

# Reading Perceptions of Intrinsically Motivated High School Juniors

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*Studies show pleasure reading results in academic benefits but declines between elementary (aged 5-11) and secondary (aged 11-18) years. The question addressed is "what are the experiences in the lives of juniors (aged 16-18) that foster intrinsic motivation to read for pleasure?" Juniors from four mid-western U.S. schools with varied ethnic and socio-economic profiles were identified as highly and distinctly intrinsically motivated for pleasure reading. Interviews revealed participants excelled academically and had family members who were readers. They read to escape stress, occupy time, and investigate careers. Rarely reading for rewards, they were opportunistic readers. Relationships with librarians were important in finding good books to read. The purpose of this study is to provide educators and librarians with insights into high school students' needs to facilitate reading for pleasure.*

## Introduction

What happens to those voracious readers elementary (aged 5-11) teacher librarians brag about to their secondary (aged 11-18) teacher library colleagues? Why do the numbers of promising readers fade as they reach the middle (aged 11-13) and high school (aged 14-18) grades? The basic research question addressed in the study is "What are the experiences in the lives of juniors (aged 16-18) in high school that foster intrinsic motivation to read for pleasure?" An examination of these experiences can lead to an understanding of how juniors in high school are able to maintain their intrinsic motivation to read for pleasure to reap the academic benefits afforded to avid readers. It is the purpose of this study to provide educators and librarians with insight into high school students' needs to facilitate reading for pleasure.

According to research by Morgan and Fuchs (2007), when students are intrinsically motivated to read, they tend to read more. Through this study's qualitative data acquired from interviews with intrinsically motivated readers, the researchers hope to reveal best practices that

increase secondary student reading for pleasure. The information can be used by both classroom teachers and teacher librarians to facilitate reading for all secondary students.

## Review of Literature

The literature review for this study includes a discussion of studies on the decline in students' reading for pleasure, an overview of research on the importance of reading for pleasure, and a discussion of how teacher librarians create a culture of reading in their schools.

### ***Decline in Students' Reading for Pleasure***

According to a National (U.S.) Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) survey (2023), 42% of fourth-grade students (age 9) said they read for fun almost every day. The NAEP survey showed reading results from 2012 and 2020, indicating the percentage of students who read every day was down 11% from the 53% reported in the 2012 NAEP reading survey (Schaeffer, 2021). In an analysis of the NAEP survey of 2012, Schaeffer (2021) revealed that over a quarter (27%) of the 17-year-olds never read for pleasure. The 2023 NAEP survey showed that "only 14% of students reported that they read for pleasure every day, down 3% from 2020 and 13% since 2012" (Lonas, 2023, para. 2).

Research reveals that reading for pleasure begins to decline for youth between the elementary and secondary school years. A 2019 study explains elementary students' positive attitudes toward reading declined significantly at the beginning of adolescence, between 10 and 14 years of age (Nootens et al., 2019). A 2021 study (Ahmad et al., 2021) indicates that excessive use of mobile devices, television, and electronic games is the greatest reason for the decline in reading for pleasure in adolescents. Additionally, this study found that rigorous high school courses demanding a large amount of time for curriculum textbook reading also infringe on the time students have for pleasure reading.

Kavi et al. (2015) in their case study found that junior high students (aged 12-14) did not read for pleasure, but rather read to be proficient in exams. This study also showed that junior high school readers did not read for "personal development, fun or to be well informed" (p. 11). These students felt that the availability of entertainment from television caused them to not participate in leisurely reading. The time students spend reading for pleasure must compete with award-winning television programming, the newest video games, social media, and engaging gadgets (Majid & Tan, 2007).

Researchers have studied students' decline in reading at the secondary level. Gordon (2010) attributes the decrease in reading motivation by middle/high school students (aged 12-18) to the fact that they are not given a choice of what they can read. Instead of selecting a book or topic of their choice to read, students are reading compulsory teacher-directed texts. This is especially true for the struggling reader. "Low achievers don't really hate to read – they hate to be told what to read" (Gordon, 2010, p. 34). Giving students choices in their reading selections affirms and bolsters their autonomy, and autonomy is a critical component in fostering intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

## ***The Importance of Reading for Pleasure***

Chidiebere et al. (2013) found that students who do not enjoy reading are likely to be less motivated, consume more time watching television, be poor decision-makers, and perform comparatively low in their studies. Larry Nuikulecky, head of the Department of Language Education at Indiana University and a literacy scholar, said, “Without the learning habit of reading, reading skills will decline or stagnate, and [students’] skills will be substandard within a decade” (Wells, 2012, p. 18).

Along with a gap in adolescents’ academic achievement, social emotional issues are also a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to *The Harvard Gazette*, “The pandemic had a more severe impact on children and young people already struggling with pre-existing issues from emotional problems to socioeconomic deprivation” (Simon, 2022, para. 12). Reading for pleasure offers students an escape from the everyday stresses of adolescence that are more evident because of the pandemic. A study by Sandell (2020) on reading and social emotional learning shows pleasure reading allows adolescents to learn how to problem-solve through the experiences of the protagonists in their books. “Reading books is a natural way for students to learn about others’ experiences, perspectives, and emotions. Through reading, students learn to relate to others and deepen understanding of the text, but also their social and emotional skills” (Sandell, 2020, p. 23).

Analysis of the aforementioned NAEP surveys (Schaeffer, 2021) showed that students who frequently read for fun scored better on the reading section of standardized tests. Elementary students who regularly read in their leisure time usually have larger vocabularies and better reading comprehension skills, as well as better spelling and technical reading skills, than children who read less often (Krashen, 2005; Mol & Bus, 2011). A study by Whitten et al. (2019) indicated that students who read on a regular basis were better critical thinkers and could expect improved employment prospects. Many studies show reading for pleasure is valuable to students and can help shape a child’s academic future (Harrison, 2018; Krashen, 2006; Pittman & Honchell, 2014).

## ***Teacher Librarians Create a Culture of Reading***

According to the 2018 American Association of School Librarians (AASL) national standards, the common beliefs state “Reading is the core of personal and academic competency” (p13). The teacher librarian is key in curating a diverse collection of materials for pleasure reading, supplemented with motivational reading initiatives. Teacher librarians provide stakeholders with “open, unrestricted access to a high-quality collection of reading materials in multiple formats that reflect readers’ personal interests and academic needs” (AASL, 2018, p. 13).

Teacher librarians are instrumental in designing motivational schoolwide reading initiatives to build excitement for reading for pleasure, “Establishing a culture of reading in a classroom or a school is a vital piece of the foundational puzzle of education” (Cheney & Wander, 2022, p 16). Many librarians initiate and manage reading programs such as the Accelerated Reading Program, Readability, and other commercial reading programs, which are designed to measure students’ comprehension of the books they read. These reading programs are usually coupled with locally designed reading promotions that include sustained silent reading, book clubs, parent/child book clubs, digital storytelling, student book talks, and reading competitions among classrooms with a

theme that excites readers (Merga, 2021). Some of the promotions provide reading incentives that include pizza coupons, candy, and other reading prizes. As an instructional leader/partner in the school, the teacher librarian is responsible for encouraging the innate habit of reading for pleasure and knowledge according to the American Association of School Librarians (AASL, 2018).

Research also shows how teacher librarians are introducing students to bibliotherapy as a way to enhance the school's reading culture. Often called book therapy, bibliotherapy involves the "reading of specific texts with the purpose of healing" (Onwubiko, 2022, p. 5). In an era where students are confronted with social and emotional issues, teacher librarians are finding reading for pleasure to assist students with emotional behaviors. According to Onwubiko (2022), bibliotherapy is "an approach that will help librarians to better address emotional, behavioral, and social concerns of children" (p. 1). By providing a diverse collection and promoting a culture of reading for students, the librarian "stimulates imagination, widens views, expands horizons and helps learning about different people and places" (Onwubiko, 2022, p. 2).

### ***Theoretical Framework***

This study on motivation for pleasure reading is framed in Self-determination Theory, known as SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT's Cognitive Evaluation sub theory explains the psychological reasons behind an individual's desire (or lack of desire) to do a task, "Intrinsic motivation is defined as the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence. When intrinsically motivated a person is moved to act for the fun or challenge entailed rather than because of external prods, pressures, or rewards" (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, p. 56). SDT posits that social contexts that support the individual's psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness will result in increased intrinsic motivation toward a given task (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Unfortunately, educational systems in the United States are typically riddled with extrinsic motivators, such as grades, stickers, prizes, and controlling praise and favor (Crow & Small, 2011). Such external motivators have been found to have "a significant negative effect on intrinsic motivation for interesting tasks" (Deci et al., 1999, p. 653).

## **Methodology**

The pleasure reading research of high school juniors (aged 16-18) was a mixed methods study administered in two phases. The quantitative first phase was developed to identify juniors who are intrinsically motivated for pleasure reading. Students volunteered to take the Self-Regulated Questionnaire-Reading (Appendix A), an adaptation of the SRQ-A Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire (Ryan & Connell, 1989). SRQs are based on the type of regulation and the degree to which an individual chooses to act in a particular domain. The questionnaire asks participants why they participate in a specific task, then provides several answers that represent styles of motivation. The types of regulations measured by an SRQ are external, introjected, identified, and intrinsic. Once the intrinsic readers were identified, the second phase of the research was qualitative and involved a Zoom interview for those students who were identified as highly and distinctly motivated to read for pleasure.

## **Population**

The students in the study were high school juniors (aged 16-18) in their English class from four different central Nebraska high schools within 55 miles of each other. According to the schools' 9-12 grade (aged 14-18) enrollments, the largest high school had an enrollment of 1,598 students (410 juniors) with a minority enrollment of 20 percent (Public School Review, 2023). The second largest school had an enrollment of 954 students (238 juniors) with a minority enrollment of 85 percent (Public School Review, 2023). The third school had a population of 165 students (41 juniors) with a minority enrollment of 54 percent, and the smallest school had 130 students (29 juniors) in grades 9-12 with a minority enrollment of 4.8 percent (Public School Review, 2023). A total of 102 students completed the SRQ-R; 63 self-identified as girls and 39 self-identified as boys volunteered for Phase 1 of the study.

## **Phase 1**

Administering the SRQ-R took place in the junior English classrooms and was not a required school activity for junior English students. The researchers administered the SRQ-R at the four schools to students with completed parental consent and student assent forms.

The SRQ-R tests (Appendix A) were evaluated using the SRQ-R Scoring Sheet, which identifies the type of motivation indicated for each answer in the questionnaire (Appendix B): IN = intrinsic, ID = identified, IJ = introjected, and EX = extrinsic. Students whose SRQ-R scores resulted in a relative autonomy index of 31 or above ( $2 \times \text{IN} + \text{ID} - \text{IJ} - 2 \times \text{EX}$  = Relative Autonomy Index [Ryan & Deci, 2000b]) and had a .30 differential between their average intrinsic score and the average of their next highest regulation score were contacted for the second phase of the study. Of the 102 total students who took the SRQ-R, two were excluded because they were not ranked as juniors. With scores on the reading questionnaire tabulated from 100 students, the assessment identified 24 students who were highly intrinsically motivated (autonomy index of 31 or above) and distinctly intrinsically motivated (.30 differential with their next highest regulation score) to read for pleasure. While 24% of high school juniors who were identified for the study seems like a high percentage, one must bear in mind that students of the ages of 16-18 who persisted in getting parent signatures and gave consent themselves showed some degree of interest in the study, and possibly in reading itself. The gender ratio of students who were found to be highly and distinctly motivated to read for pleasure was one third, males to females. 18 self-identified as females, while 6 self-identified as males.

## **Phase 2**

The 24 students who qualified for the hour Zoom interview on reading for pleasure with the researchers were asked to again complete and submit additional parental consent and student assent forms. They were also told that they would each receive a \$25 VISA gift card once they completed the interview. Of the 24 students, 14 (9 self-identified females and 5 self-identified males) chose to participate in the reading interview in Phase 2 of the study. Interviews were conducted from April to July 2022.

During the recorded Zoom interview, students chose pseudonyms to keep all recorded (both video and written) interview data anonymous. The interview questions were about the students' life experiences, especially those experiences that pertained to reading. When a reference was made to reading for pleasure, the researchers asked follow-up questions. There were approximately 14 hours of recorded data and 144 pages of transcripts from the Zoom interviews.

The interview structure consisted of the researchers asking questions in two parts. The first contained questions about the students' lives and experiences, and the second contained questions about two specific reading episodes named by the students. The second interview structure is based on an interview technique used by Shenton and Dixon (2003) for the domain of reading for pleasure. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.

## Findings

The interview information gleaned in this study is presented in two groups: findings from the general interview questions, and findings from the reading episode questions.

### ***General Interview Questions***

The themes from the general interview questions included students' high academic achievement and career goals, the people who influenced their desire to read for pleasure (family, librarians, and friends), students' reading choices (print/digital and book titles/genres), and the reading programs they had participated in during their lifetimes.

### ***High Academic Achievement and Career Goals***

Without exception, the 14 informants in the study were outstanding students involved in academically rigorous high school courses, many in honors or Advanced Placement courses and pursuing a college preparation program of study. Some of the informants were undecided as to their career pathways. Other informants said they plan to pursue a science career mentioning engineering, chemistry, math, physics, equine science, and entomology. Other career choices included becoming a nurse, a physical therapist, a counselor, a military strategist, and a career in the medical field.

Many of the study informants said their pleasure reading influenced their career choices. Camdon wants a career as a military strategist and said he was currently reading *The Art of War* (Tzu, 2007). He said he liked this book because it is about military tactics describing "different strategies of confusing your enemies by making them think you are near when you are really far or unorganized when you're organized." Bella also said her reading for pleasure influenced her career choice. She was reading many murder mysteries and was thinking about a career in forensic science criminal investigation, but later changed to pursue a career in pharmacy. Matthew said, "It added to my dream of discovering new insects. It is my passion."

The juniors in high school explained their career choices required them to take a rigorous course load when preparing for entrance into their university of choice. The honors and AP classes require a lot of time because they are so rigorous and require serious preparation. Julian explained

many students who loved to read in the lower grades were not reading as much because high school teachers did not give students the time to read compared to the reading time they had in elementary and middle school. He went on to say that students in high school are more competitive in wanting to “make an impression or leave a legacy” so they are willing to give up their leisurely reading time to achieve that goal.

The social contexts of the students in the study supported the students’ sense of competence, which has been proven to enhance students’ intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). They were placed in honors classes because of their proven competence, and in turn, pursued career goals that required a high degree of competence. They saw themselves as good readers and continued to be drawn to pleasure reading even though they had to put some of their desire for leisure reading on hold during high-stress academic terms.

### ***Influential People—Family, Librarians, Friends***

Students in the study were influenced by various people in their lives, grouped as family, librarians, and friends.

#### ***Family***

Intrinsically motivated readers often attributed their love of reading to modeling from other family members. One informant said her mother loves to read so much; she reads during her daughter’s soccer games. The informants often mentioned the family ritual of reading with their parents at bedtime, and that then transitioned to bedtime being the time the student reads for pleasure.

Two of the interviewees said their parents read to them in a different language other than their native English. “I think my mom started my love of reading because when I was younger, she would read to me, and even though it’d be in Spanish, I just developed that love, and you know it was just a good time to bond,” explained Lexi. Another student talked about how his father read him Italian books. Camden said, “So my dad has some books in Italian that he would read me on occasion whenever I asked him to.”

The act of reading is valued in her family, explained Estice. She said her grandmother is the author of four children’s books. Often during the family time of the evening meal at Estice’s house, members of the family share information about the books they are reading.

Informants who were read to also passed the activity on to their younger brothers and sisters. Lexi said she likes to read to her younger siblings as much as she can “because I know how it affected me, and I wanted to have that impact on my brother and sister. . . a love of reading starts really young.”

#### ***Librarians***

Along with family members making book recommendations, the students said they appreciated it when their librarian (public or school) recommended a book. Camden explained, “I love getting book recommendations and like hearing what other people thought about them.” Subjects also said

they felt librarians who made book recommendations showed them they cared about them as individuals, and such recommendations began a positive rapport with the librarian. Camden said the librarian even took book suggestions from him and ordered three books he requested. "She literally put all the stickers on the books right in front of me before she checked them out on my library card," explained Camden.

## **Friends**

Informants in this study experienced positive peer pressure when they shared good reads with their friends and vice versa. Many of the informants described their friends as being very important to them, and their friends were also passionate readers. "I'm now in the high school book club with a lot of my friends, and just talking about the book makes me really happy, and just motivates me to finish the book," explained Lexi.

Not a lot of the intrinsically motivated readers participated in an official book club; however, their friends would recommend a book and later have an informal discussion about their favorite books. "We had a kind of a book club going this summer, so we would trade books. So, the first book I told them about was *Where the Crawdads Sing* (Owens, 2018). That's a very popular one, and I was like, you have to read this book. We just talked about the books and shared them. It was really fun," explained Alivia.

Jessica explained she did not join the high school book club because she felt "all of the kids would have different interests" and were forced to read one book they may not be interested in. She felt schools should have book clubs with a variety of books and genres so participants can pick the book they want to discuss in a group of their peers. She also said, "I've found lots of online communities that have encouraged me to read and gave lots of good recommendations."

Having friends who love to read is important to Camden. He explained, "I think it's really nice to have someone that you can trust and just open up to, and to know that they're always gonna be there. And we always talk about books for reading. It's been that way since elementary school." Ella said she would browse the shelves for her next good read, but it is hit or miss; however, "when I take recommendations from my friends, I am not disappointed."

Although the informants spoke fondly of their reading experiences with their friends, two of them acknowledged that they have seen negative peer pressure as nonreaders bullied those students who liked to read or concentrate on their studies at school. Carly explained that in upper elementary (aged 9-11) and middle school (aged 11-13), she experienced pressure from some of her friends not to read. "My advice is to never be afraid to pick up a book because somebody else is gonna judge you, because for me I have seen so many people afraid to read a book because their friends don't read or because their friends will make fun of them," explained Carly. Her peers would call her names and indicate she was a brainiac, reading nerd, or book worm. She went on to explain that she has outgrown the insecurity of reading in public, "but for a while, I did struggle with picking up a book around my friends or at school because I didn't want the judgment that would come from other people."



The reading experiences of the subjects with family, librarians, and friends show a connection, or relatedness between themselves and others as associated with pleasure reading. SDT explains that while autonomy and competence must be present to foster intrinsic motivation, “a third factor, relatedness, also bears on its expression” (Ryan & Deci, 2000b. p.71). The effects of relatedness on motivation have a foundation in a person’s feelings of security, “Intrinsic motivation [is] more likely to flourish in contexts characterized by a sense of security and relatedness” (p. 71). This sense of security and relatedness was manifested in the family reading experiences described by *all* the subjects in the study. Additional relational reading experiences with librarians and friends also supported the students’ intrinsic motivation for pleasure reading.

### ***Reading Choices***

The types of reading choices the students discussed were choosing print or digital reading modalities, as well as the books and genres they liked to read. The specific titles and genres that students mentioned in the general interview have been combined with those they discussed during the reading episodes portion of the interview. The analysis of the titles and genres students discussed is located under the Reading Episodes section of this paper.

#### ***Print or Digital***

Most informants preferred reading a print book over a digital book. The interviews revealed nine students preferred print books, two enjoyed reading both print and digital, two had no preference, and one preferred reading digital information. “I do not like reading digital. I would rather have [a book] in my hands, and that’s the way most kids are,” explained Willow. Tara said when she was younger, she would read books on her Kindle. “I would take the Kindle everywhere just because it was so cool that I could have books on an iPad looking device,” Tara explained.

Another informant said he preferred print books because the blue light from electronics hurt his eyes. Informants at times felt forced to read digitally when they forgot their book. “I do a bit of both (reading print and digital), but I try to read as much paper. . .because it is better for your eyes,” said Lexi. Ella said she has read digital books, but she prefers print because she does not get the same pleasure out of a digital book.

Estice said, “I feel like if it's digital, it feels like schoolwork, and I don't really enjoy it as much.” Most informants used digital information for school assignments, especially research projects requiring database information. Julie said she just liked sifting through the pages of a digital book. The two informants who preferred the digital format did not like to read fiction and preferred finding current news articles that were easily accessible on devices.

Lexi said she read both print and digital, “Sometimes you just forget your book at home, and I just read online. If it’s something quick I want to read, I might just do it online.” She went on to say she tried to read as much print as possible because she felt it was better for her eyes. Jessica said deciding to read a print or digital book depends on the availability of the title. “I’ve gotten most of my books just on my phone from the Libby app, which connects to the public library,” she explained.

The students in the study expressed their desire for one mode of reading (print or digital) over another. They also showed preferences for specific titles and genres of books. Social contexts that provide choice foster intrinsic motivation versus those that use a more controlling approach (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Lack of autonomy support results in a loss of intrinsic motivation, as shown by students who disliked the use of digital resources in their studies when they had no choice.

### ***Reading Programs***

All the research informants discussed reading programs they participated in during their elementary and middle school years. Five of the students spent more time describing the extrinsic prizes used as rewards for making their Accelerated Reader (AR) points than the actual reading process. Camden described participation in the AR program as something he had to do. He went on to explain, "I would have read either way, but it did make other kids have to read."

Other students described discovering through AR and other similar programs that they were better readers than their peers. Lexi said she remembered getting pizza tickets as reading incentives in elementary school, "I remember, I'm just getting these (pizza tickets) over and over and over, and then I realize that not all these kids were getting pizza tickets." She said the other students were jealous of her and said they wished they could be good readers and get pizza tickets like she did.

When remembering the AR program, Estice said she didn't like it much, but when she got into eighth grade (aged 13-14), "You're kinda like, 'Oh, I wanna read this and that' I don't care if I'm over the points for my reading goal." Julian also said at first, he did not like getting the number of points he was assigned in the AR program. "I was pretty terrible at it until I found the book genres that I actually was interested in. Then I realized I really loved reading." Matthew also was not fond of the AR program but admitted it helped with his comprehension, retention, and vocabulary. "Which I think are very important things to be able to be able to process and repeat what you have absorbed from the books," Matthew added.

Students who participated in the AR program all remembered the prizes of gift certificates, candy, and prizes as incentives; however, some schools provided parties or other social engagements for those students who reached their AR goal. The students who said they continued to participate in AR during the summer said the successful students were rewarded with a pool party. "And then of course, we had a lockdown party at school when we got all our points for each of the terms," explained Jessica.

Many students described enjoying the public library's summer reading program even into their high school years. Nicole explained that she liked summer reading programs at the public library. Summer is when she read the most because she was too busy with academic and extracurricular activities during the school year.

Bella remembered a special reading program she enjoyed during eighth grade (aged 13-14) called Books for Breakfast. Students who registered for the breakfast event, brought their books, and enjoyed breakfast with fellow readers. "I just liked the coziness and the inspiration of reading along with the way teachers were trying to inspire more kids to read," explained Bella.

One informant mentioned a reading program that was part of a gifted/talented Enrichment Learning Program where students were pulled from their regular English class in middle school to participate in small reading groups. Allen explained this program forced the students to read books that were above their reading level.

Research has shown that extrinsic motivators have “a significant negative effect on intrinsic motivation for interesting tasks” (Deci et al., 1999, p. 653). However, extrinsic motivators can have a positive effect when the reward becomes “a kind of barometer of competence; and feeling competent. . . is a basic component of intrinsic motivation” (Crow & Small, 2011, p. 6). It is interesting to note that while students talked quite a bit about the rewards they received in reading programs, it was the recognition by others that they were good readers, increased interest in books, and the relatedness embedded in programs that made the most difference to them.

### ***Reading Episodes***

The interview technique of asking informants about a specific reading episode is based on a “life-centered line of questioning” (Shenton & Dixon, 2003, p. 9). It enables the subject to put themselves back in time to remember details of the event. In this study, the researchers could then more precisely quantify facts about the pleasure reading experiences of their subjects and compare them with the answers students gave in the general interview segment. The reading episodes also served as a type of reliability check on the general interview data.

The questions asked of the students during this part of the interview were, “Think of a time recently when you wanted to read. Could you tell me about what you remember of that time? What did you think? What did you do? How did you feel?” Then, the students were asked to describe another reading episode in a similar fashion and decide which episode they liked the best and why. Thus, 28 specific reading episodes were examined.

### ***Location***

When talking about their reading episodes, 50% of the students named the location. Half of these students (7/14) said they were in a car; 14% (2/14) said they were at work; 14% (2/14) said they were at home; 14% (2/14) said they were outside; 7% (1/14) said they were waiting for a doctor’s appointment; and 7% (1/14) said they were at school. The data show that these students were “on the go” and used their riding and waiting time to read.

### ***Why Students Wanted to Read***

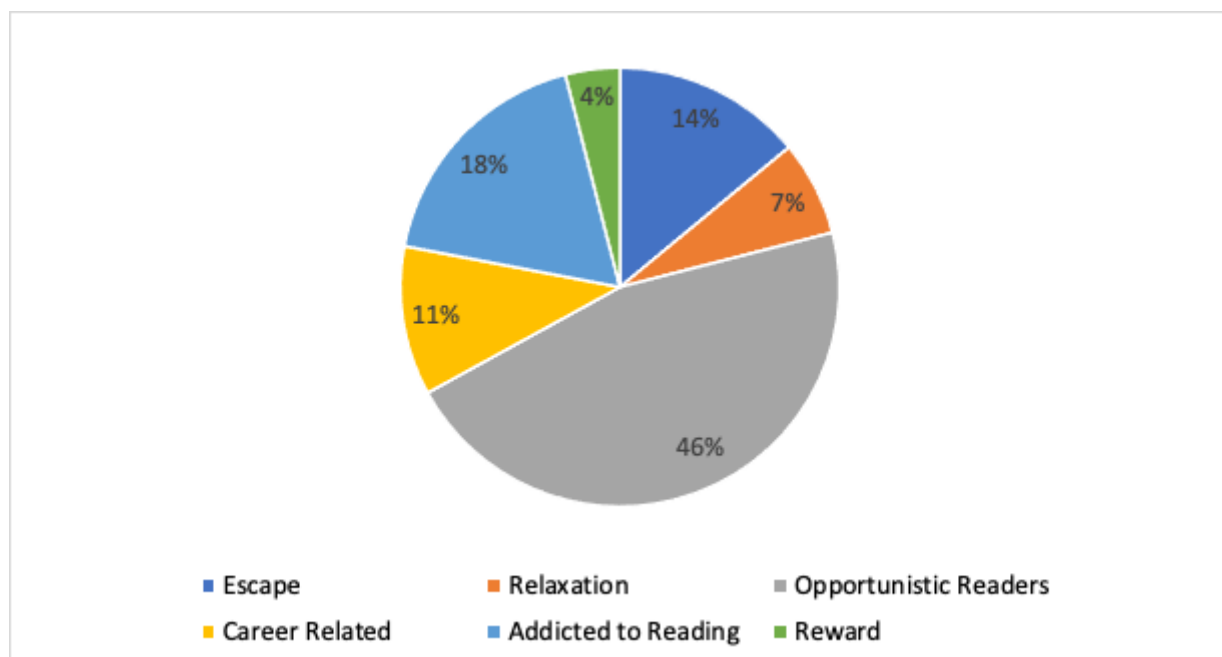
When asked why they wanted to read, students described their reading episodes as times of escape, means of relaxation, ways to occupy time, and opportunities to learn more about possible careers. Jeremy observed, “Reading books forces you to have time for yourself.” They said they read because they were addicted to reading, and because they read for a reward. Most students mentioned more than one reason for reading.

By far the most mentioned reasons for reading (46% or 13/28) were to kill time, to make time go by fast, waiting at a doctor’s appointment, etc. These were opportunistic readers, or readers who

were prepared to read whenever and wherever the opportunity presented itself. They carried books in their bags, in their jackets, in their cars, all in hopes of finding a few minutes to luxuriate in reading.

Students also mentioned addiction-like behaviors when talking about why they wanted to read (18% or 5/28). "If I could read every day I would." "I read HP on vacation and also during camp." "I stayed up on a school night until 2:00 in the morning just reading." "Started reading at work and when my shift was done, stayed in my car in the parking lot and finished reading the book."

**Figure 1: Reasons Students Wanted to Read**



Of note is the few numbers of students who read for a reward. Only one student mentioned reading for a reward during their reading episodes, and that was earlier in their schooling.

### ***How Students Felt When Reading***

When describing how they felt during their reading episodes, students used a variety of descriptors. "happy" was the most used word at 3. Addicted, energetic, good, proud, and real were descriptions used twice.

**Figure 2: Word Cloud of How Students Felt During Reading Episodes**



### **Book Recommendations**

In discussing their reading episodes, six students referred to books that were recommended by someone. Of those six, two named family members, two said friends gave them book titles, and two mentioned librarians. Organized events were not a big part of these students' reading world. Two mentioned book clubs and one mentioned the AR program.

### **Book Titles and Genres**

The book titles students named represent several genres, and included articles read on their phones. Titles ranged from the expected titles, like the *Harry Potter* series (Rowling) and books by Stephen King, to unexpected reads such as *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* (Kondo, 2014), a devotional book (title not given), and an article about the discovery of a new species of insect. Students mentioned books in the fantasy genre 12 times during the interviews with science fiction and dystopian genres each named 10 times. They referred to non-fiction and memoir/biography 5 times each. Other genres mentioned were mystery, horror, historical fiction, realistic fiction, graphic novels, a novella, animals, and survival books. The students read widely, and they moved from one genre to another based on their interests and referrals from others at the time. Students also said their genre preferences changed as they got older, gravitating from almost exclusively fiction to the inclusion of more nonfiction titles.

### **Summary of Data from Reading Episodes**

Data from the reading episodes confirmed much of the information gleaned from the general interviews; however, the passion students felt for reading was more salient while reminiscing over their episodes. Subjects spared no words in describing how they felt when reading, and how important reading was to them. "That book was the one that pushed me to crest over that boundary of never-ending reading that is so exciting" (Julian). As was found in the general interview data,

autonomy (choosing reading and reading materials), competence (pride in reading accomplishments), and relatedness (people who recommended books and read with students) were all needs met by pleasure reading, pointing to the basic three components of social contexts that foster intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Additionally, students found pleasure reading to be their go-to activity to escape reality and to fill what little extra time they had between activities. The reading escape also provides a strategy to cope with the social and emotional issues of being an adolescent.

## Discussion and Recommendations

Tapping into the mindset of high school juniors who are intrinsically motivated to read suggests strategies librarians and educators can implement to create a culture of reading in their schools. Findings in this study showed the importance of fielding readers' advisory questions, which librarians often underestimate (Moyer & Stover, 2010). Librarians need to be aware of the rapport building that takes place when they take the time to help youth find their next "great read." Informants of this study expressed appreciation of the time public and teacher librarians took to recommend a new book in the genre of their choice, or if the librarian purchased a book for the library that the youth recommended.

To be effective at addressing readers' advisory questions, librarians must know their collection. They must be readers themselves and enjoy books to readily address readers' advisory questions (Moyer, 2007). A teacher librarian who is effective at book recommendations is creating and nurturing readers. Introducing students to new books is one strategy that can be used to begin the process of building a culture of reading in the school and address the decline in reading for pleasure.

When discussing the reading episodes, study informants revealed they read as an escape. One informant said leisure reading gave him a chance to relax and get lost in another world and not have to worry about anything else going on. Garner (2020) explained that reading escapism is a "common way to experience an 'escape' from unpleasant or difficult realities" (p. 5). This provides social emotional relief to students and further supports the importance of connecting students with a good read (Onwubiko, 2022).

An issue expressed by the informants was that there was no free time to read in high school. Lee (2020) said for school districts to create a culture of reading, they need to establish a designated reading time for students. If creating a reading culture is a school priority, the administration (principals, superintendents, district leaders) must make time for it. Students who are intrinsically motivated to read are high achievers. If school administrators understood this, maybe they would allow more time for reading for pleasure during the school days, and teacher librarians should advocate for this.

The findings of this study also illustrate the importance of having a culture of reading in the home. Informants were around family and friends who liked to read. Teacher librarians should support families by offering a Family Reading Night or Book Club for families as events that would facilitate the culture of reading in the home.

Students felt autonomous when they were allowed to choose their own reading materials. It is important for university professors to instruct pre-service teachers to stress the importance of choice in fostering intrinsic motivation to read. Additionally, teacher librarians should make sure they have a variety of materials for students in both print and digital to read for pleasure.

## Future Research

This study could be replicated in ten years with the same informants after the participants have presumably finished their post-secondary education and are employed. This longitudinal research could examine changes in reading habits for the now young adult readers, how being intrinsically motivated to read impacts their lives as young adults and the culture of reading in their homes.

The study could also be replicated with younger informants to see the characteristics of intrinsically motivated readers in middle (aged 11-13) or elementary school (aged 5-11). This study could examine how the progression of the love of reading evolves. It would also be informative to interview students who were low on the intrinsic motivation scale. The current study could also be replicated in another part of the country or the world to validate the data collected or to compare the differences.

## Conclusion

Studies show that students who enjoy reading reap many benefits. Avid readers are more likely to attain a higher educational level, are more apt to achieve an influential job in the labor market, receive a higher income, and eventually accumulate more wealth (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007); yet the number of students who read for pleasure has decreased (Schaeffer, 2021). “We are not creating resilient, self-possessed readers who can travel on to the next school year, and the next, and into adulthood with reading behaviors and a love of reading that will serve them throughout their lives” (Miller, 2014). The silver bullet that educators have been looking for to make students successful in school and in life, may be the very thing that so many have cut out of their schools—a culture that values, encourages, and makes time for reading just for the joy of reading.

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## Appendix A

### Self-Regulation Questionnaire Reading (for 11<sup>th</sup> grade high school students)

#### Why I Read

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Boy ( ) or Girl ( )

#### Demo question Circle Correct Response for You:

Q. I like red.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

A. Other than for class assignments, why do I read?

1. Because I want to learn new things.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

2. Because I want my teacher to think I'm a good student.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

3. So that the adults won't yell at me.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

4. Because I'll be ashamed of myself if I don't read.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

5. Because it's fun.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

6. Because that's what is expected.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

7. Because I enjoy reading other than for a project or assignment in school.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

8. Because it's important to me to read other than for a project or assignment in school.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

B. When I read about a new topic, it is usually. . .

9. Because I want adults to think I'm a good student.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

- |     |  |              |               |                 |  |
|-----|--|--------------|---------------|-----------------|--|
| 10. | Because I'll get in trouble if I don't.                                |              |               |                 |  |
|     | Very true  | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |  |
| 11. | Because it's fun.  |              |               |                 |  |
|     | Very true  | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |  |
| 12. | Because I will feel bad about myself if I don't do it.                 |              |               |                 |  |
|     | Very true  | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |  |
| 13. | Because I want to understand the subject.                              |              |               |                 |  |
|     | Very true  | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |  |
| 14. | Because that's what I'm supposed to do.                                |              |               |                 |  |
|     | Very true  | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |  |
| 15. | Because I enjoy looking for information on new topics.                 |              |               |                 |  |
|     | Very true  | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |  |
| 16. | Because it's important to me to look for information about new topics. |              |               |                 |  |
|     | Very true  | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |  |

C. Why do I read books that are recommended by other people?

- |     |  |              |               |                 |  |
|-----|--|--------------|---------------|-----------------|--|
| 17. | To find out if I'm right or wrong about something.                                   |              |               |                 |  |
|     | Very true  | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |  |
| 18. | Because I want the adults to say nice things about me.                               |              |               |                 |  |
|     | Very true  | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |  |
| 19. | Because it's fun.  |              |               |                 |  |
|     | Very true  | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |  |
| 20. | Because I want the other students to think I'm smart.                                |              |               |                 |  |
|     | Very true  | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |  |
| 21. | Because I enjoy reading books that are recommended by other people.                  |              |               |                 |  |
|     | Very true  | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |  |
| 22. | Because it's important to me to read books that are recommended by other people.     |              |               |                 |  |
|     | Very true  | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |  |
| 23. | Because that's what I'm supposed to do.  |              |               |                 |  |
|     | Very true  | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |  |
| 24. | Because I feel really proud of myself when I read books recommended by other people. |              |               |                 |  |

Very true	Sort of true	Not very true	Not at all true
-----------	--------------	---------------	-----------------

## D. Why do I read print books?

- |     |  |           |              |               |                 |
|-----|--|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 25. | To find out if I'm right or wrong about something.       | Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
| 26. | Because I want the adults to say nice things about me.   | Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
| 27. | Because it's fun.  | Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
| 28. | Because I want the other students to think I'm smart.    | Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
| 29. | Because I enjoy reading print books.                     | Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
| 30. | Because it's important to me to read print books.        | Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
| 31. | Because that's what I'm supposed to do.                  | Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
| 32. | Because I feel really proud of myself when I read books. | Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |

## E. Why do I read print materials other than books [such as magazines, newspapers, or flyers]?

- |     |   |           |              |               |                 |
|-----|---|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 33. | Because it's fun.   | Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
| 34. | Because I enjoy reading print materials other than books. | Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
| 35. | To find out if I'm right or wrong about something.        | Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
| 36. | Because that's what I'm supposed to do.                   | Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
| 37. | Because I want the adults to say nice things about me.    | Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |

38. Because I feel really proud of myself when I read print materials other than books.
- |           |              |               |                 |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
39. Because I want the other students to think I'm smart.
- |           |              |               |                 |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
40. Because it's important to me to read materials other than books.
- |           |              |               |                 |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|

F. Why do I read on electronic devices [such as cell phones, computers, or tablets]?

41. Because it's important to me to read on electronic devices.
- |           |              |               |                 |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
42. Because I want the other students to think I'm smart.
- |           |              |               |                 |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
43. Because I feel really proud of myself when I read on electronic devices.
- |           |              |               |                 |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
44. Because I want the adults to say nice things about me.
- |           |              |               |                 |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
45. Because that's what I'm supposed to do.
- |           |              |               |                 |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
46. To find out if I'm right or wrong about something.
- |           |              |               |                 |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
47. Because I enjoy reading on electronic devices.
- |           |              |               |                 |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
48. Because it's fun.
- |           |              |               |                 |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Very true | Sort of true | Not very true | Not at all true |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|

## Appendix B

### SRQ-R Scoring Sheet

Student Code \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Question Group

Totals

External

3. \_\_\_\_ 6. \_\_\_\_ 10. \_\_\_\_ 14. \_\_\_\_ 18. \_\_\_\_ 23. \_\_\_\_ 26. \_\_\_\_ 31. \_\_\_\_ 36. \_\_\_\_ 37. \_\_\_\_ 44. \_\_\_\_ 45. \_\_\_\_

Introjected

2. \_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_ 9. \_\_\_\_ 12. \_\_\_\_ 20. \_\_\_\_ 24. \_\_\_\_ 28. \_\_\_\_ 32. \_\_\_\_ 38. \_\_\_\_ 39. \_\_\_\_ 42. \_\_\_\_ 43. \_\_\_\_

Identified

1. \_\_\_\_ 8. \_\_\_\_ 13. \_\_\_\_ 16. \_\_\_\_ 17. \_\_\_\_ 22. \_\_\_\_ 25. \_\_\_\_ 30. \_\_\_\_ 35. \_\_\_\_ 40. \_\_\_\_ 41. \_\_\_\_ 46. \_\_\_\_

Intrinsic

5. \_\_\_\_ 7. \_\_\_\_ 11. \_\_\_\_ 15. \_\_\_\_ 19. \_\_\_\_ 21. \_\_\_\_ 27. \_\_\_\_ 29. \_\_\_\_ 33. \_\_\_\_ 34. \_\_\_\_ 47. \_\_\_\_ 48. \_\_\_\_

Composite

EX \_\_\_\_ IJ \_\_\_\_ ID \_\_\_\_ IN \_\_\_\_

Relative Autonomy Index

$2 \times \text{IN} + \text{ID} - \text{IJ} - 2 \times \text{EX} = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

**Students whose SRQ-R scores resulted in a relative autonomy index of 31 or above ( $2 \times \text{IN} + \text{ID} - \text{IJ} - 2 \times \text{EX}$  = Relative Autonomy Index [Ryan & Deci, 2000b]) AND had a .30 differential between their average intrinsic score and the average of their next highest regulation score were contacted for the second phase of the study.**