

Chapter 3

Pupils' Choice of Narrative Pleasures

Too big now to cry for old pets, for stopped comics,
Too small for the evening youth club, the motorbikes,
Right size for nowhere but the corner on the carpet
With the scuffed and battered box of records.
(Katherine Pierpoint, *Winter in August*)

A Questionnaire in Narrative Form

This and the following chapters contain an account of the research process and the data collected, and focus, in particular, on the differences in the kinds of narrative choices reported by the boys and girls in the survey. They are an elaboration of the following research questions:

- What differences do boys and girls report in their reading interests?
- What reading choices are most typical of boys and girls?
- What other sources of narrative pleasures do they find?
- What are the current interests of pupils that may have direct bearing on their literacy development?

The fourth question was further subdivided into the following areas:

- which comics and magazines do they choose?
- what television programmes do they watch?
- what computer games do they play?

The data was collected in three interconnecting ways. First, through direct observation in the classroom, which included recording examples of the books being read both as individual and as class readers; secondly, by a questionnaire survey of the reading habits and interests of 255 pupils in their first year of comprehensive schooling, and; thirdly by semi-structured interviews with a sample of boys, followed up by group interviews in the following year. The questionnaire used, was first piloted in the summer term of 1992 with a group of 11-year-olds in a school not otherwise taking part in the survey. It took approximately 40 minutes to complete, the time of an average lesson in the secondary school. Instead of using a multiple choice questions with a tick box

formula as with more conventional questionnaires the respondents were asked to write under headings about their perceptions of themselves as readers.

An open format was chosen to give pupils more scope to provide their answers in the form of a story. This was intended firstly to engage their interest, and secondly to elicit answers as close as possible to the reality of their current experience. There are drawbacks to this variation of a well-tryed method of surveying the status of private reading. Most questionnaires confer greater anonymity than was the case in this study; a condition which is generally presumed to achieve greater reliability. A closed question format also facilitates the analysis of data; the limitation of possible answers allows measurement by means of a predetermined scale. I had judged, however, that such closed questions may lead pupils to responses which they assume teachers prefer. Whitehead's survey, for example, identified a high level of interest in the children's classics, books, which in the words of the survey were, 'redolent of the past'. This finding has not proved to hold true in later surveys (Benton, 1995, p. 102) and one possible reason for this is that pupils listed some titles they felt they ought to be reading in order to please. These might include books taken from the lists schools suggested for private reading or those they have recorded in previous reading records. More open questions allowed pupils scope to give their response in a way that would not have been possible on a predetermined scale. Because such questions have less predictable outcomes, a method of coding the responses was used to enter them on a data base. This allowed comparisons to be made between numbers of boys and girls responding in particular ways, and also provided detail to illustrate the individual nature of the responses.

Asking Questions

Given below is an annotated form (the annotation is presented in bold type) of the questionnaire used in the large survey.

Stories of Reading

Stories can be told about all kinds of happenings, especially if they have developed over a period of time.

Write the story of how you learned to read and the reading you do now. It will help your teacher find out about the kinds of books you enjoy reading and the sort of reading you did in your last school. Write as much as you like.

Here are some of the things you might wish to include:

(This introduction was designed to be read out and discussed by the student teacher presenting the questionnaires to the class. Its aim was to act as an invitation to writing.)

I. LEARNING TO READ

Who taught you to read?
Did you find it easy or hard to learn?
Can you remember any of your first books?

II. READING AT HOME

What kinds of books do you enjoy most?
Where and when do you enjoy reading?
Do you like reading to other people? (reading out loud)
Do you share books with anyone else?
Who reads most in your family?

III. READING AT YOUR LAST SCHOOL

What books did you read at your last school?
How were your reading times organized?
What kinds of books did your teacher read to the class?

(Sections I–III request information about the respondent's previous experience of reading and aim to discover how reading is perceived by the pupil at home and at school.)

IV. TV PROGRAMMES

Make a list of your favourite television programmes.
Is there any kind of programme that you particularly enjoy?
Do you have a television in your own room?

V. COMICS AND MAGAZINES

Which do you buy and which do you read?
What do you like about them?

VI. COMPUTER GAMES

What games do you enjoy and how long do you play on your computer each day?

(Sections IV–VI ask for information about leisure activities which compete with reading in the home.)

VII. TIME AND PLACE

Where and when do you read most often?
Do you read most at home or school?

(This question was to discover whether the respondents read from their own choice and independently of school organization of private reading time.)

VIII. COMMENTS

What have people ever said to you about your reading? (parents, teachers, friends)

To finish off how would you complete the following?

I think my reading is.

(This final section was to find out whether the respondent had a positive or negative view of themselves as a reader and how this opinion had been influenced by others.)

The questions were used as prompts to the pupils' writing, rather than as set questions requiring a specific response. Student teachers were used to present the questionnaires to the pupils. They first read out the questions and allowed time to discuss appropriate responses. Those who had difficulty in completing the questionnaire on their own were given extra help. Some pupils with learning difficulties, for example, were allowed to dictate answers to the student teacher who acted as a scribe to enable all views to be represented in sufficient detail. I visited several of the classes during the administration of the questionnaire and found that the pupils showed keen interest in completing their 'stories' and sharing responses with each other. That they enjoyed taking stock of a previous stage of their learning this willingness to reflect on their own experience is reflected in the detailed completion of the questionnaires. This provided an initial source of rich data and the main findings were then followed up in a series of semi-structured interviews with a sample of boys from the respondents. Evidence of this positive engagement with the task are recorded in this and the following chapter, where I have quoted from the questionnaires to illustrate a wide range of pupils' views on reading and other narrative pleasures.

In reporting the findings I have used the coded data from the questionnaire to compare the numbers of boys and girls responding in particular ways and used quotations from both the written statements in the questionnaires and the interviews to comment on a range of the attitudes revealed. In quoting from the findings throughout this section of the book, I have indicated in the text whether the data was obtained by interview (I); questionnaire (Q); or group interview (GI). A quantitative analysis has also enabled me to highlight the differences in the numbers of boys and girls who responded positively or negatively to each question.

Differences in Narrative Pleasure

The first responses, which I intend to analyse in some detail, concern the differences in the choices of genre selected freely by boys and girls. These were significant in both subject matter and in the media each sex chose to provide narrative pleasures. This was more apparent in the choices made from popular culture than in the books chosen for individual reading at this stage. There were, however, clear indications that reading tastes were already beginning to diverge significantly as the Year 8 girls, in particular, moved

Table 1: *Boys' favourite genres*

Choice	No.	%
No named favourites	48	35.8
Adventure/Action	33	24.6
Comedy/Humour (jokes, cartoons)	8	6.0
Science Fiction	7	5.3
Non-fiction	6	4.5
Children's Classics	5	3.7
Fantasy	5	3.7
Mystery/Thriller	5	3.7
Poetry	4	3
Ghost	4	3
Sport	4	3
Point Horror	3	2.2
War	2	1.5
Totals	134	100

away from choices of adventure, horror and comedy towards what one of the pupils identified as 'books about emoschons' (Q). Each of the nine groups had been working with student teachers in English lessons to identify different story types so they were aware when making a choice of genre of the ways in which books they read could be categorized. The boys' choices looked like this: Boy's preference for 'action' above any other kind of 'subject matter' in their chosen narratives is mirrored later in their choice of television programmes (see Tables 9 and 10, pp. 68–9). The most striking feature of Table 1, however, is the large number of boys who recorded no particular favourite type of reading but saw all genres as equally unappealing. If a check list had been provided for them to mark off the kinds of books they preferred, the results would have been significantly different because many would have recorded the genres they might be persuaded to read. These results show more effectively the extent of many boys' disengagement from reading as a leisure pursuit. Their lack of interest in the topic was borne out by subsequent observations of their habits of choosing books for classroom reading sessions. Boys in the survey whom I observed in set reading times were less likely to have brought a current reading book along with them and would rely on the teacher, or the librarian, to supply a suitable title to keep them occupied. Many more boys than girls were re-reading titles that they had first met in their primary schools, such as Roald Dahl's *Fantastic Mr Fox*, and *James and the Giant Peach*. One interpretation that has been made of the widespread re-reading of favourite books found at this age is that it signifies a continuing interest and commitment to particular kinds of reading. My interview data suggest, however, that this kind of re-reading is more often associated with the requirement by schools that some work of fiction is chosen for set independent reading times and a book that has been read before is a safe option. Respondents who reported that they spent longer periods reading tended to choose books in a particular series or made a collection of the books of a favourite author, rather than returning repeatedly to the same title.

Table 2: Boys' choice of favourite author

Author	Genre
Douglas Adams	Sci-fi, Comedy
Enid Blyton	Adventure
Tom Clancy	Adult Thriller
Roald Dahl	Comedy/Adventure
Nicholas Fiske	Adventure/Sci-fi
James Herbert	Horror
Michael Hardcastle	Adventure/Football
Steve Jackson	Fantasy

The authors named most frequently by the boys reflected the emphasis on action and adventure (see Table 2). I have listed all the authors named by the boys who, apart from Enid Blyton, are all men. They bear little relationship to the titles in the following list which had been selected by teachers for reading with 11–12-year-old pupils in school at the time of the survey.

Titles of Books Used as Class Readers by 11–12-year-olds 1992–93

1	<i>Boy</i>	Roald Dahl
2	<i>Carrie's War</i>	Nina Bawden
3	<i>Danny Champion of the World</i>	Roald Dahl
4	<i>Dragonslayer</i>	Rosemary Sutcliffe
5	<i>Goodnight Mr Tom</i>	Michelle Magorian
6	<i>Gowie Corby Plays Chicken</i>	Gene Kemp
7	<i>Grinny</i>	Nicholas Fiske
8	<i>Hating Alison Ashley</i>	Robin Klein
9	<i>I am David</i>	Ann Holme
10	<i>Red Sky in the Morning</i>	Elizabeth Laird
11	<i>Run for Your Life</i>	Robert Leeson
12	<i>The Eighteenth Emergency</i>	Betsy Byars
13	<i>The Haunting of Cassie Palmer</i>	Vivienne Alcock
14	<i>The Indian in the Cupboard</i>	Lynne Reid Banks
15	<i>The Midnight Fox</i>	Betsy Byars
16	<i>The Monster Garden</i>	Vivien Alcock
17	<i>The Piggy Book</i>	Anthony Browne
18	<i>The Silver Sword</i>	Ian Serrailler
19	<i>The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler</i>	Gene Kempe
20	<i>The Hobbit</i>	J.R.R.Tolkien

Except for the autobiographical work by Dahl these are made up of contemporary works by acknowledged children's writers. It is also worth noting that fourteen of the twenty titles chosen have a central male character. This was seen by the teachers involved in the survey as a way of engaging boys' interest in the story. The girls choice of genre is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Girls' choice of genre

Genre	No.	%
No named favourites	29	24
Point horror	17	14
Adventure	11	9.1
Funny/Joke	9	7.4
School	8	6.6
Teenage fiction	7	5.8
Children's Classics	7	5.8
Ghost	6	5
Fairy tales	4	3.3
Detective/Crime/Mystery	4	3.3
Poetry	4	3.3
Ballet	2	1.7
Romance	2	1.7
Horses/Saddle Club	1	0.8
War	1	0.8
Other	9	7.4
Total	121	100

Table 4: Girls' choice of favourite author

Author	Genre
Judy Blume	Teenage
Enid Blyton	Adventure
Roald Dahl	Adventure
Daphne du Maurier	Romance
Dick King Smith	Comedy
Lynda Hoy	School/Teenage
Michael Rosen	Poetry/Comedy
Paula Danzinger	Teenage
Catherine Cookson	Historical Romance
Christopher Pike	Horror
Berlie Doherty	Teenage
Natalie Babbitt	Teenage
Jean Estoril	Teenage

More girls than boys in my survey were able to name their favourite book. Girls also chose a wider range of genre. However, a closer inspection of some of the titles that they gave show that whether they were *Point Horror*, School, or Teenage fiction, many of them deal with a similar theme. That is, they commonly usually describe a developing teenage relationship at the centre of the action; a younger version of what Brownstein (1982) called the 'marriage plot', where a boy picks girl from amongst her peers. Girls also included the names of more authors than did the boys and their selection was more evenly divided among the genders with a choice of eight individually named women writers and five men (see Table 4).

The titles and authors chosen by the girls also included more of the kinds of book that a well-informed teacher might make as suitable for the age group

Table 5: Boys' and girls' shared genre choices

Genre	No.	%
No named favourites	77	30.2
Adventure	44	17.3
Horror	20	7.8
Comedy/Joke	17	6.7
Children's Classic	12	4.7
Ghost	10	4
Mystery/Crime/Thriller	9	3.5
Poetry	8	3
War	3	1.2
Choices not shared	55	21.6
Total	255	100

(these are marked with an asterisk in the full list of titles given in Appendix C, see pp. 190–4), whereas boys' choices tended, on the whole, to include more examples of writers from 'popular culture' although they did also include a number of titles recommended to them in school such as *I am David*. However, the girls' growing interest in *Point Horror* stories and writers such as Christopher Pike is beginning to overshadow the popular writers of traditional teenage fiction such as Judy Blume and Paula Danzinger, a trend that becomes even more marked by Year 8. In a comparable study made of the reading interests of Year 8 pupils in Oxfordshire, Peter Benton found that the popularity of *Point Horror* stories out ranked all other varieties of reading named by pupils in his survey. Benton comments, 'the appetite for (fairly mild) horror stories at this age seems to be insatiable and some school librarians have more requests for books of this type than any other' (1995, p. 105). Sarland has also documented the increasing interest of pre-teens in this particular genre (Sarland, 1994a; 1994b).

The boys' and girls' lists converge at the level of the most popular children's authors in the books of Dahl and Blyton, who still head the popularity list in both groups' choices. Incidentally, the dominant position of Dahl was found to be as true for older New Zealand adolescent readers, as it was for the younger age groups in the UK whom I studied (Bardsley, 1991; Millard, 1994). Girls were able to put names to more of the authors they liked, a fact which suggests a greater familiarity with previous searches for particular books and the works of particular writers. Table 5 records the genre favoured by both boys and girls. Table 5 shows that no single genre holds an appeal for anything but a minority of the group. Similarly, the list of book titles recorded reveals few overlapping tastes. Teachers, therefore, require a wide knowledge of all kinds of writing in order to be able to help pupils choose appropriate titles and to judge the suitability of personal choice for reading development. Full lists of the titles supplied by the pupils are included in Appendix C, pp. 190–4).

Table 6: Books chosen by both boys and girls

The overlapping titles in the separate lists are shown below:

- (i) *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory; George's Marvellous Medicine; The Twits,*
- (ii) *I am David; Stig of the Dump; The Mouse Butcher; The Silver Sword*

They consist of:

- (i) Titles that represent a shared interest in the books of Roald Dahl.
 - (ii) Titles that have been read in school or read to the class by a teacher.
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Identifying Shared Interests

Apart from books that are chosen by teachers, at the beginning of secondary school boys and girls choose very different kinds of books for themselves. Table 6 shows the areas in which most overlap is to be found. It can be seen that even in the case of Dahl, whose books were frequently chosen by both sexes, boys chose different titles from the ones preferred by girls. The boys' choices included *Fantastic Mr Fox; James and the Giant Peach; Danny, Champion of the World; Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator; Boy,* and *Going Solo;* whilst the girls preferred *Mathilda; BFG;* and *Revolting Rhymes.* On the whole, the girls' favourites have girls as the main character, Mathilda, Sophie, Goldilocks, and represent the more whimsical of Dahl's stories, while many of the boys stated a preference for his two autobiographical pieces, *Boy* and *Going Solo.* It is also still the case that the other titles recorded by both boys and girls in the survey are markedly different. This suggests that any selection of books made for a class by a teacher will be frequently challenged if the rationale for sharing the story is solely as something to be enjoyed. My observation of lessons in the first two years of secondary school in the past five years have shown that a class novel is often allowed to dominate a whole half term of work, with much of the reading being done by the teacher. Dislike of a novel's theme can act as a major disincentive for pupils to become involved and certainly the work does not always involve them in reading for themselves.

Choosing Non-fiction

Several of the boys expressed a preference for non-fiction; Paul, for example, wrote:

I choose books if they seem interesting. The books I read are often topic books, history and science, those sort of books. I read a bit at night but most of the reading I do is for homework and some at school. (Q)

At one extreme of the spectrum of readers is a group of boys whose interests are dominated by sport, almost to the exclusion of anything else. They buy magazines with names like *Shoot*, *Match* and *Top Score*, with accounts of teams, players and goals, and supplement these with match programmes and fanzines; they watch every possible football game shown on television; buy videos with titles such as *Goals Galore* and play a computer game based on football tactics called *Football Manager* and, if they have any time left in which to read fiction, choose books by Michael Hardcastle. Five boys mentioned a football option for each kind of leisure activity and a further fourteen boys had football as a content preference for two or more of the media. For this age group football is a key aspect of their social bonding. Mac an Ghail (1994) has similarly noted the significance of football cultures in the construction of masculine practices and group identity in older teenagers (pp. 58, 108–9) and it is perhaps the last of his three 'Fs' ('fighting, fucking and football') which is used in this way by the younger age group, although 'fighting' particularly in the form of 'fighting fantasy' games and computer 'beat 'em ups' figure prominently in their choices.

James, identified by his teacher as a good reader, explains the ordering of his personal preferences:

I sometimes read in bed at night for about fifteen minutes. At my last school I used to like reading football books including, *Home and Away* and *In the Net*. Now I usually buy football magazines, especially *Shoot*. I play on my computer for about 2 hours a day. I like playing football games like *Sensible Soccer* and *Goal*. Usually if I have to choose a book, I look at football first, then just look round to see if there are any more interesting ones. I think reading is very good but most of the books we read (in school) are boring. (Q)

He also describes his television viewing as centred round football—naming *Match of the Day*, *Football Italia*; *A Question of Sport*—with only *Red Dwarf* providing any variety.

It is also interesting to note that James' selection of books for personal reading is *hypothetical*; he prefaces his choice with 'if I have to choose books'. Such statements accompanied many of the boys' reports on the books they chose to read, suggesting that they frequently see reading as an imposition from the school, something they ought to do rather than a genuinely personal choice.

The only equivalent of a totally obsessive single interest amongst the girls was found in the fascination with anything to do with horses, shown by one pupil who read *Pony*; *Horse and Rider*; and *Horse and Pony* magazines, chose Saddle Club books for her individual reading and put horse programmes, such as show-jumping and racing, as her main choice of television viewing.

Identifying light and Heavy Readers

Many more girls than boys described themselves as heavy readers. Hannah used the term 'bookworm' to describe her reading and wrote:

I read the most in my family. I usually read everyday and by myself. Most of the time I read on my bed and I do recommend good books to my sister and friends. I read twenty-eight Nancy Drew mysteries last year. I think I am a good reader and reading is one of my hobbies, my friends call me a bookworm. (Q)

For Hannah, 'being a bookworm' is a positive attribute, she sees reading as part of her social context. Isabelle also writes enthusiastically about her reading abilities:

I was taught to read at school but I have always read most at home. At home I read wherever and whenever I can, but especially when there is nobody in the house. I think me and mum read most and mum usually recommends all the books I read because she knows I like Catherine Cookson. Picked at random, some of the books I read last year were, *The Hobbit*, *The Complete Borrowers* and I particularly like re-reading *Paddington at Large* (all the stories in one). I am a bookworm so I enjoy reading practically anything and I have a long list of books waiting to be read. Reading is the thing I do most. (Q)

Isabelle, poised between childhood and adolescence, uses her re-reading of well-loved books as a form of reassurance; a jumping-off point for her more 'adult' reads with her mother. It is precisely at this stage that sensitive recommendation by the teacher can open up a world of new reading. Several of the girls, however, had already begun to limit their reading almost exclusively to *Point Horror* books and in two of the schools groups of four or five girls in a class regularly collected and exchanged books in this series. It is an extensive series, and one pupil in an inner-city school, which had fewer than average committed readers, reported owning over a dozen titles.

Most significantly, however, out of this sample, 33 per cent of boys and 24 per cent of girls named no favourite book or author, with a further 12 (9 per cent) of the boys, but no girls, stating a positive dislike of reading books. They had recorded 'none' in each space on their story questionnaires left for recording choice in books, magazines and comics; with the exception of two of them who read computer magazines.

Lee had written under the heading: **What books do you read?**

I read at school, I never used to read at home. The only reading I do is sports pages on the back of papers. My mum and sister read in the

family. I only read when I really have to, for homework and in school. I was a good reader at primary school because my teachers told me.

Of television, he says:

Sports programmes are my favourite. I watch about 4 hours a night and sometimes I watch tele in my room. I enjoy playing sports managing games and I spend about 2 hours a day on the computer. (Q)

In the growing debate about gender and reading it is easy to polarize this as an attitude typical only of boys for, indeed, more boys overall have reported disliking reading. However, two girls in the survey also expressed a strong distaste for reading in school. Natalie wrote:

I do not read at all, anywhere, unless I have to at school. The only books I like is *Point Horror books* but otherwise I hate reading. I only ever read in school and I only read for school work. Reading is not very interesting. (Q)

Despite these strong protestations, her admission of an attraction to *Point Horror* titles shows that she could be drawn into a particular community of readers with some effort or compromise by the teacher. Similarly Joanne has also recorded two *Point Horror* titles she has enjoyed reading in the past year, *Emma and I* and *April Fools*, despite writing:

I'm not really a reader. I actually hate reading but I have a good reading standard. If I read, I read for work. I don't choose books I just read books given to me. I was a very good reader at primary school. (Q)

It is reading in school, rather than reading per se that both girls reject and both provide evidence of continuing engagement outside the classroom.

Just as there were girls who did not choose to read, one or two boys gave accounts of more regular reading habits, though these are different in kind from those of the girl bookworms. Thomas wrote:

I read in the morning (the newspaper), sometimes when I come in from school on *Ceefax* and at night in the bath. I read at least twice a day. I sometimes read with my little cousin. Everyone in my family reads. My mum recommends the books and my friends. I like science fiction and Roald Dahl. I ask my friends what books are good. (Q)

There is still sufficient cause for real concern about the whole year group's reading, however, when we consider the voluntary reading of continuous prose or narrative as a whole. The lack of interest in naming either a favourite book, or a favourite author, shown by 33 per cent of the boys and 24 per cent

of the girls is a significant finding, particularly as a recent study of younger readers' progress has shown that naming favourite books related significantly to their subsequent reading development (Weinberger, 1995).

Boys' Disadvantage in the Reading Curriculum

The confirmation of boys' lesser interest in books is also significant in relation to current findings about boys' relative lack of achievement in English examinations compared with girls at GCSE (Ofsted, 1993). By neglecting fiction many boys in the study appear to put themselves at a greater disadvantage in a subject where the reading and writing of narratives, as I demonstrated in Chapter 3, is essential for success. Further, the individual tastes of those boys who do read regularly for stories which emphasize action over personal relationships, excitement over the unfolding of character and humour most of all, set them at odds with many of the books chosen for study in school. This is a point I will develop more fully in the next chapter, when I consider in more detail how each gender reads (see also Chapter 1, pp. 13–15).

I suspect that in completing the 'story of reading' questionnaires, boys did not always accurately report the amount of reading they actually did. Although the researchers always explained to the class being surveyed that they could include all kinds of reading in their accounts, there is, at this age, a clear sense that 'reading' is an activity they associate with narrative fiction. During follow-up interviews, several of the boys reported reading for a particular purpose, to improve their golf, for example, without recording non-fiction in their reading lists. It is this 'efferent' reading (Rosenblatt, 1978) that is often overlooked by both teacher and pupil. An example of this is provided by Craig, one of the weakest pupils interviewed, who had included no kind of reading on his questionnaire. At the follow-up interview he talked about making visits to the library:

- Craig:* I've got a bike, just a kid's trials bike...
- Interviewer:* That's interesting, do you ever read books about motor bikes? Or do you use magazines?
- Craig:* Books.
- Interviewer:* Where do you get them from?
- Craig:* Library or near my school.
- Interviewer:* Do you have any of your own?
- Craig:* Yeah. I've got a few books at home.
- Interviewer:* What sort of books?
- Craig:* Like how to put new things on. 'Cos I've got to put a new chain on it.
- Interviewer:* Can you do that, or will your dad help?
- Craig:* I'll have to do it, 'cos my dad's working on the cranes today, and I want it done today for tomorrow. (I)

Craig has an obvious interest in reading to find out about his bike and is sufficiently proficient to follow details of how to complete a repair. However, he does not count this part of his life as involving reading and accepts a view of himself in school as a non-reader.

Reading Comics and Magazines

While there are significant differences in the book reading habits of boys and girls in the first year of secondary school, contrasts in the choice of subject matter are even more marked when we consider the reading of periodicals. By the age of 11, few children continue to read a comic regularly, but in this study those who do are overwhelmingly boys (see Table 7). Just under a third of the boys read a comic regularly, whereas less than a tenth of girls report that they still read one. *Jackie*, the hybrid between the world of comics and older teenage magazines which used to dominate the reading of girls of this age, no longer exists. Instead, apart from the few who read *Beano* and *Dandy*, girls overwhelmingly opt for the wide range of teenage magazines currently on the market which mix information about pop stars, fashion and personal relationships, with picture stories and make-up tips.

Nine boys in the study read nothing but comics (6.7 per cent), and it would be easy to dismiss their continuing interest in the comic format as a question of immaturity, the last vestige of an earlier stage of development. For example, Alex, who is a good reader, describes how he is at the point of moving on from his pleasure in comics to books:

When I go on a train I just get a *Beano* annual or something like that, because I don't really have time to finish a long book and I always find that a *Beano* suits me. But I think I'll change to a long book because I found that the last time I did that I got a *Beano* annual and I read it basically before the train had even pulled out the station. (I)

Table 7: Comparison of comic reading in boys and girls

	Boys	Girls	Total
No comic	93 (69%)	111 (91%)	204
Any comic	41 (31%)	10 (9%)	51
Total no. of boys and girls responding	134	121	255
Respondents reading only comics	9 (6.7%)	0	9
Breakdown of comics by name			
<i>Beano</i>	24	5	29
<i>Dandy</i>	11	2	13
<i>Judge Dredd</i>	2	0	2
<i>Beavis and Butthead</i>	2	0	2
Other	2	3	5

However, several of the boys interviewed who did still enjoy reading the *Beano* and *Dandy* said that it was because they re-read the old copies they had collected over several years or they read collections of comic strips in old annuals. Alex also mentions his continuing interest in cartoons, one which he shares with his father:

I'm a real fan of Giles the cartoonist, we've got tons of those, but none of them are mine, they're all my dad's, he collects them, and I nick them and keep them in my bedroom. (I)

Laurence, who reported enjoying *Point Horror* stories, also read the *Beano* because it gave him ideas for writing his own comic production. David, a good reader, both by his own account and in the estimation of his teacher, is a connoisseur of the genre. I interviewed him a month after the questionnaire had been filled in to explore this interest. He told me:

I usually read them at night, to get me off to sleep like. And then I like, I don't like those little thin ones, that's why I've stopped reading 'em now, I just read the ones I've already got. 'Cos they—they've not got much in 'em now, and they're getting more expensive. The *Beano* and *Dandy* are getting thinner. *Beezer* and *Topper* are like two comics, but they're two really short ones, and it's just a bit bigger than a *Beano*, and the *Beano's* gone up to something like 34 pages. So I have annuals at Christmas. (I)

He went on to explain that he had been collecting comics from 1989 and had some that went back to 1980:

David: I've still got them, 'cos I wanted to see what they're like a bit ago, what the drawings were like, and colour and stuff like that.

Interviewer: So is it the drawings in comics you really like, rather than the story?

David: No. It's the story that I like. It's just that I like to see how it changes. 'Cos like now I've changed from *Beano* an' all 'cos Dennis the Menace is changed, and he looks like a 5-year-old now. (I)

David had listed adventure as his favourite book genre but it is obvious that he did not choose to read books of this type at home.

David: Books—well I, I read some at school. But—normally at home, if I've got any books I'd read them at night an' all. 'Cos I only read my comics for something to send me to

sleep, I don't really like 'em now, 'cos I've read 'em over like ten times each.

Interviewer: So you read—if you've got a book from school you read that at night now.

David: Yeah.

Interviewer: You've been reading *The Voyage of the Dawn Trader* and you tell me you like the longer adventure books. Can you tell me something about the books that you chose?

David: Well—I normally like adventure books, like this one I've got now. But I don't like really short ones, 'cos they're too boring, but I don't like really long ones, like over 200 pages, 'cos they get me bored an' all. 'Cos some are like over 200 pages and it's a rubbish book, and when I've chosen it, I have to read it all, and get totally bored with it. Like this one. This one has got nearly 200 pages.

Interviewer: Right. Now tell me about a book that fits that category you talked about, that's so good you've read it over and over again. Choose a book that you've read, more than once.

David: I don't think I've read any book more than once, except for this one. (I)

There is a certain amount of self-contradiction in David's suggestion that he was replacing his comic reading in favour of books, because so far he had read little of his book *The Voyage of the Dawn Trader*. This title had been entered on David's current reading record since the beginning of term and this interview was conducted in the November, six weeks later. David is an example of someone who might read more, if more suitable material that bridged the gap between his interest in comics and his desire for adventure was carefully recommended to him. There are a wide range of sophisticated picture stories by authors such as Raymond Briggs, Anthony Browne and Michael For-man, which might be more motivating than the longer novels his class teacher insists are the only suitable reading for the classroom.

These examples should also serve to make us wary of dismissing comic reading as a 'time-consuming drug' (Whitehead, Capey, Maddren and Wellings, 1977, p. 255) and acknowledge the genuine interest in picture narrative of some pupils. Interestingly, David's description of the change in Dennis the Menace's image to that of a younger boy would suggest that the publishers are aware of the change in the age of their readership and are targeting a younger group.

Judge Dredd and *Beavis and Butthead* represent rather more 'adult' tastes as these comics are addressed at older audiences: the former with a futuristic setting and an emphasis on violent retribution for wrong doing; the second with what passes for 'adult' humour rather than the knock about slapstick of school, bad lads and mischief, represented by more traditional comics and comic strips. Elements from these comics were present in the stories written

Table 8: Comparison of choices in magazines

	Boys	Girls	Total
No magazine	38 (28%)	24 (20%)	62 (24%)
Any magazine	96 (72%)	97 (80%)	193 (76%)
Total no. of boys and girls responding	134	121	255
Respondents reading only magazines	28 (20.8%)	26 (21.4%)	54 (21%)
Breakdown of magazines named as favourite by type			
Teen culture (e.g. pop music, fashion) {including <i>Just Seventeen</i> }	4 {0}	77 (64%) {26 (21%)}	81 (32%) {26}
Computer	42	5	47
Football	34	4	38
TV magazines	2	3	
Wrestling	3	2	
Women's magazines	0	3	
White Dwarf	3	0	
Horses	0	3	
Angling	2		
Newspapers	6		

by several of the boys, who drew on the violent punishments meted out by *Judge Dredd* or *Robocop* as the key actions of their written narratives. These will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

Table 8 details the magazines most often read by the group. I have included a percentage figure only for cases where there was a significant proportion of the group naming a specific publication. The most striking feature of magazine reading is that it divides so neatly down gender lines. Girls overwhelmingly choose to read magazines with features about boys and relationships; boys choose to read about football and computers. Whitehead *et al.* (1977) had commented, 'to some extent the slump in comic reading among 14+ boys is no doubt attributable to the fact that no publisher has found a formula to appeal to their interests in comic form' (p. 155). The present range of computer and sports magazines does exactly that. Currently, then, almost as many of the 11-year-old boys read regularly about computers or sport as girls read about relationships and the superstars of the pop world. Matthew, explaining his interest, wrote:

I buy a lot of magazines and comics. I like them because they are interesting and miles and miles better than books. I like to read humorous bits and something about a killer or like that. (Q)

Publishers of special interest magazines must be gratified by the success of their marketing strategies over the past decade. A large proportion of teenage boys now choose to read a wide range of technical and hobby-related periodicals, while girls have moved upmarket from cheaper comic formats to a glossier range of teenage magazines. Some of the computer magazines

favoured by boys now cost almost as much as a paperback book, but their cost is sweetened by free games on CD ROMs and special 'cheats' (tips for completing games) for the latest releases. Boys frequently stated that their main motivation for buying computer magazines was to keep up with new developments in both soft and hardware. They enjoy reading about new technology and fantasize about owning ever more sophisticated equipment.

I will return to a more detailed consideration of the nature of the different choices pupils make and their implications for both reading and writing developments in Chapter 8. It is worth reflecting at this point, however, on how differently the genders defined themselves as readers through their tastes and interests. The boys' choices moved towards action, facts and figures; the girls' to fiction, feelings and relationships. On the one hand, there were girls who stated they did not like reading, but who dutifully chose books for class readers; recorded and remembered their titles; and recommended books which others might like to read. On the other, there were boys who claimed on their questionnaires that they enjoyed reading, but who returned to the same safe class reader again and again and remembered no specific title or author to record as a favourite. The magazine section of the publishing industry accounts for a large proportion of young people's reading outside school and it is important not to dismiss its effect lightly. Instead, the interest should be used to encourage wider reading in school while creating greater debate about the magazines published for this age group.

Further Competition with Reading

Whitehead *et al.* (1977) proposed a leisure displacement theory to explain the decrease in leisure reading of adolescents in the post-war period. They further identified the major competitor for children's attention as television, then accessible only at the time of transmission and with a limited range of programmes specifically aimed at children. Today, not only have the number of television channels multiplied but, in addition, video recording technology makes films and recorded programmes available in many homes for 24 hours a day. Added to this, a much larger proportion of children have a television set in their own room so their personal access to visual entertainment is unlimited. Computer programmes, with sophisticated graphics, offer fictional worlds where quest-like narratives with fantasies of heroic encounters with warriors and monsters can be acted out on the screen. A joystick allows the player to control the progress and outcome of a particular adventure. Nearly all computer games, whatever their origin, are promoted on the strength of their ability to create excitement. For example one home computer club, which provides programmes for a popular computer, typically advertises a new game in the following terms:

Is your life lacking a bit of excitement? Then why not practice your archery with Robin Hood, control the wrath of the demon, take part in

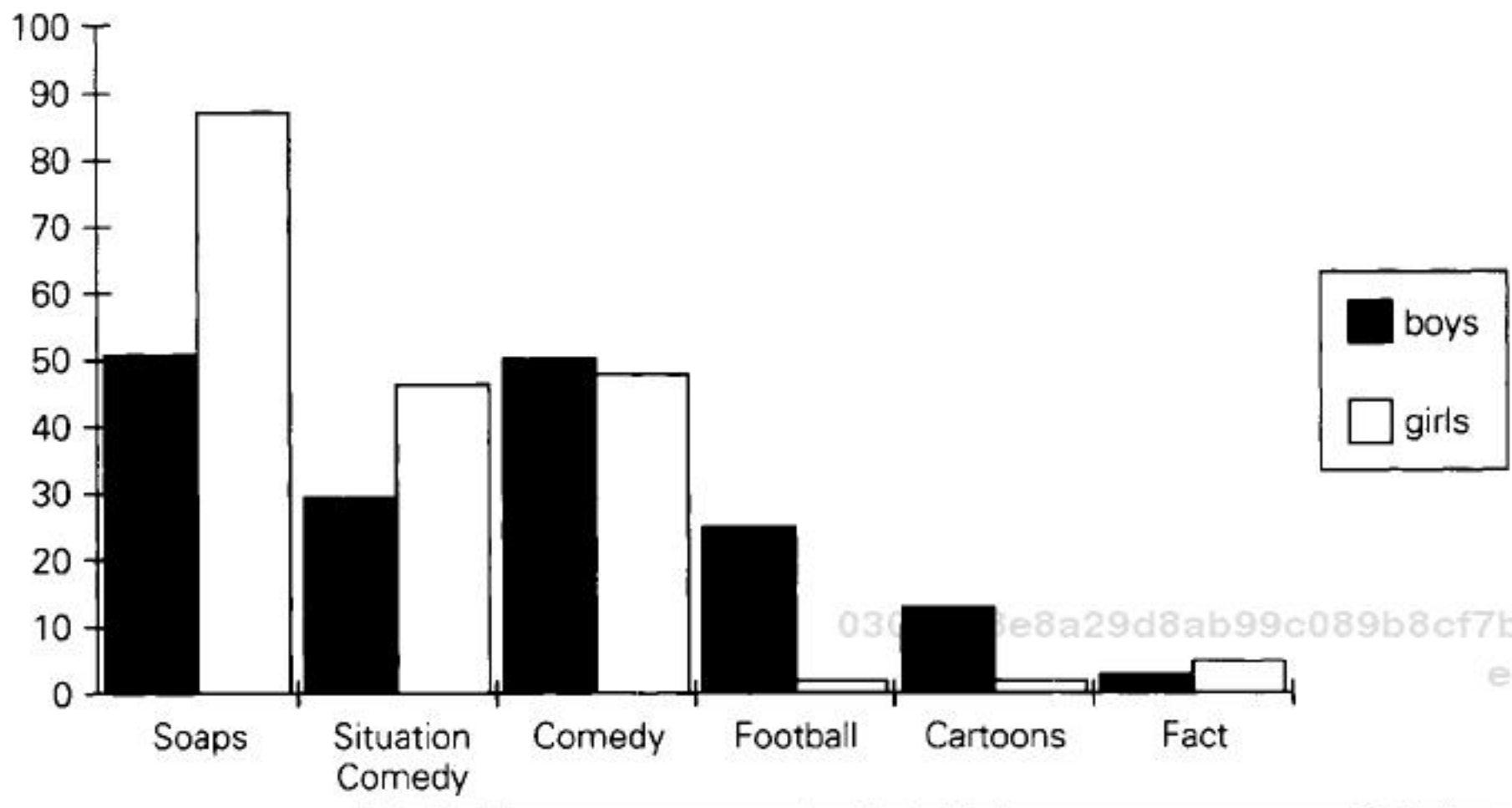
some of the most vivid simulations around, play tennis at professional level band then put on your suit to do your home accounts. (Quoted in Millard, 1994, p. 36)

The main attraction of the role of the gamester over that of the reader is the active nature of the participation offered. Unlike written descriptions of the actions in a book or magazine, the narrative of computer games is conveyed in an animated visual form. The youngest players quickly become adept at predicting outcomes of moves made in the quest structures on which many of the programmes are based. Many of the boys in the survey reported a preference for adventure stories, and adventure is readily catered for by the computer games market. Moreover, the technology already exists that can transform children into the physical protagonists of such worlds through 'virtual reality', giving a whole new dimension to the concept of getting lost in a book. Even Whitehead's argument for the superiority of the book as a more readily available source of personal gratification is thrown into question by the rapidly developing technology. The well-named Japanese 'Game Boy' (apt because owners consist largely of young males between the ages of 8–14) provides a pocket version of highly sophisticated games. It is exactly the size of a paperback book and has a wide variety of arcade and adventure games available.

Tastes in Television Programmes

I wanted to discover if boys and girls made use of televisual and computer media to the same extent and for the same purposes. The questionnaire therefore asked pupils to list all the television programmes they enjoyed watching so that I could compare the kinds of television viewing that boys and girls reported rather than simply logging the amount of time they spent in front of a television. As an indicator of the comparative amounts of television watched I also recorded the number of programmes each respondent reported regularly to identify heavy and light viewers. These ranged from three boys who watched no television at all, to a girl who recorded twenty favourite programmes and included five different soap operas in her selection. A wide variety of programmes were listed as being of interest to the group and in the classes where I observed pupils completing this question there was a universal buzz of interest in what was being recorded. They wanted to compare answers and find out what each other watched, whereas no corresponding enthusiasm was shown for sharing their answers on books or magazines. A slightly larger number of boys than girls were found to own a television. This was accounted for during the follow-up interviews, where boys explained that they used televisions as monitors for their computers, as well as for watching television programmes: 70.9 per cent of boys and 63.6 per cent of girls were able to watch TV in their own room. Only one boy stated that there was no television at all in his home.

Table 9: Preferred choice of television genre



(Expressed as %: n girls = 121, boys = 134, total = 255)

TV ownership correlates positively to the number of programmes watched, but does not seem significantly to affect reading interests. Carla, who describes herself as a brilliant reader exemplifies the ‘heavy’ television viewer. She wrote:

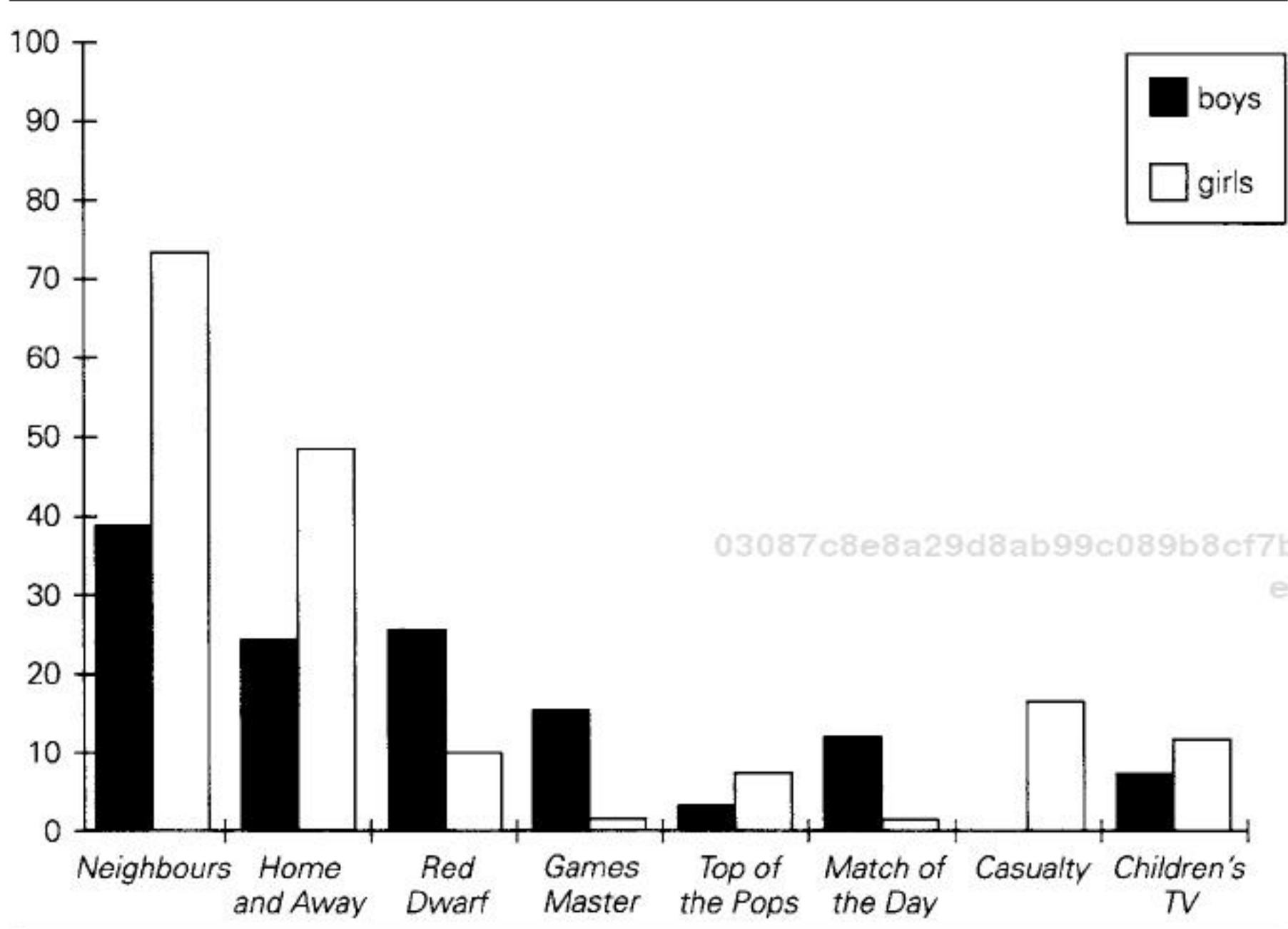
I have my own television in my bedroom and I like the following programmes: *Neighbours*, *Coronation Street*, *Byker-Grove*, *Blossom* and *Happy Days*. I also watch music programmes and funny ones. *Top of the Pops*, *Cheers* and *Roseanne*. I especially like ones with imagination like *Red Dwarf*, hypnotist shows and crime series. *Casualty* is my favourite. (Q)

On average, girls in the study watched more television than boys and, although there are large areas of common interest, there are significant differences between the sexes, both in the genres chosen and the most popular individual programmes. These are set out in Tables 9 and 10.

The most striking fact to take from Table 9 is that both boys’ and girls’ television viewing consists largely of varieties of fictional narrative, made up for the most part of soap operas and situation comedies. In keeping with their reading interests, more boys than girls expressed interest in non-fictional television, particularly enjoying the journalistic style of football commentary or the consumer guides to computer games, although narrative still dominated. A handful of girls included games shows, *Top of the Pops* and information programmes such as *Wildlife on One* in their lists, but these made up a small proportion of the total numbers of programmes selected.

In the choice of individual programmes only girls included *Casualty* amongst their favourites, whilst *Red Dwarf* was much more popular with the

Table 10: Favourite television programmes



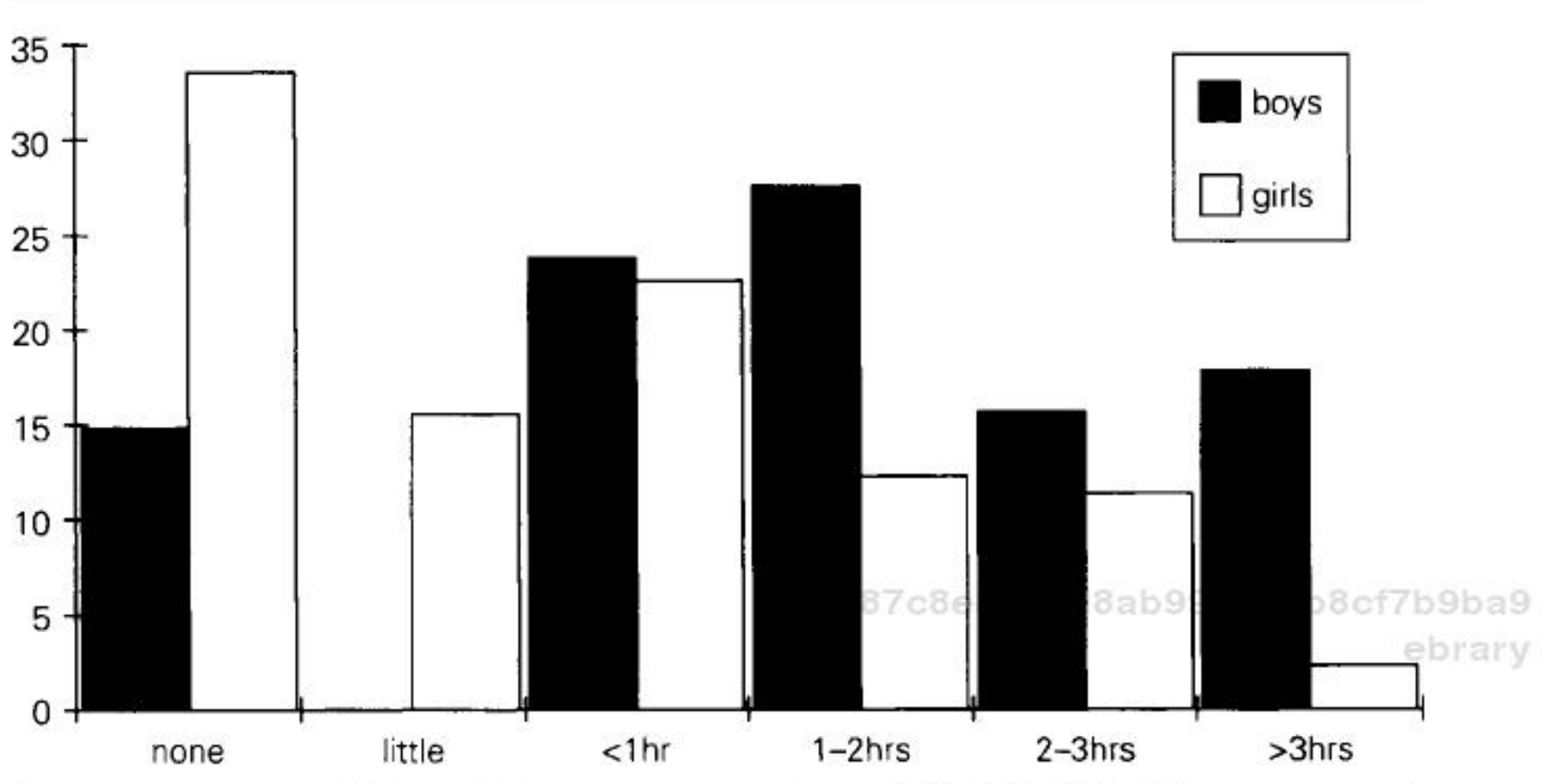
(Expressed as %: n girls = 121, boys = 134, total = 255)

boys. It would be easy to caricature the latter as a slapstick comedy in comparison with the more psychological penetrating drama of *Casualty*, which focuses on relationships and personal dilemmas. In fact, *Red Dwarf* does explore relationships within its comic and futuristic setting, but these are all to do with male bonding, male friendship and personal loyalties with only the most stereotypical presentation of relationships with women. Boys also watch the computer-related magazine programme, *Games Master*, in greater numbers than the girls. Boys' television choices, then, reinforce the difference of their narrative interests and it is girls who watch narratives that are more consistent with the psychological and social realism favoured in school.

If girls of this age are likely to spend more time watching television than the boys, the latter spend a greater proportion of the time available with computer games and the associated media of magazine, television guides featured on Ceefax, and associated programmes.

Table 11 shows that the boys in the study were by far the heaviest users of computer games with over half of them playing on a computer for longer than an hour each day. In contrast, almost half the girls either did not play computer games at all or described themselves as being very infrequent users, giving different reasons for using the technology, such as using it for word processing. Sophie, who describes herself as reading all the time at home, wrote:

Table 11: Time spent on computer games



(Expressed as %: n girls = 121, boys = 134, total = 255)

I don't usually play very much on a computer. But when I do I like to write stories on it. (Q)

and Hannah who has read 'at least twenty-eight Nancy Drew mysteries', writes:

I like action computer games but I don't play on mine too often, just sometimes at weekends. (Q)

It would have made sense to have asked similar questions about computer ownership to those I had asked about television sets. It does appear from the data that girls have less access to computers and usually gain access to them through other members of the family. The fact that boys use television sets as monitors suggests that they have computers rather than televisions bought for them. At the other extreme from Sophie 'the bookworm' is David who owns several different forms of computer games:

Well, after school I watch TV programmes, normally. I only watch under an hour 'cos I don't like them right much now, I go and play on the Megadrive, or the Commodore and the Spectrum. That's got puzzle games and adventure games. Me and my dad go on the Spectrum at night, 'cos he absolutely loves these puzzle games and he normally figures out how to complete it. (I)

and Alex who reads no more than an hour a week:

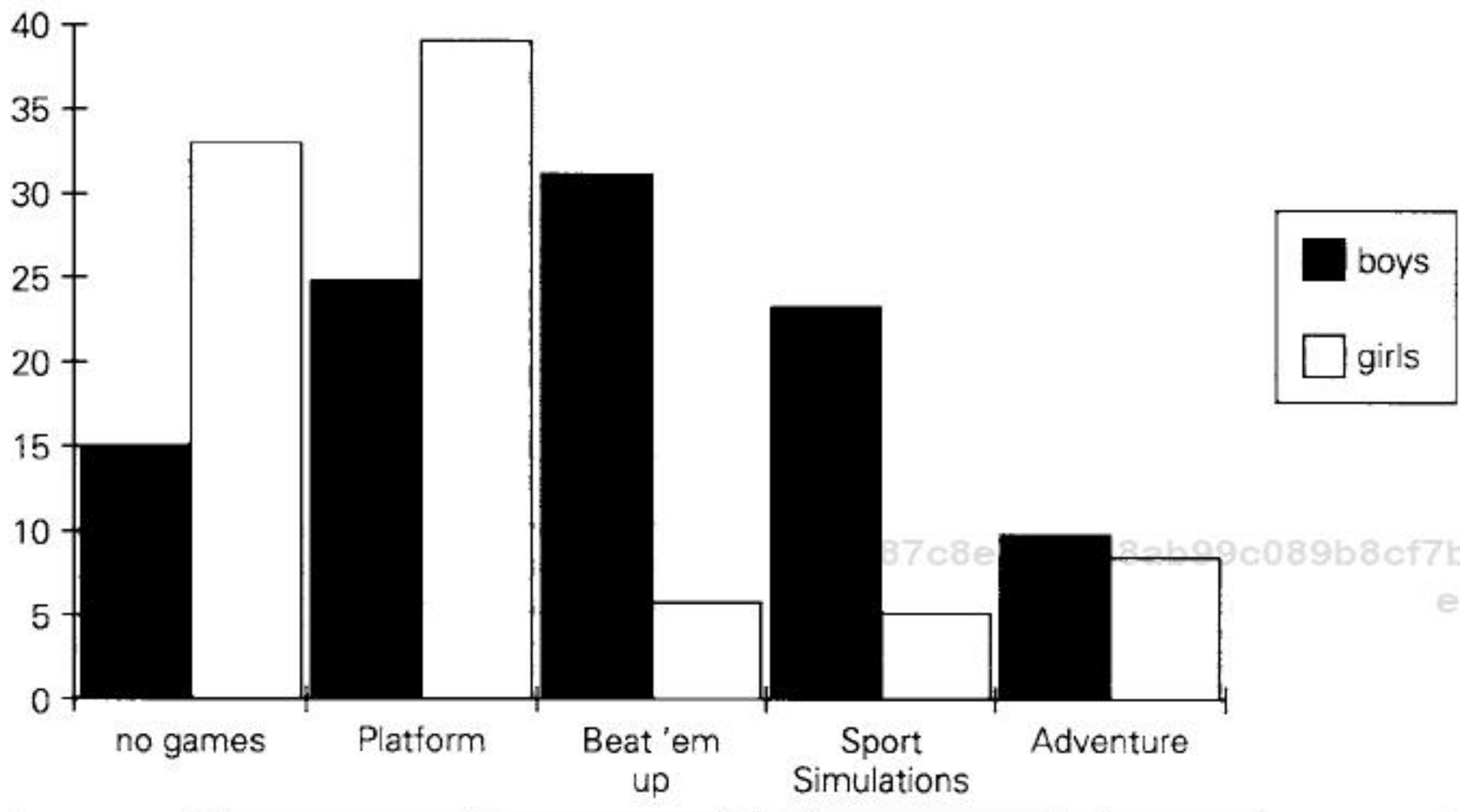
I read more at school than at home and when I do read at home it's usually because I am very bored. I buy PC magazines to keep up to date with new game systems. I play computer games like *Rise of the Robots*, *Sam and Sid* and *Ali's Incredible Cartoons*. (Q)

Table 12: Types of computer games

Category of program	Description
Arcade	Games based on commercial successes found in arcades; usually involve a lot of zapping; frequently enemy space ships. Example: <i>Street Fighter Three</i>
Role Play/Adventure	In these games the player selects a character and a starting point for an adventure or quest which points are often built up to exchange for precious objects, keys to rooms or magic weapons; narratives often involve fantasy characters such as warlocks and wizards. Example: <i>Zelda</i>
Platform	Games where the player progresses through a castle, dungeon or similar complex environment, moving from place to place to get to a specific point where there is an object to find, or someone to rescue. Examples: <i>Super Mario</i> ; <i>Sonic the Hedgehog</i>
Sports Simulation	A game based on the rules and strategies of an existing sport such as golf, rugby or football. Examples: <i>Sensible Soccer</i> ; <i>Football Manager</i>
Beat 'em up	Games in which the player defeats a series of enemies using a range of weapons and battle strategies. Examples: <i>Street Fighter</i> ; <i>Mortal Kombat</i>
Puzzle	A platform or adventure game where particular problems have to be solved to allow the player on to the next section; used in education to encourage children to solve maths problems. Example: <i>Monkey Island</i>
Strategy	Games with more complex problems to solve for example a city to plan or an eco system to establish. Examples: <i>Sim City</i> ; <i>Global Effect</i>

As well as asking pupils to record how much time they spent each day playing such games they were also asked to record their favourite computer game programs. As was the case with the television programmes, the individual programs were then reclassified into genres. As these are often less familiar to adults than the genres used for categorizing television, it is worth offering a description of the different types of games available (see Table 12). The different types of games played by boys and girls in the survey are shown in Table 13. The most interesting comparison provided by Table 13 is in the difference between the numbers of boys and girls choosing platform or 'beat 'em up' games. Girls prefer the less violent, more quest-based formats of the platform game, in which the goal is usually to get to a particular area of a building to retrieve treasure or rescue a prisoner. Interestingly, the game most frequently named as a favourite by the girls in this survey was *Lemmings*—a game in which the player gains points and moves to higher levels, not by

Table 13: The most popular computer games: Comparison of choice of computer games by boys and girls



(Expressed as %: n girls = 121, boys = 134, total = 255)

zapping the small mammals but by saving them from destruction. Boys, on the whole, prefer the quicker paced, more violent 'beat 'em ups', with the subset 'shoot 'em ups' being especially popular. Neither of these categories require much in the way of on-line reading, but many boys report secondary reading in magazines in order to progress onto higher levels of particular programs.

In each of the three media under consideration—computer games, television and reading—the narrative satisfactions sought by the sexes appear markedly different. Most popular with boys are computer games and even where there is no computer in the home many boys ensure they make opportunities to play with someone else's. Dwaine, for example, reports:

I play with my friend at his house. I can play on his computer, go to Anna's, play on the computer. I go to most of them in this class and have a go on theirs. (Q)

Dwaine also says that he buys his own computer magazines and scans them to help him decide which of his friends' games are worth playing.

Girls in general now also read more magazines than books and watch soaps and dramas on television. The narratives they enjoy in each media focus on the development of personal relationships, sometimes spiced with a pinch of horror. There is a continuity in the reading done at home and that required of them in school. Magazines for girls, unlike those aimed at boys, make an assumption that reading is a central part of their lives, as is reflected

by the advice given by one of the most read teenage magazines, *Seventeen*, on ways of saving money:

Want to read more books and newspapers but just can't afford them? Get thee to a library young woman, and if you think your local's a little on the fuddy-duddy side, you can always get the library to order you some cool new titles. (*Just Seventeen* 12 December 1994)

Comparisons with other Related Studies

Because I surveyed the 11–12-year-old pupils at an earlier stage than the youngest secondary group which were surveyed by Whitehead *et al.* (1977), comparisons with that study can only be speculative. It would require a more extensive and widely distributed questionnaire to confirm my findings and make direct comparisons. However, from the data collected it does appear that significant changes have occurred in the reading habits of pupils over the last twenty-five years.

Firstly, far fewer of the kinds of books that used to be the staple of late junior school and early secondary school class libraries are being read voluntarily at home by the whole age group. By this, I mean stories by well-established children's writers who receive literary awards and are recommended frequently by teachers; writers such as Penelope Lively, Alan Garner, Betsy Byars, and Susan Cooper. At ages 10+ and 12+, Whitehead *et al.* reported a strong correlation between the availability of books in school and the score for the number of times a particular book had been read at the time of the survey. The Whitehead team suggested that the predominance of such old favourites as *Black Beauty*, *Treasure Island* and *Little Women* and the relatively thin representation of more recent writers of books for children was attributable to their availability.

Certainly in one of the schools in my survey, where respondents reported having shared more books with their Year 6 teacher in the previous year, an interest was recorded in titles such as *The Silver Sword*, *Stig of the Dump* and *I am David*, which seemed to have grown from their teacher's recommendation. Another finding to support the importance of the schools' role in reading is that almost a third of the respondents, and within that group a large number of the boys, chose to read mainly in school (see Table 22, p. 91) so that their reading will be almost entirely shaped by what was made available for them by teachers. What is also evident is that children are moving at an earlier age to more popular forms of teenage fiction, represented by titles in the *Point Horror* series, and literary spin-offs from popular television programmes or films, such as *Red Dwarf* or *Alien*. At 11+ the reading of pupils in all the classes are finely balanced between the childhood tastes of adventure, and slapstick comedy, represented by authors such as Dahl and Blyton, and the fictional teenage world to which they aspire

(Sarland, 1994). It is at this stage where the reading of the sexes begins to diverge most significantly with more boys choosing not to read for any significant amount of time and some girls turning to magazines and television for their main narrative satisfactions.

The figures of 33 per cent of boys and 24 per cent of girls who do not choose to read books represents an increase in non-book readers from the numbers recorded by Whitehead *et al.* (1977). The latter survey found 15.8 per cent of non-reading boys at 10+ and 9.4 per cent of girls. My figures record almost twice as many non-reading boys at this state but, even more surprisingly, more than twice as many girls who, at the beginning of the secondary phase, preferred not to read or who choose to read very little. Whitehead *et al.* (1977), however, did record roughly comparable increases in non-readers at 12+, of 33.2 per cent for boys and 23.2 per cent for girls.

One reason for the size of the increase in the proportions of non-readers reported in this study may be caused by a bias in my study towards 11–16 comprehensive schools, located largely in working-class areas. Whitehead *et al.* (1977), however, had included, as part of the national survey with strict sampling, a proportion of selective grammar schools and some independent schools.

A second factor in the difference between these and the 1977 results was occasioned by my decision to ask the respondents to comment on their individual choice of books, rather than requiring them to record the title of the book currently being read. This gave permission to those pupils who had a class reader, which they have been obliged to choose by their teacher but would not read voluntarily, to record no books at all. In previous studies, it is often possible to uncover a relationship between the books most frequently chosen by pupils and those provided for them in their class libraries. This suggests that the books recorded in the surveys are not always chosen as 'voluntarily' as the researchers may have assumed.

A third factor is that the drop in reading occurs most significantly at the beginning of secondary education, and these 11-year-olds were already exhibiting a tendency not to choose works of fiction other than those chosen for them as class readers. Whereas junior schools still tend to provide specific times for independent reading, this is not as often the case in many secondary schools at Key Stage 3 where independent reading is often assumed to be located in the home. The questioning of the Whitehead team's 10+ sample had been conducted in the final year of the primary schools and was therefore strongly influenced by the books provided for their reading by the school. Indeed, in their recommendations, Whitehead's team expressed the opinion that school provision had a powerful influence on pupils' choice (1977, p. 286).

Other recent studies support the evidence for a decline in interest in fiction. Peter Benton conducted a survey of the reading tastes of Year 8 pupils in Oxfordshire comprehensive schools, where he found numbers of boys comparable to mine who chose not to read fiction at all; that is, 30 per cent of

his sample reported not having read a book in the four weeks prior to the survey. The list he compiled of the most popular titles of books read by the sample also contains a comparable preponderance of horror series fiction titles, and liberal dashes of Roald Dahl.

A pilot survey of 'Juvenile Reading Habits', conducted by Roehampton Institute (1994), also found that adventure was the most popular genre at Key Stage 2, particularly with boys, while the girls moved towards horror and romance (pp. 20–1). However, it is less easy to make direct comparisons with the Roehampton data because of the research decision to clump together a wide age range by each Key Stage. This is of particular significance at Key Stage 3 when, as other studies have shown, tastes begin to diverge most significantly. The framing of the Roehampton questions, with lists of options to check off, also meant that pupils may have opted for books that they thought they might like to read rather than those they were actually currently reading. This supposition is supported by evidence from a number of boys in my study, whom I have labelled '**hypothetical readers**', because they wrote about books they 'would choose' rather than particular titles they had recently read.

Whitehead and his team (1977) also noted a movement away from fictional narrative in comics to non-fiction periodicals by boys at 14+ (pp. 156–61). This trend has now moved downwards to a younger age group. The introduction of a wide range of computer-related publishing has meant interest in hobby-related reading has become even more pronounced. Whitehead's 14-year-olds also recorded reading magazines about angling, football, engines and pop music. In my study, the 11+ boys chose mainly to read about computers and football, although specialist interests such as wrestling, guns and ammunition, fishing, motorcycles and classic cars were also represented. From observations of other classes in the schools visited, these specialist magazines become more popular as they mature. Girls' periodical reading consisted almost entirely of teenage magazines, which combine some fictional elements with facts and fantasies about what appears to be young women's main interests, the relationship of the sexes, including explicit advice on sex.

Summary

This chapter has set out in some detail the relationships found to exist between the pupils' choice of reading, their leisure activities and their gender. Significant differences have been shown to exist not only in boys' and girls' choices of books, but also in alternative forms of narrative distraction, such as favourite television programmes, video recordings and computer games. Although a further all round decrease in the amount of time spent reading at this stage has been recorded, it is the boys in the study who are shown to be at a greater disadvantage in the reading curriculum. I have demonstrated above all that not only do they read fewer books, but that their favoured

genres are less in harmony with the English curriculum and the choices made for them in class by their teachers. The largest contrast is between boys' interest in action and adventure, and girls' preference for emotion and relationships. It is an issue to which I shall return in Chapter 6, in a discussion of the effects of reading habits in reinforcing stereotypical differences found in pupils' writing. Next, however, I want to concentrate on the act of reading itself, in particular, the manner in which boys and girls are inducted in separate ways into communities of readers, both at home and in school.