

LATINO AVID READERS AT TWO SOUTH TEXAS CHARTER SCHOOLS: ANALYSIS  
OF COMMON CHARACTERISTICS AND READING SUCCESS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL  
STUDENTS

A Dissertation

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi  
Corpus Christi, Texas

May 2014

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May 2014

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This dissertation meets the standards for scope and quality of  
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## ABSTRACT

Americans spend less time reading today than they did at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century according to a national survey conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts (2007). Further investigation revealed that much research on reading has been conducted in the formative years, but little has been explored in the middle grades (Moje, 2002). Students' interest in recreational reading declines by the time they reach middle school (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995). Collectively, these concerns present a problem of producing non-readers or aliterate persons who can read but choose not to. With so much attention on non-readers, those individuals who enjoy reading for recreation often go unnoticed. The focus of this study is on middle school avid readers who choose to read for enjoyment.

This study examined middle school students in a predominately Latino community at two charter schools in South Texas. This study explored the shared characteristics of avid readers, and how their literary avidness contributed to their reading achievement with an emphasis on gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and accessibility to literacy materials. Students in grades six, seven, and eight completed an electronic reading questionnaire with 25 questions that collected data on demographics, reading attitudes, self-perception, family literacy practices, reading habits, and reading preferences,

Statistical analysis from the study revealed significant correlations between avid readers, reading achievement, and access to literacy materials. Libraries were related to high reading achievement while socioeconomic status negatively affected overall reading success. This study established that Latino middle school students are equal in reading ability as other racial/ethnic populations nationally and internationally and that males hold literacy competencies at the same

level as females. Attentive parents and teachers positively impacted student success, while motivation for reading, large amounts of time spent in recreational reading, access to literacy materials, fair family income, and positive self-efficacy were also related to high reading achievements. These results are important because increasing accessibility to reading materials by means of school and classroom libraries would create more avid readers. Results from this study would also help teachers and librarians support reading success for all students.

## DEDICATION

In dedication to Sofia,

an exquisite teenage girl who spent many hours reading for fun in the blue chair.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation became a reality with the support of many great people. Primarily, I want to thank my loving husband, John, who through his brilliant mind makes everything seem easy and attainable. You inspire confidence in others. Thank you for believing in me. Your encouragement was the wind beneath my wings.

My gratitude to Dr. Sherrye D. Garrett, committee chair, you helped set this dissertation on its course through the endless hours you spent advising, mentoring, reading, editing, and positioning my commas in the right place. You provided the guidance and tools necessary for me to succeed in completing my dissertation.

Thank you, Dr. Guang Zeng, committee member, your keen knowledge of statistics helped strengthen my data analysis and placed greater valued on my dissertation. To Dr. Corinne Montalvo Valadez, committee member, for providing the opportunity to conduct my first research study prior to the dissertation. From that study, I developed vital qualities like patience and endurance, which abetted me with my study. To Dr. Diana Cardenas, committee member, for the encouraging words you sent me throughout the dissertation process that put a smile on my face and kept me going. The emails you sent me were a pleasant surprise.

My sincere appreciation to Dr. Daniel Pearce, Department Chair and advisor, for your advice, your guidance through the program, and your candid sense of humor. And to Dr. Nick Curiel, for assisting me with statistical analysis and quantitative research. A special thanks to Dr. Marsha Grace for her wealth of knowledge with “all things bookish” and making every reading class enjoyable. I learned a great deal from you.

My love and eternal gratitude to my family for their support, patience, and being so gracious in allowing me my time and space to complete this journey. Andreu, “cheers” for your charismatic and up-lifting personality that brought humor when I needed it the most. Sofia, you and your friends never tired of answering my endless probing questions about your reading experiences, many heartfelt thanks. My parents, Fructoso and Juliana, who instilled in me the importance of an education and reminded me of how proud they are of my accomplishments. To my sister, Veronica, my deepest gratitude for reviving my writing ability and helping me compose beautiful sentences. My eternal appreciation to my siblings, Aida, Diana, and Sergio for believing in my work and being there for me.

My gratitude runs over to my cohort and friends who cheered me on in my endeavors. Thanks Fernando, for your friendship and long conversations to and from campus; Frances, my soul sister, for your boundless support, our extensive conversations on SPSS, “writing miracles,” and your *chancla* stories that made me laugh until my belly ached; Luci, my *comadre*, for your eloquent words and soothing voice; Mapuana, for our love of bright colors and your cheerful long text messages; and a special thanks to Connie for opening your home to me unconditionally.

I would like to express a deep appreciation to all of the student participants in the study, without you this dissertation would not be possible. I would also like to give genuine thanks to the parents, teachers and administrators at the two charter schools for your cooperation and participation. Finally, I would like to express a sincere thanks to all of the great people whose paths I have crossed that have contributed to my success in completing my degree.



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## **Chapter One**

### **Overview**

Adolescence is a turbulent and multi-faceted time for children. Hall (2012) defined this tempestuous period as a phase of “storm-n-stress,” while others refer to it as a period of “biological disturbance” (Moje, 2002). Adolescence begins around 11 years old and extends to 18 years (Berk, 2010). During this challenging stage, adolescents undergo vast changes in their physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development. As children enter the transitive period of adolescence, they also cross the threshold into the complex world of middle school. Around the time adolescents reach middle school, they tend to lose interest in reading. Researchers assert that students often have a positive attitude towards reading in Grade 1, but that attitude slowly declines as the students progress in grades (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995). By Grade 6 most of the students feel indifferent towards reading (Unrau & Schlackman 2006; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995). Teachers and parents often comment that children find interests other than reading once they enter the pre-teen stage.

Many of these adolescents become more interested in peers, they succumb to peer-pressure, or they may become completely engrossed in sports and other non-academic activities. Competition with electronic media is another reason why reading is declining among adolescents (Alvermann, 2005). Adolescents invest large amounts of time texting, blogging, searching the Internet, and putting forth “effort in creating content to share with others online” (Alvermann, 2008, p. 9). Middle school students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are part of the Generation M (Henry Kaiser Foundation, 2011) group who are growing up surrounded by hi-tech media. With the constant creations of new technology, it is no wonder that adolescents choose not to read in their spare time (Hughes-Hassel & Rodge 2007). Other factors such as gender, socioeconomic status,

ethnicity, or accessibility to literacy materials outside the school may compound a lack of interest in reading. Whatever the reason may be, customarily this age group does not choose reading as a favorite pastime (Camp, 2007).

A nationwide survey conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts (2007), *To Read or Not to Read*, reported that Americans were reading less now than they did a decade or two ago and that voluntary reading has declined. When compared to other groups, the lowest group of readers was young adults (ages 18-24) while approximately two-thirds of 13 year-olds read daily. On the other hand, students at the elementary level read for fun (Camp, 2007). If these young adults are choosing other activities over reading, they may develop into Non-Readers (Stommen and Mates, 2004), which could present a problem for the future of America. We are at risk of producing aliterate individuals “who are capable of reading but choose not to do so (Pitcher, Albright, DeLaney, Walker, Seunarinensingh, Mogge, Headley, Ridgeway, Peck, Hunt, & Dunston, 2007, p. 379).” It is the researchers’ belief that we should focus on those middle school students who have not lost their love of reading from former years and find out what characteristics they share that keeps them interested in reading. More studies are needed to find out what distinguishes them from non-readers.

According to Gee (2000) and Alvermann (2008), reading is a social construct. This means that students who are surrounded by other readers will most likely also read. Reading is more than just reading a novel or a piece of literature in a reading or English class. Reading can come in various forms.

One way to find out what middle school students are doing that is successful is to ask them about their reading practices. Middle school students often have imaginary audiences

(Elkin & Bowen, 1979). In other words, they feel that everyone is looking and focusing solely on them. It is a phase in which they are absorbed with themselves. Consequently, middle school students love talking about themselves and their interests (Berk, 2010) hence a reading questionnaire would be an appropriate tool to gather this data. Who is an avid reader? In a Calvin and Hobbs comic strip, Calvin, an imaginative little boy, is observing an army of ants carrying food to the Queen. Calvin is fascinated by the ants and wants to learn more about them so he rushes home to read the encyclopedia book on ants. Hobbs, his stuffed and imaginary talking tiger, says that is too much like school. Calvin counters that by saying that it's not like school because this is fun and it is not a school assignment. Calvin's enthusiastic desire to learn more about ants on his own is an example of avidness: the passion or ardor to want to do something by choice. In the same way, some middle school students also display an avidness to read at their leisure because it is fun. Avid readers always tend to be absorbed in a book (Galda & Liang, 2003).

The amount of time students engage in free reading is linked to reading achievement and higher test scores (Krashen, 1993; Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsla, & Cox, 1999). Free voluntary reading, according to Krashen (1993), can increase vocabulary and improve reading comprehension, which help students pass the multiple-choice tests associated with standardized testing. Krashen (1993) adds that children who are avid readers can read up to one million words a year, and "at least 1,000 words will be added to their vocabulary" (p. 9). Also linked to reading achievement is the amount of books available to students both in and out of school. While some argue that electronic media hinders reading, Krashen (1993) suggests that the absence of good books is far worse than watching television. This may have a more negative effect for boys than for girls, as studies reveal that girls are better at reading than boys (Logan & Johnston, 2009).



Finally, a student's attitude towards reading can also affect their reading achievement. McKenna et al. (1995) suggested that readers who are often frustrated while reading can develop a belief and the attitude that reading is a frustrating experience. Krashen (1993) equally endorsed the idea that students' attitudes towards reading are more significant than their ability to read.

### **Significance of the Study**

Adolescents in middle school have a tendency to resist authorities such as their parents, teachers, administrators, and the like. Therefore, when they engage in recreational reading on their own, it should be celebrated and embraced. The fact that they choose to read should be used as a catalyst to encourage reading and create life-long readers who may potentially develop an appetite for books. Encouragement and inspiration to engage in reading can present itself in many ways.

Based on observations of the local phone book and an Internet search on bookstores in the Rio Grande Valley, there are few locations where children can purchase literature. While South Texas is limited in literacy resources, it did not deter one author from the valley from developing a love of reading. For many book lovers it is a real treat to listen to authors talk about their books and share personal information that makes the book all the more poignant. At an author book talk at the local university in 2005, the researcher had the pleasure of meeting and listening to Oscar Casares, author of the books *Brownsville* and *Amigoland*. Casares grew up in a town on the U.S./Mexico border, but now resides in Austin, where he writes for the *Texas Monthly* while working on his next novel. It was captivating listening to him read his stories aloud to the crowd and sharing tidbits of background information he used for his stories. Casares draws on his borderland experiences in his two books and most of the articles he has published in

the *Texas Monthly*. One particular article, *Hecho en Brownsville* (2012) is about him reading his book, *Brownsville*, at a grand opening of a new H.E.B. (a supermarket) in the Rio Grande Valley. Casares shares his experience of the reading:

The store's book and magazine section stood behind the long row of cash registers.

Twenty or so copies of *Brownsville* were displayed on a small stand next to the table where I was supposed to sign them. My photo was framed in a chrome floor sign, the kind used to advertise a special on cantaloupes or bran muffins. The only thing missing was the microphone they had promised to set up. I realized this meant I wouldn't have to read. But I also knew my reading was the reason my parents had come with me and why my mother had spent so much time calling people. And the truth was, at their ages, this was one of the few chances she and my father had to hear me share my work (p. 71).

In another Casares article, *Imaginary Friends* (2010, December), he reveals that while growing up in the valley, there was only one book in his home, a book about President Kennedy. Moreover, Casares' father also encouraged and instilled inspiration in him by taking him to visit Judge Reynaldo Garza, the first Mexican American to be appointed as federal judge in the United States. Casares' story is common to so many families in the Rio Grande Valley, where children grow up with few or no books at home. Although Casares only had one book at home, he was able to pursue his dream of becoming an author. However, not all of the students in the Valley can be or are like Casares. Many university students have reported that the only book they have read is the Bible. Perhaps it is because that is the only book they have at home. Another reason may be the lack of literary resources available, and like Casares, who read his book at a local supermarket, there are not many places in the tip of Texas where a person can purchase quality books. On the other hand, some students may have never been expected to read, or chose

not to read, as was the case with a freshman college student who stated, “Ma’am, I have never read a whole novel, and you made me read one in your class.”

The Rio Grande Valley has very few bookstores. Palm City (pseudonym), where the study took place, closed its only bookstore, Borders, in spring 2011, and another has not opened in its place. Presently, there are three bookstores in Palm City; two are Christian bookstores – one sells books in English and the other one in Spanish. The third is the university bookstore, Barnes and Noble, which mostly sells textbooks for college students. There are small pockets of places around town where books are sold, such as the local supermarkets, Target, Walgreens, CVS Pharmacy, Goodwill, and in some downtown book exchange stores. While these locations offer books, they do not always carry the most recent titles for adolescents. For trendy literature for middle school students, residents of Palm City have to either travel 65 miles to the nearest big town or order books online. For many, traveling to another town or city for books is not likely. Occasionally, the university will invite authors to speak at campus, but the intended audience is mostly professors and university students. In spite of the limited resources, a number of middle school students are motivated to read, as witnessed in the local library, and in out-of-school activities. Consequently, it is imperative to conduct research in the Rio Grande Valley where adolescents do not have basic literacy essentials and luxuries that bigger towns and cities have, yet some students still continue to enjoy reading.

## **Problem**

Early studies in reading research tended to focus on students in the elementary years. An example is Chall’s (1967) landmark study on first-grade students. Her research greatly impacted reading instruction in emergent literacy and changed the dynamics of reading pedagogy in the

United States (Pearson, 2002). Another example is the national reading survey by McKenna, Kear, and Ellsworth (1995) that included students in grades one to six. While reading research in general was gaining status, students in middle school were not being recognized.

When it comes to adolescent research, “youth literacy almost remains invisible” (Moje, 2002, p. 98), while more attention is given to literacy practices at the primary grades (Alvermann, 2005). In her publication *Youth Culture and Literacy Theory*, Moje (2002) shares her distress at the lack of attention given to youth, which she defines as ages 12 to 18, and she points out that such neglect ignores a “large portion of the world’s population” (p. 98). Whereas it is important to study the literacy practices in the critical emerging years when young children are forming a literacy foundation, often the middle grades are overlooked. However, exploration of middle school students can be beneficial to all age groups; if literacy theorists focus their “attention to youth and study how they learn increasingly complex literacy practices, we might learn more about literacy learning among children and adults” (Moje, 2002, p. 99). Much research has been conducted on adolescents since Vacca’s 1997 seminal article in *Reading Today*, “The Benign Neglect of Adolescent Literacy,” which addressed a need for research on adolescents. Most recently, Jack Cassidy’s list on the *What’s Hot in Literacy* list for 2013 considers adolescent literacy as a hot topic in literacy. The classification of a “hot topic” in the list means that at least 75 percent of the respondents in the survey agreed that it is a topic to consider (Cassidy & Grote-Garcia, 2012). Clearly, this indicates a need to further investigate this critical stage.

An early example of adolescence research is Margaret Mead’s 1928 *Coming of Age in Samoa*, which examined the social and mental development of young children in Samoa. Since Mead’s publication, most of the studies on adolescents tend to be concerned with cognitive

development and center more on struggling readers, at-risk readers, or marginalized students (Jimenez, 1997). Seldom do researchers look at those middle school students who continue to read for recreation and are motivated to pass a lazy afternoon curled up with a good book or some type of literature. Too often students who tend to be good readers go unnoticed because it is assumed they do not need the extra attention as do those who do not do as well. For this reason, further research is needed on middle school students and what they are doing right that contribute to their reading success.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to gather data at two charter schools in South Texas to explore the characteristics of middle school students who chose to read for enjoyment. Because the majority of the population in South Texas is Latino, the study will focus mostly on this particular ethnic group. The intent of this study is to investigate (1) the distinguished features that readers share in reading, and (2) to investigate the impact of their enthusiasm for reading on reading achievement.

In an effort to improve test scores, Hughes-Hassel and Rodge (2007) advocate that teachers should acknowledge the strong relationship between high interest in recreational reading with student achievement. Likewise, Camp (2007) also supports the belief that “a strong relationship...exists between the amount of recreational reading and scores on standardized reading tests” (p. 264).

Since the public reporting of the adequate yearly progress (AYP), the schools have been under great pressure to do well. As part of the accountability requirements under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2002, “all public school campuses, school districts, and the state are

evaluated for Adequate Yearly Progress” (Texas Education Agency, 2014). With the AYP, school districts and the state are measured in Reading and/or Language Arts, Mathematics, and the rate for either graduation or attendance (Texas Education Agency, 2014). Students can be classified under various categories that can overlap. The disaggregated subgroups include English-language learners (ELL), students receiving free or reduced meals, special needs, Hispanic, Asian American, Native American, Anglo-White, and Pacific Islander (Wright, 2008). The No Child Left Behind Act has made the greatest impact on American education since the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965. Since its authorization on January 8, 2002 by President George W. Bush, all public and charter schools are closely scrutinized to “improve the achievement of all students and to close the achievement gap between ethnic groups” (Wright, 2008, p. 423).

The categorization of subgroups has been part of American education history since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when an influx of immigrants made their new home in United States. Over the years, each subgroup was introduced for different purposes and at different times in history. In the present day, almost every official form has a classification section which can be overwhelming as it places people into categories or symbolically in a box. Au (2002) distinguishes students of diverse backgrounds by three characteristics: primary language, ethnicity (cultural background), and socioeconomic status.

In her article, Au (2002) offers some statistics from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that establishes students of diverse background in the United States who fit these three criteria. According to Au (2002), these students are predominantly Latino, African American, or Native American in ethnicity. These students come from low-income families, and they regularly speak another language at home other than standard

American English (Au, 2002). These students of diverse backgrounds, comprise over half of the population enrolled in urban public school districts in major metropolitan cities in the United States, and also comprise 35% of all public school students in grades 1 – 12 (Au, 2002).

## **Research Questions**

The objective of this study is to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of avid readers?
2. How does avidness contribute to student reading achievement, controlling for gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and accessibility to literacy materials?

## **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions are used in this study.

*Accessibility* - the degree to which a product is available

*Adolescence* - Adolescence is the developmental stage when children are between the ages of 11 to 18 (Berk, 2010).

*Aliterate* - a person who is a proficient reader but chooses not to read (Pitcher, Albright, DeLaney, Walker, Seunarinisingh, Mogge, Headley, Ridgeway, Peck, Hunt, & Dunston, 2007).

*Avid reader* - a middle school student, who enjoys reading, feels that reading is a great way to spend leisure time, and has read 10 books or more in the last year.

*Ethnicity* - the common cultural characteristics, background, heritage, or ethnic affiliations shared by a group of people.

*Gender* - the state of being male or female

*Latino* - people with Spanish origins. Latino is the preferred term to encompass Mexican-Americans and other groups of people with Spanish origins. Other terms such as Hispanic will be used when drawing on other sources.

*Literacy materials* - sources or devices that provide or enhance learning in reading

*Mexican or Mexican National* - a person born in Mexico with European and/or Indian heritage

*Mexican-American* - a person born in the U.S. with ancestral heritage to Mexico. This person may be first generation who was raised in U.S. but may also be born in Mexico.

*Middle School/Middle School Students* - Middle School is an academic institution for students in grades sixth, seventh, and eighth. Middle school students are early adolescents between the ages of 11-13. The terms *adolescents* and *middle school students* will be used interchangeably in this study.

*Socioeconomic status* - a status based on a family's income and social standing in a community

Additionally, the names of the two charter schools, the city, and the county will all be changed to maintain confidentiality. The city where the study will take place will be called Palm City, the county will be called Lantana County, one charter school will be called Seaside Science Academy, and the other charter school will be called Borderland Preparatory School. A further description of the city and the two schools will be discussed in chapter three.



## **Summary**

Chapter one provided an overview of this study and a synopsis of reading in South Texas. It offered a brief background on the growth and development of adolescents. Two research questions that focused on the characteristics of avid readers and how their avidness contributes to reading achievement were proposed as the objectives for this study. A definition of an avid reader was established and shown how it was used in this study. Other specific terms such as Latino/a and Hispanic were clearly defined to distinguish the two and to clarify how they are often used interchangeably. The lack of research on youth literacy especially in South Texas was presented as the problem and the inspiration for this investigation. The purpose of this study is to gather data at two charter schools in South Texas to explore the characteristics of middle school students who chose to read for enjoyment. Significantly, this research will contribute to the already existing data on middle school students.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of the Literature**

In this study, the characteristics of adolescent avid readers in an urban middle school and how their avidness contributes to reading achievement was investigated with a close look at gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and how much access the middle school students have to literacy materials outside of school. In Chapter two previous research is presented in the areas that are relevant and pertinent to this study. This chapter also presents research related to Latino adolescent readers. The following topics will be addressed: middle school students, avid readers, reading achievement, and reading test scores at two charter schools in the Rio Grande Valley with a close look at gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and how much access the middle school students have to literacy materials outside of school.

### **Middle School Students**

Middle school students are in a transition between childhood and adulthood (Alexander & Fox, 2011). They are unpredictable and face daily challenges emotionally, psychologically, intellectually, and even physically. They switch from Disney movies to PG-13 movies with more mature context or switch from Nickelodeon to MTV (Music Television). Their moods and interests sway from one direction to another quite rapidly, but one factor remains, and that is, they like interacting with friends. Middle school students may be more interested in social communication than other activities, including reading. As Nancie Atwell (1998) shared, “the reality of middle school students [is] confusion, bravado, restlessness, a preoccupation with peers, and the questioning of authority aren’t manifestations of poor attitude; they are hallmarks of a particular time of life. By nature young adolescents are volatile and social” (p. 54).

Likewise, many of the studies conducted with middle school students express the same sentiment: once they reach the middle school years they become more interested in socializing and less interested in reading (Alvermann, 2005, 2008). Most middle school students would consider their friends to be the best part of school. Whereas reading may decline during the middle years, it has not been abandoned altogether. “Enthusiastic middle school readers are not mythical creatures!” (Kindig, 2012, p. 92).

Even though research reports claim that this age group tends to lose interest in reading, they also indicate that middle school students increase their interest in other activities that may include some type of literacy (Alvermann, 2005, 2008; Gee, 2011; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004). In her commentary, Alvermann (2008) considers that adolescent literacy is connected to “social practices that involve reading and writing as well as other modes of communication (e.g., still and moving images, sound, embodied performances)” (p. 8). Alvermann (2008) also claims that she observed first-hand “how designing personal websites, gaming, and downloading songs require decoding and encoding a complex mix of images, words, sounds, symbols, and genre-specific syntax...” (p. 12). Based on her observations, Alvermann (2008) concludes that the content that these adolescents are motivated to participate in are not usually found or “taught in the typical language arts classroom” (p. 12).

Researchers Nippold, Duthie & Larsen’s (2005) also examined how middle school students lose interest in reading but find other interest in the Internet, music/song lyrics, and reading material. In their study with 100 sixth-graders and 100 ninth-graders in a lower middle-class public school in Oregon, they “indicated that interests in reading as a free-time activity declines during these years, [ages 11-15] whereas interest in using e-mail increases” (p. 98). The authors found that magazines, novels and comics were the most popular choice of reading

material for recreation indicating that middle school students are reading for fun. Other interests that were most popular among the 200 participants in Nippold's et al. (2005) study were listening to music or song lyrics and going to concerts. Both Alvermann (2008) and Nippold et al. (2005) stress the importance of alternative types of literacy development such as listening to music/song lyrics and the use of technology as motivators to read.

Allowing middle school students to choose books that are interesting to them is one way to motivate students to read (Kindig, 2012; Pitcher et al., 2007). Alvermann (2008) claims that she observed first-hand "how designing personal websites, gaming, and downloading songs require decoding and encoding a complex mix of images, words, sounds, symbols, and genre-specific syntax..." (p. 12). Based on her observations, Alvermann (2008) concluded that the content that these adolescents are motivated to participate in are not usually found or "taught in the typical language arts classroom" (p. 12).

Students in middle grades are interested in what matters to them and what is important in their lives (Atwell, 1998). Children learn best when they are actively engaged in a transactional process that respects and validates their own personal experiences (Dewey, 1938). If they find some relevance in the literature, they are more likely to read it. Children make connections with the literature when the content is meaningful (Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999). Rosenblatt's (2004) *Transactional Theory* best describes the interrelationship between the reader, the text and reading for enjoyment.

### **Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory**

Every reading act is an event, or a transaction involving a particular reader and a particular pattern of signs, a text, and occurring at a particular time in a particular

context....The term *reader* implies a transaction with a text; the term *text* implies a transaction with a reader. “Meaning” is what happens during the transaction...

(Rosenblatt, 2004)

Rosenblatt’s (2004) seminal theoretical framework, the *Transactional Theory*, defines reading as a transaction or a process between the reader and the text. Text is more than just symbols on paper; it is a living-through experience that the reader links with that makes the text meaningful. The connection that transpires between the reader and the text is a transaction or a two-way exchange that elicits a response from a literary experience (Rosenblatt, 2003).

Rosenblatt (2003) states that her “transactional theory draws on Pragmatist philosophers” (p. 70), and adopted the term *transaction* “from Dewey and Bentley” (p. 70). The term *transactional*, as used by Rosenblatt, was largely based on John Dewey’s *concept of experience*, which is the belief that children acquire an education by developing a relationship between school and their actual life experiences outside the classroom. Dewey (1938) references the term “transaction” when speaking of the lived experiences taking place between children and their environment. Rosenblatt embraced Dewey’s concept of experience and built on the conception of transactions as they applied to encounters with literature. In Rosenblatt’s (2003) transactional reading theory, the belief is that the reader connects the text to their lived experiences and interprets their own meaning based on these realities. Rosenblatt (2004) adds that individuals experience multiple realities, not just one, based on familiarities with social culture, upbringing, and inheritance. The actual experiences or realities that evoke a connection are the core to understanding the concept behind her seminal reading theory.

In Rosenblatt’s (2004) Transactional Theory, which she developed after decades of teaching and observing readers, she contends that there are two different stances operating

together during the reading process. She refers to them as *efferent* reading and *aesthetic* reading. Readers read for both efferent and aesthetic purposes, operating as a continuum and not separately. Rosenblatt stresses that both stances are critical to the reading process in order for meaning to occur and children should be taught to shuttle between the two stances.

Efferent reading derives from the Latin term *efferent* meaning to “carry away.” With efferent reading, the main purpose for the reader is to extract information or a correct response and retain it for a specific motive (Rosenblatt, 2003). In an efferent stance, Rosenblatt states that meaning occurs from “abstracting out and analytically structuring the ideas, information, directions, or conclusions to be retained, used, or acted on after the reading event” (Rosenblatt, 2004, p. 1373). Some examples of efferent reading resources are college textbooks, a newspaper, or a prescription label. The meaning that has been formulated derives from the content in the text and not from the reader’s lived experiences.

Aesthetic reading, in contrast, is positioned as a transactional experience between the reader and the text where meaning is evoked from the reader’s multiple realities. Rosenblatt (2004) chose the Greek word *aesthetic*, meaning *senses*, because the reader is in tune with the senses when generating meaning. In an aesthetic stance, the reader pays attention to details that evoke feelings, descriptions, and thoughts as they unfold in the text. Aesthetic reading fits well in the affective domain as it resonates with the readers’ emotions.

Both stances, efferent and aesthetic, have mutually cognitive and affective traits depending on the purpose or attention the reader gives to the text. In an aesthetic stance, the readers focus predominately on “the ideas and feelings being evoked and organized as the work corresponds to the text” (2003, p. 70). It is this evocation of aesthetic reading that permeates

middle school readers to read for enjoyment. When reading for efferent purposes, the reader may experience an aesthetic stance in the process. In other words, when middle school students read for recreation, they may learn new information while they read. For example, when American students read the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling, they may learn about boarding schools, the train system, and new vocabulary words such as “the lot” when Harry Potter says, “We’ll take the lot” in the first book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerers Stone* (Rowling, 1997). Even if the intention to read the book was purely for enjoyment, it is the natural process to also experience an efferent stance according to the transactional theory, and vice versa.

### **Middle School Avid Readers**

One way to keep middle school students interested in reading is to make reading enjoyable. Students who feel able and competent with what they read are more likely to read for the sheer pleasure of it (Guthrie, Schafer, Wang, & Afflerbach, 1995). Readers who read for enjoyment are avid readers. Two studies, Chen (2008) and Strommen and Mates (2004), have defined avid readers engaged in various reading activities. Several studies, Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007), Guthrie et al., (1999), and Kindig (2012) referred to avid readers to describe students who engage in reading activities by choice.

Chen (2008) investigated avid readers in grades 9 and 12 in Taiwan for significant factors in reading habits and how they relate to gender, family, and teachers. Chen defined avid readers as students who “reported reading a lot of extracurricular books” (p.217) during their summer vacation – a time when they could be involved in other activities other than reading.

Strommen and Mates (2004) also found that successful readers in a suburban middle school read for the simple pleasure of reading. In this study, the authors examined 65 students in

grade 6 and 86 students in grade 9 to determine factors that readers share that add to their love of reading. The authors used the terms *Readers* for avid readers and *Not-readers* for students who were not avid readers. The *Readers* were identified as those teens and older children who enjoyed reading for recreation compared to *Not-readers* who were identified as students who choose other activities over reading for leisure. A comparison of the two shows that *Readers* see themselves as part of a community of readers and view reading as pleasurable and part of their daily existence. *Not-readers* did not share the same point of view in reading. Guthrie et al., (1995) also used “avid readers” to describe students who talked, asked questions, and shared information about reading and books.

If a student’s assessment of himself or herself resembles a *Reader* or *Not-reader*, their perception can also affect their reading success and experiences with recreational reading. McKenna et al. (1995) asserts that readers who are often frustrated while reading can develop a belief and the attitude that reading is a frustrating experience. Krashen (1993) equally endorsed the idea that students’ attitudes towards reading are more significant than their ability to read. If students experience frustration with reading, it is likely they will not read for recreational purposes.

In an urban middle school with a high Latino and African-American population, Hughes-Hassel and Rodge (2007) similarly examined 584 adolescents ranging from ages 10 to 15 to determine if these urban youngsters read in their spare time or not. Students who did read at leisure were asked what, when and why they read and what and who they like to read about. The authors defined reading for recreation as “voluntary reading, spare time reading, recreational reading, independent reading, reading outside of school, and self-selected reading” (p. 22). Reading materials came from a variety of sources beyond books, and students chose their own



reading materials. Results showed that more than half of the participants read for fun, relaxation, and because they were bored. Magazines were the most popular and it motivated the students to read more on their own. Moreover, many of the Latino students claimed that they enjoy reading in Spanish as well as in English, and being allowed to choose what they want to read actually increased their love for reading.

These research findings are consistent with Krashen's (1993) idea of free voluntary reading (FVR). Free voluntary reading allows the student to choose their own reading material in a low-anxiety situation that eventually makes the student want to read more. Krashen (1993) claims that students who are given the freedom to choose what they want to read are most likely to be successful readers and read for fun. In *The Power of Reading*, Krashen (1993) asserts that the self-selection of books is a powerful tool and when children read for pleasure, their reading comprehension improves. When the students in Camp's (2007) study were offered free choice reading, they saw it more as recreation and less as schoolwork. Furthermore, some choices for reading materials, which varied among the multi-age participants, were actually high-level reading. Book series were among the high-level literature the students chose to read. These included titles like Franklin, Goosebumps, and Harry Potter for the younger students in grades one, four, and six, while the older students read book series by the same authors such as S.E. Hinton, Gary Paulsen, and John Grisham.

More recently, Kindig (2012) also found a positive correlation between students selecting their own reading material and a motivation to read. In a rural middle school in Virginia, students in grades six to eight fared well in the state test but administrators and teachers were concerned that middle school students were not making progress as readers (Kindig, 2012). The students' lack of enthusiasm for reading, discussing, and engaging in books compelled researcher Kindig

to investigate reasons why students were reluctant to read despite their accomplished test scores. A reading survey that Kindig designed herself, consisted of 12 open-ended questions that began like a conversation rather than a formal set of instructions. The instructions read: “Do you like to talk with your friends and find out what is going on with them? Hear what they did over the weekend – that sort of thing? It’s kind of like hearing and telling stories, isn’t it?” (p. 103) followed by question 1 “What about stories in books?” (p. 103). Question 12 asks, “What are some of the things that you do in your free time?” (p. 104).

Kindig (2012) found that a major reason these middle school students did not discuss books was due to the reading list they were asked to read. Most, if not all, of the books on the expected reading list were classics such as *A Tale of Two Cities* and *A Christmas Carol*. Although she advocates the great works of authors like Dickens and Shakespeare, she believes that the key to engaging middle school students in reading is to allow them to choose what they want to read about. The materials available at school do not often match what students want to read (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). This does not mean that the teacher throws away the curriculum and gives the students free reign. Kindig claims that the opposite is true. By empowering the students to choose literature that is published now, as opposed to canons, then students would be encouraged to read. Choice and relevance changed the students’ attitudes towards reading. Kindig (2010) concludes that “by turning so many kids on to reading, we have succeeded in our goal to help them become lifelong learners and if they continue reading at this pace and with this enthusiasm, their futures look bright” (p. 102). In an earlier study, Guthrie, Schafer, Wang, & Afflerbach (1995) also found a positive relationship between the amount of reading and avid readers.

Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, and Cox (1999) likewise found that reading amount plus reading motivation is linked to reading achievement. The study examined students in grades 8 and 10, to determine if reading amount and motivation was a determinant of text comprehension. Results from a reading questionnaire revealed that students who were motivated to read increased the amount of time they spent reading. To determine the reading amount correlations, two questions were asked: Question 1: How often do you spend time on the following activities outside of school? Answer choices: visiting friends, using computers, playing sports and reading for pleasure; Question 2: How much additional reading do you do each week outside of school not in connection with school work? Answer format ranged from none, one hour or less, 3-4 hours, 4-5 hours, and 6-7 hours. This investigation also showed that students who read large amounts of time spent more time in reading activities such as visiting libraries and discussing literature with friends and families. Students also increased their knowledge concerning a variety of topics as well as increasing their vocabulary. These cognitive strategies made it possible for students to earn a high score on tests that involved reading comprehension. For students in grades eight and ten, motivation increases reading amount and subsequently results in text comprehension. Thus, reading motivation positively affects reading achievement.

A student's attitude towards reading can also affect their reading experiences and reading success. McKenna et al. (1995) suggested that readers who are often frustrated while reading can develop a belief and the attitude that reading is a frustrating experience. Krashen (1993) equally endorsed the idea that students' attitudes towards reading are more significant than their ability to read.

Much research has proven that students learn best when they construct their own learning through meaningful experiences. Part of this process is allowing students the freedom to choose

literature that takes into consideration what is important to them. Building on this value motivates students to read for leisure. The amount of reading is synonymous with a motivation to read, which impacts student reading achievement.

### **Reading Achievement and the Nation's Report Card**

In a modern society, the ability to read well is the cornerstone of a child's education. In a modern economy, literacy is a prerequisite for a successful life.

(Preface by the National Assessment Governing Board, NAEP 2013)

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is our Nation's Report Card on education. Authorized under the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), NAEP focused its 2013 report on five of the most influential states they called Mega-States: Texas, California, New York, Florida, and Illinois. According to the NAEP 2013 report, the Mega-States are triggering a major shift in demographics in our nation, as NCES and policymakers continue to search for ways and means to lessen the achievement gap (NCES, 2013b). Mega-States are important to NCES because they enroll about 40 percent of the students attending public schools, educate over half of the English language learners (ELL), and serve the largest amount of students from low-income families. In the last decade, Texas, California, Florida and New York had the leading flow in the immigrant population in the nation.

The Nation's Report Card publicizes the academic achievement ratings of students at the elementary and secondary levels. This assessment was conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress at the national and state levels to "evaluate the condition and progress of education" (NCES, 2013a, p. i) in reading, math, science, writing, geography, U.S. history, and other subject areas. Assessments in reading were first proctored at the state level in grade 4 in

1992, and then to students in grade 8 in 1998. Ever since, NAEP has annually announced the academic achievements of students in grades 4 and 8 in various subjects.

The Nation's Report Card reported that:

- Texas scored higher than the nation in grade 8 mathematics and science, and lower in reading.
- California scored lower than the nation in reading, mathematics, and science.
- Florida scored higher than the nation in grade 4 reading, but lower in grade 8 mathematics and science.
- Illinois scored higher than the nation in grade 8 reading, but lower in science.
- New York scored higher than the nation in grade 4 reading, but lower in grade 4 mathematics and grade 8 mathematics and science.
- California, Florida, and Texas all have higher percentages of students who are eligible for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) also known as the free and reduced school meals.
- Expenditures per student ranged from \$8,562 in Texas to \$17,746 in New York, while the national average is \$10,59.

To explicitly assess reading achievement, the National Assessment of Educational Progress established the Reading Framework to specify the “types of texts and questions to be included in the assessment as well as how the questions should be designed and scored” (2013a, p. 9). Achievement levels in reading are set by the Governing Board upon recommendations from educators, policymakers, and the public. When reporting reading scores, the NAEP uses a 0-500 scale. Generally, fourth- and eighth-grade students in the Mega-States score lower in

reading, math, and science than other students in the nation. Though, NAEP (2013a) indicated that students in grade 4 scored higher in reading than middle school students in grade 8. Texas has not made any gains in reading since 1998 and scored 262 in 2011 while the nation gained three points in reading. Moreover, NAEP noted that the Mega-States have made progress over the years. For example, African American students in grade 4 and grade 8 in Florida and grade 4 in California have made the most gains in reading. Likewise, Hispanic students in New York in grade 4 have steadily gained points in reading from 1992-2011. Compared to the nation, grade 8 students in Texas scored higher in math and science, but not in reading. This may be attributed to the many charter schools that have recently opened in Texas that specialize in math and science. In sum, Texas was the only Mega-State to achieve higher scores in math and science, while Illinois was the only Mega-State that had the highest reading scores in the nation.

### **Reading Achievement and Texas: A Culture of Testing**

Texas has a history of assessing students in the core subjects, reading, writing, and mathematics, in an effort to improve the academic performance of students attending public schools. In order to fully comprehend the importance of achievement testing in Texas, a brief history of the implementation of statewide assessments is provided.

Since the establishment of the state curriculum for public school teachers known as the Essential Elements (EEs), Texas has created five different state tests in the last four decades to measure students' progress (Cruse & Twing, 2001). Starting with the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) in 1980 and the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) in 1984, both were criterion-referenced tests and both exams sought to assess the minimum competencies of basic skills. Since the EEs were not a statewide mandated curriculum, rather a

curriculum used as a guideline, the TABS and the TEAMS were not aligned with EEs and neither test measured the outlined skills of the EEs. The TABS tested students attending the public school system in grades 3, 5, and 9, and later TEAMS increased the number of grades to be tested: grades 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11. TABS was the first formal assessment to be used as an exit exam for high school students and was the first state test to report their results to the public. While students who did not pass the TABS were not kept from graduating, later students who did not pass the TEAMS were denied a high school diploma if they failed the TEAMS as an exit exam. The idea of using the TEAMS test to award high school diplomas placed much attention on campuses and school districts. To justify this action, a new statewide exam was created to align with the statewide EEs curriculum.

The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), implemented in 1990, was the first to align with the EEs and to assess the specific skills described in the state curriculum. Social studies and science were included as part of the assessment for grade 8 students. The exam moved away from testing basic skills to assessing problem-solving skills and was the first Texas test to hold teachers accountable for students' academic performance results. Schools were also graded and rated as *Exemplary*, *Recognized*, *Acceptable*, or *Low Performing* (Texas Education Agency, 2012). Student performance and school ratings were reported to the public by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). In sum, "the primary purpose of assessment in Texas had evolved from the collection of school-level information (TABS) to assessment of curriculum-specific minimum skills (TEAMS), to school accountability of student performance (TAAS, 1990; TEA, 1990, 1994)" thus, "increasing the nature of testing in Texas" (Cruise & Twing, 2001, p. 329).

High-stakes testing was shaping the Texas public school system by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the central focus was on the state achievement tests. For the first time, results from

state test (TAAS) were disaggregated by “African American, Hispanic, White, and economically disadvantaged subpopulations; dropout rates; and attendance” (Cruse & Twing, 2001, p 330). Much of the spotlight was placed on these separate groups and gave way to the development of alternative education programs, including public charter schools. The testing attitude of Texas moved to a national level when former Texas Governor George W. Bush was voted President in 2000 (Shannon, 2007). High-stakes testing and accountability was to become a national landmark with the endorsement of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act that took effect in January 2002, which encompasses and brought back the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Under NCLB, all states receiving federal funds must assess students who attend public and charter schools starting in grade 3 (Wright, 2008). The main purpose for NCLB was to have all students in grade 3 and up to be 100 percent proficient and show yearly growth in reading (Shannon, 2007; Wright, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2013) and in mathematics by 2014 (Wright, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). With accountability on the rise, Texas developed the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) 2003-2009, which not only aligned with the state competencies (EEs), but also complied with NCLB.

Common to standardized testing in Texas, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills assessed proficiency in reading (grades 3-9), writing (grades 4 and 7), mathematics (grades 3-11), science (grades 5, 8, 10-11), and social studies (8, 10-11) (TEA, 2012). However, as each new test became more challenging, the stress and demands placed on performance increased for students, teachers, and the public school districts (Cruse & Twing, 2001; Shannon, 2007; Wright, 2008). The TAKS came under attack as teachers were accused of teaching to the TAKS test, schools were accused of falsifying student tests scores, incentives to perform well divided



teachers and administrators, while some declared the TAKS test too easy (Cruise & Twing, 2001). As a reaction to the public scrutiny, in 2011 the TAKS was replaced by the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, currently known as the STAAR test.

In the spring 2012 the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness test began to phase out the TAKS. Students attending public and charter schools in grades 3 to 8 were administered the STAAR in place of the TAKS, while students in grades 9 to 12 remained under the TAKS standards. Still based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) formerly the Essential Elements, the STAAR standards are intended to prepare students in grades K-16 to compete on a global level which focuses less on skills and more on an in-depth understanding of skills taught at a given grade level (TEA, 2010). The Texas Education Agency wants to focus more on the TEKS that are most critical to evaluate, STAAR “will better measure the academic performance of students as they progress from elementary to middle to high school” (TEA, 2010). According to TEA, the STAAR will continue to test the same subjects in the same grades as the TAKS with a few exceptions. The STAAR test components:

- Time limit of four hours to complete the assessment for all students.
- Students tested only the content studied that school year to assess a deeper understanding.
- More rigorous and increased the number of questions on test that have a higher cognitive complexity.
- Added 12 End of the Course (EOC) assessments that corresponded with courses which constituted 15 percent of the final grade.
- EOCs given in Algebra I, II; English I, II, III; geometry, biology, chemistry, physics, world geography, world history, and U.S. History.
- In reading, greater emphasis is given to critical analysis than to literal understanding.

- In writing, students will write two essays instead of one.

A further explanation of the phasing system from TAKS to STAAR will be explained in chapter 4.

## **Charter Schools in Texas**

Charter schools are increasing in numbers throughout the United States as an alternative to public school systems. The concept of charter schools started as “schools of choice” by university professor Ray Budde in Massachusetts in 1991. Since then charter schools have expanded across 49 states, including Texas (Kolderie, 2005). With the implementation of NCLB, vouchers are given to parents as alternatives to being zoned to low-performing schools.

A public school system is defined as “a free tax-supported school controlled by a local government authority” (National Education Association, 2001). The U.S. Department of Education offers a broad definition of charter schools and allows each state to provide a more specific definition as long as they meet the criteria set by the Education Secondary and Elementary Act of 1965 and revised by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. The Texas Education Code defines charter schools as an alternative and new kind of public school which are “subject to fewer state laws than other public schools with the idea of ensuring fiscal and academic accountability without undue regulation of instructional methods or pedagogical” (p. 1). In other words, both public schools and charter schools are tuition free to the public and funded by federal, state and local taxes (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2012). The key difference is zoning; when a child is zoned to a public school and decides to attend a charter school, the state and federal taxes for that individual student go to the charter school, but the zoned public school keeps the local tax monies (National Alliance for Public Charter

Schools, 2012). For simplicity of the language, the term charter schools refers to public schools that are state and federally funded.

Texas charter schools were established in 1995 by the Texas legislature. Set up for open-enrollment, non-profit organizations, they are funded 95% by the state and 5% with federal funds. Although they are generally exempted from many state regulations that burden public schools, charter schools are treated like school districts and are closely watched for student performance. This accountability determines if the charter school remains open or is closed. Such scrutiny has caused some schools to close down or never open (Clark, 2000).

Funding for charter schools in the state of Texas varies and depends on the “state and local funds per student” (Clark, 2000, p. 67). Public school districts lose the state funds for every student that enrolls in a charter school, but do not lose the local tax revenue. Furthermore, charter schools are not mandated to provide bus transportation for students. While this may save them some money, they must purchase and maintain their own buildings, which are not funded by either the state or at the federal level. Their highest expenditure is the building cost and building maintenance. Several parents belonging to the Texas Charter School Association from the Austin, Dallas, Houston and San Antonio areas have collectively filed six lawsuits claiming an unfairness of the funding of charter schools. Among their requests are more funds to cover the costs of buildings, building maintenance, and bus services.

It is hard to conclude if charter schools are welcomed or hinder public schools. The scales tip in both directions depending on whom you talk to. In a recent article in the *Texas Tribune* (August, 2012), Lt. Governor David Dewhurst stated that he was in agreement with vouchers and he personally did not have a “problem with a program in which children’s parents receive a

payment from the state and are able to select which school that they go to..." (Smith & Root, 2012). He further added that he agreed to offer parents more choices in the form of payments, tax credits, or more charter schools and was willing to open up a discussion on changing public schools into charter schools. Speeches such as these raise concern for the opposing side that views this as "an attempt to dismantle the public school system by diverting state money into privately operated enterprises at the expense of the neediest students" (Smith & Root, 2012).

### **Reading Achievement and Ethnicity**

While the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) (TEA, 2012) bands a variety of people under the term "Hispanic," the diversity that exists in the Valley is mostly between the Mexican Nationals from Mexico and the Mexican-Americans who have lived in United States at least one generation or more. Some of the Mexican-American families in this part of the country still retain the original Spanish and Mexican land grants given to their families in the fifteenth century.

Despite the fact that Latinos in the 21<sup>st</sup> century now have more opportunities for an education, this does not guarantee that they are faring well. Too often we hear more about the achievement gap and low test scores among Latinos than success stories. For example, Wainer (2006) observed Latino immigrants in Arkansas, North Carolina and Atlanta and found that "testing scores for Latinos are ... typically far below district averages" (p. 142). Alarming low achievement scores is one of several issues that plague the Latino population in these states. Escalating drop-out rates and discrimination are also salient as noted in a quote from a government official from Arkansas who stated that Latino immigrants were only good for manual labor and when they are not needed any more, they simply return to their home country (Wainer, 2006). Even schools purport to this problem as one counselor claims that Latino

immigrants are tracked in schools and placed in classes with teachers who have low expectations. Perceptions such as these make it easier to continue discrimination and stereotypes. On the other hand, Zarate and Burciaga (2010) reported that in California Latinos have increased their college enrollment from 1990 to 2000.

Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic group in America according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) and will make up half of the U.S. population by the year 2050. These statistics have prompted much research and attention to Latinos with concerns in the achievement gap, the high drop-out rates, the struggles of migrant children, at-risk students, and the like. While not lessening the importance of these critical issues, there is little research that reflects the positive, academic successes of the Latino child, their families or the Latino community.

Too often Latinos are marginalized and discarded as low-achievers, associated with gangs, or forgotten altogether. As Gee (2011) points out, Hispanics are the most salient group in America, yet they are generally left behind. Then again, researchers like Au (2006) have taken notice of Latinos doing well. When analyzing test scores in all grade levels, Au noted that some Latinos received higher test scores in some areas than Pacific Islander, White, or Asian students.

Despite the dismal statistics and obstacles to education facing Latinos, many of them have had successful outcomes. For instance, the U.S. Census Bureau statistics show that in the last decade, there has been close to a 6% increase among Latinos who have attained a high school diploma from 57% in 2000 to 62.9% in 2010 and a 3% increase in college graduates. In 2000, 4.5% of Latinos earned a higher education degree in various fields and by 2010 it increased to 13.9%. While it is important to understand reasons why Latinos fail in school, it is also important to identify reasons why they are successful in school. Although there is limited

literature dealing with the successful academic performances among Latinos, researchers have noted possible factors that contribute to Latino student success.

Jimenez (1997) interviewed five seventh-grade students, identified by their teachers as being four grade levels below their current 7<sup>th</sup> grade. These students included boys and girls, and were monolingual English speakers as well as bilingual speakers of Spanish and English. As with some of the students in Palm City, some students in Jimenez's study were born in the United States while others were not. Three students received special education instruction as they were identified as having a learning disability. All five students had odd school histories and had missed at least two to three years of primary instruction due to various reasons.

Jimenez (1997) explored the various methods that would meet the needs of these students who were not able to achieve literacy success in either Spanish or English in spite of receiving instruction from dedicated and experienced teachers. Using data collected in an earlier study by Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson (1996) on successful bilingual readers, Jimenez first examined the relationship between reading in Spanish and reading in English of these five students. Empirical data states that successful readers in Spanish have a clear understanding of literacy in both languages. Successful Spanish readers have the "capability of transferring or applying their literacy knowledge and abilities from one language to the other" (p. 227). Furthermore, they developed strategies that assist them when confronting unfamiliar words. Jimenez discovered that successful readers in either language demonstrated an understanding of the process of reading while students who were not as successful in reading viewed reading "synonymous with decoding and pronunciation of isolated words, regardless of whether they process text in an oral or silent modality" (p. 227). Bilingual students who were less successful, such as the five in this study, did not see the relationship between the two languages and even felt that their Spanish-

speaking background was detrimental. Jimenez (1997) adds that, “low-achieving students from language-minority backgrounds often pursue *finishing the task*” (p. 227) as their main reading objective. Results from this study revealed that these students had very little understanding of reading and viewed it as a complete mystery. On the contrary, previous studies demonstrated that successful bilingual Latina/o readers of English, perceived “reading was a means to learning new information or a possible form of recreation” (p. 235). In keeping with the purpose of his study, Jimenez with the collaboration of the teachers applied some strategic cognitive instruction which incorporated using culturally relevant texts. Consequently, the students were more responsive and able to unfold the mysteries of reading and bridge the relationship between the two languages. Jimenez’s study illustrates that a common characteristic of successful readers is that they process text and understand the literacy system regardless of the language they read in and that low-achieving students in reading can accomplish the same goal through strategic instruction.

Enthusiastic and positive attitudes from teachers influence a student’s motivation to read; some teachers with negative attitudes toward students can impact their love of reading. In a study conducted near El Paso, Texas on the United States-Mexico border, de la Piedra (2010) found that many of the teachers in a secondary school harbored negative attitudes towards recent immigrant students who speak mostly Spanish and are at “an ESL level one” (p. 577) which implies limited English proficiency. With such pessimistic feelings from their teachers, the students are at a disadvantage; one strike against them – two other strikes are poverty and being Latino.

A disconnect often appears between teachers, students, and home when it comes to reading and writing. Researcher de la Piedra (2010) found that some teachers perceive immigrant

students as not having literacy experiences at home, therefore it was a huge problem for the teachers at school. However, de la Piedra found that the students did indeed have literacy experiences in Spanish at home, such as corresponding by mail with family members in their home country, acting as translators in various situations, helping younger siblings with homework, and reading the Bible. Reading was equally important to the parents as they encouraged their children to do well in school and learn to read so that they can earn an education to better themselves.

Consistent with Smith and Wilhelm's (2002) conceptualization that teachers should expand their view on literacy, de la Piedra states there is a great "need to consider vernacular literacies as practices that can contribute to adolescents' literacy instruction" (p. 581). She also offers some strategies used by some of the teachers of English language learners (ELL) to incorporate the students' vernacular literacies with the school's curriculum. Researcher de la Piedra, like other authors such as Alvermann (2008), Gee (2000, 2005), and Moje (2002), strongly suggests that educators should challenge the traditional views that language is the problem and embrace a more diverse understanding of what students bring to the classroom.

Unrau and Schlackman (2006) sought to explore the motivation to read for middle school students in an urban community. They used the self-determination theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan, which claims that students' motivation to read is inherent, to explore intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among Asian and Hispanic students. Their results concluded that engagement in reading had little significance in reading achievement. In other words, intrinsic motivation or self-determination to read did not affect Hispanics. The authors suggested that reading was a social activity and accounted for a greater difference in engagement and motivation. The study



revealed that Hispanic females had more social motives in reading than Hispanic males and that intrinsic motivation did make a difference for them.

Chen (2008) and Alvermann (2008) also suggested that reading was a social construct and that the desire to read in middle grades was rooted more in their social motives. Guthrie et al., (1999) similarly stated that enthusiastic readers tended to be motivated to read when others were reading.

### **Reading Achievement and Gender**

Differences between male and female adolescents is perhaps most noticeable in their physical transformation when they reach sexual maturation. Not only does their physical anatomy change to visibly distinguish boys from girls, but their brain development also changes. Psychologists note that adolescence is a time when children are being “re-wired” as they transform from children to young adults (Berk, 2010). As cognitive alterations occur in adolescence, so does their approach towards reading.

Traditionally, it has been the belief that girls read better than boys, girls are better at language arts over boys, and that girls outperform boys in communication skills. Reading scores among girls is higher than boys and girls tend to read more often than boys (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). With such claims, the scales tend to favor the girls in reading, but some researchers like Logan and Johnston (2009) offer a different perspective.

Logan and Johnston (2009) conducted a study in the United Kingdom with ten-year olds to determine the association between reading ability and the extent of reading among boys and girls. While the difference in reading ability was minimal between boys and girls, the authors found that reading ability among boys was impacted by their attitude towards reading. Boys view

their school competency as a correlation to their own reading ability. In other words, if they did well in school it was because they were good in reading. More importantly, the outcome revealed that attitude towards reading was more significant than reading ability.

Results from this study are consistent with other literature regarding gender differences. Berk (2010) states that biologically, girls develop the left-hemisphere (the side that dominates language) at an earlier age than boys. This means that girls are more linguistically advanced than boys in early adolescence. Also, the attitude that language arts are most likely to be viewed as a “girl” subject leaves the boys at a disadvantage.

Smith and Wilhelm (2002), on the other hand, dispel some of the myths about boys, reading, and competency in their book, *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys*. In this extensive qualitative study, the authors interviewed several young men of various backgrounds to unfold the mystery behind literacy and boys. They found that the forty-nine young adults in middle and high school used literacy in their daily lives. The major problems were manifested when the school's definition and uses of literacy differed from the boys' idea of literacy. Although each young man was involved in some type of after school activity that required reading, writing, or communicating (hence literacy), it was not acknowledged or valued by their school. One outside school activity was playing video games. Studies have shown that high quality video games are challenging and educational and are considered a type of digital literacy (Gee, 2005). Other boys in the study used the Internet to download music or upload their own YouTube videos. Listening to music, particularly composing Rap, gave one young man confidence and control of his life. He claimed he was unbeatable when it came to producing Rap lyrics on the spot when challenged by other rappers in the community. Moreover, when he was in an ill mood, he would listen to music and the song lyrics, which validated how he felt at that moment. It was evident in these

interviews that these boys were being challenged in reading, writing, and listening. Attentive to song lyrics, searching the Internet, and playing video games required reading instructions, game stats, literacy skills, or pertinent information to accomplish the task at hand.

These boys felt competent in their activities outside of school but felt incompetent with school assignments dictated by the teachers. The authors reported:

The young men in our study wanted to be challenged, but they wanted to be challenged in contexts in which they felt confident of improvement, if not success. If the challenge seemed too great, they tended to avoid it, instead returning to a domain in which they felt more competent (pp. 37).

Furthermore, in some cases when teachers recognized the incongruity between school and home for these boys they made a conscious effort to assign projects that interest them. In turn, the boys were more productive and developed a better attitude towards school. The authors strongly suggested that teachers make changes with their reading lessons to keep all students, especially males, interested in reading.

### **Reading Achievement and Accessibility to Literacy Materials**

When children have limited resources or limited access to quality literature, their learning and motivation to read are affected. Krashen (1993) strongly advocates the connection between the accesses to literacy materials with student reading success. In addition to free voluntary reading (FVR), he claims two other factors are important for student achievement: encouragement from parents and teachers and access to quality literature, like public libraries.

Family encouragement and access to literacy materials were closely associated with avid readers in several studies. Family influence in Chen's (2008) study included the frequency of bookstore visits, the amount of time parents spend reading at home, and the types of reading materials that are available at home, such as English or Chinese magazines, encyclopedias and literature. Her study revealed that parental influence made a difference in adolescents' reading practices. Children of parents who made frequent visits to bookstores and read eight hours or more per week were more closely associated with being avid readers than parents who read less than eight hours a week and made fewer visits to the bookstores. Positive role models and a strong support for reading are paramount for avid readers.

Similarly, Strommen and Mates (2004) found that family support as well as access to an assortment of reading resources impacted avid readers. Their study revealed that Readers, students for whom reading is a delightful activity, tend to interact around books with close friends or family members and have family who see reading as an essential leisure activity, just like the Taiwanese students in Chen's study. Moreover, another shared feature found in both studies is the role of the teacher. In the two studies previously mentioned, the teachers' enthusiasm for reading played an important role in students reading for enjoyment. Additionally, Camp's (2007) *Who's Reading and Why: Reading Habits of 1<sup>st</sup> Grade through Graduate Students* also found that enthusiastic teachers and family members strongly influenced avid readers. This is consistent with Krashen's research.

Researcher Krashen (1993) is known for his theory that claims "access to a school library results in more reading" (p.34) and the larger the amount of books in a school library, the more children read. Libraries are one of the best sources for accessing quality literature (Krashen, 1993).

## **Reading Achievement and Socioeconomic Status**

Economic issues afflict students in many ways. Children who are at the low-income or poverty levels tend to have the odds stacked against them mostly because their financial situation does not allow them certain exposure, experiences and opportunities compared to children who come from higher incomes. Basic necessities such as nutrition, health care, child care, and education are often lacking or can be of low quality for low-income families. Any one of these areas can impact a child's ability to learn in school.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers free or reduced meals to children from low-income families in grades prekindergarten to twelve based on the yearly income of their household. Applications are available in 34 different languages. In an effort to combat hunger in school-age children, the USDA reformed their policies and authorized the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, which includes several nutritional programs to help feed hungry children. Two programs that are indispensable to low income families are the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). The NSLP was established in 1946 by President Harry S. Truman and in 1966 the USDA added the SBP. Both programs are federally funded to provide free or low cost healthy breakfast and lunches for children attending public schools.

The impact that low-income status has on reading is widely recognized and noted in several studies. One study by Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007), examined the reading habits of urban adolescents in the northeastern part of the United States. These authors selected this school because it was low income with 86% of the student population receiving free or reduced meals. The second reason they chose that school was because the state reading test scores indicated that

68% percent of the eighth grade students were performing below basic level. The authors were concerned that the students did not have the means to access information to meet academic challenges. One way to alleviate the problem was the implementation of reading for leisure. They found that student achievement increased when students were allowed leisure reading over controlled teacher directed reading instruction. Furthermore, the students were able to select their own reading materials, such as comics, magazines, the Internet and even Spanish books for some. This meant that the school did not always have to supply the reading materials, which would be an added expense.

## **Summary**

Research was presented demonstrating several studies conducted on the relationship between reading and adolescent middle school students in a variety of settings. Previous data were shown in the areas that are relevant and pertinent to this study. These areas included avid readers, charter schools and reading achievement as it linked to middle school students, Latino adolescent readers, reading test scores, gender, socioeconomic status and the accessibility to literacy materials outside of school.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Research Design**

This study explored the characteristics of avid readers in middle school and how they contribute to the students' reading success. A survey research design was employed to determine how avidness contributes to student reading achievement with a close look at gender, socioeconomic status (SES), ethnicity, and accessibility to literacy materials. To evaluate the importance of reading achievement, reading test scores from the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) were obtained, as well as information on the students' free or reduced meals (FARM). A survey was also employed because questionnaires are helpful when collecting a substantial amount of quantitative data (Creswell, 2003), plus surveys are an efficient way of gathering information. The use of a survey design was fitting for this study for two reasons: (1) it expedited the data collection process by electronic means, and (2) the use of computers appeared to be more appealing to middle school students growing up with technology than a hand-written survey.

A total of 350 students completed an electronic reading questionnaire, which included a variety of questions. A questionnaire is a component of a survey research design that can be used to measure and describe a particular aspect of a sample population (Fowler, 1995). Questionnaires are beneficial in that they are more objective and less judgmental, according to Fowler (1995). Subsequently, when working with middle school students from two different campuses, the use of a standard questionnaire proved to be the best approach to investigate the research questions, plus, surveys expedite the data collection process.

## Research Participants

The majority of the participants were Latinos or more specifically Mexican National or Mexican-American. For this reason, the focus on ethnicity will be on these groups. The preferred term is Latino; when drawing on other sources and will be used interchangeably with the term Hispanic. Table 1 provides demographic data of the two charter schools that participated in this study. The data is from the Texas Association Education (TEA) (2013) for the 2011-2012 academic school years from the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) (TEA, 2012).

Table 1

*Demographic Distribution of Two Charter Schools in South Texas*

Charter School	Hispanic	White	Asian	African-American	Economically disadvantaged	Limited English Proficient
Seaside Science Academy	83.3%	11.3%	4.6%	1.4%	76.3%	12%
Borderland Preparatory School	96.4%	2.5%	1.2%	0.0%	87.9%	51.7%

The study was conducted with 350 middle school students in grades six, seven, and eight at two public charter schools in South Texas. Demographics (gender and ethnicity) of the sample are presented in Table 2. Of the 350 participants, four did not specify gender, reducing the gender demographics to 346. The sample population represents the majority ethnic group in Lantana County to be Latinos.



Table 2

*Participant Demographic Information*

GENDER	Male (n = 164)	Female (n = 182)	Total (N = 350)
ETHNICITY			
African American	4	4	8
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0	1
White (Caucasian)	12	13	25
Asian or Pacific Islander	6	1	7
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	141	164	305
Missing data for gender	—	—	4

Participants who returned signed parent consent forms were also asked to sign a student assent form on the day the questionnaire was distributed. Two sixth-grade boys from Seaside Science Academy (SSA) and one sixth-grade boy from Borderland Preparatory School (BPS) did not want to participate in the survey although their parents had given permission. One boy from Seaside Science Academy (SSA) did not want to complete the survey, and another boy from a different class did not give a specific reason for not participating. The latter agreed to participate at a later date. The sixth-grade male student from Borderland Preparatory School (BPS) said he preferred to finish his project for the computer lab teacher and chose not to participate. All of the female participants with parent permission did participate in the survey.

## Setting

The study was conducted in Palm City in Lantana County, located at the tip of Texas. All names have been changed to maintain confidentiality. Palm City, while small, holds a variety of schools: one public school system, eight parochial schools (four Catholic, one Lutheran, one Episcopal, one Methodist and one Baptist), two Montessori schools at early childhood level, one dual enrollment high school housed at the local university (some public high schools offer dual enrollment courses at their campuses), one early college high school also located on the university campus, and six charter schools.

Of the six charter schools, two charter schools offer kindergarten through high school. One offers kindergarten to seventh grade and a fourth charter school offers only grades kindergarten, two and six. One charter school is only for high school students who struggle with academics, returning students after dropping out of school, or students who were not able to pass the former State test, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) for graduation. The sixth charter school was a former Christian private school. In 2012, it became a charter school for kindergarten to eighth grade. It was not selected for this study because at the time the schools were selected, it had not yet become a charter school. All six charter schools were developed in the last ten years. Notably, charter schools are gaining much popularity in South Texas (National Education Association, 2001; TEA, 2013).

Schools in the public school system and charter schools are both tuition free, while all of the other private schools require a monthly tuition payment. The most expensive private school is a Catholic secondary school, grades six to twelve, with a monthly tuition fee of \$800 per child. The least expensive is the Montessori school with a monthly tuition of \$550 per child. All others

fall somewhere in between these two monthly rates. With the many number of schools available, parents have choices for their children. Charter schools, like private schools, are selected by parents.

Palm City has around 175,023 inhabitants according to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau. Of these, 34.0% are under 18 years-old, which means that almost one-third of Palm City are school age, K-12, and 52.8% are female. The largest ethnic group residing in Palm City is Latino or Hispanic with 93.2 %, while Whites Non-Hispanic make up 5.7 %, Asians 0.7%, and African-American, American Indian, and Alaska Native each represent 0.4 percent. Households with persons who were born in another country other than U.S. constitute 30.0%, and households where persons speak another language other than English constitute 88.1%. This means that a substantial percent of the residents in Palm City speak a second language and are non-citizens.

The average household income for employed residents in Palm City is \$28,929, compared with almost twice the average income in Texas, \$48,199. While slightly more than half of the people graduated from high school, 59.5%, it is still significantly 20% lower than 79.3% in Texas. Persons who hold a bachelor's degree is 15.2% compared with 25.4% in Texas. Perhaps the most alarming statistics in Palm City is that 37.0% of its residents, of all ages, live in poverty compared with 16.8% in Texas. An accurate conclusion based on these statistics would imply that the majority of the people in Palm City is Latino, young, low-income, and speaks at least two languages. On the other hand, the statistics do not take into account the Mexican nationals who live in Matamoros, Mexico and cross the border bridge every morning to attend school in Palm City. These large numbers of residents may not always be counted in the U.S. Census Bureau. The majority of these groups of people tend to be wealthier than the average person in Palm City and have the means to purchase property, vehicles, and material goods in

cash. Many enroll their children in private schools where they are more lenient with identification paperwork. However, in the last few years there has been an increase of Mexican national students enrolling in Charter schools as an alternative to expensive private schools.

## **Procedures**

### **Selection of the schools.**

To represent the diversity in Palm City as clearly as possible, two different charter schools were selected. One charter school is located in the southernmost part of the city in a low-income area close to the U.S./Mexico border, and the other charter school is located in a prosperous central part of the city. In many respects, the charter schools in Palm City reflect the best of both public and private school practices. Private schools were not chosen for this investigation as they often do not provide a true picture of the inhabitants and may represent only a small percentage of the population. To maintain confidentiality of the two charter schools, they will be called Seaside Science Academy (SSA) and Borderland Preparatory School (BPS). Both schools are affiliated with larger school systems.

Seaside Science Academy is a charter school located in the central part of Palm City. Enrollment at SSA is around 500 students with approximately 166 middle school students. Seaside Academy does not offer transportation and charters a bus for field trips. Parents are expected to provide their own transportation and are encouraged to car pool. Students who do not qualify for free or reduced meals can bring lunch from home or purchase lunch for \$2.90 and breakfast for \$1.90. Their lunch period is 50 minutes long compared to the public school lunchtime of 30 minutes.

Uniform shirts are required at SSA and must be purchased directly from the school for twenty dollars. Only pants or knee length shorts can be worn, khakis or dark blue, with their uniform shirts, and absolutely no skirts are allowed. As part of an ongoing fundraiser, students can wear blue jeans on Fridays for two dollars with a college spirit shirt. The uniform shirt design changes in middle and high school, which is an extra expense for parents.

Borderland Preparatory School is another charter school located near the U.S./Mexico border in an open area that is not yet fully developed by homes or businesses. The school sits in an open field surrounded by a ten-foot wrought iron black fence. To enter the school premises, visitors must speak into the microphone and are allowed access after the school personnel opens the iron gates. As part of the school system, all school affiliates are highly secured and have tall iron fences surrounding the school premises. Latinos make up 94% of the population at BPS and 83% are low-income (TEA, 2012). Transportation is provided for all students, kindergarten to high school, that live within the city limits. The school holds the same policy for free and reduced meals as SSA. Uniform polo shirts with the school emblem are also worn at BPS in all grades, K-12, and must be purchased through the school. As part of their mission statement, BPS claims that the purpose of uniforms is to create a “culture in which students can focus their energy on their academics and not on what they are wearing” (IDEA, 2012). However, they do offer a variety of colors in polo shirts but dictate which day each color is worn. Khakis uniform bottoms can be purchased outside of school and can be pants, shorts, capris or skirts for females. Denim jeans are also allowed and are the preferred by almost all students. Black shoes and black belts are a must, no exceptions.

Borderland Preparatory School proudly claims that “100% of their students have enrolled in a four-year college or university upon graduation; 93% of these students are still enrolled;

while two out of three are first generation college students” (IDEA, 2012). Borderland is affiliated with a larger charter school system that has several charter schools in Texas and, compared to SSA in Palm City which has not yet graduated its first cohort, their main campus located in another nearby city was established in 2001 and was the first charter school in the Rio Grande Valley.

The majority of the participants were Latinos, or more specifically, Mexican or Mexican-American. For this reason, the focus on ethnicity will be on these groups. The preferred term is Latino; when drawing on other sources and will be used interchangeably with the term Hispanic. Recall Table 1 which provided demographic data of the student participants.

### **Participant recruitment.**

A meeting was arranged with the principals at each school to discuss the details of the study. After the principals granted permission to conduct research at their school, the researcher met with the English/Reading Language Arts and computer lab teachers at various times and days to explain the study in detail. The classroom teachers were asked to distribute the parent consent forms to all middle school students (see Appendix A). Parent consent forms were sent in English and in Spanish at the two campuses. Parents were clearly made aware that participation was voluntary and any information would be kept confidential and not disclosed to the school personnel. Parents were given a two-week window to review the consent form should they have any questions in allowing their child to participate in the study.

Several parents had concerns and expressed their opinions in various ways. A few parents emailed the researcher with questions regarding the risks involved, and one parent called the researchers’ personal cell phone number. Other parents with anxieties directed their questions to

the classroom teachers. Another mother would only sign the permission form in the presence of the researcher because she wanted to meet the investigator. After questions and inquiries were answered, the parents eventually gave their consent. The parent consent forms were collected by the classroom teachers and then by the researcher.

Many parents readily signed the form and some even wrote reinforcement comments like, “Yes” or “*Si doy permiso*” (Yes, I give permission). Some parents offered explanations for not giving their consent for their child to participate in the study. For example, one father apologetically stated that he would only grant permission if the study was mandated by the school. A mother called the researcher to explain that while she gave permission, her daughter did not want to participate. The reason given was that it was the same day her daughter was traveling to the Girls Basketball Championship and the daughter did not want to take the time to participate in the survey. Another concerned parent circled the paragraph detailing the risks and wrote that is the reason why she did not give her child permission to participate in the study. Other parents simply wrote “No” on the consent form. A few students claimed that their parents were resolute and felt the study was taking advantage of the children. While these comments and reactions were few, they provided insightful information for the researcher.

Research participants with approved parent consent forms were asked to sign a student assent form (see Appendix B) to secure their willingness to participate. Two sixth-grade boys, one from each of the schools, chose not to participate although their parents had consented. The researcher offered them the opportunity to participate at a different day, but both refused. All assent forms were collected by the researcher prior to administering the questionnaire.

Participants were given explicit instructions on how to access Survey Monkey and to click DONE at the end of the questionnaire. Most of the students who needed help were in sixth grade

and had difficulty typing in the website. Sixth graders tended to take longer completing the questionnaire than the other grades. Some students asked if attending a Scholastic book fair at school counted as attending a bookstore. The answer was yes. Most of the questions the students needed help with were about ethnicity. Several students claimed that they were mixed ethnicity or mixed race and not sure which one to select. The researcher suggested the father's ethnicity or race if they held their fathers' surname, or the ethnicity they felt they identified with the most. This was a conflicting decision for some of the participants, but eventually they selected the choice they were most comfortable with. Five students did not understand the question and were not sure what the ethnicity choices meant. After a brief explanation, they were able to select one.

### **Confidentiality.**

To maintain confidentiality, the students used an identification number on the questionnaire. Students at BPS used their school identification number which is issued by the school in place of the State PEIMS (Public Education Information Management System) number or their social security number. An identification code with five characters was assigned to students at SSA by the researcher to avoid using their social security number or the State identification number. The identification code issued by the researcher consisted of five characters. The first character was the first letter of the school name, the second set of characters indicated the grade level and class (6A, 6B, 7A, 7B, 8A, and 8B), and the last two characters corresponded with the chronological number on the attendance list. An example of a student identification code at SSA would be S6B05.

All of the materials used in the research were kept in a secured place and all electronic information was kept in a password secured home computer. This material and data will be kept



for three years as required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and destroyed at the end of three years.

## **Instruments of Measurement**

### **Reading questionnaire.**

A reading questionnaire from the National Literacy Trust (NLT) in the United Kingdom was used for this study. Professor Christine Clark granted permission via email to use the survey *A Omnibus 2011 survey* and allowed necessary modifications to be made as needed.

Modifications made to the survey by the researcher were guided and approved by the dissertation committee. As the survey was previously used in a national study, it had established validity. The reliability of the survey was merited under the direction of the dissertation committee.

Most of the changes made to the survey were words and language alterations from British English to English used in US. Some examples of word and language changes were, “mum” to “mom,” “tick” to “choose,” and “bookshop” to “bookstore.” The *Omnibus 2011 survey* had a total of 39 questions, which included inquiries about writing. Because the study was strictly about reading, questions pertaining to writing (24-35) were not included. Other questions that did not apply to the study were 4, 9, 20, and 23.

The order and the format of the answer choices were also changed on some of the questions. For example, answer choices on question 17 on the NLT survey offered 12 individual choices. These were clustered into four groups of three. Because technology is rapidly changing, answer choices that included more recent media devices were also added. For example, some of the answer choices added were Kindle, Nook, E-books, Twitter, Facebook, audiobook, cell phone, and “Other electronic devices not mentioned,” just to keep up with the changes. Two

questions were added. One question asked students for their identification number, and the other one was a fill-in-the-blank question that asked, *Do you read in another language other than English? If you answered YES, tell us what other language(s) do you read in.* After all of the changes and modifications were made, the survey had a total of 25 questions.

The reading questionnaire asked for demographic information as well as a wide range of information as seen in the following classifications:

1. Attitudes toward reading and self-perceptions: students were asked about enjoyment of reading, how they feel, what they think, and how they perceive themselves as readers.
2. Family literacy practices and formative years: students were asked if they read with family members, does family discuss books, who encourages them to read, and who taught them to read.
3. Reading habits and practices: students were asked when, where and with whom do they read, time spent reading, leisure activities they participate in outside of school.
4. Reading preferences and materials: students were asked for preferred genres, amount of books read and owned at home, and uses assortment of technology in daily lives.

The completed reading questionnaire (see Appendix C) was uploaded onto Survey Monkey to facilitate easy access, to make it easier and more appealing to the students, and to expedite the results electronically. Students with parental consent and student assent forms granting permission for participation completed the questionnaire online. The researcher provided explicit verbal instructions on how to complete the questionnaire using Survey

Monkey. Students who did not participate in the study quietly worked on an assignment given by the computer teacher.

### **Avid reader index.**

In a study by Strommen and Mates (2004), the authors designed a questionnaire to determine the attitudes toward reading in sixth- and ninth-grade students. Embedded in the questionnaire was a list of Literacy items used to identify Readers and Not-readers. Following this example, an avid reader index was created to identify the avid and non-avid readers in this study. The reading index was designed after careful consideration of each question and answer choices under the direction of the dissertation committee. These questions were set within the questionnaire. Three questions from the questionnaire were selected and labeled Avid Reader Index (ARI). Table 3 presents the three questions used for the ARI and the answer choices sought to meet the avid reader criteria.

Table 3

*Questions for the Avid Reader Index*

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Question 5: How much do you enjoy reading? (Choose ONE only)

Answer                      a. Very much – a great way to spend time

Question 14: How many books (fiction, non-fiction) have you read in the last 12 months?  
(Choose ONE only)

Answer                      a. More than 10

Question 25: How do you typically spend your leisure (free) time after school?  
(Choose all that apply to you)

Answer                      c. Reading for enjoyment

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During the selection process of the ARI, the key words/phrases were, “enjoys reading ... a great way to spend spare time,” and “spending leisure time reading for enjoyment.” Studies show that enthusiastic readers are those who choose to read for pleasure in their spare time. McKenna, Kear, and Ellsworth (1995) stated that, “the availability of alternative leisure outlets, such as television, may compete with reading outside of school and may in fact reduce the time spent reading by poorer readers ...” (p. 939). Conversely, if engaged readers read in spite of these alternative activities, then they can accurately be classified as avid readers. Interviews with middle school readers by researchers Strommen and Mates (2004) revealed that reading “was a worthwhile way to spend leisure time because it was pleasurable” (p. 198). With this understanding, answer choices and questions number four and twenty-four were selected. Finally, question number thirteen proved to be a good indicator of an avid reader and fit perfectly with the Avid Reader Index based on Krashen's assertion that the amount of books read is

consistent with successful readers. Participants who specifically chose these answers to the questions defined by the ARI met the avid reader criteria.

### **Accessibility to literacy materials.**

Krashen (1993) and McKenna et al., (1995) assert that access to a rich print environment increases reading and impacts reading achievement. To determine the accessibility to literacy materials available to students outside of the classroom, three other questions were selected from the existing questionnaire. These questions are presented in Table 4. Because the questions were already part of the questionnaire, they were selected and grouped together.

Table 4

#### *Questions for Accessibility to Literacy m=Materials*

QUESTION	ANSWER CHOICES
Question 13: Have you ever:	a. been given a book as a present? b. been to a public library? c. been to a bookstore?
Question 15: How many books do you have at home? (Choose ONE only)	a. More than 500 books b. 250 – 500 c. 100 – 250 d. 50 – 100 e. 10 – 50 f. 1 – 10
Question 20: Which of these do you have at home? (Choose as many as apply to you)	a. Daily or weekend newspaper b. Magazines c. Computer or laptop d. Internet

## **Data Analysis**

Completed reading questionnaires provided the data, including gender, ethnicity, and access to literacy materials. Additional data were obtained from each of the campuses to determine if avidness impacted reading achievement. Data collected included student reading scores from the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) for the 2012 academic year and socioeconomic status (SES) information from FARM. Student meal status or FARM was used to determine SES.

The preceding state test, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) was replaced by the STAAR effective spring 2012 for grades three to eight. The standardized state scores for 2012 are the first STAAR scores reported and used to determine a student's performance in reading and mathematics. According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the STAAR is considered more rigorous and will measure the child's aptitude as well as show growth over the academic years. The STAAR scores are reported in three different ways: (1) a raw score, (2) a scale score and, 3) a percentage. The raw scores and percentage tell the correct number of questions received from a set number of test questions. A scale score "quantifies a student's performance relative to the passing standards..." (TEA, 2013). A raw score conversion table was created to make the transfer and provide a better analysis of the test results.

The STAAR scale score has three levels of proficiency: Level III Advanced, Level II Satisfactory (Recommended), and Level I Unsatisfactory (TEA, 2013). Table 5 contains an itemization of the scale scores at each grade level in middle school (TEA, 2013). Table 5 presents the scale score conversion for the STAAR.

Table 5

*STAAR Scale Score Conversion Table*

	Level III <u>Advanced</u>	Level II <u>Satisfactory</u>	Level I <u>Unsatisfactory</u>
<u>Grade 6</u>	1667-2035	1458-1650	829-1445
Raw Score	40-46	25-39	0-24
<u>Grade 7</u>	1718-2080	1504-1696	869-1497
Raw Score	42-48	27-41	0-26
<u>Grade 8</u>	1753-2136	1556-1738	943-1549
Raw Score	43-50	27-41	0-24

**Data entry.**

Student data from the reading questionnaire were collected in Survey Monkey and uploaded onto IBM Statistics SPSS 21. Data were organized by schools, grades, and teacher. Reading scores from the STAAR and FARM information were matched with the students' data and manually entered into SPSS. As the researcher cross-referenced the students' identification numbers with the Excel file (STAAR and FARM) provided by the campuses, it also served as a check point for accuracy.

**Summary**

Data was collected from 350 middle school students from two charter schools in South Texas. A reading questionnaire with 25 questions was employed to collect data. An Avid Reader Index was created to identify the avid readers and to explore the common characteristics they

share. Additional questions were selected to determine accessibility to literacy materials. Finally, reading STAAR scores were aggregated to explore how much they impacted the students' reading achievement. Results from the data collection will be discussed in Chapter 4.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Results of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore the characteristics of adolescent avid readers and how they contribute to the students' reading success. The objective of this correlational design (Stanovich & Cunningham, 2004) study was to answer the following two research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of avid readers?
2. How does avidness contribute to student reading achievement controlling for gender, social economic status (SES), ethnicity, and accessibility to literacy materials?

The researcher collected data from middle school students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades at two charter schools in South Texas. The data was primarily collected using the Reading Questionnaire (see Appendix C). Reading test scores from the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) were collected in addition to information on the students' free or reduced meals (FARM) status. For analysis, FARM was coded as meal status. Students' meal status was used to represent their socioeconomic status. Originally, the sample size was 350 students.

### **Data Entry**

The reading questionnaire included 25 questions. The first four questions asked for demographic data. Question 1 asked for a unique student identification number, Question 2 asked for gender, Question 3 asked for age (ages 9-16), and Question 4 asked for race/ethnicity. Five choices were offered for Question 4. These choices were modified from the original reading questionnaire from the National Literacy Trust in London, England, to fit the diversity in the

United States. The five answer choices were (1) African American or Black; (2) American Indian or Alaska Native; (3) White (Caucasian); (4) Asian or Pacific Islander; and (5) Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin (Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, Cuban, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rican, Spaniard, Central American, or South American). The modification choices were selected from the form used to collect data by the U.S. Census Bureau. Students were asked to select only one answer to prevent multiple answers.

Another three questions were used to compile the Avid Reader Index and three additional questions were used to put together the accessibility to literacy materials variable. These can be found in Chapter Three, tables three and four. The remaining 15 questions asked for either “Choose only one answer,” or “Choose as many as apply.” Questions 8, 11, 16, 17, 18, and 19 asked for more than one possible answer. Participants could select as many choices as applied to them. These questions were clustered together and used for analysis to compare non-avid readers with avid readers. Questions that required only one answer were selected for analysis to compare avid readers with each other. Question 21 was included in the analysis, although it allowed for multiple answers. Nine questions in all were selected to describe the common characteristics of avid readers. Table 6 presents this information.

Table 6

*Questions Used to Analyze Common Characteristics Among Avid Readers*

Question Number	Reading Questionnaire Question
6	How good a reader do you think you are?
7	Do you read in another language other than English?
9	How often do you read outside of class?
10	When you read, how long do you normally read for?
12	Which of these do you read outside of class?
21	Who taught you to read?
22	How often do you talk with your family about what you are reading?
23	Who encourages you to read?
24	Who in your family spends time reading?

Of these, questions 12, 23, and 24 asked one major question and offered subset questions that required one answer for each. For example, Question 12 asked, “Which of these do you read outside of class?” then presented 16 subset questions such as “Fiction books,” “Non-fiction books,” and “Text messages.” Each subset question was analyzed separately as an individual question. In total, 32 questions were evaluated to further answer research question one. The IBM® Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS®) was used for data entry, data manipulation, and data analysis. The level of significance for all statistical analysis was set at .05.

### **Descriptive Statistics: Gender, Age, Ethnicity, and Meal Status**

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample population of the study. A tabular format was used to present the results of descriptive statistics and only the most relevant information was displayed. Demographic information was collected and summarized for gender,

age, ethnicity, and free or reduced meals (Meal Status). Following is a detailed discussion of the results of the reading questionnaire. A small amount of data was missing, as some students did not answer all of the questions in the survey.

Results revealed that there were almost an equal amount of males as females in the research population. Of the three hundred and fifty ( $n = 350$ ) participating students, there were 165 (47.1%) males and 185 (52.9%) females. Ages ranged from nine years to sixteen years. Results showed there was one ten-year-old (0.30%) and 69 eleven-year-olds (19.7%). None of the participants were nine years old. The majority of the participants were twelve and thirteen years of age. One hundred and twenty-five (35.7%) were twelve years old and 113 (32.3%) were thirteen years old. Thirty-six (10.3%) participants indicated they were 14 years old and four were fifteen (1.1%) years old. There were no sixteen year olds. Two participants did not indicate their age.

Regarding race and ethnicity, the majority of the participants were Hispanic. This category included people of Latino or Spanish origin. Three hundred and five (87.2%) reported they were Hispanic or Latino. This is an anticipated result as the residents of the Rio Grande Valley are predominately Mexican national or Mexican-American. A fair amount of participants said they were biracial and were uncertain which category to select. If their father was White, they tended to select that category for themselves. Twenty-five (7.1%) reported they were White (Caucasian). There were eight (2.3%) African Americans, seven (2.0%) Asians and one (0.3%) Native American. Four participants had missing information for ethnicity.

Meal status was substituted for socioeconomic status. Results indicated that two hundred and thirty-nine (68.3%) received free meals, and fifty-one (14.6%) received meals at a reduced

price. Sixty (17.1%) participants either purchase meals at school or packed their own lunch.

Frequency results for gender, age, ethnicity and meal status are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

*Frequency of Students by Gender, Age, Ethnicity, and Meal Status (n = 350)*

Variable	Level	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	165	47.10
	Female	185	52.90
Age	9 years	0	0.00
	10 years	1	0.30
	11 years	69	19.70
	12 years	125	35.70
	13 years	113	32.30
	14 years	36	10.30
	15 years	4	1.10
	16 years	0	0.00
	Missing	2	0.60
Ethnicity	African American	8	2.30
	Native American	1	0.30
	White (Caucasian)	25	7.10
	Asian	7	2.00
	Hispanic/Latino	305	87.20
	Missing	4	1.10
Meal Status	Free	239	68.30
	Reduced	51	14.60
	Other <sup>a</sup>	60	17.10

*Note* Percentages were rounded

Other<sup>a</sup> = Students who purchased or brought their meal to school.

## **Variables**

A total of 350 student participants completed the Reading Questionnaire. Some students had missing data therefore were removed from the study. State reading test scores were used for the first screening. The dependent variable, STAAR reading test scores from the spring 2012 administration, was examined and used to screen missing data. Eighteen participants did not have reading test scores for various reasons and were not included in the study. This decreased the sample size from 350 to 332. Of the 332 participants, further screening revealed that three students did not specify their age, and three more students did not specify their ethnicity. As a final count, the size of the sample population was 326. The normality assumption was met based on results from a normality plot and a Shapiro-Wilk test.

All independent variables detailed in Table 8 were categorical variables. No adjustments were made to the dichotomous nominal variable gender and the three-level (free, reduced, & paid) nominal variable meal status. The variable age was originally an eight-level nominal variable but was recoded into a two-level nominal variable. These were 9-12 years old and 13 – 16 years old. Also recoded was the ethnicity variable. Initially it was a six-level nominal variable and was recoded into a three-level nominal variable. These were Hispanic, White, and Other. Finally, two added independent variables were created from questions within the Reading Questionnaire. These were avid readers and accessibility to reading materials. For analysis, avid readers were coded as Avid and accessibility was coded as Access.

### **Avid reader index.**

Three questions from the Reading Questionnaire were compiled to identify the avid readers. These three questions were part of the survey and were not directly available as a distinct variable. The Avid Reader Index (ARI) was constructed using responses from questions

five, fourteen, and twenty-five on the Reading Questionnaire. The dichotomous variable Avid was assembled with two levels, Avid Readers and Non-Avid Readers. Participants who selected specific answers from each of the three questions were classified as Avid Readers. From question five, the selected answer was, “Very Much,” from question fourteen, “More than 10,” and from question twenty-five, “Reading for Enjoyment.” The rest of the participants were categorized as Non-Avid Readers. Out of the 326 participants, 47 were recognized as Avid Readers and 279 were regarded as Non-Avid Readers. The ARI was used to classify the participants as Avid Readers. Table 8 presents the frequencies of the Avid Readers.

Table 8

<i>Frequency of Participants Classified as Avid Readers</i>			(n = 326)
Question	Response	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
5. Enjoy Reading			
	Very Much <sup>a</sup>	78	23.90
	About Medium <sup>132</sup>	40.50	
	A Little Bit	76	23.30
	Not Very Much <sup>25</sup>	7.70	
	Don't Enjoy	13	4.00
	Missing	2	0.60
14. Books Read – Last 12 Months			
	More than 10 <sup>a</sup>	133	40.80
	About 7 - 9	64	19.60
	About 4 - 6	73	22.40
	About 1 - 3	51	15.70
	Missing	5	1.50
25. Spend Leisure Time Reading			
	Computer Games	156	<sup>b</sup>
	On Cell Phone <sup>171</sup>	<sup>b</sup>	
	Reading for Enjoyment	146	<sup>b</sup>
	Other Hobbies <sup>246</sup>	<sup>b</sup>	
	Time w/Friends <sup>225</sup>	<sup>b</sup>	
	Social Media	216	<sup>b</sup>
	Watching TV	228	<sup>b</sup>

*Note.* Percentages were rounded.

<sup>a</sup>Responses that comprise the Avid Reader Index.

<sup>b</sup>Participants were asked to choose all that apply. Therefore, percentages were omitted

### Accessibility to literacy materials.

The variable Access was crafted as an independent variable from three questions within the Reading Questionnaire. Student participants who selected specific answers to questions 13, 15, and 20 were considered as having accessibility to reading materials. The variable Access was constructed with two levels, participants with access and participants without access to reading materials. Student participants were considered as having access to reading materials if they selected “Been to Public Library,” “Have 100 or More Books at Home,” and have a “Computer/Laptop and Internet Service at Home.” From the 326 participants, 62 were regarded as having access to reading materials and 264 were considered as not having access to reading material. Table 9 presents the frequencies for participants who have access to reading materials.

Table 9

<i>Frequencies of Student Participants with Access to Literacy Materials</i> (n = 326)			
Question	Response	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
13. Access to Books	Given Book as Present	198	b
	At Public Library <sup>a</sup>	295	b
	At Bookstore	283	b
15. Books at Home	More than 500 <sup>a</sup> 18	5.50	
	250 – 500 <sup>a</sup>	22	6.80
	100 – 250 <sup>a</sup>	38	11.70
	50 - 100	75	23.00
	10 - 50	94	28.80
	1 - 10	75	23.00
	Missing	4	1.20
20. Reading Sources at Home	Newspaper	143	b
	Magazines	215	b
	Computer <sup>a</sup>	285	b
	Internet <sup>a</sup>	290	b

*Note.* Percentages were rounded.

<sup>a</sup>Responses that identify a participant as having access to reading material.

<sup>b</sup>Participants were asked to choose all that apply. Therefore, Percentages were omitted.



**Research Question 1: What are the Characteristics of Avid Readers?**

To answer the research question in part, five cross-tabulation analyses were conducted to test the correlation between avid readers: gender, age, ethnicity, meal status, and accessibility. These series of cross-tabulations were conducted one at a time. The first cross-tabulation revealed 19 males as avid readers and 28 females as avid readers. Thirty-one avid readers were between 9-12 years old and 16 were between 13-16 years old. Forty-one avid readers were Hispanic, five were White, and one was categorized as Other. For socioeconomic status, 25 avid readers receive free meals, seven are on reduced meals, and 15 either pack a lunch or purchase lunch at school. Finally, 24 avid readers showed they have access to reading materials and 23 avid readers are considered as not having access to reading materials. Table 10 presents the frequencies for the cross-tabulations of avid readers and gender, age, ethnicity, meal status, and access.

Table 10

*Cross-Tabulation – Avid Readers by Gender, Age, Ethnicity, Meal Status, and Access (n = 326)*

Level	Avid Readers	Non-Avid-Readers	Total
Gender			
Male	19	131	150
Female	28	148	176
Age			
9 – 12 Years	31	150	181
13 – 16 Years	16	129	145
Ethnicity			
White	5	18	23
Hispanic	41	248	289
Other <sup>a</sup>	1	13	14
Meal Status			
Free	25	196	221
Reduced	7	42	49
Other <sup>b</sup>	15	41	56
Accessibility			
Non-Access	23	241	264
Access	24	38	62

<sup>a</sup>Other = African American, Asian, and Native American.<sup>b</sup>Other = Those students who purchased or brought their meal to school.

There is a possibility of committing one or more Type I errors through the five analyses when using the same variable Avid, although the level of significance was set at .05. In order to control for Type I errors, the Bonferroni method was used. When using this method, the significance level requires an adjustment to  $.05/5 = .01$ , where 5 represents the number of analyses (Green & Salkind, 2003). Table 11 presents the results of the cross-tabulation analyses.

Table 11

*Cross-Tabulation Summary Results – Avid Readers by Gender, Ethnicity, Meal Status, and Accessibility (n = 326)*

Variable	$\chi^2$	df	p	ES <sup>a</sup>
Gender	0.452	1	.501	.037
Age	1.953	1	.162	-.077
Ethnicity	1.612	2	.447	.070
Meal Status	8.671	2	.013	.163
Access to Reading Material	34.226	1	<.001	.324

*Note.*  $\chi^2$  is the Continuity Correction Chi-Square.

<sup>a</sup>ES = Effect size for gender, age, and access is Phi ( $\Phi$ ) and for meal status and ethnicity it is Cramer's  $V$ .

The relationship between Avid/Non-Avid readers and Access/Non-access to literacy materials was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 326) = 34.226, p < .001, \Phi = .324$ . The effect size is medium, indicating a moderate relationship (Green & Salkind, 2003). The proportion of Avid readers by Access/Non-Access was .51 and .49, respectively. The proportion of Non-Avid readers by Access/Non-access was .14 and .86, respectively. The remaining relationships were not statistically significant at the .01 level.

### **Results of the *t*-test.**

Additionally, a *t*-test was conducted to assess the difference between Avid readers and Non-Avid readers and STAAR reading scores. The STAAR reading score was examined for normality. Based on the normality plots and the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test, the normality assumption of the reading score for both the Avid readers and Non-Avid readers was met. Table 12 displays the mean and standard deviation of the STAAR reading scores for both groups.

Table 12

*Mean and Standard Deviation of STAAR Reading Score by Avid readers. (n = 326)*

Group	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Avid Reader	1,683.23	126.65	47
Non-Avid Reader	1,598.14	112.57	279
Total	1,610.41	118.35	326

The Levene's *F* test was used, prior to conducting the *t*-test, to assess the assumption that the variances for Avid and Non-Avid readers were equal. The assumption was met, Levene's *F* (1,324) = 3.171,  $p = .076$ . The *t*-test which was conducted to assess the difference between Avid Readers and Non-Avid Readers with regard to the STAAR reading scores was statistically significant,  $t(324) = 4.706$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.742$ . The effect size as measured by Cohen's *d* was medium, indicating a moderate to high practical significance (Cohen, 1988).

### **Common Characteristics of Avid Readers**

A further description of research question one was to examine avid readers. Nine questions on the Reading Questionnaire were analyzed to find commonalities among avid readers. Some of the questions contained subset questions that were analyzed separately as individual questions. Consequently, 32 individual questions were used in total for this description. However, only the primary nine Reading Questionnaire questions were used to describe the characteristic commonalities' among avid readers. Table 14 presents the frequencies for the common characteristics of avid readers.

#### *Question 6: How good a reader do you think you are?*

Thirty-four (73%) avid readers said they were "A very good reader." Nine (19%) specified they were "A good reader," two (4%) thought they were "An okay reader," and one (2%) said "A not-so-good reader."

*Question 7: Do you read in another language other than English?*

Thirty-two (69%) avid readers reported they read in another language other than English.

In addition to English, avid readers reported they also read in Spanish, French, Japanese, and Turkish. Fourteen (30%) avid readers reported they only read in English.

*Question 9: How often do you read outside of class?*

*Question 10: When you read, how long do you normally read for?*

These two questions were combined because question ten is an added response to question nine. Forty-four (93%) motivated readers stated they read “Everyday” and three (6%) claimed they read “Few times a week.” When asked how long they usually read for, forty-two (89%) avid readers read at least an hour or more and five (10%) read 30 minutes or less.

*Question 12: Which one of these do you read outside of class?*

Forty-five (97%) avid readers reported they enjoy reading fiction books while thirty-nine (86%) enjoy reading non-fiction books. Thirty-nine (76%) also liked reading comics or graphic novels, twenty-seven (61%) liked reading magazines, and twenty-eight (62%) liked reading newspapers. Of the reading materials that may be read on paper, manuals or instructions were selected the least by twenty-seven (58%) avid readers. Song lyrics and websites were among the more popular choices amid these motivated readers. Forty-two (93%) stated they read song lyrics and forty-two (95%) also stated they read websites. Reading poetry was appreciated by thirty-four (75%) readers.

When asked about technology, thirty-seven (82%) read text messages, thirty-six (81%) read E-mails, thirty-one (68%) participated in social networking such as Facebook or Twitter, and twenty-nine (64%) were fond of instant messages such as MSN messenger

or Yahoo News. The least selected technology choices were E-books and Blogs. Twenty-one (47%) avid readers said they read E-books and nineteen (43%) said they read Blogs.

*Question 21: Who taught you to read?*

For this question, the number of avid readers who responded to the sub-questions will be reported. Students were allowed to choose more than one answer. Thirty-four (72%) avid readers said their “Mother” and their “Teacher” taught them to read while fifteen (32%) said a teacher aide helped them to read. Twenty-three (49%) said their father taught them to read, eleven (23%) named their grandparents and eleven (23%) also said a brother or sister taught them to read. A friend was selected by four (9%) avid readers as someone who taught them to read.

*Question 22: How often do you talk with your family about what you are reading?*

Nineteen (40%) avid readers revealed they discuss what they are reading with their family members on a daily basis. Fourteen (29%) said they chat with family members about their reading a few times a year, while nine (19%) do not share what they are reading with family.

*Question 23: Who encourages you to read?*

Mothers and teachers were the most selected to encourage avid readers to read. Results showed that thirty-eight (82%) stated they were inspired to read by their mothers and thirty-seven (82%) attributed encouragement to their teachers. Twenty-eight (60%) credited their fathers as the ones who encouraged them to read, and twenty-four (53%) had friends who enthused them to read. The least to cheer them on in reading was a brother or a sister. Sixteen (35%) said a brother or a sister motivated them to read.

*Question 24: Who in your family spends time reading?*

Middle school avid readers most often identified their friends as those who spend time reading. Forty-four (93%) named their friends, thirty-seven (78%) said their mothers, thirty-five (74%) said a brother or a sister, and thirty-three (70%) chose their fathers as the one who spends time reading.

Table 13

*Percentage of Common Characteristics of Avid Readers (n = 47)*

Percentage	Question	Characteristic
97	12	Enjoys reading fiction books
95	12	Reads Websites
93	12	Reads song lyrics for enjoyment
93	24	Friends spend time reading
93	9	Reads every day outside of class
89	10	Reads one hour or more
86	12	Enjoys reading non-fiction books
82	12	Reads text messages on regular basis
82	23	Mother encourages to read
82	23	Teacher encourages to read
81	12	Reads E-mails regularly
80	22	Talks daily to family about what they are reading
78	24	Mother spends time reading
76	12	Enjoys reading comics or graphic books
75	12	Reads poems for enjoyment
74	24	Brother or sister spend time reading
73	6	Are "A Very Good Reader"
72	21	Who taught you to read
70	24	Father spends time reading
69	7	Reads in another language other than English
68	12	Social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
64	12	Reads instant messages (Yahoo news, Skype, etc.)
62	12	Likes reading newspapers
61	12	Likes reading magazines
60	23	Father encourages to read
58	12	Reads manuals or instructions
53	23	Friends encourage reading
47	12	Reads E-books
43	12	Reads blogs
35	23	Brother or sister encourage reading



In sum, avid readers possess six key characteristics. These are, they enjoy reading fiction books, reading websites, and reading song lyrics. Also, their friends are most likely to spend time reading; they enjoy reading everyday outside of class and are inclined to read for more than an hour when they read. Reading non-fiction books, Email, and text messages were also fairly high in the list of common features for the avid readers. Their mothers appear to have a strong impact in reading as they encouraged the avid readers to read while they themselves spent time reading. Teachers also ranked high in encouraging avid readers to read. A modest amount of readers considered themselves to be very good readers. Some least preferred characteristics that included technology were reading social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, instant messages like Yahoo news and reading E-books or blogs. Other less favored reading materials were comics, poems, manuals, newspapers and magazines. Fathers were not as encouraging in reading as mothers and teachers, and siblings were not influential in their reading development.

Questions 8, 11, 16, 17, 18, and 19 from the reading questionnaire were used to compare the non-avid and avid readers to gain a different perspective. These questions were clustered together as they asked the participants to select as many choices as applied to them. To analyze the multiple responses, a cross-tabulation was conducted for each answer selected for each question. Each question yielded a wide range of answers selected for each choice. The following figures show the percentages of choices selected for each subset question for non-avid and avid readers.

*Question 8: What do you think about reading? (Choose as many as apply to you)*

Answer choices for Question 8 were (a) I would feel embarrassed if my friends saw me reading outside of class, (b) The more I read, the better I get at it, (c) I only read when I have to,

(d) Reading is cool, (e) I prefer watching TV to reading, (f) Reading is more for girls than for boys, (g) I do not read as well as other students in my class, and (h) Reading is easy for me.

For answer choice “(a) I would feel embarrassed if my friends saw me reading outside of class,” the percentage was almost equal for both groups, 3% of non-avid readers said yes, and 4% of avid readers also said yes. Non-Avid readers (25%) said reading is for girls and only 2% of avid readers think reading is for girls. Reading comes easy for 75% of avid readers while 43% of non-avid readers think reading is an easy task. Avid readers watch more TV (85%) than 21% of non-avid readers. Figure 1 shows the percentages of choices selected for question 8.

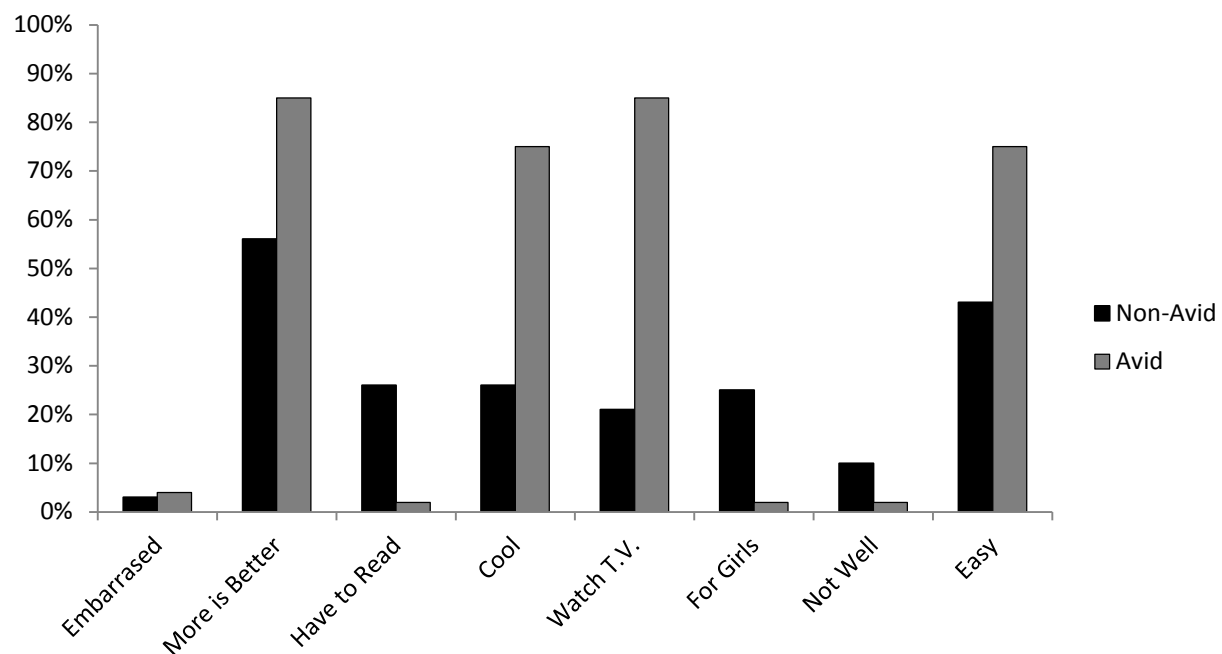


Figure 1: Percentages of answer choices for question 8, Avid and Non-Avid Readers,  $N = 326$

*Avid ( $n = 47$ ) and Non-Avid ( $n = 279$ )*

*Question 11: How does reading make you feel? (Choose as many as apply to you)*

Answer choices for Question 11 were (a) happy, (b) bored, (c) cool, (d) intelligent, (e) sad, (f) calm, (g) nervous, (h) curious, and (i) stressed.

Non-Avid readers said they felt slightly more stressed (4%) about reading than 2% of avid readers. Feeling bored about reading was selected by 17% of non-avid readers, while only 2% avid readers said they felt bored about reading. Reading makes 40% of non-avid readers happy, compared to 79% of avid readers who said they felt happy about reading. Answer choice “(f) feeling calm when reading” was selected by 58% of non-avid readers and 70% by avid readers. Figure 2 shows the percentages of choices by non-avid and avid readers for Question 11.

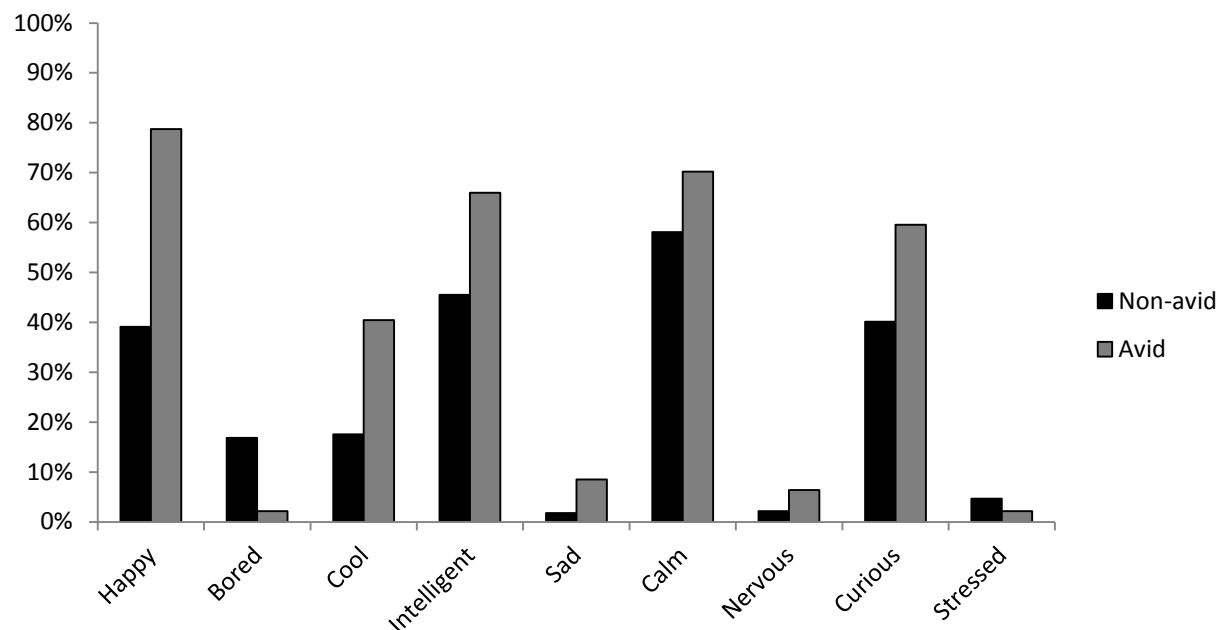


Figure 2: Percentages of answer choices for question 11, Avid and Non-Avid Readers,  $N = 326$   
Avid ( $n = 47$ ) and Non-Avid ( $n = 279$ )

*Question 16: What types of fiction do you read? (Choose as many as apply to you)*

Answer choices for Question 16 were (a) adventure, (b) animal-related, (c) crime/detective/police, (d) war/spy-related, (e) horror/ghost, (f) science-fiction, (g) fantasy, (h) sports-related, (i) poetry, (j) romance/relationships, (k) comedy/humor, (l) realistic teenage fiction, (m) historical-fiction, (n) mysteries, (o) book series, and (p) I don't read fiction.

Small percentages (3%) of non-avid readers do not read fiction, and not one (0%) avid reader selected this question. More non-avid readers prefer reading horror (66%) and sports (25%) compared to 57% of avid readers who read horror and 15% who read sports. A fair amount of non-avid readers (75%) and avid readers (83%) enjoy reading adventure stories. A larger percentage (96%) of avid readers prefers reading book series, compared to 47% of non-avid readers. Figure 3 shows the percentages of choices selected by non-avid and avid readers for question 16.

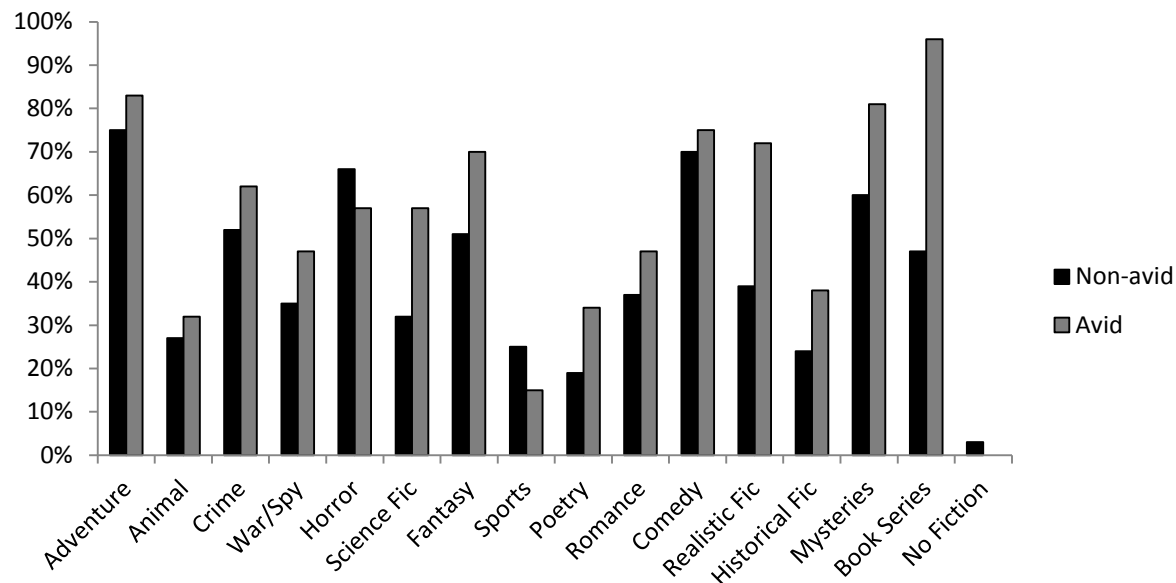


Figure 3: *Percentages of answer choices for question 16, Avid and Non-Avid Readers, N = 326*

*Avid (n = 47) and Non-Avid (n = 279)*

*Question 17: What types of non-fiction do you read? (Choose as many as apply to you)*

Answer choices for Question 17 were (a) history, (b) biographies/autobiographies, (c) home decorating, (d) crafts and hobbies, (e) nature/animals, (f) magazines (National Geographic, etc., (g) cooking, (h) politics, (i) religion (Bible, scripture books, etc., (j) self-help, (k) computers, (l) health and medicine, (m) poetry and plays, (n) travel, (o) gardening, (p) psychology, and (q) I don't read non-fiction.

For both groups, the least preferred types of non-fiction material were gardening and self-help books. Small percentages (7%) of non-avid readers said they read gardening books and 9% said they read self-help books. Likewise, small percentages (13%) of avid readers also read gardening books and 11% read self-help books. Many of the selected choices were almost equal in percentages by both groups. However, the most significant differences in preferences were reading religion and psychology material. More avid readers prefer reading about religion (38%) than non-avid readers (22%), while 30% of avid readers prefer psychology to 17% of non-avid readers. Magazines were preferred by 46% of non-avid readers, compared to 34% of avid readers. Figure 4 shows the percentages of choices selected by non-avid and avid readers for question 17.

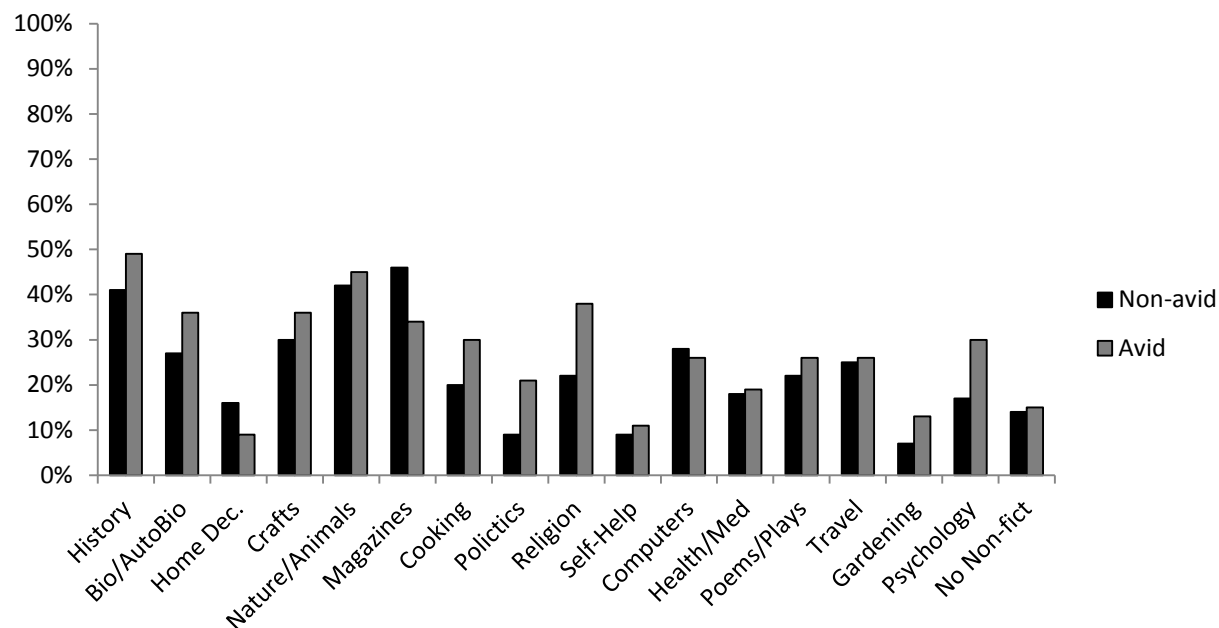


Figure 4: *Percentages of answer choices for question 17, Avid and Non-Avid Readers, N = 326*  
*Avid (n = 47) and Non-Avid (n = 279)*

*Question 18: Which of the following do you use to read? (Choose as many as apply to you)*

Answer choices for Question 18 were (a) Tablet or iPad, (b) paper (books, magazines, etc.), (c) computer, (d) cell phone, (e) Kindle or Nook (eReaders), (f) audiobook, and (g) other electronic devices not mentioned.

An equal amount (62%) of both groups use computers to read. Slightly more non-avid readers use Tablets or iPads (52%) to read than avid readers (49%). The reverse is true for paper and Kindle/Nooks. Avid readers (98%) prefer reading paper materials and 38% prefer reading on a Kindle or a Nook. Non-Avid readers read paper materials (78%) and Kindle/Nook (23%).

Figure 5 shows the percentage of choices selected by non-avid and avid readers for question 18.

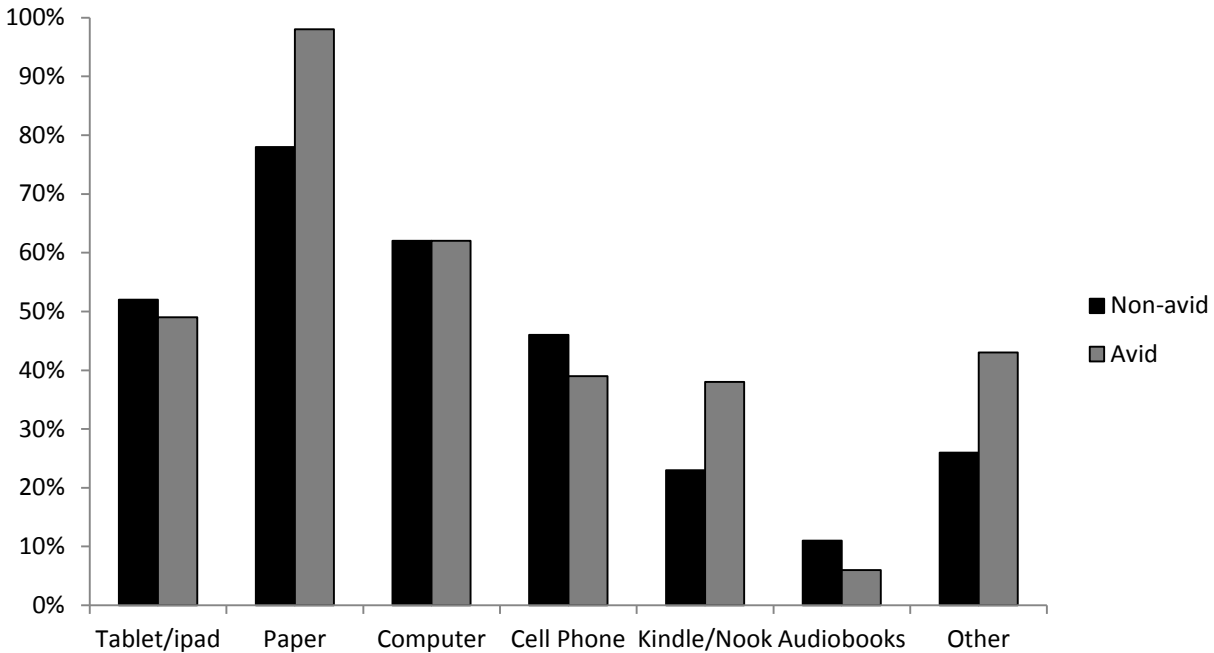


Figure 5: *Percentages of answer choices for question 18, Avid and Non-Avid Readers, N = 326*  
*Avid (n = 47) and Non-Avid (n = 279)*

*Question 19: Which of these do you have? (Choose as many as apply)*

Answer choices for Question 19 were (a) a blog, (b) a desk of your own at home, (c) books of your own, (d) a profile on a social networking site (Facebook, Email, etc.), (e) your own computer/laptop, (f) your own cell phone, (g) Kindle or Nook (eReaders), and (h) Tablet or iPad.

Choices in question 19 were almost equally selected by both groups. Having a Blog (14%) and owning a Tablet or an iPad (48%) were selected marginally more by non-avid readers than avid readers. Avid readers have a Blog (13%) and 47% have a Tablet or an iPad. High percentages (92%) of avid readers own books and 79% of non-avid readers said they own books. Avid readers also own more Kindles or Nooks (36%) compared to 18% of non-avid readers. Having their own desk was selected by 52% of non-avid readers, while 70% of avid readers have

their own desk at home. Figure 6 shows the percentage of choices selected by non-avid and avid readers for question 19.

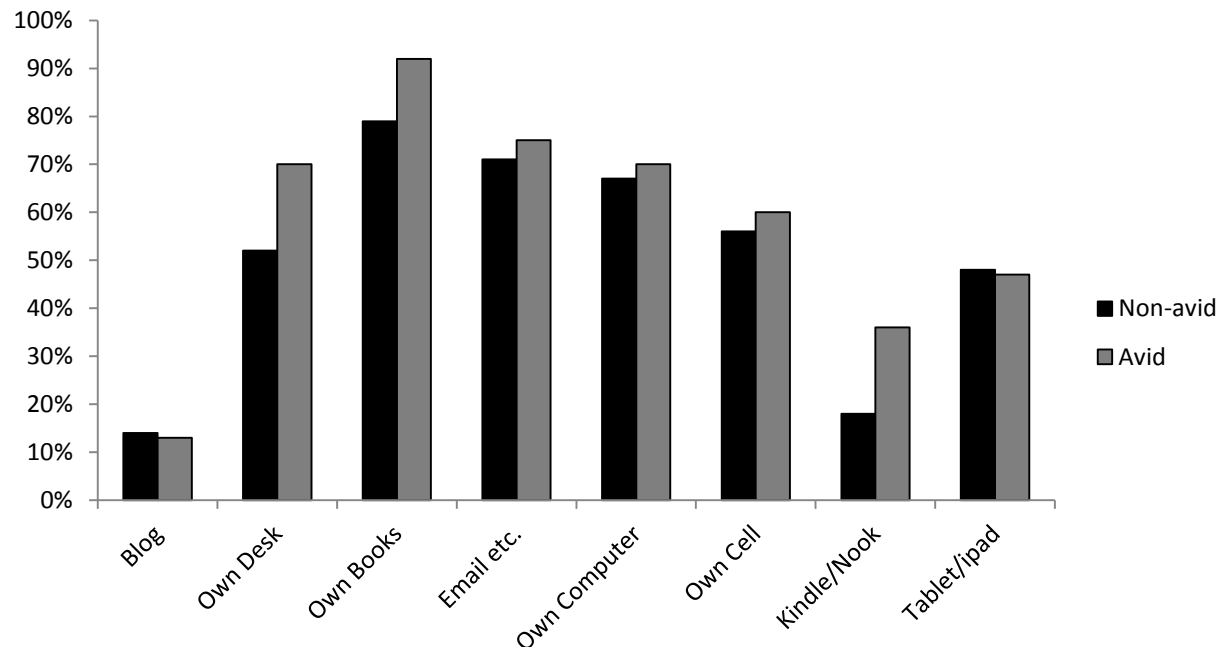


Figure 6: *Percentages of answer choices for question 19, Avid and Non-Avid Readers, N = 326*  
*Avid (n = 47) and Non-Avid (n = 279)*

Overall, there are some differences and similarities between non-avid and avid readers. In some of the questions the percentages of answer choices were very close and few had a striking difference. For example, both groups felt almost equally embarrassed if their friends saw them read outside of school. However, reading did not make most participants from either group feel sad, nervous, or stressed. On the contrary, a large percentage of the non-avid readers felt intelligent, happy, and curious about reading. When asked about the types of fiction and non-fiction materials they preferred, the most significant differences in fiction were mysteries, book series, and realistic fiction. For non-fiction choices, the most differences in selections were politics, religion, and psychology. As well, health/medicine and travel literature were also almost



equal in percentages among the two sets. Similarly, both groups used the same devices to read such as computers and a Tablet or an iPad. Finally, results showed that both groups have a Blog, a Tablet or an iPad, own a cell phone, and an Email account. These results were used to compare the non-avid readers to avid readers. Consequently, this provided another viewpoint between these two groups.

**Research Question 2: How Does Avidness Contribute to Student Reading Achievement Controlling for Gender, Socioeconomic Status, Ethnicity, and Accessibility to Literacy Materials?**

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to answer the second research question. The regression analysis was performed in three steps. First, independent variables were prepared for entry into the multiple regression analysis. Second, all the independent variables were entered at the same time into a regression analysis to check for outliers and influential cases. Finally, a regression analysis was performed by entering the control variables (gender, age ethnicity, meal status, and accessibility of reading material) first as a group and then entering the Avid reader variable.

The initial step was to prepare the data to be entered into the multiple regression analysis. The independent variables were categorical variables of nominal scale of measurement. The independent variables gender, age, accessibility to literacy materials (Access), and avidness (Avid) were dichotomous nominal variables. These variables were set and ready to enter in the regression analysis. The reference category for gender was set as male, for age it was set 9 – 12 years old, for Access it was set as non-access, and for Avid it was set as non-avid. The remaining two independent variables, ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Meal Status), had three levels and were converted into dichotomous variables before they could be entered in the regression

analysis. The reference category for the variable ethnicity was White. The first dummy variable was Hispanic and the second dummy variable was for other ethnicities. The same process was followed with the independent variable meal status. The reference category for meal status was other which included participants who either purchased their meals or brought their meals to school. The first dummy variable created represented free meals, and the second dummy variable was for reduced meals.

After the initial step, all independent variables were entered at the same time into the regression analysis predicting STAAR reading scores. In order to make the results more meaningful or predictive, this analysis was examined for outliers and influential cases. The critical value used to assess outliers on the outcome measure was a standardized residual less than -3.000 or greater than 3.000. The critical value used to assess outliers on predictors or independent variables was a Center Leverage Value greater than  $.083 = 3 \cdot p/n$ , where  $p$  is the number of predictor variable  $(8) + 1$  and  $n$  = sample size (326). The critical value used to assess influential cases was a Cook's distance value greater than 1.000. Table 14 presents a summary of the regression analysis.

Table 14

*Regression Analysis Summary (n = 326)*

Statistic	Observed Minimum	Observed Maximum	Critical Value
Standardized Residuals	-2.711	2.829	$\pm 3.000$
Center Leverage Value	.008	.104	.083
Cook's Distance Value	.000	.043	1.000

There were no outliers on the outcome measure and no influential cases detected that could potentially affect the regression analysis. The results indicated that on the Center Leverage Value there was a maximum value (.104) greater than the critical value (.083), therefore all of the cases (participants) with a critical value greater than .083 were examined. The examination revealed eleven cases had a Center Leverage Value greater than the critical value (.083). To determine in what ways these eleven cases stood out, they were examined as potential outliers on predictors. An assessment of these eleven cases using three predictor variables (ethnicity, age and avidness) as a reference revealed that five were African American, five were Asian, and one was White. Nine out of the eleven cases were Non-Avid readers, and five out of the eleven cases were 12 year-old participants. The percentage for the eleven cases was only 3.4% of the total sample size. As a result, the eleven cases were kept in the sample and were considered a meaningful cluster.

To conclude the regression analysis, the control variables were first entered at the same time and then the Avid reader variable was entered. The results yielded two models. Model 1 included only the control variables gender, age, ethnicity/Hispanic, ethnicity/Other, meal status/free, meal status/reduced, and accessibility to literacy materials. Model 1 excluded avidness. Model 1 was statistically significant  $F(7,318) = 9.139, p < .001$ . The R Square ( $R^2$ ) for Model 1 was 16.75%, which is the amount of variance in STAAR, reading scores explained by all the control variables together. The independent variable, age (13 – 16) was the only control variable which was significantly and positively related to STAAR reading scores  $t(318) = 6.25, p < .001$ . Free Meal and Reduced Meal were significantly and negatively related to STAAR reading scores  $t(318) = -4.44, p < .001$ , respectively. In other words, we can predict that low

socioeconomic status is related to low reading scores. Table 15 presents the results for the hierarchical regression analysis related to STAAR reading scores.

Table 15

*Results: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting STAAR Reading Score (n = 326)*

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
Constant	1,641.63	28.02	58.59***	1,626.45	27.41	59.33***
Gender (Female)	8.84	12.21	0.72	5.49	11.88	0.46
Age (13 – 16)	76.63	12.27	6.25***	79.12	11.93	6.63***
Hispanic	-9.482	23.86	-0.40	-8.49	23.17	-0.37
Ethnicity Other <sup>a</sup>	-61.27	37.19	-1.65	-48.21	36.22	-1.33
Free Meal	-74.69	16.81	-4.44***	-66.10	16.44	-4.02***
Reduced Meal	-87.56	21.58	-4.06***	-78.49	21.05	-3.73***
Access	25.00	15.98	1.57	1.76	16.35	0.11
Avid				80.96	17.99	4.50***
R <sup>2</sup> Change	16.75***			5.00***		

Note. *b* = Unstandardized Coefficients. *SE* = Standard Error.

<sup>a</sup>Other (African American and Asian)

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Model 2 included everything from Model 1 plus avidness. In this model, the Avid variable was added to the group of control variables. Model 2 was statistically significantly,  $F(8, 317) = 11.014, p < .001$ . The total variance in STAAR reading scores explained by all the control variables and Avid was 21.75%. The unique contribution of Avid to the explanation of the variance in STAAR reading scores was 5.00%. Avid was statistically and positively related to STAAR reading score,  $t(317) = 4.50, p < .001$ . Age (13 – 16), Free Meal, and Reduced Meal were statistically significant in Model 2 as they were in Model 1.

Results from the hierarchical regression and analysis were interpreted in two methods. To start with, the  $b$  coefficient for Avid was equal to 80.96. This means that Avid readers would predict a STAAR reading score 80.96 higher than participants who are not avid readers. Secondly, as previously stated the relationship between the variables Avid and Access was statistically significant and moderately strong (see Table 11). As seen in Table 14, under Model 1, the non-significant  $b$  coefficient for Access was 25.00. When Avid was introduced in Model 2 it dropped to 1.76. A possible explanation to describe how the predicting power of Access was reduced to almost zero in the  $b$  coefficient of Access was multicollinearity or when both variables predict the same thing. Multicollinearity is present when predictor variables are moderately to highly intercorrelated and they may provide the same information about the outcome measure (Mertler & Annatta, 2005). Recall that the strength of the relationship between Avid and Access was measured by the statistic  $\Phi$  (.324) indicated a moderate relationship.

### **Summary**

Chapter four explored the characteristics of adolescent avid readers and how avidness contributes to the students reading success by gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, age and accessibility to literacy materials. This chapter provided a detailed discussion of the results for the reading questionnaire used for this study. Following the discussion was a descriptive statistics for each research question were presented and then an analysis of each research question was performed. Conclusions from the results will be discussed in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents a summary of the study and conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter 4. Data analyses yielded results that support empirical data and other studies with similar demographics. There were also some results that were unique to this sample population. A major finding indicated that avidness and accessibility to reading materials are significant. This implies a strong relationship between avidness and accessibility to reading materials. This was consistent with other research that indicated the amount of time students engage in reading contributes to avidness and to student achievement. Finally, results revealed that avid readers attained higher reading scores on reading achievement tests.

An important finding showed that Latino avid readers from South Texas parallel other avid readers in other middle schools nationally and internationally. Results also showed that male adolescents are similarly devoted to literacy as females. Data analysis also showed gender and ethnicity were not significant factors in reading achievement. As for parental and teacher involvement, it does make a difference in reading motivation. This finding was consistent with empirical data that evidenced the importance of parental and teacher involvement in a child's life. A surprising result showed that older students scored higher in the STAAR reading test than younger students. Last of all, results showed that students' socioeconomic status negatively impacts reading achievement. All of the findings are described in greater detail in the following sections.

### **Summary of the Study**

#### **Overview of the problem.**

In 2007, the National Endowment for the Arts reported that voluntary reading has dropped among teenagers and young adults, and that Americans are reading less now than they did twenty years ago. Young adults between the ages of 18-24 were reported as being the group who reads the least. These alarming statistics have inspired an interest to investigate reading experiences in formative years to analyze reasons why children cease to read for enjoyment as they get older (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995). One study revealed that elementary students read for fun, high school students read to learn, and middle school students read because their teachers tell them to (Camp, 2007). In a national survey, McKenna et al., (1995) found that children in Grade 1 start with a high positive attitude towards reading, but they dramatically declines by Grade 6.

A decline in reading brought forth much research on reading engagement, particularly at the elementary level, while research on middle school students was considerably overlooked (Moje, 2002; Vacca, 1998). Many of the studies on reading tend to concentrate on reading deficits (struggling readers, dyslexia, cognitive and language deficits), and little on positive literacy experiences (Jimenez, 1997). Last of all, there is a lack of research in diverse populations. Literacy research ordinarily examines communities of White, middle class, English speakers, and less on “groups labeled by the majority culture as *minorities*” (Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1996, p. 90). A minimal amount of reading research on middle school students, positive reading experiences, and adolescent Latino students, encouraged the researcher to select these areas to explore.

### **Purpose statement and research questions.**

The purpose of this study was to gather data from middle school students attending public charter schools in South Texas. The inspiration for this study was to explore reasons why middle school students continue to enjoy recreational reading, and to discover common traits among these enthusiastic readers. The intent of this study was to investigate (1) the distinguished features the avid readers share in reading, and (2) to investigate the impact of their enthusiasm for reading in reading achievement. This research study was guided by the following questions:

(1) What are the characteristics of avid readers?

(2) How does avidness contribute to student reading achievement, controlling for gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and accessibility to literacy materials?

### **Review of the methodology.**

Data for this survey research design study was collected in South Texas. Middle school students in grades six, seven, and eight were selected to participate in this study. The sample population was 326 students from two public charter schools. Quantitative data was collected from a 25-question reading questionnaire modified from the original survey from the National Literacy Trust in England.

Avid readers were first identified using three embedded questions, and another three questions were used to identify accessibility. Reading test scores from the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) were obtained to measure reading achievement, and data on the student's free and reduced meals were obtained to determine socioeconomic status. Data analyses used to answer research question two, included descriptive statistics, a *t*-



test, and a hierarchical multiple regression analyses. Cross-tabulation analyses were also conducted to measure the relationship between avid readers with the independent variables, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, age, and accessibility to reading materials.

### **Participants: Latinos as the Predominant Group**

This study was conducted on the U.S. / Mexico border and the dominant ethnic group are Latinos, particularly Mexican and Mexican-American. The predominate group was Latino (87.20%), therefore it was not a surprise that 305 student participants were Hispanic/Latino/a, 25 were white (non-Hispanic), eight were African American, seven were Asian, and one Native American. However, there are other groups of people living in Palm City in addition to Latinos. The charter schools in South Texas tend to attract these diverse populations more than the public schools, which could explain the different groups identified in this study.

### **Research Question 1: Analysis of Common Characteristics**

Research question one sought to explore the characteristics of middle school avid readers. After establishing a criterion to identify these avid readers, results revealed, of the 326 student participants, 47 met the standard, and were classified as avid readers, while 279 were classified as non-avid readers. Once the avid readers were identified, several cross-tabulation analyses were conducted to measure the relationship between avid readers with other independent variables: gender, age, ethnicity, meal status, and accessibility to literacy materials. Finally, avid readers were examined to recognize patterns of reading experiences. Results from the questions shown on Table 7 (see chapter 3) were clustered for analysis.

### **Avid readers and non-avid readers.**

A Chi Square test showed the differences between Avid/Non-Avid readers, and Access/Non-access to reading materials was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 326) = 34.226, p < .001, \Phi = .324$ . The medium effect size was a moderate practical significance. An implication is that avid readers tend to have more access to literacy materials than non-avid readers. There was not a statistically significant difference for gender, age, ethnicity, and meal status.

Reading test scores from the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) revealed a statistically significant difference between avid readers and non-avid readers,  $t(324) = 4.706, p < .001, d = 0.742$ . The medium effect size indicates moderate to high practical significance. This implies that avid readers tend to score higher on reading achievement tests than their counterparts. A further examination and implications on how avidness contributes to reading achievement observing gender, age, ethnicity, and access to reading materials is discussed in the subsequent sections.

### **Avid readers: patterns of commonalities.**

What do these patterns reveal about the avid readers? After a cross-tabulation to find the frequencies of common characteristics among avid readers, findings revealed some choices that these participants have in common, and it also revealed their least favorites (see Table 14 in chapter 3). Results from the reading questionnaire showed the preferred top five choices the enthusiastic readers enjoy outside of class, ranked from highest to lowest, are 97% enjoy reading fiction books, 95% read websites, 93% spend time reading with friends, and 93% read song lyrics for enjoyment, and 93% read every day. The least five preferred were, reading materials

such as reading manuals or instructions (58%), reading Ebooks (47%), and reading blogs (43%). The other two least preferred were activities like friends encouraging them to read (53%), and having a brother or a sister encourage them to read (35%). The frequencies from the remaining responses resulted in between 89 to 60 percent. All of the responses given by avid readers will be discussed.

### **Reading materials: fiction and song lyrics preferred.**

Question 12 on the reading questionnaire asked what the students read outside of class and offered a list of choices from print text such as fiction and non-fiction to technology choices such as E-mails, Ebooks, and websites. As reported, the top common characteristic was reading fiction (97%) while 86% chose non-fiction. It appears that students are choosing to read fiction literature in their spare time. These results are consistent with other studies. For instance, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) and Worthy, Moorman, and Turner (1999) reported that students in middle school preferred reading scary, mystery, horror, and fantasy above other themes. All of these genres can be varieties of fiction. This is evident in the 2012 (the year this study was conducted) top ten list for teen's book choices reported by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA, 2014), a division of The American Library Association (ALA):

1. *Divergent* (science fiction/dystopian) by Veronica Roth
2. *The Fault in Our Stars* (fiction) by John Green
3. *Legend* (fiction/dystopian) by Marie Lu
4. *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (dark fantasy) by Ransom Riggs
5. *What Happened to Goodbye* (fiction) by Sarah Dessen
6. *Across the Universe* (fiction) by Beth Revis

7. *Cinder* (fiction) by Marissa Meyer
8. *The Scorpio Races* (fiction) by Maggie Stiefvater
9. *Where She Went* (fiction) by Gayle Forman
10. *Abandon* (fiction) by Meg Cabot

YALSA also offers a list of outstanding nonfiction books, but none made the top ten teen choices. To include nonfiction, this association awards the YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults, and the 2014 recipient was *The Nazi Hunters* by Neal Bascomb. Worthy et al., (1999) also found that male participants preferred reading nonfiction such as cars, trucks, and almanacs, while girls preferred funny novels and book series which can be types of fiction.

Teacher's preferences for fiction literature, in the classrooms, over non-fiction (Saul & Diechman, 2005) can be another reason why students selected fiction. Studies have shown that children enjoy expository text as much as narrative text (Pappas, 1993), yet the amount of time children spend on informational text is minimal. For example, in a landmark study, Duke (2000) found that first grade students spend only 3.6 minutes a day on informational texts during written language activities, and exposure to informational text usually came from the teachers by means of read-alouds. For low socioeconomic students in her sample, the amount spent on informational text was less, 1.6 minutes. She also reported that very little informational text was displayed on the walls or on the surfaces, and again, even less in low SES classrooms. However, a more current study from Yopp and Yopp (2012) which examined informational texts across the content areas, found that teachers are using informational text read alouds 85% of instructional time in science, while only 2% is being used in language arts.

An implication in this study may be how students are associating fiction and nonfiction. The researcher suggested, those enthusiastic readers may be associating nonfiction literature exclusively with science instruction, and fiction literature exclusively with reading instruction. On the other hand, international research also confirms young people's preference for fiction. For example, participants in The National Literacy Trust survey conducted by Clark (2012) in England also found that young people read fiction more often than nonfiction. A closer examination on reasons why these adolescents prefer fiction over nonfiction would warrant a better understanding of their reading interests.

Song lyrics for enjoyment were favored by 93% of the avid readers and ranked third on the list. An implication is that successful readers not only enjoy listening to the tune of a song, but also actually pay attention to the words, and possibly think about what the lyrics mean. These avid readers took an aesthetic and efferent stance to song lyrics (Rosenblatt, 2003; 2004). Likewise, all of the male participants in Smith and Wilhelm's (2002) study also said listening to music and song lyrics was a favorite pastime. The young men all talked about music with "enthusiasm, though their tastes differed wildly, and their enjoyment of music fostered some intense literate activity" (p. 150), for example, one male student reported he used song lyrics to discuss politics and other topics of interest. Music is one way young people can shape their identity as they form social groups who share the same taste in music. Nippold, Duthie, and Larsen (2005), also reported that listening to music was the most popular activity chosen by all of the 200, sixth- and ninth-grade participants in their study. Song lyrics also, can be powerful and have the potent to impact young people impressionably. Middle school teachers understand the emotional connection adolescents have with music and often use song lyrics to motivate students and to enhance reading instruction for all readers (Alvermann, 2003).

For the avid readers in this study, 75% indicated they enjoy reading comics or graphic novels, and poetry. Other reading interests included reading newspapers (62%) and magazines (61%). Several studies also reported comparable reading interests with adolescents. For example, Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) stated that magazines were the favorite choice for both males and females. Some examples of magazines types were sports, video games, and fashion followed by comic books and the Internet. In interviews, participants in Pitcher's et al., (2007) also named comics and magazines as popular reading sources, and said they used the Internet as a newspaper. Likewise, Ivey and Broaddus (2001), Nippold et al., (2005) and Worthy et al., (1999) equally stated that young adolescents were motivated to read magazines, comics, and graphic novels. Often these types of reading materials are scorned by teachers and not valued as laudable literature (Worthy et al., 1999). While some educators and researchers may see these reading resources as "light reading," free voluntary reading is important to maintain reading interest and eventually can lead to more challenging reading materials (Krashen, 2004). An implication is that devoted readers enjoy reading a wide variety of reading sources, from easy to difficult, and a variety of genres. Alvermann (2005) suggested that teachers should consider students' literacy interest if they want to make reading instruction more engaging for the students.

### **Interactions with technology: websites, text messaging, and emails preferred.**

Avid readers ranked reading websites second (95%) as a favorite activity outside of the classroom. The results were as anticipated as this sample population, often referred to as digital natives (Prensky, 2001), is part of the Millennial Generation (Henry Kaiser Foundation, 2011). Because the Reading Questionnaire did not specifically ask what types of websites students prefer, or why they choose to read websites, the choice of reading websites can span a wide range of interests for these enthusiastic readers. Surfing the Internet for websites can be for

informational purposes or for entertainment motives. Internet surfing for these digital natives can be for aesthetic preferences and also for an efferent stance (Rosenblatt, 2003). Whatever the reasons, when it comes to digital media, these Millennial keen readers enjoy reading websites during their leisure time as much as other teens across the nation. For example, in a study, Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, and Zickuhr (2010) reported that teenagers in the United States increased their technology use from 65% in 2006 to 73% in 2008, and teens ages 12-17 reported going online more often than any other age group. McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang, & Meyer (2012) also found a strong preference for digital text over print text with adolescents. These findings are consistent with results from this study. Furthermore, it shows a constant preference for the use of technology among teens. This is evident in the next ranked choices.

An anticipated result showed that text messaging (82%) and E-mails (81%) also ranked high among avid readers. These are popular methods for teenagers to communicate, and because teenagers are socially motivated (Alexander & Fox, 2011; Berk, 2010), they are willing to spend large amounts of their free time communicating with their friends through text messaging (Alvermann, 2005) and E-mails (Nippold et al., 2005; Pitcher et al., 2007). In an international study launched by The National Literacy Trust in England, researcher Clark (2012) found that text messaging (63.2%) and reading websites (50.4%) were the most selected reading materials outside of school. It appears that digital media is a central part of a teenager's life, and the Millennial avid readers in this study are no different from other teenagers nationally and internationally.

It has been implied that middle school students are digital natives and that technology is part of their daily lives. However, not all hi-tech media is equal. For instance, the least preferred technologies among the avid readers were (a) social networking (68%) such as Twitter and

Facebook, (b) instant messages (64%) such as Yahoo News, (c) Ebooks (47%), and (e) Blogs (43%). Lenhart et al., (2010) reported similar findings with Twitter and Blogs. They discovered that Twitter is not used by most teenagers ages 12-17, and Facebook is used mostly by adults. Also, the use of Blogs has steadily declined among teenagers and adults, and likewise Blogs are generally associated with older people. Tumblr (without the e) is the new Blog (Stoller, 2014) and most likely preferred by today's teens. Further examination of the digital preferences among adolescents is needed.

Ebooks were also not a favorite with the avid readers in this study. This result was not anticipated. Considering that these Generation M middle school students grew up with technology, it seemed inevitable that digital narrative texts on Ebooks would appeal to them. However, research on the benefits of purchasing Ebooks from Wexelbaum, Miltenoff, and Parault (2011) revealed several studies with positive and negative comments regarding electronic books. For example, in one study by Springer (2008) (as cited in Wexelbaum et al., 2011), researchers found that teachers and college students said they liked the convenience of Ebooks because they were easy to manipulate, easy to transfer information from their computer, and they were able to store large amounts of information in it. On the other hand, the participants also said they had trouble sitting for long periods of time reading on a screen, the brightness was a problem for some, it was time consuming, and all college student participants said they could not bond with an Ebook. Based on experience, the researcher proposes that Ebooks may not be popular with the student participants in this study because Ebooks were costly, and students could not easily trade texts without a shared Ebook Application. Clark (2012) also discovered that a low percentage (8.8%) of teenagers in England used Kindles, a type of Ebook. She also found that 72.9% of young people read paper-based resources compared to 63.8% who read on



computers, 55.9% read using their cell phones, 20.4% used their iPad, and 21.1% reported using other digital devices to read. It appears that the attitudes towards Ebooks and other digital materials with screens are similar to the attitudes shared with the student participants in this study. Perhaps reading on a digital screen is not as appealing as people would think they are. This is worthy of further research.

**Amount of time readers spend on reading: every day, one hour or more.**

Many researchers would agree that the amount of recreational time spent engaging in reading is perhaps the most significant activity of successful readers (Chen, 2008; Guthrie et al., 1995; Guthrie et al., 1999; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Krashen, 2004; Strommen & Mates, 2004). It is noteworthy that 93% of avid readers reported they read every day, and 89% reported they read for at least one hour or more daily. Student participants ranked these as choices as their preferred activities. Urban adolescents in other studies also reported spending time reading for recreation outside the classroom. Huges-Hassell and Rodge (2007) similarly found that 69% of urban adolescents “read more than two books per month outside of school” (p. 24), and Unrau and Schlachkman (2006) discovered that adolescents in a low SES school were intrinsically motivated to regularly spend time after school reading for enjoyment. It makes sense that children who enjoy reading are motivated to read more in their leisure time (Guthrie et al., 1995; Guthrie et al., 1999; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Krashen, 2004). Much of their motivation to read outside of the classroom can be attributed to free choice reading (Atwell, 1998; Kindig, 2012) and Krashen’s (2004) free voluntary reading (FVR), which he defines as:

...reading because you want to; no book reports, no questions at the end of the chapter.

In FVR, you don't have to finish the book if you don't like it. FVR is the kind of reading most of us do obsessively all the time. (pp. 1).

These results reaffirm studies that avid readers enjoy reading for recreation and are motivated to spend a lot of their free time engaged in reading. Guthrie et al., (1999) assert that intrinsic motivation increases the amount of reading in children. Galda and Liang (2003) also suggest that engaged readers are always immersed in a book.

### **Social interactions: a community of readers.**

Also important to ardent readers is having friends and family who spend time reading. In this study, 93% reported their friends devoted time to reading, 78% said their mothers read, 74% said their brother or sister read, and 70% said their fathers read. This is not surprising, as socializing appears to be a constant with adolescents. Social interactions by means of reading time with friends were found to be a strong indicator of engaged readers in Guthrie's et al., (1995) study with adolescents' ages nine, thirteen, and seventeen. Frequent readers talked to friends about books, asked questions, and shared book titles and information. When interacting with family members, 80% of the avid readers in this study said they talk to family members daily about what they are reading. These results are consistent with studies from Strommen and Mates (2004) and Chen (2008) who also found a positive relationship between good readers and family members. These authors posit that parents in a community of readers serve as role models who influence "their children's view of reading as something enjoyable and worthwhile so that they choose to become devoted readers themselves, even when they reach adolescence" (Chen, 2008, p. 221). Other researchers state that reading is a social act, (Alvermann, 2005; Knoester,

2009) and when students gather in social settings, they like to talk about things that are interesting to them. These topics of conversations and discussion can include books and other literary interests for avid readers.

### **Encouraging reading: mothers and teachers.**

In addition to having family and friends interact in a social circle of readers, 82% of the avid readers in this study reported that mothers and teachers encouraged them to read the most. Following, were 60% of fathers, while only 35% said a brother or a sister (ranked last on frequency table) encouraged them to read. It appears that mothers and teachers are the most influential and both had a high impact on enthusiastic readers. Some authors have reported that positive teacher attitudes can contribute to student success (Alvermann, 2005; de la Piedra, 2010; Ivey & Broadus, 2001) because encouragement to read from parents and teachers is important for all readers. Parents and teachers are positive role models to help young adolescents see themselves as readers (Stommen & Mates, 2004). However, when examining adolescents, some studies found contrary results. For instance, Camp (2007) found that parents and teachers play a major role in reading with fourth graders and undergraduate college students, but not for eighth-grade students. Also, Taiwanese participants, grades 9-12, in Chen's (2008) study did not reveal a significant correlation between parents, reading frequencies and avid readers. Nonetheless, she recognized that ninth graders who had parents who were the most frequent readers (defined as reading eight hours or more per week) were 1.4 times more likely to be avid readers themselves.

Mothers and teachers (72%) in this study were also the most frequently cited as the person who taught these avid readers to read. The research suggests that communities of reader encourage and motivate children to read. This was evident in the study, from Pitcher et al.,

(2007). For example, in their study, the participant, Carrie, stated that her mother and grandmother bought her a lot of books that interested her, and just put them on her bookcase. Eventually Carrie ended up reading them. This appears to be an effective strategy by the mother and grandmother to encourage Carrie to read, and it worked. It would be interesting to further examine the relationship between avid readers and their mothers. In all, parental and teacher encouragement are important factors for student achievement (Krashen, 1993).

**Self-efficacy: a very good reader.**

In a national reading survey, McKenna et al., (1995) summarized that struggling readers are often frustrated when they read, and those frustrating experiences can often cause them to view reading as a frustrated experience. These negative reading experiences can lead children to believe they are not good readers. In contrast, 73% of avid readers in this study, perceived themselves as being a very good reader. Compared to other studies, this percentage of self-efficacy is favorable. Some studies show that young adolescents do not always perceive themselves as readers, even when their interviews indicate otherwise. For example, Knoester (2009) interviewed a combination of strong and reluctant readers, ages 11-13 in grades 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup>, their teachers, and parents. One particular participant, a male, was identified by his teacher and mother to be the most resistant reader in his class. Furthermore, this student admitted that reading was not important for his future. In spite of these declarations, this student was considered to be a good reader by his teacher, and outperformed other students in his class. A female student, likewise, was considered by her peers to be a good reader because she read a lot. The teacher, on the other hand, did not identify her as a good reader, and felt other students were stronger in reading.

Pitcher et al., (2007) also found contradictions between survey responses and interviews. Male students tended to report that reading was boring, and that they never read. However, during the interviews, these male participants talked about books they had read, and how much time they spend reading E-mails, games, and articles on the Internet. Perhaps the most expressive interviews that reveal inconsistencies in self-efficacy are from the male participants in Smith and Wilhelm's (2002, 2004) study. Most of the young males did not feel competent in literacy activities, and at times felt that the school magnified their literacy weaknesses. Their interviews evidenced otherwise, as the boys discussed the many literacy activities they engaged in after school. Some examples of these included reading magazines, video games, reading the Internet, and creating websites.

The research suggested that students with low self-efficacy do not attribute success with effort or ability. Perhaps they identify success as chance or luck. Ironically, one of the participants in this study fit the avid reader criteria, yet he or she self-identified as "A not-so-good reader." If students experience low-efficacy, then they feel inferior and may not put as much effort in school assignments. Teachers have the power to change this. Further research is needed on ways to improve student's self-efficacy in reading.

### **Reading in other languages: Spanish, Japanese, Turkish, and French.**

Remarkably, 69% of avid readers reported they read in another language other than English. Spanish was the language most read in addition to English. Other languages reported were French, Japanese, and Turkish. It is not surprising that most avid readers indicated reading in Spanish as the predominant group in this study was Latinos. Reading in Spanish is an expected answer because the two charter schools where data was collected offer it as one of the

choices to meet their requirements for language credits. Spanish and Turkish are choices offered at Seaside Science Academy. Moreover, this charter school also offers summer trips to Turkey, Mexico, and Spain so students can practice their elective language.

An explanation as to why students said they read Japanese is because Manga, a type of Japanese comic book (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007), was popular in the middle schools during this study. Manga is originally written in Japanese, but is often translated to English. Perhaps participants are able to read some of the captions in Japanese, and for them that counts as reading in Japanese. Further investigations such as interviews are needed and would provide reasons for these responses.

In summary, a consistent pattern of favorites appeared in this study as with other studies. It seems that middle school adolescents share the same interests as other adolescents in other parts of the nation. This implies that Latino avid readers share common interests in reading materials, technology, social interactions, involvement, encouragement, and dislikes as other readers in the U.S. and globally.

## **Research Question 2: Reading Achievement**

### **Avidness impacts reading achievement.**

Research question two asked how avidness contributes to reading achievement, controlling for gender, socioeconomic, ethnicity, and access to reading materials. A hierarchical multiple regression analyses revealed that there is a relationship between avidness and high reading test scores,  $t(317) = 4.50, p < .001$ . After avidness was added in Model 2, results showed that avidness was statistically significant,  $F(8, 317) = 11.014, p < .001$ . This implies that avidness does contribute to reading achievement. It can be predicted that avid readers score

higher than non-avid readers in reading achievement tests. This is not surprising due to previous theories like the Mathew effect. The Matthew effect in reading describes how good readers get better at reading and build a strong literacy foundation, while the non-readers with less fortunate literacies keep falling further behind (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001; Stanovich, 1989).

McKenna et al., (1995) and McKenna et al., (2012) also believe that the negative “attitudes of poor readers contribute substantially to the downward trend across the total population of students” (1995, p. 952). It can be predicted that positive reading experiences from avidness fosters high self-efficacy.

This seems to confirm previous research from Duke and Pearson (2002). Their work summarizes what good readers do when what they read enables them to make connections with school reading assignments. Their description of good readers relates to avidness. For example, according to their description of good readers, they are active readers, understand text structure, use various strategies to construct meaning while they read, and draw from prior knowledge. Prior knowledge is the literacy foundation that avid readers develop from their positive reading experiences in formative school years, and possibly from their home environment. Good readers draw from previous knowledge to understand texts from varying book genres to more challenging academic texts like standardized tests. Good readers develop strategies that enable them to navigate through texts. Note, for example, how Guthrie’s et al., (1995) describe how active readers use their strategies to navigate their reading.

Highly active readers reported taking notes, making outlines, rereading as they studied, questioning themselves, and addressing issues raised by the textbook or by their friends. Being aware of these strategies and using them frequently and appropriately seemed to empower students to locate books that interested them to comprehend material that was

important to them, to satisfy their curiosity, or to provide a rewarding aesthetic experience (pp. 22).

Additionally, good readers have the strategies to read different texts differentially from each other. The qualities of good readers outlined by Duke and Pearson (2002) and the strategies that avid readers use in Guthrie's et al. (1995) mirror Rosenblatt's (2003; 2004) Transactional Theory on aesthetic and efferent reading. These authors state that readers use their prior knowledge and strategies learned from previous reading experiences to extract meaning from the text. Readers pay attention to text and know when to take an aesthetic or efferent stance to gain comprehension. Good readers do this simultaneously as they weave from one stance to the other without interrupting the flow of understanding (Rosenblatt, 2003).

Understanding texts, according to Guthrie et al., (1999), begins with intrinsic motivation which increases reading amount and results in text comprehension. If these avid readers are not experiencing high levels of frustration with reading comprehension, like non-readers, then their intrinsic motivation continues (Guthrie et al., 1999) and as a result, they read more. When they read more, their reading comprehension increases, and they perform better in reading assignments. Subsequently, text "comprehension is a consuming, continuous, and complex activity, but one that, for good readers, is both satisfying and productive" (Duke & Pearson, 2002, p. 204). Developed reading strategies (Duke & Pearson, 2002), high self-efficacy (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000), interacting with text (Rosenblatt, 2004), and a solid literacy foundation, may contribute to reading success. This can help explain how avidness helps good readers do well in reading state tests like the STAAR.



### **Accessibility to literacy materials.**

*Libraries are the source of literacy development*, Krashen (2004)

Results indicated that avidness and accessibility to reading materials predicted each other. The connection between avidness and access as measured by the statistic  $\Phi$  (.324) is highly correlated and indicated a moderate relationship. This implies that if participants have books in their environment, or have access to literacy materials, then we can predict they will be avid readers. Likewise, it can be predicted that avid readers have access to literacy materials. This seems to confirm previous research by Krashen (1993; 2004) who advocates the theory that accessibility to literacy materials increases the amount of students' reading, which can result in reading success. Additionally, other researchers have also concluded the importance of access to reading materials. Guthrie et al., (1995), for example, confirmed the point that availability is associated with amount of reading. They concluded that the "breadth of study strategies, and amount of library use as mediators that connect teacher-directed activity instruction to students' amount of reading activity" (p. 19).

A high number of participants in this study, 295, said they gain access to reading materials from the public libraries in Palm City. This is consistent with previous research where students mostly accessed their literacy material from the classroom library or from the public library. For example, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) reported that 61% of their participants obtained books from the public library, and 55% get books from the classroom library. Worthy et al., (1999) also stated that 44% of their participants get their books from "the school, classroom, or public library" (p. 21). Huges-Hassell and Rodge (2007) equally found that urban adolescents

mostly access reading materials from “the school library (71%), the public library (53%), and the classroom (53%)” (p. 27).

It is not surprising that the participants in this study frequent the library for literacy materials as the two public libraries in Palm City are well funded and offer a variety of resources and activities. The main library, Palm City Public Library (PCPL) was recently expanded to include one wing dedicated to children’s literature with books in English and in Spanish. The PCPL also houses a large section of juvenile books, adult literature, DVDs, and audiobooks. It also has two large computer labs, a quiet computer room for individual use, and another for computer classes or meetings. The Palm City South Public Library (PCSPL) is similar, but on a smaller scale.

Libraries can be seen as places for social interactions (Knoester, 2009). For the middle school students in this study, it may be a place for them to socialize with friends as well as use the library facilities for literacy purposes. The researcher observed that the two libraries appear to be central locations for social gatherings for the pupils attending both charter schools as well as children from other neighboring schools. This is evident as both libraries are packed with children every day after school, Monday through Friday. On weekends, families and children can be seen partaking in library activities or sitting around reading and socializing. It is not surprising that residents, particularly families with school age children, regularly visit the libraries. A favorite feature at PCPL is the café placed in the center of the library, which sells soft drinks, coffee, pastries, hotdogs, burgers, and a kid’s meal. The café resembles a regular coffee shop. The two libraries appear to have much to offer the community. This echoes findings from Guthrie et al., (1995), when they reported that active readers used “the library to find books, to complete their school work, and to share reading with peers” (p. 22). Providing students with a

great quantity of high-interest texts (Guthrie et al., (2000) and a variety of genres (Duke, 2000) can be beneficial.

Proximity of the charter schools to the two libraries can be an advantage and another explanation for the frequent visits. The Palm City Public Library and Seaside Science Academy are less than two miles away from each other, and the Palm City South Public Library (PCSPL) is 2.2 miles from Borderland Preparatory School. This makes it convenient for students to go there after school. Other locations were cited as sources from which literacy materials were attained.

#### **Bookstores and other sources to access reading material.**

Besides visiting the lending libraries, many student participants, 283, said they have access to a bookstore. This was not an anticipated result, although a positive one, because Palm City lost its only major bookstore when Waldenbooks closed in 2011. The closest bookstore and place to purchase trade books is the Barnes-n-Noble bookstore, which is 45 minutes away. An implication is that students who are traveling to nearby bookstores are gaining access to literacy materials and most likely purchasing books. Other sources to purchase books for residents of Palm City are stores such as Target, Walmart, Walgreens, CVS Pharmacy, and the biggest grocery store, H.E.B. This is not an uncommon practice, especially in low socioeconomic urban communities. Worthy et al., (1999) who gathered their data in urban public schools in Texas, also discovered that students identified as low SES bought their reading materials from “grocery stores rather than bookstores” (p. 21), while students who were not low SES bought books at bookstores. As well, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) examined students in economically and

ethnically diverse schools. They found that 56% bought books at bookstores, but they did not differentiate according to income.

The researcher identified two other possibilities from which students obtain their reading material. One option is purchasing literacy materials via the Internet through sites such as amazon.com. Perhaps the students who have the economic means shop online for reading materials. It is also possible that some students consider the Scholastic Book Fair held at their respective schools as a place to purchase books, just as they would at a popular bookstore. Knoester (2009) also discovered that the biannual Scholastic book fair at the school where he conducted his study was the place most students purchased their books. Likewise, sixth graders in Worthy et al., (1999) revealed that 56% get their reading materials from bookstores, stores, subscriptions, or book clubs. To restate, this is an optimistic finding and encouraging to discover that a favorable amount of students are familiar with bookstores given that Palm City currently does not have a common one.

A reasonable amount, 198 participants, said they were given a book as a present. Receiving books as presents can be indicative of avid readers. It may be that family and friends understand that these children enjoy reading and would appreciate a book for a gift. A student who does not enjoy reading may not find much value in receiving a book for a present. In sum, it seems that the sample population interacts fairly well with literacy materials if they are visiting libraries, visiting bookstores, and are given books as presents. It appears that reading is important to them, and they recognize the significance of literacy.

### **Books at home.**

Although the participants have access to literacy materials, the number of books they have at home is not the same for everyone. For example, 94 participants (28.8%) stated they have 10-50 books in their home. This was the highest amounts of books the sample population reported having at home and compared with only 75 participants (23%) who reported owning 50-100 books and another 75 who claimed owning 1-10 books. Smaller percentages (11.7%) reported having 100-250, 6.8% reported having 250-500 books at home, and 5.5% reported having more than 500 books at home. Several explanations are suggested as to why these students own so few books. One possible interpretation is the cost of literacy materials, as a number of participants receive free meals and are considered low-income. It is possible that buying books is a financial burden. Another possibility is that large quantities may be hard for some middle school students to conceptualize. It is easier to visualize 10 to 50 books on a bookshelf, than visualizing 100 or more books. The researcher speculates that for most of these participants, 100 books can be visually the same amount as 500 books. Also, the question on the reading questionnaire could have been misleading, and the participants were more certain of possessing at least 10-50 books rather than 100, 250, or even 500 books. The amount of books children have at home is important and associated with reading achievement. In today's digital world, literacy access also includes technology.

Consistent with the high preference for reading websites for avid readers, the overall population sample also enjoys using computers and the Internet as reading sources at home. An implication is that parents understand the necessity of owning a home computer in our high tech society, and it may be more manageable to possess home electronics with monthly fees for Internet service. Also consistent with avid reader preferences for reading materials are

magazines. A fair amount, 215, reported they read magazines at home. Further research would reveal the types of magazines they are reading.

Empirical data from several studies and research has demonstrated that access to literacy materials is vital to reading success. Findings from this study supported results from these studies. One strong correlation to student success was the use of libraries as the most likely source for students to gain accessibility to reading materials. For this reason it is beneficial to continue to examine our public and school libraries to ensure they are providing interesting and challenging reading material for all students.

### **Age.**

Results showed that older students are more likely to score higher on reading achievement tests than younger students. The independent variable, age (13-16) was the only control variable which was significantly and positively related to STAAR reading scores  $t(318) = 6.25, p < .001$ . This was not an anticipated result. Previous research indicated that young children have a better attitude towards reading than adolescents. As children move up in grades and transition into middle school, they also have a tendency to be less interested in reading for enjoyment. The researcher offers some possible explanations for this result.

This study was conducted at two charter schools, which suggests that attendance there is selective. Parents choose to enroll their children at these charter schools. It is possible that the students in the middle grades attended public schools during their elementary years, and were perhaps receiving inadequate instruction. Instruction at the charter schools may have been more challenging and engaging, better preparing students for success. Another possibility is the number of English Language Learners attending the charter schools. Many of the students at

these charter schools are Mexican Nationals whose first language is Spanish. An implication is that the students were developing their English language skills during elementary years, and through the years increased their competency in English by the time they reached the middle grades. Yet another explanation could be that students in middle grades have had more opportunities to take tests and have improved at these skills as they progress in grades. Test taking is a skill that can be mastered over time with practice.

Motivation can also be a factor contributing to the age variable. For instance, Urnau and Schlackman (2006) reported that intrinsic motivation in reading declines in middle grades while extrinsic motivation can increase with some students. Examples of extrinsic motivation included “recognition, grades, social, competition, and compliance” (p. 97). The researcher suggests that performance and social pressure could be extrinsic motivators for the student participants in this study. This can be one explanation why the older (13-16) student participants scored higher in reading achievement than the younger (9-12) participants.

### **Socioeconomic status.**

Socioeconomic status negatively predicted that participants from low-income families are more likely to score low in reading achievement tests. Student participation in Free Meal and Reduced Meal was significantly and negatively related to STAAR reading scores  $t(318) = -4.44$ ,  $p < .001$ . In other words, one can predict that low socioeconomic status is related to low reading scores. Funding for low SES schools and programs intended to help low-income families are complex issues in our country. It is a concern that plagues our schools, communities, and students, and one that cannot be resolved easily. For instance, school vouchers from the No Child Left Behind Act and state laws like the Robin Hood Act have attempted to alleviate the financial

burden faced by some families and school districts. The NAEP also reports on the socioeconomic status of the students. Researchers continue to investigate the correlation between income and student success. All of this confirms the point that SES is a significant factor correlated to student success, and results from this study endorsed this relationship. Worthy et al., (1999), reported a disparity in access to books from low-income families compared to students who were not low-income; in their study, students with affluent incomes were able to purchase books from bookstores that tend to offer more choices. In contrast, students from low-income backgrounds relied more on public libraries for access to reading material. Duke (2000) also pointed out differences in nonfiction material available to low-income students compared to students in high-income schools. Reading success has been correlated to accessibility (Krashen, 1993; 2004). Altogether, this implies that students with low SES do not have the same opportunities as those students from higher-income families. For that reason, many students from low-income background also do not have opportunities to develop their literacy skills which affect their reading success as seen in standardized tests like the STAAR. Some researchers like Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) have taken notice and explicitly seek to investigate reading achievement in low SES schools.

This study is similar to findings from Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007), who also examined adolescents for literacy practices outside the school. The school was chosen because of low reading test scores, and the large number of students (82%) on the free and reduced meal program. The researchers found that participants were spending leisure time reading from a variety of sources such as magazines, comic books, Manga, graphic novels, and the Internet. The students were getting their reading materials mostly from the school library, the public library, and the classroom, while a few said they visited bookstores. Some participants also said they



prefer reading in Spanish. It seems that these low socioeconomic students in Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) study were engaged in reading, but their reading test scores did not reflect their reading experiences. They reported that students (68%) were still performing below the basic reading level. Similar findings were found with the student participants in Palm City. In this study, 68.3% of the students reported receiving free meals, and 14.6% receive reduced price meals. In addition, 40.5% of the students also reported they enjoy reading.

Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) offered some explanations that may also apply to this study. For example, they strongly suggested that classroom libraries in low socioeconomic communities be funded in an effort to improve student achievement. The researcher is in accord with the idea of funding libraries to expand resources to students. Copious libraries are associated with high achievement and having ample resources can improve student achievement (Krashen, 1993; 2004).

The researcher supports suggestions made by Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) on ways to help improve students reading experiences. Suggestions offered for teachers and librarians to support the literacy development of these urban adolescents were to (a) provide high interest reading materials in the classrooms and the library, (b) build on student's culture and heritage by supplying more reading materials that resemble the students and parallel their lives, (c) increase independent reading time at school, and (d) talk to students about their reading interests and extend leisure reading to summer reading programs. These proposals would benefit not only the students in this study, but also all students across the nation.

### **Ethnicity.**

One of the goals for the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 was to close the achievement gap between White and minority children attending public schools. The achievement gap means there is a disparity in academic achievement in United States between Whites and African Americans, and Whites and Hispanics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013b). These academic differences are normally linked to higher drop-out rates, lower college enrollment, and in lower standardized tests scores. Scores from the STAAR 2012 administration indicate that Hispanics underperform in relation to other ethnic/racial groups, which may impede Hispanics from achieving academic success. Contrasting results were found in this study.

Analysis of data in this study indicated that ethnicity was not a statistically significant factor of avidness. This implies that the variable ethnicity did not contribute to avidness for the sample in this study. This study supports other research on Latino literacy practices. For example, Unrau and Schlackman (2006) studied middle grade students in an urban school in Los Angeles. The school had a predominately Hispanic population. The participants were 75% Mexican-American and Central Americans, 20% Asian, and the rest were a combination of African American, Caucasian, and other groups. Their study addressed literacy issues that related to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. They found that reading achievement was not affected by ethnicity. They concluded that the differences in performance were more closely associated with sociocultural trends. It was suggested that schools with “sustaining social support systems for minority youth [like Hispanics] promote positive perspectives of social mobility and enhance students ‘engagement with literacy and learning’” (p. 98).

Similarly, the participants in this study also attended schools that had predominately Hispanic populations. An implication is that the teachers at the two charter schools in this study promote the sociocultural system suggested in Unrau and Schlackman's (2006) study. It is also possible that embedded within the support system, students are receiving culturally responsive instruction that celebrates their culture (Au, 2009; Delpit, 2006; Hughes-Hassell & Rodege, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). Teacher attitudes are vital to student success (Camp, 2007; de la Piedra, 2010; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Worthy et al., 1999). An example are the Latino students in studies such as Jimenez (1997) and Jimenez, Garcia, and Pearson (1996), who demonstrated that Latino adolescents share equal reading strategies as other racial/ethnic successful readers and not-so successful readers. Correspondingly, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), in 2013, reported that Hispanic fourth grade students in New York made the most gains in reading. It also reported that reading scores among Hispanics have steadily increased since 2009 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013b).

McKenna's et al., (1995) national reading survey also found that "ethnicity appears to play little role in the negative trend in either recreational or academic reading attitude" (p. 952). It seems that several studies are finding the same conclusion that is consistent with this study. That is, that ethnicity is not a contributor to reading success. In reality, though, the gap between White -Hispanic in grades 4 and grade 8 has remained steadily the same in reading since the first assessments in 1990 (NCES, 2013a). However, the gap did narrow a few points in 1992. This is important because Hispanics will make up almost half of the population in the U.S. by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). The implication is that almost half of the nation will be reading at the basic level or below. Changes should be made to narrow this gap.

One possibility to help narrow the gap is to employ a sociocultural approach to literacy. Lev Vygotsky's social-cultural approach states that cultural context affects how people think. James Paul Gee's theory on sociocultural approach, also appreciates language in its social context. Both approaches suggest that language is embedded in social constructs. When teachers are aware of these social constructs, they have a better understanding of how their students learn. By focusing on the funds of knowledge that children bring to school, teachers can help students build the bridge between literacies at home and the school culture. Another possibility is to stop grouping all Hispanics into one category. Not all Hispanics are the same. There is much diversity within the all-encompassing Hispanic population. For example, besides the different Hispanic nationalities represented, there are recent Spanish-speaking immigrants from different countries entering schools. They enter schools with different language abilities and with varying needs. These are grouped together with other English Language Learners who have already been in the U.S. a few years, but also require differentiated instruction. Then there are children, mainly Mexican-Americans, who are second, third, fourth, or fifth generation who have different language needs as well. If educators and researchers examined these students in smaller groups, perhaps different literacy patterns will emerge, and we could better service these students based on their literacy needs.

### **Gender.**

Data analyses revealed that gender was not a significant factor of avidness. This implies that the gender variable did not contribute to avidness for the sample population in this study. This is important because it is not consistent with most literature on gender and literacy. Stereotypes for girls and boys were found in one study that examined how adolescents spend their leisure time. Nippold et al. (2005), for example, found that boys preferred playing video

games, playing on computers, and playing sports, while girls preferred writing, using E-mail, talking on the phone, shopping, and cooking. Across the research, findings on gender differences show that girls tend to view reading with a more positive attitude than boys and tend to engage in reading more often than boys (McKenna et al., 1995; Logan & Johnston, 2009; Logan & Johnston, 2010; Nippold et al., 2005). Females engage in recreational reading for social reasons, (Mucherah & Yoder, 2008; McKenna et al., 1995), interests, aesthetic reasons, for compliance, and advancing grades, more often than male students” (Mucherah & Yoder, 2008).

More recently, in a U.S. national study, McKenna et al. (2012), surveyed 4,491 middle school students in 23 states to examine attitudes in recreational reading in print settings, recreational reading in digital settings, academic reading in print settings, and academic reading in digital settings. Results from the study found that female students continue to have better attitudes towards recreational print texts than males, but males had a more positive attitude towards recreational digital settings. Because this study focused mostly on recreational print text, the researcher speculates that a more in-depth examination may show that boys’ literacy preferences may lean towards digital texts rather than print texts. Other studies indicate that boys have a different perspective of reading (Smith & Wilhem, 2002) that is not generally addressed in the classrooms. It is suggested that classrooms tend to be more female dominant and that female teachers unconsciously choose literacy that is more appealing to girls (Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991). In contrast, Chen (2008) asserts that in Taiwan, reading is not considered a feminine activity, and results from some of her previous studies indicated that college females and older women (60 years and older) read less than their male counterparts.

In defense of male students, Brozo (2006) advocates that boys “have passions, hobbies, aspirations, and experiences rife with opportunities for genuine curricular links” (p. 71). The

researcher suggests that teachers need to look at the boys' existing competencies and tap into their resources (Brozo, 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, 2004), which means changing the traditional classroom approaches to include a more diverse approach with alternatives to teaching (Brozo, 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002,2004; Kovalik, 2008) that would benefit both boys and girls (Gee, 2011; Alveramnn, 2008; Kovalik, 2008).

Logan and Johnston (2009), in comparing the reading aptitudes and attitudes among girls and boys, found that reading attitude was a bigger factor than ability. In this study, there were almost an equal amount of girls as boys who fit the avid reader profile. There were 28 girls and 19 boys. This suggests that boys were also as strong in literacy ability as girls. Perhaps the concern lies in the differences in literacy interests, and their beliefs and perceptions of themselves as competent readers (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). It appears that self-perception or self-efficacy and beliefs about one's reading experiences and capabilities are better determinants of reading success than reading aptitude. The researcher concurs with the following statement Logan and Johnston (2009) concluded:

Indeed, the strongest relationship was found between reading ability and competency beliefs, highlighting the possible influence that success or failure has on children's beliefs in their ability. As before, when the results were split by gender, it was only boys' reading ability that correlated with their attitude to school. It seems that an important source of gender differences may be detectable in how attitudes, ability and beliefs relate to each other, rather than in differences in mean performance levels (which have been found to be small and so may have little applicability in the real world (pp. 209-210).

Smith and Wilhelm's (2002) interviews with young men on their literacy practices revealed that the boys reported they felt positive about their literacy competencies outside of school, but opportunities to demonstrate their literacy abilities were not always available for them in school. This sentiment to reading competencies outside of school may also be reflective of the 19 male avid reader readers in this study. The avid male readers in this study perhaps feel competent in literacy and have developed a sense of self-efficacy towards reading and may be a reason why they met the ARI criteria.

## **Conclusions**

Several conclusions were developed based on results and data analysis of this study. It was confirmed that students who have strong reading strategies are better at comprehending text and as a result perform better on achievement tests. These high achievers in reading tend to share some common characteristics that are indicative of their reading success. Access, for example, was a major indicator of literacy development. In this study, results confirmed other empirical data that having access to reading materials results in more time spent reading. More time spent on reading can be done at school by increasing sustained silent reading (Duke, 2000; Guthrie et al., 1999; Krashen, 2004) with a book of their choice (Kindig, 2012). The amount of time spent on recreational reading at home also contributes to literacy development (Guthrie et al., 1999; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). For this reason access is important and having books at home or a well-stocked library are paramount to student success.

It has been confirmed that libraries are related to high achievement in reading (Krashen, 1993). Libraries in the classroom, in the school, and in the community are one of the best resources for literacy materials. However, this study confirmed other empirical data showing that

children of poverty usually have little access to literacy materials (Duke, 2000). The fewer books these children have at home compiled with mediocre school libraries, poorer public libraries, and fewer bookstores are less likely to become devoted readers. As a result, these children most probably will not become readers as adults, which can have major effects in their lives at many levels. Although Palm City does not have a popular bookstore, it does have two flourishing public libraries that facilitate the community. This implied that avid readers do have access.

The study also confirmed empirical data that ethnicity and gender are not significant causes for literacy development. This study established that Latino middle school students are just as accomplished in reading as other racial/ethnic populations, and that males hold literacy competencies as much as females. Current data indicated that previous stereotypes for Latinos and male students are changing. This study, in conjunction with other studies, is dispelling these myths. Moreover, results implied that the middle school students in South Texas are comparable to other teenagers in the nation and in other countries. Finally, a recurring theme that surfaced was the important role of teachers and parents. This study suggested that students who have parents and teachers who attend to their academic needs are most likely to succeed in school. Other studies shown in Chapter 5, (de la Piedra, 2010; Chen, 2008; Strommen & Mates, 2004), also indicated that teacher classroom practices together with parental involvement can predict literacy development in students.

For the student participants in this study, it is evident that motivation for reading, large amounts of time spent in recreational reading, access to literacy materials, fair family income, and great self-efficacy are related to high reading achievement. However, the study was limited to only quantitative data and did not include qualitative data that may perhaps make the researcher consider other aspects or develop a different perspective. During the data analysis, the



researcher thought about other possible research questions and other ways to extend this research. The results in this study are worthy of further research especially with the student population in Palm City, where very little research is conducted.

## **Limitations**

There were several limitations while the study was conducted and the data analyzed.

1. It is difficult to generalize the findings in this study due to certain limitations with the sample population. A limitation is the sample population was limited to only middle school students. Another limitation was the charter schools. Charter schools do not clearly represent the majority of the students in Palm City. The study was also limited to the Latino/a population in South Texas. A more robust sample population would increase the generalizability.
2. A notable limitation was the lack of qualitative data. The researcher would have liked to interview a few of the avid readers to learn about their literacy practices and to gain a deeper understanding of their selected choices on the reading questionnaire. Interviews would reveal reasons for their reading preference and types of conversations they have with their friends and families about literacy/reading. It would also provide an opportunity to compare the survey responses with interview responses for clarity and accuracy.
3. Interviews may help reveal students' perspective on literacy. In some studies, students perceived reading differently from teachers and researchers. Educators and researchers see reading as a broad activity that includes reading text messages, emails, instructions, forms, internet websites, to name a few. On the other hand,

student interviews in some studies showed that students view reading as something academic that they do in the classroom or that is assigned by teachers, and most of all, associated almost exclusively with school. They “do not associate reading or literacy with fun, out of school activities” (Pitcher et al., 2007, p. 391). It would be interesting to explore how students in South Texas perceive reading.

4. The reading questionnaire was limited to books and print texts. It would make sense to explore the digital literacies of these enthusiastic readers since technology is a big part of their lives and more studies are needed in this area.
5. Some of the limitations were managerial problems during the data collection. For example, some of the classrooms had access to computers and the students were able to take the survey a few at a time without interrupting instruction. However, this was time consuming and students became anxious to take their turn. There were also technical problems with the computer that prevented some students from completing their surveys. A solution was to take the survey on paper, which defeated the purpose of having an electronic survey that collects data instantaneously. These are considerations for future electronic surveys.

## **Implications**

1. One implication of this research is the finding that access to reading materials was important for avid readers. Schools and communities should see investment in libraries as one way to encourage avid readers. If schools had high interest and high quality libraries and children had better access to literacy materials in school, there could be more avid readers. Because reading for enjoyment has been linked to high reading achievement,

providing students with better libraries in the classrooms as well as in the school library would greatly benefit students in South Texas.

2. Ethnicity and gender were not significant factors in reading achievement in this study. These results were contrary to other research. A second implication of this study is that assumptions are challenged about who might be or might not be a good reader.
3. Finally, a third implication would be that charter schools are impacting more and more students. Student success may have been impacted by access to charter schools. If charter schools are increasing student success then communities should consider further investment in charter schools.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

1. The NAEP (2013) reported that students in Texas have not made any gains in reading since 1992. Research is needed to study changes in education since 1992 that may reveal reasons why reading test scores remain stagnant.
2. Because Illinois has some of the highest reading scores in the nation according to National Assessment of Educational Progress (2013b), it may prove useful to examine their literacy practices and compare them to practices in Texas to determine what changes we can make in Texas to raise test scores.
3. A further examination of this study would be to investigate teacher instructional practices and how it impacts reading engagement with avid and non-avid readers.
4. Further research on school libraries is needed in Palm City. Based on experience, the researcher observed that the library in Seaside Science Academy was very small, especially for a K-12 grade school. A conversation with the librarian revealed that she worked there as a part time librarian, and had an assistant, but neither of them were

trained in Library Sciences. In contrast, the library at Borderland Preparatory School appeared to be much bigger. Their library had several computers and places to sit and read. The librarian at BPS stated that she was a trained librarian and had an assistant. Neither of the librarians at the two charter schools offered more information, such as the amount of books housed, the types of genres, or the number of books per grade level. Further investigation is needed on the libraries at these two charter schools as well as the public libraries to determine the relationship to literacy development.

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## APPENDIX A

### PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

#### **Characteristics of Adolescent Avid Readers in 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> Grade at Two Charter Schools in South Texas**

##### **Introduction**

The purpose of this form is to provide you (as the parent of a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to let your child participate in this research study. This form will also be used to record your consent if you decide to let your child be involved in this study.

If you agree, your child will be asked to participate in a research to study adolescents in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. The purpose of this study is to examine the characteristics of young avid readers. Your child was selected to be a possible participant because he/she is enrolled in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade at a charter school in South Texas.

##### **What will my child be asked to do?**

If you allow your child to participate in this study, he/she will be asked to complete a survey online at school during their computer lab class period. This survey will take approximately 20 minutes in class. The survey will be conducted in one day

##### **What are the risks involved in this study?**

The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks your child ordinarily encounters in daily life.

##### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

By participating in the study, your child's voice will be heard and the experience will affirm the value of their opinion. This will also contribute to your child's sense of self worth in their schooling because they know their contributions may enhance future curriculum decision making. Your child's participation will also provide teachers and administrators insightful information regarding experiences with reading which will also help with curriculum suggestions to better shape the curriculum to meet the needs of the students.

##### **Does my child have to participate?**

No, your child does not have to be in this research study. You can agree to allow your child to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty.

This research study will take place during regular classroom activities. An alternate activity will be available if you do not want your child to participate. Your child will be allowed to sit quietly and read a book while the participants complete the survey.

**What if my child does not want to participate?**

In addition to your permission, your child must agree to participate in the study. If your child does not want to participate he/she will not be included in the study without penalty. If your child initially agrees to be in the study he/she can withdraw at any point during the study without penalty.

**Who will know about my child's participation in this research study?**

This study is confidential. All student data will be collected personally by the researcher and kept in a password-protected computer accessible only to the researcher. The participants will be assigned an identification number to distinguish them.

The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you or your child to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Sandra Murillo Sutterby will have access to the records.

**Whom do I contact with questions about the research?**

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Sandra M. Sutterby by phone at (956) 546-8871 or by email at [ssutterby@islander.tamucc.edu](mailto:ssutterby@islander.tamucc.edu).

**Whom do I contact about my child's rights as a research participant?**

This research study has been reviewed by the Research Compliance Office and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact Erin Sherman, Research Compliance Officer, at (361)825-2497 or [erin.sherman@tamucc.edu](mailto:erin.sherman@tamucc.edu).

**Signature**

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to allow your child to participate in this study.

**Signature of Parent/Guardian:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Printed Parent Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Printed Name of Child:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Person Obtaining Permission:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Printed Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### ASSENT FORM

#### Characteristics of Adolescent Avid Readers in Sixth to Eighth Grade at Two Charter Schools in South Texas

##### **Introduction**

My name is Sandra Murillo Sutterby and I am a doctoral student at Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi. I am doing a research project about the characteristics of young avid readers in 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Research is a way to test new ideas. Research helps us learn new things.

I would like you to help with my study because I am very interested in your unique input about reading. Also, you have been chosen because you are in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and you are attending a charter in South Texas..

##### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you want to help with my study, I will ask you to individually complete a survey online with about 24 questions. You will complete the survey at a computer during your computer lab class period. This study will be given in one day and will take about 20 minutes to complete from start to finish

##### **What are the risks to me?**

The risks to you are minimal. The risks to you are no bigger than the risks you have each day.

##### **What good can happen?**

The good things that could happen if you participate in this study is that your voice will be heard and it will validate your opinion. It will also help your teachers and the school to better understand your thoughts and experiences about reading which may help design the school curriculum in the future to meet your needs as students.

##### **Do I have to be part of the study?**

No. You do not have to be part of the study. Your parents said you can be in the study, and you do not have to because they said you can. I am a part of the study because I want to.

##### **Who will know I am part of the study?**

No one will know you are part of the study. Your name will be kept secret from everyone except your teacher and your parents. You can stop being part of the study whenever you want to. You can tell your parents, your teacher, me, or any adult that you would like to stop, and it is OK.

##### **Signature**

Now that I have asked my questions and think I know about the study and what it means, here is what I decided:

\_\_\_\_\_ OK, I'll be in the study.  
the study.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I do not want to be in

I have been told about the research study. I had a chance to ask questions. I know I can ask questions at any time. I want to be in the study.

If you sign your name below, it means that you want to be in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Your Name (Printed) Age Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Your Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Witness Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Assent Date

\_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX C

### Reading Questionnaire: We want to know your opinion about reading

#### About You

---

1. What is your identification number?
2. Are you a:      Girl                      Boy
3. How old are you?      9          10          11          12          13          14          15          16
4. Which one of these best describes you? (Choose ONE only)
  - a. African American or Black
  - b. American Indian or Alaska Native
  - c. White (Caucasian)
  - d. Asian or Pacific Islander
  - e. Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin (Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, Cuban, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rican, Spaniard, Central American, or South American)

#### You and Reading

---

5. How much do you enjoy reading? (Choose ONE only)
  - a. Very much – a great way to spend time
  - b. About medium – an interesting way to spend time
  - c. A little bit – an okay way to spend time
  - d. Not very much – a boring way to spend time
  - e. I don't enjoy reading
6. How good a reader do you think you are? (Choose ONE only)
  - a. A very good reader
  - b. A good reader
  - c. An okay reader
  - d. A not-so-good reader
7. Do you read in another language other than English?              Yes      No  
If you answered yes, tell us what other language(s) do you read in.
8. What do you think about reading? (Choose as many as apply to you)
  - a. I would feel embarrassed if my friends saw me reading outside of class
  - b. The more I read, the better I get at it
  - c. I only read when I have to
  - d. Reading is cool
  - e. I prefer watching TV to reading

- f. Reading is more for girls than for boys
  - g. I do not read as well as other students in my class
  - h. Reading is easy for me
9. How often do you read outside of class? (Choose ONE only)
- a. Every day or almost every day
  - b. A few times a week (3-5 times)
  - c. About once a week
  - d. A few times a month (more than half of the month)
  - e. About once a month
  - f. Almost never
  - g. Never
10. When you read, how long do you normally read for? (Choose ONE only)
- a. Longer than 1 hour
  - b. About 1 hour
  - c. Up to 30 minutes
  - d. Up to 20 minutes
  - e. Up to 10 minutes
  - f. I don't read

You are half way through the survey!!!

11. How does reading make you feel? (Choose as many as you like)
- a. Happy
  - b. Bored
  - c. Cool
  - d. intelligent
  - e. Sad
  - f. Calm
  - g. Nervous
  - h. Curious
  - i. Stressed

12. Which of these do you read outside of class? (Choose one for EACH statement)

- |                                                                 |         |        |       |       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------|-------|-------|
| a. Fiction books                                                | Monthly | Weekly | Daily | Never |
| b. Non-fiction books                                            | Monthly | Weekly | Daily | Never |
| c. Comics or graphic novels                                     | Monthly | Weekly | Daily | Never |
| d. Magazines                                                    | Monthly | Weekly | Daily | Never |
| e. Newspapers                                                   | Monthly | Weekly | Daily | Never |
| f. Poems                                                        | Monthly | Weekly | Daily | Never |
| g. Song lyrics                                                  | Monthly | Weekly | Daily | Never |
| h. Manuals/instructions                                         | Monthly | Weekly | Daily | Never |
| i. Text messages                                                | Monthly | Weekly | Daily | Never |
| j. E-mails                                                      | Monthly | Weekly | Daily | Never |
| k. Instant messages<br>(MSN messenger, Yahoo News, Skype, etc.) | Monthly | Weekly | Daily | Never |
| l. Blogs                                                        | Monthly | Weekly | Daily | Never |
| m. Ebooks                                                       | Monthly | Weekly | Daily | Never |
| n. Websites                                                     | Monthly | Weekly | Daily | Never |
| o. Social networking<br>site messages (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) | Monthly | Weekly | Daily | Never |
| p. Books and other texts in<br>a language other than English    | Monthly | Weekly | Daily | Never |

13. Have you ever:

- |                                    |     |    |          |
|------------------------------------|-----|----|----------|
| a. been given a book as a present? | Yes | No | Not sure |
| b. been to a public library?       | Yes | No | Not sure |
| c. been to a bookstore?            | Yes | No | Not sure |

14. How many books (fiction, non-fiction) have you read in the last 12 months? (Choose ONE only)

- More than 10
- About 7 – 9
- About 4 – 6
- About 1 – 3

15. How many books do you have at home? (Choose ONE only)

- More than 500 books
- 250 – 500
- 100 – 250
- 50 – 100
- 10 – 50
- 1 – 10

16. What types of **fiction** do you like to read? (Choose as many as apply to you)

- a. adventure
- b. animal-related
- c. crime/detective/police
- d. war/spy-related
- e. horror/ghost
- f. science-fiction
- g. fantasy
- h. sports-related
- i. poetry
- j. romance/relationships
- k. comedy/humor
- l. realistic teenage fiction
- m. historical fiction
- n. mysteries
- o. book series
- p. I don't read fiction

17. What types of non-fiction do you read? (Choose as many as apply to you)

- a. History
- b. Biographies/autobiographies
- c. Home decorating
- d. Crafts and hobbies
- e. Nature/animals
- f. Magazines (National Geographic, Ranger Rick, Highlights, Sports Illustrated, etc.)
- g. Cooking
- h. Politics
- i. Religion (Bible, scripture books, etc.)
- j. Self-help
- k. Computers
- l. Health and medicine
- m. Poetry and plays
- n. Travel
- o. Gardening
- p. Psychology
- q. I don't read non-fiction

You're Almost Finished!!

You and Technology

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18. Which of the following do you use to read? (Choose as many as apply to you)

- a. Tablet or iPad
- b. paper (books, magazines, newspapers, etc.)
- c. computer
- d. cell phone
- e. Kindle or Nook (eReader)
- f. audiobook
- g. Other electronic devices not mentioned

19. Which of these do you have? (Choose as many as apply to you)

- a. A blog
- b. A desk of your own at home
- c. Books of your own
- d. A profile on a social networking site (Facebook, Email, Twitter, etc.)
- e. Your own computer/laptop
- f. Your own cell phone
- g. Kindle or Nook (eReader)
- h. Tablet or iPad

20. Which of these do you have at home? (Choose as many as apply to you)

- a. Daily or weekend newspaper
- b. Magazines
- c. Computer or laptop
- d. Internet

You and Your Family, Teachers and Friends

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21. Who taught you to read? (Choose as many as apply to you) FROM 2005 SURVEY

- a. mother
- b. father
- c. grandparent(s)
- d. brother or sister
- e. friend
- f. teacher
- g. teacher assistant
- h. other

22. How often do you talk with your family about what you are reading? (Pick ONE only)

- a. Every day or almost every day
- b. At least once a week
- c. At least once a month
- d. A few times a year
- e. Rarely
- f. I don't talk about what I am reading with my family

23. Who encourages you to read? (Please pick one for each question)

- a. Does your mother encourage you to read:  
a.yes, a lot      b. yes, sometimes      c. no, not at all d. not applicable
- b. Does your father encourage you to read:  
a.yes, a lot      b. yes, sometimes      c. no, not at all d. not applicable
- c. Does your brother and/or sister encourage you to read:  
a.yes, a lot      b. yes, sometimes      c. no, not at all d. not applicable
- d. Do your friends encourage you to read?  
a.yes, a lot      b. yes, sometimes      c. no, not at all d. not applicable
- e. Do your    encourage you to read?  
a. yes, a lot      b. yes, sometimes      c. no, not at all d. not applicable
- f. Tell us who else encourages you to read that is not mentioned above?

24. Who in your family spends time reading? (Please pick ONE for each person) FROM 2011 SURVEY

Does your mother spend time reading?

- a.yes, a lot      b. yes, sometimes      c. no, not at all d. not applicable

Does your father spend time reading?

- a. yes, a lot      b. yes, sometimes      c. no, not at all d. not applicable

If you have a brother and/or sister, does he or she spend time reading?

- a.                      yes, a lot      b. yes, sometimes      c. no, not at all d. not applicable

Do your friends spend time reading?

- a.                      yes, a lot      b. yes, sometimes      c. no, not at all d. not applicable

### Last Question

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25. How do you typically spend your leisure (free) time after school? Choose all that apply to you.

- a. Playing computer games
- b. Using your cell phone
- c. Reading for enjoyment
- d. Other hobbies (sports, dance, etc)
- e. Talking to or spending time with friends
- f. Doing things on the computer like social networking (Facebook, Email, etc.), browsing the Internet, etc.
- g. Watching TV

That's it!!! Thank you again for answering all of these questions!