Young People's Self-Perceptions as Readers

An investigation including family, peer and school influences

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Executive summary

Recent developments in literacy teaching and research have tended to focus on the technical aspects of reading. However, studies continue to highlight the importance of the affective aspects of reading, such as motivation and attitudes, and the reader self-concept.

This study of over 1,600 Key Stage 2 (KS2) and Key Stage 3 (KS3) pupils explored young people's perceptions of themselves as readers and aimed to challenge assumptions of what it means to be a reader. Some of the key questions explored in this survey included the extent to which young people see themselves as readers, what it means to them to be a reader, what characteristics they typically assign to readers, what materials a reader enjoys and the extent to which these perceptions are shaped by their family, friends and school.

Reading habits:
- The majority of young people (58%) enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot and rate themselves as proficient readers. Girls enjoyed reading more than boys. Most young people read on a weekly basis, either every day or once/twice a week.
- A great majority (71%) of young people also defined themselves as readers. More girls than boys saw themselves as readers.
- Magazines, websites and emails were read most frequently outside of school, while poetry manuals/instruction and factual books were read least often. More girls than boys read magazines, emails, blogs/networking websites and poetry, while more boys than girls read newspapers, comics/graphic novels and manuals/instructions.

Reader perceptions:
- Most pupils associated reading with positive feelings, such as feeling calm and happy. A third of pupils said that reading makes them feel bored, while only a small percentage saw reading as stressful or an activity that makes them nervous. More girls than boys said that reading makes them feel calm and happy.
- When asked to imagine someone who enjoys reading, most pupils viewed readers positively and as achievers. A third of pupils believed that readers are geeks/nerds, while a quarter perceived them to be boring. Girls perceived readers differently from boys, believing that readers are clever/intelligent and someone who will do well in life, while boys were more likely to view readers as geeky/nerds.
- Unlike their own reading preferences, the majority of young people believed that readers enjoy fiction books, followed by magazines, poetry and factual books. Emails and blogs/networking websites, which were among the four most read materials outside of school, were considered materials enjoyed by a reader by only a minority of young people. There were no gender differences in their assessment of what types of material a reader enjoys.
- Most pupils believed that being a good reader means being able to read long books, to read frequently and to read different materials. Nearly half of them also believed that it means being able to read long words and to be good at reading aloud. Pupils had similar views of what it means to be a reader irrespective of gender.
- Most young people believed that reading is for everyone, with only a small percentage stating that reading is more of a girls' activity. There were no significant gender differences in the degree to which they saw reading as a gendered activity.
- While only a small percentage of young people saw reading as more important than TV, sport, computers/computer games, hanging out with friends and listening to music, these perceptions changed dramatically when they were asked to consider the impact of reading to help them do well in life. In this case, nearly half of them believed that reading is more important than TV and more important than computers/computer games. More boys than girls believed that reading is more important than TV and listening to music at

the moment, while more girls than boys believed that it is more important than computers/ computer games. These differences remained when asked to assess the importance of reading to do well in life. More girls than boys indicated that it is more important than sport, while more boys than girls believed that reading is more important than hanging out with friends and listening to music.

School influences:

- Nearly half of young people did not know whether adults in their school thought that they were good readers, while two-fifths thought they did. More boys than girls believed that adults in their school think that they read well, while a greater percentage of girls than boys did not know what adults in their school think about their reading.
- To gauge their perception of the types of materials promoted at school, pupils were asked which texts adults in their school encouraged them to read. Contrary to their own reading choices, but in line with their perception of the materials a reader enjoys, young people believed that adults in their school encourage them to read fiction books, factual books and poetry. There were no gender differences in the types of materials boys and girls feel are promoted by schools, with the exception that more girls than boys indicated that adults in their school encourage them to read fiction books and poetry.

Family influences:

- When asked whether anyone in their family thinks they are a good reader, most young people said that their mother believes that they are a good reader, followed by their father. However, nearly a sixth of pupils stated that no one in their family thinks so. There were no differences between male and female pupils in their perceptions of how good a reader their family thinks they are.
- Most pupils also indicated that their mother encourages them to read, while considerably fewer said that their father or sibling encourages them. Nearly a quarter of young people believed that no one in their family encourages them to read. There were no gender differences in the level of encouragement to read.

Peer influences:

- Young people were generally uncertain whether their friends are readers or not and whether their friends believe that they are good readers. Most also indicated that their friends do not encourage them to read. More girls than boys indicated that their friends are readers and that their friends believe that they read well and encourage them to read.
- The materials they believed their friends are reading largely mirrored their own reading choices, with magazines, websites and emails being the most frequently chosen texts. More girls than boys stated that their friends read a variety of reading materials.
- Their perceptions of how their friends view readers also closely resembled their own views of readers, with the majority of young people believing that their friends perceive readers to be clever/intelligent and someone who will do well in life. However, compared to their own assessment, a larger percentage believed that their friends see readers as geeky/nerds. More girls than boys stated that their friends view readers more positively.

The reader self-concept

Whether young people saw themselves as readers or not greatly impacted their reading habits, reader perceptions and their perceptions of family, friends and school influences. For example,

- Young people who defined themselves as readers rated themselves as more proficient and indicated reading more frequently outside of school. Nearly half of self-defined non-readers stated that they never read outside of school.
- Self-defined readers endorsed a greater variety of texts, with magazines, fiction books and websites being the most frequently read types of reading material. In contrast, self-

defined non-readers indicated reading magazines, websites and blogs/networking websites most frequently outside of school.

- Self-defined readers associated reading with positive feelings, such as feeling calm, while non-readers associated reading with negative feelings, such as boredom and stress. Self-defined readers also view readers differently, seeing them as being clever/intelligent, while self-defined non-readers had a more negative view of readers, believing them to be geeks/nerds, boring and someone who does not go out much.
- More self-defined readers than non-readers believed that being a good reader means reading long books and words, reading often, reading different materials and being good at reading aloud. Conversely, a greater percentage of non-readers said that it would annoy them if someone said that they were good readers.
- Reading played a greater role in the life of readers, with more self-defined readers than non-readers stating that at the moment, reading is more important than TV, sport, computer games, hanging out with friends and listening to music. These differences persisted when asked to evaluate the importance of reading to do well in life.
- More readers than non-readers also believed that adults in their school think they read well and promote texts, such as fiction books, factual books and poetry.
- A greater percentage of self-defined non-readers than readers believed that no one in their family thinks they are a good reader and that no one encourages them to read.
- More self-defined readers than non-readers believed that their friends are readers, that their friends think they are good readers and that their friends encourage them to read. Compared to non-readers, readers were also more likely to indicate that their friends read a greater variety of texts and that their friends have a positive view of reading.

Gender and the reader self-concept

A lot of attention has been focused on the male reluctant reader and we therefore also explored the connection between gender and seeing oneself as a reader. Of note is that there was generally more divergence in the responses between reading boys and girls than between their non-reading counterparts. These findings include:

- Both reading and non-reading girls indicated that they read more outside of school than their male counterparts. For example, more reading and non-reading girls than boys said that they read magazines, fiction books, emails and blogs/networking websites, while more reading and non-reading boys than girls stated that they read newspapers and comics/graphic novels.
- Compared to reading boys, more reading girls believed that readers are clever/intelligent, someone who will do well and is happy, while more reading boys than girls saw readers as geeky/nerds. With respect to non-reading young people, more non-reading girls than boys believed that readers are clever/intelligent and someone who does not go out much.
- More non-reading boys than girls believed that reading is more of a girls' thing. More boy than girl readers believed that reading is more important than watching TV and listening to music, while more girl than boy readers indicated that reading is more important than computer games. There were no such differences between non-reading boys and girls. Differences between reading boys and girls persisted when they were asked about the importance of reading to do well in life. There was only one significant difference between non-reading boys and girls, with more non-reading boys than girls saying that reading is more important than hanging out with friends.
- There were few differences between the groups in terms of materials they believe adults in their school are encouraging them to read. Compared to their male counterparts, both reading and non-reading girls were more likely to indicate that adults encourage them to read fiction books and poetry.
- Non-reading boys were more likely to say that no one in their family thinks they are a good reader, while non-reading girls were more likely to indicate that they did not know what their family thinks about their reading.

- Unlike their non-reading peers, who did not differ significantly in the extent to which they said that their friends were reading, more reading girls than boys said that their friends read. More reading girls than boys and more non-reading girls than boys also indicated that their friends think that they are good readers. There were no differences amongst the groups in terms of peer encouragement to read.
- More reading boys than girls stated that their friends read magazines, websites, emails and fiction books, while more reading boys than girls said that their friends read comics/graphic novels, newspapers and manuals. Conversely, more non-reading boys than girls stated that their friends read magazines, emails and blogs/networking websites, while more non-reading girls than boys did not know what their friends were reading.
- Both reading and non-reading girls were more likely to believe that their friends view readers differently from their male counterparts.

The present research raises a number of implications in a climate that is literacy-focused. Firstly, those who make and implement policy should be cautious about encouraging children and young people to become 'readers' and to be known as and see themselves as such, when many do not see being a reader as something desirable. Our research has highlighted the importance of young people's perceptions of what it means to be a reader and how these perceptions appear to shape their reading habits.

The importance of changing these perceptions is particularly relevant because of the discrepancies between the materials that children and young people think a reader reads, or think that their school encourages them to read, and the reading matter they choose for themselves. It is striking that large numbers of even those who do not consider themselves readers *do* read; the important point is that they do not often read fiction. They are also less likely than the 'readers' to recognise that a reader may read a wide range of materials. As indicated above, those working to encourage reading in the home, as well as reading for pleasure, may find it helpful to bear in mind that the top reading materials outside school are not those the children believe their schools encourage, books and poetry, but rather magazines, websites and emails. Policymakers and practitioners may wish to consider whether non-book reading materials are sufficiently valued as having a contribution to make to educational development and attainment.

Meanwhile, schools also need to consider the extent to which they encourage their pupils to read for enjoyment and, moreover, the range of reading materials that they promote. It is noteworthy that pupils in this study, who tended to perceive that their schools encourage them to read books and poetry, all attended schools that had signed up to our Reading Connects initiative (www.readingconnects.org.uk) and that were, in theory, promoting all forms of reading.

This research also highlights the existence of a group overlooked by current policy drives: namely, girls who do not see themselves as readers. These girls are likely to say that reading makes them feel bored, and that a reader is someone who is clever and will do well, but is also boring and doesn't go out much. The implication, again, is that reading is something for other, 'clever' people. The answer may not be in attempting to persuade these girls that they are readers after all, or in launching a "girls into books"-type initiative to mirror that for boys, but rather in simply encouraging them to read what they enjoy, while promoting a wide range of materials to them: something that is also important for those girls (and indeed boys) who report that they do not read at all.

Of interest is the finding that when 35 professionals from research policy, practice and the media were interviewed by the NLT about a range of literacy issues for the coming year, most interviewees believed that reading for pleasure is not currently a "hot" topic but most certainly should be a focus of attention in 2008 (NLT, 2007). The National Year of Reading provides an ideal opportunity to promote the value of many different kinds of reading, not only for enjoyment but also as having a contribution to make to educational development and attainment.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The literature shows that reading for pleasure benefits young people in numerous ways (see Clark and Rumbold, 2006 for an overview). For example, the amount children read for enjoyment and for school has a major impact on their reading achievement (Cox and Guthrie, 2001). Similarly, it also increases children's vocabulary and general knowledge. Indeed, the latest PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study; Twist et al., 2007) report showed that there is a link between reading for pleasure and educational attainment, while findings by the OECD *Reading for Change* study (2002) showed that reading enjoyment is more important for children's educational success than their family's socio-economic status. Thus, "the frequent admonition for children to 'Read, read, read' makes sense in that extensive reading promotes fluency, vocabulary, and background knowledge" (Pressley, 2000, p. 556).

Conversely, children who read very little do not have the benefits that come with reading, and studies show that when struggling readers are not motivated to read, their opportunities to learn decrease dramatically (eg Baker, Dreher and Guthrie, 2000). The latest PIRLS (2007) report also showed that attitudes to reading of 10-year-olds in England are poor compared to children in many other countries, and have declined slightly since a previous PIRLS report in 2001. Despite over three quarters of children in England agreeing with the statement that "reading is easy for me", children in England reported reading for pleasure less frequently than their peers in many other countries. It is therefore important that parents, teachers and literacy consultants examine the factors that may influence young people's literacy lives at home or at school (Chen, 2005).

One factor that influences an individual's literacy practices is the extent to which they see themselves as readers, or the reader self-concept. According to Henk and Melnick (1995: 472), "how an individual feels about him or herself as a reader could clearly influence whether reading would be sought or avoided, the amount of effort that would occur during reading, and how persistently comprehension would be pursued". Yet, how children perceive themselves as readers and the relationship between these perceptions and reading achievement is a relatively recent area of research (Chapman and Tunmer, 1995; Chapman, Tunmer and Prochnow, 2000). To what extent do young people see themselves as readers? What does it mean to them to be a reader? What characteristics are typically assigned to readers and what materials does a reader enjoy? These are some of the key questions that were explored in this survey of pupils from 29 primary and secondary schools in England.

In addition, this study investigated the social influences on pupils as readers, namely their perception of home, peer and school stimuli. Research has indicated time and again that the home environment is a better predictor of children's attitudes towards reading than social class membership. Availability of reading materials, amount of reading at home, amount of reading guidance and encouragement, and the extent to which parents served as models by engaging in reading are all predictors of early reading ability and are factors that continue to exert an influence even when the pupil enters secondary school.

Although much less thoroughly researched than the home environment, peer relationships have also been shown to influence a young person's self-concept. For example, studies into the peer influences on achievement have shown that children's aspirations are quite similar to those of their peers. A child wishing to be accepted may choose not to work as hard in school if the peer group does not value achievement. Similarly, peers are influential in shaping young people's reading choices (eg Howard, 2006). We therefore also explored the extent to which they believed their friends were readers, what their friends were reading and what perceptions they believe their friends have of readers.

Finally, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the school also exerts a major influence on young people's reading habits and self-perceptions. When asked who should teach them to read in a previous

NLT survey (Clark and Foster, 2005), the majority of pupils stated that both the home and the school should teach them to read and encourage them to enjoy reading. Yet, teachers need to know what materials students are reading outside of school to better motivate students in the classroom (Wilson and Casey, 2007). Do primary and secondary pupils read for pleasure? If so, what are they reading? If we can better understand the recreational reading patterns of both primary and secondary students then perhaps we can increase their tendency to read (Wilson and Casey, 2007). Also, what types of materials do pupils feel are being encouraged by schools? And how do these texts converge with their reading preferences at home? These additional areas were explored in the present study.

Methodology

Schools that had signed up by April 2007 to Reading Connects, a DCSF-funded project run by the National Literacy Trust to encourage a whole-school reading culture, were contacted by email to see whether they would participate in this survey. Of the 46 schools that initially expressed an interest, 29 schools – over 1,600 pupils - took part in the online questionnaire. In addition to being emailed the link to the online questionnaire, teachers were also sent guidance on how to administer the questionnaire (see **Appendix A**).

The questionnaire (see **Appendix B**) was constructed to mirror many of the questions that had been asked in previous studies of children's and young people's reading habits, reading attitudes and self-concept. Two questionnaires are frequently used to measure reader self-concept – the Reading Self-Concept Scale (Chapman and Tunmer, 1999) and the Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk and Melnick, 1995). However, closer inspection of these instruments showed that they were too biased towards the functional aspect of reading (for example, the Reading Self-Concept Scale measures perceptions of competence, difficulty and attitudes towards reading), and did not cover enough of the areas that we thought were of interest, namely reader characteristics and what types of texts are enjoyed by readers. We therefore constructed our own questions for the purpose of this survey.

In addition to the pupils' age and gender, information on the socio-economic background was also sought. Many low-income households have fewer print resources available in their homes than those from higher income brackets. Consequently, a lack of access to books and other reading materials may result in children not being exposed to the cognitive and linguistic experiences that books and other texts provide (for a detailed account of the relationship between poor literacy skills and social inclusion, see Bird and Akerman, 2005). Indeed, a previous analysis by the NLT showed that pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds read less and hold more negative attitudes towards reading than pupils from more advantaged backgrounds (Clark and Akerman, 2006). In this study, self-reported take-up of free school meals was used as a crude indicator of socio-economic status. It should be noted that the findings relating to the impact of whether pupils received free school meals will be published separately later in 2008.

Survey findings are also frequently broken down by ethnicity. However, as already discussed in previous research (eg Hall and Cole, 1999), children's self-reporting of their ethnic group is highly problematic and frequently unreliable. Also, in order to do justice to the various minority ethnic groups, we would have had to use a large range of categories, which would have been beyond the scope of the present study and would have resulted in low numbers in each category. We therefore decided not to assess ethnic background within the present study.

The analyses in this report are predominantly based on basic descriptive statistics (such as frequency distributions) and two-way cross-tabulations. The data in this study were analysed using SPSS 13.0. Any result for which statistical significance is reported was significant at the conventional probability level of 0.05. This means that the result would be likely to occur by

chance only a few times in every 100 cases. In line with Hall and Cole (1999), however, some judgement is needed about the educational significance of these findings.

Chapter 2: Main findings (whole sample)

The final sample consisted of 1,620 pupils from 12 primary and 17 secondary schools. There was an almost equal representation of boys and girls within the sample (48.9% and 51.1%, respectively). Pupils were asked to indicate their age. **Table 2.1** shows that the majority of respondents were 12 and 13 years old.

Table 2.1: Age

	Percent	N
9	2.7	43
10	7.4	120
11	12.8	208
12	36.1	585
13	30.4	492
14	10.6	172

A fifth of pupils enjoyed reading "Very much", with over a third enjoying it "Quite a lot". However, a third of pupils didn't enjoy reading very much, while almost a tenth did not enjoy reading at all (see **Figure 2.1**). These percentages are similar to those found in a previous NLT survey (Clark and Foster, 2005). We considered whether the high prevalence of reading enjoyment was the result of a sampling bias of Reading Connect schools, which have already publicly stated their commitment to reading for pleasure by signing up to the initiative. However, this seems unlikely as other studies have found similar degrees of enjoyment. For example, the Nestlé Family Monitor (2003) reported that two-thirds (65%) of 11 to 18-year-olds found reading enjoyable, while the PIRLS survey indicated a similar percentage of Year 5 pupils who enjoyed reading either very much or a little. (Twist et al., 2007).

Figure 2.1: Do you enjoy reading?

8.2% | 20.1% | 37.5% | 34.2%

☐ Yes, very much ☐ Quite a lot ☐ Not very much ☐ Not at all
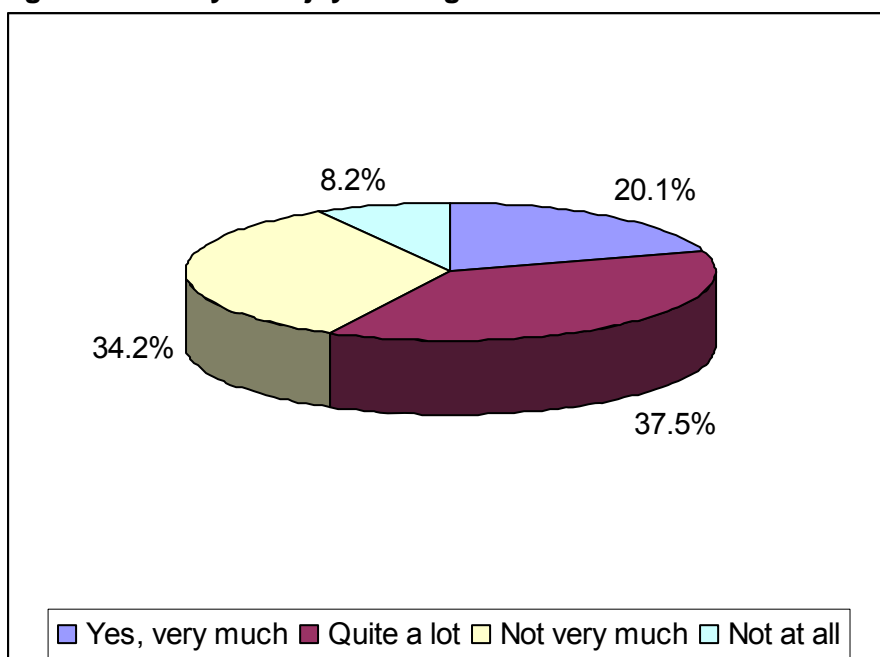
When asked to rate how good a reader they thought they were on a scale from 1-10, most pupils ranked themselves as proficient readers with 7, 8 or 9 (see **Figure 2.2**).

Figure 2.2: How good a reader do you think you are?
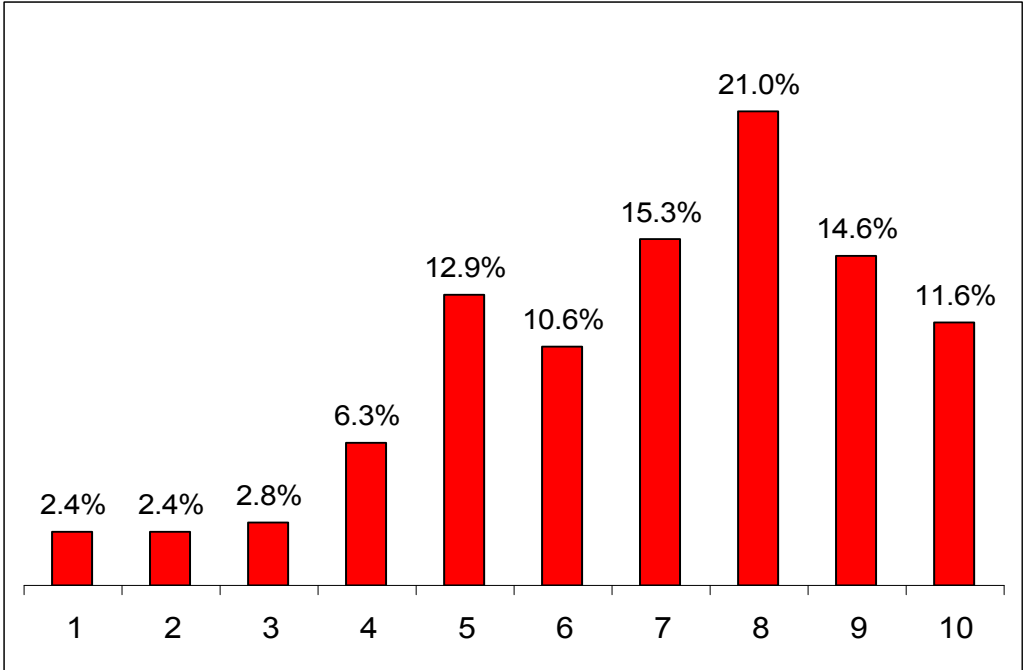
(Note: 1 = not a very good reader – 10 = an excellent reader)

Pupils were asked to indicate how often they read outside of school. Most pupils stated reading "Every day or almost every day" or "Once or twice a week" (see **Figure 2.3**). Roughly a sixth of pupils reported that they only read "Once or twice a month", while a tenth of pupils "Never or almost never" read outside of school.

Figure 2.3: How often do you read outside of school?
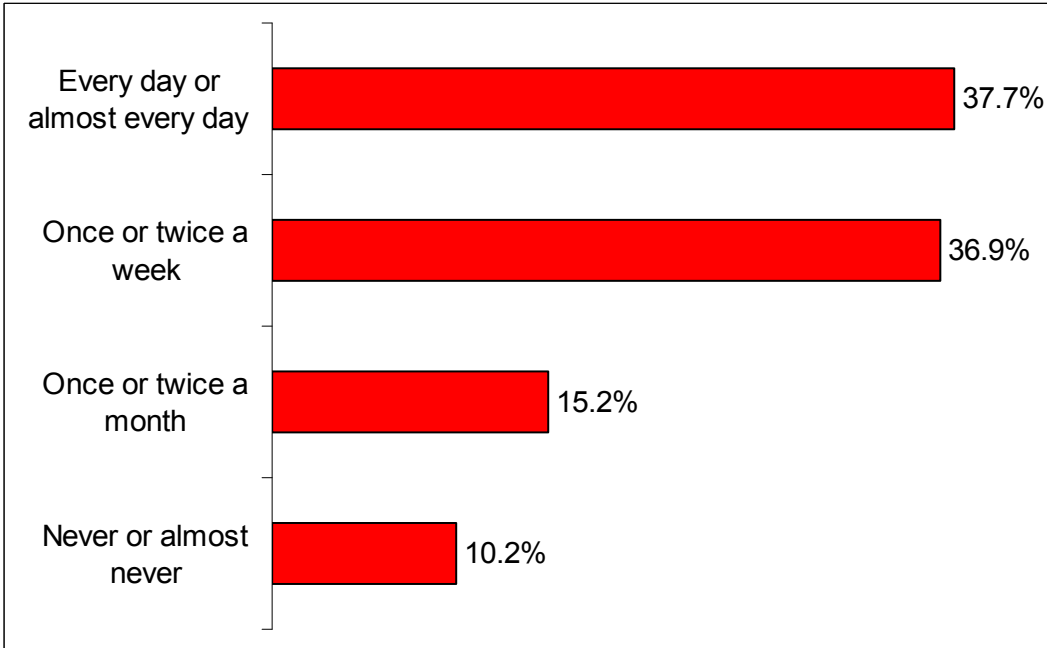
In addition to their reading frequency, pupils were also asked what types of material they were reading outside of class. In line with a previous NLT survey (Clark and Foster, 2005), **Figure 2.4** shows that magazines, followed by websites and emails were the most popular materials read outside of class. Poetry, manuals/instructions and factual books were the least preferred texts to be read outside of school.

Figure 2.4: Which of the following do you read outside of school more than once a month?

Material	Percentage
Magazines	77.0%
Websites	63.2%
Emails	58.7%
Blogs/networking websites	53.1%
Fiction books	53.0%
Newspapers	43.0%
Comics/graphic novels	33.7%
Factual books	25.1%
Manuals/instructions	22.1%
Poetry	21.0%
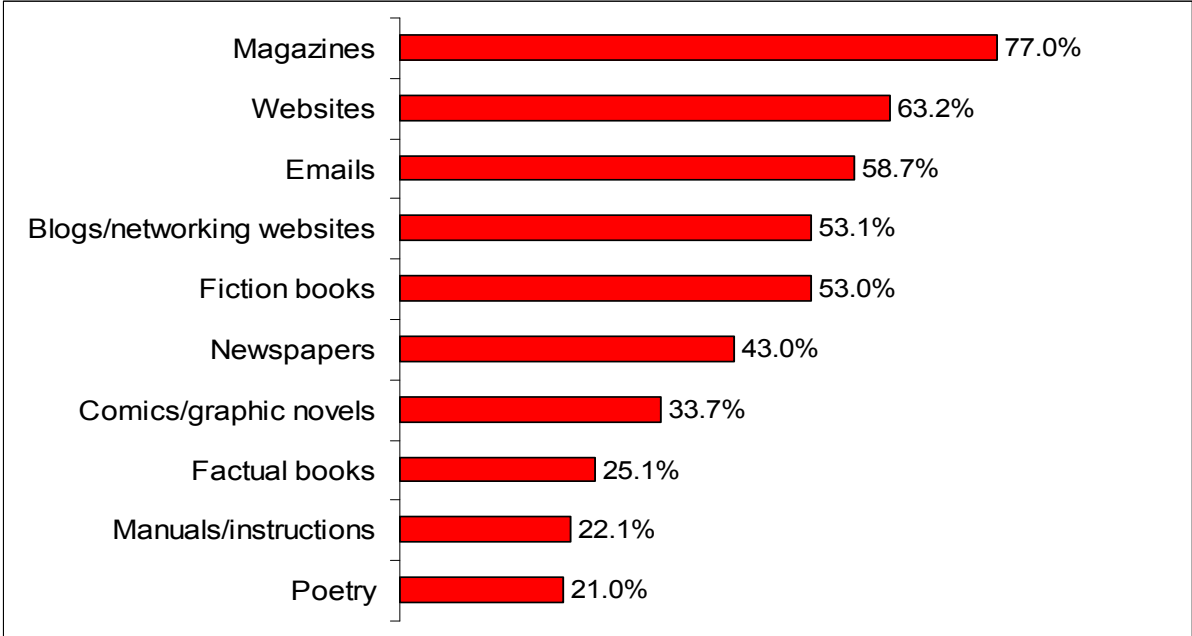
Pupils generally associated reading with positive feelings when asked how reading makes them feel (see **Figure 2.5**). Over two-thirds of readers stated that reading makes them feel calm, while nearly two-fifths of pupils also said that they felt happy. However, a third of pupils indicated that reading makes them feel bored. Only a small percentage of pupils perceived reading to be stressful or an activity that makes them nervous.

Figure 2.5: How does reading make you feel?

Feeling	Percentage
Calm	68.2%
Happy	38.8%
Bored	33.7%
Curious	31.0%
Clever/intelligent	26.3%
Sad	12.3%
Stressed	8.8%
Nervous	6.8%
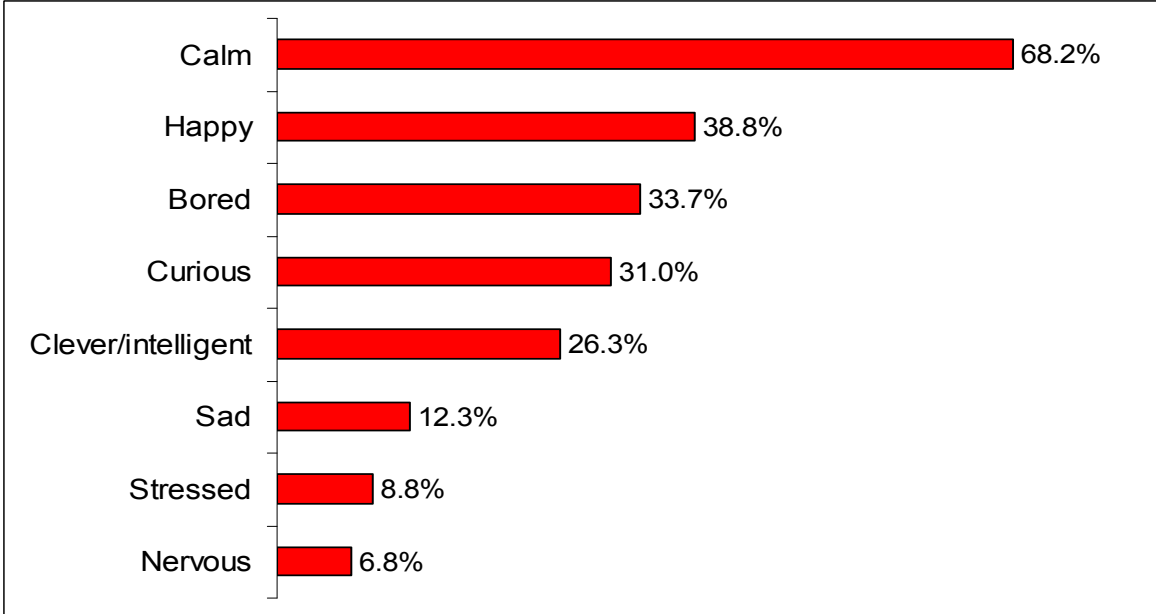
When asked to imagine someone who enjoys reading and to describe what kind of person they are, most pupils generally held a positive view of readers and perceived readers to be achievers (see **Figure 2.6**). The majority of pupils believed that a reader is clever/intelligent and someone who will do well in life. Nearly half the pupils also believed that a reader is a happy person. However, a third of pupils saw readers as geeks/nerds, while nearly a quarter perceived readers to be boring. Only three per cent of pupils believed that a reader is outgoing.

Figure 2.6: If you imagine someone who reads, what kind of person are they?

Clever/intelligent	57.9%
Someone who will do well in life	54.4%
Happy	45.9%
Geeky/a nerd	34.6%
Boring	24.1%
Someone who doesn't go out much	14.4%
Someone with friends	13.1%
Outgoing	3.4%
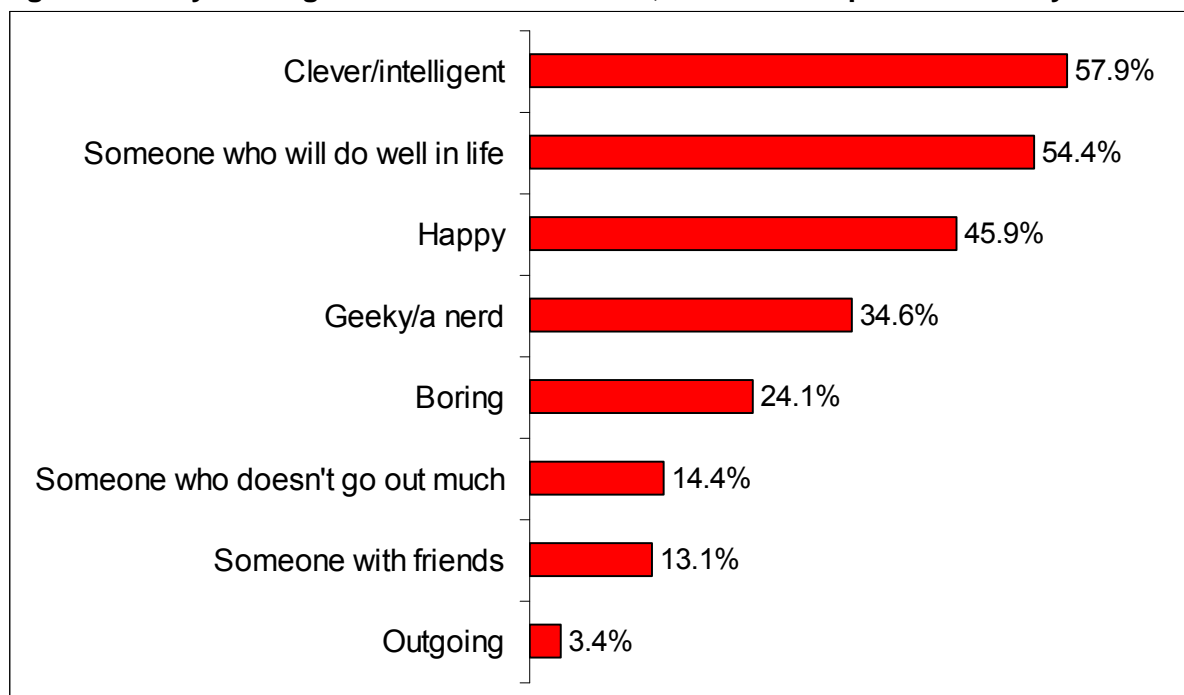
Pupils were asked to indicate what texts they believe a reader enjoys (see **Figure 2.7**). Unlike their own reading preferences (see **Figure 2.4**), nearly three-quarters of pupils believed that readers enjoy fiction books, followed by magazines, poetry and factual books. Emails and blogs/networking websites, which were among the four most read materials outside of school, were considered reading material for a reader by only a third of pupils. Manuals/instructions were seen as a text enjoyed by a reader by only a quarter of pupils.

Pupils were asked what it would mean to them if someone said that they were a good reader (see **Figure 2.8**). Most pupils believed that it would mean reading long books, reading often and reading different materials. Nearly half of pupils also said that it would mean that they could read long words and that they were good at reading aloud. However, nearly one in five pupils (16.9%) said that it would annoy them if someone said that they were a good reader.

When asked whether reading is a gendered activity, the majority of pupils believed that reading is for everyone (84.7%), while over a tenth of pupils stated that reading is for girls (12.6%). Only 2.7% of pupils indicated that reading is more of a boys' activity.

To gauge the importance of reading in their daily lives, pupils were asked to state their agreement with five questions that compared reading to other activities. Only a sixth of pupils (14.9%) believed that at the moment reading is more important than television, while nearly a quarter (23.0%) agreed that reading is more important than sport in their life. A fifth of pupils agreed with the statements that reading is more important than computers/computer games (19.9%), that reading is more important than hanging out with friends (19.9%), and that reading is more important than listening to music (21.0%) in their life at the moment.

Figure 2.7: In your opinion, what does a reader enjoy?

Category	Percentage
Fiction books	72.5%
Magazines	61.3%
Poetry	56.9%
Factual books	56.1%
Newspapers	52.5%
Comics/graphic novels	44.8%
Websites	41.0%
Emails	36.6%
Blogs/networking websites	36.5%
Manuals/instructions	24.3%
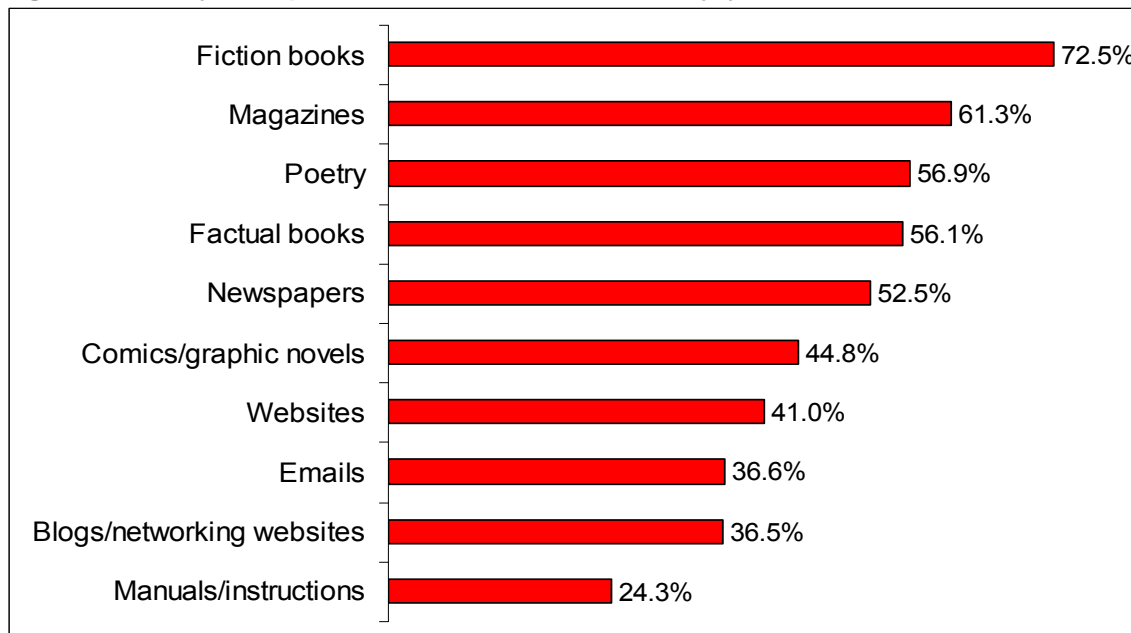
Figure 2.8: If someone said you were a good reader, what would that mean to you?

Category	Percentage
Read long books	57.2%
Read often	55.7%
Read different materials	52.6%
Read long words	49.3%
Read aloud	48.8%
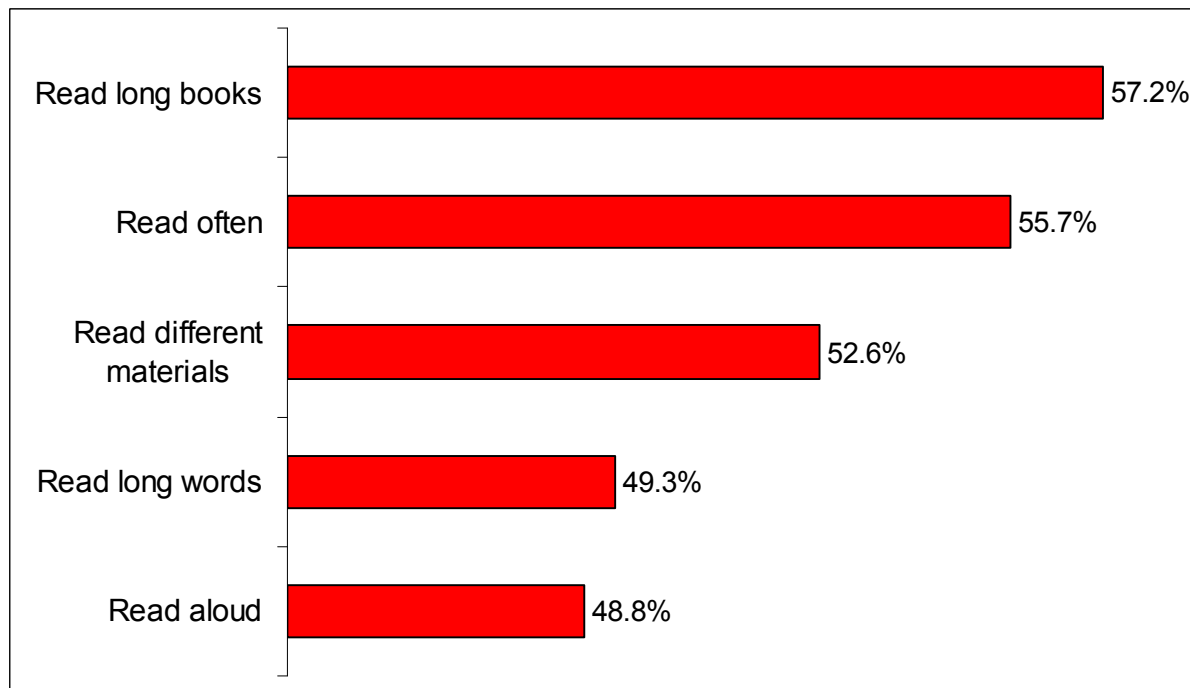
The rather bleak picture that has been painted above about the importance of reading in their lives changes dramatically when pupils are asked to consider the impact of reading to help them do well in life. Now, over half of pupils agree that to help them do well in life reading is more important than TV (54.4%) and more important than computers/computer games (50.7%). Two-fifths of pupils agreed that reading is more important than listening to music to help them do well (43.0%), while a quarter agreed that reading is more important than sport (23.0%) and more important than hanging out with friends (25.6%).

Family influences

As already mentioned in the introduction, the evidence about the benefits of parents being involved in their children's education in general, and their children's literacy activities in particular, is unequivocal (for an overview see Clark, 2007). Research has also repeatedly shown that the most accurate predictor of a pupil's achievement is not parental income or social status but the extent to which parents are able to create a home environment that encourages learning, communicates high, yet reasonable, expectations for achievement and future careers, and where parents become involved in their children's education at school and in the community (Sanders and Epstein, 1998). Literacy is one of the areas where parents have the simple facilities (a book or other reading materials) to become involved and to make a difference.

Figure 2.9 shows that when asked whether anyone in their family thinks that they are a good reader, the great majority of pupils said that their mother (or step-mother/carer) believes that they are a good reader, compared to over half of pupils who think that their dad (or step-father/carer) believes that they are a good reader and two-fifths of pupils who believe that their brother/sister see them as good readers. However, nearly a sixth of pupils indicated that no one in their family thinks they are a good reader while nearly a tenth did not know what their family thinks about their reading proficiency.

Figure 2.9: Who in your family thinks you are a good reader?
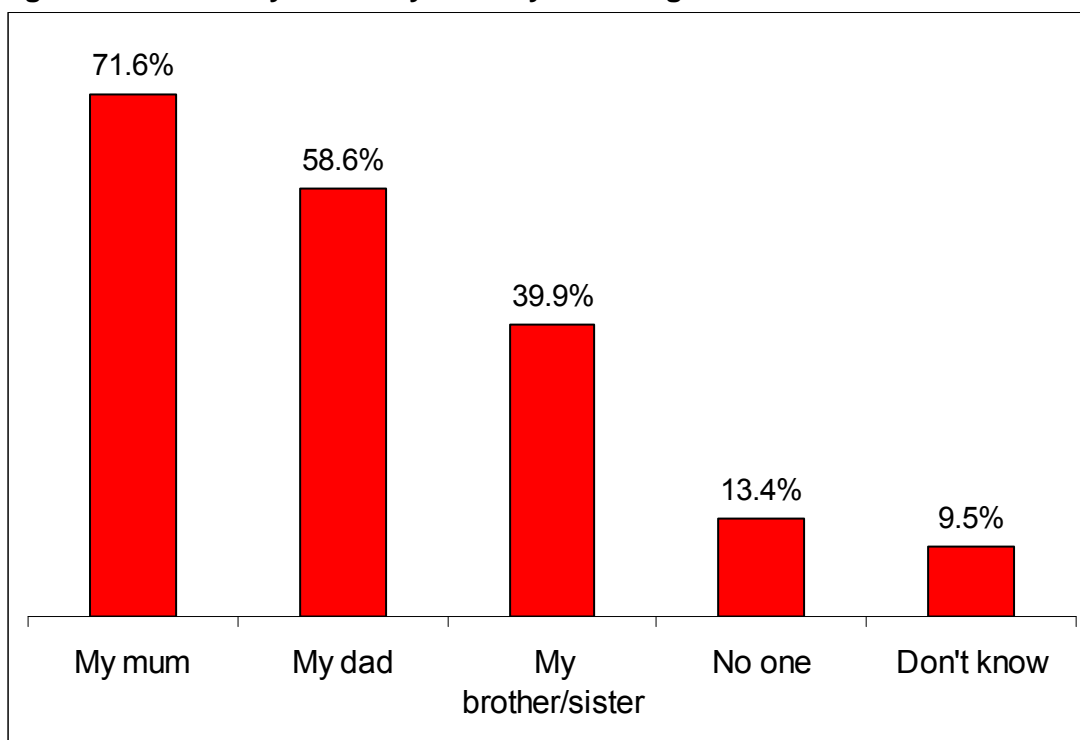
Pupils were also asked to indicate who in their family encouraged them to read (see **Figure 2.10**). Again, the majority of pupils stated that their mother (or step-mother/carer) encourages them to read. Considerably fewer pupils believed that their father (or step-father/carer) or brother/sister encourages them to read. Disconcertingly, nearly a quarter of pupils stated that no one in their family encourages them to read.

Figure 2.10: Who in your family encourages you to read?
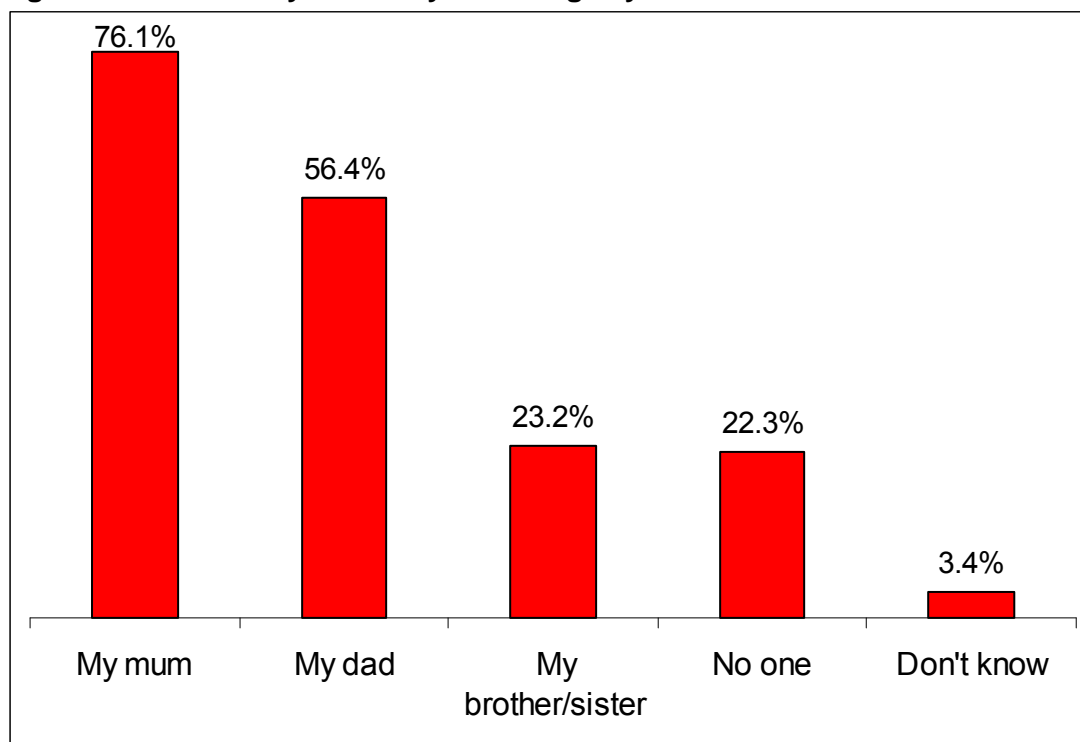
The (detrimental) influence of peers

The peer group plays a paramount role in our lives and shapes our opinions, attitudes and actions. When asked whether their friends are readers, just over a third of pupils indicated that they were (37.1%), a third reported that they were not (33.3%), while just under a third did not know whether their friends were readers or not (29.5%). There was a similar uncertainty when pupils were asked whether their friends thought that they were good readers, with nearly half of pupils (46.0%) choosing the "Don't know" option. Two-fifths of pupils believed that their friends thought that they were good readers, while nearly a sixth thought that they didn't think so. Two-thirds of pupils also indicated that their friends do not encourage them to read, with only a fifth of pupils saying that they did.

The materials they believed their friends were reading (see **Figure 2.11**) largely mirrored their own reading choices (see **Figure 2.4**). In both cases, magazines, websites and emails were the three most frequently chosen texts, while factual books, manuals/instructions and poetry were the least frequently chosen reading materials.

Similarly, their perception of how their friends viewed readers (see **Figure 2.12**) closely resembled their own perceptions of readers (see **Figure 2.6**), with the majority believing that their friends perceive readers as clever/intelligent and someone who will do well in life. However, compared to their own assessment, a larger percentage believed that their friends see readers as geeky/nerds.

Figure 2.11: What do your friends read?

Category	Percentage
Magazines	78.4%
Websites	63.0%
Emails	60.2%
Fiction books	50.0%
Comics/graphic novels	38.9%
Newspapers	34.3%
Blogs/networking websites	26.0%
Factual books	24.7%
Poetry	24.1%
Manuals/instructions	17.7%
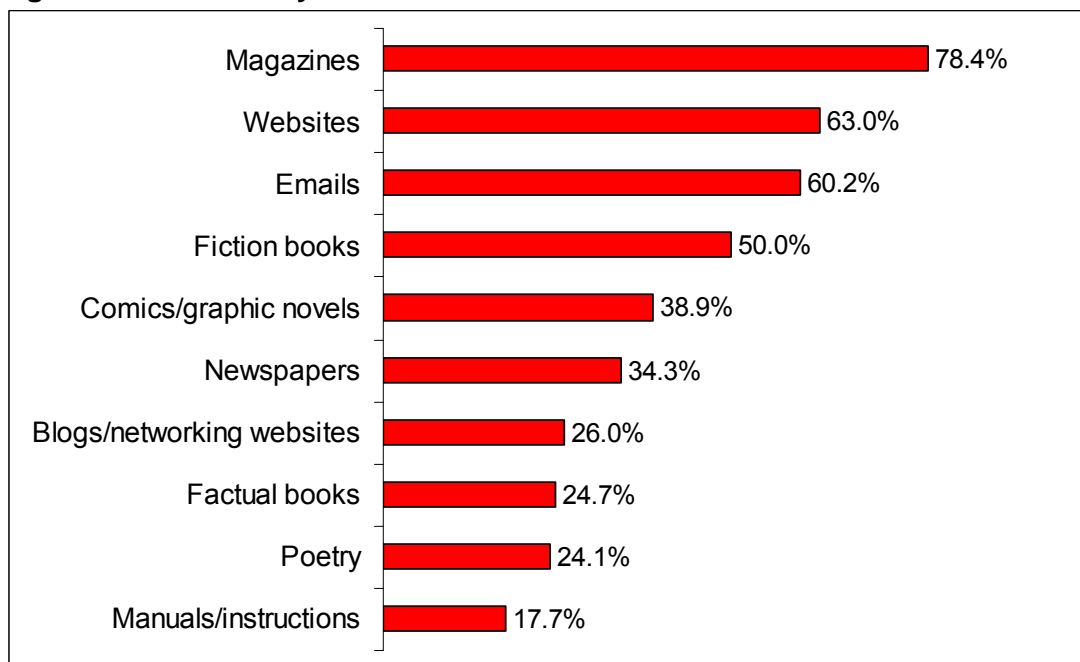
Figure 2.12: Do your friends think reading is for people who…?

Category	Percentage
Are clever/intelligent	53.9%
Want to do well in life	46.5%
Are geeky/nerds	46.4%
Are happy	35.6%
Are boring	34.3%
Are private	22.7%
Have lots of friends	14.5%
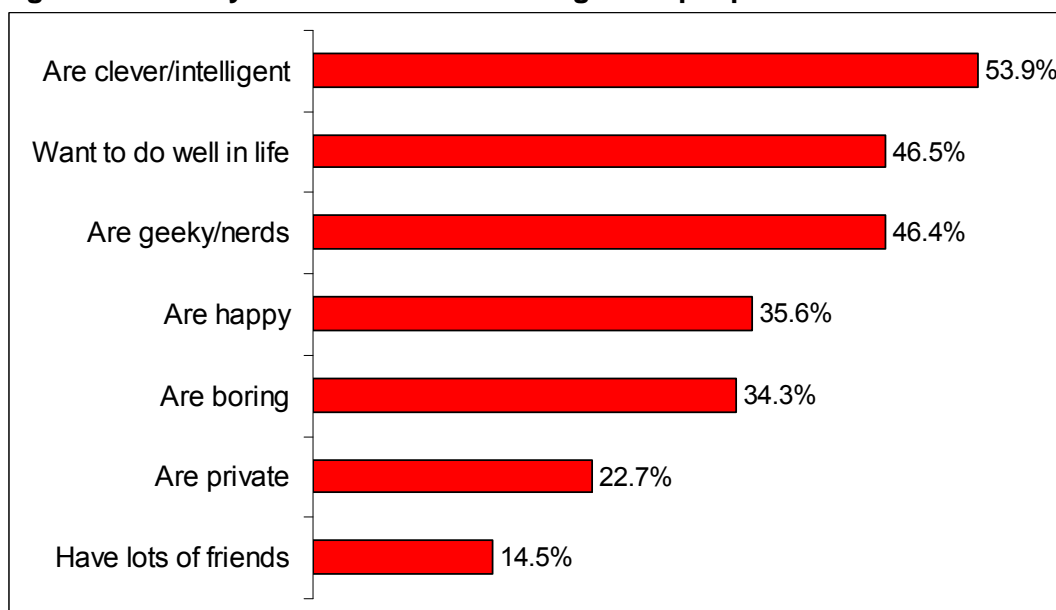
School influences

When asked whether they thought that adults in their school thought that they were reading well, over two-fifth of pupils thought they did (44.1%), while nearly half did not know what adults believed about their reading (48.0%). Only eight per cent believed that adults in their school thought that they did not read well.

Finally, to gauge their perception of the types of materials that are being promoted at school, pupils were asked which texts adults in their school encouraged them to read (see **Figure 2.13**). Contrary to their own reading choices but in line with their perception of the materials a reader enjoys, pupils in this survey believed that adults in their school encouraged them to read fiction books, factual books and poetry. Only a small percentage of pupils felt that schools encourage them to read blogs/networking websites and emails.

Figure 2.13: Which of the following do adults in your school encourage you to read?

Category	Percentage
Fiction books	76.7%
Factual books	67.0%
Poetry	66.6%
Newspapers	44.0%
Magazines	33.5%
Websites	32.6%
Manuals/instructions	30.8%
Comics/graphic novels	29.8%
Emails	20.2%
Blogs/networking websites	3.1%
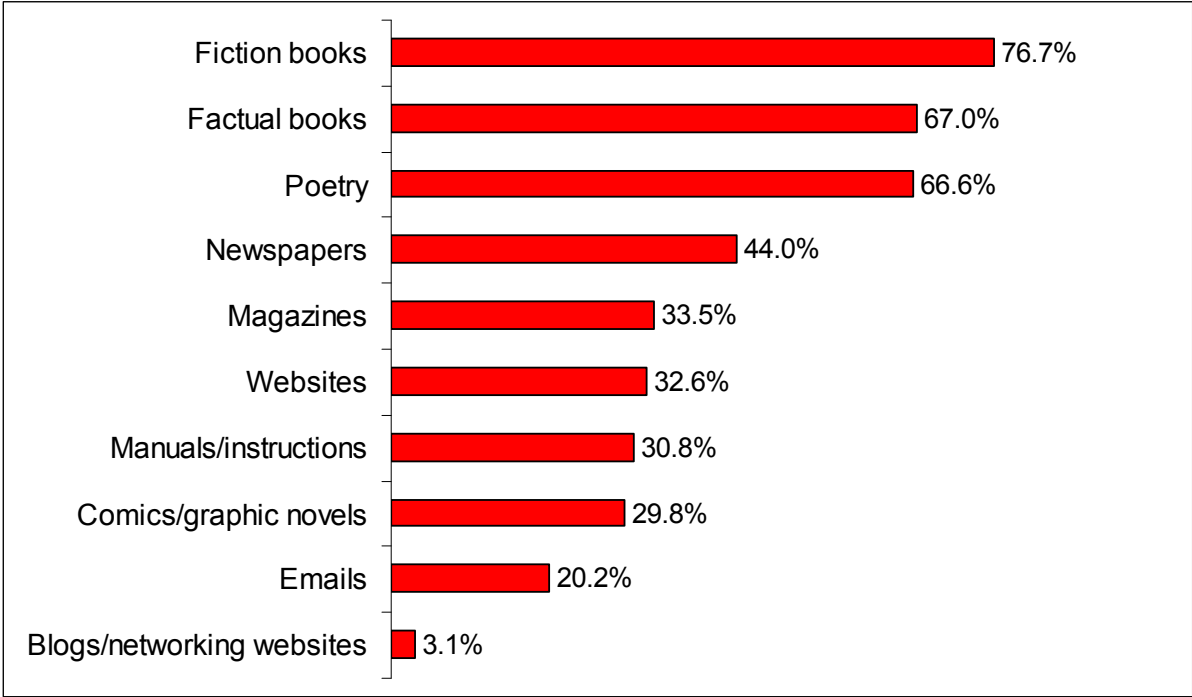
The discrepancy between the pupils' own reading choices and the materials they perceive to be promoted by schools is highlighted in **Figure 2.14**, which directly compares the two.

Figure 2.14: Home and school reading choices

Category	School	Own choice
Fiction books	76.7%	53.0%
Factual books	67.0%	25.1%
Poetry	66.6%	21.0%
Newspapers	44.0%	43.0%
Magazines	33.5%	77.0%
Websites	32.6%	63.2%
Manuals/instructions	30.8%	22.1%
Comics/graphic novels	29.8%	33.7%
Emails	20.2%	58.7%
Blogs/networking websites	3.1%	53.1%
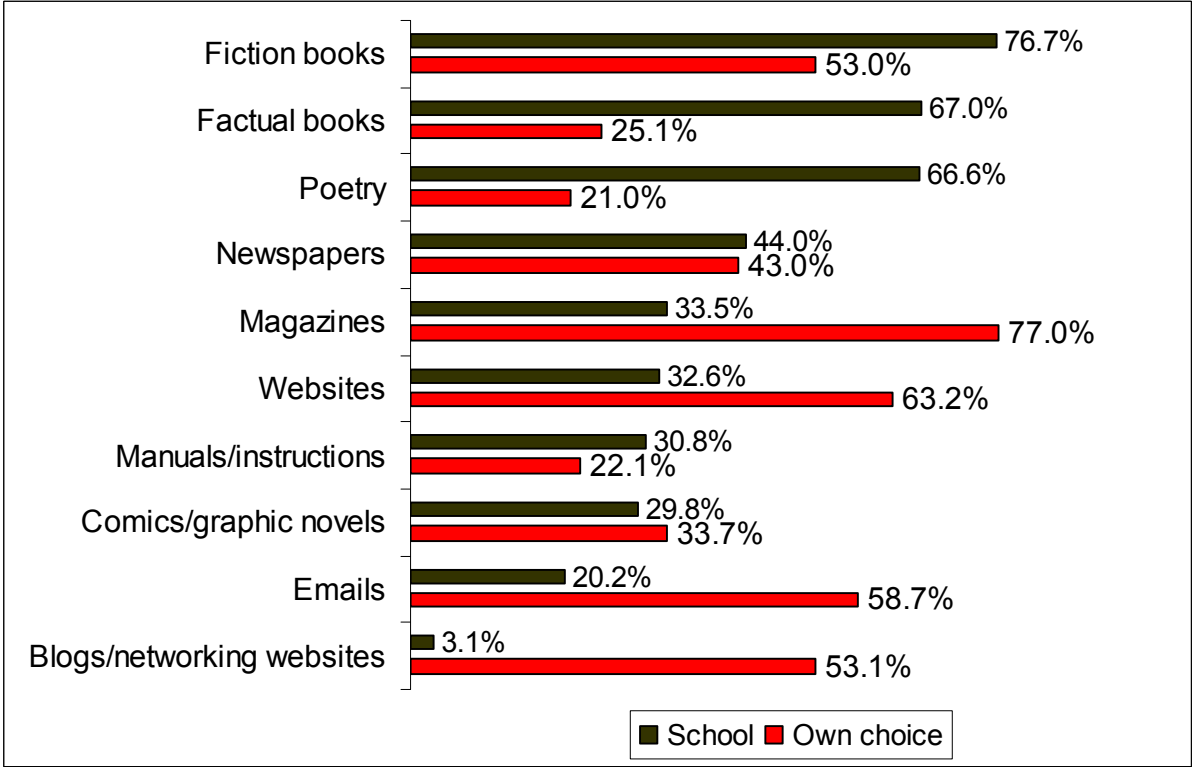
Chapter 3: Being a reader

What is of particular interest to the National Literacy Trust as well as policy-makers, teachers and parents is to investigate the differences between pupils who see themselves as readers and those who do not. By exploring possible differences between readers and non-readers in terms of their self-concept and perception of readers as well as their perceived peer and family support for reading, it is hoped that any differences between the two groups might highlight the steps that could be taken to engage pupils in reading who perceive reading to be a chore.

The results in this section are based on data from 1,614[a] pupils – 1,143 pupils who defined themselves as "Readers" (71%) and 471 pupils who defined themselves as "Non-readers" (29%). It should be noted that the term "Non-reader" does not indicate that these pupils do not read - indeed this chapter will show that they DO - but rather that these pupils do not define themselves as readers. Non-readers in this chapter should therefore be considered as self-defined non-readers.

In line with previous research (eg Clark and Foster, 2005), a significantly greater proportion of girls than boys defined themselves as readers (75.7% vs. 65.7%). Consistent with the literature, a significantly greater proportion of primary than secondary pupils indicated that they were readers (84.2% vs. 68.4%). There were no significant differences between the two groups in terms of free school meal uptake.

Young children who enjoy reading do it more often and they tend to become skilled at it. Indeed, results from this survey show that there were significant differences between the two groups in terms of self-rated reading proficiency, with a greater proportion of readers than non-readers rating themselves as good readers (see **Table 3.1**).

Table 3.1: How good a reader do you think you are?

Proficiency score	Reader %	Non-reader %
1	0.5	7.0
2	0.7	6.6
3	1.0	7.4
4	4.2	11.5
5	10.9	17.8
6	9.4	13.8
7	15.5	14.2
8	24.1	13.6
9	18.8	4.7
10	14.9	3.4

(1 = not a very good reader to 10 = an excellent reader)

In addition to rating themselves as proficient readers, a significantly greater percentage of readers than non-readers reported reading outside of school every day/almost every day or

[a] Data from six pupils on this question were missing

once/twice a week (see **Figure 3.1**). Conversely, a significantly greater proportion of non-readers than readers stated that they never or almost never read outside of school or do so only once or twice a month.

Figure 3.1: How often do you read outside of school?
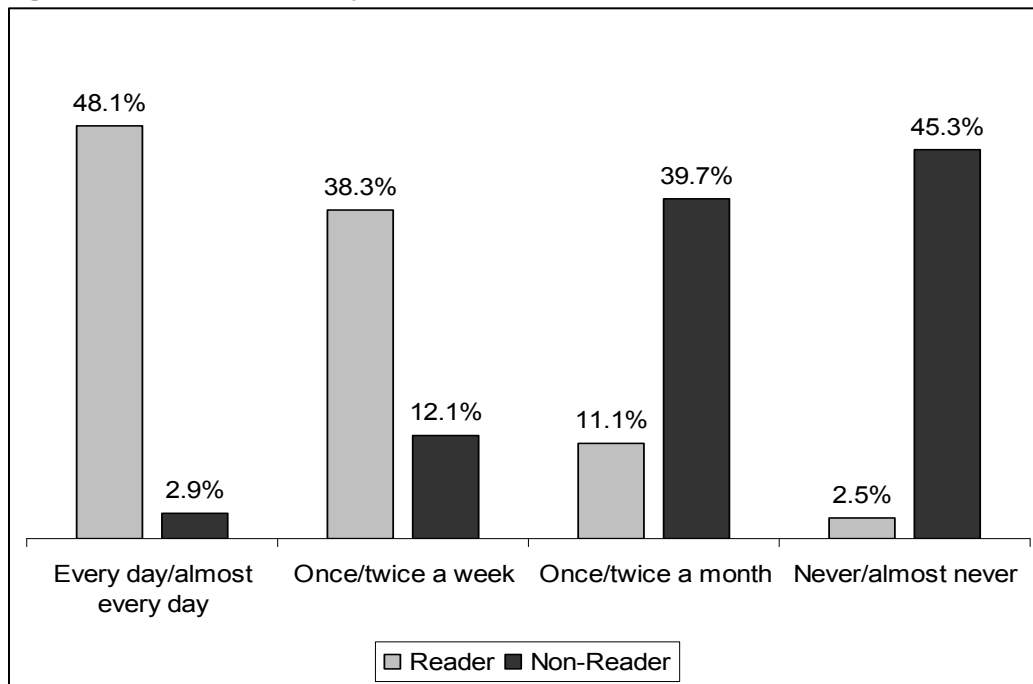
Figure 3.2 shows that there were pronounced (though perhaps unsurprising) differences between the materials read by readers and non-readers outside of school, with readers endorsing a greater variety of texts than non-readers. The greatest difference between the two groups was found for fiction books, with 60% of readers and only 11% of non-readers saying they read fiction outside of school.

Figure 3.2: Which of the following do you read outside of school more than once a month?
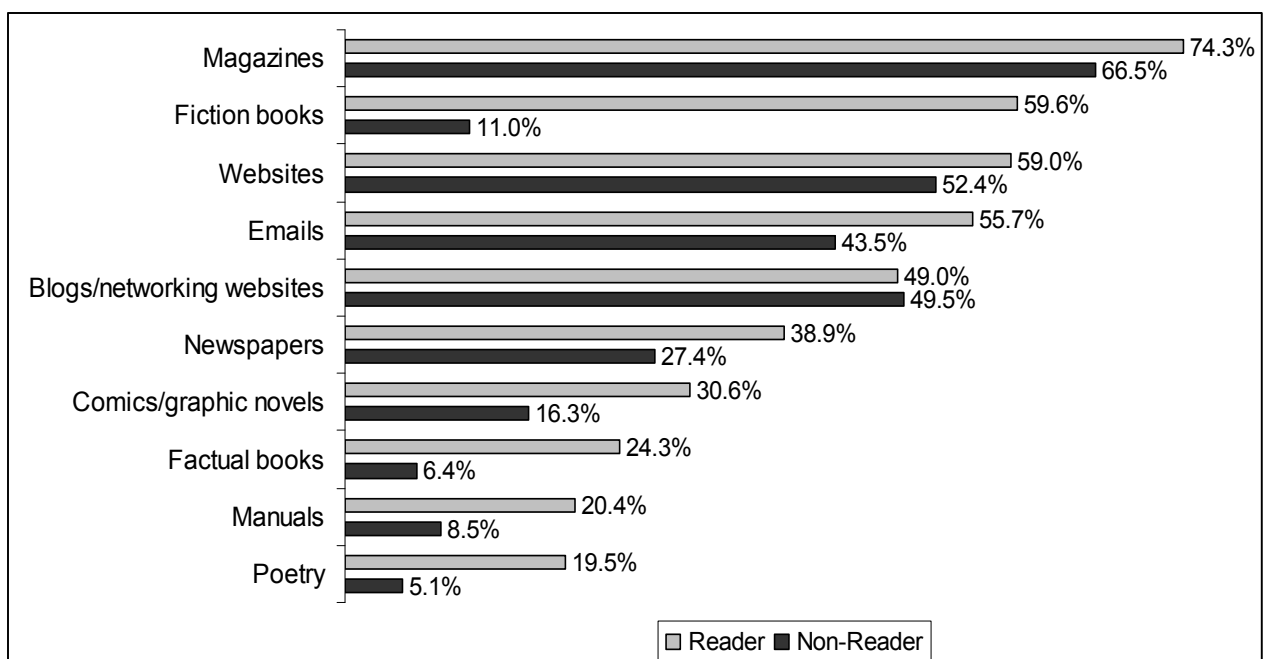
A significantly greater proportion of readers than non-readers also read magazines, websites, emails, newspapers, comics/graphic novels, factual books, manuals and poetry. A significantly greater proportion of non-readers than readers said that they read "None of these" materials (5.1% and 1.4%, respectively) or didn't know (5.3% and 1.1%, respectively).

Figure 3.3 shows that readers generally associated reading with positive feelings, such as feeling calm, whereas non-readers associated reading more with negative feelings, such as boredom and stress. With the exception of reading making them feel nervous and sad, the differences between the two groups were statistically significant. More specifically, a significantly greater perception of readers than non-readers stated reading makes them feel calm, happy, curious and clever/intelligent. Conversely, a significantly greater proportion of non-readers than readers indicated that reading makes them feel bored or stressed. A significantly greater proportion of non-readers than readers felt that "None of these" matched their feelings when reading (9.1% vs. 4.4%) or did not know how reading makes them feel (17.4% vs. 8.0%).

Figure 3.3: How does reading make you feel?
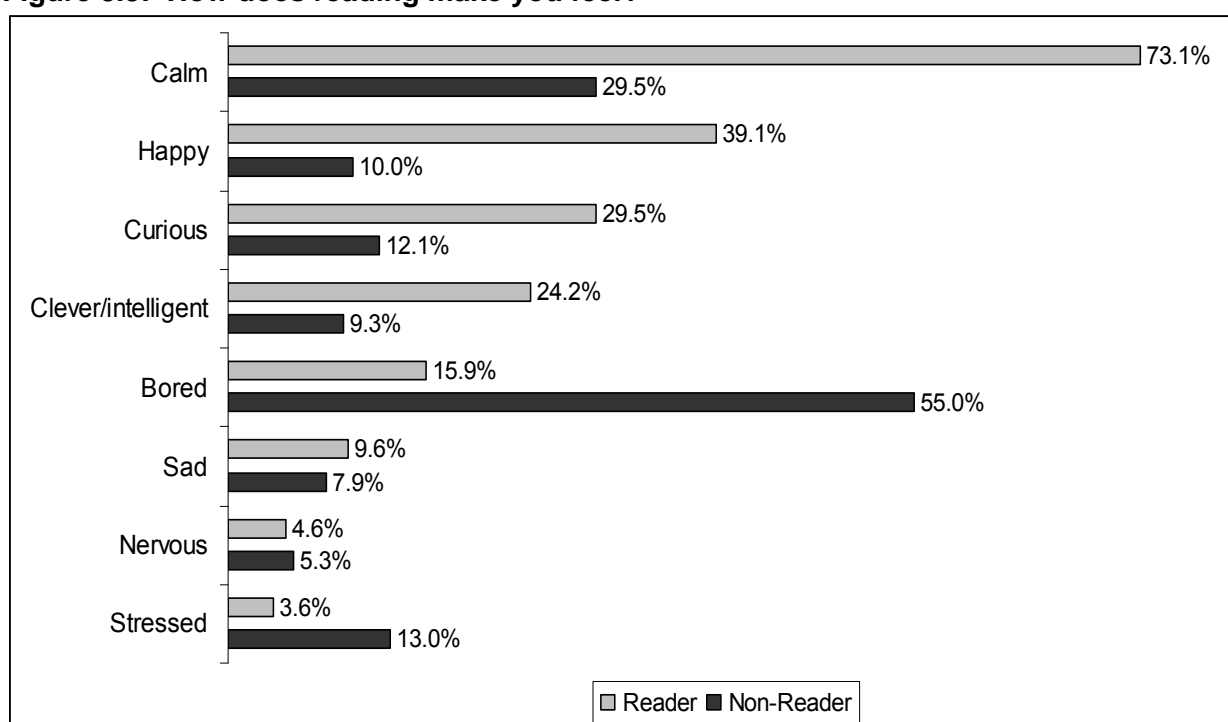
Not only did the two groups differ in how reading made them feel, they also had widely differing views on what kind of person a reader is (see **Figure 3.4**). Generally, readers had a more favourable view of reader characteristics, such as being clever/intelligent and happy, while non-readers had a more negative picture of readers, imagining them to be geeky/nerds, boring and someone who doesn't go out much. All the differences between the groups were statistically significant. More specifically, a significantly greater proportion of readers than non-readers felt that readers are clever/intelligent, someone who will do well in life, happy, someone who has lots of friends and who is outgoing. By contrast, a significantly greater proportion of non-readers than readers thought that readers are geeky/a nerd, boring and someone who doesn't go out much.

Figure 3.5 shows that the two groups also had differing views on what texts a reader enjoys. While they agreed that readers enjoy fiction and factual books, non-readers stated that readers also enjoy poetry. By contrast, pupils who defined themselves as readers indicated that a reader also enjoys magazines. With the exception of manuals, the differences between the two groups were statistically significant. A significantly greater proportion of non-readers than readers also did not know what materials a reader might enjoy (14.4% and 7.1%, respectively).

Figure 3.4: If you imagine someone who reads, what kind of person are they?

Category	Reader	Non-Reader
Clever/intelligent	54.8%	41.2%
Someone who will do well	51.8%	30.1%
Happy	42.4%	18.5%
Geeky/a nerd	21.6%	43.5%
Boring	12.0%	35.5%
Someone who has lots of friends	11.0%	5.5%
Someone who doesn't go out much	9.3%	17.8%
Outgoing	3.2%	0.4%
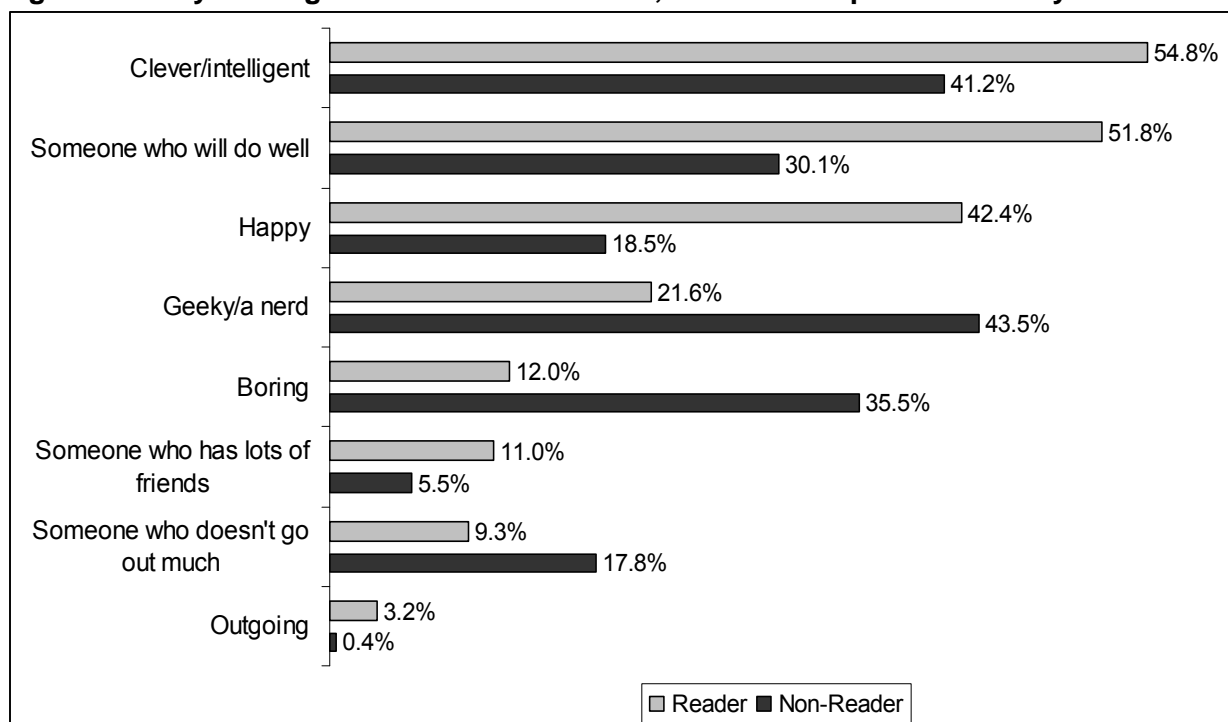
Figure 3.5: In your opinion, what does a reader enjoy?

Category	Reader	Non-Reader
Fiction books	73.7%	52.0%
Magazines	56.9%	37.6%
Factual books	52.0%	40.8%
Poetry	51.7%	41.2%
Newspapers	46.2%	39.5%
Comics/graphic novels	41.2%	25.3%
Websites	36.2%	22.5%
Emails	32.3%	19.3%
Blogs/networking websites	31.7%	22.3%
Manuals	19.0%	17.2%
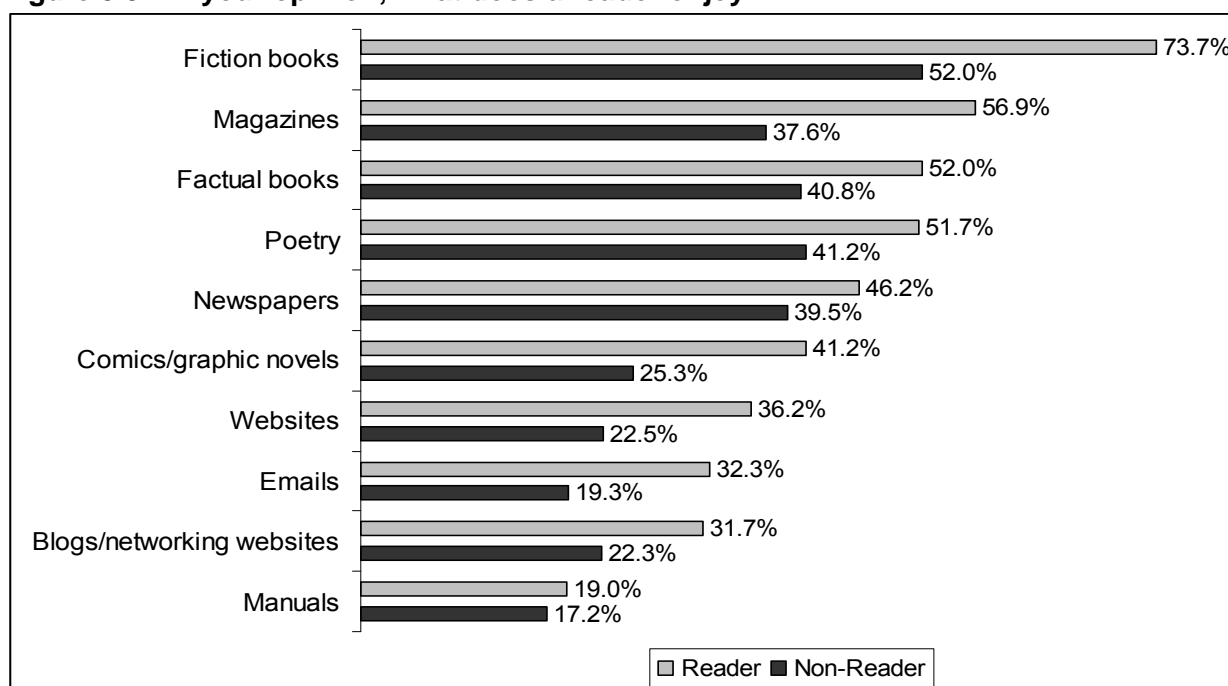
There were differences between the two groups in terms of their estimation of what it takes to be a good reader, which were statistically significant (see **Figure 3.6**). More specifically, a greater proportion of readers than non-readers thought that being a good reader means reading long books and long words, reading often, reading different materials and being good at reading aloud. By contrast, a significantly greater proportion of non-readers than readers said that it would annoy them if someone said that they were a good reader (23.4% vs. 8.2%). A significantly greater proportion of non-readers than readers also did not know what it meant if someone said that they were a good reader (15.1% vs. 6.5%).

Figure 3.6: If someone said you were a good reader, what would that mean to you?

Category	Reader	Non-Reader
Reading long books	54.9%	29.7%
Reading long words	54.3%	37.4%
Reading often	53.4%	32.3%
Reading different materials	51.0%	26.1%
Reading aloud	42.3%	35.9%
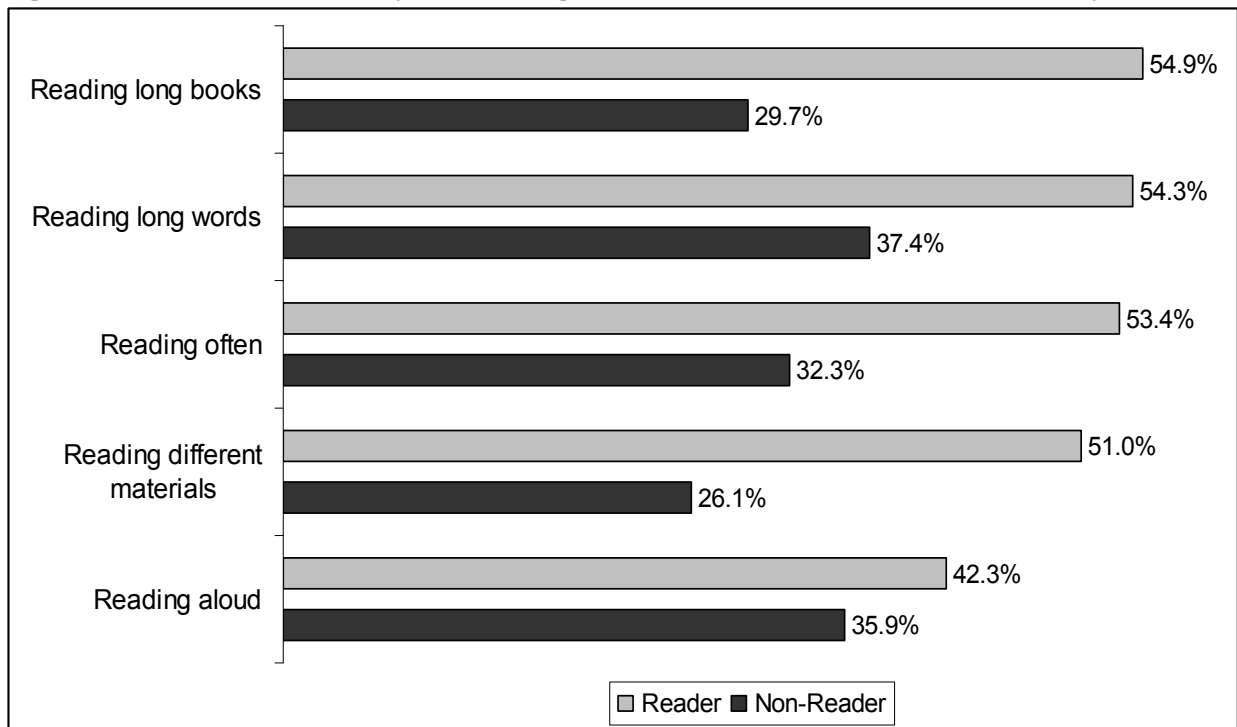
When asked about their perception of reading as a gendered activity, a significantly greater percentage of non-readers than readers thought that reading was more of a girl thing (19.3% vs. 10.0%) or more of a boy thing (4.7% vs. 1.9%). Conversely, a significantly greater proportion of readers than non-readers viewed reading as an activity for everyone (88.2% vs. 76.0%).

Perhaps not surprisingly, reading generally played a greater role in the life of readers than non-readers (see **Figure 3.7**). A significantly greater percentage of readers than non-readers indicated that at the moment reading is more important than TV, sport, computers/computer games, hanging out with friends and listening to music.

Figure 3.7: Reading is more important than…

Category	Reader	Non-Reader
TV at the moment	16.0%	8.9%
Sport at the moment	27.9%	14.0%
Computers/games at the moment	23.3%	9.1%
Hanging out with friends at the moment	22.7%	13.2%
Listening to music at the moment	24.5%	12.3%
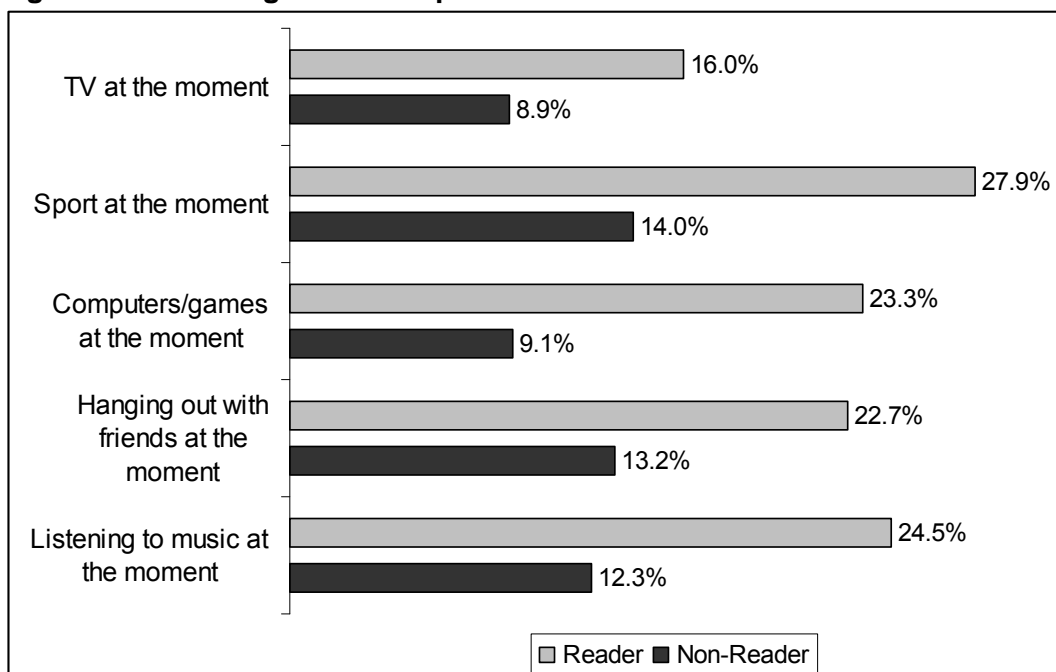
These differences remained when pupils were asked to evaluate the importance of reading to do well in life (see **Figure 3.8**). Again, a significantly greater percentage of readers than non-readers stated that for them to do well in life reading is more important than TV, sport, computers/computer games, hanging out with friends and listening to music.

Figure 3.8: Reading is more important than…
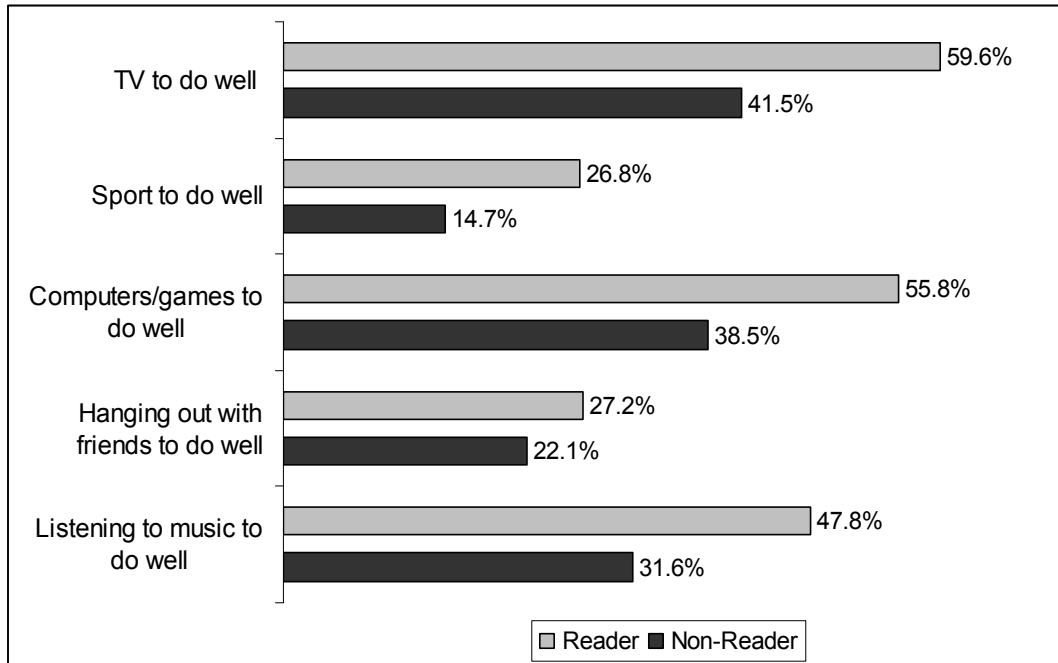
Family influences

Figure 3.9: Who in your family thinks you are a good reader?
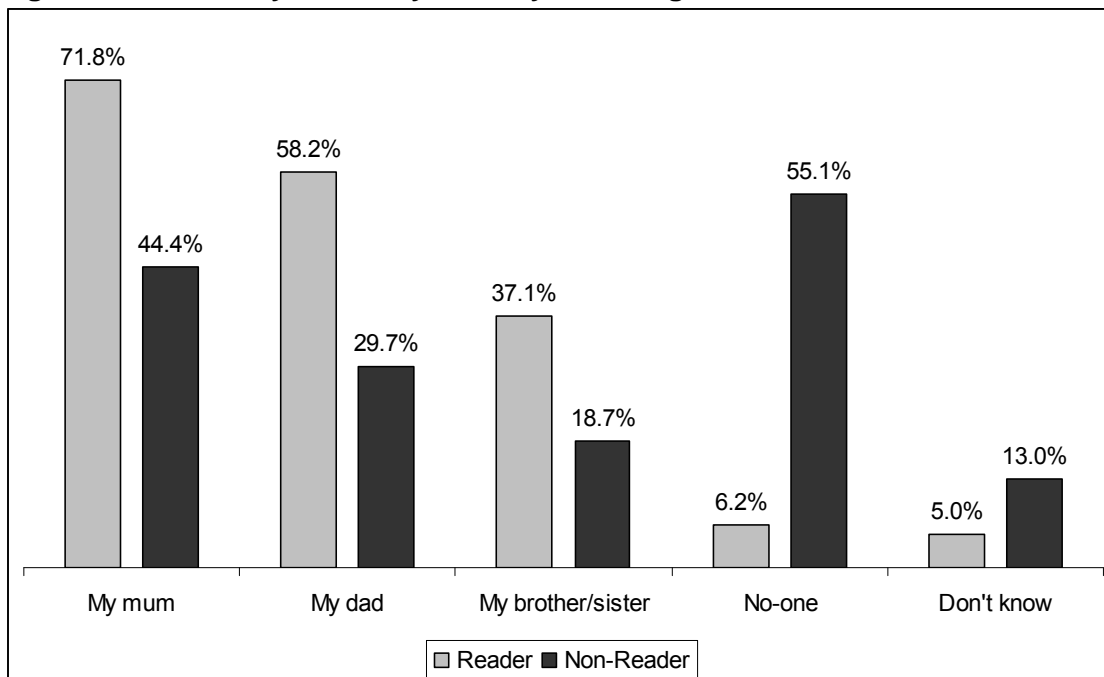
Figure 3.9 shows that when pupils were asked whether anyone in their family thinks that they are a good reader, a significantly greater proportion of non-readers than readers said that no

one has that opinion. By contrast, a significantly greater proportion of readers than non-readers thought that their mother (or step-mum/carer), father (or step-father/carer) or their brother/sister believe that they read well.

A significantly greater proportion of non-readers than readers also felt that no one in their family encourages them to read (see **Figure 3.10**) whereas a significantly greater proportion of readers than non-readers believe that their mother (or step-mum/carer), father (or step-father/carer) or their brother/sister encourage them to read.

Figure 3.10: Who in your family encourages you to read?
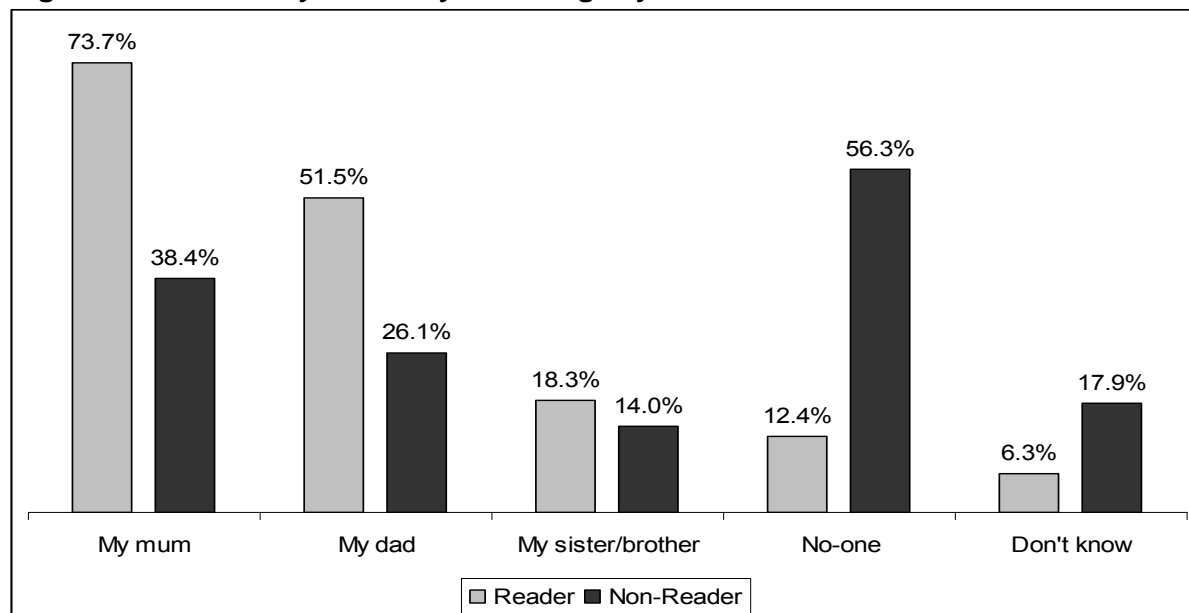
Peer influences

Pupils who consider themselves to be readers mingle with people who are readers. A significantly greater percentage of readers than non-readers stated that their friends are readers (46.5% vs. 14.2%). However, a sizeable proportion of pupils in both groups didn't know whether their friends read (readers = 29.1%; non-readers = 30.7%). A significantly greater percentage of readers than non-readers also indicated that their friends think that they are a good reader (47.4% vs. 22.4%). Again, a great proportion of pupils from both groups didn't know whether their friends think that they are good readers (readers = 44.5%; non-readers = 49.7). Readers also perceived greater encouragement to read than non-readers (22.8% vs. 9.0%). What is perhaps slightly concerning is the finding that a great percentage of readers and non-readers didn't think that they get any encouragement to read from their friends, with a significantly greater percentage of non-readers than readers saying so (79.5% vs. 59.2).

Figure 3.11 shows that readers were more likely to state that their friends read a variety of materials than non-readers. With the exception of blogs/networking websites, these differences were statistically significant. In addition, a significantly greater proportion of non-readers than readers said that their friends read none of the given options (4.7% vs. 1.1%).

Figure 3.12 shows that readers generally believed that their friends have a positive view of readers, compared with non-readers who believed that their friends view readers more negatively, believing them to be geeky/nerds and boring. With the exception of being private, the differences between the two groups were statistically significant.

Figure 3.11: What do your friends read?

	Reader	Non-Reader
Magazines	76.5%	64.1%
Websites	59.3%	45.0%
Emails	57.9%	42.0%
Fiction books	49.9%	21.0%
Comics/graphic novels	34.7%	21.4%
Newspapers	27.6%	24.8%
Blogs/networking websites	24.1%	25.3%
Factual books	21.4%	10.6%
Poetry	20.5%	10.2%
Manuals	14.3%	9.6%
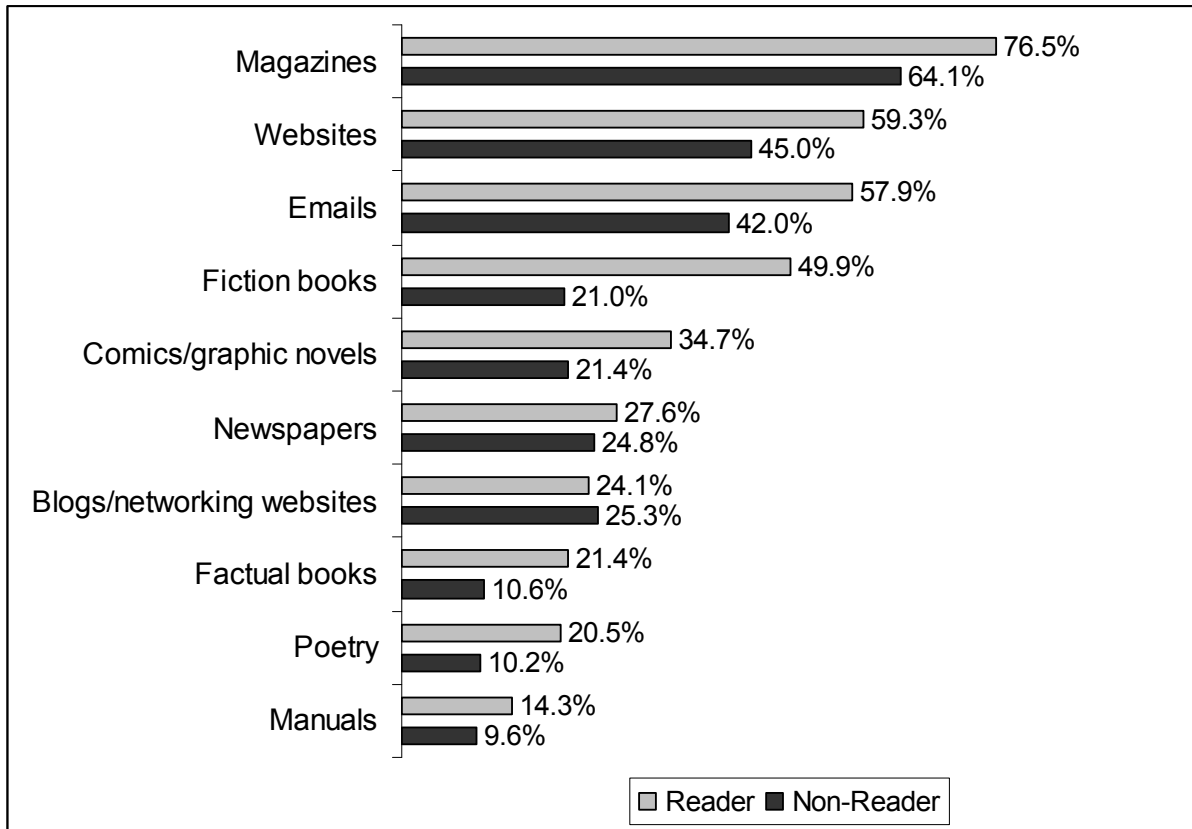
Figure 3.12: Do your friends think reading is for people who…?
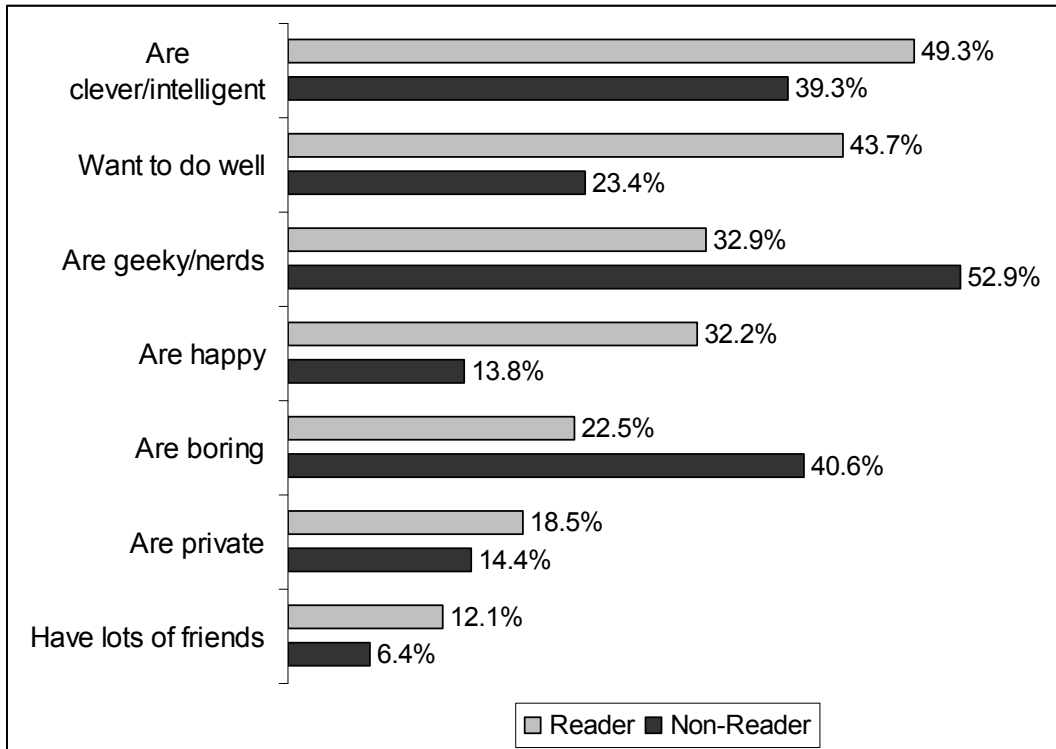
	Reader	Non-Reader
Are clever/intelligent	49.3%	39.3%
Want to do well	43.7%	23.4%
Are geeky/nerds	32.9%	52.9%
Are happy	32.2%	13.8%
Are boring	22.5%	40.6%
Are private	18.5%	14.4%
Have lots of friends	12.1%	6.4%

School influences

When asked whether adults in their school think that they read well, a significantly greater percentage of readers than non-readers believe they do (49.9% vs. 30.0%). However, a sizeable proportion of readers and non-readers didn't know whether adults in their school think they read well (45.5% and 54.4%, respectively).

Finally, when asked which materials adults in their school encourage them to read (see **Figure 3.13**), a significantly greater proportion of readers than non-readers stated that they promote fiction books, factual books, poetry, newspapers and websites. By contrast, a significantly greater proportion of non-readers than readers indicated that adults in their school do not promote any of these texts (7.2% and 1.9%, respectively).

Figure 3.13: Which of the following do adults in your school encourage you to read?

Fiction books — Reader: 76.2%, Non-Reader: 67.1%
Factual books — Reader: 62.6%, Non-Reader: 50.5%
Poetry — Reader: 60.2%, Non-Reader: 52.9%
Newspapers — Reader: 38.1%, Non-Reader: 29.5%
Websites — Reader: 26.3%, Non-Reader: 20.8%
Magazines — Reader: 24.8%, Non-Reader: 24.2%
Manuals — Reader: 24.4%, Non-Reader: 20.0%
Comics/graphic novels — Reader: 23.4%, Non-Reader: 18.9%
Emails — Reader: 15.7%, Non-Reader: 11.9%
Blogs/networking websites — Reader: 2.6%, Non-Reader: 1.3%
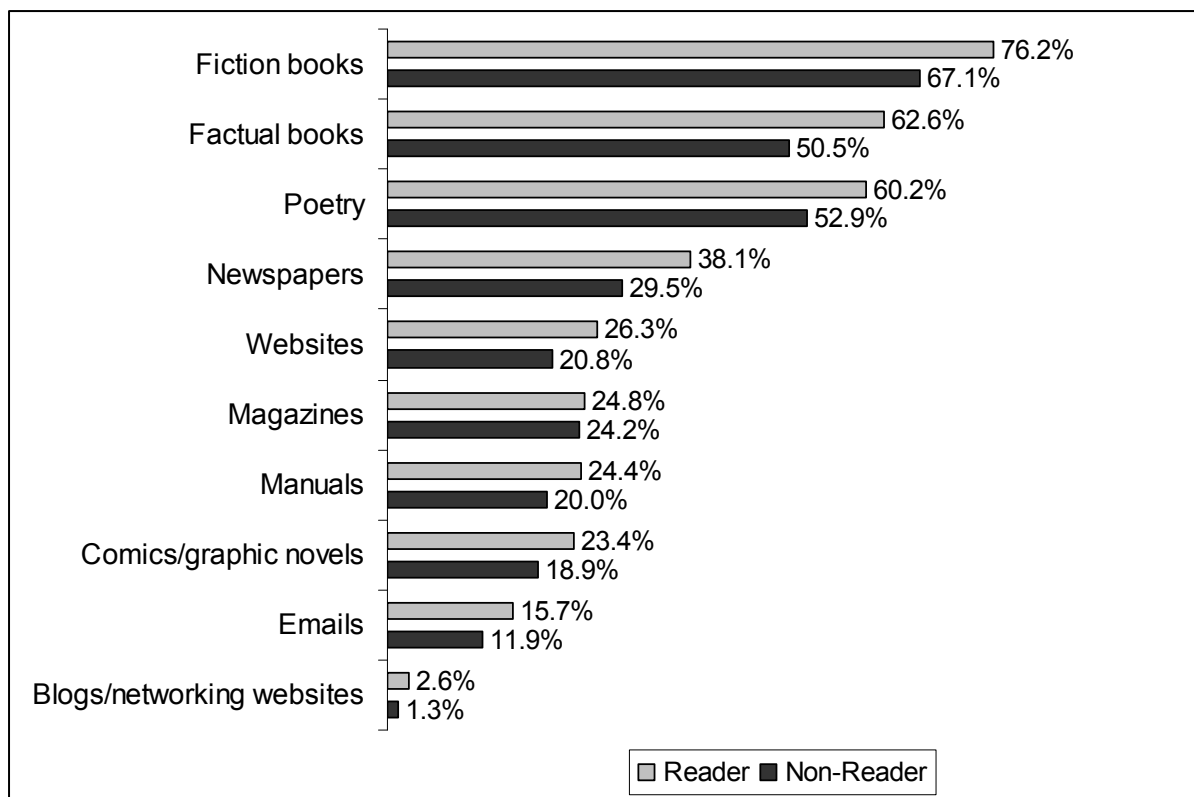
☐ Reader ■ Non-Reader

During the 1970s and 1980s, a major concern in education in the UK and elsewhere was the consistent underperformance of girls in maths and science. Whilst these issues seem to have been successfully addressed – girls' performance in these subjects now matches and even exceeds those of boys, concerns have now shifted to the underperformances of boys in reading and English. Anyone reading media articles may be forgiven for believing that British boys do not fulfil their potential, have reading difficulties, and leave school with few or no qualifications. Although headlines exaggerate the problem, there is consistent evidence that a significant percentage of boys is not attracted to reading. Therefore, in May 2007, the then DfES commissioned the School Library Association to create a list of 170 book titles to encourage boys aged 11 to 14 to read for pleasure. Called Boys into Books, the DfES provided funding for all state secondary schools in England with boys on roll to choose 20 free books from the list for their school library.

There are a plethora of explanations in the literature for the apparent under-achievement of boys, including discussions of biological/cognitive differences, differential parental treatment, changing masculinities, assessments, school curriculum, and teaching and learning. The academic performance of boys in schools, particularly in the area of literacy, is of growing concern to researchers and educators. Studies have typically found that boys have more negative attitudes to reading and possess more negative reading self-concepts than girls (Clark and Foster, 2005; McKenna et al., 1995). For example, the recent PIRLS report (2007) showed that 83 per cent of girls agreed enjoying reading either 'a lot' or 'a little' compared to just 67 per cent of boys. In line with the literature, a significantly greater number of girls than boys saw themselves as readers (54.8% and 45.2%, respectively) and indicated that they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot (see **Figure 4.1**).

Figure 4.1: Do you enjoy reading?
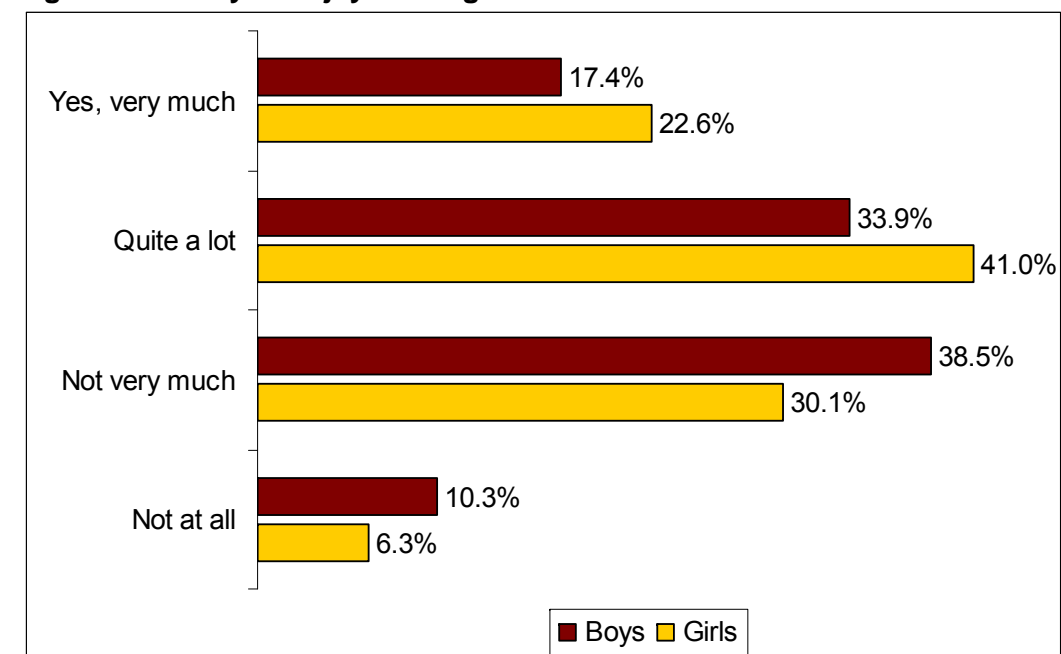
In line with a previous NLT survey (Clark and Foster, 2005), both boys and girls rated themselves as equally proficient readers (see **Table 4.1**).

Table 4.1: How good a reader do you think you are?

	Boys %	Girls %
1	2.9	1.9
2	2.2	2.7
3	3.7	2.1
4	7.3	5.3
5	11.0	14.7
6	11.0	10.3
7	16.2	14.4
8	21.0	21.0
9	13.3	15.9
10	11.4	11.7

When asked how often they read outside of school, a greater percentage of girls than boys stated that they do so every day or almost every day (see **Figure 4.2**). By contrast, a greater proportion of boys than girls stated that they never or almost never read outside of school. These differences were statistically significant.

Figure 4.2: How often do you read outside of school?
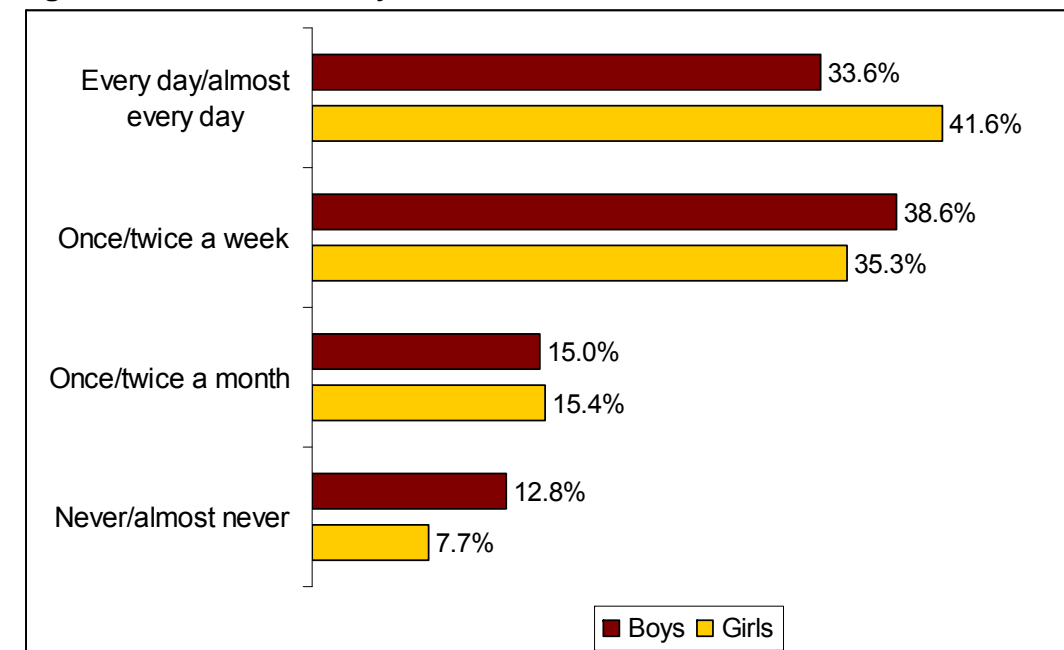
Gender affected the types of material being read outside of school (see **Figure 4.3**). A significantly greater percentage of girls than boys indicated that they read magazines, emails, blogs/networking websites and poetry. By contrast, a significantly greater percentage of boys than girls stated reading newspapers, comics/graphic novels and manuals/instructions. These differences are in line with previous research.

Figure 4.3: Which of the following do you read outside of school more than once a month?

	Boys	Girls
Magazines	63.4%	80.0%
Websites	58.2%	56.0%
Emails	45.3%	58.8%
Newspapers	44.1%	27.4%
Blogs/networking websites	43.1%	55.1%
Fiction books	42.2%	48.3%
Comics/graphic novels	37.0%	16.4%
Manuals/instructions	22.0%	12.0%
Factual books	21.5%	16.7%
Poetry	11.0%	19.4%
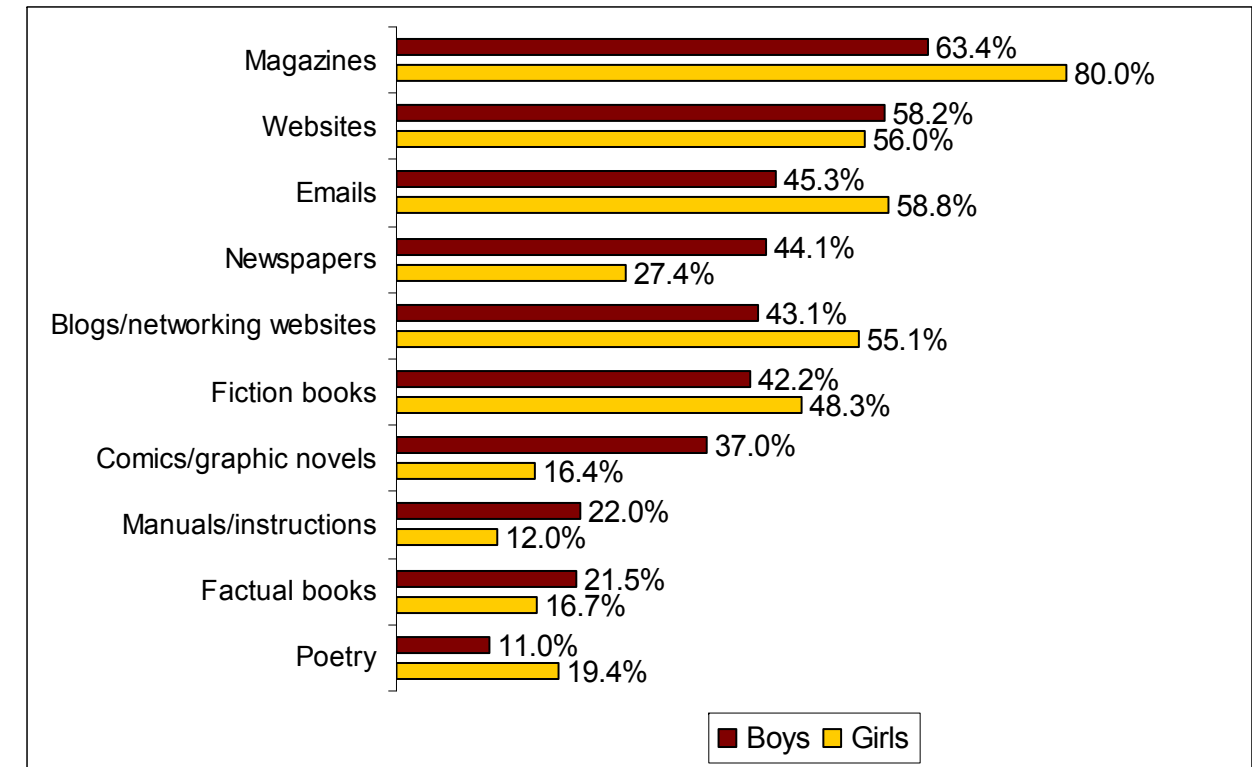
When asked how reading makes them feel (see **Figure 4.4**), a significantly greater percentage of girls than boys indicated that reading makes them feel calm and happy. Conversely, significantly more boys than girls (7.2% and 4.3%, respectively) chose the "None of these" option.

Figure 4.4: How does reading make you feel?

	Boys	Girls
Calm	56.7%	64.1%
Bored	29.3%	25.4%
Happy	27.0%	34.3%
Curious	23.1%	25.6%
Clever/intelligent	19.3%	20.7%
Sad	7.6%	10.6%
Stressed	7.1%	5.7%
Nervous	4.9%	4.8%
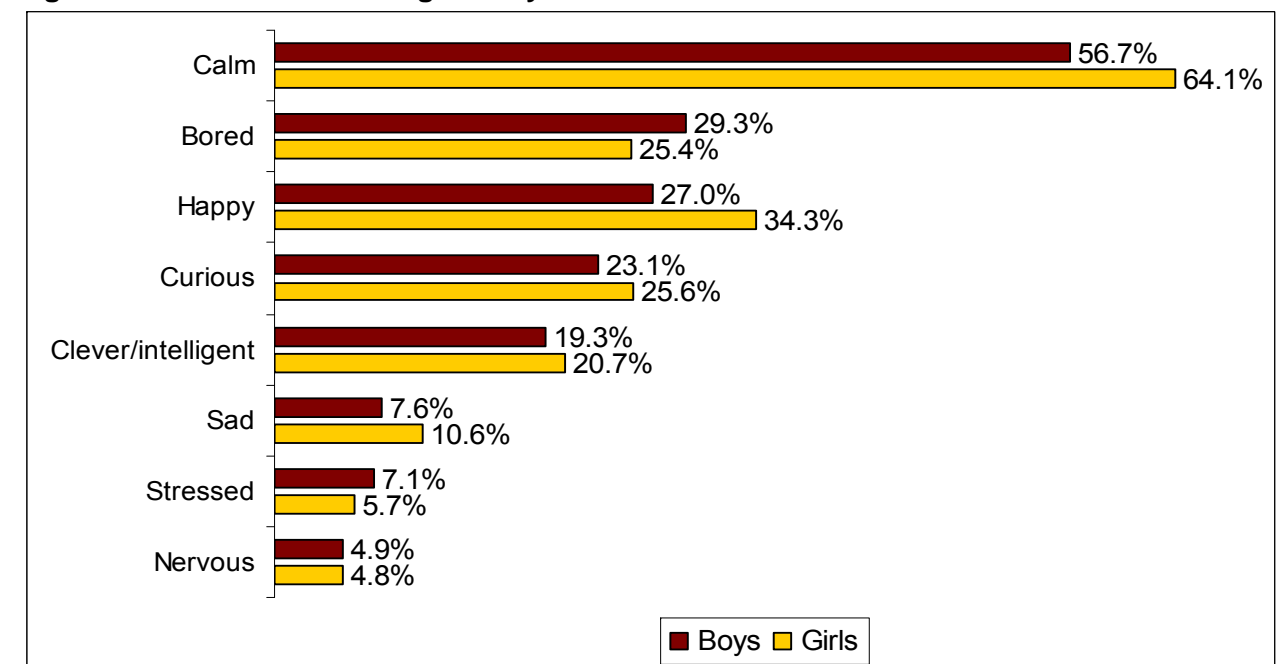
Gender also impacted on what pupils perceived readers to be like, with girls generally viewing readers more favourably than boys (see **Figure 4.5**). A significantly greater percentage of girls than boys perceived readers to be clever/intelligent and someone who will do well in life. By contrast, a significantly greater percentage of boys than girls believed a reader to be geeky/a nerd.

There was only one significant gender difference when asked what materials a reader enjoys, with a significantly greater percentage of girls than boys believing that a reader enjoys poetry (see **Figure 4.6**).

Figure 4.5: If you imagine someone who reads, what kind of person are they?

Category	Boys	Girls
Clever/intelligent	40.3%	56.2%
Someone who will do well	40.3%	50.2%
Geeky/a nerd	32.4%	23.6%
Happy	32.3%	38.5%
Boring	21.8%	15.5%
Someone who doesn't go out much	11.6%	11.8%
Someone with lots of friends	8.8%	9.9%
Outgoing	2.8%	2.2%
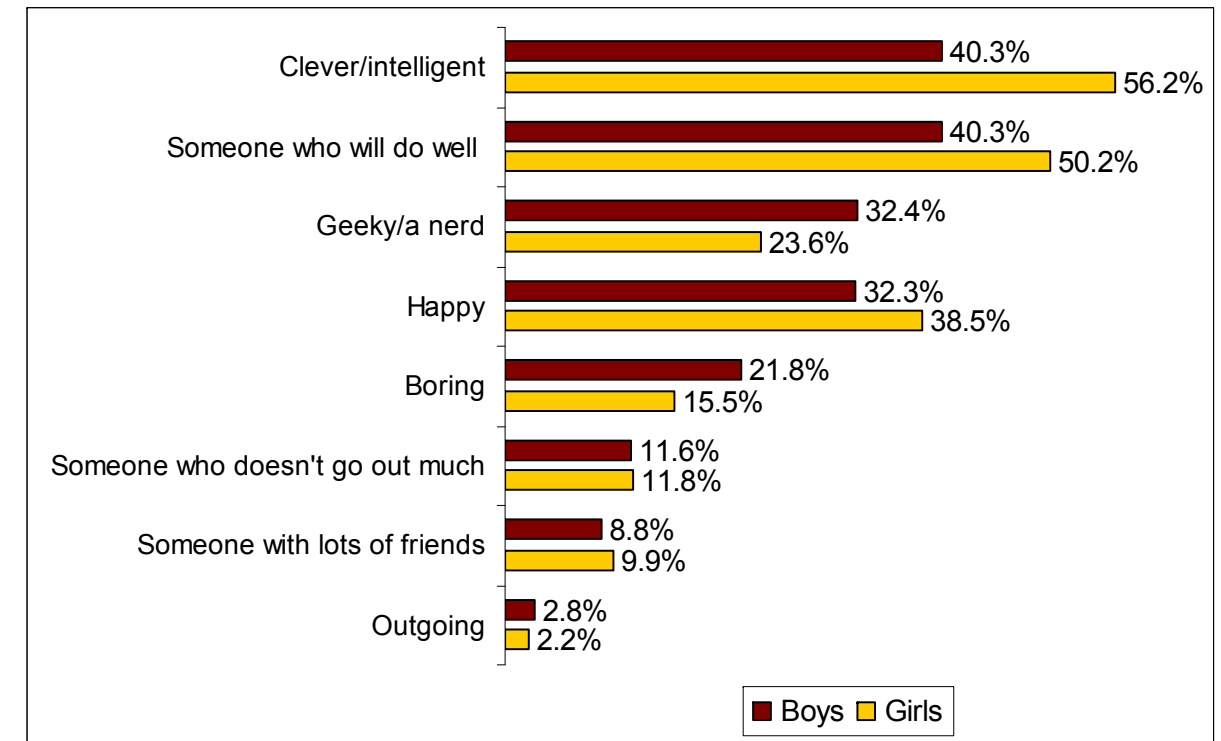
Figure 4.6: In your opinion, what does a reader enjoy?

Category	Boys	Girls
Fiction books	63.4%	70.8%
Magazines	48.7%	53.5%
Newspapers	47.7%	40.8%
Factual books	46.6%	50.4%
Poetry	43.5%	53.3%
Comics/graphic novels	39.1%	34.1%
Websites	34.1%	30.7%
Blogs/networking websites	27.8%	30.7%
Emails	26.8%	30.3%
Manuals/instructions	21.2%	15.7%
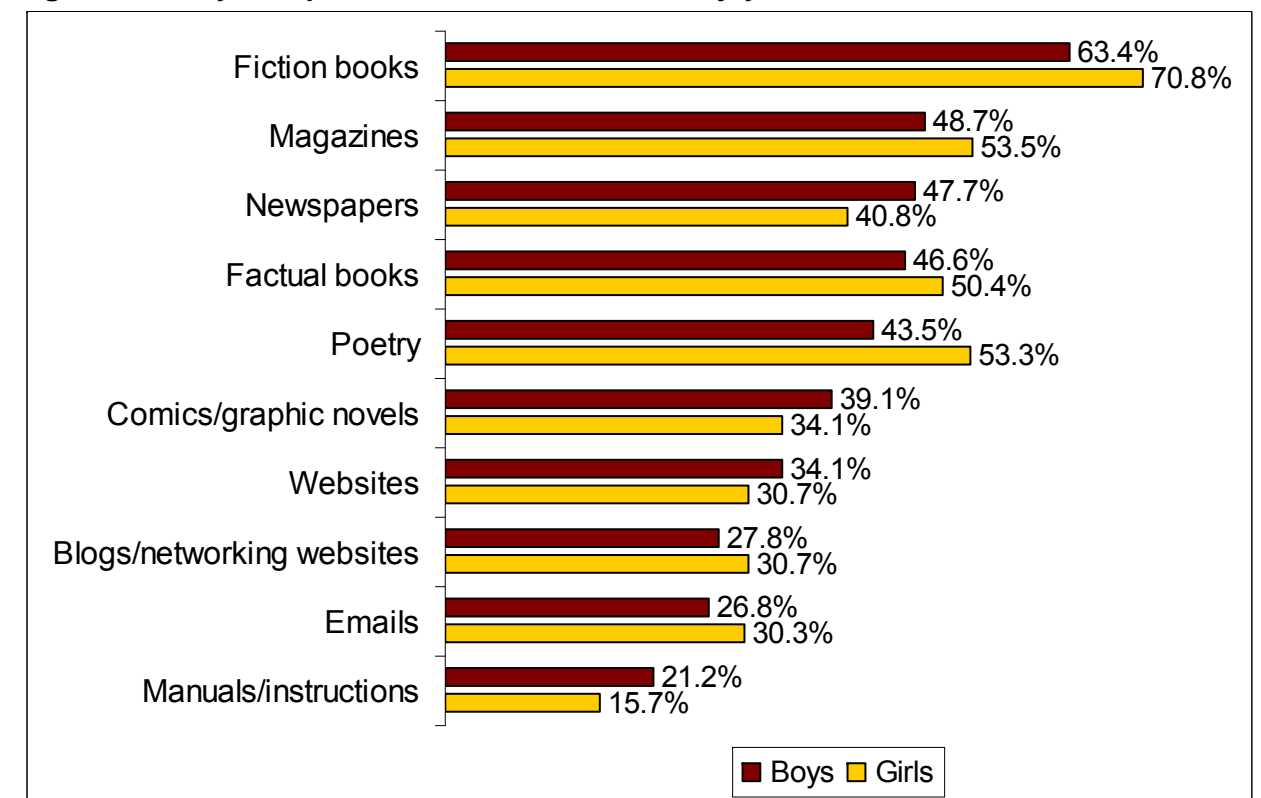
There were no significant gender differences in terms of what being a good reader means to them (see **Figure 4.7**).

Figure 4.7: If someone said you were a good reader, what would that mean to you?
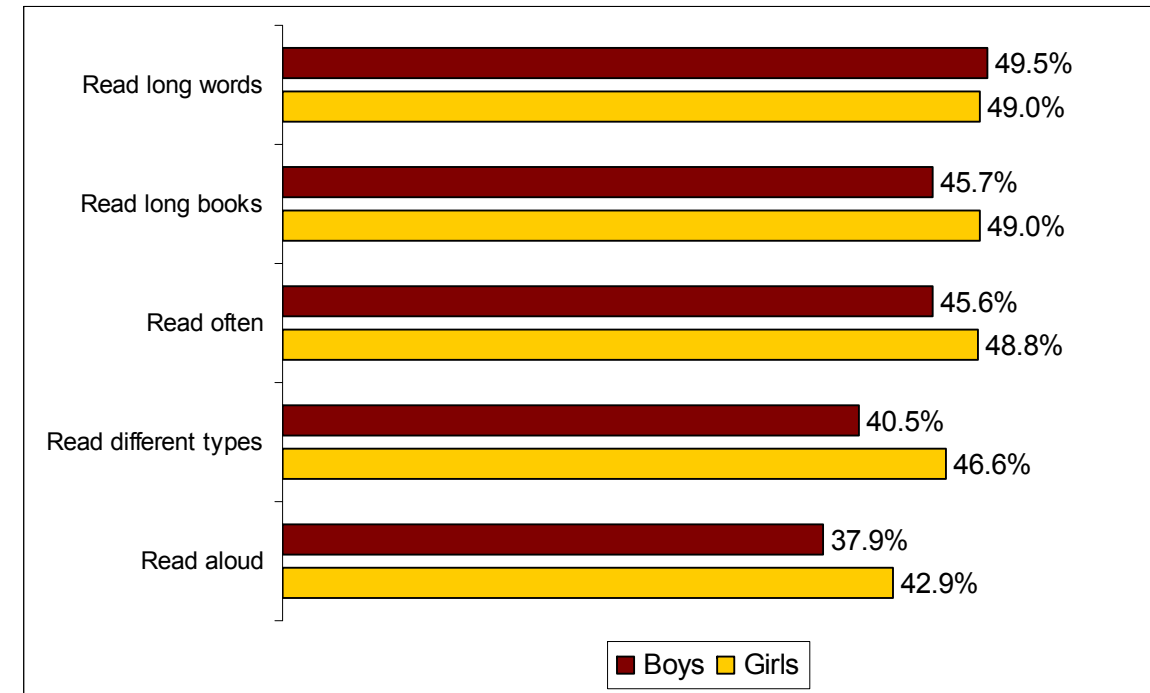
When asked whether reading is more of a girls' thing, more of a boys' thing or for everyone, more boys than girls indicated that it is more for girls (14.3% and 11.0%, respectively), while a greater number of girls than boys said that reading is for everyone (81.8% vs. 87.4%).

Interestingly, a significantly greater percentage of boys than girls indicated that reading is more important than TV and listening to music at the moment (see **Figure 4.8**). Conversely, a significantly greater proportion of girls than boys stated that reading is more important than computers or computer games at the moment. There were no significant gender differences in terms of the importance of sport and hanging out with friends at the moment.

Figure 4.8: Reading is more important than…
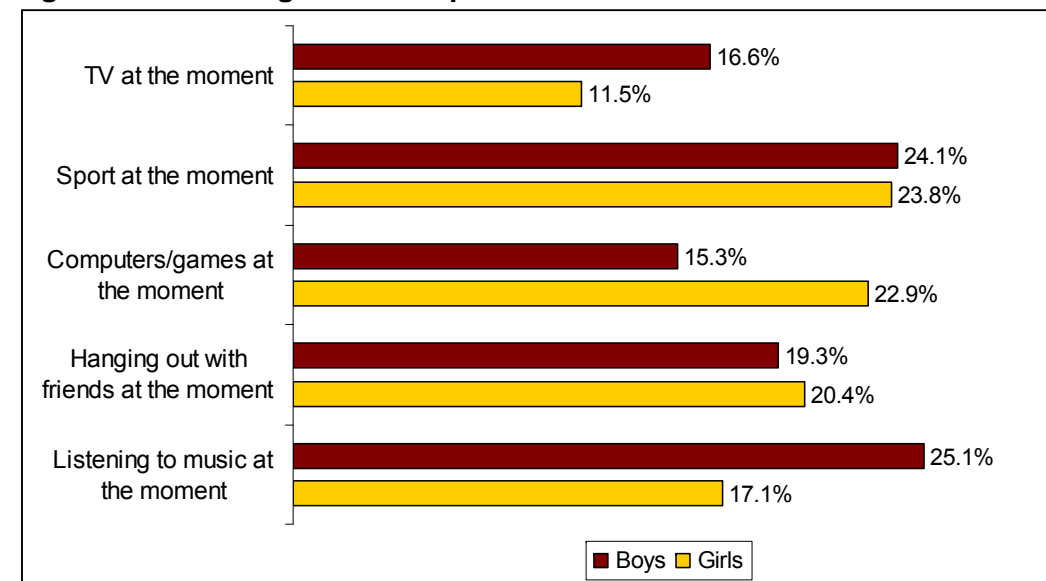
Gender continued to exert an influence when pupils were asked to assess the importance of reading compared to other activities in order to do well in life (see **Figure 4.9**). A significantly greater percentage of girls than boys stated that reading is more important than sport to do well in

their life, while a significantly greater proportion of boys than girls indicated that reading is more important than hanging out with friends and listening to music to do well.

Figure 4.9: Reading is more important than…

- TV to do well: Boys 54.0%, Girls 54.7%
- Sport to do well: Boys 20.3%, Girls 26.1%
- Computers/games to do well: Boys 50.6%, Girls 50.7%
- Hanging out with friends to do well: Boys 30.4%, Girls 21.1%
- Listening to music to do well: Boys 46.3%, Girls 39.9%

Boys ■ Girls □
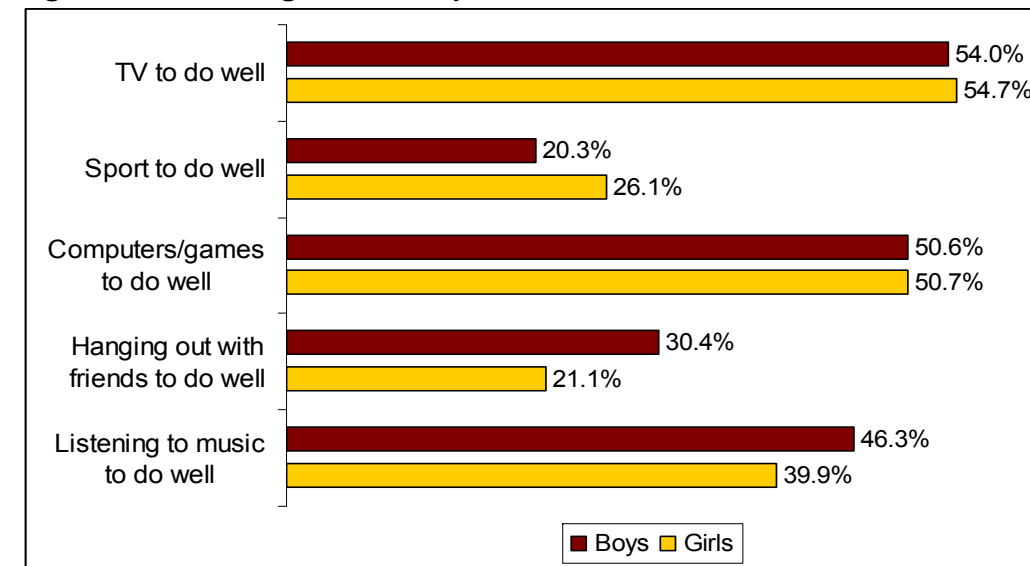
Family influences

Although girls were more likely than boys to state that their mum (or step-mother/carer), dad (or step-dad/carer) and brother/sister think that they are a good reader, these differences were not statistically significant (see **Figure 4.10**).

Figure 4.10: Who in your family thinks you are a good reader?

- My mum: Boys 61.7%, Girls 65.8%
- My dad: Boys 47.3%, Girls 52.4%
- My brother/sister: Boys 29.8%, Girls 33.5%
- No-one: Boys 12.6%, Girls 7.0%
- Don't know: Boys 6.3%, Girls 8.3%

Boys ■ Girls □
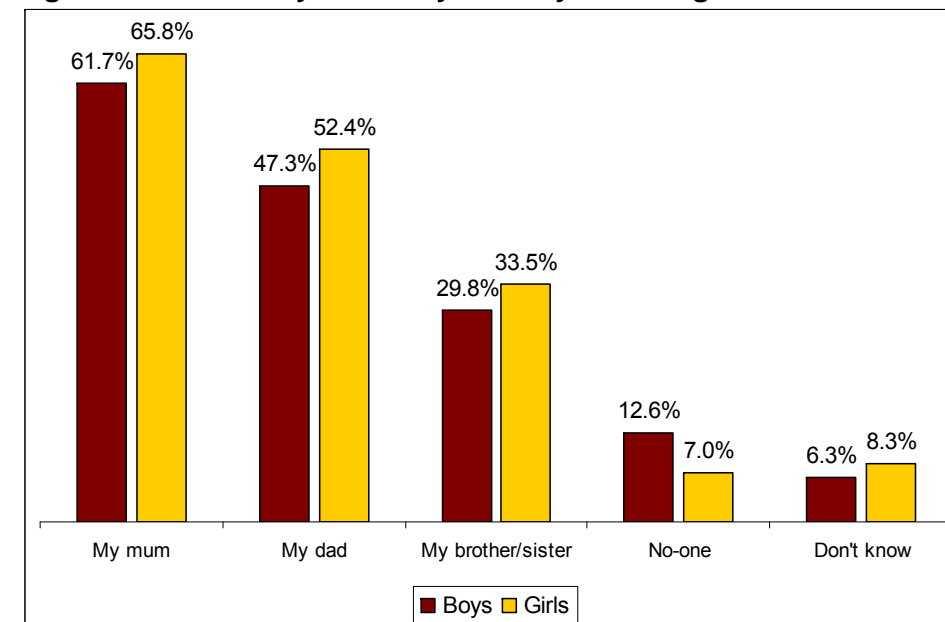
Similarly, although girls were more likely than boys to indicate that their mum (or step-mother/carer) encourages them to read, this difference was not significant (see **Figure 4.11**).

Figure 4.11: Who in your family encourages you to read?
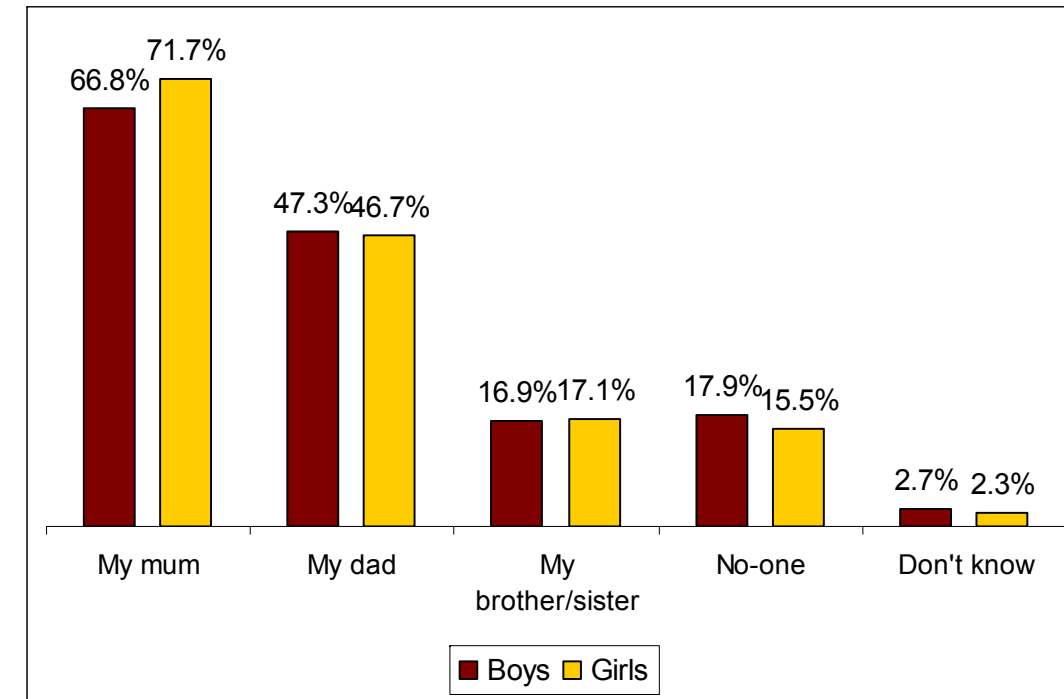
Peer influences

A significantly greater percentage of girls than boys indicated that their friends are readers (43.0% and 31.0%, respectively). A significantly greater percentage of girls than boys also believed that their friends think that they are good readers (45.8% vs. 34.3%) and encourage them to read (21.6% vs. 16.1%).

Figure 4.12 shows that a significantly greater proportion of girls than boys also indicated that their friends read magazines, websites, emails, fiction books, blogs/networking websites and poetry. By contrast, a significantly greater percentage of boys than girls reported that their friends read comics/graphic novels. None of the other differences was statistically significant.

Figure 4.12: What do your friends read?
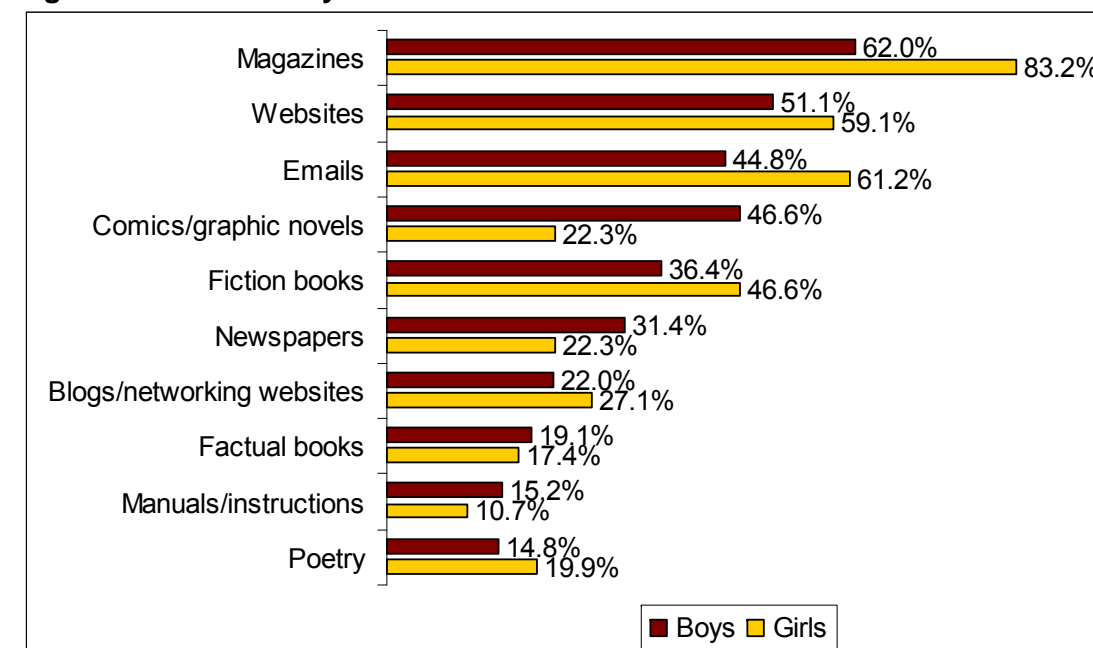
Girls generally believed that their friends had a more positive picture of what readers are like than boys (see **Figure 4.13**). More specifically, a significantly greater percentage of girls than boys thought that their friends view readers as clever/intelligent, someone who wants to do well in life and as happy. Conversely, a significantly greater percentage of boys than girls believed that their friends see readers as geeky/nerds.

Figure 4.13: Do your friends think reading is for people who…?
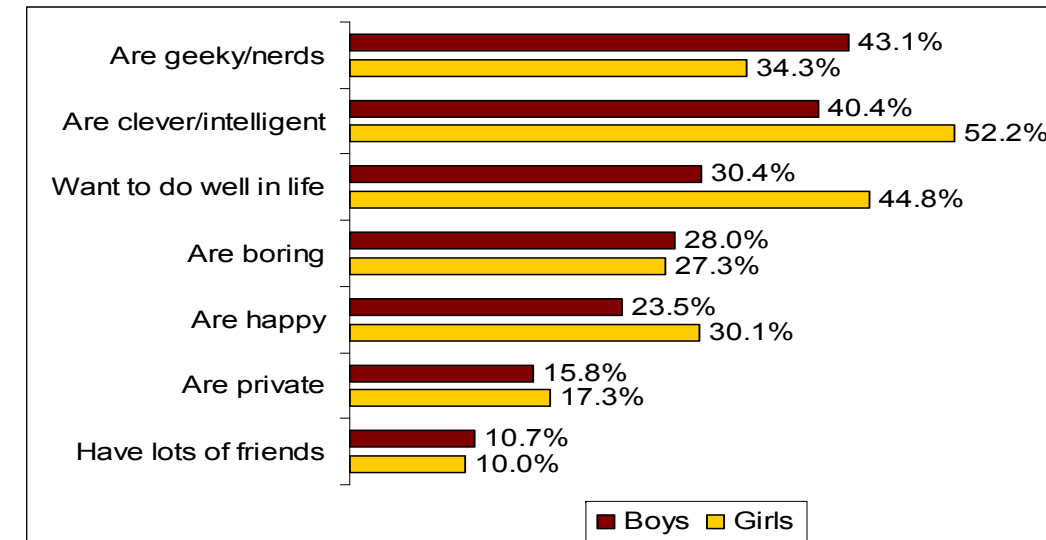
School influences

When asked whether adults in their school think that they read well, a greater percentage of boys than girls thought so (47.8% vs. 40.5%). Conversely, a greater percentage of girls than boys did not know what adults think of their reading proficiency (52.2% vs. 43.7%). These differences were statistically significant.

Figure 4.14 shows that a significantly greater percentage of girls than boys indicated that adults in their school encourage them to read fiction books and poetry. None of the other differences was statistically significant.

Figure 4.14: Which of the following do adults in your school encourage you to read?
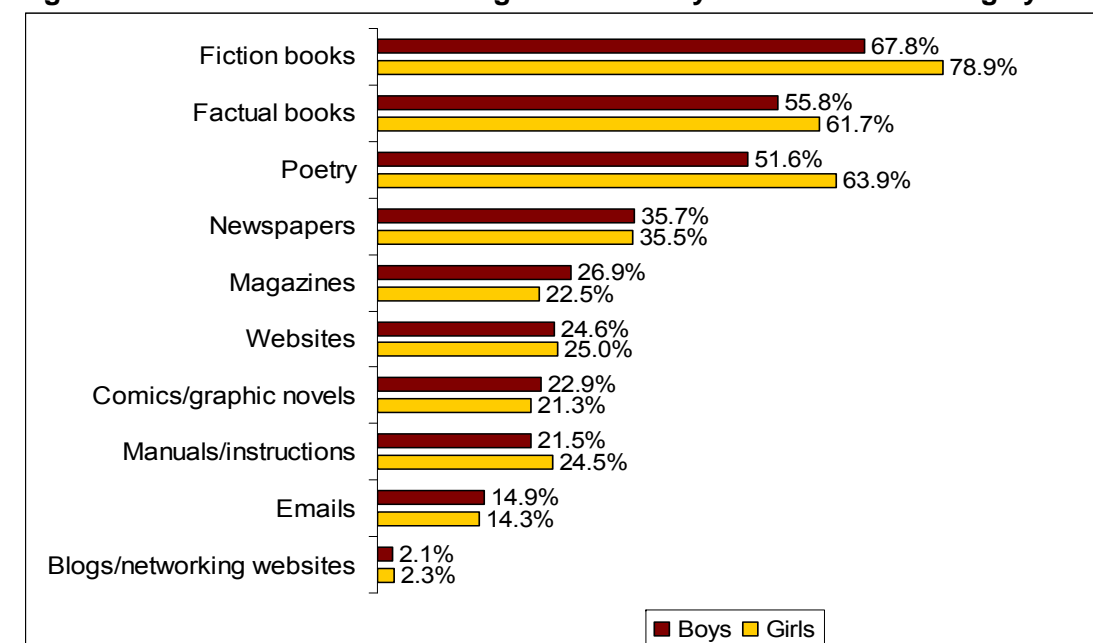
Chapter 5: The bigger picture – the interplay between gender and reader self-concept

This report so far has shown that being a reader and gender impact greatly on reading behaviour and reader self-concepts. A lot is made of the reluctant or disengaged male reader and it was therefore of interest to us to explore the connection between gender and seeing oneself as a reader. Are there significant differences between reluctant boy and reluctant girl readers? And if so, what are these differences and what could be done to address them? This is explored in this chapter.

The analyses in this chapter are based on 516 boys who defined themselves as readers, 626 girls who defined themselves as readers, 270 boys who did not see themselves as readers and 201 girls who did not define themselves as readers.

Table 5.1 shows that there were no significant differences between either boy and girl readers or between boy and girl non-readers.

Table 5.1: How good a reader do you think you are? (in per cent)

	Boy Reader	Girl Reader	Boy Non-reader	Girl Non-reader
1	1.0	0.2	6.7	7.5
2	0.4	1.0	5.6	8.0
3	1.0	1.0	8.9	5.5
4	4.5	4.0	13.0	9.5
5	9.5	12.1	14.1	22.9
6	9.1	9.6	14.8	12.4
7	15.5	15.5	16.7	10.9
8	25.6	22.8	12.2	15.4
9	17.8	19.6	4.8	4.5
10	15.7	14.2	3.3	3.5

(Note: 1 = not a very good reader – 10 = an excellent reader)

Although a greater percentage of girl than boy readers said that they read every day or almost everyday (see **Figure 5.1**), there were no significant differences between boys and girls who saw themselves as readers. There were also no significant differences between boys and girls who did not see themselves as readers.

Both reading girls and non-reading girls indicated that they read more outside of school than their male counterparts (see **Figure 5.2**). A significantly greater percentage of reading and non-reading girls than the equivalent boys said that they read magazines, fiction books, email and blogs/networking websites. Conversely, a significantly greater percentage of reading and non-reading boys than their female counterparts stated reading newspapers and comics/graphic novels. A significantly greater percentage of reading boys than girls also indicated that they read factual books and manuals.

Figure 5.1: How often do you read outside of school?

Every day/almost every day
- Reader - Boy: 45.0%
- Reader - Girl: 50.6%
- Nreader - Boy: 11.2%
- Nreader - Girl: 13.4%

Once/twice a week
- Reader - Boy: 41.0%
- Reader - Girl: 36.2%
- Nreader - Boy: 23.0%
- Nreader - Girl: 28.4%

Once/twice a month
- Reader - Boy: 10.9%
- Reader - Girl: 11.2%
- Nreader - Boy: 34.2%
- Nreader - Girl: 32.8%

Never/almost never
- Reader - Boy: 3.1%
- Reader - Girl: 2.1%
- Nreader - Boy: 31.6%
- Nreader - Girl: 25.4%

Reader - Boy   Reader - Girl   Nreader - Boy   Nreader - Girl
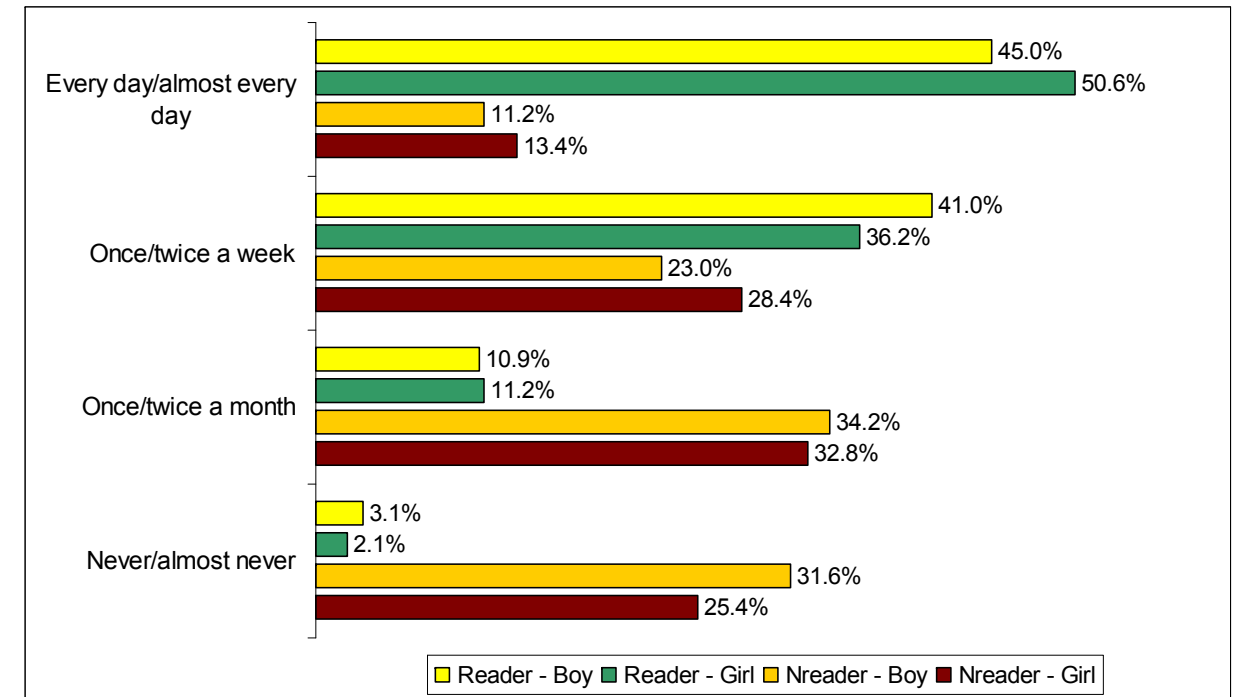
Figure 5.2: Which of the following do you read outside of school more than once a month?

Magazines
- 67.1%
- 80.2%
- 56.7%
- 79.6%

Fiction books
- 59.8%
- 59.4%
- 9.3%
- 13.4%

Websites
- 60.7%
- 57.5%
- 53.0%
- 51.7%

Emails
- 50.3%
- 60.2%
- 35.2%
- 54.7%

Blogs/networking websites
- 43.3%
- 53.7%
- 41.9%
- 59.7%

Newspapers
- 49.7%
- 30.0%
- 33.3%
- 19.4%

Comics/graphic novels
- 44.3%
- 19.3%
- 23.0%
- 7.5%

Factual books
- 29.2%
- 20.3%
- 7.0%
- 5.5%

Manuals
- 29.0%
- 13.3%
- 8.9%
- 8.0%

Poetry
- 14.7%
- 23.5%
- 4.1%
- 6.5%

Reader - Boy   Reader - Girl   Nreader - Boy   Nreader - Girl
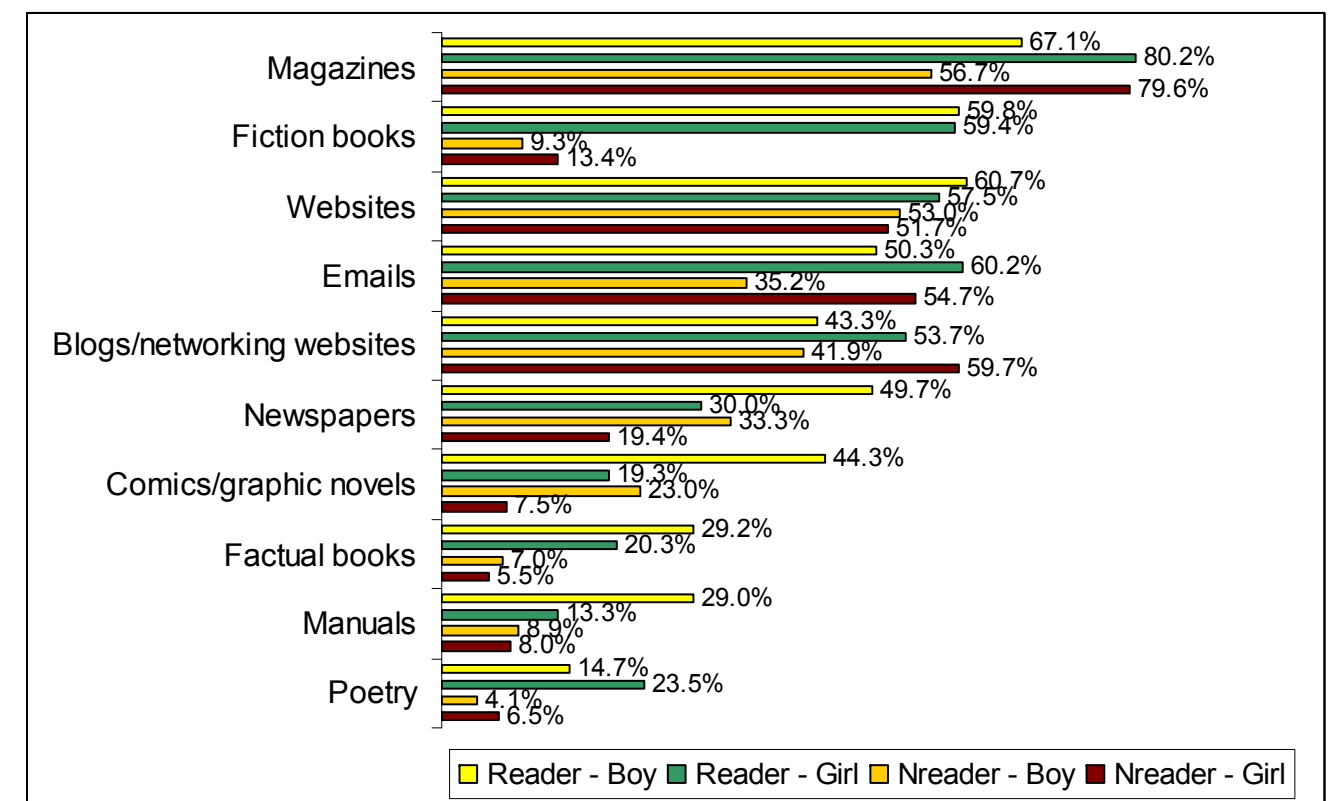
While chapters 3 and 4 showed that both readers and non-readers as well as boys and girls differed in their feelings associated with reading, **Figure 5.3** shows that there were no great differences between boys and girls who saw themselves as readers as well as boys and girls who did not see themselves as readers. None of the differences was statistically significant.

Figure 5.3: How does reading make you feel?

Chart data:

- Calm — Reader-Boy: 71.2%, Reader-Girl: 74.8%, Nreader-Boy: 28.5%, Nreader-Girl: 30.8%
- Happy — Reader-Boy: 35.6%, Reader-Girl: 42.0%, Nreader-Boy: 10.0%, Nreader-Girl: 10.0%
- Curious — Reader-Boy: 29.6%, Reader-Girl: 29.4%, Nreader-Boy: 11.1%, Nreader-Girl: 13.4%
- Clever/intelligent — Reader-Boy: 24.6%, Reader-Girl: 24.0%, Nreader-Boy: 8.9%, Nreader-Girl: 10.0%
- Bored — Reader-Boy: 17.8%, Reader-Girl: 14.4%, Nreader-Boy: 51.5%, Nreader-Girl: 59.7%
- Sad — Reader-Boy: 7.0%, Reader-Girl: 11.8%, Nreader-Boy: 8.9%, Nreader-Girl: 6.5%
- Nervous — Reader-Boy: 4.8%, Reader-Girl: 4.5%, Nreader-Boy: 5.2%, Nreader-Girl: 5.5%
- Stressed — Reader-Boy: 4.1%, Reader-Girl: 3.2%, Nreader-Boy: 13.0%, Nreader-Girl: 12.9%

Legend: Reader - Boy, Reader - Girl, Nreader - Boy, Nreader - Girl

While there were no differences in the types of feeling associated with reading between the groups, there were significant differences between them in their perceptions of the characteristics of readers (see **Figure 5.4**). Compared to reading boys, a significantly greater percentage of reading girls perceived readers to be clever/intelligent, someone who will do well in life and happy. Conversely, a significantly greater percentage of reading boys than girls saw readers as geeky/nerds. With regard to the non-reading group, a significantly greater proportion of non-reading girls than boys not only believed that readers are clever/intelligent but also that they are someone who does not go out much.

Figure 5.4: If you imagine someone who reads, what kind of person are they?

Chart data:

- Clever/intelligent — Reader-Boy: 50.5%, Reader-Girl: 58.3%, Nreader-Boy: 35.2%, Nreader-Girl: 49.3%
- Someone who will do well — Reader-Boy: 47.2%, Reader-Girl: 55.6%, Nreader-Boy: 27.8%, Nreader-Girl: 33.3%
- Happy — Reader-Boy: 39.1%, Reader-Girl: 45.2%, Nreader-Boy: 18.9%, Nreader-Girl: 17.9%
- Geeky/a nerd — Reader-Boy: 26.7%, Reader-Girl: 17.4%, Nreader-Boy: 44.1%, Nreader-Girl: 42.8%
- Boring — Reader-Boy: 15.3%, Reader-Girl: 9.3%, Nreader-Boy: 34.8%, Nreader-Girl: 36.3%
- Someone who has lots of friends — Reader-Boy: 11.0%, Reader-Girl: 11.0%, Nreader-Boy: 4.8%, Nreader-Girl: 6.5%
- Someone who doesn't go out much — Reader-Boy: 11.6%, Reader-Girl: 7.3%, Nreader-Boy: 11.9%, Nreader-Girl: 25.9%
- Outgoing — Reader-Boy: 3.7%, Reader-Girl: 2.9%, Nreader-Boy: 0.7%, Nreader-Girl: 0.0%

Legend: Reader - Boy, Reader - Girl, Nreader - Boy, Nreader - Girl

When asked what types of materials a reader enjoys (see **Figure 5.5**), there were a few significant differences between the groups. A significantly greater proportion of boy than girl readers believed that a reader enjoys newspapers, comics/graphic novels and manuals. By contrast, a significantly greater proportion of girl than boy readers thought that a reader enjoys poetry. A significantly greater proportion of non-reader girls than boys believed that a reader reads poetry and factual books.

Figure 5.5: In your opinion, what does a reader enjoy?
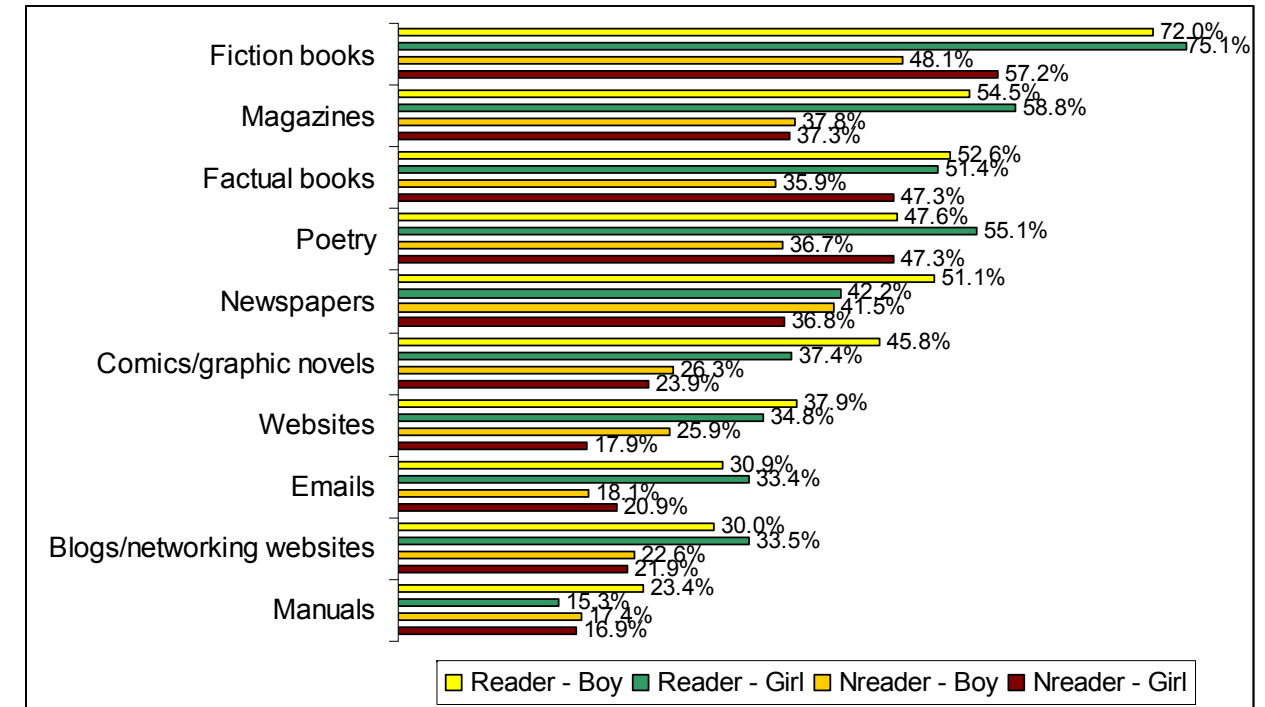
There were no significant differences between reading girls and boys in terms of their attitude towards reading as a gendered activity. However, a significantly greater percentage of non-reading boys (24.1%) than girls (13.0%) believed that reading is more of a girls' thing. Conversely, non-reading girls were more likely than boys to see that reading is for everyone (82.0% vs. 71.4%).

A significantly greater proportion of boy than girl readers (see **Figure 5.6**) indicated that reading is more important than watching TV and listening to music at the moment, while a significantly greater proportion of girl than boy readers stated that reading is more important than computers/computer games at the moment. None of the differences between boy and girl non-readers were statistically significant.

When asked whether reading is more important than other activities to do well in life (see **Figure 5.7**), a significantly greater proportion of reading girls than boys stated that reading is more important than sport, while a significantly greater proportion of reading boys than girls believed that reading is more important than hanging out with friends and listening to music to do well in life. Also, a significantly greater proportion of non-reading boys than girls said that to do well in life, reading is more important than hanging out with friends.

Figure 5.6: Reading is more important than…

TV at the moment
- Reader - Boy: 20.0%
- Reader - Girl: 12.7%
- Nreader - Boy: 9.6%
- Nreader - Girl: 8.0%

Sport at the moment
- Reader - Boy: 28.3%
- Reader - Girl: 27.6%
- Nreader - Boy: 15.6%
- Nreader - Girl: 12.0%

Computers/games at the moment
- Reader - Boy: 19.0%
- Reader - Girl: 26.9%
- Nreader - Boy: 8.5%
- Nreader - Girl: 10.0%

Hanging out with friends at the moment
- Reader - Boy: 21.7%
- Reader - Girl: 23.5%
- Nreader - Boy: 14.8%
- Nreader - Girl: 10.9%

Listening to music at the moment
- Reader - Boy: 30.2%
- Reader - Girl: 19.8%
- Nreader - Boy: 15.2%
- Nreader - Girl: 8.5%

Legend: Reader - Boy, Reader - Girl, Nreader - Boy, Nreader - Girl

Figure 5.7: Reading is more important than…

TV to do well
- Reader - Boy: 59.9%
- Reader - Girl: 59.3%
- Nreader - Boy: 42.4%
- Nreader - Girl: 40.3%

Sport to do well
- Reader - Boy: 23.1%
- Reader - Girl: 29.8%
- Nreader - Boy: 14.5%
- Nreader - Girl: 14.9%

Computers/games to do well
- Reader - Boy: 57.2%
- Reader - Girl: 54.6%
- Nreader - Boy: 38.7%
- Nreader - Girl: 38.3%

Hanging out with friends to do well
- Reader - Boy: 33.4%
- Reader - Girl: 22.0%
- Nreader - Boy: 25.1%
- Nreader - Girl: 18.1%

Listening to music to do well
- Reader - Boy: 53.3%
- Reader - Girl: 43.2%
- Nreader - Boy: 33.5%
- Nreader - Girl: 29.1%

Legend: Reader - Boy, Reader - Girl, Nreader - Boy, Nreader - Girl

There were no significant differences between the groups in what being a good reader means to them (see **Figure 5.8**).

Figure 5.8: If someone said you were a good reader, what would that mean to you?

	Reader - Boy	Reader - Girl	Nreader - Boy	Nreader - Girl
Reading long books	56.9%	52.2%	35.9%	39.3%
Reading long words	54.7%	55.0%	28.9%	30.8%
Reading often	51.6%	54.8%	33.7%	30.3%
Reading different materials	39.7%	44.6%	34.4%	37.8%
Reading aloud	48.5%	53.0%	25.6%	26.9%
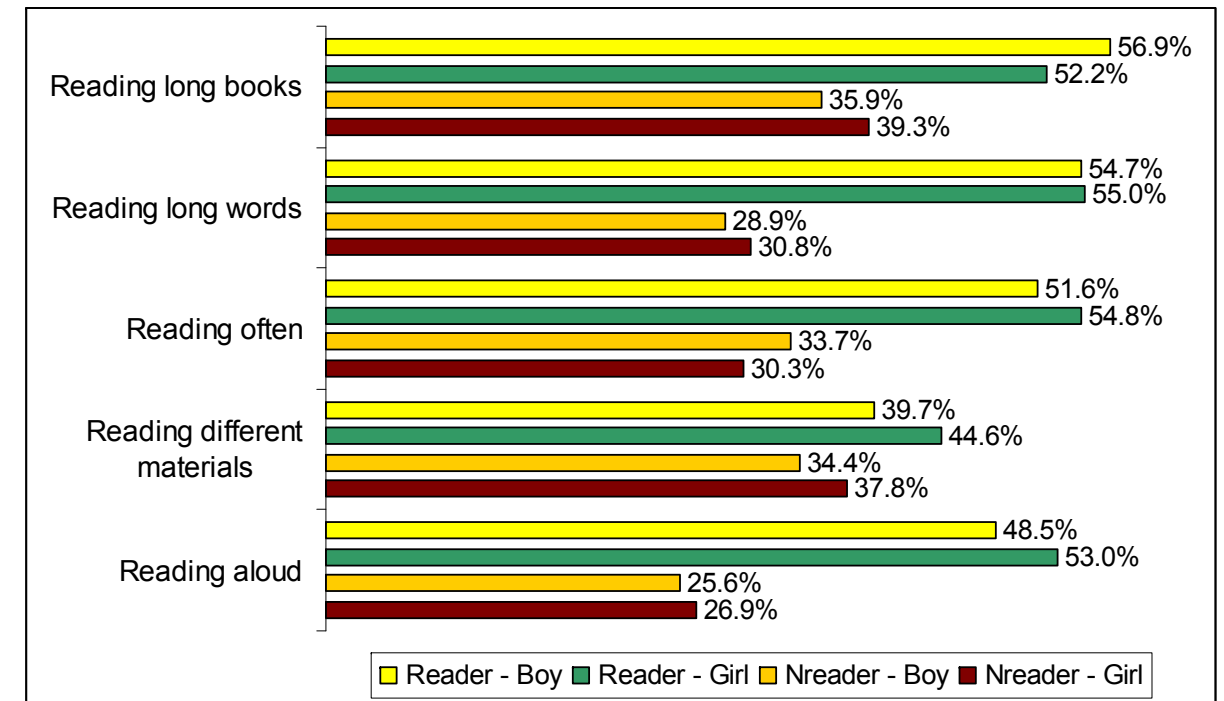
Family influences

When asked whether anyone in their family thinks they are a good reader (see **Figure 5.9**), a significantly greater percentage of boy than girl non-readers said that no one thinks so, while a significantly greater percentage of girl than boy non-readers indicated that they did not know whether anyone in their family thinks so. None of the other differences was statistically significant. There were also no significant differences between the groups in the extent to which they believed that members of their family encourage them to read (see **Figure 5.10**).

Figure 5.9: Who in your family thinks you are a good reader?

	Reader - Boy	Reader - Girl	Nreader - Boy	Nreader - Girl
My mum	71.0%	72.5%	44.1%	44.8%
My dad	56.9%	59.3%	28.9%	30.8%
My brother/sister	36.4%	37.7%	17.8%	19.9%
No-one	8.3%	4.5%	21.1%	14.9%
Don't know	4.6%	5.3%	9.3%	17.9%
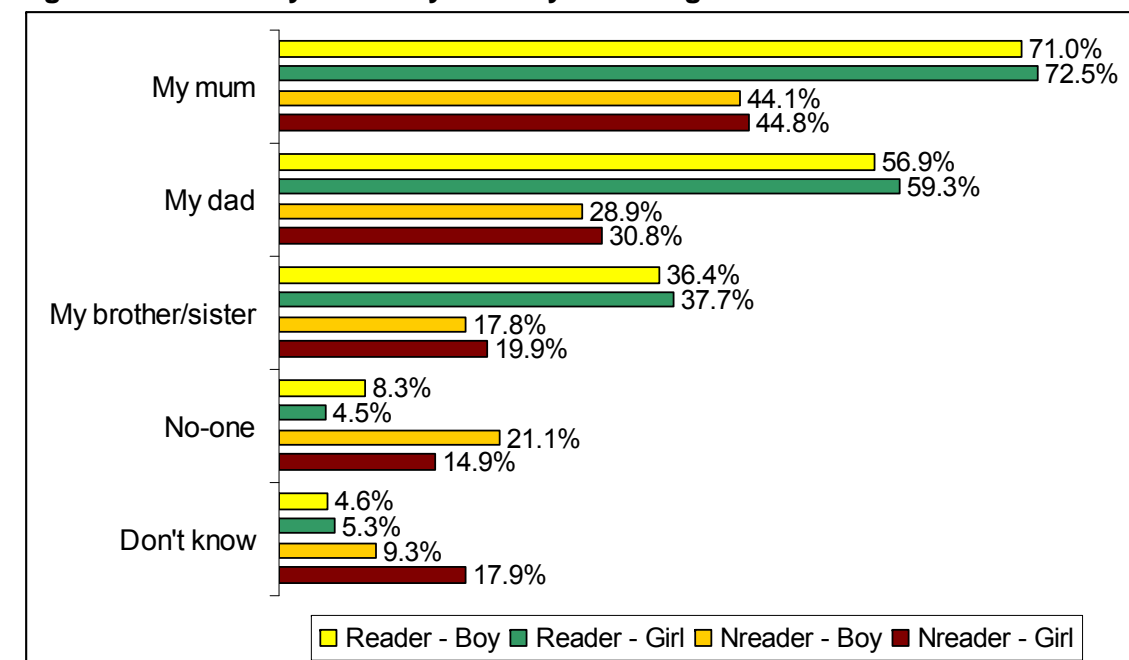
Figure 5.10: Who in your family encourages you to read?

My mum
- Reader - Boy: 72.0%
- Reader - Girl: 75.1%
- Nreader - Boy: 58.1%
- Nreader - Girl: 58.7%

My dad
- Reader - Boy: 54.0%
- Reader - Girl: 49.5%
- Nreader - Boy: 34.8%
- Nreader - Girl: 37.8%

My brother/sister
- Reader - Boy: 18.8%
- Reader - Girl: 17.9%
- Nreader - Boy: 13.7%
- Nreader - Girl: 14.4%

No-one
- Reader - Boy: 13.0%
- Reader - Girl: 12.0%
- Nreader - Boy: 27.0%
- Nreader - Girl: 26.4%

Don't know
- Reader - Boy: 2.7%
- Reader - Girl: 1.4%
- Nreader - Boy: 2.6%
- Nreader - Girl: 5.0%

Legend: ☐ Reader - Boy ■ Reader - Girl ☐ Nreader - Boy ■ Nreader - Girl

Peer influences

Unlike their non-reading peers, who did not differ significantly in the extent to which they said that their friends were reading (non-reading boys = 14.2% vs. non-reading girls = 18.2%), a significantly greater percentage of reading girls than boys said that their friends are readers (reading girls = 50.9% vs. reading boys = 41.1%). A significantly greater percentage of reading girls than boys (51.2% vs. 42.8%) and non-reading girls than boys (28.9% vs. 17.5%) indicated that their friends think that they are good readers. However, there were no significant differences between the groups in the degree to which they feel that their friends encourage them to read (reading: girls = 25.1%, boys = 20.0%; non-reading: girls = 10.1% , boys = 8.2%).

There were significant differences between the groups in the extent to which they believed their friends were reading a range of materials (see **Figure 5.11**). A significantly greater percentage of reading girls than boys believed that their friends were reading magazines, websites, emails and fiction books. By contrast, a significantly greater perception of reading boys than girls stated that their friends read comics/graphic novels, newspapers and manuals. A significantly greater percentage of non-reading girls than boys thought that their friends read magazines, emails and blogs/networking websites. Conversely, a significantly greater percentage of non-reading boys than girls did not know what their friends are reading (21.9% vs. 11.9%).

Figure 5.12 shows that when asked what they thought their friends believed readers to be like, a significantly greater percentage of reading girls than boys indicated that they thought their friends perceive readers to be clever/intelligent and someone who will do well in life, while a significantly greater percentage of reading boys than girls thought their friends see readers as geeky/nerds. Mirroring their reading counterparts, a significantly greater percentage of non-reading girls than boys also indicated that they believe that their friends perceive readers to be clever/intelligent and someone who will do well in life, while a significantly greater percentage of non-reading boys than girls thought that their friends see readers as boring.

Figure 5.11: What do your friends read?

Magazines — Reader - Boy 66.0%, Reader - Girl 85.1%, Nreader - Boy 54.1%, Nreader - Girl 77.6%
Websites — Reader - Boy 55.3%, Reader - Girl 62.6%, Nreader - Boy 42.6%, Nreader - Girl 48.3%
Emails — Reader - Boy 51.1%, Reader - Girl 63.6%, Nreader - Boy 33.0%, Nreader - Girl 54.2%
Fiction books — Reader - Boy 45.6%, Reader - Girl 53.4%, Nreader - Boy 18.5%, Nreader - Girl 25.4%
Comics/graphic novels — Reader - Boy 47.0%, Reader - Girl 24.6%, Nreader - Boy 25.9%, Nreader - Girl 15.4%
Newspapers — Reader - Boy 33.1%, Reader - Girl 23.0%, Nreader - Boy 26.1%, Nreader - Girl 23.4%
Blogs/networking websites — Reader - Boy 22.6%, Reader - Girl 25.2%, Nreader - Boy 19.6%, Nreader - Girl 32.8%
Factual books — Reader - Boy 24.4%, Reader - Girl 19.0%, Nreader - Boy 9.3%, Nreader - Girl 12.4%
Poetry — Reader - Boy 18.4%, Reader - Girl 22.2%, Nreader - Boy 8.1%, Nreader - Girl 12.9%
Manuals — Reader - Boy 18.4%, Reader - Girl 11.0%, Nreader - Boy 9.3%, Nreader - Girl 10.0%

Legend: Reader - Boy | Reader - Girl | Nreader - Boy | Nreader - Girl

Figure 5.12: Do your friends think reading is for people who…?

Are clever/intelligent — Reader - Boy 44.7%, Reader - Girl 53.2%, Nreader - Boy 32.2%, Nreader - Girl 48.8%
Want to do well — Reader - Boy 35.6%, Reader - Girl 50.3%, Nreader - Boy 20.4%, Nreader - Girl 27.4%
Are geeky/nerds — Reader - Boy 38.1%, Reader - Girl 28.6%, Nreader - Boy 53.3%, Nreader - Girl 52.2%
Are happy — Reader - Boy 29.4%, Reader - Girl 34.5%, Nreader - Boy 12.2%, Nreader - Girl 15.9%
Are boring — Reader - Boy 24.0%, Reader - Girl 21.2%, Nreader - Boy 46.3%, Nreader - Girl 36.3%
Are private — Reader - Boy 16.8%, Reader - Girl 19.8%, Nreader - Boy 13.7%, Nreader - Girl 15.4%
Have lots of friends — Reader - Boy 13.0%, Reader - Girl 11.3%, Nreader - Boy 6.7%, Nreader - Girl 6.0%

Legend: Reader - Boy | Reader - Girl | Nreader - Boy | Nreader - Girl

School influences

Although a greater percentage of reading boys than girls (55.2% vs. 49.9%) and non-reading boys than girls (33.6% v. 25.1%) felt that adults in their school think that they read well, these differences were not statistically significant.

There were a few significant differences between the groups when they were asked which materials adults in their school encourage them to read (see **Figure 5.13**). A significantly greater proportion of reading girls than boys and non-reading girls than boys believed that adults in their school promote fiction books and poetry. None of the other differences between the groups was statistically significant.

Figure 5.13: Which of the following do adults in your school encourage you to read?
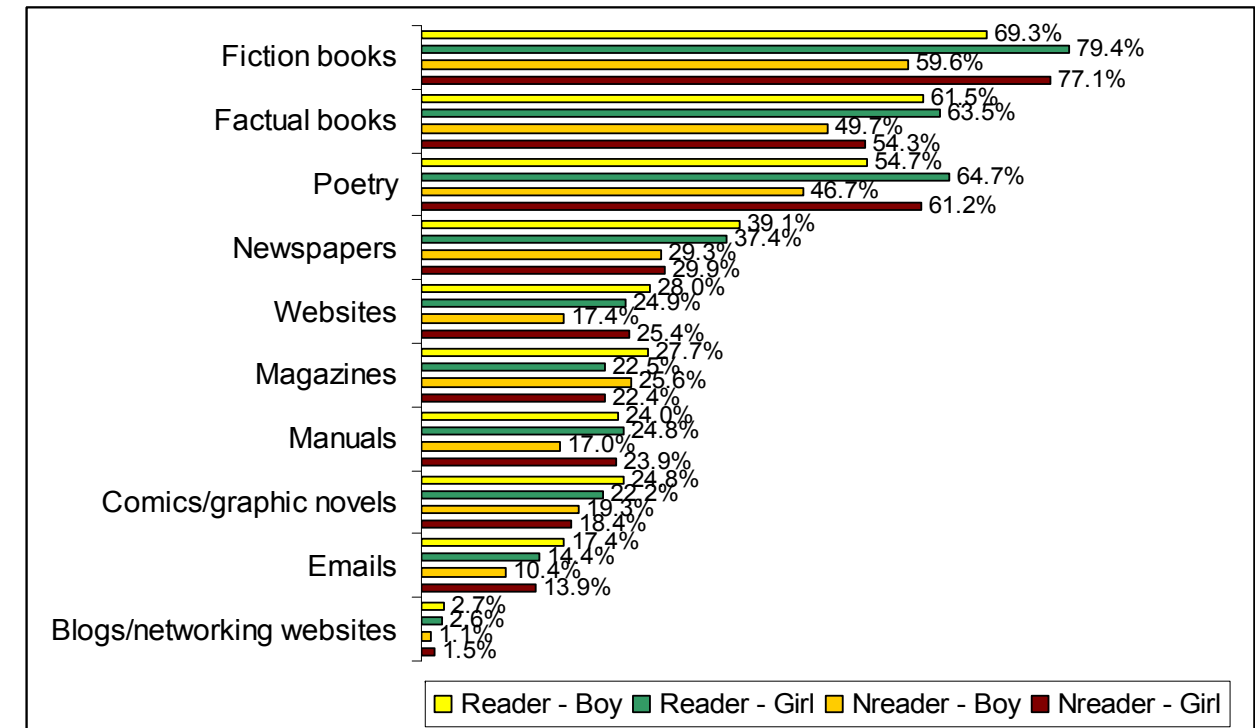
Chapter 6: Discussion, implications and conclusion

Current policy around literacy at school includes, alongside a framework for teaching, a drive to encourage children to enjoy reading as a way of raising standards. This can be seen in the Government's revised primary and secondary frameworks, which include a focus on reading for pleasure, as well as the announcement of a National Year of Reading in 2008. Of interest is the finding that when 35 professionals from research policy, practice and the media were interviewed by the NLT about a range of literacy issues for the coming year, most interviewees believed that reading for pleasure is not currently a "hot" topic but most certainly should be a focus of attention in 2008 (NLT, 2007).

In addition, there is great support for such initiatives as Booktime, Booked Up, Boys Into Books, Reading Connects and Reading Champions. The Rose Review into the teaching of reading (2006) also advocated a language-rich framework for teaching, with the aim of fostering positive attitudes towards reading and a love of books.

Among other concerns, the present study investigated reading enjoyment and reading habits in young people. Findings by the recent PIRLS report (2007) showed that while the reading of novels and stories has declined significantly between 2001 and 2006, there has been a slight increase in the number of comic books and newspapers read by 10-year-olds in England. A recent US study of the reading habits of urban adolescents (Hughes-Hassell and Rodge, 2007) found that magazines were the preferred reading material for both males and females, followed by comics and the internet. The present study showed that a similar reading dynamic occurs here in England – pupils indicated that magazines, followed by websites and emails, were the most popular reading materials outside of school.

The importance of the reader self-concept

The main focus of this research has been the reader self-concept. Recent developments in literacy teaching and research have tended to target the needs of primary, rather than secondary school pupils and focus on technical rather than affective aspects of reading (Atkinson, 2006). However, studies such as the present one highlight the importance of focusing on the affective aspects of reading, such as motivation (Baker and Wigfield, 1999), attitudes (McKenna, Kear and Ellsworth, 1995), or the reader self-concept.

Previous research analyses imply that the development of a "self that reads" might be described as a process of movement along a continuum over which a complex, flexible, dialogic self-system develops and which then influences the kind and amount of transactional relationship a reader has with a text (Lynsaker, 2006). Studies have shown that pupils' reading competence affects their reader self-concept in that less competent readers are more likely to evidence a negative self-concept and negative attitudes towards reading than competent readers. The present findings are consistent with this research. In this study, pupils who defined themselves as readers were significantly more likely to rate themselves as proficient readers than pupils who defined themselves to be non-readers.

However, this study adds to previous research by also showing the self-concept seems to be linked to all facets of reading behaviour and attitudes. For example, readers not only read significantly more often and more widely than non-readers but they also associated reading with more positive feelings and viewed readers more favourably. Overall, our findings are in line with Quandt and Selznick (1984) who in their seminal work on the reading self-concept argued that the self-concept is not a behaviour but a construct that is evidenced by a number of behaviours and attitudes.

This study also highlights the importance of combating negative belief systems. It is now widely known that readers who resist reading risk becoming readers who struggle, and those who already struggle with reading miss important opportunities for improvement through interaction with text (Lenters, 2006). Morgan and Fuchs (2007) reviewed 15 studies that addressed the relationship between young children's reading and competency beliefs or goal orientations. Their results support the possibility of a bidirectional relationship between the two and they suggest that researchers, practitioners, and parents may need to target both reading skill and motivation to help poor readers become proficient.

The reader self-concept and gender

Findings from this questionnaire study support previous research, which has highlighted important differences between boys and girls, particularly in relation to reading preferences. Girls enjoy reading more, read more frequently and are more likely than boys to read magazines and emails outside of school, while boys are more likely to read comics/graphic novels. In line with findings by PIRLS (2007), girls also had a better attitude towards reading and were associating reading with different feelings and characteristics.

The origins of such gender differences are unclear. According to Eisenberg, Martin and Fabes (1996), girls have more positive attitudes towards reading than boys because they have greater internalised expectations of reading success. Alternatively, this bias may reflect a more cultural bias towards reading being more of a girls' activity. For example, Byrne (1996, p. 50) argued that "one's self-perceptions are very closely linked to the cultural context within which he or she was socialised". According to a recent review of the literature (DCSF, 2007a), other reasons contributing to the gender gap include girls and boys operating via different styles of learning, relating differently to school, and boys being more easily influenced by their peer group than girls. While we cannot say that boys and girls in our study were differently influenced by their peers, we found that boys and girls hold significantly different perceptions about their friends' reading choices and views of readers. Generally, girls believed that their peers view readers more favourably than boys did.

To redress the apparent gender gap in reading enjoyment, we would encourage schools to continue to focus on boys and their attitudes to reading. Increased awareness of the different types of reading materials that boys are reading would be a step in the right direction for addressing the gap between reading in school and reading outside of the classroom. Reading role models are also an important way to break the stereotypes that pupils may have, and male reading role models are particularly important, given the strong association that some boys have between reading and the female domain. Reading Champions (www.readingchampions.org.uk), a DCSF-funded National Literacy Trust initiative, is based on using the motivational power of male reading role models to inspire boys and has consequently successfully engaged many boys as readers.

Furthermore, we explored possible gender differences in the self-concept. Previous research has consistently shown that girls have more positive reading attitudes (e.g. Swalander & Taube, 2007). In line with previous research (eg Nieuwenhuizen, 2001), boys are significantly more likely than girls to view reading negatively − to view reading as boring and as geeky. However, we also wondered whether there are significant differences between reluctant boy and girl readers. And if so, what are these differences and what could be done to address them? Our research showed that there were very few differences between non-reading boys and girls or between boys and girls who defined themselves as readers. While a lot of research, policy and practice has focused on the male reluctant reader in the past few years, the self-defined non-reading girl has frequently been overlooked. Therefore, schools need to consider working to change the stereotypes of the girls in a similar way that they do with the boys to avoid the self-defined female non-readers feeling neglected. This could involve drawing on similar key components which seem to motivate the boys, such as rewards and competition, but also using

the strong penchant of girls towards social and verbal interaction to create a buzz around reading.

The reader self-concept and reading proficiency

Consistent with a previous NLT survey (Clark and Foster, 2005), pupils in this study also rated themselves as proficient readers. Of further interest is the finding that the non-reader rates him/herself as a proficient reader. Tentatively put, non-readers know how to read but do not want to be seen to be readers, most likely because they tend to perceive readers negatively; that is, as geeky/nerds, boring and as people who do not go out much.

The self-defined non-reader and their reading habits – are we asking the right questions and what can we do to change perceptions?

One important finding of this study is that it has shown that pupils who label themselves as non-readers still read a variety of texts outside the classroom. For example, two-thirds of pupils who did not define themselves as readers said that they read magazines, while a half of these pupils also read websites, blogs/networking websites and emails. Alvermann and colleagues (2007) also found that adolescents who are deemed underachievers and who struggle to read school-assigned textbooks will engage with popular culture texts of their own choosing (eg, magazines, comics, TV, video games, music CDs, graffiti, email, and other internet-mediated texts).

However, these texts might not conform to what pupils (and parents, teachers and society at large) necessarily perceive to be "proper" reading materials. It can be assumed that because they do not enjoy "proper" texts - only 11% of them read fiction books - they label themselves as non-readers. This is highlighted by the gap between their own reading choices outside of class and the materials they believe a reader enjoys. Indeed, across the chapters, there was a close match between perceptions of the materials a reader enjoys and the texts they feel are being promoted by schools. However, both of these were also far removed from their own reading choices outside of class, particularly for self-defined non-readers.

Technology features strongly as a vehicle to encourage pupils to read more widely. By showing that websites, emails and blogs/networking sites were among the most commonly read texts outside of school, this study highlights the importance of technology in informing young people's reading choices. However, it throws into question the effectiveness of the approach of using technology as a hook to draw reluctant boy readers into reading because the use of technology, i.e. emails and blogs/networking websites, is significantly more prevalent with self-defined non-reading girls than boys, possibly because these forms of technology are just another form of communication and networking for girls. Also, there is still a certain amount of caution held by school staff about the validity of the internet and online communication as reading materials, and also in some cases lack of knowledge and confidence in using these materials in their reader development work. Schools might like to consider how they can break down the barriers related to ICT and include it as part of their continuing professional development. This could include setting up systems to share knowledge of good websites, blogs etc.

However, what this study shows is that questions about reading choices need to be framed inclusively and widely to combat such stereotypes. For example, time and again, studies report that boys read less than girls. For example, when asked whether they had read any books in the four weeks prior to the survey, Coles and Hall (2002) found that significantly more girls (84.1%) than boys (74.5%) responded positively to this question. Similar findings have also been made by previous and subsequent research. At the same time, however, research suggests that boys and girls read different things: boys are more likely than girls to read comics, for example. Comics are not books. Thus, although boys still read materials, i.e. comics, these are not targeted in the questions and the percentages may therefore underestimate boys' reading frequency. Similarly, by focusing questions about "books" a wide variety of materials are being excluded that are part of pupils' daily literacy practices.

Based on our findings, the key to changing the perceptions of those children and young people who consider themselves to be non-readers is to find out about their own perceptions of reading and readers. This could be done by surveying pupils at strategic points in their schooling lives – for example, at the key stage transition points. Such information would help inform planning and possibly also present an avenue for involving parents in their children's schooling.

On another practical level, our findings indicate that in order to change the negative perceptions that pupils might have about reading, schools need to find innovative ways to show that readers are not geeky, boring or without friends. This could be achieved by raising the profile of family and community role models to whom they aspire to be like. For example, in a NLT survey for Reading Champions (Clark, Torsi and Strong, 2005) of 1,500 boys we found that boys cited a variety of professions that would inspire them to read more, including the army and navy. Schools should consider creating links with these prominent members of the community and using them as role models. In addition, it is paramount that there are role models in school itself who pupils can identify with as readers. Reading Connects, a DCSF-funded National Literacy Trust initiative which supports schools in developing whole-school reading cultures advocates that schools need to involve the whole school community in the development of their pupils as readers, including catering staff, caretakers, parent groups etc. This will help to ensure that there is a reading role model for each pupil to relate to.

How can we change self-defined non-readers' perceptions of valid reading materials? This is the dual responsibility of the school and family. Schools can be encouraged to create reading lists related to curriculum areas which include websites, magazines etc as further reading materials. Also, in their reading promotions, they need to be aware of the bias to fiction books when they are advising pupils on reading choices, but also in the range of reading materials they stock. If pupils are overwhelmed by fiction titles on entering the school library or library corner, they will not be able to identify with it as a place of interest to them. Interesting displays of magazines, graphic novels, newspapers and website recommendations need to be prominent and appealing.

Furthermore, members of staff need to reinforce the message that reading means more than fiction titles by appearing as visible readers in school, enjoying newspapers, magazines and surfing on the internet. Parents also might need to be encouraged in the value they themselves place on a wide variety of reading materials. For example, according to Howard (2006), parents similarly often only acknowledge print-based reading, particularly novels, rather than electronic forms and may even limit their children's access to competing leisure pursuits such as computers and magazines.

The process of developing pupils' perception of what reading really is may take a long time. Therefore, schools need to be aware of the way in which they manage their reading promotions and activity. If pupils do not see themselves as readers, they are not likely to be interested in 'reading clubs', activities organised for National Children's Book Week or 'reading' lists. Schools may need to think creatively about how they can motivate self-defined non-readers to participate in this kind of activity. Rebranding reading promotions as activities linked to their own interests may be more motivating. The powerful effect of focusing on children's reading choices and wider interests are illustrated in the following before and after drawings reflecting one pupil's feelings about reading.

Would you draw a picture about how reading feels for you?

Would you draw a picture of how reading feels for you?
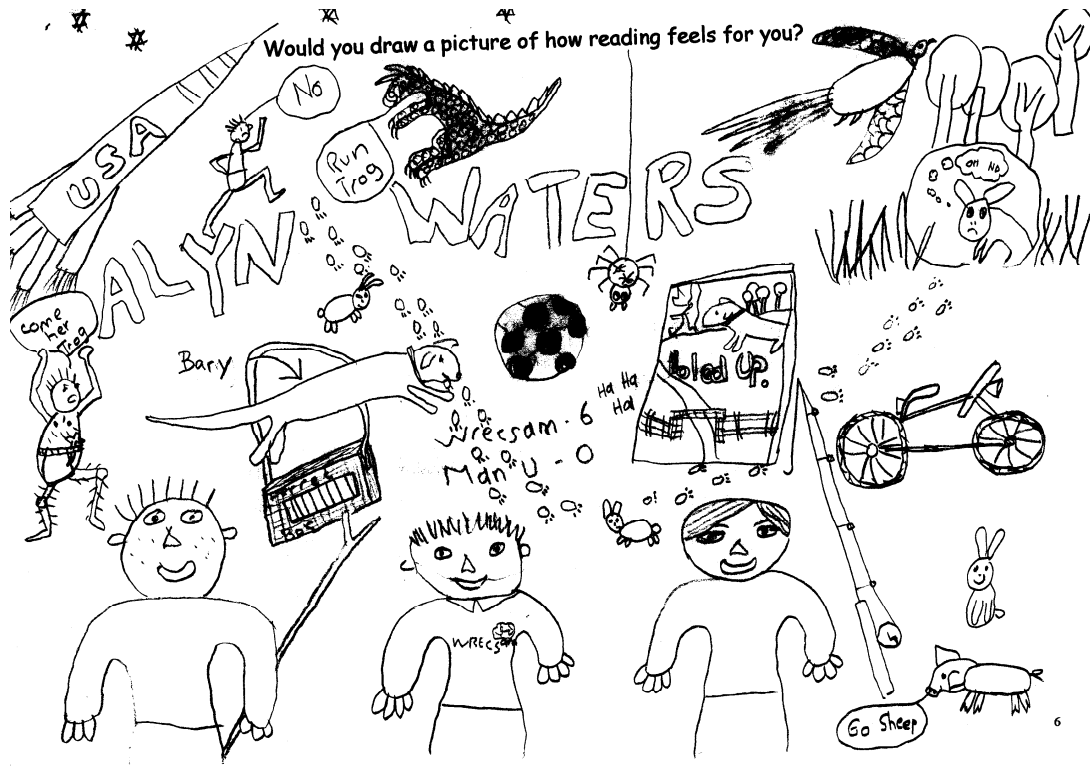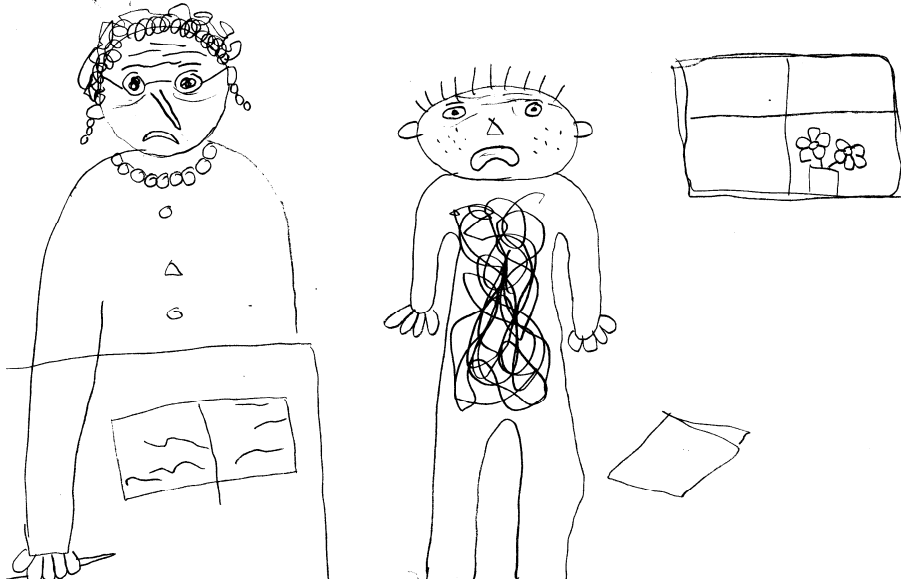
(reproduced with permission from Britten, 2001)

Importance of reading in relation to other activities

Visual and ICT media are often perceived as a threat to book reading in leisure time (Johnsson-Smaragdi and Jonsson, 2006). They are accused of taking time and interest away from children and adolescents' book reading by offering them more approachable alternatives (Wilson and Casey, 2007). When they know that an activity has some importance to them personally, they are more likely to engage in that activity. Findings from the present study indicate that reading was rarely more important than other activities in their lives at the moment. However, the pictured changed dramatically when pupils were asked to consider the importance of reading to help them do well in life. For example, while only a fifth of pupils believed that reading was more important that television in their lives at present, over half of the sample agreed that reading is more important than TV to help them do well in life. A similar increase in importance was evidenced for other activities as well. Thus, while reading has a hard time competing with other activities in their leisure time at present, pupils seem to be aware of the importance of reading as a skill to help them achieve in life.

Social interactions around reading

Interactions with significant others greatly influence children's perceptions of themselves (Brookover and Gottlieb, 1964). Gambrell (1996) proposes that "social interactions with others about books and stories foster wide, frequent reading" (p. 22). She also maintains that "opportunities for sharing and talking with others about books is an important factor in developing engaged, motivated readers" and supports the contention that social interactions have a positive influence on reading achievement (p. 22). Daniels (2002) also supports the idea of literature discussions: "what real readers actually do is find someone to talk to, ASAP. We need to enthuse about the book, to grieve the lost characters, revisit the funniest lines, savor the beautiful language" (p. 90). However, this study has shown that these strategies seem to work best for young people who are already engaged readers. Self-defined non-readers do not appear to have, or at the very least do not perceive themselves to have, the same opportunities for social interactions around reading compared to their reading peers. One of the consistent findings in the present study has been that non-readers are more likely to say that they do not know what their family thinks about their reading, that they do not feel that they get family encouragement to read, that they do not know whether their friends are reading or, indeed, what their friends are reading, and that they do not know what materials are being promoted by adults in their school.

Importance of peers

With the exception of paired reading or buddying programmes, there is a remarkable lack of rigorous research into the impact of peers on reading habits, attitudes or choices. However, what is clear from research into young people as well as adults is that peers are very influential in determining reading choices. Indeed, pupils who consider themselves to be readers mix with people who are readers. Our study showed that readers were significantly more likely to say that their friends are readers than non-readers. Readers also perceived greater peer encouragement to read than non-readers. Our study also shows that there is a remarkable overlap between pupils' own reading choices and the materials they believe their friends are reading. However, this study also suggests that pupils, particularly non-readers, who have a negative view of readers also believe that their friends hold this negative view.

There are strong practical implications for the findings of this research with regard to the influence of peers on pupils' attitudes to reading. The findings validate the need to use systems of peer-to-peer recommendation, involving pupils in developing their school's reading culture, championing reading to other pupils. We can use the enthusiasm of the self-defined readers to encourage other readers to widen their choice of reading materials in creative and innovative ways.

However, this does leave us with a problem. How can we motivate the self-defined non-readers if they are only socialising with other self-defined non-readers? We need to find ways to capture the imagination of the pupils who define themselves as non-readers, who have an influence on their peers, but who would also be motivated to take up a challenge given the right hook. The Reading Champions framework promotes using two methods of recruitment to motivate boys to become Reading Champions. The first of these relies on boys that are already keen on reading or actively involved in a reading scheme. The second involves directly targeting the boys who have a measure of status and are seen as "cool" by other boys. Feedback and case studies from schools have indicated that the second approach, whilst harder and one that takes longer to implement, produces more positive results and sustainable impact. Using motivating factors such as rewards and competition are also key ways to motivate these Reading Champions.

The home environment

The evidence about the benefits of parents being involved in their children's education in general, and their children's literacy activities in particular, is unequivocal. For example, research shows that parental involvement in their children's learning positively affects the child's performance at school, both in primary (Jeynes, 2005) and secondary school (Jeynes, 2007). The impact is the same regardless of ethnic background, family income, maternal level of education, or child's gender (Deaher et al., 2006; Jeynes, 2005).

Research has also repeatedly shown that the most accurate predictor of a pupil's achievement is not parental income or social status but the extent to which parents are able to create a home environment that encourages learning, communicates high, yet reasonable, expectations for achievement and future careers, and where parents become involved in their children's education at the school and in the community (Sanders and Epstein, 1998).

Mothers seem to be the family member that is most involved in their children's literacy practices. Almost three-quarters of pupils believed that their mother thinks they are a good reader, compared to only three-fifth of pupils who believed that their father thinks they are a good reader. Mothers also appeared to be the family member who encourages them to read most. Interestingly, these perceptions were unaffected by gender and age (with the exception of reading proficiency, where more primary than secondary pupils believed that their mother and father think that they are good readers). However, self-perceptions as readers made a significant impact. Pupils who saw themselves as readers were significantly more likely to believe that their family thinks that they read well and more likely to perceive family encouragement to read than pupils who view themselves to be non-readers.

Given the correlation that the research shows between reading enjoyment and the home environment, schools therefore need to continue to focus on reaching out to their pupils' families to encourage them to make their homes reading homes. This report specifically highlights the messages that schools need to support and promote to parents:

- o Parents need to understand the importance of praising their children on ability and motivation to read
- o Parents need to understand that reading means more than books and should encourage pupils to read newspapers, magazines and websites. They should be encouraged to praise their children whatever their chosen type of reading material.
- o Parents should continue to talk about reading and reading materials as their children get older and are at secondary school.
- o Fathers/male carers need to be as involved in promoting reading and reading with their children in the home as mothers.

In addition, schools need to engage in a meaningful dialogue with parents about their involvement. Recent research continues to show that many parents are not aware of the

importance they play in their child's education and have a limited understanding of their role in their children's learning (DCSF, 2007b).

Supporting parents is currently high on the Government's agenda too. In March 2007, it published "Every Parent Matters", which sets out the vital role parents play in improving their child's life chances and educational achievement and how the Government can help achieve this. The Family Reading Campaign was launched in 2007 to promote reading for pleasure in the home and beyond to help build a nation of readers, and the National Year of Reading in 2008 will build on this.

The role of the school

Ivey and Broaddus (2001) found that adolescents may not be able to reconcile what they read outside of school with what they read in school. Adolescents often have their own reasons for what they read at home but see little reason for what they are assigned to read in school. The present study found a marked discrepancy between the reading choices of pupils outside of class and the materials they believe are being promoted at school. Such a discrepancy between young people's chosen reading materials and texts they feel are being advocated by schools is worrying and may have serious implications for those who try to encourage reading at home as an extension of practice encouraged at school, or vice versa.

Other researchers have noted the dramatic contrast between reading done in school and that done outside of school. For example, in his US study of 6-12 grade boys, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) found that "school reading was assigned, unconnected to their interests, too long and hard; life reading was freely chosen, built on their interests, and was usually short text they felt competent to read" (see also Cox and Collins, 2001).

Recent research by the UKLA (2007) into the reading choices of primary teachers showed that the majority of teachers read popular fiction for pleasure, followed by autobiography/biography. The least frequently read categories included newspapers and magazines, practical/factual, poetry and plays. This study also highlighted the deficit of teachers' knowledge of picturebooks and poetry. This is a concern given the present finding that a considerable percentage of primary and secondary pupils read comics/graphic novels outside of class and feel that texts such as these are not encouraged by schools. It is hoped that developing teachers' knowledge of such alternative texts will help foster children's reading for pleasure both in and out of school and also that an increase in teachers' awareness of such materials will help validate young people's reading choices.

This is particularly pertinent not only with respect to present findings but also based on findings by Alvermann and colleagues (2007) who found that many struggling readers considered themselves as readers in out-of-school activities that were relevant to their everyday literacy activities and that offered choice. In line with our findings, Alvermann and colleagues (2007) found that struggling readers voluntarily engaged in a variety of literacy practices outside of class, including browsing the internet and reading song lyrics.

Millard (1997) explored the notion that the national curriculum is gendered and where the non-fiction reading choices of boys have no place. According to Millard (1997), the narrative/fictional practices encouraged by the school curriculum not only disadvantages boys and their reading practice while they are in school but also later in life where narratives are not relevant to the literacy used by men in the workplace (see also Coles and Hall, 2002).

Reading Connects, as well as government policy (Every Child Matters), emphasises the importance of involving pupils in discussions, planning and delivery of reader development activity. This includes engaging them in meaningful dialogues about the materials they want to read. Given the gap between the materials pupils are reading outside of school and how the

latter is aligned with what they feel a reader reads, and the school is encouraging, the involvement of pupils in this activity is crucial.

Implications for policy

Literacy policy on teaching and assessment in schools places a heavy emphasis on reading competency and on the analysis of texts. Although central government has lent its support to various initiatives that encourage reading for enjoyment, these still tend to make the assumption that reading means books – and therefore risk alienating large numbers of children and young people who could benefit from engaging in reading materials that interest them. In the light of this study's findings, the National Literacy Trust recommends that policymakers should:

1. Encourage schools to find out more about children and young people's perceptions of reading and readers, and use this information to inform curriculum planning, the involvement of parents and the development of links between home and school through reading. Information could be gathered at school level through pupil surveys and/or engagement in dialogue about the materials they want to read, or research could be undertaken more centrally.

2. Encourage the awareness, promotion and validation by schools and families of the different kinds of reading materials preferred by both boys and girls, and particularly by those who do not see themselves as readers. This will involve an awareness of any current bias towards fiction in reading promotion, and a special consideration of the needs and interests of girls who do not define themselves as readers. The need to develop teachers' knowledge of alternative types of text may be addressed through professional development or even in initial teacher training. The National Year of Reading 2008 provides an ideal opportunity to promote the value of many different kinds of reading, not only for enjoyment but also as having a contribution to make to educational development and attainment.

3. Consider whether a campaign or other activity could usefully influence children and young people's perceptions of what a reader is, particularly through the use of role models. Meanwhile, those who make and implement policy should be cautious about encouraging all children and young people to become 'readers' and to be known as and see themselves as such, when many do not see being a reader as something desirable.

4. Consider a greater emphasis on promoting motivation to read, and developing a love of reading based on pupils' interests – including within the curriculum. This may need to begin as soon as reading tuition starts, in order to break down the relationship between struggling with reading and not seeing oneself as a reader. For older pupils, helping them to formulate their personal aspirations and promoting reading as a means to achieving them may be effective. Parents may also have an important role to play here. While many initiatives encourage parents of young children to recognise their important role in helping their children to learn, perhaps more can be done to emphasise to parents of older children that involvement in their education, including encouragement to read materials that they enjoy, can still have a significant and positive impact.

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Appendix A – Questionnaire guidelines

National Literacy Trust reader self-perception survey

Many thanks for offering to take part in the National Literacy Trust reader self-perception survey. The survey will investigate children's and young people's self-perception as readers and the influences which help them form those attitudes. The research resulting from the survey will particularly concentrate on and compare the gender differences in the results.

All surveys need to be submitted online before 21st July 2007.

Useful information

- The survey can be accessed online via the link included in the email to which this document is attached. By clicking on this link, your pupils will be able to access the survey and complete it online. The survey can be completed by multiple pupils simultaneously**. – Can you please point out that each pupil needs to fill in their own survey though, the last sentence could be read to mean that a group of pupils can fill in one survey**
- The survey is also attached to the email as a Word document. This version of the survey is for informational purposes only, to help those working with the children to look at the questions in advance of the session. **Please do not photocopy this version of the survey and ask children to complete it by hand.**
- The survey is designed for pupils at upper Key Stage 2 (9-11 years olds) or Key Stage 3 (11-14 year olds).
- If possible, we would ask schools to try and survey two classes of pupils to enable us to gain a weighty sample of responses. If schools are not able to survey two classes, this is not a problem, any information gathered will be useful.
- It will be useful for us if you are able to ask a fair representation of boys and girls to complete the survey.
- As pupils will be completing the survey online, you will not be able to access their results. However if you would like to receive an Excel spreadsheet showing the answers entered by your pupils we will be able to email this information on request. **We will be unable to provide individual school reports based on the survey results.**

If you have any questions please email sarah.osborne@literacytrust.org.uk or call 0207 828 2435.

Appendix B – Online questionnaire

Are you a boy or a girl?
☐ Boy ☐ Girl

How old are you?
☐9   ☐10   ☐11   ☐12   ☐13   ☐14

Do you get free school meals? (Ask your teacher if you are unsure what this means)
☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Don't know

Questions about you and your reading

1) Are you a reader?
☐ Yes ☐ No

2) On a scale of 1 – 10, how good a reader do you think you are? (Tick one box only)

Not a very good reader				Average reader				Excellent reader	
1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐

3) Do you enjoy reading? (Tick one box only)

Very much ☐	Quite a lot ☐	Not very much ☐
Not at all ☐		

4) Which of the following do you read outside of class more than once a month?
(Tick as many boxes as you like)

Websites (general) ☐	Blogging/networking websites ☐ (such as MySpace)	Newspapers ☐
Magazines ☐	Graphic novels or comics ☐	Emails ☐
Fiction books ☐	Poetry ☐	Factual books ☐
Manuals/instructions ☐		

5) How often do you read outside of school? (Tick one box only)

Every day or almost every day ☐	Once or twice a week ☐	Once or twice a month ☐
Never or almost never ☐		

6) How does reading make you feel? (Tick as many boxes as you want)

Calm ☐	Stressed ☐	Nervous ☐
Intelligent ☐	Bored ☐	Curious ☐
Happy ☐	Sad ☐	

7) If you imagine someone who enjoys reading, what kind of person are they? Is she/he…. ?
(Tick as many boxes as you like)

Happy ☐	Sociable ☐	Geeky/nerds ☐
Outgoing ☐	A private person ☐	Intelligent ☐
Someone who will do ☐ well in life	Boring ☐	

8) In your opinion, what does a reader enjoy……?
(Tick as many boxes as you like)

Websites (general) ☐	Blogging/networking websites ☐ (such as MySpace)	Newspapers ☐
Magazines ☐	Graphic novels or comics ☐	Emails ☐
Fiction books ☐	Poetry ☐	Factual books ☐
Manuals/instructions ☐		

9) Choose one of the following. Reading is: (Tick one box only)
More of a girl thing ☐   More of a boy thing ☐   For everyone ☐

10) a) Do you think that reading is more important than these activities at this moment in your life? (Please tick one box for each activity)

	Yes	No	Not sure
a. Television			
b. Sport			
c. Computers and computer games			
d. Hanging out with friends			
e. Listening to music			

11) Do you think that reading is more important than these activities to help you do well later in your life? (Please tick one box for each activity)

	Yes	No	Not sure
a. Television			
b. Sport			
c. Computers and computer games			
d. Hanging out with friends			
e. Listening music			

12) If someone said you were a good reader, what would that mean to you? (Tick as many as you like)

You can read long/difficult words ☐	You can read long books ☐	You read often ☐
You are good at reading aloud ☐	You read lots of different types of reading materials such as books, internet sites, magazines etc ☐	It would annoy me ☐

Questions about your family and reading

13) Does anyone in your family think you are a good reader? (Tick as many as you like)
☐ Yes, my mum (or step-Mum/carer)
☐ Yes, my dad (or step-Dad/carer)
☐ Yes, my brother or sister **(if you have more than one brother or sister, just choose one of them)**
☐ No, no-one
☐ Don't know

14) Does anyone in your family encourage you to read? (Tick as many as you like)
☐ Yes, my mum (or step-Mum/carer)
☐ Yes, my dad (or step-Dad/carer)

☐ Yes, my brother or sister **(if you have more than one brother or sister, just choose one of them)**
☐ No, no-one
☐ Don't know

Questions about your friends and reading

15) In general, are your friends readers?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

16) What do your friends read?
(Tick as many boxes as you like)

Websites (general) ☐	Blogging/networking websites (such as MySpace) ☐	Newspapers ☐
Magazines ☐	Graphic novels or comics ☐	Emails ☐
Fiction books ☐	Poetry ☐	Factual books ☐
Manuals/instructions ☐		

17) Do your friends think reading is for people who are: (Tick as many as you like)

Happy ☐	Sociable ☐	Geeky/nerds ☐
Outgoing ☐	Private ☐	Intelligent ☐
Want to do well in life ☐	Boring ☐	

18) Do your friends think you are a good reader?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

19) Do your friends encourage you to read?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

Questions about your school and reading

20) Does your teacher think you read well?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

22) Does your teacher encourage you to read the following?
(Tick as many boxes as you like)

Websites (general) ☐	Blogging/networking websites (such as MySpace) ☐	Newspapers ☐
Magazines ☐	Graphic novels or comics ☐	Emails ☐
Fiction books ☐	Poetry ☐	Factual books ☐
Manuals/instructions ☐		