests that having a study hall in a student's schedule is also a factor in the amount of leisure reading they do. The next most popular time to visit the library was as a class with a teacher. This response was selected by 20% of participants. This percentage was significantly higher than that of other times to visit, also suggesting that teachers intentionally setting aside class time to visit the library together influences the amount of leisure reading students do. Visiting after school accounted for 8% of participant responses, and after school, during advisory, and during class with a pass (i.e. without the teacher) was each selected by 4% of participants.

Male and Female Selection of Leisure Reading Materials

An assumption when beginning this research was that there would be differences in the selection practices of male and female students. This study sought to see if there was truth behind this assumption. If so, knowledge of such differences could be used to cater to the unique needs of library patrons. Focus group discussions and survey results showed there were a few minor differences in the selection behaviors of male and female students. For the most part, however, selection behaviors and influences were quite similar between male and female participants.

One of the greatest differences to emerge through focus group discussions between male and female selection practices was that of participants "go-to books". Male participants in multiple focus groups mentioned many times that they find an author they enjoy or a series they find interesting and continue to check out books by that particular author or in that particular series. Female participants, on the other hand, expressed consistently that they tend to find a genre they enjoy and check out numerous

books that fit into that category. Male participants also discussed interest in browsing

non-fiction sections whereas female participants only discussed interest in fiction books.

Survey results showed minor differences in participants' answers to the prompt,

"When I go to the library, I want to _____." Participants were allowed to pick

multiple responses to this prompt. Responses can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Library Experience Preferences

	Hear about new books (Book Talks)	Look for books with the help of a teacher	Look for books with the help of a librarian	Look for books with the help of my friends	Look for books on my own	Other
Male	1	4	4	6	9	0
Female	6	5	7	9	10	1
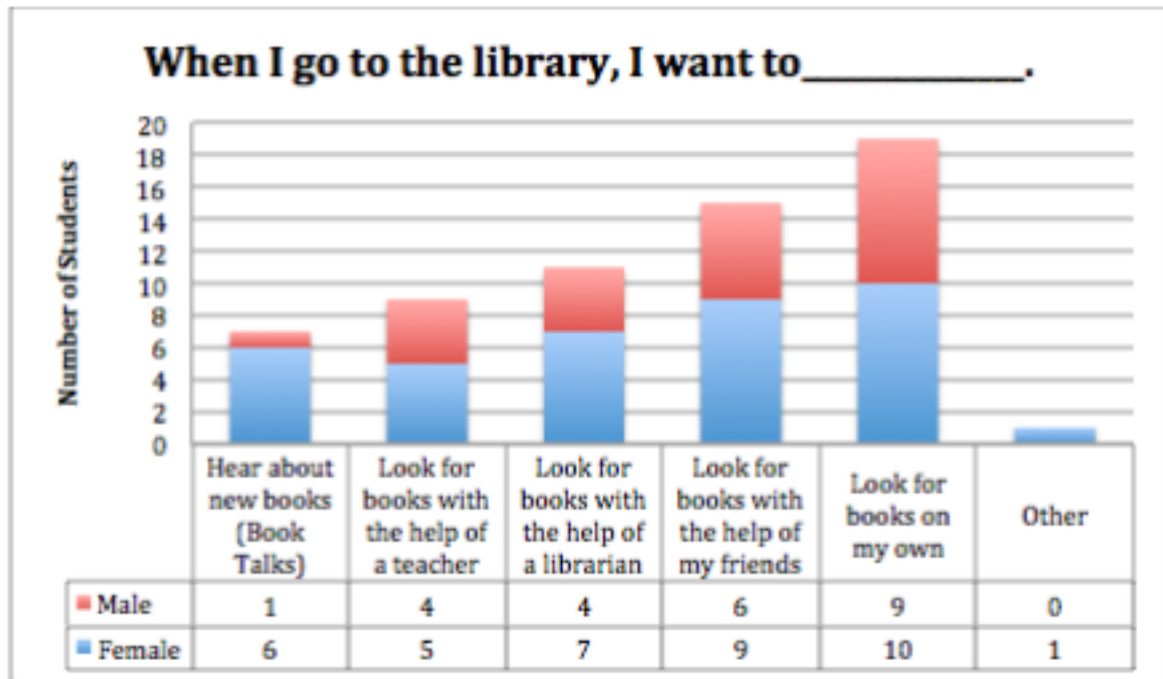
The only major difference noted in participants' responses to this prompt was the desire

to hear book talks when visiting the library. Six female participants expressed interest in

hearing book talks, while only one male participant said that this was something in which

he wished to partake. No major discrepancies existed between male and female

participants' desire to look for books with the help of a teacher, librarian, friend, or on their own. The sole 'Other' response selected indicated that the participant wished to find a spot and read in the library. The majority of participants, 76%, showed that once in the library, they wish to look for books on their own.

Implications for Middle School Libraries

One goal of this study was to gain information that could be used by middle school librarians to create library spaces and foster interactions with students that were meaningful and useful. In addition to the focus group scenario discussion and survey questions asking students to select responses from a list generated by the researcher, a final question was included on the survey asking participants what suggestions they had about how their librarian could promote books to students. Responses were as follows:

· Suggest "read-alike" books to students

· Display books you are personally reading or your top picks for your favorite books

· Display posters of books around the library and in the hallways

· Have a recommendation wall where students can suggest books to one another

· Give more book talks, either in person or post videos on the school blog

· Display even more books throughout the library

· Have a shelf of books that are being made into movies out all year

· Advertise books in the hallway more, like new books or the top-rated books in

our school

These findings suggest that students are quite visual in their selection of leisure reading materials and appreciate when materials themselves or modes of recommendations are on display in some form.

Summary of Findings

Overall, no major differences existed in the leisure reading material selection behaviors of male and female participants. Male and female participants both showed to be strongly influenced socially by peers when selecting leisure reading materials. They also both expressed being influenced visually through displays, placement in the library, and advertisement in hallways. Data gathered offers insight and suggestions as to how teacher librarians can use student preferences to create a middle school library environment that meets the needs of the students they serve.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

As students become older and are more connected to technology, are exposed to more rigorous curriculum, and are involved in more extracurricular activities, they may spend less time reading for leisure. As mentioned previously in the study, Gander (2013) found that reading for pleasure drops by 50% in middle school due to such factors. The purpose of this research was to present teacher librarians, and classroom teachers, with information they can use to connect with their individual students and assist them in finding reading materials. In addition, the research aimed to gain insight on ways in which school libraries can create a community in which students are utilizing the library and actively seeking reading materials to continue reading for leisure as they age.

Numerous factors, both social and environmental, influence middle schools students when they are selecting leisure reading materials. Middle school is a time during which most students are eager to interact and socialize with one another. Not only does this desire for social interaction apply to cooperative learning opportunities in the classrooms, but it also applies to students' selection of leisure reading materials. Some students will naturally seek out the opinions and suggestions of their peers when looking for reading material. However, libraries should also provide other means and opportunities for students to share with their peers beyond their close friends to encourage a culture of reading in their building(s). One method for encouraging this could be the creation of a suggestion wall where students can post books that they have enjoyed with a short review or advertisement. This could be done electronically via a

blog or through a bulletin board display. While this is facilitated by the teacher librarian, the ownership and creation of the ultimate product is in the hands of the students. Similar to this method of advertising, students could also submit "shelf-talkers", short book recommendations to be displayed on the shelves by the books they advertise. Another mode through which peer suggestion can take place is by having a designated spot in the library where the top 10, or 20, books checked out in the school are displayed. Such a display will pique students' interest and encourage them to check the books out for themselves. Finally, teacher librarians can create posters to display around the library and the rest of the building with embedded QR codes that link to book trailers or excerpts of the books for students to preview.

While recommendations from teacher librarians and teachers weren't ranked as high as peer recommendations, they were still noted as factors that did influence students' selection of leisure reading materials. With co-teaching and other duties frequently requiring the attention of the teacher librarian, it isn't always possible for them to personally interact with every student who comes to the library. However, there are other ways in which they can interact and suggest books to students and this is through displays. Focus groups and survey results from the study both indicate that students like seeing books on display. This placement immediately suggests to them that the book is out for a reason and may be worth checking out. Possible ideas to engage students through teacher librarian recommendations are placing suggested books on top of book shelves, having a display by the circulation desk of the librarian's favorite books, or designating a shelf in the library where other content area teachers can display their

favorite books for students to see. This inclusion of all teachers helps create a unified community in which reading is seen as an important tool to success.

Study results showed there were not overwhelming differences between the selection habits of male and female students. Subtle differences were seen in male and female "go-to" books though, as male participants showed they like to find an author or series they enjoy and consistently read those materials while female participants expressed more interest in a favorite genre. Male participants also expressed more interest in selecting books on their own compared to following the recommendations of others. To cater to these patrons' needs, teacher librarians can create displays centered around read-alike books where books or series similar to another author's style or series are shown. This same technique can also be used sans display through conversations as students check out or renew their books. To specifically address the needs of female students who expressed interest in genre reading, displays could be created each month, or more frequently if desired, that spotlight a certain genre. Lists or posters could also be made of top checkouts according to genre.

These suggestions provided are just a few options that can help create a library program centered around the unique needs and desires of middle school students. Each environment will be distinctive to the patrons it serves and will require the teacher librarian to seek ways in which to get to know their students in order to best meet their individual needs.

Future Research

If this study were to be completed again, this researcher would like to conduct the focus groups and survey with a larger sample population. While the participants of this study provided valuable information, it would be interesting to determine if the trends observed in this study remained consistent with a larger population of participants, as well as participants of other grade levels. Another change this research suggests is creating both like-gender and mixed gender focus groups to see if the composition of focus groups altered the responses students gave. A follow-up study that this researcher may need to explore is the idea of genrefication of a library. This method of organizing reading materials in a library groups book according to genre rather than by Dewey Decimal, making it easier for students wanting to select a book of a particular genre to find them. Further research would need to be conducted on this topic as only a portion of participants in this study expressed interest in finding books based on genre and such a method of organization would be a change that would impact the entire school population and may cause students to unknowingly limit themselves in terms of the books their select for leisure reading.

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APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP SCENARIO

Scenario: Imagine you are in need of new free reading material. What steps do you take to find something to read? Describe any tools you may use, or people you may talk to, in order to find reading materials.

APPENDIX B

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Please select you gender: *

○ Male

○ Female

When are you most likely to visit the library? *

○ Before school

○ During advisory

○ During class (with a teacher)

○ During class (with a pass)

○ During study hall

○ After school

○ Other: [   ]

Complete the following sentence: When I go to the library, I want to _____. Check all that apply *

☐ Hear about new books from the librarian (book talks)

☐ Look for books with the help of a teacher

☐ Look for books with the help of a librarian

☐ Look for books with the help of my friends

☐ Look for books on my own

☐ Other: [   ]

What influences the books you read? Check all that apply *
Influences= Helps you decide/choose

☐ Book trailers

☐ Advertisement on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.)

☐ Seeing books on display in the library (on top of shelves, by the check out desk, pictures in the hallway)

☐ The cover of a book

☐ Recommendations from a teacher

☐ Recommendations from a librarian

☐ Recommendations from a friend

☐ Recommendations from a parent

☐ Other: [   ]

What suggestions do you have about how your librarians can promote books to students?

[   ]

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear parents and guardians,

My name is Jess Elliott and I am the other language arts teacher on the 8th grade gold team. I am currently in the process of finishing my master's degree in School Library Studies through the University of Northern Iowa. One of my degree requirements is to conduct a research study. My study's goal is to gain a better understanding of what influences middle school students when selecting free reading materials (ex. peers, teachers, parents, social media, placement in the library, etc.). I then plan to share this information with the other middle school librarians in our district so we can create library programs and spaces that fit the needs of our Waukee middle school students.

To collect data, I am hoping to conduct small focus groups with Mrs. Laedtke's students. Focus groups will take place during silent reading time so students will not miss any direct instruction from Mrs. Laedtke. Groups will meet once for 15-20 minutes, during which time students will respond to a scenario question and take a survey consisting of six questions. Participation is voluntary, involves no foreseeable risks, and will not impact their classroom grade.

If your student is willing to participate and you give your consent for them to take part in the study, please sign the permission form I sent home with students today. Your student can then return it to Mrs. Laedtke by the end of the week. I am also attaching the permission form to this email in case the first one is lost and you wish to print a new one.

If you have any questions or concerns feel free to contact my faculty advisor or myself:

Jess Elliott   **Dr. Joan Bessman Taylor**

(515) 987-3222 ext. 3108   **Advisor, School Library Studies**

jelliott@waukeeschools.org   **(319) 273-2192**

                                                                  joan.taylor@uni.edu

You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

Thank you for your consideration in helping me complete this final step in my master's program.

APPENDIX D

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW

PARENTAL PERMISSION

Project Title: _____ Middle school leisure reading selection: Influences during selection and implications for school library programs

Name of Investigator(s): Jessica Elliott

Invitation to Participate: Your child has been invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to allow your child to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision whether or not to allow your child to participate.

Nature and Purpose: The purpose of this research is to develop an understanding of what influences middle school students in their selection of leisure reading materials. Information will them be used to create library programs and determine strategies/tools that Waukee Community School District librarians can utilize to best meet the needs and preferences of the students they serve.

Explanation of Procedures: During March 2015, participants will partake in focus groups of four to six students that will take approximately 15 minutes. During the focus groups, the researcher will ask participants open-ended questions related to what influences them when selecting leisure reading materials. Focus groups with students will be recorded using a digital audio recorder for later reference by only the researcher. Recordings will not be attached to students' names and will be kept for six months after the research is complete and then deleted.

Discomfort and Risks: There are no foreseeable risks to participation. Students participating in the study will not miss any direct classroom instruction.

Benefits: Through this research, the researcher hopes to develop a deeper understanding of what specifically influences middle school students when selecting leisure reading materials (ex. Peer influence, teacher influence, social media coverage, placement in the library, etc.). Information gathered can then be used by Waukee Community School District librarians to develop library programs that fit the needs and preferences of its patrons.

Confidentiality: Information obtained during this study which could identify your child will be kept strictly confidential. The summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: Your child's participation is completely voluntary. He or she is free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, your child will not be penalized or lose benefits to which he/she is otherwise entitled.

Questions: If you have questions about the study you may contact or desire information in the future regarding your child's participation or the study generally, you can contact Jessica Elliott at jelliott@waukeeschools.org or the project investigator's faculty advisor Joan Bessman Taylor at the Department of School Library Studies, University of Northern Iowa 319-273-2050 or joan.taylor@uni.edu. You can also contact the office of the Human Participants Coordinator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process."

Agreement: I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my child's participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to allow my son/daughter to participate in this project. I have received a copy of this form.

_____   _____

(Signature of parent/legal guardian)   (Date)

_____

(Printed name of parent/legal guardian)

_____

(Printed name of child participant)

_____   _____

(Signature of investigator)   (Date)

_____   _____

(Signature of instructor/advisor)   (Date)

APPENDIX E

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

HUMAN PARTICIPATION REVIEW

INFORMED ASSENT

FOR OLDER CHILD APPROXIMATELY 11-17 YEARS OLD

Project Title: Middle school leisure reading selection: Influences during selection and implications for school library programs

Name of Principal Investigator(s): Jessica Elliott

I, _____, have been told that one of my parents/guardians has given his/her permission for me to participate in a project about how I prefer to select free reading materials and what strategies and/or people help me find free reading materials.

I understand that my participation is voluntary. I have been told that I can stop participating in this project at any time. If I choose to stop or decide that I don't want to participate in this project at all, nothing bad will happen to me. My grade will not be affected in any way.

_____   _____

Name   Date