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“Books That Civilize as Well as Satisfy”

Surveying Children’s Reading Habits in 1940s and 1950s Australia and New Zealand

Bronwyn Lowe

In 1906, New Zealand journalist and strident imperialist Constance Barnicoat published the results of a survey of colonial girls’ reading habits from across the empire in popular British journal *Nineteenth Century and After*.[1] In choosing to focus on “colonial girls,” Barnicoat was fighting against the prevailing idea that colonial girls would not be as intelligent as those girls from the British Isles. Yet Barnicoat concluded that the results of the survey were quite positive, noting that many girls read Charles Dickens, Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen.[2] She defended the few “inferior” results of the survey in comparison with a similar survey of British girls by arguing that the responses of country girls and Indian girls had been included; the girls surveyed had also been younger than the respondents of the British survey.[3] Barnicoat’s hope that girls would be reading the “right” fiction is indicative of a widely held concern developing throughout the first half of the twentieth century: that girls should grow up preparing for their future roles as wives and mothers—and girls’ reading of the “right” books was thought to help achieve this.

As reading surveys of Australian and New Zealand children continued to be conducted throughout the twentieth century, they reflected a raft of differing concerns amidst a growing moral panic. This panic encompassed fears about the rise of new technologies and children’s declining intelligence, and also the effect of American comics on young children. Educationists and sociologists worried that the material that children were consuming would affect their psychological development. Some of these concerns were similar to those of their international counterparts in Britain, the US, and Canada. Others more closely reflected widely-held antipodean concerns about the state of Australia and New Zealand as new nations. Yet the actual results of reading surveys conducted across the nations are similar, with Martyn

Lyons noting the "remarkable convergence of young peoples' reading tastes around a few celebrated titles" internationally across this period.[4] Books that appear repeatedly across decades and nations across this period include L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* series and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* for girls, and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* for boys. The main difference for Australian children in particular was the appearance of certain Australian children's classic books in lists of favourite books, namely Ethel Turner's *Seven Little Australians* and Mary Grant Bruce's *Billabong* series. All of these books were recorded by surveyors with approval as being both socially and intellectually appropriate for children aged from around ten to fourteen years old.

This article will examine a range of surveys taken over the 1940s and 50s in Australia and New Zealand, focusing on W.J. Scott's 1947 survey of New Zealand children's reading habits, and Connell, Francis and Skilbeck's account of Australian adolescents' reading habits published in 1957. Because the children who were surveyed for such projects were of a similar age, a close comparison of the projects is possible and, indeed, highly useful.

When examining the surveys of children's reading habits undertaken over this period, it is important to keep in mind the limitations of using such studies as historical data. Results are interpreted by adults interested in focusing on a particular aspect of reading habits, with their own concerns and fears about what they might find. However, Kathleen McDowell argues that, in comparison with other evidence of children's reading habits, surveys have certain advantages: "Data was collected in a more timely manner than similar data taken from the biographies of adult individuals remembering back to their young reading interests," she states. "Children's responses to surveys were given in both multiple-choice and more open-ended forms, so that there is a substantial body of children's own writings about their reading."[5] These factors lend a voice to the children participating in such surveys, giving them agency to showcase the various ways in which they chose to read. Rather than focusing on the results of the surveys themselves, however, this article will address the motivations and concerns of those conducting the surveys—which are vitally present in the analysis of the results that they publish.

Surveys have often been used to find out what children were reading in any given time period. In the United States and the United Kingdom surveys became prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century, and they have continued to be conducted until the present day. Historians of reading Helen Da-

mon-Moore and Carl F. Kaestle, Jonathan Rose and Joseph McAleer have all made important contributions to their field through their use of historical reading surveys.[6] Yet few historians have sought to focus on the motivations and concerns of adults in conducting such surveys.

Reading surveys proliferated throughout the first half of the twentieth century.[7] In fact, in 1946 American curriculum consultant Bernice E. Leary was already remarking on their prevalence, noting especially of high school students that "their reading preferences have been discovered and re-discovered, until there is no doubt that the best readers among them have no quarrel with the classics in the right place, that the average elect contemporary literature, and that the weight of free choice is for a rather wholesome mixture" of texts. [8] Leary saw the intense focus on the results of such surveys as being ultimately unhelpful, as she saw the particular stress on the detrimental impact of radio and film on children as not being grounded in solid evidence.[9] Yet such surveys continued to be conducted.

The first large-scale reading survey wasn't undertaken in Australia until the 1930s, when the Melbourne Teachers' College surveyed over 3,000 Victorian children. The results of this survey were meant to be published by the Australian Council for Educational Research but they have since been lost, and only extracts of the survey survive until this day. By the 1940s, when more surveys of this kind were starting to be made, they tended to follow Terman and Lima's 1931 model of studying "the qualitative and quantitative aspects of children's reading, with special reference to individual differences caused by age, sex, intelligence and special interests."[10] However, the most illuminating conclusions from these surveys can be taken not from their results, but from how the surveyors record and then analyze these results.

Understanding Adults' Approaches to Children's Reading Habits

Reading surveys can and should be seen in the context of the vast social surveys undertaken across the Western world over the first half of the twentieth century. Seth Koven notes that "the social survey can be seen as inherently value-laden, a product of and servant to politics and the state," going on to say that such surveys "played an important role in shaping social policy, social reform and social work."[11] The reading surveys discussed in this article fit into this model in a way, as the conductors of the surveys aim to shape

library policies and reform English curriculums—thus shaping the future citizens themselves. Yet they also reflect the various interests of the librarians, educational researchers and sociologists that undertook such surveys.

The concerns authors lay out in their published findings should also be seen as part of a wider moral panic surrounding children's reading experiences, and especially their readership of comics. Since Stanley Cohen's pioneering work into moral panics was published in 1972, this area has seen great attention.[12] Moral panics often focus on the behaviour or habits of children and youth, and so many historians have since attempted to piece together adults' attitudes towards children's behaviours and habits. Kirsten Drotner, in discussing the media panic, which is what she calls a specification of the wider moral panic, classifies it as an adult discussion primarily focused on children and youth, instigated and purveyed by the media. In addition, she argues, the proponents often have professional stakes in the subject, as teachers, librarians, cultural critics, or academic scholars.[13] The analyses of surveys discussed in this article should, then, be seen as responding to the media panic playing out at this time.

Styles and Arzipe argue that "adults, usually with good intentions, have always agonised about children's reading," going on to address adults' instincts in censoring such reading habits. However, history, they argue, "shows us that the healthy reaction of the young is to resist such constraints and that a goodly proportion of young readers have always defied attempts to impose conformity and limit their freedom to reach out and read as and what they please."[14] This was certainly the case among Australian and New Zealand youth, who found a myriad of different ways to access books and magazines not necessarily approved of by parents and teachers.

This article will, then, argue that the analysis that the authors choose to employ on their results were both "value laden," in reflecting the concerns of the state, and a public response to the broader moral panics surrounding Australian children's recreational habits of the 1940s and 50s. Any efforts that adults made to control children's recreational habits, in addition, were effectively foiled by the methods that children used to access banned books anyway.

W.J. Scott and Postwar Concerns for Children

The Second World War irrevocably changed girls' everyday experiences and reading habits. Children were mobilised for the war effort in huge num-

bers, mainly through schools. Children also dug trenches, collected salvage, bought war loan certificates, sold raffle tickets and performed in fundraising contests.[15] Newspapers reported on these activities with joy. But such endeavors were contrasted with stories expressing dismay that many children were progressing down the wrong track to adulthood. This was part of a broader moral panic fuelled by the worry that wartime strains would bring about the moral degradation of society, and children specifically. In Australia the *West Australian* reported that "boys found themselves disturbed by war conditions and for many girls war was an artificial stimulus. It often meant glamour and excitement, and emotional conflicts which the family could handle in peace time became sharpened by the war tension."[16] Concerns about girls, on the other hand, centered on how their sexuality might be affected, and newspapers commented on the growing amount of girls they feared were heading down the path to prostitution.[17] More broadly, there were also worries about discontented youth. This was seen as an issue during the war when unfailing patriotism was expected, but it continued after the war ended, with articles looking to help youth who were "suffering from the upheavals of war."[18] This scale of moral panic had been unprecedented in Australian history.

Concerns about a negative American cultural influence on Australian children also proliferated. Varied reading material was becoming harder to find, as governments banned material not considered to be "essential" to the war effort.[19] Adults writing letters in the press worried that children were being corrupted by American culture in the form of comics and romance books, and the belief that good books were an antidote for poor "mental hygiene" remained common.[20] These concerns had become common in Australia and New Zealand in the 1920s and 1930s, but now took a wartime turn. Yet wartime conditions in Australia and New Zealand actually conspired to make it more difficult for children to access what might have been considered to be harmful American publications. Severe restrictions were put into place against the importation of such material, and international comics, film and radio magazines, and fashion publications were prohibited from entering the country.[21]

Nevertheless the 1940s saw an explosion of interest in how Australian and New Zealand children were occupying their time, during a period of what was considered to be significant psychological stress. In this context Joan Coates published a survey of 700 school students from a variety of schools in the city and the country for her Masters of Education thesis at the Melbourne Teachers' College in 1943.[22] Coates did not have any survey

training for this project. Instead, and at the suggestion of prominent Melbourne educationist G.S. Browne, who was looking to see whether or not children's reading habits had changed in the last ten years, she based her survey on the Melbourne Teachers' College survey, the results of which had been lost by the time her work was completed.

Being unable to compare her results to the results of the Teachers' College survey, Coates presented her work as a stand-alone survey. Reflecting the wartime setting of her results, Coates showed that while boys were most interested in reading the war news section of the newspaper, girls turned first to the children's section.[23] Coates showed that school and adventure stories were the favourite genres among girls, recording girls' favourite books to be *Little Women* and *Anne of Green Gables*. Australian authors Mary Grant Bruce and Ethel Turner were also popular among girls.[24] One of the conclusions that Coates drew from her study was that "it seems to be true that though girls often read books written for boys, boys rarely read books written for girls," a finding consistent with the findings of other scholars around that period.[25]

Coates' own assumptions about boys' and girls' reading were presented quite clearly in the text. In writing that "on the whole the girls' tastes seem to be more stereotyped and less interesting than the boys," her value judgement that boys' reading was of a higher quality than girls' reading was made clear—but this was a common assumption to make across the first half of the twentieth century. In her work on British children's reading from 1880–1910, for example, Kimberley Reynolds draws a distinction between what was considered at the time to be "high" and "low" areas of juvenile publishing. Reynolds argues that high fiction consisted of those works "recognised as having literary merit," including "boys' adventure and school stories" and "depictions of bourgeois family life"; whereas low fiction consisted of "those works denied literary merit, notably girls' stories and 'bloods' or comics." High fiction, including the mainstream of children's literature, "tended to be read by both sexes," whereas low fiction was mainly written for girls and working-class children.[26] Such assumptions are present throughout Coates's work. When she wrote that her ultimate aim was to cultivate "a perception of literary values" in school students, girls' reading habits were considered to be a particular priority.[27]

According to surveys of the type conducted by Joan Coates, the most popular American books read by children during the 1940s were in fact always children's classics that were approved by parents and teachers. Yet in recording her findings, Coates still questioned how the quality of books

that boys and girls were reading might be improved. She was particularly concerned about the content of comics and magazines, and worried that while they were by no means the most popular form of magazine among girls, "film magazines might have a harmful effect on the girls because they present a meretricious scale of values emphasizing beauty, glamour, wealth and notoriety, and making light of divorce and unfaithfulness."[28] This worry seems overstated considering that the *Australian Women's Weekly*, which presented a much more traditional vision of Australian femininity, was overwhelmingly the most popular magazine among girls.[29]

After the war, concerns about magazines' and comics' harmful effects on girls did not abate. In 1947 the biggest survey of antipodean children's reading habits to be published so far was received with wide acclaim when W.J. Scott presented the results of a survey of New Zealand secondary-school-aged boys' and girls' reading, film, and radio habits. Scott was heavily involved in the education profession in New Zealand as a lecturer in English at the Wellington Teachers' Training College, honorary secretary of the Wellington branch of the National Education Fellowship, and a founding member of the Wellington Co-operative Book Society.[30] His study stemmed from a request by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research for an investigation into the teaching of English in the post-primary school; the survey was to correspond with a separate study on the teaching of English in secondary schools by Professor Ian Gordon. So while Scott's survey focused on children's reading habits at home, rather than their reading of school books, it was also designed to assist English teachers in finding out what books children enjoyed.

Scott's questionnaire was given to 3,972 schoolchildren, aged mostly between 13 and 18, for them to fill out in the classroom in October of 1942. Yet any impact that this classroom environment might have placed on the students' responses was not mentioned. Scott was by his own admission an "inexperienced investigator," and he did not have any formal social science training to conduct the survey. As such, his project is not deeply concerned with questions of methodology—such questions are treated in a much more sustained manner by the sociologists Connell, Francis, and Skilbeck in their 1958 survey.

The 1942 questionnaire comprised a range of different questions about children's reading of books, periodicals, and poetry and plays. Questions about their habits regarding the cinema and radio were also asked. Scott based his questions largely on an English survey by A.J. Jenkinson entitled, *What Do Boys and Girls Read? An Investigation into Reading Habits with*

Some Suggestions about the Teaching of Literature in Secondary and Senior Schools, which was published in 1940. So in the same way that Coates's project had been conceived as a response to an earlier reading survey, Scott's project also continued the conversation conducted through Jenkinson's work. Indeed, many surveys across the period speak to each other in this way, and show an awareness of other work being completed in the field. Accordingly, similar questions and concerns are also raised throughout the texts.

Scott and Jenkinson both explained that the aim of their research was to contribute to the improvement of the teaching of literature in schools, but both men also revealed a great deal about their personal concerns about children's reading habits, in response to prevailing attitudes towards this in the 1940s. In the introduction to his survey results, Scott argued that "a knowledge of the books, magazines, newspapers, films, and radio items that [children] voluntarily choose to fill their leisure hours is indispensible if the task of teaching English, and particularly English literature, is to be well done."[31] Jenkinson's main thesis throughout his book was that teachers continuously gave children the wrong books to read: books that were too far above their level of reading interest and expertise.[32] He argued that, if gently encouraged to read in the right direction, children would develop their own healthy reading habits. However, Scott refrained from recommending giving New Zealand children this much agency in their reading choice in his survey; his concerns about books' and comics' impact on children's development thus came through much more strongly. These concerns are particularly apparent in Scott's reflections that students were not "being successfully taught to like the best literature they [were] capable of."[33]

Scott's survey was produced in a period of increasing fears that children were reading the "wrong" sort of books, that they were reading less overall and that their reading of comic books was eroding their intelligence.[34] Scott himself worried that even children who read English periodicals like the *Champion* or the *Crystal* would retract into a life of fantasy rather than trying to understand or grapple with the real world.[35] The results of his survey, however, go some way towards challenging prevailing concerns about childhood at the time. In the findings of his survey Scott presented separate results for favorite book titles and favorite authors. For girls *Little Women* took the top position, *Anne of Green Gables* came second, and *Good Wives*, the sequel to *Little Women*, third.[36] For boys Stevenson's *Treasure Island,* Ballantyne's *Coral Island*, and Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* made up their favourite three books.[37] Among both girls and boys, socially approved children's classics made up the majority of their top ten most popular books.

Despite these results, Scott expressed great concern over the books that children were reading. He discussed the difficulties of developing in children a proper taste in books "that civilize as well as satisfy," and noted that the solution would involve many changes, both at school and at home. "Then it could be expected that the liking for Dickens would increase still further . . . the girls' need for emotional relationships be satisfied by more Jane Austen, Dickens, and George Eliot and less Georgette Heyer, G.S. Porter, and A.J. Cronin."[38] Here he showed a belief that reading of the "proper" literature would stimulate girls' correct development, and this was a common sentiment of the time. Yet rather than noting a trend of children turning away from the "great authors," Scott showed Dickens to be the third most popular author among both girls and boys. His results did show that American literature had become very influential by the 1940s, a fear held by many Australians. Yet the majority of American books such as *Little Women* recorded in the survey were approved of by most Australians. Scott's concerns were, then, heavily overstated—perhaps influenced by the common calls of the time for children's reading habits to be improved.

Through Scott's reflections on children's favourite books shines a defense of a canon of children's literature, which he saw as coming under threat from more temporarily popular novels and magazines. Many scholars have attempted to define what a classic novel is, describing a literary work that has "endured over time, has universal meaning," and explaining that "more than one age has read it and decided that it has something really important to say."[39] For Scott and most adults around this time, authors of children's classics included Louisa May Alcott, L.M. Montgomery, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Mark Twain, and Robert Louis Stevenson—and these classics continue to remain in the canon today, represented in series such as the Oxford Children's Classics. Other children's books, including books by Mary Grant Bruce, R.M. Ballantyne, and the Biggles series, were socially accepted at the time but were not considered, in Scott's eyes, to be classics. Many of these books have struggled to retain so many readers.

Often parents and teachers started seeing such books as being out of date, whereas children's classics were considered to have more universal messages. Bruce's books, for example, fell out of print in the 1960s, and would later be seen by teachers and librarians to be racist and sexist. Brenda Niall concedes "there is no denying the racial stereotypes in the Bruce novels," but argues that Bruce "has been misjudged by anxious censors who have not seen her work in historical perspective." She states that the books "have been taken to task with a severity which can only be explained by the

special vigilance given to children's reading," indicating that concerns about children's literature remain perennial.[40]

Scott's explanations for the reading preferences of girls versus boys illustrate widely held views about the differences between the sexes. He noted that girls tended to re-read books more frequently than boys, and that their reading tastes were more varied. While girls read domestic and romantic tales in large numbers, they also read "boys' stories," including adventure and detective stories. Scott shows that boys' reading habits were narrower, and focused mainly on adventure, detective, and humorous stories. Scott posited that the explanation for these differences was "probably to be found in the greater intensity of the girls' responses and their more comprehensive curiosity about people and personal relationships," going on to observe that "girls remain the 'gentler' sex, temperamentally and physically more sensitive than the 'stronger' one, and endowed with greater delicacy of feeling and a warmer sympathy for the weak."[41]

In this analysis Scott showed himself to have similar attitudes towards the different reading habits of boys and girls as did previous surveyors of children's reading habits who simply attributed the differences between boys' and girls' reading habits to differing temperaments.[42] Yet the analyses recorded in such stories do not take strongly into account the varied life experiences of boys and girls in this period; they miss out on several of the differences between their experiences of reading as well. One main aspect of their reading experiences missing from such surveys is a detailed understanding of how children accessed their books. At a time when books were still very expensive, many children received books from parents and relations only at birthdays and Christmas time; another common way of receiving books was as school prizes. As a result, children did not have as much choice as is commonly assumed in such surveys to pick all of their books themselves; they were directed repeatedly towards the types of books thought to be the most appropriate for them—and this was commonly based on their gender. This was also the case in libraries, with many librarians taking an active role in removing certain books from children's book choices.[43] These factors all would have conspired together to direct children towards socially approved books for boys and girls—an issue not taken strictly into account by Scott and other surveyors.

Scott's concerns over the detrimental effects cheap literature may have been having on children's minds were also reflected in his analysis of children's reading of poetry and plays. His educational focus also shines through, as he directly connected children's readership of poetry with the ef-

fectiveness of their classroom teachers—in this way placing the responsibility on the teacher rather than the child.[44] In reporting average results of the readership of poetry outside of school, Scott reflected that "to get the emotional release that poetry has always been able to give the willing listener or reader, [children] are taught to go instead to its modern competitors—the film and radio . . . in the face of this competition poetry of any subtlety and delicacy of feeling has little chance of attracting many readers."[45] He opined that teachers themselves did not have the necessary training or knowledge to inspire students to read more than the poems that appear in school textbooks and anthologies, and argued that poetry would help children aspire to develop and mature emotionally.

The results of Scott's survey were reported on widely in Australia and New Zealand; his impact in Australia was heightened by his presence at several educational conferences there shortly after his book was published. At such conferences, he continued to present on the importance of encouraging in children a love of the "right" literature, so that they would be discouraged from the reading of comics and magazines.[46] Scott's work was also recommended briefly by the famed British children's literature advocate Geoffrey Trease in his book *Tales out of School.* Trease remarked that everyone should read Scott's chapter on the reading of comic books and magazines—even though, at the time that Scott conducted his survey, many comics and magazines had in fact been banned from importation to New Zealand due to wartime restrictions, which further limited what was available to children.[47]

Despite its drawbacks in analysis of the results of his survey, Scott's work has in fact proved to be enormously useful and indeed influential to future scholars interested in surveying children's reading habits; his results correspond closely to surveys conducted around the same time across the Western world. Yet the concerns that Scott threaded throughout his work also serve to illuminate to scholars the prevailing attitudes and concerns of the time; it is these concerns that make Scott's work interesting as a cultural and historical artefact. His fears regarding the detrimental impact of film, radio and comics on the reading habits of children show the strength of these concerns around the globe. Scott's intended use of this survey as a tool for teachers to improve their students' reading habits, on the other hand, gives us valuable insights into the perceived role of teachers during this period. It also shows the lack of agency afforded to the students themselves in their emotional development—instead teachers, using classic literature and poetry as their aid, were expected to take on this responsibility.

Surveying Australian Adolescents in the 1950s

In comparison to previous decades, in the 1950s children started staying at school for longer, completing the various Leaving certificates that provided pathways into expanding white collar jobs.[48] Indeed, Lees and Senyard argue that it was the increased duration of children's schooling in this decade and "a greater recognition of the individual" that brought the issue of the teenager to new prominence.[49] There was also a new emphasis on the sexualised teenager, about which many Australians expressed concern, and fears of the effects of American comics also re-emerged as they started to enter Australia in greater and greater numbers.[50] These comics were viewed as flooding the Australian market with violent, sexual and intellectually inferior material; they were also seen to distract children from reading good books.[51] In 1956, the introduction of television provoked similar fears among Australian adults, some of whom were convinced that children's reading and literacy levels would drop.[52]

A growing number of newspaper articles debating the issue of children's reading habits was accompanied by more sociological research on children overall, as university-based sociological surveys of specific groups began to accumulate.[53] Reading surveys continued to be conducted by individual librarians or teachers who questioned children from one particular area or school; these were often published in the *Australian Library Journal*.[54] Most of these surveys sought to identify children's favourite books, how many books they were borrowing and the sort of books that they liked to borrow. While these surveys aimed to find out such information in order to better serve the children, like W.J. Scott's 1947 New Zealand survey they also reveal adult concerns about the quality of books that children were reading. Yet we see other agendas promoted in these types of surveys as well. As Kathleen McDowell writes, reading surveys of children conducted by librarians also tend to focus on librarians' ability to inspire in children a love of reading; the promotion of the good work that librarians do is often a feature of these surveys.[55]

In 1957 sociologists Connell, Francis, and Skilbeck published *Growing Up in an Australian City*, based on a study which had surveyed 9,500 adolescents, approximately 10 percent of the adolescent population of wider Sydney, on a wide range of issues. It was at the time the largest survey of Australia's youth to be conducted.[56] This survey, which began in 1951, had arisen out of a desire among Education students at the University of Sydney to study the relationship between Australian culture and Australia's educa-

tional programme and theories. While the students themselves did not have formal social science training, the project was supervised by Connell, Francis, and Skilbeck, who were accomplished social scientists at the top of their field—at a time when sociology was just starting to boom in Australia. The discipline would start to gain much more traction moving into the 1960s.[57]

Positioned as being concerned with the future of Australia's adolescents, and being much more wide-ranging than any previous surveys, the project elicited great interest around Australia. The fact that the lead authors were all professional sociologists also lent the project more weight when it was discussed in newspapers. The allure attached to the professionalization of the project was something that the authors took advantage of when they made explicit public policy suggestions.

The surveyors were keenly aware of the social differences between different groups of adolescents, and so they were surveyed proportionately to the number of children from upper, middle and lower class living areas, and they conceived the survey as a way to represent the interests and development of Australian adolescents more generally. In the 1950s this was a common way to use sociological surveys. Mike Savage, for example, writes that "by defining the local as a site of social change, rather than as a location in a wider landscape, [sociologists] abstracted the local study from its environment, and so mobilized them as displaced exemplars of the nation." He goes on to write that these projects "involved the use of sampling, survey, and interview methods, which gave sociologists a distinctive lever to prise change open."[58] Connell, Francis, and Skilbeck aimed to use their analysis of a quickly changing adolescent population to effect change in Australia's educational policies.

Concerns over how Australian culture was promulgated through Australia's youth pervaded the wide-ranging survey. The survey seeks to present a new understanding of Australia's youth through the application of three themes—"learning appropriate roles," "achieving emotional stability," and "seeking intellectual maturity," in which the reading of appropriate books was seen to assist. The main concern presented throughout the survey was, then, that Australia's youth develop into healthy and productive Australian citizens.

During the survey, 629 adolescents had been asked about their reading and film-watching habits specifically, including 13–15-year-old girls, and 13–18-year-old boys. The survey separated the boys into two groups, comprising 13–15-year-old boys at school, and 15–18-year-old-boys that were all out of school at this time.[59] These adolescents answered questions on

their reading habits as part of a larger survey called "Twenty Questions," for which they answered a range of different questions about their recreational habits. The survey's chapter on "the pattern of adolescents' book reading" returned to the theme of the promulgation of Australian culture, and it was particularly concerned with what the survey conductors saw as the Americanisation of the adolescents' reading habits.

In this way it conveyed similar concerns to Scott's survey of the state of adolescents' reading habits, and these authors also promoted a focus on developing "good reading habits." Yet again this stress on "good reading" appeared overstated as the authors went on to present their findings. Of the 90 13-year-old girls who had been surveyed on their reading, Eleanor Porter's *Pollyanna* was the most frequently mentioned book, named by five different girls. It was also the most popular book for the fourteen-year-old girls. The *Anne of Green Gables* books and the *Little Women* books were also popular for both ages.[60] In this case girls' reading tastes were explained by arguing that their preferences for "stories of home life, gentle sentiment, and tempered excitement" gave them "a feeling of security and stability in an unsure world."[61] The authors noted that most of the girls' favourite books at this stage are books that "have been popular with this age group for at least a generation."[62] They are the books that the authors widely accept to be suitable for the age group, to be high in quality and have a worthwhile message—they are, then, books of the accepted canon of children's literature. But again the authors neglected to tease out the different ways that girls had been steered towards these books their whole lives.

These authors did, however, allow for the influence of schools on girls' reading habits.[63] They suggested that school libraries would be more likely to carry older books, and that school staff would be more likely to recommend older fiction rather than more recently published works. The authors added that "the strong narrative element in most of the classics carries an appeal to the adolescent, while most of the modern novels demand an emotional awareness and a willingness to understand the psychological implications of human conflict for which few 13 to 15-year-olds are prepared."[64] This explanation again shows that sociologists had a limited understanding of how girls were handling early adolescence in postwar Australia. While the idea that girls would read such books as an antidote to what was going on in the world is legitimate, this impulse does not seem to be present in girls' autobiographies and memoirs; nor do they normally mention a sense of uncertainty at this time in their lives.[65]

The authors had a similar attitude towards boys' reading habits, pointing out thirteen-year-old boys' love of Biggles, but also of *Treasure Island*,

Uncle Tom's Cabin and *Wind in the Willows*. The authors devoted a few pages to exploring the Biggles books, evidently looking to assuage any concerns that parents might have about the books' excessive readership among young boys. They noted that the books' attraction for boys was in their focus on action over any deeper sense of emotion or explication of characters' motivations. Likening them in this way to adventure comics, they regretfully reported that "younger adolescents do not have available to them a supply of literature which combines the attractiveness of Johns' skilful plot development with a more sensitive criticism of human life and character at a level which can be appreciated by them."[66] On the other hand, they worried that schools tended to direct boys towards more modern books when they did not have the emotional maturity to deal with them. Again in this work appears an implicit belief that socially accepted children's classics were more appropriate for children than more modern books. The canon of children's literature, then, continued to be defended with little attention being paid to the importance to children of more contemporary and relevant books.

Having set up a sense of boys' and girls' maturity levels through the rest of their surveys, Connell, Francis, and Skilbeck were perhaps better equipped to analyze the effect of such books on adolescents' emotional lives than was Scott. Nevertheless in their analysis of both boys' and girls' attitudes towards books, the authors still neglected to track how exactly children located and accessed books that they wanted to read; they placed primary responsibility on the schools in influencing children towards appropriate books and they did not take into account the other ways children accessed books at this time. There was minimal acknowledgment that there might be a contrast between books that children were reading, or being encouraged to read, at home versus at school, for instance.

This aspect of children's reading habits was more effectively established in Marjorie Roe's 1958 survey of 326 children from the Mittagong area of New South Wales. A school librarian, she does not appear to have had any formal social science training. Instead, Roe was motivated by a sense of great unease that children were being steered towards books that were simply popular, arguing that teachers and librarians must "seek continually to improve their reading taste in accord with what they need if they are to develop fully and mature."[67] Roe based her work on Scott's survey, and the two projects reflect similar concerns.

Roe noted the extreme popularity of Enid Blyton books among boys and girls of particular schools, stating that "fifty-three per cent of all girls and 31 per cent of all boys named Blyton" as their favourite author.[68] She stated

that "for individual schools the figures ranged from 68 per cent for Blyton down to *nil*," going on to show that girls' schools and peer groups in fact played as large a role in how girls chose their reading matter as did the recommendations of school teachers.[69]

Roe was, for the most part, scathing of schools' influences on children's reading habits, writing that when children were asked for the titles of books that had been recommended to them by teachers, the answers "were not encouraging. 200 titles were mentioned and 101 of them were classics. . . . The good contemporary children's fiction recommended by teachers did not amount to more than three per cent of the total recommendations."[70] Like Bernice E. Leary before her, Roe worried about the lessons that people would take from the findings of reading surveys, writing that while most reading surveys ended up making generalisations about what books children read, "there is no reason to believe that because children read and like 'bloods,' unlikely adventures, and romances, that these are the types of books they *need*—for example, for their best possible development through the period of change known as adolescence."[71]

These attitudes and concerns are clear in Connell, Francis, and Skilbeck's discussions of Sydney adolescents reading comics. The sociologists were particularly wary of what they called romantic comics, with "provocative titles such as *Dramatic Love*, *True Sweetheart Secrets*, and *Intimate Confessions*" that "invite the reader to share vicariously the affairs of young men and women experimenting with their social relationships and expressing graphically their emotional reactions to the . . . circumstances into which their inexperience may lead them."[72]

While boys did read a wide range of comic genres, the authors noted that girls were reading romance comics far more than any of the other genres, which were all aimed at boys. Kevin Patrick notes that "while US reprints virtually dominated some comic book genres, such as the 'teenage' (e.g. *Archie Comics*) and 'romance' (e.g. *Young Romance*), Australian-made titles were amongst the top-sellers in other categories."[73] Therefore, concerns about the Americanisation of Australian children's culture had particular pertinence for girls, and girls were the focus of the moral panic surrounding comics at this time. This panic was fuelled by calls to ban such comics altogether. Indeed in discussing the types of comics that he would like to see banned, W. Keenan of the Catholic Young Men's Society in Benalla specified "romantic comics, which place an unhealthy emphasis on sex, crime comics, which glorify crime and criminals, and those which portray brutality and horror to excess. Certain American comics which give a farcical picture of

home and family life are also to be deplored."[74] He thus demonstrated a fear that Australia's way of life would be changed by the influence of American culture. The *Current Affairs Bulletin* argued that the reading of comics among children, "may be only a thin thread in the all-over pattern where there are good books in the home and a love of books inculcated in the children by their parents; also where parents take care to provide their children with suitable books at each stage of their development." Yet it indicated a concern that, in families where "good" reading habits were not established, the habit of comic reading would continue into adulthood.[75]

While Connell, Francis, and Skilbeck played into these prevailing concerns about adolescents' comic book reading habits, again the evidence that they reported cautioned against worrying about this issue too much at that stage. The authors admitted that, in fact, most of the adolescents that read comic books in great numbers "read slightly (though not significantly) more books a month than do the non-comic book readers. It seems that there are some adolescents who read little or nothing at all—neither comic books nor real books—and it also appears that there are other adolescents who are voracious readers, who will therefore read, irrespective of whether the matter consists of books or comics."[76] As the majority of the books that the authors had recorded adolescents to be reading were considered to be appropriate, it then should have followed that readership of these books would have proved to be an antidote against the apparently pernicious influence of American comics.

Connell, Francis, and Skilbeck's study is a useful historical artefact—not only in its recorded attitudes towards children, but also in its assumption of the central importance of reading in adolescents' development. As sociologists at a time when professionalization was being seen to be more and more valuable, their dictation of public policy towards adolescents also provided a sense of urgency to their project. While Scott had aimed for his project to be useful to specific teachers, Connell, Francis and Skilbeck used the weight of their profession to effect wider change.

In the case of Connell, Francis, and Skilbeck, as in the case of W.J. Scott, the very results that the authors recorded should have counselled against responding with great worry and consternation about the state of children's reading habits. Instead, both of these surveys, along with many (though not all) of the smaller surveys conducted over the 1940s and 50s, presented great concern that children's intelligence was being seriously eroded by their readership of comics and inappropriate literature. These responses were fuelled by the greater moral panic concerning children's recreational habits

that was happening at the time. While all of these surveys are useful in identifying the types of books that children were reading across this period, the views on reading habits that the authors presented drew on preconceived notions of what children "should" be reading. This prevented them from finding effective ways to understand the actual children's reading habits that they themselves recorded.

Notes

1. Janet McCallum, "Barnicoat, Constance Alice," from the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara—the Encyclopedia of New Zealand,* updated October 30, 2012, http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/3b10/barnicoat-constance-alice

2. Constance A. Barnicoat, "The Reading of the Colonial Girl," *Nineteenth Century and After* no. 358 (1906), 950.

3. Barnicoat, "The Reading of the Colonial Girl," 950.

4. Martyn Lyons, "Reading Practices in Australia," in *A History of the Book in Australia 1891–1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, ed. Martyn Lyons and John Arnold (St Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 337.

5. Kathleen McDowell, "Toward a History of Children as Readers, 1890–1930," *Book History* 12, no. 1 (2009): 242.

6. Helen Damon-Moore and Carl F. Kaestle, "Surveying American Readers," in *Literacy in the United States: Readers and Reading since 1880*, ed. Carl F. Kaestle, et al (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991); Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001); Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain: 1914–1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

7. For examples of international reading surveys, see A.J. Jenkinson, *What Do Boys and Girls Read? An Investigation into Reading Habits with Some Suggestions about the Teaching of Literature in Secondary and Senior Schools* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1940); Arthur Melville Jordan, *Children's Interests in Reading* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1921).

8. Bernice E. Leary, "What Does Research Say about Reading?," *The Journal of Educational Research* 39, vol. 6 (1947): 437.

9. Leary, "What Does Research Say," 439.

10. Lewis M. Terman and Margaret Lima, *Children's Reading: a Guide for Parents and Teachers* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1931), vi.

11. Seth Koven, "The Dangers of Castle Building—Surveying the Social Survey," in *The Social Survey in Historical Perspective, 1880–1940*, ed. Martin Bulmer, Kevin Bales, and Kathryn Kish Sklar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 368.

12. Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1972).

13. Kirsten Drotner, "Dangerous Media? Panic Discourses and Dilemmas of Modernity," *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 35, no. 3 (1999): 596.

14. Morag Styles and Evelyn Arzipe, "Introduction," in *Acts of Reading: Teachers, Text and Childhood* (Stoke-on-Trent, UK: Trentham, 2009), 1-6, 4.

15. Melanie Oppenheimer, *Volunteering: Why We Can't Survive Without It* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2008), 34–38.

16. "War's Effect on Children. Preventing Strain," *West Australian*, 14 June 1941, 13.

17. See for example "Plan to Save Erring Girls," *Courier Mail*, 10 June 1943, 3.

18. "Religion to Stem Youth Delinquency," *Morning Bulletin*, 27 July 1946, 5.

19. Geoffrey Sawer, *Australian Federal Politics and Law, 1929–1949* (Parkville, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1963), 106.

20. See for example Caroline Isaacson, "Your Child and His Reading Need Wise Vigilance," *Argus*, 25 July 1944, 7.

21. "Love Tales, Comic Strips in Ban List," *Adelaide News*, April 11 1940, 11.

22. Joan Coates, "Reading Habits and Interests of Victorian Boys and Girls" (MEd thesis, University of Melbourne, 1943), 2.

23. Coates, "Reading Habits," 46.

24. Coates, "Reading Habits," 26. Small surveys and articles from children's librarians also tend to confirm these findings. In 1947 Alice M. Lapthorne, a children's librarian in Mildura, stated that "girls still read the old favourites Montgomery, Bruce, Porter, as well as modern Wynne, Cheyne, and Potter," showing that girls in fact were also reading modern books, although they do not appear so much on reading surveys. Alice M. Lapthorne, "Where Children Browse. Mildura Children's Library," *Australasian Book News and Library Journal* 1, no. 12 (1947): 557.

25. Coates, "Reading Habits," 67. See also Barbara Henderson, "What Children Like to Read," *Australasian Book News and Library Journal* 2, no. 4 (1947): 173.

26. Kimberley Reynolds, *Girls Only? Gender and Popular Children's Fiction in Britain, 1880–1910* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), xvi.

27. Coates, "Reading Habits," 27.

28. Coates, "Reading Habits," 45.

29. Coates, "Reading Habits," 44. The *Weekly* clearly recognised this large teenage readership, as in 1949 they began publishing in the magazine an imported comic strip called "Teena" about an American "bobby-soxer," or teenager. In 1954 they began publishing a teenage supplement as well. See Susan Sheridan et al., *Who Was That Woman? The Australian Women's Weekly in the Postwar Years* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2001).

30. William Renwick, "Scott, Walter James," in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara—the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/5s8/scott-walter-james

31. Walter J. Scott, *Reading, Film and Radio Tastes of High School Boys & Girls* (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1947), 1.

32. Jenkinson, *What Do Boys and Girls Read?*, 144–45.

33. Scott, *Reading, Rilm and Radio Tastes*, 41.

34. See for example H.W.B., "Reading 'Muck.' Children's Habit. How Can It Be Stopped?," *Auckland Star*, 22 November 1944, 4.

35. Scott, *Reading, Film and Radio Tastes*, 83.

36. Scott, *Reading, Film and Radio Tastes* , 8.

37. Scott, *Reading, Film and Radio Tastes*, 8.

38. Scott, *Reading, Film and Radio Tastes*, 34.

39. Evelyn Winfield and Brian Keaney, as quoted in Sally Maynard, Cliff McKnight, and Melanie Keady, "Children's Classics in the Electronic Medium," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 23, no. 2 (1999): 184–201.

40. Brenda Niall, *Australia through the Looking-glass: Children's Fiction 1830–1980* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1984), 131.

41. Niall, *Australia through the Looking-glass*, 56, 58.

42. See George W. Norvell, "Some Results of a Twelve Year Study of Children's Reading Interests," *The English Journal* 35, no. 10 (1946): 531–36.

43. See for example Mavis Thorpe Clark, *Trust the Dream: An Autobiography* (Spring Hill, Vic.: Ronda Hall, 2004), 45.

44. Scott, *Reading, Film and Radio Tastes*, 146.

45. Scott, *Reading, Film and Radio Tastes*, 153.

46. "Reading Influences Child's Mind," *The Telegraph*, 5 September 1946, 7.

47. Geoffrey Trease, *Tales out of School: A Survey of Children's Fiction* (London: New Educational Book Club, 1948), 81–82.

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50. Craig Campbell and Helen Proctor, *A History of Australian Schooling* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2014), 181.

51. See for example "Drive Urged for Control of Comics," *News*, 16 July 1952, 3.

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55. McDowell, "Toward a History of Children as Readers," 249.

56. McDowell, "Toward a History of Children as Readers," xiii.

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60. Connell, Francis, and Skilbeck, *Growing Up*, 183.

61. Connell, Francis, and Skilbeck, *Growing Up*, 185.

62. Connell, Francis, and Skilbeck, *Growing Up*, 185

63. Connell, Francis, and Skilbeck, *Growing Up*, 189.

64. Connell, Francis, and Skilbeck, *Growing Up*, 189.

65. See Bronwyn Lowe, "'The Right Thing to Read': Australian Girl Readers in History and Text, 1910–1960" (PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2014).

66. Connell, Francis, and Skilbeck, *Growing Up*, 189.

67. Roe, "The Teen-age Reader," 17.

68. Roe, "The Teen-age Reader," 20.

69. Roe, "The Teen-age Reader," 20.

70. Roe, "The Teen-age Reader," 20.

71. Roe, "The Teen-age Reader," 17.

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