



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

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## **Reading for Pleasure and Motivations of Children and Teenagers**

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this study is to discover what motivates children and teenagers to read for pleasure. This research was conducted using qualitative methods by carrying on in-depth interviews with ten young people aged between ten and fifteen years old. Two observations in one of the biggest public libraries in Iceland were also conducted. Data was carefully coded, classified in main themes and analysed. The main results show that children' and teenagers' readings are varied in content and in form as they enjoy as much fiction as nonfiction and that they read from different printed media as well as electronic material. They mostly read in Icelandic and in English. Parents have a great influence on their children's reading habits and they act as reading material providers as well as models. Older siblings also have a great impact on their brothers' and sisters' readings. Children and teenagers seem to read for four main reasons which are (1) learning, (2) getting attached to characters, (3) be entertained and imagine, and (4) be creatively stimulated. Most participants used their school libraries more than public libraries and there is not much communication between them and library employees.

# Útdráttur

Markmið þessarar rannsóknar er að varpa ljósi á hvað hvetur börn og unglunga til að lesa sér til ánægju og yndisauka. Rannsóknin byggir á eiginlegum aðferðum þar sem tekin voru ítarleg viðtöl við tíu ungmenni á aldrinum tíu til fimmtán ára. Einnig voru gerðar tvær þátttökuathuganir á stærsta almenningsbókasafninu á Íslandi. Öll gögn voru vandlega dulkóðuð, þau flokkuð í meginþemu og greind. Helstu niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar eru þær að lestur barna og unglunga er mjög fjölbreytilegur bæði hvað snýr að innihaldi og formi, þar sem ungmennin njóta jafnt fagurbókmennta sem og annarra bókmenntategunda, auk þess sem þau lesa í ólíkum gerðum prentmiðla og rafrænum miðlum. Ungmennin lesa að mestu á íslensku og ensku. Foreldrar hafa mikil áhrif á lestrarvenjur barna sinna og útvega þeim lesefni auk þess að vera börnum sínum fyrirmynd. Eldri systkini hafa líka mikil áhrif á lestur yngri systkina sinna. Fjórar meginástæður skýra hvers vegna börn og unglingar lesa, en þær eru (1) lærdómurinn, (2) þegar ungmennin verða hænd að sögupersónum, (3) þau nota lestur til þess að hafa ofan af fyrir sér og auðga ímyndunaraflíð og (4) til að efla sköpunargáfu sína. Flestir þátttakendur rannsóknarinnar notuðu frekar skólabókasafnið sitt en almenningsbókasöfn og það eru lítil samskipti milli ungmennanna annars vegar og starfsmanna bókasafnanna hins vegar.

# Preface

This thesis is presented as the final dissertation for the obtainment of a Masters of Library and Information Science in the Faculty of Human and Social Science at the University of Iceland. It has the value of 30 ECTS credits.

Most of all, I would like to thank the participants for their precious collaboration, their families who opened their homes to me so generously, and the eager intermediaries who put me in contact with these participants. This work would not have been possible without the support, advice and trust of my supervisor, Ágústa Pálsdóttir. I would also like to thank Hanna Björg Sigurjónsdóttir and Eiríkur Karl Ólafsson Smith for guiding my first steps in qualitative research. Finally, I want to thank my life partner, Gabriel Malenfant, for always being there to support me during the whole duration of these studies.

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# 1 Introduction

*And this guy—that's very funny—he went in this fusion with his dog. So he's half dog and half man—half dead man—and he's sent back to try to get the girl, to help. That's very complicated how he's going to do that. And he gets some funny hologram guy with him. It's very funny!*

Björn, 13 years old.

*That is the book of two best friends and one of them had written a diary about herself and about her friend and she's getting sick. She told her brother to give the key of the diary to her best friend and after she dies, she reads it. I think that her best friend was telling her to move on, that she would always be there for her in this diary.*

Silja, 14 years old.

These are two young teenagers telling a stranger about one of their favourite books and they do so in two very different ways. They are not talking about the same book, but if they were, they would still probably use very different words and concepts and be touched by it in ways that the other would not imagine. This thesis is about reading for pleasure and what stimulates someone to do it. In a nation like Iceland, where reading has been part of the intimacy of modest farmer homes since the very first centuries of its settlement, taking on such a research is of great relevance. Yet, trying to discover what motivates children and teenagers to read for pleasure can seem to be an impossible task and it is indeed not something that can be discovered easily. A slow process that started by listening to what some of them had to say led me through the complicated endeavour of understanding their deep motivations. More than a simple means of entertainment, leisure reading impacts one's understanding of the world and others as well as oneself. By its almost infinite possibilities of styles, topics, genres and mediums, leisure reading has the

potential to reach anyone who can read, and even those who cannot. It can be a powerful tool for personal and social development and first and foremost, an immense source of pleasure.

## **1.1 Reason for the Research**

I have been a leisure reader for as long as I can remember and I have always believed that it brought me personal benefits that I would not have gotten otherwise. As I completed my undergraduate studies in preschool and elementary school teaching, I was particularly interested in the development of children and in how they became leisure readers. Research on this general topic had already been conducted in Iceland, but the last ones were published almost ten years ago. In a context where the media offer changes and evolves at fast rate, it became increasingly interesting to look into how leisure reading was now perceived and practiced among young people. Furthermore, readers' advisory services, which are concerned with library users' leisure readings, are not very much taught in Library and Information Schools. Carrying on this research was an occasion to sensitise and educate myself and future students about this often underrated service provided by public libraries and build a better understanding of young readers and their needs.

## **1.2 Research Questions and Method**

The aim of this research is to understand what motivates children and teenagers to read for pleasure in order to provide them with better adapted services in public libraries. To achieve this, three research questions were elaborated and continuously kept in mind during the research process. These questions are:

1. What influences children's and teenagers' motivation to read for pleasure
2. What kind of material do they read and where do they get it from?
3. What is children's and teenagers' perception of libraries and how do they use them?

A qualitative research approach was chosen to answer these questions and ten in-depth interviews using open-ended questions were carried on with children and teenagers aged from ten to fifteen years old. They were not randomly chosen and the “snowballing” sampling technique was used to find participants that could carry on a conversation in English, due to the researcher’s language limitations. The chosen participants all lived in Iceland’s capital area and were leisure readers. Some of them had lived abroad for some time and others had resided only in Iceland. Two observations were also conducted in the children’s section of a public library to witness the interactions between young patrons and librarians. This second qualitative research method was specifically chosen to help answer the third research question.

### **1.3 Structure of the Thesis**

Five chapters form the structure of this thesis, the first one being this introduction. The second chapter constitutes the literature review on which this research is based and attempts to give an overview of the theoretical framework that constitute its academic background. The selected literature addresses the importance of literacy, the culture of literacy through reading habits, and an explanation of the basic principles of readers’ advisory services in public libraries.

The third chapter describes the methodology and method that was used to carry on this study. It gives a short account of what qualitative research methods are and states the three central research questions that formed the core of this research process. A detailed outline of the research process’ stages and techniques are presented and finally, the participants and their family contexts are shortly introduced.

Chapter four is a detailed account of the results of the analysis of the collected data. It is subdivided into the five main themes which emerged from it: (1) what do children and teenagers read?; (2) why do they say they read?; (3) the influence of other people; (4) reading and the transition between child hood and teenage hood; and finally, (5) libraries, librarians, and access to reading material. These themes are analysed and illustrated by quotes taken from the interviews.

Finally, chapter five sums up the findings and discusses them in relation to the three research questions. Links are established between this research's findings and the ones presented in chapter two. A special attention is given to the role and use of public libraries.

## **2 Literature Review**

In this section, you will first find some definitions of literacy, information on its social importance and on how it is measured by official world organisations like UNESCO (United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). The concept of a culture of literacy will then be defined, illustrated by way of examples, and tied to reading habits in highly literate societies. Finally, the role of libraries in the development and support of a culture of literacy will be explained and exemplified through the presentation of the readers' advisory services in public libraries.

### **2.1 The Importance of Literacy**

This subchapter was originally supposed to discuss studies about reading habits, more precisely, how much, when and why do people read and to get an overview of the world's reading habits. My objective proved itself to be more challenging to document as I thought it would be. Finding studies and statistics on the world's population reading habits is a task that requires patience and a flexible mind set. Studies have been conducted on the topic of reading habits in the past, but their scarcity, difference in time, geographic location and actual objects of study made them hard to use as reliable sources of information for the paper I wanted to write. Moreover, I kept finding articles on literacy and illiteracy while I was searching for information regarding reading habits. At one point, I stumbled upon an IFLA article (Evans, 2007) that was advocating for the establishment and support of a culture of literacy instead of simply implementing basic literacy programs. I was intrigued and started reading more on this concept which I had then only discovered. I gathered that a social context which included a culture of literacy was indispensable to the mere presence of reading habits. Basically, when discussing an individual's particular reading

habits, it is implied that this individual not only knows how to read, but lives in an environment where reading material is accessible to the majority and where reading is actually valued.

It is when I realised that the very idea of a culture of literacy and reading habits could not exist independently from one another that the scope of this section slightly changed to cover both the notions of basic literacy and culture of literacy.

### **2.1.1 Definition of the Concept of Literacy**

In English, being qualified as literate originally meant that one was familiar with literature and well educated. This definition also implied that a literate person had the ability to read and write, but the term was not used mainly to describe this capability. Only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century did the concept of literacy start to indicate more precisely the basic ability to read and write and the opposing concepts of *literacy* and *illiteracy* became of common use. An interesting and sometimes confusing fact is that the two definitions of the concept are still in use today in the English language. Furthermore, international literacy promotion agencies often include *numeracy*—the ability to count and use basic mathematical skills in everyday life—into the concept of literacy, thus bringing the concept closer to its original general educational definition without pushing it towards knowledge of literature and high level studies (UNESCO, 2008, p.10).

Making the concept of literacy a little more confusing, researchers and government officials have come up with subdivisions such as functional literacy. This type of literacy refers to having the necessary reading and writing skills to be able to function in society (Valdivielso, 2006). Because not every society has the same demands for this, being functionally literate can mean very different things from a society to another. In the same line of ideas, the American NAAL (National Assessment of Adult Literacy) divided literacy skills into three categories (NCES, 2003). The first one is *prose literacy*, defined as “the knowledge and skills needed to perform prose tasks (i.e. to search, comprehend and use information from continuous texts)” (NCES, 2003, p. 2). The second type of literacy is called *document literacy* and is defined as “the knowledge and

skills needed to perform document tasks (i.e. to search, comprehend and use information from noncontinuous texts in various formats)” (NCES, 2003, p. 2). Finally, the last type of literacy they define is *quantitative literacy*, which means to possess “the knowledge and skills required to perform quantitative tasks (i.e. to identify and perform computations, either alone or sequentially, using numbers embedded in printed materials)” (NCES, 2003, p. 2). This last type of literacy is what we referred to earlier as numeracy.

In this dissertation, I will refer to UNESCO’s definition of literacy and illiteracy in order to simplify the matter somewhat. The definition goes as follows:

- (a) A person is literate who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his (her) everyday life. (b) A person is illiterate who cannot with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his (her) everyday life. (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2008, p. 17)

## **2.1.2 The Social Importance of Literacy**

As early as in the 1950s, UNESCO recognised that illiteracy was one of its main challenges. Illiteracy was first perceived to be the result of the poor conditions in which populations were living, but it was later acknowledged that the relationship between living standards and illiteracy was much more complicated. Is someone illiterate because of his or her poor conditions of life, or are poor conditions of life caused or made worse by illiteracy? Illiteracy could be both the effect and the cause of poor life conditions as one influences the outcome of the other (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2008p. 9).

In 2008, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics established different links between literacy and human development and welfare (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2008, p. 12):

- Human benefits including self-esteem and empowerment
- Political benefits including political participation, expansion of democracy, ethnic equality and amelioration of post-conflict situations
- Cultural benefits including cultural change and preservation of cultural diversity
- Social benefits including health, reproductive behaviour, education and gender equality
- Economic benefits including economic growth and returns to investments



These are all very clear benefits that can befall a community as a result of the increasing of its levels of literacy. It is unquestionable that access to literacy should be considered as a basic human right. Being literate gives a better chance at employment and higher studies and is the foundation of a life-long learning process. It allows citizens to actively participate in society in an informed way. It is safe to say that societies benefit as much as individuals of the implementation of measures promoting literacy (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2008, p. 11).

### **2.1.3 Measuring Literacy**

Most of the world's literacy statistics are compiled by UNESCO and are obtained by censuses. The definition of literacy used in these censuses is the one which was cited earlier, and which is based on the dual definition of literacy. In other words, it touches on whether a person is able to read and write or not within the context of his or her everyday life. This simple definition only allows us to know if a person possesses the lowest level of ability to read and write and excludes all other definitions of literacy that were mentioned earlier. Although this conception of literacy has great limitations, it is still the most widely used because of practical reasons. This type of measurement does not permit to take levels of literacy into account, but does allow the censuses to be conducted in a great number of countries, regardless of their cultures and type of relationships with the written word. The information collection is made simpler by this type of measurement, but other factors can hinder the collection of data and whether it can be trusted or not. For example, because countries do not all use the same methods of distribution of questionnaires and of collection of answers (administrative data, self-report in individual population censuses, household declarations, etc.), the results might not always reflect reality. Also, some subgroups of the various populations can be left out if they happen to be harder to reach: homeless people, nomadic people or child-headed households, for instance. However, UNESCO is an international organisation and its goal is to get an overview of the world's situation to dispatch help and development measures to places where they need them the most. On that account, the

organisation chooses to trust the information they obtain and interpret it in regard to political situations and social living conditions. Even if this information is not perfect, this type of surveys is still vastly conducted, given the importance of continuing to measure literacy levels worldwide.

Yet some countries, like the United States of America, are able to conduct studies which are very precise and give a clearer, more detailed portrait of the literacy situation in their society. For example, such a study was conducted by NAAL in 2003 and gives a very intricate picture of the state of literacy in the United States. Not only did this study divide literacy in three different types (prose, document, and quantitative), but it also divided the proficiency levels in four categories (below basic, basic, intermediate, and proficient). Undoubtedly, such detailed information for every country would prove most invaluable, but unfortunately, not all of them have the means to pursue such studies among their own population.

Following on the next page is a table presenting literacy results for the world as reported by UNESCO (2008).

**Table 1. UNESCO literacy results (2008)**

Region	Adult (15+) literacy rate (%)					
	Year 1990			Year 2000		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
<b>World</b>	76.4	82.6	70.1	82.4	87.4	77.4
<b>Africa</b>	53.1	63.3	43.5	61.1	71.0	51.7
<b>Americas</b>	92.7	93.3	92.1	93.7	94.2	93.2
<b>North America</b>	95.2	95.9	94.6	95.7	96.2	95.2
<b>South America</b>	88.7	89.4	88.2	90.8	91.3	90.3
<b>Asia</b>	70.3	79.1	61.1	79.7	86.2	73.1
<b>Europe</b>	98.4	99.1	97.8	99.0	99.3	98.7
<b>Oceania</b>	93.5	94.3	92.9	93.5	94.3	92.8

As we can see, women are less literate than men in every part of the world. A considerable improvement in literacy levels from 1990 to 2000 is also noteworthy and these progresses have been made especially in Africa and Asia. It is possible to think that this is due to the increasing awareness of the importance of literacy and of literacy development programs that have been put in place by governmental and international organisations. However, even though the general situation has improved, Africa is still far behind with almost 40 % of its population that do not possess the ability to read and write at a basic level. From these statistics, it seems clear that literacy levels are closely tied to general standards of living and access to education, although no causal link can rigorously be established.

## 2.2 A Culture of Literacy

As we have seen, the level of literacy is generally improving worldwide and this is in part due to the efforts that have been put in literacy campaigns and programs throughout the world. However, improving basic literacy skills as described in the UNESCO's census definition should not be the ultimate goal of a society, nor of the world community. Basic literacy development should be a step taken forward in the direction of creating a *culture* of literacy. Gwyneth Evans (2007) defines this culture of literacy as a concept that:

...includes training in the skills needed to read and write and use information in every day life. But that also includes the motivation, incentives and support to practise literacy skills, learned and encouraged not only within the formal curriculum but also at work, in families, in institutions, on the street and in the community. (Evans, 2007, p. 2)

In other words, a culture of literacy goes beyond the simple ability of reading and writing, but makes them part of everyday life, in all spheres of life. It is practiced, encouraged and valued by all. This implies that a culture of literacy can only occur in highly literate countries. Nevertheless, it is not sufficient to have a literate population to claim that the latter is developing and encouraging a culture of literacy. Even in highly literate countries, a culture of literacy cannot be taken for granted and constant measures have to be taken to sustain it. Societies evolve at a fast rate and officials have to make sure that everything is done to keep as much people as possible up to date with the changes. Just as it was (and still is) the case for illiteracy, cultural illiteracy is a barrier to accessing a higher quality of life. It is also an obstacle to one's affirmation in the workplace and in society in general.

Different factors to develop and promote a culture of literacy have been suggested as part of a study made in a partnership between different international organisations related to reading (IFLA: International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, IRA: International Reading Association, CAL: Center for Applied Linguistics). These factors were sent by email to different reading related agencies and organisations in different countries all over the world. The respondents were asked to comment the factors on their

relevance. Here are the nine factors that were sent as part of this study (Evans, 2007):

- Access to material—getting appropriate books into the hands of children, youth and adults (1)
- The importance of people owning their own books (2)
- Alternative agencies that supply books if they are beyond the means of people (3)
- A national reading policy (4)
- Advocacy materials for child and adult literacy (5)
- Training models and materials for teaching literacy and reading (6)
- Cooperation between agencies and programs (7)
- The importance of print literacy in contemporary societies (8)
- Government promotion of a culture of literacy (9)

These factors were generally well received by concerned people all over the world and none was judged to be completely irrelevant. However, some of them were either deemed less important than others, or had to be slightly modified from their original formulation. For example, the importance of owning books (2) was not considered as very important by many respondents who thought that their accessibility in public libraries could suffice. On the other hand, other respondents thought that owning books could be a source of pride and demonstrated their importance in a culture of literacy. Also, a national reading policy (4) was considered by many as a good idea, but only insofar as it could be supported by funding for organisations promoting reading (libraries and schools for example). Finally, the importance of print literacy in contemporary societies (8) was commonly accepted, but many respondents added that electronic material literacy had to be considered as equally important, or even more so than printed material.

### **2.2.1 Personal and Social Benefits of Leisure Reading**

There is no doubt whatsoever that leisure reading is of an utmost importance in the development of a culture of literacy. Not only can it nurture the habit of reading from a very young age, it has concrete and deep impact on children's and adults' ability to understand and make sense of different written messages in a host of different contexts, including the ability to participate in social debates by understanding their implications better.

Based on a qualitative research using 194 interviews conducted with heavy readers about fiction pleasure reading, Catherine Sheldrick Ross found that pleasure readers were exposed to what is called 'incidental information acquisition' (2000, p.72) and that this information had effects on their personalities and how their world view. Here are different ways in which reading has made a difference in participants' lives: awakening, new perspectives, or enlargement of possibilities; models for identity; reassurance, comfort, confirmation of self worth, strength; connection with others, awareness of not being alone; courage to make a change; acceptance; disinterested understanding of the world (2000, pp. 72-80). Ross' definition of pleasure reading is the one that was put forward by Krashen.

Leisure reading is called Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) by Stephen Krashen. He is a very strong advocate of FVR and furthers a particular definition of what it is and how it should be viewed; he makes his ideas clear about this notion in his work *The Power of Reading* (1993). According to Krashen, FVR "means reading because you want to". He stresses the point that no constraints, such as book reports for example, are to be attached to this kind of reading. He also puts forward the idea that all FVR is valuable and that no sort of reading should be frowned upon, including comic books, paperback romances and other genres that have been condemned in the past by parents, educators and even librarians. He argues that children who read for pleasure—and therefore practice FVR—are more likely to succeed in school because

[...] their reading comprehension skills will improve, and they will find difficult, academic-style texts more comprehensible. Their writing style will improve and they will be better able to write prose in a style acceptable to schools, business, and the scientific community. Their vocabulary will improve and will improve at a better rate than if they took one of the well-advertised vocabulary building courses. Also, their spelling and control of grammar will improve. (1993, p. X)

Correspondingly, FVR can be practiced even before children know how to read themselves if parents or other adults in children's surroundings are available to read to them. This type of reading encourages what is called "emergent literacy" (Finn, 2009, p. 95). According to Finn, if the whole process of emerging literacy is an ideal preparation for success in school, it remains

mostly present in middle and higher social classes and is often absent from working class households. This is where special activities in public libraries could help fill a void—we will discuss this further later on. Finn demonstrates how this emergent literacy deeply influences children’s future reading and writing abilities by an example of a story “written” by a 5 year old kindergarten pupil. Following is her “story” and how Finn interprets it:

### **The Runaway Elephant**

“The elephant squirted her ad the girl couldn’t find the elephant. But she finally found the elephant and they were friends again.”

Ashley’s “story” includes introducing characters and narrating some action. She has even introduced a problem and a resolution. Her concept of writing a story is to make marks on paper that represent the story she has created. She has shown an understanding of conventions—the title comes first at the top of the page followed by the story itself. For a child who can’t write, Ashley shows a remarkable understanding of story form and literary conventions. (Finn, 2009, p. 104)

Krashen argues that we can only learn to read by reading and that it must be done in a low anxiety situation, therefore, when comparing FVR (low-anxiety situation) to formal reading instruction (often associated to higher anxiety levels) he argues that FVR is superior in what can be retained and understood.

In my work in language acquisition, I have concluded that we acquire language in only one way: by understanding messages, or “comprehensible input” in a low-anxiety situation [...]. This is precisely what free voluntary reading is: message we understand presented in a low-anxiety situation. (1993, p. 23)

This vision of his is not shared by everyone and opponents to this view allege that some children do not read precisely because they do not have a sufficient knowledge of the language to enjoy reading; that their reading abilities are not fluid and fast enough and that they just did not learn to read well enough to do it for pleasure (Sallenave, 2009, p. 102). To this Krashen would answer that direct reading instruction (mostly done with drills and exercises) can only partially compensate for a lack of vocabulary and basic knowledge of grammar and that it can only prepare students for tests, leaving out the infinitely more

complex task of truly understanding text. By letting children choose what they want to read, we can let them choose the difficulty of the text. Furthermore, if a child (or even an adult) chooses a book that really triggers interest, he or she is more likely to read it even if the level of the text is higher in difficulty than what he or she is used to, therefore creating an opportunity of learning and perfecting language skills. The same theory applies to second language acquisition (1993, p. 4) and to educating children of lower social classes. Like Finn, Krashen believes that public schools do not always help working class children to learn how to read precisely because the “emergent literacy” stage is often not as complete for children growing up in these environments. He puts forward the idea that schools situated in lower social class neighbourhoods could help their students by offering in-school free reading programmes and supports this suggestion with researches reporting on the success of many of these programmes (1993, p. 2).

Such arguments are rather convincing as to why FVR should be encouraged for children, but adults should not be forgotten. In a paper entitled *The social ethics of reading*, Rita Ghesquière (1996, p.109) tells us that:

More than at any other time in our history, being literate is of great importance in our industrialised societies. Hence, there is a growing awareness of the need to link critical thinking with literacy skills. More than ever before, we need the writings of others – distant in history, geography and profession – to understand our complex world. [...] Discourse analysis proves that complexity of discourse is higher in written than in spoken language. [...] Being literate creates the opportunity for increasing access to knowledge not generally available in the direct experience of life.

Although Ghesquière does not specifically mention FVR, there is no doubt that the benefits of reading and general literacy can be acquired through it. The level at which she places one’s literacy abilities can only be attained by someone who reads regularly and for no other immediate purpose than reading for the sake of it. Some people might think that too much importance is here attached to leisure reading, but for several authors, the latter is fundamental to the development of a culture of literacy, a concept emulating and complementing Ghesquière’s *social ethics of reading*.



## 2.2.2 Reading Habits in Highly Literate Societies

As we mentioned earlier, data about reading habits are not easy to find. Yet it is even more laborious to compare different sets of data. Some studies have been made in highly literate societies, but their results seem to have only been intended for their own local population. Still, the attempt will be, here, to present them in an intelligible fashion.

In Canada's main French speaking province, Québec, a study was conducted in 2004 and then presented in the context of a conference on the future of public libraries in that province. The aim was to give an overview of the population's reading habits to be better able to meet the needs of this population. The main findings were the following (Garon, 2004):

- 65,5% of the population reads newspaper
- 59.2% reads books
- 52,9% reads magazines
- 67.6% of women read and 50.2% of men read
- Reading of books in regards to age
  - 15-24: 54%
  - 25-34: 59.7%
  - 35-44: 57%
  - 45-54: 61,4%
  - 55 and +: 61.7%
- Main reason to read: to relax (70%), to get information (21%), and for work or studies (9%)

These results indicate that reading holds an important place in this society and that a culture of literacy is present, but also that not everyone takes part in this culture of literacy. Women read more than men and younger people seem to be reading less than their parents. An encouraging sign of the presence of a culture of literacy is that 70% of the people reading do it mostly "to relax". This means that they individually attach importance to reading and literacy and do it on their own terms.

In the United Kingdom, data from various studies has been collected and put together as a patchwork of its population's reading habits. Here are a few interesting facts that were singled out (National Literacy Trust, 2009):

- In 2002, almost half of the adults had read 5 books in the past year and almost 20% had read more than 20 books.

- 25% of respondents said they had read none in the same period (half of them being males aged between 16 and 24).
- 96% of respondents had read something in the last 7 days (books, magazines, newspapers)
  - Magazines: 70% of 16 to 24 years old and 59% of 55 to 64 years old
  - Fiction: 33% of 16 to 24 years old and 43% of 55 to 64 years old
- In the general population, reading (79%) is considered an activity more important than sex (69%), television (67%), gardening (49%), and video games (15%). (BBC, 2006)
- 62% of parents read bedtime stories to their children. (2006)
- 83% of 11 to 18-year-olds read in their spare time and 23% read everyday.

It is slightly more difficult to draw conclusions on the basis of this information, because on the one hand, the study years are not the same, and on the other hand, some information seems to be missing—information which would help us really understand what is being demonstrated. However, the fact that 83% of 11 to 18-year-olds read in their spare time and that 23% of them read everyday can only be encouraging statistics for advocates of a culture of literacy. Furthermore, knowing that half of adults have read five books in 2002 is also a positive figure. On the contrary, the fact that a quarter of adults admitted not to have read a single book in the same year proves that there is still work to be done in the promotion of a culture of literacy in the UK.

### **2.2.3 Reading Habits and Cultural Context in Iceland**

In Iceland, the situation is a little different than in the two societies previously discussed. Iceland is recognised as one of the most literate countries in the world with a literacy rate of 99%. Although many other countries claim to have the same literacy rate, it is thought that the culture of literacy is more strongly implemented in this demographically small and geographically isolated country. A study about Icelanders' reading habits was conducted in 1988 (Weingand 1992) and was based upon the responses to a questionnaire of 57 Icelandic citizens from various age groups and occupations. Although the author claims to be using qualitative methods to conduct this research, she does not thoroughly apply the principles of qualitative research in her interviewing

methods. She mentions having a questionnaire of twenty-eight items and the same questions are asked to everybody in the same way, regardless of their age. Questions touch on family and educational backgrounds, reading habits, reading influences and personal perceptions regarding cultural and literacy issues. Even if the research method is somewhat flawed, this book still presents an interesting historical perspective to the Icelandic culture of literacy.

According to Weingand—and general acknowledgment among the Icelandic population—Iceland is a nation where literacy flourished from the very beginning of its establishment. The Icelandic people started writing books in Icelandic about general knowledge of the time very early on, and the saga genre was established in the twelfth century. These texts represented a whole new way of writing and are presented as such by Weingand (1992, p. 88):

The Icelandic sagas can be viewed as the premier achievement of European medieval literature, and represent the progeny of a unique literary evolution. These sagas are realistic and secular prose novels based on historical fact and written in vernacular. [...] At a time when there was little writing of vernacular prose in Europe (c.1100-1300 A.D.), Icelandic authors created a narrative prose that demonstrates a subtlety and sophistication which is incorporated into a psychological realism.

This literacy tradition would only fortify over the years and saga reading séances would become a common activity in families as soon as in the thirteenth century.

In a nation where literacy was remarkably widespread, in the large part a result of the influence of the Church, the sagas were viewed as primary and very serious entertainment. In family households in every part of the country, evenings were devoted to saga-reading. (Weingand 1992, p. 89)

The present-day situation of the culture of literacy in Iceland is now under close scrutiny, or at least it was at the turn of the millennium. Most of the studies and articles published about reading habits in Iceland date back to the end of the 1990s and early 2000s and mostly relate to habits of children and young adults. Although Icelandic scholars concerned with reading habits

question the fact that this culture of literacy is still as strong as it once was, there is a consensus acknowledging the fact that the remains of the saga culture still influence today's generation in their reading habits and general attitude toward literature.

In her 2000 article, Sigrún Klara Hannesdóttir explains that “[...] the limited resources and the geographical isolation of Iceland fostered the growth of a culture grounded in books and literature” (p. 210). One of the influences of this long established culture of literacy in Iceland is what she calls the “Christmas book tradition”. She conducted a quantitative study in 1997 to find out if this tradition was still as much alive as ever and what kind of impact it had on the Icelandic publishing industry. Because this tradition has to do mainly with presents made to children, she concentrated her survey on four age groups: 10 year olds, 12 year old, 14 year olds, and 16 year olds. Five minute interviews were made over the telephone and the questions were about the number of books received and the number of hours spent reading during the Christmas Holiday break with regard to age, gender, place of residence, the book donors, and what books were received.

One of her main conclusions was that giving books as Christmas presents was still popular. However, she found out that the tradition “seems to get weaker when the children get older and when the youngsters reach 16 years, only about half of them receive books” (2000, p. 222). She also found out that girls read more than boys in every age group, but that boys receive more books as Christmas presents after the age of 10 (1998, p. 22-23). Although there is an appreciable group of young people who do not read “it seems [...] that those who read, read quite a lot [...]” (1998, p. 26). Here is how she explains that the Christmas book tradition is still alive:

The majority of children in all age groups received books as Christmas gifts, 83.3% of the 12 year old children, 82.9% of the 10 year olds, 63% of the 14 year olds and 52.7% of the 16 year olds. Most of the books received as Christmas presents were newly published which supports the theory that the tradition of giving children books for Christmas is the foundation on which general publishing for children in the Icelandic language is based on. (1998, p. 26)

Another quantitative study about book reading and mass media use among youngsters aged between 10 to 15 year old was conducted by Þorbjörn Broddason over a period of 20 years ranging from 1968 to 1988 (Broddason, 1990). Although this study is over 20 years old today, it still shows the evolution of reading habits in a society more and more dominated by new technology and new media. In his study, Broddason was mainly concerned with television and video use and its impact on reading habits of youngsters. As hours of video and television watching increased over the years, Broddason found a significant diminution in the number of books being read over a period of 30 days. One of his main questions was “*Hefur þú lesið einhverjar bækur (fyrir utan skólabækurnar) síðustu 30 dagana?*” [“Have you read any books (except school books) in the last 30 days?”] (1990, p. 17). The average number of books read in 30 days fluctuated over the years of survey, but it slowly diminished from 1979 to 1988. In 1968, the average number of books read in 30 days was 4.1, in 1979, it jumped to 7.2, but went down to 4.8 in 1985 and 2.7 in 1988. In this article, the author briefly suggests an explanation to these results by stating that:

During these years vast changes have occurred in the mass media landscape of the country, the most significant being the introduction of VCRs in the early 1980s and the end of state monopoly on radio and television rights in 1986 with the consequent immediate proliferation of radio stations as well as the establishment of a second television channel. (1990, p. 19)

These results and explanation for the decrease of books read by youngsters remain partial and incomplete if we think of what young people and adults are presented with today, in the age of multimedia and Internet. Currently, three television stations are properly Icelandic, but many households have access to foreign television stations. Iceland is now a nation where wireless Internet access is available in almost all populated areas and where children learn to use computers at a very young age. Already in 2000, Hannesdóttir was questioning the contradiction between the fact that Iceland was a “nation of books” and that it was filled with “computer freaks” (2000, p. 222). At that time she held an optimistic position, believing that some balance would be attained between Internet use and Icelandic publishing. She believed that “[w]hen people

[would] get more used to the possibilities and the limitations of the Internet, it [would] be used as a tool rather than a toy for the excitement it offers” (2000, p. 222). Ten years later, now that the Internet is well established in Iceland, that most household have Internet access, and that 46.89% of Icelanders own a Facebook account (according to IceNews, on September 12 2009), it still needs to be determined whether this balance has been reached or not.

We could believe that this balance has indeed been reached if we consider the new data published by Broddason in a 1999 article. Although this article is more concerned about the general impact of television on youngsters’ learning and cognitive abilities, the same question about reading was asked to the same age groups. The results indicate that the overall mean of number of books read in a 30 days period is 2.7 in 1997, the same as in 1988. In these nine years that elapsed between the two surveys, Internet was introduced, and when asked about their computer use, 65% of the respondents said they used a personal computer at home at least once a week, 27% of them claimed to be regular Internet users and 28% regarded themselves as e-mail users (Broddason, 1999, p. 184). This data actually suggests that even if technology occupied a greater place in the respondents’ lives, their reading of books did not diminish. Furthermore, it is fair to say that the use of the computer and Internet involves a fair amount of reading and writing (albeit under a different form). New data is needed to assess the present situation of leisure reading in Iceland, but these past numbers give us a different perspective on the evolution of reading habits in Iceland.

Furthermore, in an attempt to have a clear view of the reading habits situation in Iceland, here are a few statistics about the publishing industry that can say a lot on the importance of the printed word in the small country (Statistics Iceland, 2010):

- 1 533 books published in 2007
- 276 children and young people’s books were published in 2007
- 1 079 works written in Icelandic were published in 2007 (adding up to more than 70% of all published titles)
- 8.5 books loaned per capita in public libraries (2 441 243 in total) in 2001
- 75 228 loans were made at the National and University Library in 2008
- 157 published newspapers and periodicals in 2007

- 5 children's magazines published and 1 comic published in 2007

It is not far fetched to say that for a population of approximately 300 000 people, the publication industry is flourishing. It is also remarkable to see that not only is the population buying books, but that it is also writing books at an incredibly fast rate. At this point in time, we could say that Iceland is an almost perfect example of what a culture of literacy (including media literacy) should be. Even in a situation of economical crisis, the sales of books continue to rise and show no sign of slowing down. The only figure that leaves much to be desired is the number of books loaned per capita in libraries. These institutions could definitely improve their methods to attract more users, but the numbers could also be interpreted to mean that in Iceland, owning books is a source of pride.

In this very rich and literate context, a qualitative study about reading in Icelandic families in a multigenerational setting took place. In 1995 and 1996, Ágústa Pálsdóttir conducted a series of in-depth interviews with children aged from 10 to 12 years old, both their parents, and all living grand-parents. In addition to this, similar interviews that had been conducted in 1990 were used in the analysis, bringing the total number of interviewed families to twelve. The interviews were mainly about the use of print media, reading habits and attitudes over three generations, as well as about changes that occurred between these generations. This research was part of larger project which studied written culture and media use in Nordic families.

Pálsdóttir's findings concerned mainly the behaviours and attitudes of family members towards reading and she distinguished *two* primary attitudes that had an influence on reading habits. A *formal* attitude toward reading means that reading is done principally to inform and is seen more as a means than as an end. This kind of reading is often related to study or work activities. On the other hand, a *functional* attitude toward reading implies a consciousness of the importance of literature and, in these families, parents are more concerned about what their children read than about whether they read or not. These families are also more likely to supply a good access to varied reading materials.

Unsurprisingly, Pálsdóttir concluded that "[...] children who read a lot come from families where reading is regarded as an essential element of life" (1998, p. 20). She sustains that reading for kids when they are very young is not

enough and that discussing their reading as they grow older could awake in them interest for new reading material. Parents need to be models and reading has to be part of children's upbringing and immediate environment.

This last study bears special value for my own research because of the close relation of the topic, methodology and geographic situation between the two works. I will thus come back to it later in my discussion and compare my findings closely with the ones of Pálsdóttir in order to see if the situation has changed significantly or if other important factors come into play. As my project reaches outside of printed media to include reading on the computer and the use of Internet, the previous cited studies of Broddason and Hannesdóttir will also be important, although we used different research methods.

## **2.3 What Is Readers' Advisory Service?**

As it was mentioned earlier (see section 2.2), libraries have an important role to play in the development and support of a culture of literacy. Of course, different libraries in different social contexts have to implement different measures to improve literacy in their community, because part of their role is to adapt to the local factors that surround them. IFLA (2003) has established guidelines for library-based literacy programs based on questions any librarian must have answers to in order to provide good literacy programs. These programs can be developed to increase the basic levels of literacy if needed, or to take part in the development of a culture of literacy. Here is what IFLA recommends we should know:

- Who is our audience? (What is the general literacy level?)
- How do we start planning and developing community cooperation?
- Who are our potential partners? (Businesses, local artists, schools, etc.)
- What materials are needed and how do we choose them?
- How do we train our staff? (Are special trainings needed?)
- How do we promote our literacy program? (How can we use the media?)
- How can we tell if we are successful? (Based on measurable results)
- How do we keep our program going? (How to insure interest and funding?)



To encourage a culture of literacy, libraries should also provide reader-centered or “reader development” activities. The aim of such activities is to “enhance libraries’ traditional strength in promoting reading as a skill and pleasure.” (Train, 2002) As has been shown by Krashen (1993) and Finn (2009), notably, reading for pleasure is known for improving students’ writing and reading of more difficult texts and should be seen as a powerful tool to develop the culture of literacy. Encouraging reader development has a positive impact on library service, and the whole society can benefit from it.

Reader development has the potential to create the environment, to give the opportunity and to present the range of elements that can entice the reader, and draw him or her to the reading experience. It is not prescriptive, and to suggest that he or she manipulates the reader in any way, rather that their personal intervention could make the fiction collection more relevant and more accessible to an interested reader. (Van Riel in Elkin, Train and Denham, 2003, p. 34)

Library staff has a great role to play in the promotion of a culture of literacy by the services it provides its users with. Libraries have to continue promoting reading as leisure to their current users, but they also have to reach out to non-readers and non-users. The qualities of library staff have to be present as much for the promotion of reading as for quality reference work. If library staff demonstrates value to their work and the service they provide, they will contribute to demonstrate the value of a culture of literacy. Libraries are not the only active players in the development of a culture of literacy, but their basic role and existence participate deeply in a community’s cultural literacy habits. It is in this context that the importance of a good readers’ advisory service comes into play.

### **2.3.1 Origins – History**

Readers’ advisory (RA) services were originally created in the United States of America and were, as they still are today, a patron-centered library service for adult leisure readers (Saricks, 2005). However, as will be discussed later on in this chapter, children and young adults can and should also benefit from readers’ advisory services. Even though the service has changed its aims

and supporting philosophy over the many years it has been practiced, it has always been based upon the fact that reading has an “intrinsic value” (Saricks, 2005) and that it should be promoted by libraries. The way it is promoted and the judgements made about readers is what changed along the years.

According to Bill Crowley in a 2005 article entitled *Rediscovering the History of Readers Advisory Service*, it is almost impossible to say exactly when readers’ advisory services started in public libraries. He explains this historical vagueness by the local nature of public libraries who have always been working in close relationship with their users, but not necessarily with each other. Nevertheless, he distinguishes four different periods of RA in the American public libraries. The first period he identifies extends from 1876 to 1920 and corresponds to the invention of RA and its establishment as a means to educate the general population in a social context where “fewer than 25 percent of American children older than fourteen years of age were still in school, and relatively few adults were college graduates” (2005, p. 38). Here is how he describes the general idea behind the service:

Whatever the local service philosophy, the circulation of books of any type was a task to be undertaken for the reader’s own good and the good of the nation, since to produce the best results the library should furnish to all the people, old and young, of average intelligence and of the highest intellectual advancements, both improvement and intellectual entertainment. (2005, p. 38)

The second RA period he defines takes place between the years 1920 and 1940 and is thought of as the time where the real and more generalised implementation of RA services in public libraries took place; full-time readers’ advisor positions were even created in sizeable libraries. The role of the public library in education was defined in three major activities by Judson T. Jennings (in Crowley, 2005, p. 39):

1. An information service regarding local opportunities for adult students.
2. Service to other agencies engaged in adult education.
3. Service to individual readers and students.

It is also said that non-fiction was considered of higher value than fiction and that it is what librarians privileged in their interactions with readers. It is in this

period that the ALA started a formal RA program called *Reading with a Purpose*, also called “reading courses”, which consisted of published pamphlets recommending fiction and non-fiction titles on different topics.

Crowley calls the third period (1940 to 1984) in readers’ advisory history “RA Lost in Adult Services”. It is a period characterised by the participation of the U.S. in the Second World War and by a lack of funding for public libraries. The recreational aspect of library services was dismissed as the sole informational role of the library was put forward. RA services were merged with the regular “adult services department” and readers’ advisors were no longer assigned specific posts. These adult services departments were defined as providing “library services for the continuing educational, recreational, and cultural development of adults” (Crowley 2005, p. 39) but readers’ advisory services were discontinued in most libraries.

The situation of RA stayed in a somewhat dormant state until approximately the mid-eighties. Crowley pinpoints the year of 1984 which coincides with the creation of the Northern-Illinois based Adult Reading Round Table (ARRT), a group formed in the purpose of reviving RA and giving it back its rightful place in the public library. Even though ARRT was a state based committee, it had an impact all over the United States of America and created programs that were used nationwide. Strong advocates of RA were members of the ARRT and were major actors in its reviving in North America.

One of these important figures is Joyce G. Saricks, who was quoted a little earlier. She wrote with Nancy Brown in 1989 the first edition of the book *Readers’ Advisory in the Public Library* that would be reedited twice afterwards (in 1997 and 2005), thus becoming the go-to reference for readers’ advisors in the field and for anyone who aspired to do a better job at helping people find leisure reading material. The new interest in RA was picked up where it was left in the 1940s, but it was motivated by a completely different agenda. Reading was still seen as having an intrinsic value that had to be promoted, but the perception and judgment of readers was divergent in the sense that the readers’ advisor no longer ‘knew best’; i.e. the tastes and reading habits of the readers would be respected from then onward.

In her chapter about the history and introduction to RA, Saricks (2005) divides the periods mentioned by Crowley in a more detailed way and illustrates

them by examples that contrast greatly with today's RA views. For example, she states that the period going from 1922 to 1926 was the beginning of structured RA during which librarians would sit down with patrons in long private interviews to discover what the best readings for them were. These interviews led to personalised reading plans determined by the readers' advisors. In the following years (1927 to 1935), annotated book lists started to appear on special topics and were made available to the patrons of the libraries without any special consultations. Individual RA services and reading courses were still offered in parallel to the topic lists, however. Saricks underscores the fact that "while this approach sounds very similar to that used in present-day readers' advisory interviews, the judgmental suppositions made about patrons then are in direct contrast to today's attitude." (2005, p.5)

The following phase in Saricks' chronology (1936 to 1940) is even worse as regards judgments made about readers and their reading abilities. She explains that as a result of the RA services' success, librarians were running out of time to interview in length every patron who wished to use the service, and started preparing different standardized reading plans for different types of people. Seventy reader types were established according to class, occupation, race, sex, and personality traits. Here are a few examples to illustrate these reading plans and the extent to which judgments were made about patrons without any relevant training to do so:

Ranging from The Timid and Inferior-Feeling Person, The Low-Brow, and Tenement Dwellers to The Ambitious Person and the Sophisticated Woman, each type was listed with three or four book titles considered appropriate reading suggestions. For instance, The Unskilled Worker was advised to read Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*; for The Coward, Conrad's *Lord Jim* was suggested; The Criminal in the Making was advised to read Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*. (2005, p. 6)

After this period, Saricks agrees with Crowley that RA went out of fashion. Perhaps patrons got alienated from the library because of the constant judgment they were subjected to, or simply because their leisure time significantly diminished as a result of the U.S. implication in the Second World War.

Not much has been written about the history of RA services devoted to young people. Perhaps this is so because young people always were the object of educational concerns and therefore, a special attention was already given to their development as readers. However Jennifer Burek Pierce claims that the interventions of librarians and readers' advisors "responded to social concerns articulated by forces outside the profession." (2006, p. 42) The librarian's objective was to make sure that the reading material intended for young people reflected the moral values of the time and kept them away from potentially so-called mind-threatening 'cheap literature'.

Whereas readers' advisory efforts for adults in this era focused on self-improvement and as prescribed by cultural norms, librarian's recommendations to adolescent directed teens' attention toward wholesome literature that would compete with their enjoyment of such popular and affordable genres as the dime novel, with its allusions to sex and depictions of violence. (2006, p. 42)

Despite the shortcomings of early American RA services, these form the necessary grounds on which the services provided today were built. Bill Crowley ties together the origins and the future of RA services when he says that:

[...] contemporary readers advisory service is best understood as an organized program promoting both fiction and nonfiction discretionary reading for the dual purpose of satisfying reader needs and advancing a culture's goal of a literate population. Even when perceived as a recreational activity, effective readers advisory is inevitably in the service of an educational end. (2005, p. 37)

### **2.3.2 The Basics of Readers' Advisory**

To this day, RA remains more prominent in countries of Anglo-Saxon culture and its basic principles were laid down and commented mostly by American and British authors and practitioners. However, after having worked in library and studied the literature on the subject, it is the author's belief that different forms of readers' advisory services are being put into practice worldwide without anybody documenting them officially. RA services enclose

many different activities prepared and performed by librarians and library staff. What is here called readers' advisory services refers to all library activities related to helping patrons finding leisure reading material, being fiction or nonfiction. Train refers to the same idea via the expression "reader development" and confines the term "readers' advisory" to the "one-on-one conversation with the librarian, initiated either by the member of staff or more likely by the reader [...]" (Elkin, Train and Denham, 2003, p. 37). Because most of the literature that will be referred to is of North-American origin, the first signification of RA will be privileged in this text, even when mentioning British authors.

Duncan Smith, in his 2000 article, identified four areas of competencies necessary to do a good job as a readers' advisor:

- Background in fiction and nonfiction
- Understanding people as readers and readers as people
- The appeal of books
- The readers' advisory transaction

These areas of competencies regroup what will be here closely examined and are the result of a collective reflection that has taken place over many years and that was echoed in many books and articles. Here is an overview of the basic components of readers' advisory and how they are put into practice.

### ***2.3.2.1 The Readers' Advisory Interview***

The readers' advisory interview, or transaction, is at the centre of all RA activities. It is called an interview because it is meant for the librarian to discover the reading tastes and desires of the patron, but it does not take the traditional form of an interview. Here is how Saricks defines it:

The readers' advisory interview is actually a conversation between the advisor and the reader about books. A readers' advisor will certainly use all the same communication skills involved in reference interviewing to get the readers to describe their reading tastes and what they are in the mood to read at the time. Yet, unlike a reference interview, this is not primarily a question-and-answer exchange; it is a conversation [...] (2005, p. 75)

Even in libraries where RA services have been in place for many years, patrons are often unaware of them or just do not feel comfortable *disturbing* a

librarian with unimportant questions as those about leisure reading. For this reason, the readers' advisor often opens the dialogue by asking if they can be of any assistance or if the person is finding what they came for. This is why readers' advisors seldom stay at their desk while working, as they are rather often seen roaming the aisle or just walking around among patrons. (Saricks, 2005, p. 86)

For Saricks and many other authors and practitioners such as David Wright, one of the most important aspects of the RA interview is the way it concludes. She claims that making sure that the patron leaves with books at the end of the interview is not the main goal of it, but rather that the patron involved in the conversation leaves with an invitation to come back.

These conversations are ongoing and we may not have a perfect suggestion at every turn, but when we treat our patron with respect, attention, and enthusiasm, we make it clear that we value and serve readers and thus lay the foundation for good things to come. (Wright *in* Moyer, 2008, p. 162)

The patron must feel he or she has been listened to and that someone is prepared to take opinions into consideration without judgment, providing genuine help and interest (Saricks, 2005, p. 90).

### ***2.3.2.2 A Book's Appeal***

In order to conduct a successful and useful RA interview, the readers' advisor must be able to have this conversation about books in a way that conveys what Saricks calls the appeal of the book. "The elements of books to which a reader relates constitute the appeal of a book for the reader." (2005, p. 42) She divides these elements of appeal into five big categories: (1) pacing, (2) characterization, (3) story line, (4) frame and tone, and (5) style. These are elements that characterize books in different ways, and an infinite quantity of words would be available to instantiate them—words we can obviously not list here. However, we must be sure that what we are saying about a book's appeal is understood by the person we are talking to. Our vocabulary can be adjusted to the interlocutor and comparisons to other works can be made to clarify what we mean. "Appeal elements describe more accurately the 'feel' of a book" (Saricks, 2005, p. 41), and that is what a readers' advisor should ultimately be able to convey by using them.

The reason why it is important to be able to talk about the appeal of a book is that readers will often refer to a specific author or book as what they would like to read. However, since works of all authors are not always available, the readers' advisor must be able to discover what characteristics made that certain authors or books were liked (or not) by a specific reader in order to be able to suggest other possibilities. To do this, the readers' advisor must have a general knowledge of literature, genres, popular and classic authors as well as nonfiction, and moreover, be able to talk about it fluently. This refers to what is called background in fiction and nonfiction by Smith. This means that the readers' advisor must read and enjoy reading, but as no one is expected to have read everything, different tools and strategies are available to render the task a little more manageable.

### ***2.3.2.3 Readers' Advisory Tools and Resources***

This making a priority of non-fiction over fiction runs right from senior management...to the library assistant at the counter. In response to queries, library staff will confidently recommend books on do-it-yourself or travel. Asked for a 'good read' they hesitate and tend to fall back on their personal tastes. Is this a professional response? Why do we not have systems which enable staff to recommend fiction they have not read with the confidence they recommend non-fiction they have not read? When you consider that 75% of adult issue are fiction, this lack of support and attention is extraordinary. (Van Riel in Elkin, Train and Denham, 2003, p. 33)

Tools and resources do exist to help readers' advisors perform a professional job and not rely solely their personal tastes, but they are certainly not organised in a system and many library staff still feel uneasy when faced with a leisure reading request that does not involve a particular title or author. Many different types of resources exist and should be chosen from by readers' advisors and libraries to suit their users' needs. Several well made websites<sup>1</sup> exist solely for the purpose of readers' advisory, and a large portion of them are free while others come with a fee. These electronic resources are very useful and

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<sup>1</sup> The following website is particularly useful for English language readers. Authors and titles can be found in many categories. It is easy to use and it also offers nonfiction suggestions. <http://www.webrary.org/rs/flbklistmenu.html>



should be made known to users as well as all staff members. Print resources also exist and are useful even though they get outdated as new works are published. However, a book like *Genreflecting: A Guide to Popular Fiction Reading Interests* (Tixier Herald, 2006) will be of use during an extended period of time because of the accurate descriptions of the different literary genres. One who does not enjoy all genres can find out what others appreciate in them and be able to talk about them and suggest them to interested patrons. Moreover, readers' advisor should always be aware of book reviews and read them regularly. Resources will not be listed in these pages because of the limited space allotted and many of them are mentioned and assessed by Saricks (2005, p. 18). However, Mary Wilkes Towner established a list of items to be considered when evaluating an RA tool and how to choose from all that is available (Wilkes Towner in Moyer, 2008, p. 181).

- What do I need to do my readers' advisory job?
- What do we need in our library to support readers' advisory for both staff and patrons?
- Does this particular tool fit well with the needs we've analyzed?
- Will our patrons actually use this tool?
- What can we afford?
- Is there a free version that will fill the same need?
- Which format is best for my library, print or electronic?

Now that RA resources have been established as valuable and needed, Saricks reminds us that even if "[...] reference sources are the backbone of a readers' advisory department, [...] they are only as good as the staff who use them" (2005, p. 38). She insists on the collaborative nature of RA and suggests that these sources be shared, compared and used as tools. She also outlines guidelines to create local lists of different genres, authors and titles that are often requested in particular libraries (2005, p. 34) as well as insists on the importance of updating them regularly.

#### ***2.3.2.4 Promoting Readers' Advisory Services and Collection***

Before even thinking of establishing an RA service in a library, a respectable collection must be established. To do so, a librarian responsible of acquiring new works for the collection must know the population it is meant to serve and adapt choices to it. The ongoing debate about the quality of books

versus popular demand is of less importance today, but the question of whether we should strive to offer a selection of classics and critically acclaimed works or only what is most popular can still be posed. Moyer (2005, p. 221) quotes a study by Budd and Wyatt which “indicates that both quality and popularity are important factors in collection development.” The authors also looked into the phenomenon of reviews and concluded that they weighed greatly in the choices made by librarians in their acquisitions. Moyer’s conclusion is that a balance between works considered of quality and popular books is important so that patrons can satisfy most of their literary needs at the library.

When this collection has been built and is believed to be fulfilling readers’ needs, it must be publicised so that library users and others know it exists. Saricks suggests many practical and not too costly ways of achieving this (2005, p. 136), ranging from signs, book displays, custom-made bookmarks, annotated books lists, booktalks, book discussion groups and layout of the readers’ advisory area. Her ideas are as simple as making sure that the readers’ advisory desk is visible when entering the fiction section and that it is well identified. She proposes putting up book displays with catchy signs such as “Good Books You May Have Missed” (p. 140) or “Books for a Long Winter Night” (p.142), and emphasizes the importance of changing them often so that people get the habit of coming to them regularly.

#### **2.3.2.5 Book Groups**

The reading discussion groups participate in the promotion of library services. Yet it remains, in many authors’ opinion, an entity different in and of itself. Jessica Moyer (2005) dedicated a whole chapter to the phenomenon of book groups and concludes that “research [on book groups] coalesces in two main areas: studies of identity formation and the fashioning of the female self, and book groups as sites for negotiating cultural hierarchies of taste” (p. 122). Andrew Smith (*in* Moyer, 2005, p. 123) iterates that “book groups are part of what Robert Putnam calls ‘social capital’—small groups creating the bonds that build successful communities by allowing interactions with others”. He maintains that public libraries have an important role to play in community building and that making book groups possible in a public library is an essential

part of library practice. The small section he wrote in Moyer's book is a complete how-to model to start a book group in a public library.

Accordingly, Train advocates for the active role of the reader in what she calls reader development and what we have so far been calling readers' advisory.

[...] reader development emphasizes the importance of intervention, of increased choices and of shared activity between readers: reader-centred promotion that recognizes the creative role of the reader as well as the artistic role of the writer. (Elkin, Train and Denham, 2003, p. 34)

In her opinion, readers' advisory is both a solitary and a shared activity. It is solitary when the *passive approach* is privileged (when patrons go around browsing through aisles, displays or using library available tools) and it is a shared activity when the *active approach* is privileged (patrons interacting with readers' advisors or other library staff or with other patrons) (Elkin, Train and Denham, 2003, p. 36-37). The book group is part of the *active approach* of readers' advisory and should be considered as equally important as other aspects of it.

#### **2.3.2.6 Education of Readers' Advisors**

In 2005, Moyer and Weech conducted a case study of the most prominent Library and Information Science schools in the USA, Canada, and Europe to review the presence of readers' advisory in these schools' curricula. In a context where public library users in the USA and Canada attend it to borrow fiction in a proportion of 60 to 70 percent of all books taken out (Moyer and Weech, 2005, p. 67), we could expect that attention given to readers' advisory in official LIS schools would be, if not equal in proportion, at least greater than that which prevails today. Indeed, the authors recorded that "only 25 percent of the 56 ALA accredited programs had courses on readers' advisory in their course catalogs" and that "fewer than 40 percent addressed readers' advisory in their required courses" (2005, p. 76). This lack of RA formation in universities is also noted by Joyce Saricks:

Very few librarians required to provide readers' advisory service have had formal library school training in public service techniques useful in dealing with patrons or any background in popular fiction and nonfiction. In probably no other aspect of library work is on-the-job (and even less formal) training more often the rule rather than the exception. (Saricks, 2005, p. 161).

In Iceland, the MLIS programme involves an obligatory course called *Þekkingarmiðlun* (knowledge mediation) and is about information mediation in the context of references. It is built around how to answer patrons' information needs with library dispositions and reference services, but readers' advisory is not mentioned. However, information seeking behaviour theory and the reference interview are detailed in a way that can certainly profit those who would want to pursue readers' advisory.

As Saricks mentioned, readers' advisory training is mostly done after librarians have graduated from LIS schools. Therefore, the formation is received in the contexts of conferences, workshops, in library training or basically acquired with experience on the job. Because of this particular status of readers' advisory and the parallel growing need for it, she identifies specific goals of RA training that are crucial to promote and ensure its longevity (2005, p. 162):

1. Help staff (and the administration) recognize the importance of and the need to provide readers' advisory service in the library.
2. Teach readers' advisors to be comfortable, skilled, and non-judgemental in their interactions with readers.
3. Provide strategies so that readers' advisors can be successful in going from readers' interests, moods, and needs to books as they suggest a range of possible titles patrons might wish to read.
4. Help readers' advisors understand the concept of appeal and its essential role in readers' advisory work.

She then stresses the importance of ongoing training for experienced readers' advisors to keep them challenged and able to give the best service they can. She suggests ongoing training activities that are suitable for beginner readers' advisors as well as for experienced ones. As advocated by Dilevko and Gottlieb (2003), reference librarians' reading habits are important in order for them to provide a professional service. Moyer comments on their work by

saying that “it brings up many important issues to modern librarianship, such as digital reference, deprofessionalization, and the increasing reliance on technology while providing ample proof that old fashioned skills like newspaper and leisure reading can also be of great benefit to reference service.” (2007, p. 137) Even if Dilevko and Gottlieb do not directly mention readers’ advisory services, it is clear that their intervention goes in the same direction as Saricks’ ongoing training activities in order to keep up to date with new tools and publications. Here are suggested activities that focus on reading and sharing with others (2005, p. 175):

1. Design a personal reading plan.
2. Read in unfamiliar fiction genres and nonfiction topics.
3. Subscribe to a genre mailing list for two months, reading postings and sharing insights into the genre with other staff.
4. Read authors on the best-seller lists.
5. Share discoveries with staff and patrons.
6. Practice talking about books—every day.
7. Collect and share Sure Bets.
8. Keep statistics of readers’ advisory interviews, and set personal goals to increase interactions.
9. Create annotated book lists.
10. Brainstorm readalike bookmarks for popular authors.
11. Create readers’ advisory tools such as popular fiction and nonfiction lists.
12. Undertake a genre study.

All of the above insists on the importance of self-training and professional development in the present state of development of readers’ advisory services. However, as courses are offered in some LIS programmes, it is possible to imagine that they could be spread to other schools so that they could at least be followed by students interested in doing readers’ advisory work in public libraries.

### 2.3.3 Reader's Advisory for Children and Young Adults

Readers' advisory for children and young adults is built on the same principles as readers' advisory for adult readers. However, differences in the way it has been treated over the years in research shows that it is a field that is usually a lot more related to education than modern adult readers' advisory services. As was reported earlier, adults have always had a natural educational relationship with children and young adults and this case is no exception. Librarians still need to play this role with young readers, and its approach to the role has evolved in a manner similar to adult RA. In her 1995 essay reporting findings on series fiction reading—which has been considered cheap literature for a long time, and still is by some—Catherine Sheldrick Ross concludes that “[w]ithout abandoning their historical roles as educators, public and school librarians should note the implications of recent research: the most important thing they can do to encourage literacy and develop powerful readers is to encourage free voluntary reading” (p. 234). Ross' findings support Krashen's FVR principles and show that most adult avid readers were once consumers of 'cheap' series fiction. This implies that youth librarians should not look down on their patrons reading choices but, on the contrary, should be open to talking about them in a respectful manner directly with them, as suggested by Amanda Blau (*in Moyer, 2005, p. 100*). Following Blau's idea, Heather Booth stresses the importance of validating recreational reading and reading selections, and mentions the positive effects of approaching young adults in a fashion that builds a trusting relationship between them and the librarian. She suggests approaching them by starting conversations about authors and books they like before offering help, in order to avoid sounding like another authority figure who knows best and is ready to tell them what to do and think (*in Moyer, 2005, p. 103*).

Passive readers' advisory, as explained in section 2.3.2.4, is also something that needs to be considered carefully with children and young adults. “Shy children might not talk to a librarian at a service desk, but we still have the opportunity to reach them” (Blau, *in Moyer, 2005, p. 99*). The use of displays could even be more important for children and teenagers who might feel

overwhelmed by tall and long aisles of books; little changes like showing books with their covers facing users could even have a positive effect.

Another important part of children and young adult RA is what Booth calls readers' advisory by proxy (2006). By that term, she means any RA request that is not done by the readers themselves, but by someone who is asking for them. In the case of children and teenagers, the parents are often the "proxy" figure. They are sometimes sent by a busy teenager to get some books, but they most often come because they think their children should read. Booth claims that parents are not always aware of their children's reading interests, but that they "have a firm idea of what they *should* read" (2006, p. 14). To achieve their main objective—to ultimately have a face-to-face encounter with the youngsters themselves—RA advisors must use solid interview techniques to determine the exact nature of the need and show the child or teenager they care by sending lists of books and asking for follow-up contacts (p.15).

An additional aspect of readers' advisory for young people that should not be overlooked is the participatory characteristics of library services that can be offered to them through special activities, such as author visits, workshops, or simply story reading. Children and teenagers can be enticed to come to a library to participate in a media event such as the arrival of the last *Harry Potter* book, for example (Blau *in* Moyer, 2005, p. 98). As for adults, book discussions and book groups can be a great place to meet people, making it a social event, or to discover new books they would not have picked up on their own. In a study about family reading groups in the U.K. published in 1988, Dina Thorpe reports some of the positive effects that can be brought by these weekly gatherings and exchanges. (Thorpe, 1988, p. 102-103)

[...] the children listened to each other's comments and encouraged one another to speak. This helped the children feel that it was acceptable to enjoy silly rhymes [...]. In other situations and at other times they might have been made to feel that books like these were "babyish" [...] but introduced at a Family Reading Group they increased the "fun" value of reading and the confidence of the reader.

With this self-reliance, it became easier for children to make their own recommendations to the group and several parents commented on the effect of this: "*I have noticed that he has brought home one or two books that have been talked about by other people in the group that he wouldn't have thought of reading.*"

Librarians dedicated to young people must not forget they are helping lay the foundation for future reading habits and library use. Lynn McKechnie suggests “factors that foster early reading” (*in* Moyer, 2005, p. 79) and that will contribute to future reading habits:

- Reading aloud
- Providing space for quiet reading
- Ready access to materials
- Choice of materials
- A sense of reading as a valuable activity
- Access to an enabling adult

These factors can be present at home, as shown by Pálsdóttir (1998), or in library settings and should be meant to include children as well as their whole family. They are part of what a readers’ advisor for young people can and should do. The following quote wraps up the importance of readers’ advisory for children and teenagers and reminds us of the fundamental role of public libraries.

By making books available to all who want them, together with specialist staff to make them accessible through advice and assistance in the choice and use of them, libraries are uniquely placed to make a significant contribution to the encouragement of reading amongst children and young people. (Elkin, Train and Denham, 2003, p. 33)

### **2.3.4 The Future of Readers’ Advisory**

As the arguments and studies pile up, it becomes clear that readers’ advisory should be treated as a core part of library services. It is in accordance with the traditional educational role of public libraries while providing assistance for leisure reading selection in a non-judgemental way outside of official schooling programmes. However, readers’ advisory authors and practitioners are aware that the present state of the service is not perfect and needs to improve as it strives to continue serving patrons in a satisfying way.

For Hollands and Moyer (Moyer, 2005, p. 251 and 258), a better understanding of appeal factors would help improving RA services by being able to include them more and more in library OPAC (online public access catalog) systems. This would not only allow librarians and users to research



documents using these appeal terms, but it would also give both parties a common vocabulary that would facilitate exchanges and book discussions. Reviews could even include more appeal vocabulary, as librarians often participate in their writing and publication. Professional readers' advisors already rely on reviews to be able to suggest works they have not read, but they could now find even more precise details in them and be better equipped to discuss these works (2005, p. 254).

Using Internet is of course of great importance in readers' advisory services and future developments of RA databases are primordial. The use of technologies enabling broad participation, such as Wiki technologies, ensures that a wider selection of books and genres can be covered, and that an understanding of the general consensus can emerge from them to describe books and their related appeal factors (2005, p. 256). Hollands (2006) also suggests that we use online or paper forms to collect information about individual readers and build a profile determining what they have read and what they prefer. He argues that, as some patrons enjoy face-to-face communication with librarians, other patrons would prefer a more indirect type of reader's advisory. This still needs to be tried and researched, but it is definitely an avenue that could further explored.

As was already argued, better and more readers' advisory formation should be offered in LIS School. According to Hollands and Moyer, a better representation of RA in courses could result in a wider acceptance and application of its methods in the professional field and granting more legitimacy to readers' advisory requests in libraries. Having a better formation to practice readers' advisory would insure that it would become more of a science than an art. Moreover, the service could be promoted as receiving the unbiased and non-judgmental assistance of a professional that could help readers go beyond very popular titles, a service that users could more or less get in a bookstore (Moyer, 2005, p. 253).

As advocated by Barry Trott (2008), readers' advisory services will only continue to be useful as long as the all intervening professionals in the field become reflective practitioners and continue to strive to serve patrons at the best of their capacities.

## 3 Methodology and Method

This chapter begins with a short account of what qualitative research methods are. It is followed by a presentation of the research questions and description of the particular research process that was used in this study. Finally, the participants and interview contexts are briefly introduced.

### 3.1 Qualitative Research

Deciding to base this study upon qualitative research methods meant that data had to be gathered while being close to people rather than observing them from afar. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998), qualitative research is “concerned with the meanings people attach to their lives” (p. 7) and is an inductive process that considers people as a whole and not as “reduced variables” (p. 8). There are five qualitative traditions of inquiry, and each varies in form, terms and focus (Creswell, 2007):

- **A biographical study** includes many approaches but always amounts to the storytelling of a person’s life, whether the latter is told through an autobiography, a life history, or an interpretive biography. (pp. 47-51)
- **A phenomenological study** “describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or *the phenomenon*” by exploring human consciousness. (p.51)
- **A grounded theory study** attempts to develop a theory as regards a specific context using mostly interviews, but also observations. The obtained data is analysed in a systematic way. (pp. 55-58)
- **An ethnographical study** “is a description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system” (p. 58). It is mostly based on

participant observations and interviews while the researcher is immersed in the object of study. (pp. 58-61)

- **A case study** “is an exploration of a ‘*bounded system*’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information [...]” (p. 61)

The qualitative approach used in this particular study is the *grounded theory*. Data was collected through open in-depth interviews with children and teenagers aged from ten to fifteen year old and subsequently coded. This type of interview “is intended to yield a picture of a range of settings, situations, or people” (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998, p. 90). Important features of in-depth interviews include the (1) combination of structure and flexibility, (2) interaction between researcher and interviewee, (3) use of probing techniques by the interviewer, and (4) generation of new ideas as unexpected answers are given by the interviewee. Specific qualities and behaviours are required of the interviewer, such as genuine curiosity, interest and respect for the interviewee, a good memory and good listening skills. Establishing a good rapport and a climate of trust is also primordial for an in-depth interview to bring about its full informative potential. (Legard, Keegan and Ward *in* Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, chap. 6)

In order to be analysed, the interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed. As a first step, *open coding* (also called *line-by-line coding*) was carried out by reading interview transcripts and carefully noting the ideas and concepts which came out in them until themes emerged. The data was then meticulously reanalysed with these specific themes in mind (also called *focused* or *closed coding*). Themes were interpreted in accordance with both the general and particular contexts relating to each participant, and theories were then induced from these cases as well as extrapolated to answer the research questions. (Charmaz *in* Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2004, chap. 23) However, since qualitative research uses a limited amount of participants (as opposed to quantitative research methods) its findings, or grounded theories, cannot be generalised to entire populations. Researchers rather use their own background assumptions to gradually build the research and “generate ideas that may later

be verified through traditional logico-deductive methods” (Charmaz *in* Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2004, p. 516)

## **3.2 Research Questions**

The present research project was conducted as the final work of my Masters degree in Library and Information Science (MLIS). When I started my MLIS studies, I was already very much interested in leisure reading and curious about why people choose this activity over other possibilities in their free time. Being an avid leisure reader myself, I felt compelled to know more about what triggered this behaviour. As I did my previous studies in elementary and preschool teaching (Université de Montréal, 2003-2007), I was also receptive to young people’s inclinations and needs and felt strongly about encouraging them to read. I had immediate support from my supervisor when I suggested dedicating my research project to leisure reading and habits of children and teenagers. Consequently, she promptly handed me references that helped me define the orientation I was going to give my project. I could then narrow down my research questions and decide how to proceed in order to answer them. Here are the research questions:

1. What influences children’s and teenagers’ motivation to read for pleasure?
2. What kind of material do they read and where do they get it from?
3. What is children’s and teenagers’ perception of libraries and how do they use them?

## 3.3 Method

### 3.3.1 Researching by Open Interviews and Participant Selection

Before being able to start the interviewing process, I had to notify the Data Protection Agency of Iceland (*Persónuvernd*) as is required of anyone who wants to gather and process personal information about Icelandic residents. After this was done, I could start looking for participants to interview. Since I was relatively new to the country, I started asking people around me if they knew any children or teenagers who would be willing to be interviewed about reading. The only two conditions the participants had to fulfil were that they had to be (1) aged between ten and fifteen year old inclusively, and (2) able to understand and speak English at a level sufficient enough to have a conversation with someone who had very basic knowledge of Icelandic. As a result of these first requests, I got about four people I knew personally who were willing to refer me to young people in their surroundings. I then contacted possible participants via email or telephone. More than once, the responding participant happened to have a sibling who was also in the right age bracket, and I was then invited to interview him or her as well. I also used the *snowballing* technique (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam *in* Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p. 94), which consists of asking participants to suggest other possible informants—I got in contact with two more participants thanks to this methods. The interviews were conducted during a six months period elapsing from the end of September 2009 to March 2010.

Some participants were very easy to get in contact with and the appointments for the interviews were settled conveniently. However, I had to call back many times other participants who had expressed the will to participate in the research, but who had trouble finding a suitable time slot. The interviews were therefore conducted at the most suitable time, whether it was on the weekends or after school, and took place in the homes of the participants, except for one that was conducted at the house of a friend who was also being interviewed. The informants chose the room in the house where they wanted us to sit and, because some of them were quite young, I also let them choose if they wanted a family member to be present. Because my participants were all minors,

I had to get written consent from one of their parents so as to be allowed to record and use the data I would gather from them. I did not have much difficulty obtaining parents' consent and most of them were very interested in the future conclusions I would draw from the research.

Before properly starting the interviews, I explained to the participants that I would be recording our exchange and that it would later be transcribed and analysed, but that their identity would be kept secret by the use of pseudonyms. I also informed them that they could stop the interview at any time and that they did not have to answer a question that made them feel uncomfortable. I tried to put them at ease by letting them know that whatever they had to say would be valuable to me and that they should not be worried about giving right or wrong answers as there were no wrong answers. I did not use a rigid questionnaire, but rather started the interviews by asking participants to tell me something about themselves so I could get to know them better. I then took the conversations from there, following them through, wherever they were leading me. I did have a list of items that needed to be discussed, but they were often tackled without me having to directly ask about them. This way, I gathered information on themes I had not thought of asking about and could integrate them into subsequent meetings with other participants.

### **3.3.2 Time Frame of the Interviews**

Since I decided to do interviews with children and teenagers, I was advised by my supervisor that these usually did not last as long as interviews with adults and that I should expect them to go on for about twenty to thirty minutes. Indeed, some of them lasted only twenty minutes, but others lasted up to an hour. I usually stayed in the home of the participants longer than the duration of the interview. Parents or older siblings were often eager to talk about their own thoughts with regard to reading and I often only left their home a full hour after the interviews were over. This often permitted me to gather information that had been left out by the interviewee and I was grateful for it.

### **3.3.3 Data Collection and Treatment**

As mentioned earlier, all interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after they were conducted. It was usually done the next day or two days later when the first option was not possible. The idea was to retain as much of the impressions and extra information I had gathered—both from the family members and the physical disposition of the homes I visited—as was possible. I furthermore set about to write down lengthy comments about the interviews and participants to ensure that I would not forget important details. This also allowed me to use these thoughts in forthcoming interviews. In effect, the list of items I sought to talk about changed as the research progressed, making no interview exactly the same as the ones before. The coding process began after I had taken my fourth interview and the analysis sped up from that point onward. I was able to identify themes as I was coding new interviews in an open fashion and go back to former interviews with new ideas taken from the following ones.

### **3.3.4 Observations**

In addition to the interviews, I also conducted two observations in a public library to witness the interactions taking place between a reference librarian and young patrons at a reference desk. My first idea was to go once on a week afternoon, after school hours, because I thought children and teenagers would be there to do homework, just read or gather information for special projects. However, this turned out not being the case. Over a one hour period, almost no one asked for assistance from the reference librarian, and almost no patrons were present in the children section of the library. For that reason, I decided to go back on a Sunday afternoon, when I imagined the library would be more crowded. Thankfully, it was. The observations I made then as well as on the first visit are reported in section 4.5.

### **3.3.5 Limits and Problems of Research Process**

Some limitations of my research were induced by the sampling technique I used. Asking people around me if they knew children and teenagers who would accept to be interviewed about reading had as an effect that I was referred to young people who were good readers. I did mention that I was not

necessarily looking for avid readers, but acquaintances instinctively thought about young good readers they knew when discovering the aim of my research. Furthermore, by requiring that participants speak sufficient English, I may have biased my sample by targeting children and teenagers who on the one hand, might have a facility for languages and reading; and , on the other hand, might have perfected their English skills by reading in that language. The result is that all participants to my study ended up being young people who enjoy reading as a leisure activity and that many of them are avid readers. The only person I interviewed who did not enjoy reading in her free time was a girl who was dyslexic. Since I am not versed in the causes or consequences of that condition as it relates to her reading abilities, I was not convinced that I could analyse her interview in a way similar to the others. After conferring with my supervisor, I decided not to include this interview into my data. It would, without a doubt, be interesting to find out how dyslexia affects reading habits, yet this topic deserves a full research in order for it to be studied properly.

### **3.4 Participants and Family Context**

All ten participants reside in the Reykjavík area and go to a school near where they live. With the exception of one participant, they all have a proficient knowledge of the English language and occasional problems of communication could easily be solved by explaining the meaning of a word or by saying it in Icelandic. This one informant, however, did not have sufficient knowledge of English to have a fluent conversation and her sister had to act as an interpreter. Four of the participants were the sibling of another participant and four were friends with one of the other participants. Only two had no known relation to other participants. Following are brief accounts of the interview contexts and short descriptions of all participants (using fictitious names) in the chronological order of when they were interviewed.

#### **First Couple of Siblings—Kiljan and Silja**

These informants are from a family that is not “typically Icelandic” even though they are all Icelandic citizens. The whole family has previously lived



abroad for almost ten years and came back to live in Iceland approximately one year before the interviews. Both Kiljan and Silja are fluent in two foreign languages, of which one is English, on top of having Icelandic as their mother tongue.

**Kiljan** is a 12 year old boy who leads a very active life. He practices soccer, dance, guitar and karate in organised conditions, and spends a lot of his free time reading. He is also very interested in computers and uses them for work, information, communication and entertainment alike. He does not have any problems in school and even thinks it is a little too easy in Iceland compared to what he has been accustomed when living abroad.

**Silja** is 14 years old and is really representative of a typical teenager. Her friends are very important in her life and her best friend was in the room at the moment of the interview. She also referred to her friends often in her answers. She takes part in many organized activities such as piano lessons, singing lessons, volleyball and a girls' choir. She spends a lot of time reading, but does not consider herself like someone who reads a lot, although other people might think that she actually does. She reads novels that are about people her age and enjoys reading news and blogs on the Internet. She also likes to write. Languages are her favourite subjects in school.

### **Second Couple of Siblings—Björn and Anna**

This family has always resided in Iceland, but they travelled to over ten countries. I interviewed the boy in his room following his suggestion and I interviewed the girl in the kitchen, because she wanted to stay close to her mother. One of the children's extended family members is a published author.

**Björn** is a 13 year old boy who is very interested in science and fantasy and these interests are reflected in his chosen reading material. He is confident and outgoing and participates (or participated) in many activities such as Tae Kwon Do, horseback riding, and Lego programming competitions. He is a heavy reader and reads news on the Internet or in the newspapers as well as novels, scientific magazines and comic books. He wishes to be an inventor

when he grows up and he already thinks he has theoretically solved the world's environmental problems. He also enjoys dark humour and cracked many jokes when we were talking.

**Anna** is 10 year old and quite different from her brother, even though she reads just as much, or perhaps even more than him. She is much more reserved than Björn and I could feel that she was not very comfortable: she did not seem to really want to do this interview. For these reasons, the interview only lasted 21 minutes. She did not want us to go in her room and preferred that we stayed in the kitchen where her mother was. Being an avid reader, she reads everything she can find and decides afterwards if she liked it or not. Her favourite book is the last one of the *Twilight* series and she read them all in English. Her personal interests almost all revolved around themes of the books; like vampires and romance, and she could barely talk about anything else. She has been playing violin for many years. She likes writing and wishes to become an author later.

**Magnús** is a 15 year old teenager who lives in the city center of Reykjavík and who is interested about current events and reads a lot of nonfiction. He has a personal subscription to *The Economist*, has opinions about many things and is not afraid to express them. He likes strategy computer games and uses the Internet a lot. He does not participate in organised activities. When reading fiction, he enjoys satirical fantasy like that of Terry Pratchett. He claims to be a better reader in English than in Icelandic. A member of his family is a published author. He has an older sister who studies in an Icelandic university and a younger brother who still is in elementary school.

**Jóhanna** is 10 years old and lives in a suburban area of Reykjavík. I interviewed her at her sister's house on the weekend. She is a very timid girl who does not speak English very well. Her sister had to act as an interpreter during the interview. She takes dancing lessons and piano lessons. She has two older sisters who are over 20 years old. She reads a great deal of books and her favourites are children novels in Icelandic. She has a subscription to an

Icelandic children's magazine and claims to enjoy reading the obituaries in the newspaper. She does not use the Internet much.

**Corina** is 15 year old and lives in the city center of Reykjavík. She was born abroad and moved to Iceland with her parents almost ten years ago. Her little sister was born here and they now speak Icelandic together. She is Silja's friend but they do not go to the same school. Her father is not Icelandic and met her mother when living abroad. She speaks two languages beside Icelandic and is doing well in her Danish and Spanish classes in school. Her friends are very important to her and she claims to be very sensitive. She used to read more a couple of years ago, but does not do it as much now. She sometimes writes short stories and draws what she is feeling. She anticipated many of my questions and exhibited remarkable talent for communication. Her parents take great interest in her and her sister's evolution.

**Jakob** is 12 year old (almost 13) and was born in an English speaking country. His mother is Icelandic but not his father; the family moved to Iceland some years ago. He takes guitar lessons and took piano lessons in the U.S. Jakob used to be an avid reader, but does not read as much for fun since he is in Iceland. He did not learn the language before he moved here and has spent a lot of time trying to learn it to reach the level of other children in school. He does not read so much in English anymore because he feels he ought to be reading in Icelandic. He has a 19 year old brother, to whom he is very close, and a 10 year old sister. He is friends with Kiljan.

**Ingimar** is 13 year old and likes playing football, video games and using a computer; he considers himself to be quite "normal". His favourite authors are J.K. Rowling and Tolkien and he generally enjoys fantasy. He reads a lot and receives reading recommendations from his older sister and mother, as he lets himself be guided by them. He has two sisters and one half sister. He was born abroad, where his whole family lived for many years, but they came back to Iceland when he was only three. He mostly enjoys reading in Icelandic, although he sometimes reads in English. Ingimar enjoys talking about books

with his sister's boyfriend because he has the same literary tastes as he himself does, unlike his friend Bergur, whom I interviewed right after him.

**Bergur** is 13 years old and is Ingimar's friend. He takes swimming lessons and takes part in competitions once in a while. He has an older brother who reads the same books as he does, but his brother does not feel compelled to talk about them. He enjoys reading classics like *Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn*. He mostly reads in English because he does not like Icelandic translations of foreign books. He is planning on reading *Hrafnkell Saga Freysgoða* to be better in Icelandic because he heard that he could be better in foreign languages if he had solid bases in his mother tongue. He does not go to the library frequently because they have a wide selection of books at home.

## **4 Reading Habits and Motivations of Children and Teenagers to Read for Pleasure**

In this section, the information that emerged from the coded data obtained in the interviews is presented through different themes that turned out to be central in the participants' discourses. Although the participants were all very different from one another, they mostly addressed similar issues and topics that allowed the grouping of ideas and creation of links between them. Because the object of this research is the motivations of children and teenagers, it seemed appropriate to allow the participants' words to come out clearly and to leave them a lot of space. Their language has been kept intact, including mistakes, and clarifications have been added in square brackets where needed. Participants' quotes are included into paragraphs at times and taken out in block quotes when judged necessary. The names of all participants and relatives have been changed in order to protect the informants' identities.

The different themes have been grouped and displayed to increase comprehension and facilitate the unveiling of motivations and individual characteristics of participants. As general information about participants' lives and personalities is hard to summarise, we will get to know them better through their quotes as themes unwind and follow one another progressively. That being said, a table summing up basic information such as gender, age, number of siblings, number of countries of residence as well as languages spoken and read is provided on the next page. In addition to the succinct presentations that were put forth in section 3.4, this table should offer an appropriate overview of the participants and allow for the comprehension of subsequent information revealed in the findings.

**Table 2. Participants and Main Characteristics in Chronological Order of Interview**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Siblings</b>	<b>Number of countries of residence</b>	<b>Number of spoken and read languages</b>
<b>Kiljan</b>	M	12	2 older sisters	2	3
<b>Silja</b>	F	14	1 older Sister and 1 younger Brother	2	3
<b>Björn</b>	M	13	1 younger sister	1	2
<b>Anna</b>	F	10	1 older brother	1	2
<b>Magnús</b>	M	15	1 older sister and 1 younger brother	2	2
<b>Corina</b>	F	15	1 younger sister	2	3
<b>Jóhanna</b>	F	12	2 older sisters	1	1
<b>Ingimar</b>	M	13	2 older sisters	2	2
<b>Bergur</b>	M	13	1 older brother	1	2
<b>Jakob</b>	M	12	1 older brother and 1 younger sister	2	2

## 4.1 What Do Children and Teenagers Read?

### 4.1.1 Fiction

All participants to this research were or had been fiction readers. Most of them read in multiple genres, but the fantasy genre was definitely represented strongly, especially among the boys. Every single one of the participants had read the *Harry Potter*<sup>2</sup> series, although one of them did not read it entirely. The books represented in the fantasy genre were the *Eragon*<sup>3</sup> series, the *Artemis Fowl*<sup>4</sup> series, *The Wish List*<sup>5</sup>, *The Lord of the Rings*<sup>6</sup> series, and *The Lightning Thief*<sup>7</sup>. These books were all written for young readers and have had ample international success. They seem to be ‘must-reads’ for teenage boys who enjoy reading, a fact illustrated by the way Björn recounts his readings: “*And ‘Harry Potter’, I of course read that. I also read the ‘Eragon’ books. They are very good. [...] Here is another from the same author of ‘Artemis Fowl’, ‘The Wish List’.*” Perhaps the works of Tolkien are more complex and require a higher degree of reading abilities, but Ingimar explains that this did not stop him from reading it: “*I have to say, because it's kind of hard to read [...] you know, but that doesn't really change the book. It's more challenging, but I like it as much.*”

Another author who has been named twice, and who somehow fits into the fantasy genre is Terry Pratchett. Two informants said that they started enjoying his books after getting a little bored of the fantasy books they usually read. This author writes in the fantasy genre, but does not take the latter too seriously and incorporates a great deal of humour in his stories as well as some social criticism. He has been very popular over the last twenty five years in the U.K. Here is how Magnús describes his stories: “*They really just go in unpredictable ways and are just very funny in that way. He doesn't really mind keeping the storyline intact. He just makes up something bizarre to fix it.*”

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<sup>2</sup> Rowling, J.K. (1997). *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's stone*. London: Bloomsbury.

<sup>3</sup> Paolini, C. (2006) *Eragon*. London: Corgi.

<sup>4</sup> Colfer, E. (2001). *Artemis Fowl*. London: Penguin.

<sup>5</sup> Colfer, E. (2002) *The Wish List*. London: Penguin.

<sup>6</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. (1986). *The Lord of the Ring: The Fellowship of the Ring*. London: Unwin.

<sup>7</sup> Riordan, R. (2005). *The Lightning Thief*. New York: Hyperion.

The boys also all mentioned reading comics and especially Donald Duck (or its Icelandic counterpart: *Andrés Önd*) which has been published in Iceland since the 1960s. Many of them have a subscription to the weekly comic or just already have a lot of them at home. Bergur does not enjoy them as much anymore because he has grown out of them, but still reads them from time to time. Others, however, still read them regularly and expect them anxiously.

**Jakob:** *For a hobby I read Icelandic comics like Andrés Önd, which is Donald Duck. And I get those every Tuesdays, which is today! I've read everyone except the one I got today. I read it, you know, I try not to read as much because I want something to read along the whole week.*

**Kiljan:** *I like Donald Duck stories like.... I started reading them a long time ago. [...] [About reading before sleeping] It can be 5 minutes. It can be half an hour. But usually I'm just reading the comics over and over.*

The girls did not seem to read too much comic books and only Anna mentioned liking them. Corina said that she had tried reading them when she was younger, but that she never really caught on to them: “*Yeah, I think I was just trying to like it because others were reading it.*”

Although most of the girls had read *Harry Potter*, they did not seem to be overly enthusiastic about fantasy. Their tastes revolved a lot more around romances involving young people. Corina’s favourite book is a romance written for a young audience :

*[My favourite book is] Farðu aldrei frá mér<sup>8</sup>. It's a love story. It's about a girl who met a guy and she liked him so much and then he got hit by a car, so he died and she was like so upset. But then the ghost came and she was always in her room just talking with the ghost of him. And he was telling her to kill herself so she could come to heaven too or something. But she didn't at the end and then... I loved it.*

At the moment I interviewed Anna, she was finishing the last book of the *Twilight*<sup>9</sup> series. She only had about one hundred pages left and the book was next to her during the interview. This series includes certain elements of fantasy like vampires and werewolves, but the centre of the series is really the love story between one of the vampires and a teenage girl. Silja, who is the same age as

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<sup>8</sup> Lauridsen, I. (2008) *Farðu aldrei frá mér*. Reykjavík: Skjaldborg. (Translated from Danish)

<sup>9</sup> Meyer, S. (2006). *Twilight*. New York: Little, Brown.



Corina, seems to enjoy the same kind of books. She mentioned more titles that she liked; they all had a teenage girl as main characters and they were involved in different adventures including romances. The titles she mentioned are *The Star Girl*<sup>10</sup>, *Twilight*, *Loforðið*<sup>11</sup>, and a book in a foreign language of which she did not mention the title, but with a similar storyline and characters. Contrarily to Anna, Silja did not enjoy the *Twilight* series that much. She only read the first book and did not catch on. Concerning Jóhanna, she seems to be a little apart from the other informants in her reading choices. Even though she is about the same age as Anna, she seems to read books that are aimed at children more than teenagers. She mentioned liking the series *Gæsuhúð*<sup>12</sup> (or *Goosebumps*), which is a series of scary books for children. She does not seem to be very interested in teenage romance and still enjoys fairy tales.

The male participants claim to not only read fantasy, although it undeniably is the most popular genre among these readers. Some participants read classics like *Animal Farm*<sup>13</sup> and the works of Mark Twain. Bergur, especially, had the concern of reading important books: “*I like classics like Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn [...] and I'm going to start, I think, Life of Pi*<sup>14</sup>.” He had also read *Robin Hood* and *Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde*<sup>15</sup>. Jakob and Kiljan were not particularly concerned with reading classics, but they did read books that went out of the usual teenage books. Jakob had started reading *The Ruins*<sup>16</sup>, an adult thriller that takes place in the Mayan ruins, which he qualified as “*more grown up*”. When I interviewed him, Kiljan was in the process of reading *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*<sup>17</sup>. This book was considered for young people by some, but it is written from the perspective of an autistic fifteen year old boy and is quite singular in style. Not any teenage boy would enjoy a book like this one.

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<sup>10</sup> I think this book is part of a series but I cannot find the exact title she mentioned. However, according to the story, it is probably this book: Charles, N. (2004). *Sophie's friend in need: further adventures of Sophie alias Star Girl*. Vancouver: Beach Holme Pub.

<sup>11</sup> Þórsdóttir, H. (2007). *Loforðið*. Reykjavík: Vaka-Helgafell.

<sup>12</sup> A series written by R.L. Stine that started being published by Scholastic in the beginning of the 1990s and that has been translated in Icelandic since.

<sup>13</sup> Orwell, G. (1945) *Animal A Fairy Story*. Harmondsworth: Penguin in association with Secker & Warburg Ltd.

<sup>14</sup> Martel, Y. (2002). *Life of Pi*. New York: Harcourt.

<sup>15</sup> Stevenson, R. L. (1981) *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. New York: Bantam.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, S. (2006). *The Ruins*. New York: Vintage Books.

<sup>17</sup> Haddon, M. (2003). *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. London: Vintage.

The fiction readings of the participants are varied in genres, topics and reading difficulty levels, but most of them are works especially aimed at young people. It is fair to advance that most girls are interested by romantic fiction and that most boys look for adventure and fantasy. Obviously, this conclusion cannot be generalised, but remains accurate with regard to the participants of the present study. In addition, it should be noted that books that include both of these characteristics—like *Harry Potter*—seem to be meeting everyone’s interests.

### 4.1.2 Nonfiction

Many participants claimed to be reading nonfiction on a regular basis and Magnús even said it is what he read and liked the most. Why they do it will be discussed further in section 4.2, but the type of nonfiction will here be described and listed. Also, nonfictional material entails various formats of publications, depending on whether they are in print or electronic format.

#### 4.2.2.1 Books

Nonfictional books that were mentioned in the interviews are mostly science books or history books. They have only been mentioned by Magnús, Bergur and Björn. Björn talked about a high school chemistry book he read when he was only starting to learn how to read and seemed to be very proud of it. Bergur mentioned a practical survival book that he thought was very useful and books related to philosophy: *“I like philosophy too. We own these two books about philosophy, ‘How to Understand Philosophy through Jokes’<sup>18</sup>. And it points out that philosophy and jokes have something in common.”* Magnús, on the other hand, is a fan of big illustrated books on multiple subjects and talked about them at many occasion in his interview:

*Do you know those huge DK books<sup>19</sup>? [...] I have some like about animals and everything and... yeah, I just have a lot. [...] Yeah, natural sciences. And also History, a lot of History.*

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<sup>18</sup> Cathcart, T. and Klein, D. (2007). *Plato and Platypus Walk into a Bar...: How to Understand Philosophy Through Jokes*. New York: Abrams Image.

<sup>19</sup> Dorling Kindersley - Illustrated Reference Publisher

*There's a collection of books about World War II. It's not as complete as the one my dad has, but I read a lot of that. So I know a lot about World War II and stuff like that. [...] I really like the Romans and the Second World War most of all. Because it's really... I don't know...Empires fascinate me. How they crumble and rise and stuff like that.*

#### **4.2.2.2 Newspapers**

Newspapers were read very sporadically by most of the participants. Most of them said they read them once in a while or when events they were interested in were happening, but newspapers are not their main source to read news: the Internet is (as discussed in section 4.2.2.4). However, these are a few examples of when and why the participants read newspapers:

**Ingimar:** *When I come home, yeah. Sometimes I just look at them and go, when it's not really interesting, but yeah, I sometimes read it seriously.*

**Jakob:** *I read, you know, like articles sometimes if it's interesting. Like there's this... there's been this eruption and it's getting bigger, you know, and stuff.*

Jóhanna says she reads the obituaries because there is nothing else exciting in the newspaper. Magnús considered that information in newspapers was usually of poor quality and that journalists did not really know what they were doing.

#### **4.2.2.3 Magazines**

Magazines are a non-negligible source of nonfiction reading for many participants and many of them have a subscription to one of them. Jóhanna has a subscription to an Icelandic magazine for kids called W.I.T.C.H. and receives it every month. Although this magazine includes short fictional stories, there is also nonfictional material in it, like short articles on witchcraft and how to make certain objects. Silja said she used to buy many magazines about teenage celebrities when she lived abroad but that she did not like the ones she could find in Iceland, so she stopped buying them. Kiljan used to subscribe to an Icelandic magazine that was really two magazines in one and that were called Sagan öll/Skakki turninn. They were about History and strange facts about

everything and anything. Jakob used to read science magazines for children when he lived abroad and here is how he describes them:

**Jakob:** *You know there are these little magazines... I used to read them in English about nature and you know, this bunny has something special about it or something... this turtle can walk slower than others, or something. These were okay to read.*

Björn and Magnús are both still subscribing to magazines that are not published mainly for children or teenagers. Björn receives *Lifandi vísindi*<sup>20</sup> (or Living Science) and mentioned many articles he had read in it during our interview. Magnús receives *The Economist* once a week and reads it from cover to cover: “*And yeah, I spend maybe four or five hours [a week] reading The Economist.*” Corina is the only participant who said she had never read magazines on a regular basis.

#### **4.2.2.4 Internet**

As mentioned in a previous section, Internet is the main source of current information and news for the participants of this study. They use it often and for a variety of purposes, and most of them use it everyday in an unrestricted manner. Magnús, Ingimar and Anna use the Internet to satisfy their information needs related to personal interests or school work, and also for games. Björn specifically insisted on the news he got from the Internet and made the main Icelandic newspaper website (mbl.is) his Internet browser opening page. Corina also uses it for general information needs and she particularly enjoys websites related to horoscopes and animals. Like others, Silja uses the Internet for information, but she is the only one who mentioned reading other people’s blogs. She likes to read these personal stories of people she does not know, contrarily to what you can find on social networks like Facebook. Many informants did say they used Facebook, but did not seem to associate its content to reading and did not elaborate on it.

An interesting declaration by Magnús can lead us to believe that this early familiarisation and regular use of the Internet can result in an increase of information literacy:

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<sup>20</sup> *Lifandi vísindi* (1997-). Reykjavík: Elísa Guðrún.

*I read sometimes on Wikipedia about history. [...] Like when they are numbers and then at the bottom there are like references. [...] But like in recent history, I don't tend to read that on Wikipedia because it isn't that impartial.*

Whether Magnús discovered the limits of a website like *Wikipedia* on his own or if he was taught was not said, but one thing that is certain, is that a regular use of the Internet allowed him to experience it and verify it. Only two participants did not use the Internet so often, but it is for different reasons. Jóhanna just does not seem to have much interest in it while Jakob would like to be able to use it more, but has a restricted access:

*I don't use the Internet a lot. And I don't really know a lot of sites to read this stuff. [...] I like to be on the computer, you know. Like I have a Facebook and an MSN and all that, but I'm usually not allowed a lot on the computer. My dad is very strict on computers and computer games and stuff. He knows that, well that might do that problem and there's this chance that that might happen, but I guess he knows them too well! 'Cause then he always puts up boundaries. I can be on it on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and that's it.*

### **4.1.3 Language of Reading Material**

The language in which participants choose to read is important as regards what was raised by Hannesdóttir (2000) (see section 2.2.3) concerning the Icelandic publishing industry. Most informants said they read mainly in Icelandic but that they had read printed material in English simply because they were able to and that such material was available. Jóhanna is the only participant who only reads in Icelandic. Many participants learned English outside of school, even though they have English classes. Most of them said they learned by reading, watching television or traveling. Suffice it to say that English is omnipresent in popular culture and that they mostly picked it up without consciously making an effort. Some participants have also lived abroad and acquired a better understanding of the rules and colloquial expressions. Magnús asserts that he is better at reading in English than in Icelandic and therefore reads more in English. He even goes as far as saying this about the

possible disappearance of the Icelandic language: *“It isn't an important thing! It's really just a way of communicating and if the Icelandic language changes or dies out, or changes to English, it's still Icelandic. Because Icelandic is only defined by the language the Icelandic people use to communicate.”*

Jakob, who only started learning Icelandic a couple of years ago, is better in English than in Icelandic; yet he does not seem to allow himself to read a lot in that language anymore. He makes efforts to read in Icelandic as much as possible to improve as fast as possible. He is amazed by the amount of rules and expresses it in this way:

*You know, in English, there's ... You don't have to say it right, you know, exactly. But in Icelandic, if you don't say it right they're just like "what are you saying?" Also, there is you know like one word, it changes into like four words, you know. And there's also the adjectives, they also change. Everything changes! Even the numbers! And even when you say like ... persónufonöfn [personal pronouns], those ones change to!*

Corina also reads mostly in Icelandic even if it is not her mother tongue. She speaks a foreign language with her parents, but speaks Icelandic with her little sister who was born here. Here is how she explains her family language situation:

*Like I talk [a foreign language] to my mother and my dad. But me and my sister we just talk Icelandic together. It's just strange to talk in [another language] to her. I also mostly read in Icelandic. [...]I cannot write in [the parents' language]. I don't know anything. When I write a note to my mother or something, I write everything so wrong. She's like "you have to do this and this and this..."*

Kiljan and Silja, although they speak a foreign language and English, both mostly read in Icelandic. When they were living abroad, they read a lot in the country's national language, but never stopped reading Icelandic because their parents made sure they had access to Icelandic material. Kiljan says that playing video games online helped him learn English quickly and that he was already better than his English teachers at a young age. Silja says that her favourite subjects in school are languages like English and French.

The issue of translated international works has a great impact on the language in which the participants chose to read. Here, Björn tells us why he and his sister Anna started reading in English:

*The reason is that... You remember the book I showed you? The problem was that only the first two books came out in Icelandic. Then I wait one year. No book came. Another year, no book came. So I just gave up and asked about them in English. My sister was a little more crazy. She didn't even wait. She just asked about them in English. But I was then already started. So, I think that may be some of her inspiration.*

Other translation issues have to do with the quality of the language and how well it relates to the original publication. Here are two remarks that clarify the opinions of informants:

**Magnús:** *I read my first English book when I was ten or eleven or something like that. [...] Me and my sister, we really agree about it that Icelandic translations... there's a lot that gets lost in translation. It's really bad often. When they try to translate quotes and stuff like that and what people say in conversations comes out really weird. [...] Because the language is so inappropriate for someone that's supposed to be twenty year old in the book.*

**Bergur:** *I don't like the fantasies in Icelandic because they are usually not very well translated. Like Terry Pratchett. A guy tried to translate a Terry Pratchett's book and he couldn't spell the name of the main city right each time. I mostly read in English, like 3 books out of 4 I read in English. But I'd like to improve my Icelandic too.*

On the other hand, Ingimar, who was born abroad but moved back to Iceland when he was three years old, says he mostly reads in Icelandic and does not seem to be bothered by the translations. He does read occasional books in English and describes the experience like this: *"I have read a few books in English and not pretty basic books [complicated books]. I kind of enjoyed it, yeah... I think it was kind of fun reading in English."*

#### 4.1.4 Choice and Freedom

Freedom of choice seems to be a very important aspect that will determine if a participant likes a book or not. Even when having to read books for school, participants would like to be able to choose by themselves and Magnús, being the one who expressed his opinions in the most direct way, is a good example of this:

*It's really annoying when I'm told to read this book, because if it's sucks... I just tell them, "I read twenty books a year. Why the fuck do I need to read this?" [...] Especially not when I'm told to read books by famous authors. Like we got a list of books that we can read and that's...All of Halldór Laxness, you know, and all of Arnaldur Indriðason. And then, there are few just...like besides that, there are just no other authors that get all of their books. And there are only a few foreign ones that we can actually read. And no...no like... I don't think there's a single [fantasy].*

Corina expresses the fact that she can actually choose books she wants to read for school and that she has a great amount of freedom in doing so. Here is how she describes this situation that would probably be an ideal one for Magnús:

*I have to read ten pages per day, because in my school we have to read 2000 pages for... in like three months or something, so I have to read everyday, like ten pages or something. But if I don't like it, then I don't read the book, but I still... I give up on the book if I don't like the first thirty pages or something. [...] But if the book is fun, I read more. [...] Yeah we can choose the books we read. We can read in English also if we want to, or Polish or whatever.*

An interesting outcome of the interviews was discovering how the participants chose a book and what their criteria for first picking a title were. Corina and Kiljan admitted choosing books by their covers and Kiljan seemed to feel bad about it: “*When I'm looking for a book I also,...I don't know why, but I tend to look at, just, you know, how it looks. They say "don't judge a book by its cover", but still! And if it's got a catchy title.*” However, this was not his only criterion because he also likes when books are thick—the bigger the better! Corina had another choosing criterion in common with other participants and it is that the books look old: “*Like when the pages are like old, they seem old. I like the smell and it's a pleasure to read it*”. Here is how Jakob explains his taste for old books:



*For some reason, I like more of those older books, you know, where you turn the page, you know it makes a sound. [...] It's really weird. Yeah, I just like, you know, it's almost like a ripping sound and it just sounds like history, you know, it sounds like an adventure.*

The other participants said that they picked up a book and read the summary at the back of it to decide if it was worth reading. They also sometimes read a couple of pages in the beginning, as explained by Jakob:

*And sometimes, if I'm not sure, then I read the first two pages or three and then...most of the stories, if they're good enough, then I'll read them. But some of them are like really good and they like grab your attention right in the beginning.*

#### **4.1.5 Summary**

Knowing what children and teenagers read is important in order to understand why they do read and what they get out of such an activity. More boys than girls appear to read nonfiction in books and magazines, but they all mostly use the Internet in the same way. Fiction reading is also different for the boys and girls of this study in that most boys enjoy the fantasy genre as girls prefer romances. The *Harry Potter* series is impossible to leave out, because it has been read by participants of both genders and different ages. Classics and fairy tales were also popular among participants. The matter of the language in which participants read is important. The situation of the reading languages for children and teenagers might be different now than how it used to be as little far back in time as ten years ago. The participants of the study read in Icelandic, but some of them read in English often or most of the time. Nevertheless, because my sample is biased by the fact that I requested English speakers, I of course cannot say that it is representative of the young Icelandic population. From the different criteria that were enumerated to choose a book to read (size, cover, summary on the back), the one which was the most surprising is the fact that some participants love books that seem to be old. In an age where everything is digitalised, we might not think that the book as an object has any relevance for younger people. Apparently it still does for some participants, contrarily to the newspapers that are not often read in their printed form.

## 4.2 Why Do Children and Teenagers Read?

### 4.2.1 A Learning Opportunity

For some participants, learning is one of the main reasons they state to explain why they like to read. Some of them mentioned it in a straightforward fashion. For others however, it is possible to notice this thanks to the way in which they described books they have read and loved. The learning areas are multiple and go from History to language and science. Bergur, Björn, and Kiljan illustrate three different reasons to read to improve language skills:

**Bergur:** *A good woman pointed out that if you know your mother language better, you're better at learning other languages. So I was thinking that the next book I read is Hrafnkell Saga Freysgoða, because it is where my grand-mother lives and where Ivar's grand-dad lives. And also I want to know the Sagas better.*

**Björn:** *[About reading in English] I just go through and hope that...Most of the time, it just happens that I read more and then "Oh! So that means that!" You can mostly get the word if you just keep reading. Most of the time.*

**Kiljan:** *All books have like different ways of saying something. So, that's something that I really learned. But even in the comics, there are a lot of ways of saying stuff and I learned that a lot, because they pretty much say the same thing over and over.*

Those who read to get informed on current issues, scientific discoveries and history do not always do it in the same way. Some read specific material on specific topics, just like Magnús: *"I buy a weekly magazine, The Economist. [...]It's really interesting because it really does tell you what's happening. Not just like an official statement that they receive and they can just copy-paste onto the Internet or something."* Moreover, as was written in section 4.1.1, the participants I interviewed all read fiction and some of them enjoyed certain books especially for the discoveries they made in them. For instance, Björn is an avid reader of science fiction and fantasy and describes the books he loved by comparing their plots and details with historical events and scientific discoveries.

**Björn:** *[In] the first book "Raven's Gate", that's just like a typical witch...You know like in the middle ages when a witch was burned? It's like typical of what they do, but instead of just fire, blood and sacrifice, it was blood, sacrifice and nuclear energy.*

*[...] and it's stories about the ancient world in Europe. Before...emmm, just a little bit after, you know, Ice age. With the same animals, but just the people live in little clans, huts, travel, just live on the nature.*

It is obvious that probably no reading can be done without a minimal amount of learning happening—if nothing else, basic language skills will be revised. However, some informants, like Silja, Jóhanna, and Ingimar did not mention learning opportunities as something they were looking for in readings, even if they were talking about reading nonfiction. Furthermore, two other girls mentioned circumstances in which they did not like reading material that was specifically meant to teach them something. It is noteworthy that they were all talking about school readings that did not fit into the category of FVR. Anna said, for instance: *"I just think it's more fun to read and write what I want, but not learning."* Corina said that she was specifically not interested in History:

*I don't know how to say it, but we're reading about how Iceland was many years ago and also how it got like it is now. I don't like that either. I'm not interested in knowing how it began, became like this or something.*

For Jakob, it is not as black and white as for others concerning the value of a book and its potentiality for learning. He said: *"It's just that it's cool to learn stuff, but then again it's okay if you don't learn anything and it was still a good book!"* Here, Jakob is probably saying what the first two girls did not talk about. Learning is a good thing and can be fun, but it is not their main reason for wanting to read a book: how they feel while reading is the most important thing they get out of it. It is striking how four boys out of six mentioned learning as one of the main motives to read and how no girl made a point to talk about it. Again however, these findings cannot be generalised due to the small size of this study's sample.

## 4.2.2 Feeling and Getting Attached to Characters

The other main reason why the informants felt compelled to read on their own time is well exemplified by Silja when she says: *“I like how they write things in the books. Or, sometimes I have a favourite character.”* This notion of favourite character and feeling of identification and attachment to them is important for many of my participants. Silja likes books that make her feel something and she often reads fiction in which the main character is about her age and confronted to situations that she could live herself. Her favourite book of all is *Loforðið*<sup>21</sup> which tells the story of the death of a girl’s best friend. Here is how she talks about it:

*Yeah really touching![...] Yeah, and I think that her best friend was telling her to move on. That she would always be there for her, in this diary. This book, I could read it many times, because...Even though I know the end, it's just so...yeah, it touched me very much.*

Corina, who is also Silja’s friend, says something similar about the kind of books she likes to read and why, but she insists further on her personal identification to the characters.

*I love stories and I like the ‘Nancy’<sup>22</sup> books. And I always think I'm this person, I think it looks like this and this and this. And sometimes I cry over books and I can... Yeah, I'm really sensitive.*

The two youngest participants I interviewed were both ten year old girls. They did not have as much insight into the reasons why they liked to read certain materials more than others, but their favourite books can give us an idea about these reasons. For Anna, her favourite books are the five books of the *Twilight*<sup>23</sup> series. She was not as able as the other ones to explain what she thought and felt but she was very attracted by the vampire romance present in these books. She was also completely focused on these books’ story and could not think of anything else. When I asked if she liked romance, she answered *“Yeah, but vampire romance.”*, and about other types of romance, she said *“It's not...as exciting.”* I then asked her what she loved in these books and she answered *“Emmm, vampires, fun, romance and excitement.”* As for Jóhanna,

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<sup>21</sup> Þórsdóttir, H. (2007). *Loforðið*. Reykjavík: Vaka-Helgafell.

<sup>22</sup> The *Nancy Drew* series of books for children, written by multiple authors, published Aladdin.

<sup>23</sup> Meyer, S. (2006). *Twilight*. New York: Little, Brown.

her favourite book is called *Elsku besta Binna*<sup>24</sup> and is about a nine year old girl. When I asked Jóhanna to tell me about it, all she had to say was “*she lives at home and has a dog.*” This is a slim explanation, but it does reveal that she likes to read books with characters to which she can relate.

Most other participants, who are all boys, did not mention having a particular attachment to characters. Only Björn related to characters in some way by comparing their reality to his, but without talking about feelings.

*[...] he tries to teach Torack, the main character, that he shall not sleep all the night. That he's just supposed to sleep a little bit, sometimes. And he is not happy about that! I understand him. I would be crazy if someone tried to wake me all the night!*

*The same author that I was telling you about. He also writes some series book about a guy that's just as old as me. Just he works for MI6. [MI6: Military Intelligence, section 6]*

So, according to the participants of my study, feelings and attachment to characters are important for girls and not as important for boys. Nonetheless, it is possible to say that boys might also, to a certain degree, identify with characters and their feelings, but that they do not feel that it is worth mentioning when talking about a book. The only one that really sticks out in this regard is Magnús. Talking about the *Harry Potter* series, he not only demonstrates that he did not get attached to the characters, but he discounts the needs of others to do so.

*But I really reached the decision, after I finished the last one, that the whole thing isn't really that good. It should have ended with him dying and most of the team as well. At least she could have left out the last pages about them getting married and really cliché. [...] There are two types of fans: the fans that started reading the book and actually liked the books and the ones that saw the movies and really like Hermione, or something like that. Like teenage girls.*

### **4.2.3 To Be Entertained and Imagine**

One element that came out from participants of both genders is the entertainment aspect of reading. Reading is for them as enjoyable as other types of entertainment and has a pastime value that cannot be denied. They can be gripped by what they are reading and immerse themselves completely in the

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<sup>24</sup> Gunnarsdóttir, H. K. (1997). *Elsku besta Binna*. Reykjavík: Mál og menning.

story that is being told. Humour also seems to be an important aspect of their readings. Here are a few examples of this:

**Bergur:** *I don't know... I just... yeah it just entertains and yeah... and like practical learning. Learn and get funny jokes!*

**Björn:** *[...] just the excitement and it's always good that they put some humour into it. That's the main ... that's the main good about 'Artemis Fowl' books.*

Another interesting idea that was brought by informants is the fact that one has to be able to imagine to enjoy reading and that it might not be given to everybody. Here is how Ingimar explains it:

*I think because of my imagination it's just easier for me to enjoy to read. Like I know some kids that just... I think they don't really enjoy the books because they can't really, you know, set up the world that the book is about. But I think that's one of the biggest reasons why I read books.*

Other participants also described what happened in their head while they were reading.

**Anna:** *It's just exciting and it's fun. I love to read. I can imagine what is happening with a picture.*

**Corina:** *When you're reading a book you can think about the persons yourself and you can like a little bit imagine a little world there. But when you're watching a movie you're just like watching it. But, yes, sometimes I think it's more fun to read a book. [...] I really much imagine like this and this. I imagine that the room is pink, like I always imagine, like it's the movie in my head or something.*

This could relate to why many of the participants compared reading books to movies and said that they sometimes preferred the books. Björn explains why some books are often superior to the movies that are made out of them:

*Just take Harry Potter, for example. You know, that's both books and movies. Think about books before the movies. In the books there are always funny little things [...] details that isn't in the movies. That makes the books so good. You know, all these humour details that isn't in the movie. I mean you can have...there is limits of how long a movie can be, but books can just be like that.[Showing a really big book with his arms.]*

#### 4.2.4 Reading and Creating

A relationship between reading and writing was established by some participants and it is not something I had thought of discussing before they mentioned it. I am not talking about the improvement in the ability to spell correctly or the use of good grammar, but about the desire to become a writer and the fact that those participants already wrote regularly outside of school imperatives. These participants are the same who expressed the deepest connections to the characters in the stories they read. Anna says that she decided she would become an author four years ago (remember she is ten) and that she could not imagine herself doing anything else. Silja has also been writing for a long time and her mother had an interesting comment about that: “*She wrote books from the age of seven. She didn't read them, you see. She wrote...everyday she wrote something for us.*” Here is how Silja herself tries to explain the reason why she feels the need to write:

*Maybe because I listen much and then I get so many ideas and then I write stuff like that...or from what I heard, or something. I always get ideas about watching something or... I also write a diary. I finished one in Icelandic and now I'm writing one in [a foreign language]. Because I think that when I'm getting older, and then I can read it in [that language].*

Her writings are then to share with other people, but also to be able to remember who she was when she will be older. Her friend Corina, who does not aspire to become an author but who also has a need to express herself in different ways, writes when she is feeling strong emotions or when she is inspired by a great book.

*I write much love stories in my computer. [...] Sometimes I read them to someone, but sometimes I think maybe someone wouldn't like them or something so I just keep them in my computer. [...] And sometimes I write stories about how my life is, just using other names. [...] Sometimes when I finish to read a book, it inspires me to write on my own. I think like "Wow, this was an amazing book! I have to write something amazing now!"*

No male participant has expressed the will to become a writer, even when asked directly. They also did not mention writing personal diaries. However, in the same way Corina is inspired to write when she reads a good story, Björn gets

new ideas for the many inventions he has carefully drawn and mapped to remember them.

*And if I'm not reading anything, then I just maybe read Donald [Duck] papers or science magazines. [...]. I know very much about it [science]. Like I said, I read this chemistry book at 6 years old. Very funny to talk about it. To read chemistry for high school at the same time you're learning to read. [...]. Personally, I think I have solved most of the environmental problems in the world.*

This highly colourful quote demonstrates that he is inspired to create by what he reads and that, although in a different way, it relates to the relationship between reading and writing first mentioned by Silja. Simply put, for these participants reading is a basis for creativity and personal expression.

#### **4.2.5 Summary**

To sum up, according to the participants to this study, there are four main reasons to read. They are (1) reading as a learning opportunity, (2) reading to experience feelings and get attached to characters, (3) reading to be entertained, and (4) reading to trigger creativity. It is here important to stress that these are not presented in any order of influence and that they are not the same for every informant. However, we suspect that their outcomes are present in everyone, but that they do not necessarily identify them as being important. Gender differences are also present and have been pointed out when they were impossible to ignore. For instance, it is clear that most boys in this study claim to read to learn and that all girls claim to read to feel and relate to characters. Nevertheless, as has been said more than once already, this observation cannot be taken as a general assertion that gender differences necessarily play a role in how children and teenagers perceive their readings. The gender aspect of children's and teenagers' reading habits would require an entire study in and by itself.



## 4.3 The Influences of Others

### 4.3.1 Family Members

According to my informants' answers, family and friends have different roles in their lives and therefore have different influences on their reading habits. For most of the informants, parents are seen as those who provide the books. They are thus responsible of making reading accessible by buying books, magazines, newspapers and computers. Anna told me that she only tells her mother about the books she likes if she wants her to buy them. Also, she says that *"like sixty percent of [her] gifts are books"* and that extended family members always buy books as presents. As mentioned earlier (section 2.2.3), Christmas is one of the periods of the year when informants read the most because of the Christmas book tradition. The publication industry advertises new titles during autumn in anticipation of the Christmas season and makes sure that the most popular and known authors are published during that period of the year. Not being originally from Iceland makes me realise how different this is from Canada or the United States where books do not benefit from so much publicity (apart from very few guaranteed international bestsellers such as Dan Brown's or J.K. Rowling's books). All of this makes accessibility of books a big factor in the incitement of children and teenagers to read.

#### 4.3.1.1 Parents

The way in which parents influence their children's reading habits was different for every informant, or at least in each family. Particular family circumstances and, in some cases, the professional activities of the parents were direct influences on reading habits and on how reading was generally perceived. For example, Jóhanna, Silja, Kiljan and Magnús have a parent that works in a field related to language and reading. Other factors come into play concerning parents' participation in their children's reading habits. Magnús' mother said during the interview that she sang lullabies to all her children when they were just babies. She started reading young children's books every night when they were just toddlers and went on to bigger books like *Harry Potter* when this informant was about six years old.

All informants, without any exception, said that their parents read to them when they were smaller. Jóhanna's parents still read to her once a week, even though she is now ten years old and already reads a lot on her own. It seems to be a ritual and special moment to spend with her parents; for her, it is not 'only reading'. This also clearly had an impact on Silja who recalls her father and no one else reading to her and her brother. She still enjoys sharing special activities with her father even though he does not read to her anymore. This interview excerpt is quite revealing and tells us about how much she might have enjoyed being read to by her father:

**Mother:** [...] *Sudoku is also something that she likes.*

**Silja:** *Yeah, and crossword puzzles.*

**Me:** *Ok, and what do you like about that?*

**Silja:** *I learn new words and...*

**Mother:** *She does it with her father.*

**Silja:** *I do it with my father. [she said this while smiling and looking a little embarrassed.]*

Björn recalls his father reading him comics when he was just a toddler, but insists on the fact that he asked his parents to read a high school chemistry book to him when he was just starting to read and that they did it until he was able to do it by himself. In this case, parents acted as facilitators for reading, as the child already had the desire to read by himself. Many informants observed that it was their father who read to them when they were younger. Here is how Ingimar and Bergur remember it:

**Ingimar:** *My dad, yeah, he read for me out of books. [...] He was always ready to do that and he would read to me. It was always the same book I asked for. I don't know it in English, but maybe it's the same, but it was *Carius and Bactus*. It's about dwarfs who are picking your teeth because you eat too much sugar!*

**Bergur:** *I think I only remember Harry Potter. Our dad used to read it to us. He would read like one chapter for us and then we would like fall asleep and then he would read four or five more so.... And then we'd be like [he makes a confused face]...we started on the first chapter and then we'd be on like four or six and... Yeah and it was just to calm us, you know, listen to a voice.*

In other cases, the mothers were the ones who were the main support to reading and did it in different ways. Some of them did it in the same way that was mentioned earlier, like Corina's mother who read her fairy tales stories and

listened to her daughter when she was pretending to read a story before she could actually do it. Other participants said that their parents, and especially mothers, acted more as active agents in teaching how to read. Jóhanna's mother taught her how to read before she entered school and Jakob's and Bergur's mothers acted as facilitators for them to read on their own:

**Jakob:** *Well, at first I read by my mom's side so that she could hear, you know, say what's happening, but I always got the whole picture. Not every detail, but pretty much what kind of happened. But once I could understand everything, then I started reading more independently. My mom was more focused on helping my sister to read then.*

**Bergur:** *Yeah... I remember that my first like, English book I read was Robin Hood. Emmm, a Penguin [i.e. book publisher] just this thin. Yeah, it was like...yeah I understood like fifty percent of the words but then I got... I just knew what was going on so I didn't need all the details. And then I just asked my mom if a word just like came often.*

As the children grew up and became more independent, different ways were used by parents to maintain habits that had been put in place at a younger age. In some instances, parents make sure that their children always have access to books and insist on the fact that they read them. Ingimar is a good example of that and here is what he says about the effects of his mother's efforts:

*My mom sometimes drags me to the library. And it's not bad really. But when I get books from the library, it's also my mom who just goes to the library and fetches me some. [...] My mom always tells me to read [books received as gifts]. Then I read them. And yeah, I often enjoy them, but I would never read them if my mom wouldn't do anything about it. But I don't read all the books I get! [...] Well, I guess if she hadn't done it I wouldn't be reading, you know, I would be reading now, but I think not as much.*

Silja and Kiljan were also encouraged to read in Icelandic while they were living abroad by the fact that they always had access to Icelandic material. Their mother said that they were part of a book club that sent them new original Icelandic works for young people every month. Here is how Silja recalls having these books in the house: *"At one point, it was just lying there so you were just like "Oh ok, I'll read it!"* This statement clearly demonstrates how simple access to reading material can have an effect on children's and teenagers' reading

habits. Other motivational methods that are a bit more direct in their approach have been used and Bergur tells us about something that was used by his parents and that had the desired effect:

*My mom and dad, we had this computer time. So if I read like one hour, I could stay on the computer for one hour, so that's when I really, really read! And my record was forty...no, fifty-four hours in stock! It's like that I didn't have a good computer game that I would sink into. But I think I had, like, four books that I sank into. [...] Yeah! That was a good thing.*

The only case in which parents' expectations are maybe not encouraging to read is with Jakob. He used to be an avid reader when he was living in the United States, but does not do it as much anymore. He feels like he's not as good as he should be in Icelandic and does not allow himself to read in English as much as he did before. He thinks he should concentrate more on Icelandic books and, as a consequence, does not read as much for pleasure. He is a little nostalgic of how easy things used to be when he was living in another country and wishes his father would recognise the efforts he is making:

*But what's really disappointing to me is that I used to be really good in everything and being the highest in this and the highest in that or the second highest. But here I'm just like below average and it's like "I never got a grade like that before..." You know? [...] My mom is like that [supportive], but my dad is different. My dad is like "now that you learned that, you can learn this!" [...] He's never like "Good job!" you know. I usually wish he would say it more.*

It is important to say at this point that this is based on what was said by the informant. The informant's perception might be affected by the whole new living circumstances in which he finds himself; meaning that everything is made more difficult by the fact that he has to learn a new language. It is possible to think that this situation will slowly wane as he will get better in Icelandic and that day-to-day efforts required just to use the language will not be as intense.

#### **4.3.1.2 Siblings**

No participant was a single child and siblings often had an influence on their leisure reading habits, especially when they had older siblings who were themselves leisure readers. As with parents, older siblings can be providers of

reading material through gifts, but also by lending books and suggesting material that they think the younger siblings will enjoy. They are closer in age to their brothers and sisters than their parents and have a more vivid memory of what it was like to be ten or fifteen years old and, therefore, are usually better equipped to make successful suggestions. They also are more likely to be aware of the reading trends of the age groups their siblings are in.

Jóhanna has two older sisters that are more than ten years older than she is. Although they both left their parents' home, it does not mean that they do not have an influence on her reading habits. One of Jóhanna's sisters makes sure that all the presents she gives her are books and it was she who acted as an interpreter for the interview we did together. She takes her sister's reading seriously and does what she can to encourage it. In Corina's situation, she is the big sister and was not influenced by her little sister's readings. However, she said that when her sister did not yet know how to read, she often requested that someone read to her before going to bed and that both her parents and she took turns in doing it.

For some participants, older siblings are the ones who pass down their knowledge and reading experiences. It is notably the case for Magnús and Kiljan, and here is how they explain it:

**Magnús:** *I never really suggest things to her. She just finds it by herself and she's always reading so much for university. She often suggests books to me and gives me books and stuff like that.*

**Kiljan:** *If somebody suggests me to read a book...I mean, I started reading Harry Potter because Þórdís [his sister] told me to start reading it. I did! If somebody suggests a book, if they liked it, I will usually read it.*

For other participants, the discussions about books go both ways, and older and younger siblings give suggestions and comments equally. Jakob says that he mostly has these conversations with his older brother, especially since he is himself a little bit older: "My brother and I, you know, are pretty close. We talk a lot. You know, we didn't really use to talk a lot, but then once I got older, we had more in common than when... You know there's a big difference between like elementary school and junior high and high school." In Ingimar's case, one of his sisters is particularly interested in reading and likes talking about it. Incidentally, I left their home with two books that she lent me after having a

conversation about reading with her. Here is how Ingimar illustrates his sister's impact on his reading:

*Yeah, we talk about books a lot, me and Maria. She recommended me to read 'Animal Farm' and another English book which I can't remember what was the name of it... It's about animals! Yeah, it's about, you know, critters like mice and badgers and stuff. It's pretty much like animal farm. The writer makes the main characters animals, every character an animal. It's kind of like a Lord of the Rings or Harry Potter fantasy.*

In other participants' cases, the effect of older siblings was not as explicit, but there was definitely a certain influence. Here is what Bergur said about book talks with his older brother: “[...] if I'm talking about a book that he didn't read, he says "don't tell me because I'm gonna read it." And if I want to talk about a book we both read, he just says "I already read it!" So no, I don't really talk about books with him!” If this answer gives the impression that there is no communication about reading between these two brothers, it also demonstrates that Bergur has a certain desire to talk about books and that they read the same material. This means that they have access to similar reading material and that if one reads it, the other is probably going to read it too. In Anna's case, she says that she does not talk about books with her brother because “he doesn't like as much vampires.” However, they both read avidly and often do it side-by-side. From the fact that they do not always read the same material and that they do not talk about it, it does not follow that they do not have an influence on each other's reading habits and choice of reading material.

#### **4.3.1.3 Extended Family**

Extended family members as cousins, aunts, uncles and grand-parents also have a certain influence on participants' reading habits, and that, mostly as providers of reading material through gifts. Jakob is happy to have new books from family members to have new Icelandic material to read: “I got like three or four books, you know, that I can read for Christmas presents, you know, from my grandma and my grandpa!” According to Ingimar, relatives often fail to offer him something that he is really attracted to, but as was quoted before, his mother pushes him to read these books and he ends up liking some of them. Bergur also says that he does not always like books given by extended family

members because they are often translated fantasies that he does not enjoy. However, because he does like books, he cannot be too disappointed when receiving them.

Magnús also receives a lot of books as presents from relatives. In addition, he seems to have been influenced by an older cousin to read the books of Terry Pratchett: “[...] *most of the books I read I probably borrow from my parents. The ‘Discworld’ series I got from my cousin.*” He has read the entire series, and while he reads mostly nonfiction, he talks about these books as his favourite fiction. In a similar way, Ingimar discusses reading with his sister’s boyfriend: *“My sister’s boyfriend, Geir, we read often the same books. We often talk about the big... what can happen in the book that comes.”*

Extended family members can also have an impact, as parents, through their professional activities. Anna and Björn have an extended family member who is a published author. They both read what he does—even if it is not usually for children—and find it really funny. It is obvious that they both admire him, and it might even be an influence on the fact that Anna believes she could become a writer when she grows up.

### **4.3.2 Friends**

Friends are definitely important for all the participants, but especially for the older girls. Silja and Corina—the two older girls I interviewed—stressed the importance their friends had in their lives. Not all their friends read a lot and they do not talk about reading with many of them, but they said that they did share opinions about books with very close friends. Corina remarks that she only talks about books with specific people:

*Sometimes when I finish a book that I liked very much, I go to my friends and tell them about the book and go "I read a book and it was really fun". [...] But it depends of what friend I'm talking to. Because some friends don't like to read so I'm not going to talk about books with them if they don't like it. But others do really much talk about books, so I talk with them about books.*

According to Silja, certain books are more important and are worth being promoted and talked about. She pointed out that her favourite book had also been read by her friends: *“My friends have read this book also and they agree*

*with me that it's really good.*" Anna is younger and did not insist as much about the importance of her friends, but she also shares about books with them, though it seems to happen more casually and less because of a need to express feelings: *"We tell each other stories in the books. Like my friend was reading a book and she was just, in the recess, she was telling us what was happening and other stuff."*

Most boys did not seem to feel the need to share their reading tastes with their friends and did not discuss them very much. Kiljan said that he was more prone to share good websites than books, but also said that his friends and he share reading moments in school: *"I have yes, some of my friends, yeah. They usually go to the library too. Just in school, at recess. There's not a lot to do, I mean you can go outside, go to the store or something, or you can just stay inside and play chess or something. Or go to the library."* Jakob, when asked directly if he talked about books with friends, said that he did not really do it, but later mentioned a friend telling him about books: *"I don't read a lot of those, but my friend does, so he tells me what's happening. He's reading The Hobbit now. A really long book, so...700 pages, or something."*

### **4.3.3 School**

I had first thought of entitling this section 'Teachers', but as I was rereading the data that related to this theme, I realised that teachers only played a small role in the actual material that the participants read as free voluntary reading. Moreover, the school settings revealed themselves to be that which had the broadest influence on what and when the informants read. In Anna's case, school is promoting reading by providing special moments to read and children are free to choose what they are reading: *"Teachers leave us time to read in school. Especially this one. In the end of classes. [...] Fifteen minutes, ten minutes. And we read in the beginning of the school too."* The idea of imposed readings is also present in school, but it is not applied in the same way in every school. Some schools, like Corina's, insist that students read a certain amount of pages during a certain time frame, but do not choose particular books for them. Other schools propose a list of possible books from which students have to choose, as is the case in the schools of Magnús, Jakob, Kiljan and Silja.



Another interesting fact that was pointed out by the participants who have lived abroad is that school is easier and less demanding in Iceland than in the countries where they lived before. Kiljan and Silja lived abroad for almost ten years and Kiljan has strong opinions about it: *“The school is way easier. [...] I mean, [abroad] they have school from like 8 to 4, and in Iceland, school is like 8:00 to 1:00 or something, or 2:00.”* This leaves him plenty of time to read after school, even if he takes part in different organised after-school activities. Magnús, who lived abroad for a couple of months, also thinks that school is easier in Iceland: *“[Abroad], there was so much discipline and so much... like everyone did what they were supposed to do. There was so much more learning.”* In Magnús’ case, he prefers the situation in Iceland to the one he has known elsewhere. He likes to read nonfiction and be able to choose what he wants to learn and the Icelandic school system gives him a greater opportunity to do just that. The discipline is also something that Jakob noticed to be looser in Iceland than where he lived for the first ten years of his life. He wishes there would be more discipline in Icelandic schools: *“Sometimes, you know, in Iceland there's less rules in class. The teachers are not strict enough I'd say. [...] Usually kids say "oh they're too strict" and all that, but I think they should be more strict so, we would get it done faster and not that we do more, you know.”*

#### **4.3.4 Summary**

Others have a great influence on children and teenagers’ reading habits. Some ‘others’ are more influent and can have great positive impacts on the promotion of leisure reading. Parents definitely play an important role in the motivation of their children to read and act as reading models as soon as the children are born. The habits that are taken on when the participants are very young often stay with them as they grow up. Access to reading material often depends on parents, but also on other family members. Receiving books as presents means that there are books at home just waiting to be picked up to be read. Older siblings who are themselves readers have a great role to play in developing reading habits in younger brothers and sisters and can often do it better than parents once they get older. Being culturally closer makes a big difference in how much suggestions are taken seriously. There is also no

authority relation that could rebuke some of the participants. Friends had a different role to play than family members for the participants of my study. For many informants, reading is private and they do not feel the need to share what they thought about their readings. For others, talking with friends about important readings was done naturally. Finally, the role of school in the creation of reading habits seems to be different for every participant. Some enjoy the obligatory readings while others are repulsed by them. Absolutely no participant mentioned having had a literary discussion in class or a teacher that suggested leisure reading titles. However, something that is clear is that the amount of work is not big enough to keep the informants from having time to read after school. One very interesting point that came out in the school theme is what Anna said about having specific moments in school to read freely. This is what is called *in school free reading programs* by Krashen (1993, p. 2). He believes this is one of the best ways to teach language and promote FVR.

## **4.4 Reading and the Transition between Childhood and Teenage-Hood**

When I decided to choose participants who were aged between ten and fifteen years old for this research, I knew that major differences would be found between the younger and the older participants. I had foreseen some important distinctions between them, but I had not thought of the fact that the transition between childhood and teenage-hood could have this big of an impact on reading habits. The first participant who brought up this fact is Corina. She claimed to be someone who liked to read very much, but at the same time, she said that she did not do it that much. As the interview went on, I became aware that she used to read a lot more and she confirmed it when she said:

*I remember I read much more like two years ago than I do now. [...] I remember it was Christmas and I was reading a Nancy book or something and I finished it and began another one. And like everybody was having a family moment and I was in the kitchen with a candle just reading while everybody was watching a movie or something. I couldn't stop! It was so exciting to know what was going to happen next! But then I don't know what happened. I just stopped reading that much, but I do it when I*

*have to and sometimes it gets fun. [...] I don't really know why... it just happened.*

This excerpt shows two different things at once. It means that she somehow lost her insatiable appetite to read when she was just a few years younger, but it also means that she still enjoys reading when she finds a book that really connects with her tastes. She was not able to explain what had happened to make her lose such an unquenchable interest in reading, but Ingimar offers a personal explanation to this phenomenon:

*When you're at the teenage age, I think you always read like a bit less and a bit less than you used to read when you were a child. But maybe that's just me. [...] But that's because I was reading Harry Potter and all those and finished reading all those. And I haven't found any as good books.*

As was mentioned earlier, Ingimar has the chance to have two significant persons in his life that take great interest in reading and also in his reading habits. His mother brings him new material constantly and his big sister is just someone who loves discussing books and reading. She has suggested him to read books he would never have chosen by himself like *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. He readily acknowledges the fact that it changed his perception of books: *“Yeah, I liked it! But, you know, it opened to me another way of reading books, because it was so strange apart from other books.”* Growing older and more mature has its benefits, but as everyone knows, the transition is not always an easy one and well-known landmarks are often lost on the way. Non-invasive guidance might just be what is needed to keep up reading habits; young people can then get an idea of what else exists outside of children and teenage literature.

Some participants have already taken this step on their own, or perhaps with the help of someone or many different influences. Bergur, for instance voiced differences that occurred over the years in his reading tastes: *“I mean, like one or two years ago, I was more into like fantasies, but like then now, I don't like... I like humour fantasies.”* As was reported in section 4.1.1, he now also reads classics like the works of Mark Twain and is interested in books that contain adult themes such as philosophy in the work of Yann Martel’s *Life of Pi*. In Magnús’ case, his interest in current affairs and history has helped to shape

his reading choices and make him move on from child interests to more mature subjects.

Ten year old Anna, for example, tells us how she chooses her reading material: *“If I can get it, I just read it, or the comics in the newspaper. I just like to read. [...] Most of my books I have, I read more than one time. But it’s mostly the old books. The newest I had, I only read once.”* She reads whenever she has the chance and cannot seem to get enough of it. If children who like to read can be interested in everything and anything and almost read compulsively, it is not the same things for adults in the making. Their tastes and judgments become more discriminating and they get a better sense of what they appreciate. The *good* and *evil* dichotomy that is often present in fantasies for young people might not be representative of how they now experience the world and they become ready to explore new ideas. It is the role of their librarians, parents, and educators to offer them the possibility to do this through reading.

## **4.5 Libraries, Librarians and Access to Reading Material**

This section has been kept for last because it is in the perspective of improving library offer and services to young people as regards leisure reading that this research has been conducted. In light of everything we now know about the informants’ reading habits—that they are leisure readers and that many are heavy readers—it is interesting to see how they use and perceive libraries and librarians. It is first of all important to consider the fact that many of them have access to the Internet, to magazines and to many books in their own homes and that they can read independently of using libraries. In this perspective, libraries are mostly considered as a surplus value or addition to what they already have at home. This is well illustrated by Bergur: *“[About going to the library] Like once or twice a year. It’s usually just when I don’t find any books at home. [...] I mostly get books I already want to read.”*

Most informants stated using their school library more than public libraries. They use it as much for assignments as for leisure reading. The following quotes are good examples of this fact:

**Anna:** *There's one comic that we just have and most of the others I take at the library in school.*

**Jakob:** *We usually use the school library, but mostly for assignments and stuff like that, because we use the books there.*

**Kiljan:** *We have a library in our school and I just took two books recently, pretty big ones.*

Public libraries are used only rarely by most informants and they only visit them when they have a lot of free time on their hands. Some informants have a positive view of the library environment and offers while others have rather negative opinions about their local branch. Corina and Björn seem to think that it is a nice place to be in and associate the idea with a nice and relaxed day:

**Corina:** *Maybe when I'm really really chilled out and I don't have anything else to do. Then I go and I find it's kind of cosy. [...] It's quiet and... yeah, sometimes it's good to go to the library.*

**Björn:** *Sometimes I go to the public library. That's very good. Then I can just go, get some books and maybe buy some ice cream on the way back.*

Others however have a different perception of public libraries in Iceland. Magnús was a regular user when he was younger, but thinks that the library did not answer his changing needs as he got older: “*The books, were so...many of them were so old in the city library and when I went looking for the really... like about history and stuff like that. I really couldn't find any...*” For Jakob, it is the public libraries’ physical situation that is an obstacle for him to use them. He compares the situation to when he lived abroad:

**Jakob:** *[About going to the library] Not much in Iceland. They more have stores closer than libraries. There's more bookstores than libraries I'd say. It's more like you buy and you keep it than you rent it. And that was always fun [renting books]! Because my mom had a membership card in a library [abroad] and we would go and just look for books [...] because there was a good library close to our house.*

Kiljan’s and Silja’s mother said something similar about when her family lived abroad: “*We used them more in over there. It was on our way from school.*” The geography and weather of Iceland is of course different from other countries and

the use of cars is often required to go from one place to another, making it harder for some children and teenagers to visit libraries on their own.

Concerning communication between participants and librarians, the results were quasi unanimous. Most participants said that they only spoke to library employees to ask about titles they already knew they wanted and not for suggestions or discussions about books. Seven participants out of ten reacted to my question with an expression of puzzlement. They did not really imagine that someone would do that because they felt that talking to strangers about reading was not something they would think of doing. Some of them had rather harsh perceptions of particular library employees and did not seem to think they were providing a good service. Magnús and Jakob had strong feelings about this:

**Magnús:** *[About librarians.] There are two types. The ones that work in school libraries, they are really weird and creep you out. And then the ones that are helpful and are in like the National Library. The librarians there are really helpful and friendly, actually. [...] They just tell me where it is, or showing me or getting me something.*

**Jakob:** *The librarian in the school is like really strict, like really strict! And she's a bit weird, you know, not so much understanding as some others. If you're trying to say something, you know, she's... I don't know how you could say. It's just different from a regular librarian where you come in and, you know, you say hi to them. It's just you go find a book check it out and leave, you know. [...] she's not much for conversation.*

Kiljan's and Silja's mother had an interesting comparison in mind when she thought of library employees in Iceland: *"You don't talk to them consulting, 'do you like this book' or anything, and they actually... they don't give you the answers. Because I'm that kind of person. 'I know this author, is this book similar to this one?' and so on. They don't know. They are more like people working in Bónus [local supermarket]."*

However, there were a few exceptions among the answers that informants gave me. In the cases of Corina and Jakob, they were the initiators of communications between them and library employees. For both informants, whether you talk to a librarian depends on if you are shy or not. They expose the matter in different ways; Jakob points out the fact that he can be responsive to

passive readers' advisory techniques and Corina shows that she has had positive responses when she asked for assistance:

**Jakob:** *I've always been shy, so I always just asked my mom to what are the best books... and what book should I read. I mean, ever so often I talk to librarians, yeah I guess, "which one out these five would be the best for me?" If it's on a display I usually check out the book, but if it's not that good then I'll just put it back.*

**Corina:** *[...]When I'm in school and we have to pick books, I'm like...ah! I don't want to go through all the books. So I go there and ask "can you tell me a book that I could read?" and she's like, "what do you want?" "Just whatever!" and she's like "this one, and this one and this one..." I'm not shy, I just ask!*

In Ingimar's case, he is also the one that initiated the communication between him and his school librarian. His comment shows that it happened at more than one occasion and that the librarian was open to actual book discussion. The fact that he has been used to talk about reading with family members might explain why he was comfortable in a situation where others might not have been. Here is how he demonstrated this: *"[About the school library] Yes, I have used it and I talked to the librarian and stuff. [...] I had finished books and had talked to her about them and, you know, she would come with comments and thoughts about them."*

The interviewed participants of this study mostly confirmed what I had noticed during the two observations I conducted in the beginning of this research process. During the first observation, there were hardly any people at all in the children's section of the public library, but during the second one, it was filled with families and young children. Even though the city library holds books that are suitable for the interests of young teenagers, they do not seem to use it much. The whole physical disposition of the children section is clearly conceived for younger children. The tables and chairs are low and suited for small people. The decoration is made from bright primary colours. Posters on the walls represent books for toddlers and the games are also aimed at young children. In this context, the most a teenager could do would be to come in, quickly choose books and go elsewhere to read them.

This setting however seems to be successful in attracting young children and their parents on weekends. Moreover, the library offers storytelling

every Sunday afternoon, and it appears to be very popular. The observation I made on that day was characterized by the high level of noise and an incredible amount of families and children reading and playing in every corner of the children's section. Despite the almost inexistent contacts between users and the reference librarian and the lack of a space for teenagers, I could say that the library fulfills its role by providing accessibility to books and creating an environment that entice people to go there. However, it seems that an important part of potential users—those of my participants' age—have been forgotten in the physical planning of the place.



## **5 General Summary and Discussion**

The previous chapter intended to draw an accurate portrait of the participants as well as render the results of the careful interpretation of the data that had been collected. The different themes which exuded from the raw data were classified by way of the conceptual links woven between them in order to answer the research questions posed in section 3.2. They have been illustrated and exemplified by directly quoting the participants' answers and comparing them to one another. This section summarises the findings, relates them to the research questions and establishes links between this study's findings and previous researches mentioned in chapter 2 as well as new ones that have proven themselves relevant in light of the analysis and interpretation of the data.

### **5.1 Research Question 1:**

#### **What influences children's and teenagers' motivation to read for pleasure?**

Many different factors influence children's and teenagers' motivation to read as a leisure activity and they are found in various spheres of their lives. Some of these factors have to do with them deciding to read and actually choosing something to read. Other people are one of the most important factors that influence their reading choices and reading habits. Parents play an important role in the creation of these habits from a young age and continue having an impact as children grow older. These findings are in concordance with those of Pálsdóttir (1998). She insists on the importance of making reading a part of children's upbringing and environment (1998, p. 20). Introducing reading at a very young age by reading to them is one way to achieve this, but as has been shown in the participants' answers, it should not stop there and parents

should continue to be reading models and encourage discussion about reading as they enter adolescence. The transition between childhood and teenage-hood should not be forgotten as a crucial moment for the sustenance of reading habits. As noted by Rothbauer (*in* Moyer, p, 81, 2008), “many teens report being regular readers as children but dropping the habit as they move into the difficult and busy teen years, making adolescent reading a particularly important area of study.” The same conclusion can be drawn from this research, in which most participants aged from thirteen to fifteen years old mentioned a diminution in their desire to read for pleasure or a shift in their reading tastes that was confusing to them.

In these transitional years, other people than their parents start to be of importance and older siblings can be an influential source of motivation as regards reading, assuming that these older siblings enjoy reading as well. Friends can also play an important role. In the context of this research, girls especially mentioned sharing about their readings with their close friends. Boys did not always address this matter directly, but some recounted occasions in which they had had these types of discussions with peers. These contacts with others can help teenagers smoothly take the leap between children and teenage literature to more mature readings. Moyer reports that “young adults who read adult books often need guidance” and that “they may have read only one adult author [...] and not know what other adult authors they might enjoy” (2008, p. 82).

Many participants have been impressed by an important read that changed the way they practiced leisure reading. For some, reading a book in a new genre helped them understand that there were many things out there for them to explore. For others, reading a book of a size they had never dared tackling before helped them build their confidence as readers and take on more imposing works. This idea is also supported by Ross and she calls it “the transformative book” (2000, p. 77). However, she does not limit its possible effects to adolescent readers, but extends them to all leisure readers.

Teachers were not identified as specific motivators for reading, but measures put in place in school—as silent free reading periods in class (Krashen, 1993, pp. 2-12)—have had impacts on some informants, although most of them did not really enjoy the obligatory readings they had to do for

school. Freedom of choice was important to them and increased the pleasure they took in reading something. This should be an important element to consider for the development of libraries. They have the possibility of offering a wide variety of material while providing a reading context that is free of obligations and burdens. This is the ideal environment to create an atmosphere in which leisure reading can take place.

Such answers to the question ‘why they read’ can help us understand their motivations. Participants exhibited four main reasons to explain why they enjoy reading. These reasons are (1) reading as a learning opportunity, (2) reading to experience feelings and get attached to characters, (3) reading to be entertained, and (4) reading to trigger creativity. Reading as a learning opportunity was mostly present in the interviews with boys. They liked being exposed to new concepts and new realities when they read fiction and nonfiction. Girls mostly liked reading when they could identify to a character and get attached to it. They liked to be touched and experience powerful emotions. Keeping in mind the size of the sample used in this research, we cannot generalise these findings. However, it would be interesting to explore this theme in further research. Both genders expressed that being entertained was important when they were reading as a leisure activity. They like the fact that they can imagine what they are reading and see it in their heads as if it were real. Some of them even feel that, in that respect, reading is superior to watching television or a movie in terms of entertainment. Finally, for some, reading was a motivation for them to create something of their own. One boy got ideas and inspiration for the multiple inventions he had designed and was always happy to discover a new problem that he could try to find a solution to. Three girls mentioned that they liked to write and that reading helped them to do it.

## **5.2 Research Question 2:**

### **What kind of material do they read and where do they get it from?**

The data collected during this research process shows that participants read both fiction and nonfiction. In the fiction category, fantasy, romance, classics, comics and fairy tales are the privileged genres. Fantasy and comics are mostly read by boys and romance and fairy tales are mostly read by girls, although there are exceptions. Nonfiction in the form of books and magazines—often about history and science—are mostly read by boys. These results are notably consistent with a study conducted in Ontario (Canada) on boys aged from four to twelve years old, which reported that “they own novels but also non-fiction books, computer magazines, comic books, graphic novels, and role-playing game manuals” (McKechnie, 2006, p. 66). Apart from the role-playing game manuals, it is remarkable that all the other types of reading materials have also been mentioned by boys in this study.

However, both genders were equally represented in Internet use to read nonfiction. Video games, blogs, news, and informational websites were accessed regularly by both girls and boys. In this regard, the ever so dreaded competition between reading habits and the explosion of new media offer is perhaps not justified. A Swedish quantitative study that monitored reading habits of teenagers from 1976 to 2002 seems to point in that direction: “Although a series of new media has occurred during the 1980s and particularly the 1990s, the threat against book reading does not seem to come from that direction. Time spent on different media does not turn out to indicate a simple zero-sum relationship. Instead, most teenagers in Sweden seem to increase the total time they spend with the media altogether” (Johnsson-Smaragdi, U. and Jönsson, A., 2006, pp. 536-537). As suggested by Hannesdóttir (2000, p. 222) (see section 2.2.3), these Icelandic participants’ reading habits demonstrate that a certain balance between traditionally published material and Internet use has been reached. However, contrarily to what she has advanced, they do not merely use the Internet as a tool, but also as a mean to access leisure material, and that, while utilising all of the growing possibilities of the medium.

Most informants have access to a big collection of books at home. This collection belongs to them or to other family members and they receive a lot of books and other reading material as gifts. Parents, older siblings, and extended family members are the main providers of reading material. These findings are in accordance with Hannesdóttir's conclusions about Iceland's Christmas book tradition (2000). Informants receive many books during this period. Since these books mostly come from family members living in Iceland, it is possible to assume that they have been bought in the country. However, because most informants claimed that they often read in English and since two of them said that they almost exclusively read in English, it is worth pondering if there will be a gradual decrease in Icelandic publications as Icelanders become more and more proficient in English. Nonetheless, reading in any language should be considered positively and experiencing pleasure while reading in English could eventually stimulate the desire to read more in Icelandic as well.

The issue of the quality of translated works should also be noted. Participants who had attained a high level of proficiency in English did not enjoy reading foreign literature in Icelandic because they did not recognise important stylistic elements that they had learn to appreciate in the original works. It would be interesting to study the same participants' reading habits in a few years from now to see if they will be more interested in original works of Icelandic authors, and then contribute further to the development of Icelandic publishing. Many informants use their school library to obtain reading material in addition to what they already have access to at home and only a few participants also use the public library once in a while; this will be discussed further in the next section.

### **5.3 Research Question 3:**

#### **What is children’s and teenagers’ perception of libraries and how do they use them?**

In her chapter on children and young adult readers and readers’ advisory, Moyer mentions that “young adults have consistently reported that libraries do not have the kinds of books (or other materials) they actually want to read, that libraries are not cool places to hang out, and that library staff are not welcoming or helpful” (2008, p. 82). Although not all these aspects of libraries have been criticised by the participants in this research, many of them were mentioned. No informant said that they did not think that libraries were “cool places to hang out” and it did not come across as if this would be their main concern in deciding if they would want to go to the library or not. The three other criticisms Moyer attributes to young people did reveal themselves to be true for this study if we consider the participants’ thoughts and behaviours.

Libraries in Iceland are mostly used by participants for their content—or books—and are not much considered as spaces to spend time or discuss reading with anyone. Librarians have a bad reputation among some participants. They are often considered as people who are not likely to provide help and who are not open to discussion, both in school and public libraries. Most informants only approach them with orientation questions and would never think of discussing readings with them. However, a few participants are exceptions in this regard and take the initiative to start book conversations and ask questions related to reading suggestions. Libraries have a great potential to help young people develop themselves as readers and Van Riel explains how readers’ advisory techniques are more effective in a library context than somewhere else:

Although some of those techniques could be used within an educational sector, their power comes from being outside of that. Reader development is driven by the individual and by choices made by the individual. It follows, therefore, that the public library, accessible to all and non-judgemental, is the ideal environment in which to conduct such activity. (Van Riel *in* Elkin, Train and Denham, 2003, pp. 35-36).

The matter of the absence of spaces devoted specifically to young teenagers and young adults can also be a factor explaining why they do not use

public libraries much and that they seem to feel more comfortable in their school libraries. A qualitative research conducted by Jóhanna V. Gísladóttir—also done in the context of an MLIS final dissertation in 2009—dealt with the services offered to young people in public libraries in Iceland. She interviewed ten librarians in seven public libraries and found out that only one of these libraries had a special section for young adults (Gísladóttir, 2009, p. 73). The other libraries had adult sections and young children sections. Other findings revealed that many teenagers stopped coming to the library as they got older and that three librarians felt they were not providing the best possible services to young people (2009, p. 4). In a context where there is no space dedicated to teenagers, providing readers’ advisory services such as displays and promoting the service to that specific age group is more difficult. In addition to the fact that most participants seem intimidated by library employees, the lack of a specific area for young teenagers and young adults makes readers’ advisory communications almost impossible to find in Icelandic libraries.

The fact that these participants were readers and that they did not use public libraries much can only make us wonder how much they are used by children and teenagers who do not enjoy reading as a leisure activity as much. As put forward by Dina Thorpe, libraries “are dependent on their users for survival” (Thorpe, 1988, p. 15). A low use of library resources by parts of the potential clientele may result in a diminution of budget to maintain these resources. Librarians’ tasks are not only to make sure that quality services are available; it is also to do what it takes to ensure that they are used as much as possible.

## **5.4 Assessment of the Research**

This research was conducted using qualitative methods by carrying on in-depth interviews with ten young people aged between ten and fifteen years old. Two observations in one of the biggest public libraries in Iceland were also conducted. The objective was to answer the three research questions posed in the beginning and it has been accomplished. The limitations stated in section 3.3.5 were taken into account while interpreting the data as regards the high level of English proficiency that was requested of participants. This research has to be considered as offering a glance into the minds of young people who are leisure readers. It provides partial understanding of what motivates some children and teenagers to read for pleasure and should be considered as such. It does not claim to be comprehensive.



## Conclusion

Despite the rather small sample of participants that were interviewed for this MLIS final dissertation research project, their answers do provide insights into their motivations to take on leisure reading. Their perceptions of its value and importance were also of interest in order to answer the three research questions. The results of the research suggest that family members, and especially parents, have an important role to play in the motivation of children and teenagers to read for pleasure. Reading habits are developed at a young age and an effort has to be made in many cases to keep them from disappearing or dramatically decreasing in teenage years. Children and teenagers seem to read for four main reasons which are learning, getting attached to characters, be entertained and imagine, and be creatively stimulated.

Their readings are varied in content and in form as they enjoy as much fiction as nonfiction and that they read from different printed media as well as electronic material. They also like to have a wide choice of material and the freedom to pick what they can read themselves. This makes libraries a potential oasis for leisure reading, as they offer equal access to reading material to all and that without any pressure or constraints. The preferred reading language is Icelandic for most and all but one also read in English. Two participants out of ten mainly read in English for pleasure.

The findings relating the informants' reading habits to library and librarian perceptions are quite important for this research, as its ultimate aim is to help create a basis of knowledge upon which to build improved library services to young teenagers and young adults. Many improvements in the offers of services to children and teenagers can be made in public libraries to keep them coming as they advance in life. Library services seem to be very successful in attracting young children and families by offering many activities and suitable environments for them. However, there seems to be a void concerning specific services for older children and teenagers. They find themselves without a space that suits their needs and do not use the books that are available to them as much as they could. School libraries seem to be answering these needs in a better way, simply because they are easily accessible and are there precisely for the age group we are here concerned with. Short and seldom communications between

library employees and our participants leaves out the possibility of proper readers' advisory interactions.

Because most participants admitted being shy, initiatives could be taken by librarians so as to create a comfortable and trust-based climate to stimulate communication about reading. Readers' advisory services would probably not be widely used and become the norm with children and teenagers overnight, but it could still be offered and slowly play the role of a promoting instrument for library use. By understanding children and teenagers as readers, we are better equipped to help them progress and become active agents of the culture of literacy they live in. Iceland is a fertile land to grow lifelong readers and libraries must take part in it by adding value to the efforts of parents, siblings and schools.

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