To what extent do Sheffield's library based reading groups reach the wider community?

A study submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Librarianship

at

The University of Sheffield

by

Daniel Marshall

September 2006

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the extent to which Sheffield's library based reading groups reach the wider community within which they operate. In order to satisfy the broad aim of the investigation, the focus of all research was based around four specific objectives. These are:

1. *To investigate how representative reading group users are of the wider community.*

2. *To understand the dynamics of Sheffield's library based reading groups and the potential impact of this dynamic on their effectiveness in reaching the wider community*

3. *To discover the benefits of attending library-based reading groups for individual participants.*

4. *To investigate the wider impact of library reading groups on the community.*

An inductive approach was used which employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods and consisted of a combination of questionnaires and interviews. Both reading group participants and library staff from different levels and locations around Sheffield were questioned.

The results offer a snapshot of reading group participation over the relatively short period of investigation during summer 2006. However, in relation to objective one, they suggest that during that time reading group participation was generally not representative of the wider community. In respect to objective two, this pattern appears to be in part explained by numerous aspects of the reading groups' dynamic, however, perhaps ultimately, a lack of defined goals and higher coordination is responsible. Encouragingly, and in relation to objective three, participation in the

reading groups appears to hold a varied and seemingly important selection of benefits for individual participants. However, in respect to objective four, whilst the investigation offered some insight into the likely wider impacts on the community, it probably cannot offer a full picture of the current situation. This said, there does appear to be some evidence for the reading groups having wider impacts, however due to a general lack of awareness, these may be limited.

Following a broad discussion, the report ends with recommendations both for further research and service development.

Acknowledgements

Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction

This study is an investigation of how effectively Sheffield's library based reading groups reach the wider community within which they operate. This chapter introduces the specific aims and objectives of the investigation and places them into context with a brief examination of reader development, the rise of the reading group phenomenon and the relevance of such an investigation in Sheffield Libraries at this time.

Aims

The aim of this study is to investigate the extent to which Sheffield's library based reading groups reach the wider community within which they operate.

Clearly when considering the rather broad term to 'reach the wider community' there is potential for different interpretations of its meaning, and possibly confusion over the question's focus. It is therefore necessary at this stage to define what 'reach the wider community' actually means in relation to the question's focus. Firstly, there is some question over how well the diversity of the community is represented in the make-up of those attending Sheffield's reading groups. Are all sections of the community catered for and realistically, are the reading groups open to all. These questions are addressed in the study's first two objectives with the results of the relevant investigations presented in chapters four and five.

Secondly, in accordance with the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of 'reach' "*To succeed in affecting or influencing by some means*" (Oxford University Press, 2006), there is some question over what impacts the reading groups actually have. Indeed, how successfully are the potential benefits of reading group participation delivered, and furthermore, do the reading groups have any wider impact be it positive or negative on the community? These questions are

addressed in the investigations third and fourth objectives, for which the results of relevant investigations are found in chapters six and seven.

Objectives

In order to satisfy the broad aim of the investigation, it is necessary to have specific objectives. These are laid out below and as well as providing focus to the research, also form the basis of the four results chapters. The specific objectives are,

1. *To investigate how representative reading group users are of the wider community.*

2. *To understand the dynamics of Sheffield's library based reading groups and the potential impact of this dynamic on their effectiveness in reaching the wider community*

3. *To discover the benefits of attending library-based reading groups for individual participants.*

4. *To investigate the wider impact of library reading groups on the community.*

Background

The benefits of reading for pleasure are recognised as huge and have been widely considered by many commentators. Elkin (2003: 12) describes the value of reading at length but amongst many benefits highlighted, areas include the *"stimulation of imagination and personal development",* the *"growth of social and cultural awareness"*, and *"the opportunity to relieve stress, relax and find mental balance".*

It should perhaps come as no surprise therefore that laid down in the IFLA/UNESCO guidelines for the development of the public library service, intrinsic to the public library mission is the provision of access to

works of the imagination and knowledge (IFLA, 2001). Such access is considered essential to the promotion of reading as a meaningful activity. What is more, in the UK, the promotion of reading has been placed at the heart of libraries modern mission, occupying a key position in the three areas of activity outlined in *Framework for the Future*, the Government's strategic vision for libraries over the next decade (DCMS, 2003).

Of course in reality, British public libraries have always had the promotion of reading, and perhaps especially fiction as one of their key roles. Black (1996) notes in reference to the birth of early Victorian libraries, that provision of literature was considered important to the improvement of society. However, interestingly Train (2003) reports that whilst libraries have always promoted reading, since the 1990s this role has increasingly taken on an element of more active intervention into the reading habits of library users. As a concept this movement is now largely referred to as Reader Development and has been defined as,

> *"Active intervention to increase people's confidence and enjoyment of reading, open up reading choices, and offer opportunities for people to share their reading experiences."*
> (Opening the Book, 2004)

Reader development work takes on many forms, including 'readers advisory', the production of themed displays, and the delivery of larger scale reading based events such as 'reader's days'. However, perhaps the most high profile and arguably successful reader development activity over recent years has been the reading group (Toyne and Usherwood, 2001). Of course, reading groups themselves vary in nature. However, as Hartley (2002: 2) points out, the *"the usual minimal definition would be a group of people who meet on a regular basis to discuss books"*. Clearly the library in its apparent neutrality and also capacity to provide books at low cost makes it an obvious venue and supporter of such activities. However perhaps it is interesting to note that while libraries may be increasingly important providers of reading groups, historically they have been neither the source, nor driving force behind the movement.

In fact, reading groups of a kind have probably existed ever since there were books (or their equivalent) to talk about. However, in the UK, Hartley (2002) describes extant and formally structured groups dating back to the mid 18th century. Perhaps of more significance to the current reading group phenomenon however were those that arose out of the women's social networks of the 1960s and 1970s. Bell (2001) reports that by 1983, in the UK 1,267 groups had risen out the former National Housewives Register. Impressively though, today the total number of reading groups nationally has risen to an estimated 50,000, taking place in a variety of locations including pubs, homes and workplaces, as well as libraries (Hartley, 2002). Furthermore, groups vary in their focus and goals and may for example, just include women, focus entirely on specific genres of fiction, or cater specifically for people with disabilities (The Literacy Trust, 2005).

More recently, major contributors to this pattern of expansion have been the media, and perhaps in particular, the popularity of book based television discussion programmes (Reading Agency, 2004). This seems to have begun in the United States when the Oprah Winfrey Book Club came to air, a programme described by Ross et al (2006: 226) as a "*phenomenon* [that] *has provided an enormous boost to reading".* However in the UK this was followed by the hugely successful Richard and Judy Book Club, also recognised as shaping reading patterns nationally (Hounsome, 2005) and more recently, the BBC's Page Turners.

Without doubt, libraries have sought to take advantage of this observed trend and as such, the number of library-based groups has increased dramatically over recent years (Train, 2003). Indeed, many hundreds can now be found in the national directory of library-based reading groups on the People's Network website (MLA, 2005a). To what extent these groups reach the wider community in the terms described above however, is perhaps unknown. Indeed, is participation generally representative of the wider community, do the groups cater for the diverse range of needs of library users, and do they have any wider

impact upon the communities within which they are based? As noted by Walters (1995), they should after all offer value to the people who are paying for them. Although just focussing on Sheffield, these issues are at the heart of this investigation.

Significance to Sheffield

In Sheffield as in many other authorities, libraries are responding to the growing popularity of reading groups and are expanding their capacity to support them. Over the last two years the number of library based reading groups has risen from just a handful to 19, and through the provision of an increasing number of reading group book sets, many more groups are now indirectly supported across the city (Sheffield City Council, 2006a). However, whilst resources distributed towards reading groups may be increasing, it is unclear to what extent these resources permeate into, and positively affect the wider community. Indeed, to what extent do Sheffield's library based reading groups reach the wider community?

The relevance of this question can perhaps be brought further into context with an examination of certain Library and City Council priorities. A key goal in the Sheffield Libraries 06/07 service plan is to promote reading skills, the importance of literacy and the enjoyment of reading (Sheffield City Council, 2006b). When considered in light of the wider mission to *"provide opportunity and access to library and archive resources for everyone to learn, enjoy and discover",* the case for reading groups to 'reach' the wider community is perhaps highlighted. What is more, investment in reading groups that don't offer benefits to all perhaps bear little relevance to the wider Council priorities of "*develo*ping *community engagement* [in culture]" (Sheffield City Council, 2006c) and 'Closing the Gap' between the most affluent and deprived areas in terms of successful and participative neighbourhoods (Sheffield City Council, Date unknown)

In light of the above and at a time when Sheffield Libraries are for the first time constructing a reader development strategy (Sheffield City Council, 2006a), this investigation is particularly timely.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Objective 1

To investigate how representative reading group users are of the wider community.

Although we may live in a single society, it is one of extremes. Britain is home to the immensely wealthy, yet 11.4 million people live in poverty (Branigan, 2006). While in theory education is universal, it is perhaps shocking to hear that one in five adults is functionally illiterate (OECD 2000). What is more, while 92.1% of the population is classified as White British, the remaining 7.9% is from a truly diverse range of cultures and backgrounds (National Statistics, 2006). These few examples go some way to highlighting how varied our society is; yet in truth the range of needs that would ideally be catered for is probably uncountable.

Libraries, as a public service are of course one type of organisation that might aspire to meet the needs of a diverse public. As such, reading groups as just one of their functions might also be expected to cater for and be representative of that local diversity. However, perhaps it is interesting to consider how realistic this ideal is when the traditional stereotype of the reading group user is a White, middle-aged, middle-class woman (Colgan, 2002).

Certainly the national picture of participation as a whole is not one that necessarily reflects the relative diversity of the nation. Hartley (2002) in a nationwide study of 350 reading groups found that 69% were made up entirely of women. In addition, one third had participants entirely in their forties, another third entirely over fifty, and 88 % contained a majority of members with some kind of higher education qualification. As yet it would seem there is little data relating to ethnic origin. It is perhaps noteworthy that Higgins (2005) writing in the Guardian has described the reading group as a "*near ubiquitous part of bourgeois life*".

However, can it be assumed that the stereotype perhaps reinforced by Hartley's findings is also true for library based reading groups? If so, then what about men, people from different ethnic groups, those individuals with poor literacy, and people with disabilities. Again, these labelled groups are just a few of a great many that perhaps should, but may not be represented. Of course, unlike private reading groups, public libraries are by definition open to all. According to the MLA (2005b), libraries offer a neutral space that is naturally inclusive, and according to the Government, this is what makes them so valuable (DCMS, 2003). Ultimately, perhaps this apparent neutrality offers the potential for library reading groups to reflect a different picture to that of national participation.

However, perhaps discouragingly, national library membership does not appear to differ considerably from national reading group participation. Of the national statistics available, two thirds of library users are over 44 years of age and also 62% are female (MLA, 2005c). Studies also show that considerably higher numbers of middle-class people use libraries than those in the lower social categories (ASLIB, 1995), and that library membership is particularly low amongst Black and ethnic minority (BME) groups (Roach and Morrison, 1998). Perhaps therefore, these figures offer little to suggest that library reading group participation should be any different to that of private groups.

Objective 2

To understand the dynamics of Sheffield's library based reading groups and the potential impact of this dynamic on their effectiveness in reaching the wider community

Adapting Reading Group Management

Perhaps ultimately, the relevance of a reading group's management to potential participants will determine who attends, and thus, to some extent how effectively it reaches the wider community. It is perhaps interesting therefore, that Goulding (2005) notes that reader development practice has often ignored the needs of a substantial proportion of the adults who find reading difficult. This is clearly an important point, especially if one in five UK adults really are functionally illiterate. Added to this however, there are no doubt numerous other groups largely absent from libraries that for whom without a certain level of tailoring, reading groups may appear irrelevant. This is supported by Leadbeater (2003), who points to the need for libraries generally to target, and is in accord with the suggestions of Sugg (1999) whom stresses that tailored library services are the key to attracting socially excluded groups.

However, how realistic it is that library reading groups can be tailored to the needs of such groups is perhaps questionable when as noted by the Audit Commission (2002), public libraries tend to look inwards, focussing on existing users rather than reaching out to those absentees. This said, however, there is evidence of positive work taking place around the country. Mcloughlin and Morris (2004), point towards the use of reading groups by several authorities to assist the personal development of basic skills students. In these cases, the use of abridged talking books was used to facilitate participation. Furthermore, groups adapted to meet the needs of visually impaired people are can be found in libraries nationwide (National Library for the Blind, 2006) and Caldwell (2005) points towards groups specifically for Asian women that are held in libraries across the North West and run in partnership with other organisations.

In fact, perhaps then it would seem that as stressed by The Reading Agency (2004), an adapted reading group model can be used to target different groups and thus meet the needs of a diverse range of potential readers.

Reading Groups and ICT

In addition, it would seem that the potential for reaching groups of people that may ordinarily be excluded from activities such as reading groups may be increased by the effective use of technology. Bird and Tedd (2004) note how the use of ICT in the delivery of reader development is now common practice and refer to numerous reader development based websites aimed at different groups. What is more, perhaps the enormous amount of public engagement in the People's Network since 2004 indicates the potential of technology to make an impact. This is certainly not insignificant as installation has largely been recognised as turning around a decade long decline in library visits (MLA, 2006).

In fact, thanks to its inherent flexibility, it seems the World Wide Web (Web) may be used to encourage participation in reading groups through several means. Perhaps most basically, it can offer an outlet to raise awareness of reading groups in a given area. The *Askchris* website from Essex Libraries contains hundreds of listed groups, many of which are library based, but it also others throughout the county varied in their focus and target audience (Essex Libraries, 2006). However, numerous groups also exist whereby participants read a book and then discuss it on-line. As commented by Starkey (2005), by using an electronic discussion board, "*participants can discuss books at their convenience and from any location*". Clearly, such a facility may promote the inclusion of people who may not normally be able to reach a library, such as the housebound, and also may favour those people who may for whatever reason feel uncomfortable making comments in a physical group.

Interestingly, this concept is extended through Web based 'real time' discussion groups. Such a facility is available on the People's Network *Read* website and allows real time comment to take place in a manner similar to a physical group. Impressively however, this function is open to anyone, anywhere that has access to the Internet (MLA, 2005a).

Clearly the challenges faced by library authorities seeking to encourage the use of reading groups by a greater range of groups are considerable. Indeed, those potentially excluded groups mentioned in this chapter are just a few of a great many. However, given the fact that public libraries are largely accessible public spaces, given the inherent flexibility of the reading group model, and given that specific groups may be targeted; there is clearly the potential for library based groups to reach a diverse range of groups and possibly deliver associated benefits.

Objective 3
To discover the benefits of attending library-based reading groups for individual participants.

The case for public libraries delivering a variety of benefits to individuals and indeed society as a whole has long since been recognised. This is after all, their ultimate purpose (Black, 1996). In an investigation into the value and impact of public library book reading, Toyne and Usherwood (2001) highlight numerous benefits ranging from the positive impact on the nations mental and physical health, to inspiring individual creativity, and to encouraging self-expression and improved educational attainment. They also point towards reader development playing an important role in facilitating the delivery of such benefits. This should perhaps be of no surprise however. As pointed out by Van Riel and Fowler (1996), reader development aims to enhance the quality of the reading experience, so perhaps therefore it follows that through libraries, the benefits of reading can be extended. What is more, given

that reading groups are possibly the most high profile reader development activity, perhaps they offer an ideal means of doing so.

Certainly there seems to be a strong case for library based reading groups having a positive impact on those that participate. It might be considered that the sheer number of such groups alone points towards there being something to gain from involvement. With an estimated 4,500 library based groups nationwide (The Reading Agency, 2004), it could be argued that tens of thousands of people must be gaining something out of attendance.

In addition, detailed evaluations appear to make the case for library based reading groups delivering benefits to readers on several fronts. The Reading Agency (2004) in a detailed examination highlights how participation "*encourages people to read more and to read more widely*" and in fact, it is noted that 50% of participants read more books as a result of their involvement (Book Marketing Ltd, 2000). Furthermore, the Reading Agency reports that participation promotes a more satisfying reading experience, "*helping people to get more out of their reading*", supports learning at an informal level, has the potential to empower and increase confidence, and promotes inclusion through developing individual's sense of belonging. These findings are no doubt supported by Matarasso (1998), who notes that public libraries actually have a rich history of delivering such benefits.

However, not all commentators are so positive. Colgan (2002) passionately argues that whist providing a social focus, reading groups offer little for '*real readers'.* What is more, Bell (2001) suggests that the broadened appeal of reading groups is thanks to a dumbing down of the reading experience, an activity that too often fails to give proper attention to a book's content and significance. She states that,

> "*Perhaps in the case of reading, a pleasure shared is a pleasure adulterated*".

Objective 4

To investigate the wider impact of library reading groups on the community.

As well as the apparent benefits to individual participants, perhaps there is a case for reading groups having a wider impact upon the communities within which they are based. Hoffert (2006) talks of their importance in promoting the value of reading to the community at large. However, there seems to be a case for positive impacts potentially extending even further than this. As argued by the Reading Agency (2004):

> *"Reading groups bring communities together, promote cultural understanding through reading, equalize access to cultural and creative activity, and promote a sense of belonging and local pride".*

Indeed, even Bell (2001) and Colgan (2002) recognise the fact that they do bring potentially isolated groups of people together, Ross et al (2006) identify reading groups as developing community networks, and importantly as Harris and Dudley (2005) state, such community networks are of major importance to creating wider community cohesion.

Furthermore, perhaps even some groups which might be cited as examples of dumbing down may actually be managed to deliver wider benefits to the community.   One such example perhaps comes from the 'Everybody's Reading' project aimed at socially excluded 16-25 year olds in the North-West of England. In this case, reading groups were part of a wider reader development initiative that also included targeted stock selection and marketing. While not necessarily being the most vigorously literary of reading groups, the project is an example of work that has engaged a hard to reach user group with the wider community (Spencer and Mathieson, 2003).

Interestingly, the concept of using reading to engage a community is something that has also been seen in numerous large scale and often citywide projects. Ross et al (2006) reports on the 'one city, one book' projects now widespread in the United States. Such schemes have seen libraries coordinating the widespread reading and discussion of single texts over a specified time. Whilst such projects may be an extension of the traditional reading groups, Burkeman (2002) notes how they have been successful in harnessing the power of reading "*to forge a new and exhilarating sense of community*".

Wider Picture

When considering the wider picture, it seems clear that there are benefits to be had from an individual's participation in reading groups. What is more, it seems possible that reading groups may have the potential to impact upon the wider community. Whilst any benefits may vary according to the focus and goals of a particular group, this diversity is perhaps indicative of the potential of reading groups to contribute to the realisation of key library goals.

It is noteworthy that Framework for the Future (DCMS, 2003) sets out three areas of activity that should be central to the libraries modern mission. These include the *promotion of reading and informal learning, the provision of access to digital skills,* and *measures to tackle social exclusion and build community identity.* Obviously reading groups can only contribute a limited amount to realising each goal. However, from the examples given in just these pages, perhaps they might have a role to play in each of these areas whilst possibly also contributing the realisation of other more locally specific and clearly relevant visions of success.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Methodological Approach

This investigation makes use of a method based on the grounded theory approach in order to understand how effectively Sheffield's library based reading groups reach the wider community. As opposed to testing a given hypothesis in the style of deductive research, this type of inductive approach appears more suitable to addressing what is a broad and open question. Powell and Connaway (2004: 201) describe this approach as,

> *"A method for discovering theories, concepts, hypotheses, and propositions directly from data, rather than from prior assumptions, other research, or existing theoretical frameworks".*

In order to do so and ultimately to satisfy the four objectives laid down, the investigation makes use of several different lines of enquiry. Three different questionnaires of varying length and focus, as well as interviews with library staff were used to gather data apparently differing in focus, yet relating to the specific objectives. It was hoped that by doing so, the investigation would construct a fuller picture of the current situation than would be possible by just using a single approach. This use of multiple methodologies is known as triangulation and according to Gorman and Clayton (1997) has other notable benefits. These include the possibility of addressing different aspects of a single research question and thus finding conclusions more likely to be true, as well as also compensating for the inherent weaknesses associated with using only a single research paradigm.

It is believed that by using both quantitative and qualitative data the benefits associated with triangulation will also be further enhanced. As noted by Hafner (1989), the analysis of quantitative data looks to provide an explanation of what is happening in a given situation. In relation to this investigation, this type of data can thus be used to satisfy uncertainty

about reading group composition and to some extent group dynamic. However, qualitative data can offer insight into why things happen and focuses on the meaning of things (Robson, 2002). Through drawing "*data from the context of the environment in which events occur*" (Gorman and Clayton, 1997)*,* this type of enquiry is clearly relevant to addressing the non-quantifiable elements of how reading groups 'reach' the community. Used together it is believed a richer, more reliable data set is available for analysis.

Literature Review

The literature review was an on-going process beginning before the main investigation and continuing throughout, thus proving to be an essential part of the study. Busha and Harter (1980: 19) note that *"the selection of a specific area of exploration can often be the by-product of extensive reading and study*", and indeed, early reading formed the basis of the entire investigation. Initial reading of the literature relating to reader development inspired the researcher's first thoughts about writing a dissertation in this area, and interest was further developed through extended reading around the area of reader development and as an extension of this, reading groups.

Hart (2001) stresses the importance of the literature review to gaining new insights as a researcher and "*synthesizing previously unconnected ideas"* and indeed, this was true in this case. It emerged that while at the national level, reading groups vary in whom they attract and how they 'reach' people, there seemed to be something of a skew towards certain groups. Interestingly however, it was unclear whether this pattern was also true for libraries. Given the apparent potential of libraries to offer benefits widely, and also their frequently heralded neutrality (MLA, 2005b); it seemed appropriate to ask the question 'how effectively do library based reading groups reach the wider community'.

Furthermore Hart (2001) states that an understanding of the wider context is necessary to ensuring the relevance of the direction of enquiry. As such, detailed reading was crucial to the development of the

investigations various elements including specific objectives and subsequent research questions.

The process of searching for relevant literature varied. Initially this included basic searches via the University Library catalogue STAR, and considered browsing along library bookshelves. Relevant citations referenced in books were also sought. Following this, more targeted searching for relevant periodical articles took place using the databases LISA (Library and Information Science Abstracts) and Web of Science. The database Lexis/Nexis Professional provided access to newspaper articles providing popular perceptions and opinion, and Google advanced searching brought up relevant reports from governmental and non-governmental organisations.

The results of the literature review are mainly presented in chapters one and two, however, to a lesser degree there is some inclusion throughout the other chapters. In doing so, the researcher has sought to place methodology and results into context.

Methods of Investigation

In order to satisfy the four specific objectives, three different questionnaires (A, B, and C) were distributed amongst the appropriate reading group participants and co-ordinators, what is more, seven interviews took place with selected members of library staff.

In accordance with the recommendations of Gorman and Clayton (1997) several considerations were taken into account when designing the various research tools. Firstly, every question produced had to relate back to the specific objectives. The bracketed numbers at the end of each question in questionnaire C and the interview guide indicate which objectives those particular questions relate to. Secondly, all information sought from either questionnaire or interview should not have been obtainable beforehand. This was necessary to save time, approach the procedures most efficiently and to conduct the investigation in the most professional manner possible. Finally, efforts were made to ensure that

everything required to satisfy the specific objectives was obtainable from the full set of research tools. Whilst realising that the grounded theory approach is to some extent exploratory and that an investigation's focus may at times shift as data is collected (Goulding, 2002), a well prepared beginning was essential given the limited time for investigation.

While the quantitative data from Questionnaires A and B allow some conclusions to be drawn regarding the extent to which Sheffield's library reading groups reach into the wider community, the qualitative data gathered from Questionnaire A, C, and the interviews allows further interpretive analysis.   This should promote an in depth understanding of the potentially complex issues that constitute the whole.

An example of each questionnaire and the interview guide is provided in Appendix 1-4. In addition, an explanation of their role in the wider investigation is provided below and is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. A summary of which research tools relate to which specific objectives.

Objective	Relevant Research Tool
Objective 1 - Representation	Questionnaire B Questionnaire C Interview Guide
Objective 2 - Dynamics	Questionnaire A Questionnaire C Interview Guide
Objective 3 - Benefit to participants	Questionnaire C Interview Guide
Objective 4 - Wider impact on comm.	Questionnaire C Interview Guide

Questionnaire A - Reading Group Dynamics

Primarily concerned with objective two regarding the dynamics of Sheffield's library based reading groups, this questionnaire was sent to all library based reading group co-ordinators. Data obtained was both quantitative and qualitative and it was hoped that by acquiring this data for all groups, a picture of Sheffield's groups as a whole could be

obtained. In addition, comparisons between groups could be made with a view to highlighting particular features of a group dynamic that may contribute to success in reaching the wider community.

Questionnaire B - Reading Group Demographics

This questionnaire was wholly concerned with objective one, to investigate how representative reading group users are of the wider community. The questionnaire was constructed to provide data that could be directly compared to that of library membership and national census data from the Office of National Statistics. For this reason, age categories are uneven in size. Although not statistically complex, comparisons are visually simple promoting accessibility for the viewer.

All reading group participants attending meetings during the period of investigation were asked to complete the questionnaire. Unfortunately given the limited time of enquiry and the one month delay between most group meetings, there was no opportunity to question any participants who may have been absent from the meetings when questionnaires were originally handed out. Clearly, this means the data set obtained cannot be considered completely full. However, what data is available may be regarded as a snapshot of reading group participation during the months of investigation.

Questionnaire C - In-depth Participant Questionnaire

As an addition to questionnaire B, which all participants were asked to complete, a selection of reading groups were chosen to complete the more in-depth participant questionnaire C requiring written comments about their reading group. Questionnaires were handed out at the group meetings with stamped addressed envelopes and returned through the post to the researcher. Although perhaps ideally participants from all groups would have completed this questionnaire and thus provided a very large amount of rich data, due to time restrictions this seemed impractical. What's more, Patton (2002) suggests that in such situations a trade off between breadth and depth can be applied. In the case of this questionnaire, it was considered acceptable to distribute fewer questionnaires thanks to the questionnaires relative depth. In addition,

this decision is perhaps further supported by the series of in-depth interviews addressing similar areas, and the selection of a carefully chose purposive sample. Patton (1980) points towards the importance of choosing a sample that is representative of the wider population under study, and Gorman and Clayton (1997) stress the importance of using stratification to ensure the full range of views are heard. As such, six reading groups from different part of Sheffield were chosen to complete the questionnaire. The groups were based at Broomhill, Burngreave Central Lending, Ecclesall, Stannington, and Walkley Libraries and together represent very different areas in terms of community profile.   At the time of analysis, 29 questionnaires had been returned to the researcher with comments supplied by representatives of each of the above reading groups.

Questionnaire C is mainly focussed on objectives three and four, concerning the benefits of participation and the impact on the wider community respectively. However, several questions also relate to objectives one and two.

Interviews with Sheffield Libraries Staff

As in Questionnaire C, the interviews were conducted with a view to acquiring data mostly relevant to objectives three and four, however some discussion also related to objectives one and two.   The use of interviews to do so was considered desirable due the "*potential to generate rich and detailed accounts of an individual's experience*" (Goulding, 2002: 59). This was thought particularly relevant to satisfying objectives three and four for which a rich data set was required. However, the potential of interviews to offer "*balance and corroboration where observed phenomena are complex or involve a number of factors*" (Gorman and Clayton, 1997: 45) also suggested relevance to fulfilling objective one and two.

Also as in questionnaire C, a purposive sample was carefully chosen that aimed to collect data from a wide range of representative sources. It was necessary in this case, that the stratification would encompass both geographical area and different levels of hierarchy

within the Library management structure. As such, of the seven interviews held in libraries across Sheffield, interviewees included frontline counter staff, frontline managers, middle managers and a senior manager.

An interview guide was used in interviews to guide the direction of conversation; however this remained semi-structured and flexible. Thus while open ended starter questions and non-directional prompts provided some structure, as recommended by Goulding (2002: 59) discussion was to some extent allowed to *"lead into areas which may not have been considered prior to interview, but which may be potentially relevant to the study"*.

A Dictaphone was used to record conversation and full transcripts were written up following the interview. This detailed recording was essential to the subsequent qualitative data analysis.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Following the collection of a considerable mass of data from numerous questionnaires and interviews, it was necessary to find order and structure within this data so that some meaning might be found in relation to the objectives. To some extent the analysis was structured around how the different questionnaire and interview questions were considered to hold relevance to specific objectives (see Methods of Investigation) However, this was not exclusively true as data gathered from other questions considered previously irrelevant to certain objective also proved at times illuminating.

As suggested in Gorman and Clayton (1997), identification of dominant themes was the first step of analysis. Within these themes, data were further placed into more specific categories during which time recurring trends and differences were observed as the data was re-evaluated for interrelationships. Thanks to this on-going process of interpretation, individual units of data were eventually subsumed into the

structured and meaningful categories that are presented in the following results chapters.

Ethical Considerations

Since the investigation involved direct interaction with human participants and the analysis of human data, measures were taken throughout the investigation to ensure all lines of enquiry were ethically appropriate. When initially contacted with questionnaires or for interview, both staff and reading group participants were provided with an information sheet outlining the project goals and procedures. What is more, in recognition of the importance of informed consent, a signed consent form was essential before data was used.

All participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, something made possible by the researcher alone having access to data gathered, and also the fact that no identifiable details would be included in the final report.   What is more, participants had the option of returning any questionnaire to the researcher via post, thus ensuring that any comments were not visible to other group participants or to the group co-ordinator.   At no point were participants coerced into taking part or any incentives offered. Furthermore, any participant could withdraw their data at any time.

Clearly in building a larger picture of how effectively Sheffield's library based reading group reach the wider community, the investigation looks closely at individual groups. As such, the researcher was aware that some members of staff may feel threatened by the investigation, possibly seeing it as a test or a criticism of their work. Because of this, the researcher made clear to all interviewees that neither of the above was true, and that in fact there was no correct answer or desirable outcome. Rather the investigation simply seeks to understand the current situation.

Limitations

It is perhaps important to recognise that despite the researcher's best efforts, there are several potential limitations to the described methodology. Firstly, it was originally planned that data collected from questionnaire B would be compared to Sheffield Library membership data as well as census data for the wider Sheffield population. It was considered that doing so would make for more interesting and richer analysis. Unfortunately, whilst the relevant data was provided by Sheffield Libraries, it came too late to be analysed and included in the main investigation write up.

In relation to objective two, while the investigation can offer some explanation for the patterns observed for objective one. The investigations lack of contact with non reading group participants perhaps prevents a full understanding of the reasons for non-attendance.

In addition, it should be stated that there is potential for bias in the interpretation of the data due to the researchers close association with Sheffield Libraries. Having worked in many of the libraries previously, the researcher already knew several of the reading group coordinators. Hopefully however, any bias was avoided thanks to a conscious effort to be as objective as possible when analysing.

Perhaps a further limitation however, is the lack of a full data set concerning the demographic details of reading group participants. Unfortunately, whilst it emerged that 187 people participate in the 19 reading groups, data was only gathered from 140 of those. This was mostly due to some people not attending the reading groups during the time of investigation, however in some cases people also chose not to complete the relevant questionnaire. In addition, some of those filling out questionnaires did not provide personal details such as age and ethnicity. It is therefore must be assumed that the data provided remains representative of the wider pattern of participation.

Furthermore, once data was gathered it emerged that question 7 of questionnaire C should perhaps have been phrased differently. Several respondents chose not to answer this question perhaps because of a lack of understanding of the term 'inclusive'. This obviously limited the amount of potentially relevant data gathered but perhaps could have been avoided had the questionnaires been piloted prior to the main investigation.

It should perhaps also be recognised that many of the responses given to questionnaire C may be biased towards positive remarks. Respondents may have simply written what they thought a correct answer should be, or there may be a loyalty to their reading group coordinators.

Finally, once investigation was under way, it became clear that that objective four was perhaps too broad an objective for an investigation of this size. To satisfy such an objective most fully, an in-depth investigation using numerous methods and perhaps most importantly involving non-participants would be required. Unfortunately, given the time and resources available to the researcher this was not possible.

Chapter 4.   Results - Objective 1

This chapter details the results of investigations concerned with objective one,

To investigate how representative reading group participation is of the wider community.

Questionnaire B was sent to all library-based reading groups and the data from questionnaire C and interviews with library staff is also presented to offer further insight into how representative library based reading groups are of the wider community. The sections below offer a snapshot of reading group composition over the relatively short period of investigation.

The results are given under several headings that emerged during the analysis of the data. These include; Gender, Age, Ethnic origins, Geography, Education, Class, and the Socially Excluded. Although this chapter is mostly concerned with the broad picture of Sheffield library-based reading groups as a whole, the raw data concerning gender, age, and ethnic origin for the individual reading groups, is provided in Appendix 5.

Gender

As apparent in Figure 1, there is a considerable difference in gender composition between the library-based reading groups, and that of Sheffield as a city. Whilst the citywide population has a broadly even distribution of men and women (National Statistics, 2006), this is far from reflected in reading groups where women out number men ten to one. In addition, whilst nationally women use library services disproportionately more than men (MLA, 2005c), this pattern is amplified in their comparative participation in library-based reading groups in Sheffield.

Figure 1. Gender composition of Sheffield's library based reading groups, national library users, and the City of Sheffield
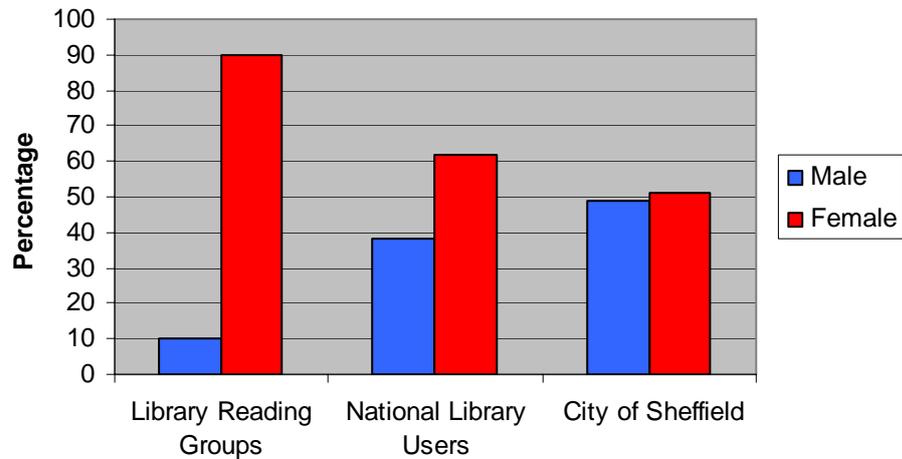
Interestingly, this pattern in Sheffield appears similar to that of reading group participation nationally. Hartley (2002) in her national survey of reading groups reports that more women participate in reading groups across the UK and that in fact, 69% of groups consist entirely of women. In Sheffield, this figure is only 53%, with nine reading groups being mixed. However, unlike the national picture, no Sheffield Libraries group consists entirely of men, or indeed has more in attendance than women.

Age

Given that the youngest reading group participant is 25 and the oldest 87, there is clearly a wide distribution of ages across the reading group participants. This is highlighted in Figure 2, which shows that Library reading group participants fall into all adult age categories.

However, it is noteworthy that the distribution of participants across the categories is not even. Indeed, the category with the largest number of participants is age 45 – 64, followed by 65+, and then age 16 – 44. Clearly, this picture of participation does not reflect that of age distribution across the wider Sheffield population. In fact, the adult age category 16 – 44, which contains the least reading group participants, actually contains the most Sheffield residents (National Statistics, 2006). What is more, it would seem the other two age categories contain disproportionately high numbers in relation the wider population. Interestingly, participation in the 45-64 category is also disproportionately higher that would be expected if reading group participation was representative of library usage.

Hartley (2002) observed a similar pattern of participation nationally. She reports that reading groups are dominated by the middle-aged with two-thirds of reading groups containing participants that are all over the age of 40. In Sheffield 44% of Library groups contain participants entirely over the age of 45, and only 16% of groups contain participants falling into all three age-categories. Clearly, the age distribution of the reading group participants is not representative of that of the wider community.

Ethnic Origin

Figure 3. Percentage of participants from Sheffield's Library based reading groups that fall into different ethnic groups
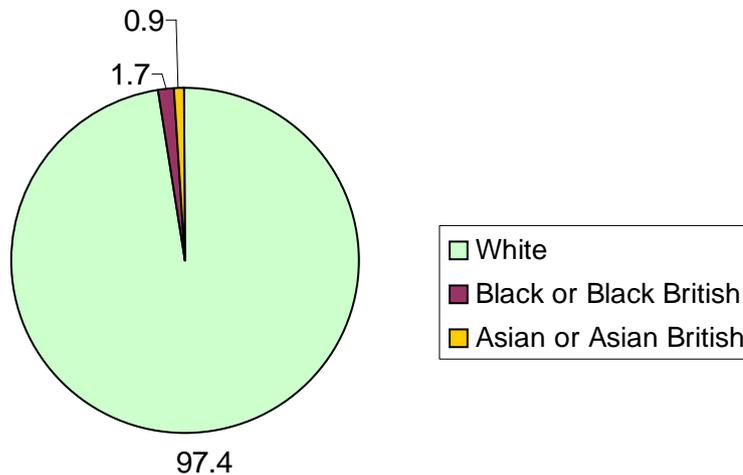
As highlighted in Figure 3, at the time of data collection, the vast majority of people participating in Sheffield's library-based reading groups were White (112 people), with only a tiny fraction of participants from ethnic minority groups (2 Black and 1 Asian). Clearly, however when compared with Figure 4, this pattern is not representative of the ethnic mix which currently exists within Sheffield.

Figure 4. Percentage of population in Sheffield that falls into different ethnic groups

0.8
1.6
4.6
1.8

White

Black or Black British

Asian or Asian British

Mixed

Chinese or other ethnic group

91.2
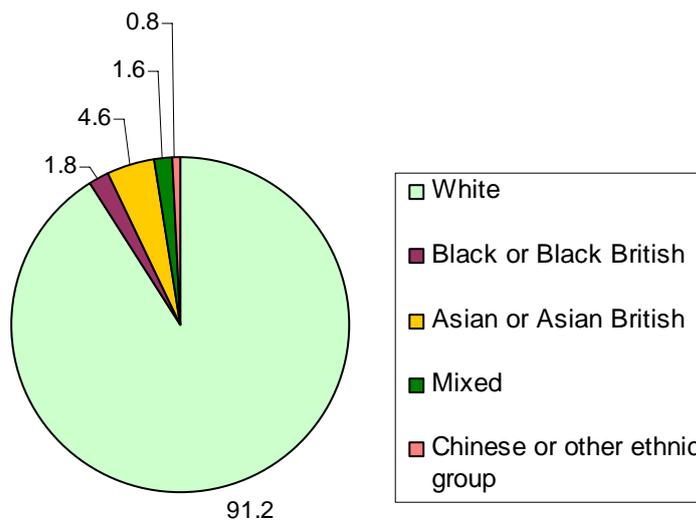
At the time of the last national census in 2001, the total population for Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups in Sheffield formed 8.8% of the total population (National Statistics, 2006). However, it is noteworthy that only 2.6% of reading group participants in this snapshot of participation is from BME groups. Of these, there is no representation of Mixed Race, Chinese, or other ethnic groups.

What is more, several of the reading groups take place in communities where the proportion of BME group members is higher than that of Sheffield as a whole. In the Broomhill Ward for example, 10.4% of the population is from BME groups (National Statistics, 2006), yet 100% of reading group participants are White. In Burngreave Ward, 41.5% of residents are from BME groups, a total of 55,536 people (National Statistics, 2006), yet only two attend the underused reading group.

It is perhaps also important to recognize that because the 2.6% of participants from BME groups represents only three people attending just two reading groups (Burngreave and Central Lending), all the other reading groups are entirely White in composition.   Clearly these figures

suggest that in relation to ethnicity, Sheffield's library based reading groups are not representative of the wider Sheffield community

Geography

One of the questions contained in questionnaire B asked reading group participants to indicate their postcode. The purpose of this was to discover if participants attending the reading groups are indeed local to those libraries and communities within which the reading groups are based. Unfortunately, not all respondents completed this section; what is more, caution must be taken when using postal districts as a measure of locality to a point, as district size differs. However, analysis of the details provided by the participants did suggest some obvious patterns.

Figure 5. Location of participant's homes in relation to the site of library-based reading groups

- Shared postal district
- Neighbouring postal district
- Other postal district
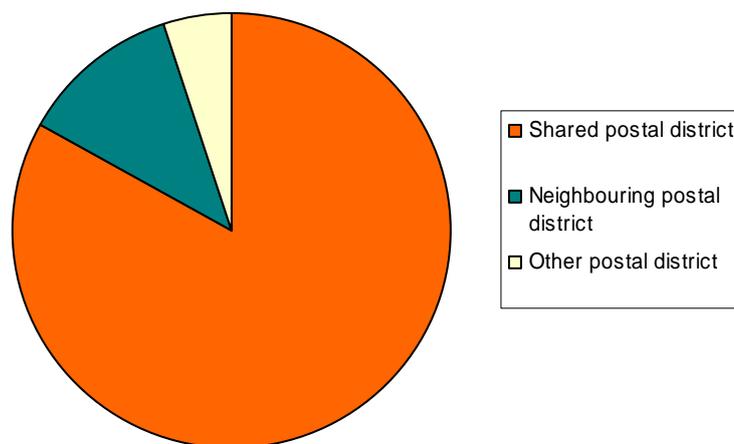
In particular, it would seem that in the case of branch library-based reading groups, the vast majority of participants attending the reading groups are local to the area within which the library is located. As can be seen in Figure 5, of those participants that provided their postcode, 83% live in the same postcode district (e.g. S10) as the library/location of the reading group they attend.   What is more, given that 12% of the remaining participants live in neighbouring districts, there is perhaps some support that in respect to geography and at the branch level,

participation is representative of the wider communities within which reading groups take place.

Interestingly however, participation at the central library does not appear to be representative of the city as a whole. In fact, 88% of respondents from the Central Library reading groups live in the west of Sheffield. This is a figure which is perhaps disproportionately high given that Sheffield Central Library is easily accessible from all over the city.

Education

Although questionnaire B asked for no details of educational attainment from the reading group participants, the theme of education did emerge out of careful analysis of qualitative data provided from questionnaire C and interviews with staff.

Interestingly, it would seem that although variation in the levels of education does exist in some groups, the general pattern is of high levels of education amongst most participants. This was communicated by the majority of staff and a considerable number of reading group participants:

Most that come are university educated which is a shame because we've had some older people come and they don't have that level of education, and now and again I can see them thinking this isn't for me. When a few are talking about the socio-wotsits it can be difficult to include everyone. (Frontline Manager)

I think they're mainly teachers, psychologists, nurses. A couple of accountants come. I can't think of anybody that does anything else. (Frontline Counter Staff)

It's mostly people who are working professionally within the area who come. (Frontline Manager)

I would say we are all well educated, middle-class professionals.
(Reading Group Participant)

We are retired or part-time teachers, nurses, secretarial staff.
People who read for pleasure. (Reading Group Participant)

It is no doubt of note that Hartley (2002) reports similar findings for her national survey of reading groups. In fact, 88% of the groups in her survey had a majority of members with some kind of higher qualification.

However, in Sheffield, levels of education across the city are hugely varied. In the Manor Ward for example, attainment in achieving 5 or more A*-C grades is almost three times less than the City average (Sheffield City Council, Date Unknown). What is more, whilst 29.21% of 16-74 year olds do possess higher qualifications at level three or above, 32.04% are lacking any kind of qualification at all (National Statistics, 2006). Perhaps when considered against these statistics and in respect to levels of education, Sheffield's library-based reading groups could not be considered representative of the wider community.

Class

Perhaps in part related to the above issue of education, is also the issue of class and whether or not participants in terms of class are representative of the wider community. It is however, perhaps important to state that at the outset, the researcher had not intended to consider class as an issue for comparison. Rather, during analysis of qualitative data collected from questionnaire C and interviews with staff, class emerged as an issue in need of consideration.

Firstly, it is perhaps telling in itself that even though no reference was made to class in questionnaire C, 45% of those participants completing the form, referred explicitly to class as an issue relevant to

how representative of the wider community, the reading groups are. If participant's level of education is also taken as a proxy for class measurement, then the percentage of participants referring to this as an issue is considerably more.

Interestingly, analysis of the data appears to suggest that a majority of participants fall into the category of middle class. Indeed, this was a strong theme emerging from the comments of participants attending groups across the city:

> *We're all white middle-class. Does that make it representative?*
> (Reading Group Participant)

> *The make up of the group is very middle class, white and female.*
> (Reading Group Participant)

> *I'm not sure about how it reaches a cross-section – I'd say we're all middle class.* (Reading Group Participant)

What is more, this interpretation is apparently supported by the comments of library staff:

> *This is quite a working class area but there's also a lot of people who are professionals. It's* [The reading group] *representative of that part.* (Frontline Manager)

> *Well you know, it seems mostly a middle class thing, but that is the area.* (Frontline Counter Staff)

Of course in the case of some communities within Sheffield, there does appear to be something of a middle class skew and to a large extent, the reading groups in those areas perhaps are representative. However, whilst those electoral wards in the southwest of the city contain large middle class populations, those in the northeast contain high proportions of people in the lowest social class categories (Sheffield City Council, Date Unknown).

In fact 55% of the wider Sheffield population fall into the categories of working class or below (C2, D, E) (National Statistics, 2006). It would thus perhaps seem that as in the case of education, participation of Sheffield's library-based reading groups is not representative of the wider Sheffield community.

Socially Excluded

Social exclusion is broad term used to describe the situation when people suffer from a series of Social problems. As the Government Social Exclusion Unit notes, these may include unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes and numerous other problems which when combined can create a 'vicious cycle' (Cabinet Office, 2006). Train et al (2000) also identifies various factors that can contribute to exclusion, several of which are examined above. It is noted for example that low educational attainment, belonging to BME groups and living in areas of poverty can all contribute to exclusion or marginalisation. In addition, it is perhaps noteworthy that for some commentators, the terms 'working class' and 'socially excluded' are synonymous (Bentley, 2002).

Of course this investigation was never intended to focus specifically on social exclusion and as such has not gathered data regarding many of the issues relevant to this area. However, perhaps when considering the above findings, there is little evidence to suggest that the library-based reading groups generally attract participants that may be considered socially excluded. Indeed, there seems a clear bias towards the highly educated white middle-class and perhaps a suggestion of a disproportionately high number of participants from the affluent west of Sheffield.

Unfortunately, in Sheffield there is huge social divide, with social exclusion as a major problem for tens of thousands of households (Sheffield City Council, Unknown Date). Perhaps given this and the apparent reality that library reading groups fail to attract the socially

excluded, the groups also apparently fail to be representative of the wider Sheffield community.

Chapter Summary

Gender

Sheffield's library-based reading groups are largely dominated by women. Women make up a total of 90% of total participation and 53% of groups have no male participants attending. These figures are disproportionately high and are not representative of the wider community.

Age

There is broad age range amongst participants attending the reading groups across the city as a whole. However, the age category with most participants is 45-64, followed by 65+. This is not representative of Sheffield as a city where there are considerably more residents in the age category 16-44 than any other.

Ethnic Origin

97.4% of reading group participants are White. This is not representative of the wider Sheffield population, and in several communities containing large BME group populations, there is no representation in reading groups at all.

Geography

83% of participants attending reading groups based at branch libraries live in the same postcode district as the host library. However, 88% of participants attending Central Library groups live in the generally wealthier west of Sheffield. This figure appears disproportionately high.

Education

It would appear that the majority of reading group participants possesses a high level of education. This pattern is not representative of

the wider Sheffield population where only 29.21% have higher qualifications at level three or above.

Class

The majority of reading group participants appear to be middle-class. This pattern is not representative of the wider Sheffield community as high proportions of the population fall into the lowest social-class categories.

Social Exclusion

There is little evidence of participation from groups of people traditionally affected by social exclusion. Since social exclusion is a major problem in Sheffield, perhaps the reading groups cannot be considered truly representative of the wider community.

These results offer a snapshot of reading group participation over the relatively short period of investigation during summer 2006. In relation to objective one, they suggest that during that time reading group participation was generally not representative of the wider community.

Chapter 5.   Results - Objective 2

This chapter details the results of investigations concerned with objective two;

To understand the dynamics of Sheffield's library based reading groups and the potential impact of this dynamic on their effectiveness in reaching the wider community

Questionnaire A was sent to all library-based reading group co-ordinators with a view to obtaining basic data concerning the dynamics of each reading group. Data from questionnaire C and interviews with library staff was also collected and combined. Data relating to the observed dynamics of the reading groups is presented below. In addition, and following interpretation, there is an explanation of how these dynamics may be impacting on the effectiveness of groups in reaching the wider community; in effect, how these dynamics may have contributed to the current level of participation, and to the lack of diversity in reading group participation which was observed in the last chapter.

During careful interpretation of the data, several themes emerged. These are presented as headings below and include: Participation, Limited Capacity, Promotion, Location, Time, Book choice, Relevance, and Objectives.

Participation

Figure 6. Current participation in all library-based reading groups, and total participation over the last year
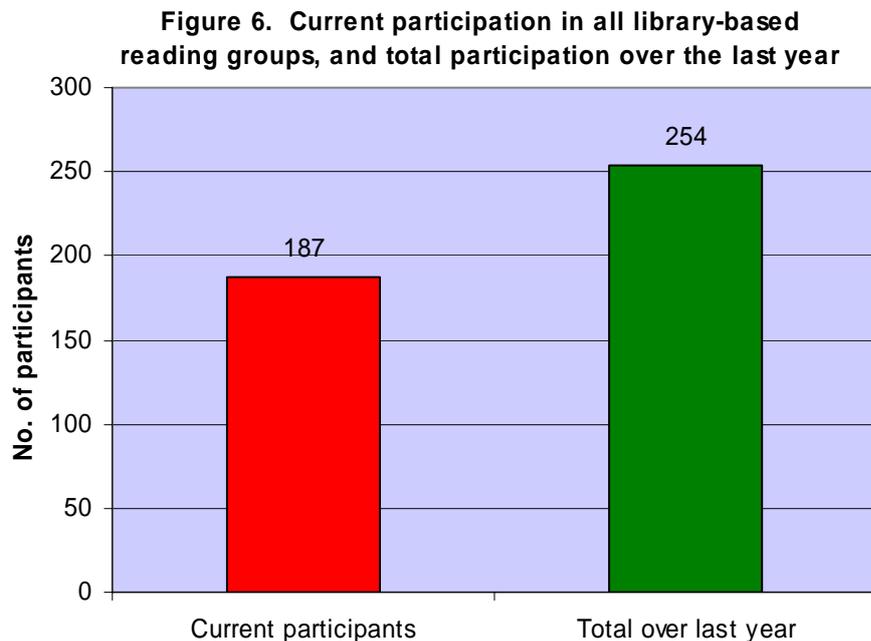
Although perhaps not directly relating to the reading group dynamics or management, when assessing how effectively library-based reading groups reach the wider community, it was considered important to understand how many individuals are actually participating in the groups in total. Figure 6 shows how many people are currently participating in the reading groups, taking into account the nine people that attend two or more library groups at the current time. This Figure also shows how many individuals have participated over the last year.

Interestingly, when considered beside the total number of active library members (107,869 people (Sheffield City Council (2006a)) these figures appear quite small. Indeed, the total number of people participating over the last year represents only 0.24% of the total active library membership.

Figure 7. Participation in individual reading groups at current time and over the last year
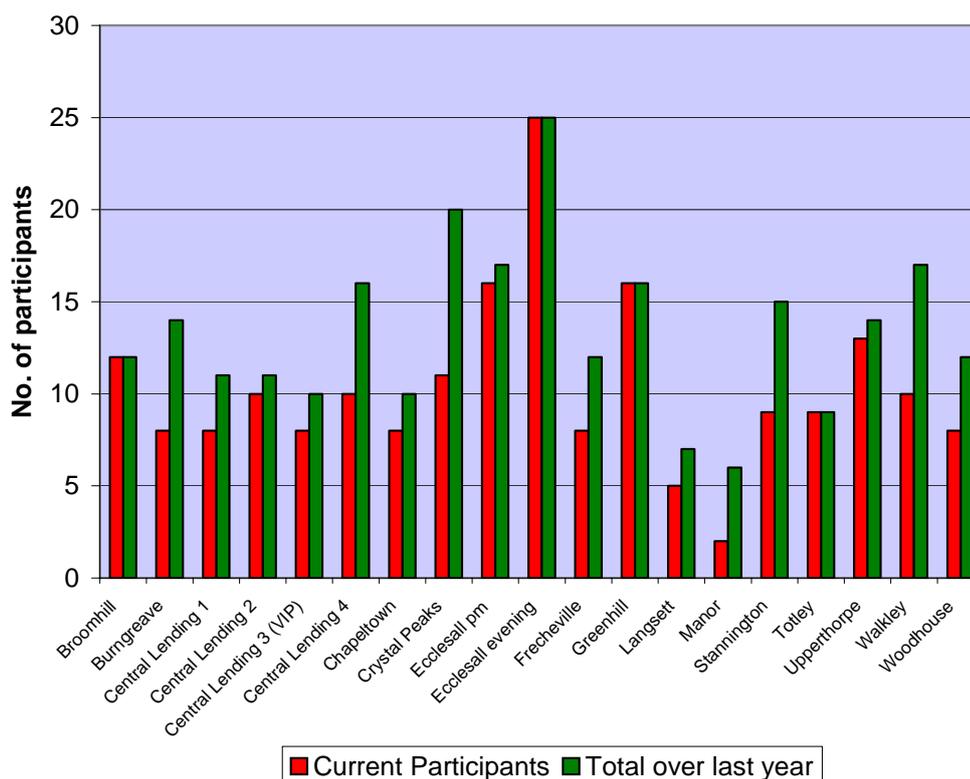
Figure 7 shows participation in each individual reading group and interestingly highlights the variation across the different libraries. Ecclesall Library's evening group has both the largest number of current and total participants both at 25, and Manor Library has the smallest. Current participation at Manor is only two; however, perhaps it is necessary to note that during the last year, meetings were at one point suspended for a library refurbishment.

The mean number of current participants is 10.3, however it should perhaps be recognised that only six of the 19 groups have more than 10 people currently participating. Indeed, this figure may be somewhat misleading due to the unusually large number of participants using the Ecclesall groups. A more representative average may be the median at nine participants.

It is no doubt also important to note that in the case of groups with the largest levels of participation especially, there appears to be limited participant turnover. This issue is dealt with further in the next section.

Limited Capacity

Clearly the scale of participation is at least in part relevant to how effectively groups reach the wider community. As such, fundamental to this issue, is the question of how many people can actually be involved in a reading group at any one time. Interestingly, although it seems that many groups are currently under capacity, seven groups are considered full. These groups are closed to new members and several waiting lists exist with no procedure for moving people on. No doubt, this is a significant issue in itself since if groups can become full; there is ultimately a limit to the total number of people that can participate and moreover, perhaps a limit to how effectively groups can reach the wider community. This is a problem recognised by Library staff:

> *Of course if you have a physical reading group as such, you are only ever going to have the capacity to touch a very limited number of people.* (Middle Manager)

> *Unfortunately you can't invite everyone – especially if you only have a group of ten.* (Frontline Counter Staff)

However, it is also evident that in order to maintain a certain quality of meeting, or even possibly to ensure that meetings can properly function, a cap on group size is necessary. This point is made by the professional reading group leader, Rachel Jacobsohn (Jacobsohn, 1998) and is recognised by library staff and participants:

> *We limit the size of our groups to 10. I know it's different at other libraries. Trouble is if you don't limit, then you become inundated and that limits them because we can't get copies for everyone.*
> (Frontline Manager)

Groups couldn't be more than 10-12 members otherwise it wouldn't work as well. (Reading Group Participant)

Too many members could lead to discussion not being easy.
(Reading Group Participant)

In addition however, there appears to be recognition that simply adding potential participants to a waiting list for an unspecified time, not only fails to increase participation, but also perhaps lacks a level of good customer service:

If you are on the waiting list for six months, it's completely de-motivating. And you can't just say to people that are waiting, why don't you get together and start your own because you need someone their leading it for the first couple of goes before they actually get to know each other. (Frontline Counter Staff)

I suppose it can be frustrating for people when they're waiting.
(Frontline Manager)

It 's a little unfair if you always have the same 10 people attending a staff led group for years. (Middle Manager)

Clearly the current situation is inappropriate. It limits the number of potential participants and possibly even presents library reading groups poorly. Without a significant change this situation may actually restrict how effectively library reading groups reach the wider community.

It would seem there is a requirement for an increased number of groups running out of those libraries with the highest levels of participation. Perhaps only then can groups retain current participants whilst also drawing in those who are new.

Promotion

Despite seven reading groups having full membership, the majority are under capacity. Furthermore, as highlighted in chapter four, Sheffield's library-based reading groups as a whole fail to be representative of the communities within which they are based. These shortcomings no doubt affect how effectively the groups reach the wider community yet are probably due to a variety of reasons. Promotion is one of several possible reasons that are presented here.

The potential of promotion to encourage the use of library facilities has been highlighted by numerous commentators. Kinnel and Shepherd (1998) for example, highlight the substantial amount of promotional activity taking place in public libraries nationally. However, it would seem that in the administration of Sheffield's reading groups, promotion takes a low priority. Figure 8 highlights the different types of promotion used by reading group co-ordinators and also how many groups are promoted in the different ways.

Figure 8. Number of libraries using different types of promotion
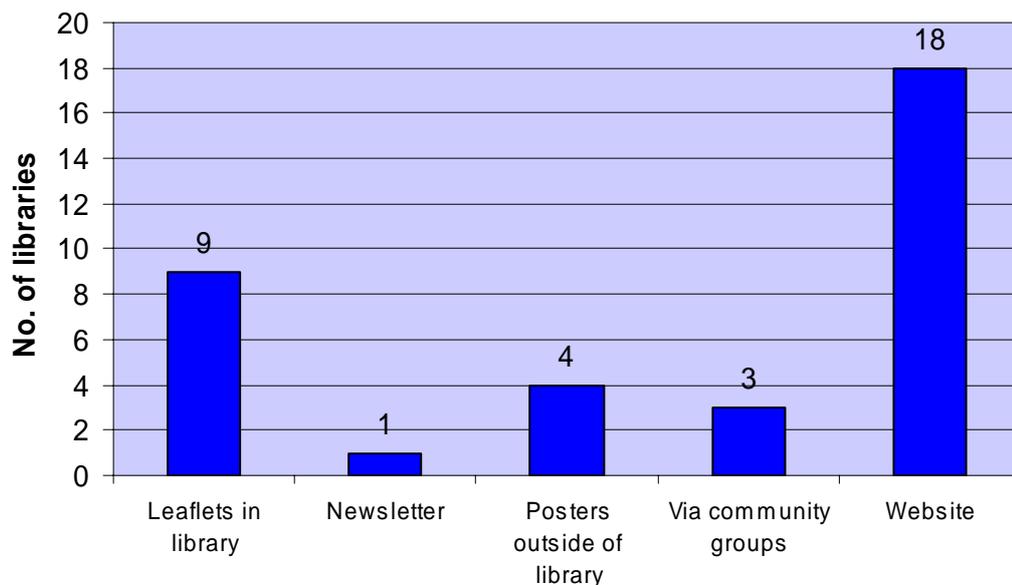
Whilst all but one reading group is positioned on the Sheffield City Council website, promotion outside of the library is clearly limited. The

next most common method is the positioning of promotional leaflets within the libraries; however, less than half of the groups are promoted in this way.

Clearly if groups are not promoted then the probability of them attracting community members, or indeed there being any kind of awareness of the groups within the community is somewhat limited. This was recognised by some staff and widely commented upon by participants:

> *It may be that people just don't know about them. Libraries don't have a very good tradition of promoting themselves.* (Middle Manager)

> *I don't think anyone who doesn't come in regularly would even know we exist.* (Reading Group Participant)

> I doubt that many people have heard about it. *(Reading Group Participant)*

In fact these findings are perhaps supported by the Audit Commission (2002) which reports a lack of awareness of library services generally. However, even when some kind of promotion does take place, an overriding opinion amongst interviewed staff and participants was that it is not broad enough and needs to be taken outside the library:

> *If you're only promoting your reading group within the library, like I did, then you're only going to get people who visit the library.* (Frontline Counter staff).

> *Unfortunately, we only do it to people who are already coming through the door, that needs changing.* (Senior Manager)

> *As far as I'm aware, the only place it is advertised is in the library itself. If I had not been an active member myself, I never would have known about it.* (Reading Group Participant)

This is perhaps a key point because as noted by numerous authors including Pateman (1998), and Muddiman et al (2000), current library usage is not representative of the diversity in the wider community. Given that inwards facing promotion is perhaps only likely to be seen by people already using library services, by not promoting the reading groups more widely, the potential for attracting a more diverse and representative range of participants is clearly reduced.

Location

Since the reading groups in question have been founded by Sheffield Libraries and are ultimately supported by them through co-ordination and book supply, perhaps it is to be expected that they should be located in libraries too. Indeed, of all Sheffield Library's reading groups, 18 actually meet in libraries, one in a community centre, and one in a home for the physically disabled. However, it emerged through investigation that opinion is split as to whether or not libraries are the best place to hold the reading group meetings, especially if seeking to attract people from the wider community.

Of course and as stated by the MLA (2004), "[libraries] *are one of the very few places people can go where there are no barriers or divisions"* and indeed, for many, libraries are considered the ideal location for such meetings thanks to a perceived neutrality and openness:

> *Perhaps the library has a feeling of being a bit safer than other places.* (Middle Manager)

> *The library is open and free to everyone! Where else could be better?* (Reading Group Participant)

What is more, there is perhaps also a case for holding reading groups in libraries, thanks to the potential for attracting non-library members. The Reading Agency (2004) for example, claims that "*reading group provision helps libraries increase and widen the library audience".*

If so, clearly new participants would be open to the benefits of wider library use and thus reading groups might have a further positive impact indirectly:

> *I like the idea of people actually coming into the library because you might get different people coming in.* (Middle Manager)

However, analysis of the data also led to the emergence of an opposing argument. Indeed, it would appear that for many, the location of reading groups in libraries may actually limit how effectively they might reach the wider community. Rather than providing an attractive community space, negative perceptions of the library may actually discourage some people from attending reading groups:

> *I don't know if people assume it's a bit literary because it's set in a library and that puts them off.* (Frontline Manager)

> *The fact that it's held in the library might put people off who don't regularly use a library.* (Reading Group Participant)

Interestingly, Pateman (2004) reports that nationally, levels of library use by working class and disadvantaged groups is disproportionately low, and Muddiman et al (2000) suggest that this is in part due to negative perceptions of libraries amongst these groups. Perhaps then, this is support for the case that the potential of reading groups to reach the wider community is reduced by their location in libraries.

As such perhaps there is a case for some library led reading groups to be located outside of the library. This is not to suggest that existing groups be relocated, as in reality such action may move existing users out, rather than bring new users in. What is more, clearly for many, libraries remain the preferred location. However, if this is not true for certain people, then perhaps in order to deliver the benefits of reading group participation to a wider audience, and thus more effectively reach

45

the wider community, new locations for new groups should be considered. As one Manager put it:

I think you have to get out of the library sometimes, to get new people in. (Frontline Manager)

Time

Figure 9. Total number of reading groups meeting in the morning, afternoon and evening
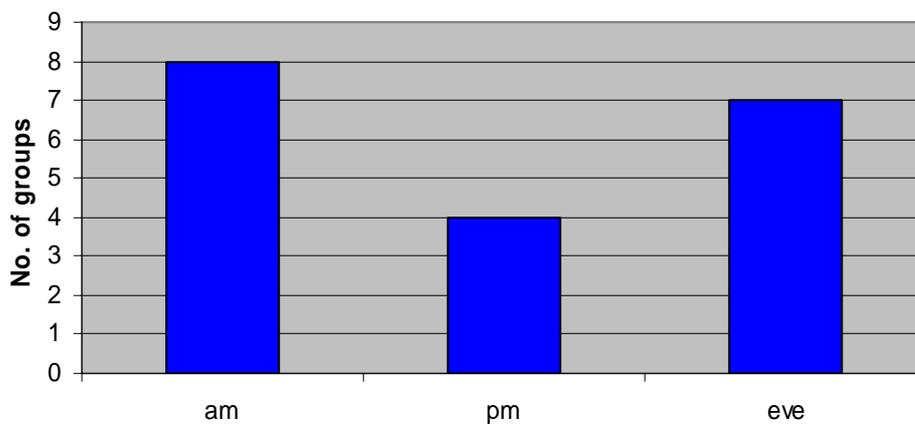
Figure 9 shows the number of reading groups meeting at different times of day. Of course, the time a reading group meets will have some bearing upon who can attend, just as distribution of library opening hours has been shown to impact on the level of access to libraries generally (Proctor et al, 1998). Those working a full day for example, will probably be unable to attend group meetings taking place in the morning or afternoon. Likewise, those responsible for caring for children after school hours may not be available in the evening.   This is recognised by group co-ordinators:

I think in the evening it's probably a different set of people to those who come in the afternoon. (Frontline Counter Staff)

I suppose timing affects who can come. We have groups in the evening too, so that people can come after work (Frontline Manager)

I think there are times when some people from cultural groups might not be able to make it. (Frontline Counter Staff)

However, given that the majority of Sheffield's library based reading groups meet in the day, perhaps there is an inherent bias towards attracting participants that are available at this time. Indeed, perhaps this in part accounts for so many participants being in the older age brackets described in the last chapter, with 31% of the total number of participants being of retirement age.

Clearly, it is important to have a spread of times at which different groups meet across Sheffield, thus ensuring that attendance is at least possible somewhere. Encouragingly this does appear to be the case, however, it is interesting to note that amongst staff and participants there appears to be a widely held belief that reading groups would reach a larger and more varied group if more were held in the evening:

Having them earlier means not everyone can make it so we might be excluding some people. (Frontline Counter Staff)

I think the key thing would be to hold it outside of library hours. I mean, I wouldn't have the time to go to a reading group because I'm working. I'd hardly have the time to go to a library. (Frontline Manager)

Unfortunately, because we meet during the day, many people are excluded due to work commitments and family commitments. (Reading Group Participant)

It would be great if we could do it outside of normal working hours. We'd get a more diverse group, but we just don't have staff or the time. (Frontline Manager)

This assumption is perhaps further supported by Figure 10 which highlights the fact that on average, more people do participate in group meetings held in the evening.

Figure 10. Mean number of participants at different times of the day
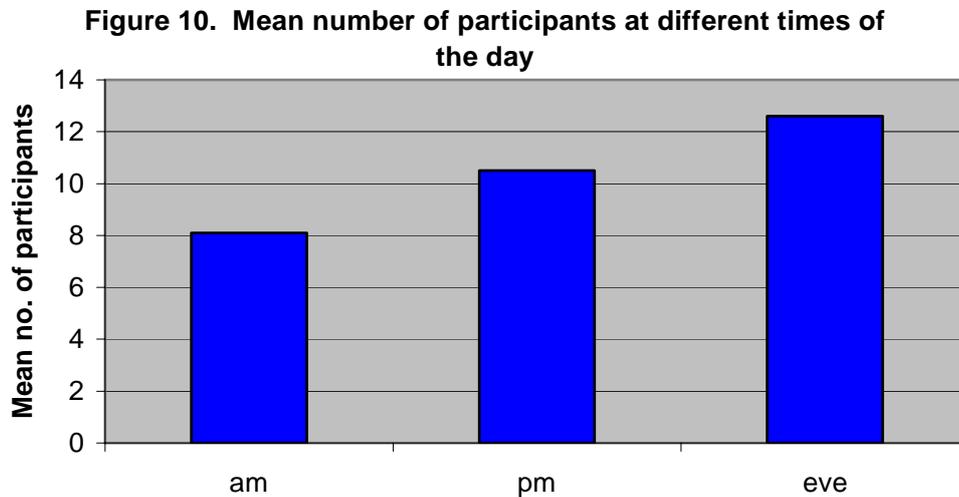
Clearly, the times at which groups meet should vary between groups and perhaps across Sheffield. Such variety is no doubt an essential component of ensuring that the greatest number, and possibly the greatest diversity of people can attend. However, given that the evidence points towards evening groups in particular as attracting a larger and more diverse group of participants, it would perhaps be more fruitful to shift the balance of distribution from the morning to evening. In doing so, perhaps there is an increased potential for the groups as a whole to reach the wider community more effectively.

Book Choice

Although not appearing as quite such a strong factor in influencing the number of people attending and the composition of groups as some of the above issues, the selection of books for the reading groups also seem to be a factor that could have some impact upon this.   Most notably, and excluding the occasional biography, all groups generally read fiction, most of which is selected from Sheffield Library's 'book set' list. Perhaps then, this lack of diversity across the groups as a whole may be to the exclusion of readers that prefer different genres or types of

writing. This is most obviously suggested by the general lack of non-fiction. Interestingly, 96% of responding participants described their reading tastes as primarily fiction, but what about those people that would not. As noted by one member of staff:

> *A lot of people prefer non-fiction as well, so straight away they are cast aside.* (Frontline Counter Staff)

Interestingly, this point may have a particular relevance to the observed gender imbalance reported in chapter four. As referred to by Hawkins et al (2001), men tend to read less fiction than women and according to Tepper (2000) are generally more likely to read non-fiction to fiction titles. Perhaps the lack of non-fiction read by groups puts many men off. This is supported to some extent by the data collected in this investigation:

> *I did have a man who came but stopped coming because he said he didn't like the books we were reading.* (Frontline Manager)

> *One of the men that came had never read fiction before so he was a bit of a nightmare because he always tried to say "but this isn't what happens".* (Frontline Counter Staff)

Furthermore, whilst the 'book set' list contains over 170 titles (Sheffield City Council, 2006d), it is unclear how relevant it is to the tastes and needs of the wider community in Sheffield as a whole. Does it for example represent the needs of BME communities, does it contain texts suitable for more emergent readers, does it have appeal to the Gay community. This is no doubt as important issue as traditionally an absence of such materials has been seen to deter the use of library services by these groups (Muddiman et al, 2000). Unfortunately this investigation does not have an answer to this question; however, if indeed those books on the 'book set' list do not contain such diversity, then perhaps also, Sheffield's library-based reading groups are limited in their appeal.

Perhaps as in the case of promotion, location, and the timing of meetings, the selection of books for groups to read should be diversified. Indeed, since the broadening of 'reading horizons' forms the basis of reader development (CILIP, 2005), such practice should perhaps be fundamental to the group management anyway. In doing so, once again there is perhaps increased potential for attracting the widest diversity of participants and as such, to more effectively reach the wider community.

Relevance

Although perhaps broader than the factors discussed above, the relevance of the reading groups to different people may also offer some explanation for the observed patterns of participation. Indeed, analysis of data from this investigation seems to point towards the reading groups ultimately lacking relevance to many of the social groups that are under represented:

It's probably not terribly relevant. We don't get that many people coming so most can't think it is that important. (Frontline Manager)

There are a lot of other things going on; activities, projects, renewal money. Maybe it's just one of those things that happen that they're not interested in, maybe they just want to bring their kids up. (Frontline Manager)

In reference to BME groups, so often people are so busy using the library to for other things to get themselves established in British society and you're not gonna get them though the door to discuss some authors latest text. It's what people need libraries for. (Senior Manager)

I'm not too sure how well it reaches out to the real needs of our community (Reading Group Participant)

Indeed, as the Senior Manager states, *"It's what people need libraries for"*, and perhaps in their current form, many of the reading groups fail to reflect this. This is perhaps especially true for areas with high levels of social exclusion such as Burngreave and Manor (Sheffield City Council, Date Unknown) and is perhaps reflected in the lower levels of reading group participation in those areas.

Further support for this case for non-relevance can perhaps also be found from numerous commentators on the subject of libraries and social exclusion. Muddiman et al (2000) note that the perception of reading as an irrelevance deters many from using libraries generally, and Elkin and Kinnell (2000) reports on the failure of library services often to meet the specific needs of socially excluded groups. Interestingly, it is reported that the key to libraries reaching socially excluded groups is in tailoring services to meet their needs, and often introducing new services (Sugg, 1999). This is further stressed by Train et al (2000). Yet such activity is perhaps limited in Sheffield, something apparent in the previous sections of this chapter. As one manager put it:

> *In Sheffield we've done general reader groups and they've sort of been an open invite, but I don't think there has been a push to encourage specific groups of people.* (Senior Manager)

This is not to say that good examples of targeting in Sheffield Libraries do not exist, some certainly do. The Library Outreach Service for example, coordinates a group in a residential home for the physically disabled. Through specific tailoring, an estimated 150 residents have been involved over the last year. In addition, through partnership with social workers, a group for the visually impaired takes place once a month at Sheffield Central Library. However, perhaps in order to attract more representative participation to reading groups, these successes need to be built upon.

Clearly, whilst the needs of different groups and perhaps especially those traditionally socially excluded are not reflected in the management of at least some library based reading groups, those reading groups may

not be relevant to potentially large numbers of people. Ultimately, perhaps a lack of relevance may be a major limit to how effectively groups may reach the wider community.

Objectives

Interestingly, an additional but perhaps important point that emerged from interviewing library staff was that over the last few years, there has been little guidance for reading group coordinators as to how they should manage their reading groups. As such, it would seem that rather than operating in a joined up and strategic manner, the individual library reading groups have acted independently, perhaps taking no account of what other groups were doing and who they were attracting. It would seem there has been an absence of higher goals:

> *It's a bit ad hoc; you just start a reading group if you want to.*
> (Frontline Counter Staff)

> *I think they've started off just because people have thought I'll start a reading group.* (Frontline Manager)

This is perhaps a key point however when considering how effectively Sheffield's library reading groups can reach the wider community. Indeed, if it is desirable that participation in library reading groups is more representative of the wider community, then surely it is essential that group coordinators must be aware of it so that they may adapt the group management. This desire for direction was apparent in some of the comments of library staff:

> *We should know as a leader; why are we doing it? Is it to encompass everybody? Should we be raising issues, are we working to broaden tastes?* (Frontline Counter Staff)

I think there is a lack of guidance from above as to what we are supposed to be doing. I mean, are there some objectives, are we supposed to be doing certain things, are we doing it right? (Frontline Manager)

Certainly, when considering the above sections and the apparent reasons for groups not being representative, these can perhaps to some extent be explained by this lack of coordination. When considering the lack of diversity in relation to promotion, location, time, book choice and also for whom groups are likely to hold relevance, perhaps ultimately, these problems could only be resolved with higher level coordination and a joined up approach.

Chapter Summary

This chapter is concerned with objective two and thus offers some insight into the dynamics of the library based reading groups. It also provides some explanation of the potential impact of those dynamics on the effectiveness of groups in reaching the wider community.

Participation

As determined from questionnaire A, 187 people were participating in Sheffield's library based reading groups at the time of data collection. Ecclesall library had the highest level of participation at 25, and Manor Library had the lowest at 2. The mean number of participants across all libraries was 10.3, and the median was only 9.

Limited Capacity

Although most groups are currently under capacity, seven groups are considered full. These groups are closed to new members and several waiting lists exist with no procedure for moving people on. This lack of capacity to accommodate more participants' at the most popular libraries is an obvious limit to the level of participation in groups as a whole.

Promotion

There seems to be little promotion of most reading groups which in itself is identified as a likely limit to higher levels of participation. When promotion does take place, the focus is mostly on existing library users (physical and virtual), thus the potential for attracting a more diverse and representative range of participants is clearly reduced.

Location

18 of the 19 library-based reading groups actually operate within libraries. Whilst for many people a library is an ideal location for a reading group, it would appear that the location of groups within libraries may deter some people from attending due to negative perceptions of libraries apparently common amongst certain social groups.

Time

Despite there being some diversity in the times reading group meetings are held, the majority take place during the normal working day. This appears to be a limit to the diversity and level of participation.

Book choice

All groups generally read fiction, most of which is selected from Sheffield Library's 'book set' list. There is some evidence to suggest that this potential lack of diversity may have contributed to the lack of diversity observed amongst the reading group participants.

Relevance

Data analysis appears to point towards the reading groups ultimately lacking relevance to many of the social groups that are under represented. This is perhaps due to a lack of tailoring to the specific needs of those groups shown in any reading group management.

Objectives

A lack of guidance for reading group leaders has apparently led to a lack of joined up and strategic working across the different reading groups. Perhaps this lack of coordination has played an important part in all the above factors contributing to the observed picture of participation.

In relation to objective two, there appears to be numerous aspects of the reading groups' dynamic that may be contributing to the current picture of participation. However, perhaps these issues can be largely explained by a lack of defined goals and higher coordination.

Chapter 6. Results - Objective 3

This chapter details the results of investigations concerned with objective three,

To discover the benefits of attending library-based reading groups for individual participants.

Questionnaire C was used to question reading group participants directly about why they considered attending group meetings and also what they believe they get out of doing so. Interviews with library staff also proved useful in providing insight and information regarding this area that may not usually be volunteered by participants.

Careful interpretation of the data led to several themes emerging that now provide headings and structure within the chapter. These headings are; Personal Development, Broadened Reading, Social Benefits, and Sharing.

Personal development

Interestingly, whilst interpretation of the data did not suggest that the pursuit of personal development was a key reason for people deciding to attend reading groups, personal development did emerge as one of the strongest themes concerning what people gained from participation. For many, whist this no doubt remained informal, this development could perhaps be classified as intellectual:

> *Attending this reading group is a learning journey which I love.*
> (Reading Group Participant)

> *It's been good to hear views which are opposite to your own, sometimes to see things at a higher level, sometimes be enlightened.* (Reading Group Participant)

You get different perspectives on a book, it widens your outlook and make discussion fascinating. (Reading Group Participant)

It has advanced my reading, made me persevere with books I usually would have avoided because they were too 'intellectual'.
(Reading Group Participant)

Although it's not our main aim, I think if you read something different you develop. I think it's a by product. For example we read Memoirs of a Geisha and Kite Runner and you know, you learn about other cultures that way. (Frontline Manager)

Such development is no doubt in part due to the extension of the participants reading. Organisations such as the Literacy Trust (2006) and commentators such Elkin (2003) are extremely vocal about the potential of reading to aid intellectual development, and to form a critical and thinking mind. What is more, the interaction necessary in a reading group is recognised by Hartley (2002) as changing the way people read, talk and think, and was observed in her national survey of reading groups.

In addition however, and especially from the perspective of reading group co-ordinators, it would seem that involvement in reading groups can have a significant impact upon the confidence of certain participants:

Some are quite shy and I think it has helped some develop confidence around groups of people. When you are not working with people regularly you can quickly lose confidence around groups so I think it has helped them – definitely. (Frontline Counter Staff)

Often if you measure these things in quantitative terms, it's nothing. Maybe just eight people who meet once a month to read a story. But I've seen unbelievable personal growth in people, and just over a matter of months thanks to reading groups. (Senior Manager)

I think this group has made me a more confident person. Two years ago I couldn't have spoken in front of a group. (Reading Group Participant)

Perhaps however, this also should not be a surprise. The Reading Agency (2004) states confidently that participation in reading groups "*Develops individual confidence and self esteem"* and Matarasso (1998) reports in a summary of numerous library projects, that involvement in library activities tends to have the affect of increasing confidence which ultimately can lead to greater empowerment. Clearly, this evidence points strongly towards the reading groups having a positive developmental impact upon participants.

Broadened reading

Broadened reading was another key theme that emerged from interpretation of the data. In fact, 69 % of respondents to questionnaire C identified participation in their reading group as having increased the range of books that they read, and many comment that they are now reading books they never would have read in the past. 17% of respondents also claim to be reading more thanks to participation. These findings also appear to be supported by similar patterns nationally with the Reading Agency (2004) reporting both an increase in breadth and volume of reading thanks to reading group participation

Interestingly, for many, a desire to have their reading broadened was the main reason for them taking part in a library reading group in the first place:

I thought attending a reading group would both focus and broaden my reading. I like the idea of reading books that I wouldn't always choose myself. (Reading Group Participant)

I used it to get back into reading after only reading newspapers, etc for years. I was finding it difficult with such a vast array of books. (Reading Group Participant)

I always read the same authors and books from the same part of the library. I thought I should try something new. (Reading Group Participant)

However many have also been surprised by how participation has led to a broadening of their reading horizons, yet also how this has been a positive experience:

Since being in the group I have read styles of books I would not usually have been interested in and sometimes I have been really surprised at how much I have enjoyed them. (Reading Group Participant)

Some people are surprised when you introduce them to a new book or type of book, something they wouldn't normally pick up off the shelf, and then shocked when they like it. That is what's really good about the groups I think. (Frontline Counter Staff)

With the elderly members it has broadened their reading in a really positive way. Some hadn't read fiction since school and are now revisiting those old books too. (Frontline Counter Staff)

These findings should also perhaps be expected. The Reading Agency's definition of reader development after all describes it as a concept whereby intervention 'expands people's reading horizons' (CILIP, 2005). Perhaps therefore, these findings in Sheffield point towards the library reading groups as being successful reader development projects.

Social benefits

The desire to meet people for a social gathering also appeared to be a common reason for people first choosing to attend the library-based reading groups. In fact, 41% of participants completing questionnaire C

described the chance to socialise as an important reason for their attendance.

Obviously by its very nature, the reading group is a social activity and it would therefore be expected that participation would bring benefits associated with this. Interestingly however, being part of such a social group appears to differ in significance to different people. For some, it seems the reading group simply provides a focus around which to talk to people:

> *It's a social get together with the added advantage of a common focus so it's a richer experience than some other social groups.*
> (Reading Group Participant)

> *I think it's about bringing together a group of people who like the same things as you do.* (Middle Manager)

For others it forms the basis of a wider shared cultural experience:

> *We've been to places like the cinema, had meals out too. People have really enjoyed that. There is a bigger social side to things.*
> (Frontline Manager)

> *We've been to the theatre before. And also, I think some people come here and then they might then go on to theatre together.*
> *(Frontline Counter Staff)*

In addition, it seems that participation allows participants to broaden the range of people they come into contact with:

> *It's a social circle too and I think people use it to move in a circle different to their norm. (Front Line Manager)*

> *The people are from all walks of life. So it's great to chat to people you normally wouldn't talk too.* (Reading Group Participant)

Class or social background aren't important when you're reading a book. It's nice to chat to different kinds of people. (Reading Group Participant)

However, an especially common theme that emerged was that participation in a library-based reading group helped to reduce social isolation:

Well sometimes people come to Sheffield and don't know anyone but they think they might be able to make some friends through the library. You know, it's a none threatening, safe environment that people can come to. (Middle Manager)

We've had quite a few younger people who have finished university and have moved here for a job or now they've finished they're looking for new friends. (Frontline Manager)

I would say a few have come out of loneliness (Frontline Counter Staff)

Perhaps we are fulfilling some kind of social function for people that is needed outside the work environment. We do touch on very personal issues. (Frontline Counter Staff)

I helps to reduce a certain level of social isolation. (Reading Group Participant)

Previously, I would often read a book and want to discuss it afterwards but have no-one to discuss it with. (Reading Group Participant)

Again these findings are largely supported in Hartley (2002: 128) where the social aspect of the reading group meeting is described as the

"*main gain*". This social function is also an aspect of the reading group movement often referred to by commentators despite often significant differences in the angle of commentary taken. Whilst Colgan (2002) rather dismissively describes reading groups as being more focussed on socialising than reading, Wertheimer (2005) positively reports on the social side of reading groups as potentially reducing social isolation within communities. Regardless of in looker's opinions, clearly for participants, the social aspects of the reading group dynamic are major benefits of attendance.

Sharing

The process of sharing ones thoughts, beliefs or passions about a book, of course ultimately forms the basis of any book group dynamic. Indeed, sharing is perhaps what defines a book group and as such, is fundamental to the delivery of all the fore mentioned benefits of participation.   As noted by Train (2003), this sharing is crucial to turning a solitary activity into something participatory. However, interestingly, many participants and staff, also highlight the process of sharing their thoughts about books as a key benefit of participation in itself:

> *I just find it enjoyable to share a book together.* (Reading Group Participant)

> *I've found it nice to share my views and to listen to other people too.* (Reading Group Participant)

> *I think they also like that sharing of the experience. I'm sure it helps people share other things as well.* (Middle Manager)

Furthermore, the desire to share also appears to be a major factor in attracting people to the book groups. Seemingly, attendance at a reading group offers an opportunity to satisfy a certain need:

I enjoy reading and wanted to share my love with others! (Reading Group Participant)

The kind of people that come love reading, they need to talk about a book when they've enjoyed it and they're keen to see what other people's opinions are. (Frontline Counter Staff)

Like any positive experience, if it is something that is good for you, you want to share it with somebody. Equally, if you want to have a good rant about how terrible something is, having a group of people to do it with is very handy. (Senior Manager)

They've either enjoyed it so much or they've not enjoyed it. And they want to share that with other people, they want to find out what other people thought. (Middle Manager)

In fact, the benefits of sharing ones thoughts and experiences of books are widely reported. Sharing forms the basis of bibliotherapy, the health based activity so often taking place in groups (The National Literacy Trust, 2006), and as stated by *Opening the Book* (2004), an understanding of other's reading experience is so often vital to illuminating our own. Certainly then it seems, the very process of sharing, so integral to participation in reading groups can also be an important benefit of participation in Sheffield's library-base reading groups.

Chapter Summary

Personal Development

It would seem that whilst participants do not attend the reading groups with the intention of developing themselves, personal development is an important benefit of participation. This development appears to fall into the categories of intellectual and confidence boosting.

Broadened Reading

The majority of participants believe they read more widely thanks to their participation in the reading groups. For many this was the reason for them deciding to participate, however others report this as a surprising yet positive development. A considerable proportion also state that they read more generally.

Social Benefits

It would seem that the reading groups also provide an important social function for participants. This however varies in significance according to the individual.

Sharing

Although forming the basis of the reading group dynamic, the actual process of sharing is also identified by many participants as a benefit of participation. The opportunity to do this appears to be particularly important in attracting participants.

In relation to objective three, participation in Sheffield's library-based reading groups appears to hold a varied and seemingly important selection of benefits for individual participants.

Chapter 7. Results - Objective 4

This chapter details the results of investigations concerned with objective four,

To investigate the wider impact of library-based reading groups on the community

Questionnaire C was used to question reading group participants, and several library staff were interviewed. In both cases, several lines of enquiry were used in an attempt to build a picture of what impact, if any, the library reading groups have on the wider community. Clearly, the broadness of this objective presents a considerable challenge in itself. Furthermore, due to investigations being limited to questioning only participants and staff, a full and balanced picture of the wider impacts of the reading groups is perhaps unlikely. However, the results detailed below no doubt offer some insight into the likely wider impacts, and what is more, perhaps provide the basis for further and more in-depth investigation.

Figure 11. Percentage of group participants that perceive their reading group as having or not having and impact on people not directly involved
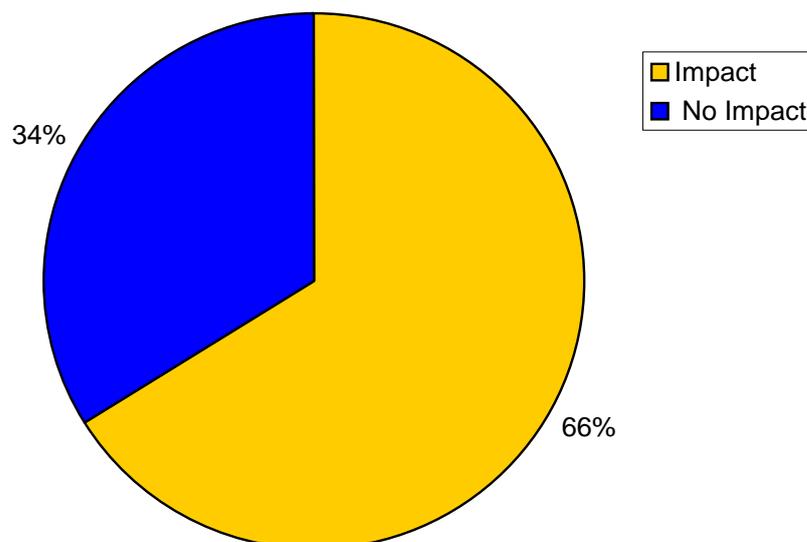
Interestingly, at the simplest level, it seems that a majority of reading group participants consider their groups to have some kind of wider impact. As Figure 11 shows, 66% believe that their group has an impact on people not directly involved with it. Importantly all of these participants appear to consider this impact positive. However, whilst this is no doubt an encouraging outcome, it should perhaps be kept in mind that a considerable proportion (34%) recognise no such impact at all. It should also be stated that since everyone questioned was in some way involved with a library reading group, there is clearly potential for some degree of bias towards perceiving a more positive picture than may actually be the case.

In addition and perhaps importantly, interviews with library staff also seemed to reveal something of a divergence in opinion about any wider impact. Whilst three of the seven people interviewed appeared to hold a solid belief that groups do benefit the wider community, the remaining four considered any wider impact likely to be somewhat limited, some even suggesting a possible negative outcome.

Given the apparent disparity in opinion from both participants and staff, it is perhaps all the more important to understand what any impacts may be, and to build a more complete picture in an attempt to satisfy objective four. In order to do so, careful interpretation of the data took place and several themes emerged relating to wider impacts that now provide headings and structure within the chapter. These headings are; Advocacy, Awareness, Outsider Perceptions, and Community Networking.

Community Networking

As stated in the last chapter, an important benefit of participation in the reading groups is an individual's involvement in the social aspects of group meetings. Perhaps it as an extension of this therefore, that the groups appear to have some kind of wider role in the development of community networks. Certainly analysis of the data points towards the

groups connecting people that perhaps otherwise would have no contact with each other:

I was talking to a lady randomly the other day and it turned up she was a member of a reading group and she was in another one at a school she works at too. She was saying how there is a lot of informal networking and word of mouth publicity going on. (Middle Manager)

*It is a social event, it's a way of meeting people in the neighbourhood (*Frontline Counter Staff)

I think it's good to have a local group making use of the local library. It brings us locals together. (Reading Group Participant)

In fact, Matarasso (1998) recognises that through various projects libraries have a history of forming community links. What is more, the Reading Agency (2004) identifies reading groups as providing a focus for community activity and promoting a sense of belonging and inclusion.

While the potential for effective community networking is no doubt reduced in the groups with low participation, clearly the suggestion of single units of people being knitted together into active group of contacts is encouraging. After all, the concept of community is defined by the inter-connectivity that exists between groups of individuals, and as stated by the Harris and Dudley (2005), this connectedness is the major contributor to wider community cohesion. From this perspective, perhaps the reality of library-based reading groups bringing people together must be considered as a significant wider and most likely positive impact upon communities.

Advocacy

The Reading Agency (2004) reports on the potential of reading groups to create "*reading activists*", people whom enthusiastically champion reading, reading groups and libraries within the community. Perhaps encouragingly, this seems to be a reality in Sheffield. Analysis of the data shows that in nearly all cases, group participants describe their group experiences in a positive light. Of course, this should perhaps be expected as people would be unlikely to use a service if they did not see any benefit of doing so. However, analysis of the data would also seem to suggest that many participants, enthused by their experiences go on to communicate this enthusiasm to others not involved in the reading groups:

> *I'm always talking about the group and recommend books that we read and talk about to family, friends and work colleagues.* (Reading Group Participant)

> *I've enjoyed it an awful lot and since joining have brought along quite a few friends.* (Reading Group Participant)

> *One of my members was talking about how she was on the tube and saw someone reading one our chosen books and felt the need to say how wonderful it was and that she never would have read it had it not been for her reading group. So in that case they are taking something into the wider world.* (Frontline Counter Staff)

Apparently then, at least in part fuelled by their participation, many act as advocates for reading groups and perhaps more widely, public libraries generally. Clearly given the potential benefits of library use, the creation of library advocates who go on to encourage this should be considered a very positive outcome, and moreover, one which has the potential to positively impact upon the wider community. This appeared to be recognised by a number of staff:

And I think more people [participants] are bringing their friends to the library. (Frontline Counter Staff)

Perhaps the waiting lists are an indication that people are going back into the community and passing on a positive message. (Senior Manager)

If you have an actual reading group then it can also be a forum you can use to advertise other library services and because they are having that positive experience, they are more likely to talk about those things to others. (Middle Manager)

What is more, there is perhaps further support for the impact of advocacy from numerous reports that participants have actually established or in some way inspired the establishment of other reading groups in the community:

I often mention the topics which we've talked about to friends. Some have gone on to join other reading groups themselves. (Reading Group Participant)

We've had some people come to us and then go on to start their own groups as well. (Frontline Counter Staff)

I think library groups are inspiring people to set their own groups up and because we've got the books we can say to people you don't need to go out and buy them because we've got them here. (Frontline Manager)

I talk about what we have read to others, and since joining have begun to run a reading group at work. (Reading Group Participant)

Of course, it must be kept in mind that some participants may have been library advocates even before their involvement with library reading

groups began. However, the data collected strongly suggests that for many, participation has sparked a passion about an activity that is now being communicated enthusiastically and potentially widely within the community. Since according to CILIP (2006) such messages are vital to building a "*greater awareness and understanding of the service*", the encouragment of library advocacy thanks to reading groups may be considered an important wider impact of their existance.

Outsider Perceptions

Perhaps in part related to the issue of public awareness of library services, is also the heavily commented upon area of public perceptions of the service. These perceptions appear remarkably varied. As noted by Harris (1998: 3), many perceive their library to play a *"valuable public role,"* yet other commentators such as Greenhalgh et al (1995) report of libraries carrying with them a heavy baggage of popular mis-perceptions that are counter productive to the library cause.

Interestingly, Muddiman et al (2000) note that many non library users do not regard libraries as places where friends meet or socialise, findings mirrored in a recent report looking at younger adults under the age of 35 (Define, 2006).   Such perceptions are no doubt important since clearly when we consider reading group dynamics; these actions in part define them. What is more, the Reading Agency (2004) state that thanks to this social aspect, reading groups have the potential to "*challenge stereotypes about libraries*". Given these statements, it seemed that if Sheffield's reading groups are affecting perceptions of libraries, they are clearly therefore having an important wider impact in the community. As such, one of the direct questions given to both participants and staff was,

'*Do you think the presence of reading groups in libraries affects the way non-participants view the library service?'*

This question is non-specific regarding who those non-participants may be and thus refers to people in the community that may, or may not be library members.

Of course, when asking people such questions who are already involved in library reading groups, there is perhaps potential for a biased response towards more positive answers. However, interestingly whilst numerous participants were unsure of what any affect might be, amongst many participants and certainly amongst interviewed staff, there was something of a divide in opinion. As such, no overriding pattern emerged.

For many, the presence of library reading groups seemed to signify a progression in the service and was thus something they believed would stimulate positive perceptions in the community relating to this:

> *I think they see it as a more vibrant place than it used to be because there's more going on. You know they can see it on the posters or on the website and although they might not want to come along, they know something is happening. They can see spin offs like the readers day too.* (Frontline Manager)

> *People may realise that now there is more to libraries than just borrowing books.* (Reading Group Participant)

> *I think it makes them (the library) feel a bit more contemporary. There are books based around reading groups, comedies, they've even been on coronation street so I think they make the library seem a bit more active and also that the library now has something in the way of a social aspect.* (Frontline Counter Staff)

For others, the reading groups seemed to be something that would promote the Library as an inclusive space:

> *I think that if I moved to Sheffield and joined the library, and was told that there was a reading group, then I'd think yeah, this library is welcoming. And it's doing something.* (Middle Manager)

I think it gives a friendly and welcoming appearance to the public.
(Reading Group Participant)

Maybe it makes the library look like a place where people can meet.
(Reading Group Participant)

However, just as marked, appeared to be the belief that the presence of library-based reading groups could actually have a detrimental affect upon the perceptions of libraries amongst non-participants. Indeed, several staff in particular referred to the reading groups as potentially contributing to libraries appearing as exclusive:

I suppose it might have a negative effect. I don't know, but if we're trying to get away from the idea that libraries are just for a certain type of people who like books or that you have to have a certain standard of reading to go into a library which is the perception that some people still have. We have to move away from that, but maybe having a reading group just reinforces that it is just for people who read. (Frontline Manager)

I also think the term 'reading group' can be a put off. I've always wondered if it should be book club. I think reading group sounds a bit like something you do at school. (Frontline Manager)

I know there are some groups where it seems quite exclusive and intense. That might put some people off. (Middle Manager)

Ultimately, while this study may offer some insight into the diversity of ways non participants view Sheffield Libraries, there can be no solid conclusions about what a dominant view may be, or even if there would be one. It is perhaps possible that in the areas of Sheffield with the highest levels of participation, the presence of library reading groups may reinforce a positive image of the library. In contrast, traditionally hard to reach groups may consider negative library stereotypes further validated by there presence. It is perhaps equally as likely however, that

due to a lack of awareness, library based reading groups are doing little to impact on the wider perception of libraries. Ultimately, perhaps in order to gain a truly reliable and representative understanding of the situation, it would be necessary to undertake a large-scale survey of non-participants, one that includes library members, but importantly, also people that are not.

Awareness

Despite a strong case for library reading groups creating library advocates. An important, yet contrasting theme emerging from the data was that groups remain limited in their wider impact thanks to a lack of awareness amongst the wider community. Several staff and a considerable number of reading group participants noted this:

I don't know if it has a wider impact, I wouldn't be sure. I think a lot of people around here don't know we have a reading group or don't even know what a reading group is. (Frontline Manager)

I don't know if they would be aware of it. I don't think so. I get the feeling here that people are so busy getting on with their lives. (Frontline Manager)

Most people probably don't know of its existence. (Reading Group Participant)

I doubt that many people have heard about it. (Reading Group Participant)

Of course those above mentioned library advocates may play a role in raising levels of awareness. What is more, even those less enthusiastic participants, still generally concede to discussing their group with non-participants. However, perhaps importantly, many do not view this as raising awareness to the point of having an impact:

73

I might recommend a book to friends or discuss how it was received, but I think any wider impact is minimal. (Reading Group Participant)

Work colleagues will often ask me "what are you reading in your book group?" but this is little impact on the community. (Reading Group Participant)

It seems for many, this lack of awareness and thus potentially limited wider impact is due to an absence of formal outward communication, an opinion that appears to be commonly held in groups both large and small:

I don't know how many people in the community actually know that we have a book group. Because we are full and because we're not promoting, do these people realise. (Frontline Counter Staff)

I doubt we have much of an impact because as yet there is nothing coming out of the reading group into the public library space, we're not sharing what we've enjoyed, sharing book recommendations, sharing anything like that. (Frontline Counter Staff)

I'm not sure about its wider impact on the community or how this can be developed. Perhaps it would be good if the comments we make about a book could be publicised more widely. (Reading Group Participant)

This should perhaps be of no surprise however. In chapter five, Figure 8 highlights the general lack of promotion of reading groups in Sheffield and perhaps the lack of outwards communication might be related to this. Wadley et al (1997) state that awareness is essential to library services delivering benefits to all, yet as noted by the Audit Commission (2002) and Davies (2003) a major problem that faces libraries is a lack of awareness of their services generally. Perhaps this lack of awareness of Sheffield reading groups reflects this larger problem.

Ultimately, perhaps the potential for library reading groups to have a wider impact on the community is itself being limited by a culture that has apparently failed to look outwards. As one manager put it:

> *Because we do everything in libraries, people that don't do them probably just don't know what's going on. How do they benefit? We're not there and we're not obvious.* (Senior Manager)

Chapter Summary

It would seem that opinion is split amongst participants and staff over whether or not the reading groups have a wider impact upon the community. Many recognise a positive impact, many consider there to be no wider impact at all, and there is even a suggestion of a negative impact. Analysis of the data however led to the emergence of the following themes.

Community Networking

The reading groups bring together people from the community that would otherwise have no contact with each other. Perhaps therefore, as an extension of their social function, the reading groups have some kind of wider role in the development of community networks. Obviously, the potential for such networking is highest in those groups with the largest participation.

Advocacy

The reading groups appear to develop library and reading advocates amongst participants who become vocal about the benefits of participation and library use. There is also evidence that thanks to their participation, many of these advocates have inspired the creation of new reading groups within the wider community.

Outsider Perceptions

It is claimed that library reading groups may challenge negative perceptions of libraries. This investigation offers some evidence to

support this view, yet equally there is the suggestion of reading groups reinforcing those negative stereotypes.

Awareness

Importantly, it would seem that the potential for any wider impact upon the community would appear limited by a lack of wider awareness about reading groups. This appears attributable to a lack of formal outwards communication from the groups, something perhaps related to an inward looking culture within Libraries.

In respect to objective four, there does appear to be some evidence for the reading groups having wider impacts upon communities, however this may be limited. What is more, given the limited scope of this investigation, it probably cannot offer a full picture of the current situation.

Chapter 8. Conclusions

This study was undertaken to investigate the extent to which Sheffield's library-based reading groups reach the wider community. It is hoped that at a time of growing reading group provision, the information acquired during this investigation will assist Sheffield Libraries in their efforts to reach the wider community.

In order to satisfy the broad aim of the investigation, it was necessary to have specific objectives. It was around these that the different lines of enquiry were based and thus it is around these that the focus of the following discussion is also centred.

Objectives

1. To investigate how representative reading group users are of the wider community.

The traditional stereotype of the reading group participant is a White, middle-aged, middle-class woman, yet this is a picture apparently supported by the literature concerning national participation in reading groups generally. Interestingly, it would seem that this pattern is also true for participation in Sheffield's library-based reading groups. This investigation has found women to outnumber men ten to one, and also completely make up the composition of most groups. In addition, whilst the age of participants does vary, the vast majority are over 45 in a city where the majority of adults are younger.   Importantly, 97.4% of participants are White and there is no representation at all of many BME groups currently living in Sheffield in large numbers. Furthermore, most participants appear to be highly educated and middle class, even though most residents are in the lowest social categories. There is little evidence to suggest any participation from people in groups traditionally socially excluded.

Sheffield is a city of extremes being home to the rich but also the very poor. Whilst it must be remembered that these results only offer a snapshot of reading group participation over a relatively short period of time. In relation to objective one, they strongly suggest that generally library-based reading group participation is not representative of the wider Sheffield community.

2. To understand the dynamics of Sheffield's library based reading groups and the potential impact of this dynamic on their effectiveness in reaching the wider community

Of the 19 library-based reading groups, seven are considered full with several holding waiting lists; those remaining however are under capacity with participation extremely low in some cases. Interestingly, this situation may limit how effectively the groups reach the wider community due to several reasons. In the case of the former, a lack of capacity is a clear limit to how many may participate, thus will restrict how many can enjoy the potential benefits of participation. In the case of those reading groups under capacity however, there are perhaps numerous aspects of their management which may not only deter general participation, but also particularly that of those groups which are under represented.

The lack of promotion generally appears to offer some explanation for the observed patterns, however when promotion does take place, its inwards facing focus perhaps does little to counter these.   In addition, the location of most reading group meetings actually in libraries probably reduces the potential for attracting those that view libraries in a negative light. Although the time of meetings does vary across the city, most are held during the working day, thus being inaccessible to the large proportion of people working normal hours. Furthermore, all reading groups mostly read fiction; a lack of diversity which itself, due to limited appeal may limit the diversity of those attending. However, more widely and perhaps due to a lack of tailoring, it is reported that the groups lack a certain relevance to many of the social groups that are under

represented. No doubt importantly, and perhaps in some way relevant to all of the above points however, there is a clear lack of guidance for reading group leaders. This has would appear to have led to a lack of joined up and strategic working across the reading groups as a whole and perhaps this lack of coordination has played an important part in all the above factors contributing to the observed picture of participation.

Ultimately, there are no doubt numerous reasons beyond the reach of reading group management and also the scope of this investigation that contribute to the patterns of participation. However, in relation to objective two, there are clearly aspects of the reading groups' dynamic that appear to be contributing. Of these, a lack of diversity in relation to promotion, location, time, book choice and also for whom different social groups are likely to hold relevance is perhaps of particular importance. However in order for this to be achieved across Sheffield, a certain level of joined up working would be required. To some extent, these problems could only be resolved with a degree of higher level coordination and perhaps the pursuit of defined goals.

3. To discover the benefits of attending library-based reading groups for individual participants.

Given the nature of voluntary participation, it should of course be expected that those attending the reading groups will consider themselves to benefit from doing so. Moreover, it is proposed in the literature that whilst varied, there are several benefits to be had from such participation. This case is also strongly supported by the findings of this study where the benefits of participation follow four themes.

Interestingly, there appear to be an element of personal development associated with participation, although the degree and type of development naturally varies according to the individual. What is more, most participants read more widely thanks to their involvement and a considerable proportion also read more books generally. It would seem that the reading groups also provide an important social function

for participants despite this also varying in significance according to the individual. Finally, having the opportunity to 'share' appears to be particularly important to many participants

Clearly, and in relation to objective three, participation in Sheffield's library-based reading groups has a varied and seemingly important selection of benefits for individual participants.

4. To investigate the wider impact of library reading groups on the community.

It must be kept in mind that the broadness of this objective presented a considerable challenge for investigation in itself. Indeed, given its breadth, the potential for building a full and balanced picture of any wider impacts was perhaps always going to be limited by the scope of the investigations. This was perhaps particularly so due to the fact that only participants and staff were questioned. However, despite this obvious limitation, the results that did emerge no doubt offer some insight into the likely wider impacts that the reading groups have on the community.

Interestingly, despite opinion being split amongst participants and staff over whether or not the reading groups have wider impacts, and also what these might be, analysis of the data did lead to the emergence of several themes. In particular, it would seem that as an extension of their social function, the reading groups bring previously disconnected people together, thus promoting the development of community networks. This is perhaps most relevant however, to those groups with higher levels of participation. In addition, participation appears to encourage library and reading advocacy within the community, which as well as promoting reading generally, has inspired the creation of new reading groups outside of the library. Whilst there is some evidence to suggest that reading groups challenge negative perception of libraries, equally there is a case for them reinforcing these. Perhaps of particular note however, is the suggestion that any wider impact upon the community,

whether positive or negative, is limited by a lack of wider awareness about reading groups. As potentially a hugely important point, this is perhaps linked to the lack of formal outwards communication discussed in previous sections.

Perhaps then, in relation to objective four, there does appear to be some evidence for the reading groups having wider impacts upon the community. Importantly however, it is unclear how extensive these can be, especially given the reported lack of wider awareness and the overarching limitations associated with the adopted methodology.

Discussion

In reference back to the broad aim of the investigation, to what extent, do Sheffield's library-based reading groups reach the wider community?

To begin most positively, and in respect to the definition of 'reach' as *affecting or influencing by some means*, there does appear to be a case for this to some extent being achieved. Indeed, those participating clearly enjoy a range of benefits associated with doing so, and what is more, despite the limitations of the methodology, there is some suggestion of wider although perhaps limited impacts upon the community beyond those immediately involved.

However, in respect to actually involving and being representative of the true diversity of the wider Sheffield community, this investigation points towards something of a failure in both attracting participants and breaking from the unrepresentative reading group stereotype. The observed pattern of participation is no doubt attributable to numerous reasons, many of which will be beyond the reach of reading management, however clearly the observed dynamic of the groups is a key factor. Despite the apparent flexibility of the reading group model reported in the literature, and the clear potential for reading groups to be made relevant to the needs of a diverse range of defined groups, they

largely are not. Although there are good examples in Sheffield of successful partnership work and targeted management, these are few and have not have not been built upon.

Broadly, the individual reading groups are largely independent of each other and as such, those members of staff that coordinate them have little understanding of how other groups are managed, or who they 'reach'. Furthermore, it seems that most reading group management is inwards facing, perhaps based on convenience, rather than conscious thought about how the dynamic may be best adapted to meet the needs of those not represented.

Importantly, this is not to suggest that Library staff are not committed to making their reading groups a success, indeed the enthusiasm and skills of many are considerable. Yet ultimately, there is an absence of higher level co-ordination and joined up working which is necessary to diversify reading group dynamics as a whole. Perhaps lacking true diversity in terms of dynamics, the reading groups generally, cannot be relevant to a greater variety of people, as such cannot deliver benefits to those people, and ultimately cannot effectively 'reach' the wider community.

Chapter 9. Recommendations

Recommendations for Service Development

Diversification

      The dynamics of reading group management should be diversified across Sheffield in order to increase the accessibility and appeal of the groups as a whole. This would include increasing the range of times that different reading groups meet, leading more reading groups outside of libraries in places such as cafes, creating specialist interest groups, and tailoring the whole group dynamic of certain reading groups to the needs of specific social groups.

Partnerships

      In their attempts to target certain groups, libraries should also take advantage of partnerships with other organisations better placed to reach them. Library books combined with partners' specialist knowledge and existing relationships in communities could ensure relevance. The importance of such partnerships is recognised in *Framework for the Future* (DCMS, 2003).

Community Consultation

      Community consultation as to what different groups want from the reading groups could ensure that new services developed are relevant. This consultation may be channelled through existing community liaison librarians.

Promotion

      Reading groups need to be promoted more widely both within and outside of the individual libraries. The methods used need to be diversified and should concentrate on communicating the key benefits of participation. Reading group promotion should perhaps also be incorporated into any wider Sheffield Libraries marketing strategy.

Outwards Communication

Reading groups should have the opportunity to share their views about books with the wider community. This may be via ICT, through circulated reading group newsletters, and on dedicated reading group notice boards within libraries.

ICT

ICT should be used to increase participation 'virtually' and to encourage wider community networking. A Sheffield reading groups website could host discussion boards and real-time web chat, as well as having a forum for physical reading groups to communicate their thoughts more widely. Such a site might also contain a directory of reading groups across Sheffield and contain an advertising board for people looking for reading 'buddies'.

Initiate more Groups

In order to solve the problem of waiting lists at the most popular branches, more reading groups must be created. No doubt limited staff time would restrict involvement long-term, yet libraries might initiate, house, supply materials, and promote groups with minimal staff input beyond the initiation stage.

Higher-level co-ordination

Sheffield's library-based reading group as a whole could be more effective in reaching the wider community if city wide co-ordination were in place. Furthermore, guidance should be provided to existing reading group co-ordinators that allows the local interpretation of a standard framework, thus ensuring a high quality of service.

Recommendations for Further Research

It is believed that this investigation has offered some insight into how effectively Sheffield library-based reading groups reach the wider community. However, during and following the analysis of data, the researcher felt that several areas would benefit from further investigation.

Representation

In terms of gender, age, ethnicity and geography, this investigation used quantitative data to compare reading group participation with wider community composition. It is felt that more reliable results could be acquired concerning the remaining areas of comparison if quantitative data were collected concerning these too. In addition, a fuller picture of representation could be achieved by narrowing the age categories on questionnaires and analysing other demographic variables such as physical and mental disability, employment status, and sexuality.

Wider impacts

As stated earlier, objective four was perhaps too broad for an investigation of this size. As such it was difficult to draw any solid conclusions. However, this question could perhaps form the basis of a larger investigation in its own right and consist of more specific and manageable objectives. Any such investigation might also question non-participants in order to reduce the potential for bias and bring more balance to the over all study.

Relevance of 'book set' collection

This investigation identifies book selection as a possible factor contributing to the observed pattern of reading group participation. As an extension of this, it would be interesting to investigate how relevant the current Sheffield Libraries 'book set' list actually is to the tastes and needs of different social groups.

Re-visit

At the time of writing, Sheffield Libraries management were constructing a reader development strategy. This strategy may result in

the reading group becoming more effective in reaching the wider community. However, further investigation post implementation would not only be interesting, but might offer some insight into the effectiveness of the overall strategy.

References

Aslib (2005). *Review of the Public Library Service in England and Wales for the Department of National Heritage: Summary and Schedule of Recommendations.* London: Aslib

Audit Commission (2002). *Building Better Library Services.* London: Audit Commission.

Bell, H. (2001). "The Pleasures and Pitfalls of Reading groups". *Logos,* **12**(4), 203-209.

Bentley, M. (2002). *Institutionalised Classism?: An Investigation into How Far Public Libraries are Serving the Needs of Working Class Individuals and Communities.* MA, University of Sheffield.

Bird, A. & Tedd, L.A. (2004). "Reader Development and ICT". Journal *of Librarianship and Information Science,* **36**(4), 159-174.

Black, A. (1996). *A New History of the English Public Library: Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850-1914.* London: Leicester University Press.

Book Marketing Limited (2000). *Reading the Situation: Book Reading, Buying and Borrowing Habits in Britain.* In: The Reading Agency (2004). *A National Public Library Development Programme for Reading Groups.* London: The Reading Agency.

Branigan, T. (2006). "Labour Checks Britain's Widening Poverty Gap". *The Guardian* [Online]. 10 March, http://www.guardian.co.uk/guardianpolitics/story/0,,1727748,00.html [Accessed 24 August 2006].

Burkeman, O. (2002). "It's a novel idea, but nothing can get New York reading from the same page" *The Guardian* [Online] 27 February. http://books.guardian.co.uk/news/articles/0,,658720,00.html [Accessed 24 August 2006]

Busha, C. H. and Harter, S. P. (1980). *Research Methods in Librarianship: Techniques and Interpretation.* London: Academic Press.

Cabinet Office (2006). *What is Social Exclusion* [Online]. London: Cabinet Office.   http://www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/page.asp?id=213 [Accessed 23 August 2006].

Caldwell, A. (2005) (eds). *Time to read: a good practice guide: examples of reader development work from North West libraries 2001-2004.* Manchester: Time to Read.

CILIP (2005). *Reader Development* [Online]. London, CILIP. http://www.cilip.org.uk/professionalguidance/readerdevelopment/default. htm?cssversion=normaltext [Accessed 1 August 2006]

Colgan, J. (2002). "Book Clubs are Nothing to do with Reading" *The Guardian* [Online], 3 May. http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,,709070,0 0.html [Accessed 26 July 2006].

Davies, A.E. (2003). *Not for me: a study into the characteristic reasons for people's choice in not using the public library*. MSc, University of Sheffield

Define (2006). *A Research Study of 14-35 Year Olds for the Future Development of Public Libraries.* London: Define

Department of Culture, Media and Sport (2003). *Framework for the Future: Libraries, Learning and Information in the Next Decade.* London: DCMS

Elkin, J. & Kinnell, M. (eds.)(2000). *A place for children : public libraries as a major force in children's reading.* London: Library Association.

Elkin, J. (2003). "The Reader". In: Elkin, J., Train, B. & Denham, D. (2003). *Reading and Reader Development: The Pleasure of Reading.* London: Facet Publishing.

Essex Libraries (2006). *Book Talk* [Online]. Chelmsford: Essex Libraries. http://askchris.essexcc.gov.uk/adult/Booktalk.asp [Accessed 15 July 2006]

Fister, B. (2005). "Reading as a Contact Sport". *Reference and User Services Quarterly*, **44**(4), 303-309.

Gorman, G.E. & Clayton, P. (1997). *Qualitative Research for the Information Professional: a practical handbook.* London: Library Association.

Goulding, A. (2002). "Public Libraries and Reading". *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science,* **34**(1), 1-3.

Goulding, C. (2002). *Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide for Management, Business and Market Researchers.* London: Sage Publications.

Greenhaulgh, L. (1995). *Libraries in a World of Cultural Change.* London: UCL Press.

Hafner, A. W. (1989). *Descriptive Statistical Techniques for Librarians.* London: American Library Association.

Harris, K. (1998). *Open to interpretation: community perceptions of the social benefits of public libraries.* London: Community Development Foundation. (British Library Research and Innovation Centre Report; 88)

Harris, K. & Dudley, M. (2005*). Public Libraries and Community Cohesion.* London: Museums, Libraries and Archives Council

Hart, C. (2001). *Doing A Literature Search.* London: Sage

Hartley, J. (2002). *The Reading Groups Book.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hawkins, M., Morris, A. & Sumsion, J. (2001). "Socio-economic Features of UK Public Library Users". *Library Management*, **22**(6/7), 258-265.

Higgins, C. (2005). "Why the Book Club is More Than a Fad". *The Guardian* [Online]. 12 February http://books.guardian.co.uk/news/articles/0,,1411452,00.html [Accessed 2 July 2006] 12 February

Hoffert, B. (2006). "The Book Club Exploded". *Library Journal*, **131**(12): 34-35.

Hounsome, M. (2005). *The Impact of Richard and Judy's Book Club on the Reading Habits of the General Public.* MA, University of Sheffield.

IFLA (2001). *The Public library service: IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for Development.* München: IFLA

Jacobsohn, R. W. (1998). *The Reading Group Handbook*. New York: Hyperion.

Kinnell, M. & Shepherd, J. *Promoting reading to adults in UK public libraries.* London: Taylor Graham.

Leadbeater, C. (2003). *Overdue; How to Create a Modern Public Library Service.* Laser Foundation Report. London: Demos.

The Literacy Trust (2005). *Online resources - reading groups advice* [Online]. London: The Literacy Trust. http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/campaign/readinggroupsadvice.html [Accessed 2nd May 2006]

The Literacy Trust (2006). *National Reading Campaign* [Online].
London: The Literacy Trust.
http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/campaign/index.html [Accessed 12
August 2006].

McLaughlin, C. & Morris, A. (2004). "UK Public Libraries: Role in Adult
Literacy Provision". Journal *of Librarianship and Information Science,*
36(1), 37-46.

Muddiman, D., Darrani, S., Dutch, M., Linley, R., Pateman, J. & Vincent,
J. (2000). *Open to All? The Library and Social Exclusion.* Resource:
The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries: Library and
information Commission Research Report 84.

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (2004) *A Quiet Revolution.*
London: Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (2005a). *The People's Nework*:
Read [Online]. London: Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.
www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk [Accessed 5th July 2006].

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (2005b). *The Little Book of
Public Libraries.* London: Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (2005c). *Digest of Statistics
for Museums, Libraries and Archives 2005.* London: Museums, Libraries
and Archives Council.

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (2006). *Library visits on the up
for third year running* [Online]. London: Museums, Libraries and Archives
Council. http://www.mla.gov.uk/ [Accessed 16 May 2006].

National Library for the Blind (2006). *NLB Online* [Online]. Stockport:
National Library for the Blind. http://www.nlb-online.org/ [Accessed 24
August 2006].

National Statistics (2006). *Neighbourhood Statistics* [Online]. Newport: National Statistics. http://www.statistics.gov.uk/email.asp [Accessed 16 June 2006]

Oxford University Press (2006). *The Oxford English Dictionary* [Online]. Oxford: Oxford University Press. http://dictionary.oed.com/ [Accessed 2 July 2006].

OECD (2000). *Literacy in the Information Age: Final Report of the International Adult Literacy Survey.* Paris: OECD Publications.

Opening the Book (2004). *What is reader development?* [Online]. Pontefract: Opening the Book. http://www.openingthebook.com/ [Accessed 29 June 2006]

Pateman, J. (1998). "Public Libraries and Social Class: Are Libraries Still a Class Act?" *Public Library Journal,***15**(3): 81-82*.*

Pateman, J. (2004). *Public Libraries, Social Exclusion and Social Class.* [Online]. Information for Social Change. http://libr.org/isc/articles/10-public.html [Accessed 10 August 2006].

Patton, M. Q. (1980). *Qualitative Evaluation Methods.* London: Sage Publications.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods.* London: Sage Publications.

Powell, R. R. & Connaway, L. S. (2004). *Basic Research Methods For Librarians.* London: Libraries Unlimited.

Proctor, R., Lee, H. & Reilly, R. (1998). *Access to Public Libraries: The Impact of Opening Hours, Reductions and Closures 1986-1996/7.* The University of Sheffield: Centre for the Public Library in the Information Society. (British Library Innovation and Research Centre Report No 89).

The Reading Agency (2004). *A National Public Library Development Programme for Reading Groups*. London: The Reading Agency.

Roach, P. & Morrison, M. (1998). "Public Libraries, Ethnic Diversity and Citizenship". In: Muddiman, D., Darrani, S., Dutch, M., Linley, R., Pateman, J. & Vincent, J. (2000). *Open to All? The Library and Social Exclusion.* Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries: Library and information Commission Research Report 84.

Robson, C. (2002). *Real World Research.* 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell

Ross, C. S., McKechnie, E. F. & Rothbauer, P. M. (2006). *Reading matters : what the research reveals about reading, libraries, and community.* London: Libraries Unlimited.

Sheffield City Council (Date Unknown). *Closing the Gap: A Framework for Neighbourhood Renewal in Sheffield* [Online]. Sheffield: Sheffield City Council. http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/index.asp?pgid=41448 [Accessed 25 July 2006].

Sheffield City Council (2006a*). Personal Communication with Library Management.*

Sheffield City Council (2006b). Libraries, Archives and Information – Service Plan 2006-2007. *Sheffield: Sheffield City Council.*

Sheffield City Council (2006c). *Culture Service Plan 2006-2007. Sheffield:* Sheffield City Council*.*

Sheffield City Council (2006d*). Library Catalogue.* [Online]. Sheffield: Sheffield City Council. http://hip.sheffield.gov.uk/ [Accessed 23 August 2006]

Spencer, J. & Mathieson, J. (2003). "Time for a Change: Co-operative Reader Development Working the in the North-West of England*". New Library World*, **104**(1193-2003): 391-403.

Starkey, N. (2005). "Online Book-Clubbing Made Easy". *American Libraries,* **36**(8): 50-51.

Sugg, A. (eds)(1999). *Social inclusion: where do libraries stand: proceedings of a seminar held at Stamford, Lincolnshire on 11th May 1999.* Bruton: Capital Planning Information, 1999

Tepper, S. J. (2000). "Fiction Reading in America: Explaining the Gender Gap". *Poetics,* **27**(2000): 255-275.

Toyne, J. & Usherwood, B. (2001). *Checking the Books: The Value and Impact of Public Library Book Lending.* University of Sheffield: Centre for the Public Library in the Information Society.

Train, B., Dalton, D. & Elkin, J. (2000). "Embracing Inclusion: The Critical Role of the Library". *Library Management,* **21**(9), 483-490.

Train, B. (2003). "*Reader Development".* In: Elkin, J., Train, B. & Denham, D. (2003). *Reading and Reader Development: The Pleasure of Reading.* London: Facet Publishing.

Van Riel, R. & Fowler, O. (1996). *Opening the Book: Finding a Good Read.* Bradford: Bradford Libraries.

Wadley, A. L., Broady, J. E. & Hayward, T. E. (1997). "An Evaluation of Current Public Library Service to Unemployed People". *Library Management,* **18**(4): 205-215.

Walters, R. (1995). "The Library, the Bookshop and the Literature Centre". *New Library World,* **96**(1116): 21-27.

Wertheimer, F. (2005). "Word perfect: The book club scheme that is bringing communities together, improving health and allowing its members to discover the joy of literature." *The Guardian,* 19 October, 7.

Wilson, K. & Train, B. (2004). *Reader Development Evaluation Framework.* University of Sheffield: Centre for the Public Library in the Information Society.

Appendix 1 – Questionnaire A

Library Code - [   ]

1. How many groups do you run from the library?

2. How many people attend the reading group/s?

3. How often do you meet?

4. How long has the group been running?

5. What is the joining procedure?

6. Is there a waiting list?

    If so, how long?

7. Roughly how many participants have taken part over the last year?

8. What kind of books does the group read? E.g. Specific genre/variety?

9. Who chooses the books?

10. Do you target a particular group?

-        If yes, describe

11. Are you actively promoting the group? If yes, describe

Appendix 2 – Questionnaire B

Thank you for answering this questionnaire. Your response will be treated in confidence.

1. Male ❑   Female ❑

2. Date of Birth   e.g. 14 March 1973 _____

Your age range (please tick one box)

16-19 ❑   20-44 ❑   45-64 ❑   65+ P ❑

3. Racial or Cultural Origins

White		*Black or Black British*		*Asian or Asian British*	
❑	British (BR)	❑	Caribbean (CAR)	❑	Indian (IN)
❑	Irish (IR)	❑	African (AFR)	❑	Pakistani (PA)
❑	Any other white background (AOW)	❑	Somali (S)	❑	Bangladeshi (BAN)
		❑	Yemeni (Y)	❑	Any other Asian Background (AOA)
		❑	Any other Black background (AOB)		

Mixed		*Chinese or other Ethnic Group*	
❑	White and Black Caribbean (WBC)	❑	Chinese (C)
❑	White and Black African (WBA)	❑	Any other group (OL)
❑	White and Asian (WA)		
❑	Any other mixed background (AOM)		

4. Postcode   e.g. **S10** _____

5. Please provide a few words to describe your reading tastes

_____
____

6. Do you attend any other reading group?   Yes ❑

No ❑

If YES, please give brief details (e.g. Other library/ bookshop/ private)

_____
____

Appendix 3 – Questionnaire C
Reading Group Participant Questionnaire

Questions

1. What made you decide to participate in a library reading group? (1,3)

2. What do you think the benefits of participation in such a group are? (3, 4)

3. How does participation in the group affect your reading, if at all? (3)

4. Do you think the library reading group you are involved with has an impact on people not directly involved in its meetings? (e.g. family/ friends/ wider community) Please explain why. (4)

5. Do you think the presence of reading groups in libraries affects the way non-participants view the library service?'

6. Considering its organization, how inclusive is the reading group? Please explain why. (1, 4)

7. How representative of the local community is the reading group membership? Why is this? (2, 4)

8. Do you think the reading group should be actively promoted outside of the library? (1, 2)

9. Would you describe the reading group as successful? Please explain your answer. (2, 3, 4)

Appendix 4 – Interview Guide

1. What do you think attracts people to the reading group? (3)

   Prompts   General- social activity
                    Specific- promotion, recommendation

2. What do you think the benefits of participation in the group are? (3,4?)

   Prompts   -social, educational, eye opening?

   Why is this?

3. Does the reading group have / do you think it should have defined objectives? (1)

   Why is this?

4. How representative of the library membership and wider community do you think the reading group participants are? (2)

   Prompts   -demographics, education

   Why is this?

5. How relevant to the community do you think the reading group/s is? (3,4)

   Why is this?

6. To what extent do you think the reading group administration/ procedures affect how successfully the group/s reaches the wider community? (1,4)

   Prompts   -waiting lists, book selection, timing, location?

   Why is this?

7. Do you think the methods used to promote the reading groups affects who actually takes part? (3)

   Prompts   -Are some groups more likely to see/be targeted?

   Why is this?

8. Do you think library reading groups have a wider impact upon the community in which they are based? (4)

   Prompts   -Is there an indirect impact on wider group via small group of participants? e.g. Family/friends
                    -Does the presence of groups affect the way non-participants see the library?

   Why is this?

9. What do you think could be done to encourage wider participation? (1)

   Prompts – Should library groups be run outside of the library, targeting?

Appendix 5 – Demographic Composition of Individual Reading Groups

Reading Group/Library	Male	Female	White	Black	Asian	Mixed	Chinese or other	16-19	20-44	45-64	65+
Broomhill	1	4	5							1	4	
Burngreave	1	4	3	1	1					3	2	
Central Lending 1	0	8	8							5	3	
Central Lending 2	1	9	9	1						6	4	
Central Lending 3	0	8	8							5	3	
Central Lending 4	0	3	3									3
Chapeltown	0	8	8								5	3
Crystal peaks	0	2	2								1	1
Ecclesall pm	2	7	9								1	8
Ecclesall eve	2	9	11							1	7	3
Frecheville	1	7	8							3	2	3
Greenhill	2	14										
Langsett Comm. Group	0	3	3							1	1	
Manor	0	2	2								1	1
Stannington	0	6	6							1	5	
Upperthorpe	2	11	13							4	7	2
Walkley	1	9	1								1	
Woodhouse	1	7	8								2	7
Totley	0	5	5								3	2
Total	14	126	112	2	1	0	0	0	30	52	33
Percentage	10	90	97.6	1.6	0.8	0	0	0	26.1	45.2	28.7