

ADULT NEW READERS:
THE IMPACT ON FAMILY

by

Ellen Clough Darden

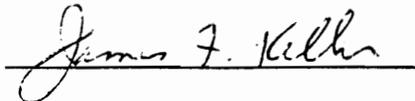
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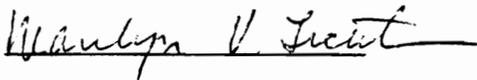
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Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Graduate School

1993

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore the changes that occurred in marital, child and family of origin relationships when an adult who was previously illiterate became literate. Eleven adult new readers participated in in-depth interviews. The results indicate that learning to read is not an isolated skill but changes the "self" of the new reader and subsequently his or her interactional patterns with family members. Six of the participants marriages improved, three of the marriages were ambivalent and two of the marriages deteriorated. All relationships with children improved. Relationships with family of origin

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members varied. The various outcomes were connected to the levels of support participants received and to how much the participants had previously defined their identities and their lives in relation to their previous illiteracy.

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CHAPTER I

Overview and Purpose of the Research

Researchers and theorists in the field of family therapy address families in a variety of contexts, but have yet to speak to the issue of illiteracy. Illiteracy is a problem which is often disguised and kept a secret. Many family therapists are probably unaware when they are working with a family where a member may be illiterate or learning to read. According to professionals in the field of literacy and according to new readers, the process of learning to read has many impacts on the family, sometimes in negative ways. These families may be at risk or may be coming in for therapy. The purpose of this research was to explore the changing family dynamics experienced by new readers and their families when a family member who was previously non-literate as an adult learned to read. The study was designed to explore the issue systematically and move beyond anecdotal experience and informal information. While neither the literature on families nor that focusing on education examines this issue with any sort of focus, new readers themselves have called attention to the changing family dynamics. At the Second National Adult Literacy Congress in 1989, new readers called for literacy providers to become aware of the changing dependency issues that occur among families of new readers. They also called for

literacy organizations to provide support and counseling for the new readers and their families in order for them to address the family changes that occur (see Appendix A). In order to address these issues, providers must first learn what the issues are and better understand how newly literate adults impact the family.

This research project was an exploratory study which investigated issues related to adult new readers and the impact their learning to read had on their families. The in-depth interview was the research methodology chosen for the study. The individuals interviewed were all non-readers as adults who then learned to read. All participants were volunteers.

Rationale for and

History of the Evolution of the Study

The following is the rationale for the topic of this study and the choice of qualitative methodology. Both are best understood in the context of the historical development of this research project.

Three years ago I was asked to begin a support group for a Literacy Volunteers of America local agency. We determined that the support group should include students, their family members and the tutors. The group was developed after the staff of the agency reported that they experienced many dropouts when reading skills began to

develop and they suspected family issues related to the new ability to read were contributing to the dropout rate.

Volunteers shared numerous accounts of new readers' family members who were originally supportive of the new reader and his or her developing reading skills, but who later became antagonistic toward the process and often the new reader.

During the course of more than three years of involvement as facilitator for the support group, I have heard a number of accounts of similar experiences from the volunteers and from the students. One student whose previous marriage ended in divorce cited his new ability to read as a primary factor. The purpose of involving family members in the group was to give them a chance to support each other with regard to the changes that were occurring in their families which revolved around the new readers' new and increasing reading skills.

As stated earlier, a review of the family therapy and psychology literature found very little information addressing the topic of illiteracy. While a review of the education literature revealed some information more pertinent to the topic, these articles and books were limited to a few presentations and articles which addressed illiteracy/literacy within in a social context (Barton, 1990; Coles, 1984;) but not within a familial context. A few scholarly publications were found which alluded to

learning to read and the individual's changing social interactions but again nothing which directly addressed the impact on the family or changing family dynamics. However, at a grass roots level, new readers formally addressed the issue at the Second National Adult Literacy Congress (1989 [a congress of new readers, see Appendix A]). They wrote a proclamation calling for the professionals and volunteers working with non-readers to become aware of the changing dependency issues they were experiencing in their families and called for counseling to be provided to address these issues.

Theoretical Framework

General Systems Theory and Cybernetics

The theoretical assumptions guiding this research were grounded in systems theory and cybernetics. General systems theory suggests that individuals can only be understood within the context of relationships and that what affects one member of a family affects all other members of a family (Gurman & Kniskern, 1981). It seems that of all the theoretical assumptions and concepts, this one is by far the most important on which this study is based. However, this is too simplistic an explanation. To better understand the theoretical underpinnings of this study it is helpful to describe the contributions of the cybernetic theoretical orientation. According to cybernetic theory two levels of

change exist. First order change involves shifting something within a system, while second order change is said to involve a fundamental structural shift of the total system (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). In other words, second order change involves changing how the system changes, not just something changing something within the system. Viewing learning to read as an acquired skill of an individual within the system would be a first order change. However, learning to read in this study is viewed as more than an individual acquiring a skill and is therefore assumed to have the impact of a second order change on the family itself. The system as a whole is perturbed into change.

This study is also based on the assumption that learning to read is not an isolated event but occurs within a familial context, whether that be family of origin and/or current nuclear family. Recent literacy attainment as an adult is understood to affect family interaction in dynamic and powerful ways. Consequently the interaction between learning and family dynamics are both circular and recursive phenomena. Cybernetically speaking, actions do not occur in isolation but instead as part of a recursive system of interactions between people (Piercy & Sprenkle, 1986). These interactions are where change occurs in the family system. Becoming a reader as an adult is change and occurs within a

familial context.

Furthermore the change in literacy status of an individual is directly related to the interactional process with others and therefore the very nature of reading alters communication patterns since reading is a form of communication itself. The system itself is not merely a grouping of individuals but is instead the interactions among the individuals. Consequently the system of interaction/communication is changing. According to Bateson (1972) the word "mind" could be substituted for "system", the "mind" becomes a property not just of single organisms, but of the relations between them, (p. 253)". As Bateson (1972) cites Holt for a clearer understanding of the concept "The rock sculpts the sculptor, as much as the sculptor sculpts the rock" (p. 249). Dell (1982, p. 32) suggests that "following a discipline or practice changes the entire self rather than simply adding a skill to the pre-existing self". "Learning" to read is not just a skill that is acquired, but instead results in a change in the person's self. This change in self is mirrored by a change in the interactions with others which, in turn, brings about change in the others' interactions with the new reader.

Another important aspect of this project which incorporates an assumption is that the process of understanding how reading impacts the family was punctuated

by beginning with the reader for purposes of clarity, though others might punctuate it differently. One could look at the interactions in the family of origin solely as the genesis point of this study. However, that is beyond the scope of this particular research.

The shift from thinking of reading as an acquired skill to changing the self is what Nichols and Everett (1986) would call a second order change. Because it is a second order change it has major implications for the family system within which the new reader lives. The family system, by nature of the individual's change, is being expected also to enter into a second order change. The other individuals in the family are being required to change themselves in order to continue to interact with the new reader's new self. These changes may be uncomfortable, scary, and/or rewarding for all involved because they are different from how they interacted previously.

Assumptions

This study is based on the following assumptions:

1. Families are dynamic and what affects one member affects all of the rest.
2. Families are involved in circular processes.
3. Learning to read is not an isolated skill, but instead occurs within a familial context.

Research Questions

While the theoretical orientation suggests that changes would occur in a system in which a new reader exists, I as a researcher wanted to be open to the question of whether changes occurred. Based on this it seemed logical to ask the following research questions:

1. Do family interactions change when adults who are illiterate learn to read? (Based on new readers' perceptions)
2. If so, how are family interactions changed

Definition of terms

An understanding of how specific terms used throughout this study will enhance further understanding of the remainder of the study. Following is a list of the terms used within this research and the definitions of how they were used for purposes of this study.

Adult - Someone who is eighteen years of age or older and does not have a developmental disability.

Non-reader - Any adult who is functionally illiterate, which for this study is below a completed fourth grade reading level.

Functionally Literate - The ability to read well enough to function effectively in everyday life. The majority of the literature places this at a minimum of a fifth grade level.

New Reader - Someone who has become functionally or more literate (learned to read) as an adult within the past 10 years.

Family Member - Anyone in the new reader's nuclear family or family of origin.

Participant - An adult new reader who has voluntarily chosen to participate in this study.

Literacy Provider - Any organization or individual which helps individuals with the process of learning to read. This also includes adult individuals whether in a voluntary or paid position who may be involved in such activities as tutoring, organizing programs, providing funding or any other activity associated with literacy programs.

Literacy Volunteers of America A local and national non-profit organization that provides one on one and small group tutoring to individuals who are functionally illiterate (below the fourth grade level on initial evaluation).

Literacy Volunteers of America National Conference This is a conference for any individual who is interested in adult literacy. The conference has three primary groups of attendees and offers three tracks of meetings: one for new readers, one for volunteers and tutors and one for literacy professionals

(administrators, program directors, etc.).

Significance of the Study

for family therapists and literacy providers

If a family therapist is unaware of the newly developed literacy ability of an individual in a family, the therapist may miss a very important piece of the family dynamics and be unable to understand or work through the issues with the family. Similarly, literacy providers may be able to lower dropout rates and enhance learning by knowing how the new reader impacts family dynamics and by providing services to address the issues. This study contributes much needed information to those professionals working in both the family therapy field and those in the literacy field. It also contributes information to new readers and their family members which will be helpful to them as they change and adapt as a family.

Finally, the findings of this study are a beginning point for future research on family dynamics related to adult literacy. From this study a clearer understanding of questions to be researched has emerged.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

It is important to note that the professional literature on literacy and the impact on family dynamics is almost non-existent. A thorough review of the literature in family therapy, other clinical literature, family studies and education revealed only a few articles which addressed literacy as more than a skill and these addressed literacy within a larger social context. However none of the articles addressed directly the topic of illiteracy/literacy and changing family dynamics. The only document which directly addressed learning to read within the familial context was the proclamation written by new readers nationally which was discussed in a previous chapter. The two areas in the literature focusing on literacy which were found to most closely relate to learning to read and family dynamics included literacy within a social context and the psychological aspects of illiteracy.

This chapter will review the literature pertinent to this study in four ways: (a) the proclamation from the new readers, (b) the literacy literature in general (c) illiteracy/literacy within a social context, and (d) the psychological aspects of illiteracy.

Proclamation by New Readers

The only piece in the literature which directly addressed illiteracy and family dynamics was a proclamation written by new readers at the Second National Adult Literacy Congress on September 10, 1989 in Washington D.C., (this was a conference for new readers; see Appendix A). The proclamation was one of ten generated by the new readers at this conference. Through the proclamation new readers addressed problems which they were experiencing and gave recommendations for solutions. The definition of the problem read as follows:

We, the new readers, have found the following problems in our families:
stopping illiteracy continuing from generation to generation; poor self-image creating a vicious cycle leading to problems like drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and high drop-out rates; shame dividing families; learning to read changes dependency relationships in families; taking time away from the family while in a literacy program.(p.9)

The proclamation then recommended that "Literacy providers should train tutors to be aware of family issues which may occur and to be prepared to provide referrals," and that literacy providers should "Provide counseling for the new readers, spouses, and families" (p.9).

A General Review of Illiteracy

Public attention to illiteracy in the United States began in the mid 1970's (Street, 1984). Kozol (1980) reported that between 10% and 35% of adults were functionally illiterate. More recently it has been cited that of the 100 million adult workers in the United States 20-30 million of those individuals are functionally illiterate (Chisman, 1989). They have "serious problems with basic skills: they cannot read, write, calculate, solve problems, or communicate well enough to function effectively on the job or in their everyday lives" (p.1). Of those 20-30 million, 3-4 million are absolutely illiterate. Of these 3-4 million approximately 100-200 thousand are served a year by Literacy Volunteers of America and by Laubach International (literacy organizations). Of these 100 - 200 thousand, approximately 50-70 percent drop out. According to the National Coalition on Women and Girls in Education, (1988) there are 27 million adults older than 17 who are functionally illiterate and "cannot read or write well enough to perform the basic requirements of everyday life" (p. 17).

These figures deserve serious consideration especially when understood within the context of the job market. With the baby boom generation currently in the work force and a projected diminishing work force, 75% of the work force of

1987 will still be working by the year 2000. This is significant because illiterate adults will be remaining in the work force or will be laid off in our move from an industry oriented society to a service society. A joint publication by the Department of Education and the Department of Labor (1988) reports that by the year 1995 90% of the new jobs will be service jobs requiring at least a minimal level of functional literacy and often much higher. Only 7% of new jobs by 1995 will be manual labor. Interestingly, most illiterate individuals under 65 years of age are in the work force and consequently ineligible for federal assistance programs related to literacy (Chisman, 1989). This shows that if a person is currently working and illiterate, he or she has very limited options in attempting to learn to read.

According to many professionals, illiteracy among adults is widespread and is related to many contemporary social problems. Hunter and Harmon (1979) were some of the initial authors who suggested that illiteracy is not an isolated problem but is highly interrelated with other social problems. "Just as the problems faced by people everywhere are interrelated, so too must be the efforts to solve them" (p. 3). Miller (1988) makes a connection between illiteracy and teenage pregnancy. According to her report teenage girls who have below average basic skills are

five and a half times more likely to become teen parents. Poverty, according to Miller is also related to illiteracy. Individuals whose education is below the sixth grade are four times more likely to require public assistance than individuals who have a ninth to eleventh grade education (Miller, 1988).

Following the same ideological thinking, Berlin and Sum (1988) suggest that "Too often we have been treating symptoms rather than causes. Teenage parenting, youth joblessness, and dropping out of school are closely intertwined.... Few people realize the critical role that basic skill deficiencies play in each of these stubborn social problems"(p. 26). They reviewed data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth Labor Market Experience which

contains data on a representative national sample of youth who were fourteen to twenty one years of age when they were first interviewed and who have been re-interviewed annually from 1979-1986. Some 11,900 sample members were given the Armed Forces Qualifications Test, a straight forward test of reading, word knowledge, and basic mathematics, which the military uses to determine whether young people have the necessary skills to enter the armed services [see Appendix A]... results show an alarming, direct

relation between basic skill levels and all three of the social problems enumerated above [teen pregnancy, drop-out and youth joblessness]. Those with limited reading, mathematics, and vocabulary skills are much more likely to experience some social pathology. The lower a test score, the higher the concentration of people experiencing a particular social problem." (p. 27-28)

These are important findings because it is the illiterate youth who become illiterate adults and the single most important activity for the literacy of children is parents reading to their children (Miller, 1988). If parents cannot read they cannot read to their children and subsequently the cycle of illiteracy is perpetuated.

Not only is illiteracy viewed from a cyclic perspective with educational overtones, but Hunter and Harmon (1979) believe that treating illiteracy as merely an educational issue is much too narrow and simplistic. They feel that illiteracy should be treated from a multiplicity of disciplines which affect the total life of individuals. Illiteracy is not isolated but instead a problem with wide sweeping social implications. This broader perspective is important and aggregate numbers are helpful in understanding the issues of illiteracy. However, in order to fully appreciate and understand the impact of the problem, it is

essential to gain an understanding of illiteracy on a personal level.

Most illiterate individuals go to great lengths to disguise their illiteracy (Clabby & Belz, 1985). A wide variety of tactics may be employed by the individuals, such as always ordering the same meal at restaurants, going only to restaurants that have pictures on the menu and pointing to the picture to order, and asking for help filling out a form by saying that they cannot see the form well enough because they forgot their reading glasses (Seda, Spann, Pinkston, & Burrows, 1991). These are but a few of the highly creative ways individuals have hidden their lack of reading ability

Literacy and the Social Context

Another body of literature on literacy, although much smaller, exists which addresses illiteracy within a social context (Coles, 1984; Barton, 1990). This is very different than the traditional research and writings on literacy which view it as an acquired skill which occurs in isolation. Scribner and Cole (1981) call for an expanded view of literacy which moves beyond viewing literacy as an autonomous skill or a variable, to including the wider social context of the individual. Coles (1984) in his research on learning disabilities even goes as far as suggesting that "social relationships,...need to be regarded

as the context in which disabled cognition is created and embedded" (p. 321). This article is important because a significant number of individuals who are non-literate as adults test as having learning disabilities. Coles suggests that learning disabilities are not a dysfunction but rather based on the individuals interactions with his or her social context.

A study conducted by Fingeret (1983) involved unstructured in-depth interviews with 43 illiterate adults. Her focus was their interactions within the larger social context of society and the aspects of dependence and independence. She suggests from her findings that:

American literacy work is oriented to individual rather than social action. With few exceptions, the relationship between an illiterate adult and the social network is ignored. Illiterate adults know, however, that as they learn to read, all of the network relationships must shift. They will have less time available to respond to the needs of others, and their own needs will change. Previously secure niches in the social order become unstable as reader's skills are requested less often. Present literacy programs meet the needs of those illiterate adults who are willing and able to separate themselves from their social networks for a variety of reasons. Program models must

expand to embrace illiterate adults as individuals-in-networks. (p.144).

Fingeret is the only author who has addressed the relational changes which occur as the individual learns to read. Her focus however, is on the changes of the social networks and does not specifically focus on the family.

Psychological Aspects of Illiteracy

According to some professionals in fields of adult education and psychology, a strong relationship exists between psychological problems and functional illiteracy (Mezirow, Darkenwald, & Knox, 1975). However, Clabby and Belz (1985) propose that little has been done to address the psychological aspects of illiteracy. The focus of their work is on the effects of illiteracy:

A person who lacks basic literacy skills often suffers from feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, fear, anxiety, and resentment. In turn, these negative feelings can complicate family relationships and occupational functioning.describing the cycle of psychological events that can be set into motion for a child who experiences consistent failures in his or her early academic career. The growing youngster can develop a low self-concept, feel insecure, generalize performance anxiety into other areas and avoid "academic" type tasks. As an adult, excessive energy

might be placed in covering up felt shortcomings. In many situations these painful experiences are permitted to interfere with the work and family life of the client suffering from academic deficiencies. (p. 526)

These researchers feel that the psychological barriers must be addressed in any literacy program. Their orientation however, is that the psychological problems "are generally rooted in the personality system of the individual" (p. 527).

Mace (1979) also suggests that illiterate individuals suffer from low self esteem and feelings of incompetence and sometimes feelings of moral voidness. Fingeret (1983) in the previously cited in-depth interview study of 43 adult illiterate individuals found that "Dependent illiterate adults often do not believe they are capable of intentional action, and they do not recognize their withdrawal as an action in its own right" (p. 141). She continues on to suggest that "an inability to read and write cannot, by itself, cause the extreme alienation found among dependent illiterate adults" (p. 141).

There are others (Street, 1984; Levine, 1980) however, who feel that the field of literacy has swung too far to the radical "left" and is being labeled as a social ill of great magnitude because it is the readers who are projecting their sense of loss onto the non-reading population as if they

could not read. A common denominator which joins the differences of opinions in this section however, is that all schools of thought view literacy as an isolated skill.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Analysis Overview

Several factors influenced my decision to utilize a qualitative analysis for this study. First of all, the new readers had learned to read and not necessarily learned to write. To ask them to respond to a written survey to be analyzed quantitatively would have drastically limited the sample population and would have excluded many from participating who had valuable experiences to contribute because they were undergoing changes in family dynamics. By utilizing in-depth interviews I obtained information verbally and I was not dependent on the writing level of the individuals participating in the study. Consequently I increased my accessibility to participants. This was very important because as I sought participants one question I was often asked was whether or not (or how much) the participant would have to write.

Secondly, there was a need for a thorough exploratory study because very little was known about the subject. As McCracken (1984) suggests exploratory research is extremely valuable and vital to the understanding of phenomena. Thorough exploratory research provides the foundation on which other research is grounded. The purpose of the research in this study was to discover what the issues were,

and the study was consequently inductive in nature. The existence, occurrence, intensity and variety of specific issues were unknowns prior to this study. According to Babbie (1983) exploratory qualitative studies are designed and best suited for discovering the issues, as opposed to quantitative designs. Another reason for utilizing in-depth interviews was because the study was looking at the processes of interaction within the family. Smith (1987) proposed, that the qualitative researcher is not looking to discover universal laws, (because they do not think they exist) but instead is looking to understand processes within a particular context. Smith suggests that qualitative methodology is the method of choice for this purpose.

Another factor which contributed to the selection of in-depth interviewing as the method of data collection was that the processes examined in this study were assumed to be recursive interactions among family members. The idea that qualitative research is more suited to circular processes, and that quantitative research is more suited to linear processes is not new to the field of family therapy (Keeney & Morris, 1985). Barton (1990) similarly, in the field of literacy, called for an acknowledgement of the limitations of quantitative research and for a move toward including qualitative methodologies. He reasoned that the field of literacy needs a more detailed and in depth understanding of

the dynamics of the social relationships of the non-literate. Barton, however, focused his attention on how the social context relates to the learning process and vice versa and does not enter the domain of the familial context and the impact of new adult readers on the family. He does, however, issue a call for research to be conducted in this area.

Sample

Sample selection

It is important to thoroughly understand how the sample was obtained for this study because it is crucial to fully understanding the results of the study. The sampling process somewhat parallels the sense of empowerment that new readers feel and also the concept that new readers are entering somewhat unfamiliar territory when they learn to read.

The targeted population was persons who were (a) 18 years and older who were non-literate as adults and (b) who had become readers (new readers) within the past nine years. There were 11 participants in this study. Preliminary conversations with new readers and with literacy providers from across the country indicated that non-readers and new readers can be very embarrassed with regard to their state of illiteracy and usually have gone to great lengths to hide this for many years. Access to participants was potentially

difficult, and access potentially even more difficult to individuals who would be willing to participate in an audio-taped in-depth interview.

Due to this inaccessibility, I utilized purposive sampling (Babbie, 1983) and snowballing techniques (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) to gather subjects. I had planned on obtaining participants from the southwest Virginia area. However, when I realized I could time the data collection to coincide with the Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) National Conference, I chose to coordinate with this organization to conduct interviews at the national conference. I felt that obtaining data from participants from across the United States would add greatly to the depth of the study and understanding of the issues involved by providing input from a variety of locations and backgrounds.

The following procedures were followed in obtaining participants for the study. In November of 1991 I attended the national LVA conference in Orlando, Florida and discussed my research idea with several new readers attending the conference. They gave me positive feedback with regard to the necessity of the research and their future willingness to participate. Since I had received positive feedback from the several students at the 1991 conference, I proceeded to contact the national LVA

organization about obtaining participants at the conference in 1992. I first spoke with the president of LVA national, Ms. Jinx Crouch, who was very supportive of the research, but together we agreed that it was vital that the new readers make the decision of whether or not the research should/could occur at the national conference. Ms. Crouch also suggested that I create a brochure to be circulated with a letter I would send to her. I subsequently sent Ms Crouch a letter (Appendix B) and a brochure (Appendix C) which she circulated to several new reader volunteers who had taken leadership roles in coordinating activities for new readers at the 1992 conference. Due to issues of confidentiality, she also made several phone calls to new readers for me and asked for their feedback, giving them my name and phone number to call if they felt comfortable in doing so. I have not enclosed further correspondence to protect the confidentiality of any new readers who do not wish to be identified in this study, whether or not they participated. The letter and memo Ms. Crouch sent described the purpose of the research and emphasized the voluntary status for any participants. I then received phone calls from three new readers who were very interested in the study and in helping me obtain participants. Phone conversations with one student also included feedback to me about the brochure that I had assembled to hand out to new readers and

changes were made to the brochure based on this input. Through these phone calls I was also placed on the new readers pre-conference agenda to meet with the other new reader conference volunteers (new readers who were designated as helpers and leaders of new reader activities at the conference) so that the whole group of new reader volunteers at the conference could decide the day before the conference started whether or not to endorse the project and allow me to explain the study and ask for volunteers during general new reader meetings.

With the positive feedback from the LVA staff and from the two new readers, I went to the conference in November of 1992, not knowing for sure whether I would be able to obtain participants. I did have permission to meet with the new reader conference volunteers just prior to the start of the conference to discuss my research. I met with two different new reader conference volunteer groups. Both groups were very informal and I was one item on a long and important agenda. The first group asked many questions and was very supportive of the research and agreed to allow me to present the research and the request for participants at the general new reader meetings. The second group I met with was more skeptical; they expressed concern based on what they described as several incidents involving new readers in which the new reader had been taken advantage of by

researchers and the media. As a result of these anecdotal problems, several members of this group were hesitant to endorse the project. The best description that I can give for this meeting was that I felt very strongly that several members were really concerned for the well being of vulnerable new readers and I felt "grilled" by them. They were supportive of the need for the research, but were quite concerned about the individuals who volunteered to participate. They were also concerned about how the research was going to be used once it was completed. This group asked me to leave while they deliberated.

In the end they did agree to let me present the research to new readers at the general meeting for new readers each morning of the conference and ask for volunteer participants. Several individuals, though, wanted one provision to be met. They wanted one of them to be present while I explained the study to a potential participant and while the consent to participate was signed. They explained that many times new readers feel like they can do anything and agree to participate in interviews. Some have subsequently been taken advantage of (especially by the media) because the new readers did not know their rights. I felt that this was a very reasonable request as long as the volunteer participant did not mind and that having him or her there did not jeopardize his or her confidentiality. It

was agreed that if the volunteer participant did not mind then I would ask one individual to be present during the explanation of the study and the signing of the consent to participate (Appendix D). The new reader conference volunteers from both groups I met with then agreed to be available to answer questions about the research from the new readers. It was also agreed that the new reader conference volunteers could share the research with any other new readers they chose and thought might be interested in participating in the study. It is important to note that after one individual in the second group attended several "signings" with me he indicated that he felt that I would not take advantage of any participants and did not feel the need for attending any further "signings" and trusted my judgement to ask for assistance if I felt it was warranted. I appreciated his assistance because I think it did lend credibility of the study to potential participants and it emphasized the confidentiality of the study and the rights of the participants.

Each morning of the conference all of the new reader attendees met for a general session to begin the day. After meeting with the new reader conference volunteer groups I was placed on the agenda for the morning general sessions for new readers for the first two days. In a brief (5 minute) presentation I explained the research and emphasized

the voluntary nature of participation. I handed out the brochure at this time and after the session I stayed in the student lounge to answer any questions. The first morning I had approximately 6-8 new readers approach me with interest in participating and/or with questions. The second day I also had approximately 6-7 new readers approach me potentially interested in participating. From responses to these presentations and from new readers talking with other new readers at the conference I eventually was able to conduct 11 in-depth interviews.

Sample Criteria

Criteria for participation in this study included the following. The participants had to have been non-readers as adults and had to have learned to read as adults. The participants had to have been in a tutoring program for six months or more and had to have attained some level of functional reading ability according to official evaluations conducted by the tutoring programs. For example, a student who had learned only the alphabet but no words and been involved with a tutor for two years would not have been included in this study because he/she would not have learned to read. Participant reports on initial and attained reading level were utilized for this criteria.

All participants were volunteers and were required to sign a form giving their consent to participate (Appendix

D). The participants were later mailed a copy of the signed consent form along with a letter thanking them for their participation (Appendix E). The participants were also given the opportunity on the form to request a summary of the results.

Description of sample

Following is description of the sample with a summary of some the demographic and historical data collected from the participants. Participants came from seven different states. I have purposely omitted the names of the states participants live in and their specific occupations in order to increase confidentiality.

All participants for this study were self selected and of those who volunteered, everyone met the criteria of the study. It is important to note that 10 of the participants were currently married and one was divorced and they all had children. Of those who were currently married, three were remarried, two had been divorced and one had been widowed. The years married for those currently married ranged from 8 years to 27 years. For specific ranges please see Table 1. The age of participants ranged from 30 years old to 51 years old. All participants were Caucasian; five were female and six were male. The occupation of participants included business owners, skilled laborers, laborers, middle managers, aides in helping professions, and homemakers.

With regard to educational level and reading ability, four had received high school diplomas, four others had received special education high school diplomas, one completed the 11th grade, one completed 9th grade and one completed 6th grade. All of the individuals who had received a special education high school diploma were in their 30s. The participants who had not finished high school were the three oldest participants in the study. Upon entering a tutoring program as an adult, the individuals were all evaluated as having a reading level below the completion of the fourth grade level which is defined as functionally illiterate. Initial reading evaluations revealed the following break down of reading levels among participants; two tested at a 0 reading level, six tested at a 2nd grade level, two tested at a 3rd grade level, and one tested at a fourth grade level. After receiving tutoring, participants gained from 1.5 to 8 years of reading skills according to later evaluations by the literacy programs in which they were participating. These increases in reading ability occurred over 2-6 years of participation in tutoring. This figure is important because all but one participant's reading level gained more years of reading level than the actual calendar years reflected in their tutoring. For example, one individual gained seven years of reading level in 2.5 years of tutoring and another

participant gained 8 years reading level in four calendar years of tutoring. The participants reading levels varied both at the time of their first evaluation and at the time of their final evaluation. The years involved in tutoring also varied. It is important to remember that the reading levels were not homogeneous, future research may focus on these differences and whether they are connected to changes in family dynamics.

With regard to others in their families of origin, of the 11 participants, six identified at least one other person in their family of origin who as an adult had a reading problem. Five said they knew of no one else in their family of origin who had a reading problem. None of the participants reported anyone else in their present nuclear families who had a reading problem.

Some information with regard to the nuclear family was also gathered in order to better understand the participants' families and relationships. Participants' spouses ages ranged from 29 to 48 years. The spouses educational levels ranged from almost completing a GED to a bachelor's degree. All participants had at least one child, up to as many as five children, ranging in ages from 2 years old to 30 years old. For specific demographic and historical data please see tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Demographic and Historical Data - Participants

Gender	Age	Race	Occupation	Education	Initial To Recent Evaluation According to Grade Level	Increase In Reading Involvement According to Evaluation	Length of Involvement In Tutoring
1. Male	46	Caucasian	Business	H.S. *	3-10+	7 grades	5 years
2. Male	51	Caucasian	Skilled Labor	9th grade	2-7+	5 grades	5 years
3. Male	48	Caucasian	Skilled Labor	11th grade	0-7+	7 (almost GFD)	4 years
4. Female	32	Caucasian	Homemaker	H.S.-Spec. Ed.	3-9+	6 grades	2 years
5. Female	38	Caucasian	Paraprofessional	H.S.	2-7	5 grades	4 years
6. Female	38	Caucasian	Laborer	H.S.	2-4+	2 grades	6 years
7. Female	46	Caucasian	Paraprofessional	6th Grade	0-5+	5 grades	4 years
8. Female	31	Caucasian	Paraprofessional	H.S.	4-11+	7 grades	2.5 years
9. Male	30	Caucasian	Business	H.S.-Spec. Ed.	2-10	8 grades	4 years
10. Male	32	Caucasian	Laborer	H.S.-Spec. Ed.	2-7	5 grades	3 years
11. Male	31	Caucasian	Laborer	H.S.-Spec. Ed.	2-3+	1.5 grades	2 years

Note: H.S. = High School Diploma; H.S. - Spec. Ed. = Special Education Diploma

Table 2. Demographic and Historical Data - Others in Family Unable to Read

Others In Family of Origin	Others in Nuclear Family	Marital Status	Spouse's Age	Spouse's Education	Occupation	Number of Children
1. Father	None	Married 27 years	46	1 semester college	Para-professional	3
2. Uncle (?)	None	Remarried 14 years	47	1 year college	Professional	5
3. None	None	Remarried 14 years	47	G.E.D.	Business	4
4. None	None	Remarried 2 years	29	9th Grade	Business	3
5. Grand-father	None	Married 19 years	40	H.S.	Laborer	2
6. None	None	Married 19 years	37	1 semester college	Laborer	1
7. Father	None	Married 25 years	48	B.A.	Business	3
8. Sister	None	Married 9 years	39	H.S.	SKILLED Laborer	1
9. None	None	Married 8 years	29	2 years college	Laborer	2
10. None	None	Married 12 years	32	H.S.-Spec. Ed.	Homemaker	2
11. Brother	None	Divorced 11 months	31	H.S.-Spec. Ed.	Laborer	1

Instrumentation

The data in this study was gathered using an in-depth interview methodology (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) (McCracken, 1988). I, as the interviewer, was the main instrument of the study (McCracken, 1988). The interview was semi-structured, utilizing a biographical sheet (see Appendix F) and an interview guide (see Appendix G). The majority of questions on the interview guide introduced general topical areas and were open ended to allow the participant the freedom to respond in the ways he or she felt most appropriate and according to his or her experiences. "Floating Prompts" were employed to elicit expansion on content areas that the participant brought up. Planned prompts were utilized to elicit expansions on particular topics and to address topical areas that were not covered spontaneously in response to the general open-ended initial questions (McCracken, 1988). Planned prompts were utilized only at the end of each topical area and only if necessary. "Cross Checks" were also used throughout the interview to explore the consistency and inconsistency of accounts of the same event (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

Each interview was taped on to a 120 minute audio-cassette tape so that changing tapes was minimally disruptive.

An interviewer's journal was also used as described by

Taylor & Bogdan (1984) in which I ended up incorporating four different types of entries. I purposely allowed myself a minimum of 1 hour between interviews so that I could process and write in the journal. One type of entry was a description of any topics discussed which were different than or in addition to topics covered on the interview guide in each interview. The second type of entry included my comments about the interviews themselves. These comments were written immediately following each interview and included such things as non-verbal behaviors of the participant, researcher's hunches, and my own processing of the interview. A third set of entries was used to keep a record of conversations with the participants outside of the interview. The fourth type of entry included items with a potential for developing themes and ideas with regard to the data being collected. The entries in the journal were written immediately following each interview, and at any other time entries were deemed appropriate or pertinent to the study. Some examples of entries follow. During one particular interview I was extremely tired and felt somewhat distracted. This was a very helpful piece of information which was reviewed when I analyzed that particular interview. During the analysis though, I found that I did not seem any different on the tape than I had on the other interviews. On another occasion it came to my attention

after the interview that one participant had had several alcoholic drinks prior to the interview. I noted this because it was interesting that of all the interviews I had completed, I had written in my journal that it seemed that for this individual I had to work the hardest to be clear about the topical areas of the interview. When I heard this information (just from idle conversation; the people talking had no idea the individual they were mentioning had participated in the study) I made a note in my journal. I was prepared to throw the interview out if upon review of the tape it did not make sense. However, when I analyzed this interview and I reread the journal entries I again found that the interview was much clearer and held a wealth of information. However, during the interview I did more explaining and seemed to be misinterpreted more often, but the misinterpretations were cleared up with only a little more explanation. Another interview journal entry was based more on my reactions and process such as a keen awareness of my conscious distinguishing between my role as interviewer and how I would have responded had the individual been a client that was seeking my services as a therapist. I was relieved and pleased with the clarity of this for myself and actually felt that my therapeutic skills made me a much better interviewer and analyzer of the in-depth interview procedure. The keeping of a journal allowed me the

opportunity to record potentially important data which were not directly related to the interviews themselves. The interviewer's journal proved quite valuable in both the data collection and the data analysis stages.

Data Collection/The Interview

The Interview Guide Development

An interview guide (McCracken, 1988) was developed to provide a guide for the interview and to help me make sure that important areas were covered for all interviewees. The guide also provided me with a reference and allowed me to give all of my attention to the content of what the participants were saying instead of having to remember what areas I had planned on asking about.

The development of the interview guide was based on information from new readers in southwest Virginia and from across the country whom I met at various conferences, from literacy providers (both tutors and professionals) and from the literature. Questions on the guide were developed and revised over time as I asked them to different new readers and requested their feedback. This feedback process was very valuable and added to the depth of the interviews. I found that by the third interview I knew the guide so well that I did not have to consult it at all for guidance.

The In-Depth Interviews

All interviews for this study occurred at the 1992

National Literacy Volunteers of America conference in Denver, Colorado with new readers. Interviews lasted approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes to 2 hours.

The participant was asked where he or she would like to be interviewed, and locations were chosen jointly by the participant and me. The participant was asked to choose the interview site to allow the participant control over the situation. The interviews took place in private settings in which confidentiality could be maintained. Since we were at a hotel, in order to ensure privacy and a minimum of interruptions, most interviews occurred in the individual's hotel room or in the room in which I was staying. I asked all participants if they were comfortable with the location of the interview. They all assured me that they were. All rooms were equipped with a sitting area which included several comfortable chairs and a table for the tape recorder and the timer to be placed on. The hotel rooms were not my first choice but were used because attempts to secure another room at the hotel complex (that was insured to be private and confidential) were unsuccessful. One area was offered; however, I declined its use because the walls were merely partitions and could not provide a confidential setting.

After deciding on a time and location, the interview began with warm up "idle chatter" (McCracken, 1984, p.38).

This was the rapport building stage. We then moved on to reviewing the consent-to-participate form. The participant was asked at this time if he or she had any questions and then was asked to sign the consent form, with a reminder that he or she could withdraw from the study at any time. I informed the participants that about 5 minutes into the interview I would stop and rewind the tape to make sure that it was recording. I explained to each participant that I wanted to make sure the tape was recording because I did not want to lose anything they said and that I did not want to trust accuracy of their responses to my memory. In other words, what they had to say was very important and significant and I wanted to make sure none of it was lost and that my analysis was based on accuracy. I also utilized a timer and set it for approximately 50 minutes so that it would go off before the end of the tape, acting as a reminder to turn the tape over. I explained the timer and its purpose to the participants. Using the timer was very helpful in that it relieved me of the task of having to look at the tape frequently. Thus, I could fully concentrate on the interview. Also, the timer served as a reminder to me and to the participant; when it went off it was much less disruptive than if I had had to stop the flow of the interview myself. The tape was then turned over and the interview proceeded, first with obtaining the demographical

and biographical data, and then moving into the general descriptive questions on the interview guide (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). After about five minutes into the interview I stopped the tape and made sure that it was recording. After checking the tape the interview proceeded with minimal interruptions. On several occasions telephones rang or there were knocks on the door. If we were interrupted, I rewound the tape slightly and the participant and I reviewed what had last been said so as to continue with the same thoughts.

Once the consent form was signed and the tape was turned on, the interview began by obtaining demographic information and specific information pertinent to this study such as education level and progress in reading level. The interview proceeded then to the topical areas on the interview guide which I had before me in every interview. These included the individual's history of not reading, adulthood as a non-reader and adulthood as a reader with emphasis in each area on family relationships.

Throughout each interview the research questions were treated as continuous and dynamic with the information received from initial interviews enhancing questions in future interviews. Based on this, several modifications in the interview questions occurred over the course of the 11 interviews. I had actually thought prior to the interviews

that more modifications would occur than actually did. The first modification occurred by the fourth interview when I added a topical area by asking for the participants to tell me what advice they would give to students just entering a literacy program with regard to changes in the family and what advice would they give to tutors and literacy providers. By the ninth interview I was also asking how could these ideas be incorporated into the learning process. Another modification occurred about the seventh interview. I found that I need not spend so much time asking questions on historical background and could focus even more acutely during the interview on the participant's adult relationships as a reader and as a non-reader while still maintaining an understanding of the participant's growing up as a non-reader. This modification occurred because the individual participant's experiences about what it was like as a non-reader growing up were quite similar, but it seemed that more variations in experiences occurred in their adult relationships.

All interviews were considered complete when all areas on the interview guideline had been addressed and when any other areas that the participants thought were important to the study were discussed. Closure of the interview occurred by asking the participant how he/she felt about the interview and by informing the participant of my time

schedule for completing the research.

Participants were also asked to share any other thoughts they might have with regard to the topic with me if they thought of anything else over the course of the conference or after. Most participants at this point said that they felt that we had covered the issues really well and they did not think they would have anything else to add. No one approached me with additional verbal input after the interviews. At the end of the interview I also asked the participants if they wanted to send me any copies of other interviews or other work that they were involved in that they thought would be helpful to the study I would appreciate it. I asked this because several of the participants had mentioned it would be helpful for me to see or read another interview or program in which they had participated. I received writings from two individuals at the conference and a packet of newspaper accounts of interviews in the mail after I returned from the conference from one other participant.

A follow-up phone call was made to the participants to ask any questions which evolved while analyzing the data, to gather any missing data and to allow the participant the opportunity to ask me questions and bring closure to the process for the participant. The follow-up phone calls occurred during the analysis of the data phase.

Data Analysis

Description

Analysis of the data began after the completion of all of the interviews. This is suggested by Bogden & Bilken (1982) for researchers who are inexperienced with field research. The basic strategy for data analysis proposed by McCracken (1988) was adopted for this study with a few initial minor variations and a few minor alterations developed as the data emerged. I will discuss the variations briefly first before I give a detailed account of the stages of analysis so that the chronological order of how the data was actually analyzed can be maintained with clarity.

The variations which emerged during data analysis were in response to the type of themes and patterns which emerged. Consequently a few shifts in the data analysis process occurred as the analysis proceeded to incorporate the emerging patterns and to more fully take advantage of the data. McCracken's strategy consisted of five stages and moved from detailed analysis to more general analysis, then into thematic groupings within interviews and finally thematic groupings among interviews. McCracken had also recommended the use of a computer word processing system because it provided a history of each step of the analysis process for reliability and replication. The following is a

detailed discussion of the strategy of analysis, the stages of analysis and the computer techniques I utilized. Initially (for the first four interviews) I broke McCracken's stage three into two levels on the computer since I was able to copy and move the text around with the capabilities of Word Perfect. The breaking down of stage three into two stages was really just to preserve each step of the analysis procedure recommended by McCracken on computer and did not really alter the way in which the data was analyzed. This change resulted in saving on to computer all 6 different stages of data analysis. By the fourth interview I collapsed several levels to a total of four levels due to a redundancy in the analysis process which was not contributing to a more thorough understanding of the data. This will be explained in further detail as it occurred in the analysis process.

All interviews were analyzed individually before the final themes were compared among the interviews. The interviews were analyzed in the order they were conducted. All interviews were analyzed directly from the audio recording. It was determined that to analyze the data from a transcript would subject the analysis to a loss of the inflection, tone and pauses which were crucial to interpreting the written words. Consequently the audio-tape was listened to for the first, second and third levels of

analysis and none of the text was transcribed. By the fourth interview however, it was determined that transcribing pertinent and important portions of the text at the first level of analysis was beneficial because it saved time rewinding the tape, fast forwarding the tape, having to keep such a close eye on the cue numbers and it would save hunting time in the final write up for quotes because they would already be on disk. This alteration did not really reflect a change in the process of how the data was analyzed as much as it was in how the analysis was recorded. However, it is deemed important enough to report to preserve the replicability of this study.

Interviews One Through Three

Analysis of the first three interviews proceeded along the following sequence without any alterations, which are based on McCracken's (1988) five stages of analysis. The way it was completed on computer was my own creation.

Stage One

At this stage the focus was on the individual "utterances" in the interview. No attention was paid to connections with other utterances. Written observations and comments were made on the computer at the point in the audio-tape where the participant's words or phrases seemed intense and/or important. McCracken explained this stage of analysis with an analogy of an archeologist who approaches a

dig site and begins by sifting through and sorting out the important from the unimportant.

The use of the researcher's self (myself) was very critical in this stage. I became the instrument of analysis and tuned into the participant's reactions. I maintained a focus on what was in the data, based on the information in the literature and on my knowledge base and experience of the changes in families when a non-reader learns to read as an adult. At this point in the analysis, the notes in the interviewer's journal were reviewed concurrently with the analysis and any notes with regard to my reactions were incorporated into the analysis at the point in the interview the reactions occurred.

This stage was completed on computer by making comments with the tape cue marking numbers so that future reference could be exact and quick. This created a record which consisted of only the observations. This was important for the next stage.

Stage Two

This stage expanded the observations in three ways. 1. I made comments about the implications and possibilities of the observations made in stage one. 2. Each observation was then looked at through a review of the entire transcript to determine any possible relationships to other content or first stage observations. 3. The observations were examined

each in relation to the other stage two observations. Attention was paid at this stage not only to similarities but to oppositions and contradictions. This stage was completed on computer by inserting the stage two observations next to the stage one observations within the transcript with the cue number and brackets. To prepare for the third and fourth stages the first and second stage observations were copied into a new file. This was important because the third stage involved examining the observations.

Stage Three

In this stage observations were again made of the observations. This was the beginning of the identification of patterns and themes. A general outline of the interview emerged with regard to patterns and themes. The audio-tape was consulted only for clarification and for confirmation or discouragement of developing themes. This stage was completed on computer by using the new file created in stage two and inserting observations isolated by brackets into this file. Potential themes were also preserved at this stage.

Stage Four

In this stage the focus was more intent on the themes that emerged. Themes were written in capital letters and consisted of one word or very brief descriptions. Attention

was not paid to how the general themes related to any other parts of the interview. The idea was to pull out the themes and patterns that had arisen based on the files created in stages two and three.

Stage Five

After all of the themes were identified I then created a new file with them and reviewed the themes with regard to their interrelationships. Where themes were repetitious, one theme was chosen and the others discarded. This was the point in the process where the information became narrowed and was consolidated.

In this stage I took the stage four analysis and made a copy and created a stage five file. I was then able to rearrange the comments and observations and group them according to commonalities or themes, though I continued to preserve all observations and comments. Having included the cue numbers was crucial because even though I was now rearranging I could still easily and quickly go back to the audio-tape and determine if the thematic or pattern grouping was appropriate. I could also copy and utilize some comments and observations that seemed to fit into more than one theme or pattern.

Stage Six

Again a new file was created with the stage five analysis and theme/pattern development. The first step of

this stage was to then delete all of the observations so that all that remained were the themes that had emerged. These remaining themes were rearranged into hierarchical groupings with major themes and sub themes placed categorically beneath them.

The remaining themes which did not seem to fit anywhere were maintained. They were assessed to see if they contradicted any of the themes or the particular hierarchy which developed from the data. No themes were discarded. This is a point at which I varied slightly from McCracken's analysis methodology and did not discard the seemingly unrelated themes. This way in the sixth stage I could compare the seemingly unimportant or less important themes among all of the interviews to see if there were any similarities.

Interviews Four Through Eleven

Interviews 4 through 11 were conducted with four stages of analysis saved onto disk which is a reflection of collapsing several stages while maintaining the same basic method of analysis procedures. The data still followed the levels of analysis as suggested by McCracken but with variations as to how they were maintained on the computer and with one slight variation in the development of themes.

The stages were collapsed when it was found that to maintain six levels on disk was extremely redundant and did

not save anything really unique.

The stages for interview 4 through 11 were as follows:

Stages One and Two

In level 1, I listened to the audio-tape and made transcriptions with observations as in stage one of the previous three interviews. Stage two of the previous three interviews was also completed at this level on this file because no analysis was lost from stage one.

Stages Three, Four and Five

This stage was a combination of stage 3 and four of the initial three interviews which briefly included making more observations and then the development of themes and rearranging the observations and themes.

Stage Six

This stage was the same as the stage six for the first three interviews.

The reduction of stages on computer and the inclusion of thematic ideas occurring earlier in the data analysis were a result of several factors. After completing the analysis of the first three interviews I understood the need for the first three stages of analysis which lead up to the development of themes. The very deliberate nature of the process seemed to have been designed to guide one's thinking step by step toward a thematic direction. In my analysis journal (which I kept on computer while analyzing the data)

I had noted that I was already quite skilled at learning to develop themes and looking at patterns and themes since this was my professional background. Because of this, several of the steps proposed by McCracken were redundant to me. What I wrote in my analysis journal as to the redundancy of the levels is as follows:

my surmise is that it is because of my professional therapeutic and systemic skills of looking for patterns and themes when I work clinically (actually in anything I do). I feel that my clinical skills were an immense help and that McCracken's 5 tiered level of analysis may have been needed for those who are not thoroughly skilled in observation and looking for patterns. I did not find myself looking for pathology either, to my wonderful surprise, if anything I did not want to acknowledge when a seemingly "negative pattern" was evolving, and for this reason it was definitely good to analyze the data through several layers of observation to remove me from the words and into the patterns and themes (i.e. one pattern that I was surprised at finding and did not want to find was the one that often the marital relationship revolved around and was defined by the needs of the new reader both when they could not read and when they could, although the degree of this varied greatly according to the level of

support in the relationships.) but I did not need that many layers for the themes and patterns to emerge. Consequently during the analysis I allowed myself to put in themes during stage two and three as they seemed to emerge but I did not place a heavy emphasis on finding them at these stages. This is a variation from McCracken's stages of analysis.

All of the stage 6 analyses for all 11 interviews were then analyzed with comparison to each other and this is stage seven of my analysis.

Stage seven

This stage began only after all of the other interviews had been analyzed through stage six. This stage reviewed the stage six themes and patterns from all of the interviews. The themes from each interview were compared and organized and results were generated. Stage seven was the stage where the comparison occurred across interviews to determine the results of this study.

This stage was completed on computer by creating another new file which consisted of all of the stage six categorizations. At this point I made a hard copy of all of the stage six analysis and read them so as to be able to view them side by side. I then color-coded the new categories to aid in the identification across interviews. Similar themes were given the same color. A final

categorization was developed from this process which was where the results of this study were drawn from.

Upon completion of all stages of analysis the results were then compared with the theoretical orientations of this study and the theoretical implications were analyzed.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview

This chapter is devoted to a thorough presentation and discussion of the results of this study. The results were generated utilizing a qualitative analysis process which used my "self" as the instrument of analysis and interpretation of the findings (McCracken, 1988). Therefore the synthesis, organization and presentation of the results is conducted utilizing my worldview as a reference point. My worldview is one of literacy. This is in sharp contrast to the participants' worldview of illiteracy to literacy. This "difference" between my worldview and that of the participants is seen by Agar (1983) as contributing valuable information to the analysis and interpretation of the data. The "difference" helps bring forth vital data by revealing my literate worldview's expectations and assumptions. By utilizing my knowledge of illiteracy, literacy, systems and cybernetic theory and my own worldview the experiences of the participants are illuminated.

I struggled with how to present the findings because of their complex nature and the participants' varied experiences. I found myself with an image of creating a path through a dense forest which needed to be marked clearly but which wound through all of the forest without

overlapping any sections of the forest. The path was constructed to allow the readers to see the complexities of the forest without getting lost. I found the process of my presentation of the results a recursive process in itself.

Because this was an exploratory study and little was known from a research perspective, I chose a "thoroughness of presentation" approach. I opted for this method rather than risk jeopardizing the integrity and complex nature of the findings (McCracken, 1988) by a need for conciseness and simplification. I feared that such a simplification would undermine the complicated and interwovenness of the themes that impacted these participants' lives as they progressed from illiterate to literate. A major portion of the results section will focus on exploring who the participants were prior to their involvement in current family relationships and seemingly does not focus on the "changes in family relationships". This is vital to understanding the "changes in family relationships" and cannot be extricated and isolated from the "changes in family relationships."

The results are presented in such a manner as to maintain the dynamic, connected and recursive nature of the findings while answering the two specific research questions of this study: (a) when adults who are illiterate learn to read, do family interactions change (based on new readers perceptions)? and (b) if so, how are family interactions

changed? The results clearly and strongly indicate that the answer to question number one is yes, family interactions do change when an adult who is illiterate learns to read. The answer to question number two provides the bulk of explanation in this chapter. How these family interactions changed is examined by exploring what the impact of being illiterate and the subsequent progression to literacy as an adult had on the participants' lives and relationships. How and why the changes impacted the relationships are also explored and discussed. Since the study examined learning to read from a systems perspective and more specifically the changes which occurred from a cybernetic theoretical orientation, the linking of the results and discussions to the theoretical underpinnings of the study were included in this chapter. First and second order changes will be discussed as they occurred in the explanation of the results.

Two major groupings emerged from the analysis. The first type of grouping included five phenomenological themes that illuminated how illiteracy and learning to read were connected to the participants' lives and their family relationships and what changes occurred. The five phenomenological themes which applied to all participants in varying degrees were (a) the level and types of "support" the new readers received, (b) how not being able to read

"defined their sense of selves," (c) how not being able to read "defined their lives," (d) how learning to read "changed their sense of selves" and (e) how "changes did occur in the family relationships." As these major themes emerged, it became clear that the impact the themes had on the participants' lives and familial relationships varied according to what combinations of the themes the participants experienced.

The second grouping which emerged focused on the impact the varied phenomenological themes had on the marital relationships of the participants. The second grouping included three "impact on the marriage" categories: (a) improved marriages, (b) ambivalent marriages and (c) deteriorated marriages. The two major groupings addressed changes that occurred and how the changes impacted the marriages of the participants. More detailed explanations of these groupings occur in following sections.

Before the presentation of themes begins it is important to explain how the primary focus on marital relationships (as opposed to child and family of origin relationships) emerged from the data. The intent of the study was to examine the family in which they were currently living or had most currently lived. The participants who volunteered all had established nuclear families within the context of marriage. Consequently, the relationships

discussed by all participants focused primarily on these nuclear families. When asked about the changes that learning to read had on their families, the participants themselves, though asked about all relationships with family members, focused the interview primarily on their marital relationships. They secondarily focused on their relationships with children and thirdly on their relationships with families of origin.

I feel it is important to provide a thorough discussion of how the findings are to be presented at this time. It is extremely important to note that the themes were ones of process and cannot be understood by examining them as one observes a snapshot. Therefore they must be viewed through the lens of an evolving process across time, more like viewing a movie. Consequently, I felt it necessary to organize the discussion of the themes in a way that took the process of their development into account.

The following strategy was devised in order to maintain the dynamic process of the themes and to maintain the recursive connectedness among the phenomenological themes of the first grouping and also maintain the connections between the two groupings (the phenomenological themes and the impacts on marriages). The strategy consisted of clarifying what the different "impact on marriage" groups were and then, giving a brief description of the five

phenomenological themes. I will then move on to an in-depth exploration of each of the five phenomenological themes. I chose to present the results in this sequence so that the detailed explanations of each theme could be viewed within the larger context of the other themes with which it interacted.

Impact on Marriages Grouping

In order to better understand the three categories of "improved", "ambivalent", and "deteriorated" in the grouping of "the impact on marital relationships", it is helpful to know that the majority of the phenomenological themes were quite similar and relevant for all of the participants in the study, but they varied mostly in magnitude. It was the variance within and between these themes which impacted the participants' relationships, specifically their marital relationships, as noted by my creation of the three categories. For example, the theme of "support", including the various types and levels of support the participants received, was of particular importance because it was central to how the other themes impacted the marital relationships. The support level the participants perceived that they received from their spouses mirrored the impact on the marriages of the changes that occurred. The six participants who self-described their marriages as improved were placed in the "improved" marital category. They all

described high and consistent levels of support from their spouses across time and circumstances. These participants looked forward to continued lifelong marriage with their spouses. This did not mean this group did not experience changes and struggles which resulted from their learning to read; they did.

The three participants in the "ambivalent" group described inconsistent and ambivalent support levels from their spouses. The support they received from their spouses was described as at times supportive and at other times non-supportive. Two participants in this category were experiencing personal struggles about whether to pursue divorce or work hard to maintain the marriage, often vacillating between the two. To me, their commitment seemed more to the institution of marriage than to their specific marriage (Strong & DeVault, 1992). The third participant in the ambivalent category did not mention divorce but described increased levels of tension and fighting due to changes occurring from learning to read. This participant's hopes were that the marriage would improve in the future. However, the improvements were not occurring in the present.

The "deteriorated" group consisted of the two participants who described the marital relationship as worsening due to the participants' learning to read. One participant talked about divorce as an option but was not

pursuing divorce due to fears of losing all the participant had worked for and to fears that the participant's skills were not advanced enough to "make it" independently. For the other participant, the marriage had actually ended in divorce. In this group the spouses were described by the participants as consistently non-supportive, across time and circumstances. Other than the preceding descriptions, the marital impact categories are not discussed as independent categories but are utilized throughout my presentation to understand how the phenomenological themes impacted the participants' family relationships.

Phenomenological Themes

Briefly Discussed

Support

For clarity and emphasis, I chose to start the brief discussion of the themes with the "support of the new reader." I did this because it emerged as the most important above all the other themes. I was surprised by the emergence of this as a primary theme because it did not occur anywhere in the literature or in my own expectations. While I have always known that support was helpful and was important within a recursive system of interactions, I thought that it would play a secondary role much like a supporting actress or actor. Instead, I found that it was one of the lead characters. Support acted as a membrane

which wound through and around all of the other themes. It provided the structure and direction for how the other themes interacted and were connected to the participants' lives. A word of caution now to the reader not to remove and elevate "support" from the context of the other themes in which it was only one player. Personally, I found myself after several interviews thinking that support was the "key" theme and would provide "the" answer to why participants marriages went in different directions. However, as I conducted more interviews my initial construction proved illusory. I could not predict the changes nor the impacts of learning to read on participants' lives based solely on support. This was one point in the study where I felt the quantitative/qualitative data analysis tug mentioned by McCracken (1988). I wanted a "simple" cause and effect. My interviewer's journal contains a note concerning this tug for me during the interviewing process. Although support was not "the" theme, looking back over my journal I found that it contained more entries about support as a possible theme than any other type of entry. Support, whether positive, ambivalent or negative provided the hub around which all the other themes revolved and organized themselves, with an especially strong connection to how learning to read impacted the marital relationships of the participants.

Illiteracy Defined Senses of Selves

The second theme which emerged was that the participants' illiteracy prior to learning to read "had defined each participant's sense of self." The participants, to varying degrees, gained their self identities from their inability to read and all that accompanied the illiteracy. This included being labeled and being treated differently than others both within and outside of the family. Two categories emerged which reflected the magnitude with which the sense of self was determined from the participant's illiteracy. These were **compartmentalized** and **pervasive**.

Illiteracy Defined Lives

The third theme was closely related to the second in that the participants' inability to read had "defined their lives." This concept is vital to this study and encompasses such aspects as the participants' social activities, who they met, where they went, how they got there and how they experienced life. For example, for all participants certain aspects of their marital relationships were organized around their inability to read. However, for some participants their illiteracy was the primary organizing aspect of their marital relationship. An important sub-theme was that all participants at some level "lived life through somebody else" prior to learning to read. This was

an extremely important theme that varied only in degree and application to their individual lives and relationships. The various levels of support the participants received from their families of origin and spouses had the largest impact on how much of the participants' lives were defined by their illiteracy. The more positive and consistently lifelong support they received from both families of origin and from spouses, the less the participants had lived through others when they were illiterate. I identified two categories, *compartmentalized* and *pervasive*, which reflected how much the participants' lives were defined by their illiteracy.

Learning to Read Changed Senses of Selves

The fourth theme which emerged was that learning to read "changed the participants' senses of selves." Their identities and their overall capabilities evolved and changed with increases in reading abilities. Participants commented on moving from a state of perceiving themselves as hopeless, unchangeable and optionless to being hopeful and having an abundance of options because they had changed their circumstances by learning to read. As with the two previous themes, the magnitude with regard to how much these changes impacted their lives fell into two categories: *compartmentalized* and *pervasive*.

Changes Did Occur in Family Relationships

The first four themes are crucial to understanding the

fifth theme which was, "changes did occur in the family relationships" as a result of the participant learning to read. While the majority of these changes were identified by participants as having occurred in the marital relationship, changes also occurred in relationships with children and in relationships with members of the participants' families of origin.

As the discussion proceeds, each of the five phenomenological themes is discussed in-depth. For each theme, discussion of the other themes continues to be intertwined to highlight the connections between them. As appropriate, each phenomenological theme is explored through the lens of the improved, ambivalent and deteriorated impact on the marital relationship categories. This order of presentation of the thematic groupings was selected to reflect, somewhat, the chronological order of the process of change which occurred for the participants. I realize though, that my punctuation inevitably alters the perception of the process and is not a "true" reflection of the person's experience.

Support

Analysis revealed that the types and levels of support received were, for all participants, central to how the changes that learning to read created for them were adapted into the their lives and their relationships. The types of

support were as follows: (a) spousal, (b) family of origin (c) child and (d) tutor and support groups. The levels of support that emerged for the spousal, family of origin, and child types of support were as follows: (a) high, (b) ambivalent and (c) non-supportive. These terms were chosen to reflect the participants' described levels of support they received over the span of these relationships including the transition from non-reader to reader. High level of support was attributed to a participant's received level of support if he or she described positive and consistent support. Ambivalent level of support was assigned to a participant's received level of support when he or she described a mixture of support and non-support in any combination. Non-support was assigned to a participant's received level of support when he or she described either active, passive, covert or overt non-support.

For the tutor type of support, the levels emerged based more on each participant's perception of the role the support from their tutor played in their process of learning to read. The following levels of support for tutors emerged; (a) helpful and (b) lifeline. I gave the term "helpful" to the support received from tutors that participants described as extremely helpful and wonderful; the term "lifeline" was assigned to the support received from tutors that participants described as essential to

learning to read in that the participants attributed their ability to learn to read to the tutors' support and encouragement. These types and levels of support in relationship to the impact of learning to read on the marital relationship can be seen in table 3.

Table 3
Types and Levels of Support in Relation to the Impact of Learning to Read on the Marital Relationship

Gen	Impact	Spouse	Child	Parent	Sibs	Tutor
Marr						
M	improved	high	high	high	high	help
M	improved	high	high	high	high	help
M	improved	high	high	high	high	help
F	improved	high	high	high	high	help
F	improved	high	high	high	high	help
F	improved	high	high	high	amb	help
F	ambiv.	amb.	high	non	non	help
F	ambiv.	amb.	high	amb	amb	help
M	ambiv.	amb.	high	amb	high	life
M	deter.	non	high	amb	amb	life
M	deter.	non	high	amb	amb	life

Marital Support

Ten of the 11 participants expressed that learning to read had made major changes in their marital relationships. How the changes impacted their relationships though, varied among the participants. These various "impacts on the marriages" were connected to the types and levels of support the participants received. Following is a more thorough discussion of the types and levels of support.

Improved Marriages

High levels of support. The marriages of the participants who received high levels of support were able to adapt and incorporate the changes that learning to read created in their relationships. They incorporated the changes by creating new interactional patterns which resulted in new levels of intimacy. Such a change in relational patterns is seen as an example of second order change. The structure of how the couples interacted changed. Support was strongly connected to these new interactional patterns. While the support level remained the same (high), the spouses' "ways" of supporting changed in response to the participants changed needs. The changes in "ways" of support are of the first order because the nature or structure of the support did not change (the first and second order changes will be examined more closely later).

Participants in this category repeatedly spoke about the consistency of the support they received from their spouses and the aspect of total acceptance. As the interviewer I was struck by how quickly the participants pointed to their spouses support as crucial to their literacy process. The participants in this group did not need to be asked about support, they offered the information without prompting. There was also a sense of amazement

about other students who had learned to read in spite of non-support from spouses. Often the participants who received high support from their spouses also received high support from other relationships and frequently spoke about a multiplicity of high support sources.

Quotes from two participants reveal the importance of consistently high levels of support from many sources, (including his spouse).

1.) "I have been completely supported wherever I go, so that's the easy part about it. You know I guess, if you were getting a lot of negative feedback from it, yes you would have probably folded up a long time ago... you couldn't progress like you want to,... it would be more of a struggle."

2.) "Hell, if your family don't support you, you're not going to get any place, I don't care if you can read or if you can't read, you're not going to do it you know. If you got negative at home you're going to feel negative in your life."

Another participant focused on the characteristic of total acceptance, equality and partnership regardless of reading ability.

"He's (participant's husband) about the only buddy I had, that I let into my world ... He was my

reader and I trusted him, but he never, I never felt like he was over me, okay he was my partner, he wasn't the lord, he wasn't the master, he was just my partner, he encouraged."

Another participant emphasized the importance of consistency, acceptance and equality.

"neither one of my wives made me feel uncomfortable or dominating over me or anything like this. They was real supportive and tried to encourage me earlier to go and learn to read."

Still another participant emphasized the partnership aspects of the support. When she told her husband she could not read, his response was:

"So, we'll fight it together I can help you, we'll get help."

Ambivalent Marriages

Ambivalent levels of support. Not all participants received high levels of support. The three participants in the "ambivalent impact on the marriage" category received ambivalent levels of support.

A series of quotes from one participant serves as an example of the inconsistent nature of the support received from the spouses for these participants. Initially the spouse was quite supportive of the participant's efforts to learn to read and then became openly non-supportive.

"My wife actually got me to call, we saw something on T.V., we spoke about it and she wanted me to call (to get a tutor) and I wasn't ready to call so god forbid, if something happened so I could take care of it, ... take the kids to the doctor or read some bill,".

At another point in the interview the participant described how his spouse's support changed to non-support and how it was connected to changes in levels of power and control. Her need to be in control may have been providing the direction of whether she was going to be supportive or non-supportive.

She feels, she may feel like she's losing me, she has to have that control of [me]... as soon as she saw, once my wife saw me getting better ... she wanted me to stop, she was, there was a moment where it's like 'oh my God' he's learning too much, that's what I thought,... and I definitely think that's what it was because she was losing my control,... 2 years [into learning to read] I guess, yeah between 2 & 3 years when I started really making progress, and she wanted me to leave him [my tutor] because she thought he was putting pipe dreams in my head.

The changes in support levels received from the spouse,

in response to the participant's increased feelings of power and control over his own life, revealed a recursive pattern of interactions between the spouses. I was struck by the participants confusion and hurt with regard to his wife's movement from support to non-support. He was deeply pained and interpreted the non-support as not being loved. The changes also reveal the recursive interaction between the two themes of "changes in the participant's sense of self" and "support" (this will be discussed in depth at a later point).

The changes in support level were painful for all of the participants in this category. The participants did not use the word pain to describe it but the descriptions were often accompanied by tears and changes in tone of voice. This was supported by entries I had made in my interviewer's journal.

The ambivalent support took several different forms. Two of the participants' spouses attempted to undermine the participants' relationships with their tutors. One participant describes the undermining and the pain it caused him.

He [participant's tutor] always gave me motivation that I could accomplish things in my life that I thought I never could, that was very important to me, every time he would say something to me,

he motivated me ... and my wife started telling me you cannot do this stuff, he's putting dreams in your head that will never come true and she hurt me when she said that cause she has, um, I'm starting to cry, but um, you know when she tells me that, you know that doesn't feel good, you know that's very, uh, somebody you think that loves you can say that to you, you can't do better in your life because that's what you want; you don't want what you have, you want to change and that's what I wanted and I'm crying. You know you love somebody and you think they care and you hope they care for you, they should want the best for you, you know and if they, they should actually see that, that is hurting you and she knew it hurt me.

For the above participant it was as though the tutor was replacing the spouse in the role of emotional supporter. A different participant's spouse was aware of the changes in his support levels. The participant described the numerous stages that her spouse was going through.

... so when he saw this [that I was learning to read], he goes, oh, this is good, we'll let her do this for awhile, and then... he got jealous of [my tutor]. She [my tutor] was the one that said, you are somebody and you are going [places], you are

intelligent. [The participant talked increasingly about her tutor and her husband's response was as follows:]. Then he used to say 'well, you really think you ought to go [to your tutoring session], it's not that nice out... why don't you just stay home and go next week.' Well... he was trying to discourage me. [Then] he went to the next stage where he knew he couldn't beat it, so he joined it, and then he joined the boat [became supportive and even involved in the literacy movement], he knew that he had to join this ship or things weren't working out. Then he talks about when...he thought that I didn't love him, and that I was going to leave [and his support waned again].

As with the other types of support the ambivalent support levels were not just connected to the participants' learning to read but seemed to be a pattern that was established prior to the participant obtaining a tutor. I felt that the participants in this category were not just passive receivers of whatever level of support their spouses gave them, but that they had been highly engaged in a recursive process. Participants were often quite active in trying to gain positive support or in altering the level of support they received. One participant who had received

some positive and negative support discussed unsuccessful attempts to receive positive support. Not only was the spouse's support level ambivalent but the participant's description itself revealed an ambivalent perspective on his part with regard to how to interpret the non-support received. His description included attempts to give his spouse the benefit of the doubt.

There was a point where I would give my wife hints [about suicide ideas] and she just never, I guess she never realized... Maybe she didn't know what to do, I have no idea and one time I was crying and she said, 'get off that, what are you crazy? Cut that out.' Cause her family's not very emotional and she would never cry in front of me, so maybe it was very unusual for her to hear, see me cry...

The same participant at another point in the interview discussed his negative perception of her lack of support. This again revealed his own ambivalent perspective with regard to his spouse's lack of support and revealed the negative impact the ambivalent support had on their relationship.

Most of it is that the other person doesn't want the other person to grow and so there's nothing that is said or done can fix it. You know we try

to grow together, but... when somebody's holding you back there's nothing nobody can do about it...it's either there or not. When a person has love they don't care if... they're bettering themselves, they shouldn't let that scare them, they have a low self esteem themselves probably.

Throughout the interview I was struck by the intensity and frequency with which this participant vacillated between talking about the deterioration of the marriage and the hope and desire to keep it together. His talk about the future of his marriage mirrored the discussions of his spouse's support and non-support. The following quotes revealed the participants' movement between the disintegration of the relationship and the hope of continuing it.

But maybe if I ever did get a divorce, ... I could get married again and not find the right person, but I think I have a much better understanding of other people that I could find the right person ... Maybe everything (my marriage) will work out, cause I'd rather it work out.

Deteriorated marriages

Non-support. Two participants described their spouses as consistently non-supportive of them.

At first, well I guess right to the end, my wife always was like skeptical about me going into

read,... Any type of hobby I had she uh, she, you know, would always want me to get away from, ... draw me down, bringing me down more and here I am trying to being better with my reading, trying to open more horizons and I was being dragged down.

The non-support took many forms. These included passive and active non-support, overt and covert non-support. As the participants increased in reading levels the spouses became steadily more non-supportive. The participants in this category described the non-support in angry tones and did not cry or express hurt feelings. They seemed to have moved from hurt to anger. They were not confused but very clear about the non-support. Their initial responses to the non-support connected to their gains in literacy were to try to include the spouse in the process. These attempts were vehemently rebuffed. Both spouses claimed that their husbands were having affairs, the spouses clearly felt threatened.

I always tried to make a point of you know ... getting her involved with the tutoring and that, and there were times when I first started she just gave me a lot of trouble... um basically she accused me of cheating on her.

The non-support created extreme frustration for the both participants and was described by one participant in

the following way:

it's rough because I want to go do so much and she won't allow that to happen and, um, it's frustrating, like I'm beating my head against a wall and she doesn't support me anyway.

One participant described the movement of the non-support from covert and passive to overt and active. The non-support became filled with hostility.

... more or less after [I started reading] in the last two year's it's really gotten rough...and then when I got involved in the student group... She puts me down a lot in front of a lot of people and doesn't care, she's a person that does not like herself and has a hard time liking others... I have that enough from other people, I don't need that from my wife. She should be out supporting me and giving me good praises and stuff, I mean all she can say is a bad thing about it [learning to read].

I found that spousal levels of support were crucial to the outcome of the marriage for all participants. However, spousal support was not the only type of support that was important. All types and levels of support were connected to how learning to read impacted the participants lives and relationships.

Children's Support

High levels of support. All participants described the support they received from their children as very important to them. Interestingly, all participants described their children as supportive, varying only in the degree. Following are some quotes from participants in all categories of marital outcomes which reveal the perceived high support from their children.

One participant described the support from his children in terms of acceptance and assistance.

If I needed to read something and their mother wasn't around or something or other and I needed something read they'd be more than glad to read it to me and they never, oh, they never acted like, they never showed any pity toward me, they knowed I could do whatever I wanted to do, they didn't poke fun at it or kind of try to belittle or anything like this. You know they was real supportive, you know they really helped me...

Another participant, whose child was in primary school, described the child's support in terms of motivation and teamwork.

... he [my child] had a big inspiration to learn how to read, to help mom...we turned the tide, when we read his history book he thought he was

helping mom read, mom knew I was helping him comprehend.

Probably the most interesting aspect of the support from children was that it often took the form of the child's being a helper when the participant was a non-reader and a learner. Once the participants learned to read, the children's support turned into pride and admiration for their parents' literacy accomplishments.

Family of Origin Support

In addition to support from their children, participants also cited the family of origin support levels as connected to how learning to read impacted them. Families of origin were however, quite varied with regard to support levels. For some participants, the level of support changed as their reading level changed. Family of origin support levels seemed especially linked to the participants' "senses of selves" prior to learning to read and how much "their lives were defined" by their illiteracy.

High Levels of Support. The three participants who described their parents as totally and consistently supportive of them, even when they could not read, described that prior to learning to read, their total identities and lives were not dictated by their illiteracy but were only compartmentally impacted by their illiteracy (this will be discussed in more depth later).

One of these participants described his father's and uncles' extensive support as helping him to believe in his strengths regardless of his illiteracy. The support instilled confidence in him.

I can do things, I can't read but I can do things...[my dad & uncles] always pushed when I said I couldn't do something. He always had a little saying, 'can't never did anything and won't never will' and that was his whole philosophy 'what do you mean you cant' that's the way he pushed me.

I felt that for this participant the inability to read did not limit him in what he believed he was capable of doing, it just limited some of the things he chose to do, those things that required good reading skills.

Another participant whose "sense of self" was compartmentalized since the illiteracy did not permeate all aspects of her life gave her parents credit for being able to adjust to the changes she experienced.

I have to be thankful for great parents because they are the ones who really helped me.

Ambivalent levels of support. Three other participants described their parents' support prior to learning to read as lacking. The lack of support however was not active but passive and somewhat based in naivete. This description of

lack of support is from the participants' adult perceptions of what happened. As children they perceived their parents as supportive and now as adults they question the wisdom in their parents' decisions. Likewise the participants reported that through conversations with their parents they have found that their parents previously perceived their decisions as helpful and now some of them also question their decisions as most likely misdirected out of ignorance and respect at the time for professional educators. The parents were basically unaware of the needs of their children and their ambivalent support levels were acts of omission. Their parents did not advocate the need for the participants to learn to read because the parents saw reading as a skill learned in school. The "experts" and professionals in the school system would know what was best for their child and would do what was best. The parents trusted the larger educational system to work with their child's reading problem in the best way possible.

These participants were quick to point out the difference between support of them as individuals and support of their need to learn to read. The three participants specifically described their parents as supportive of them as people but that their parents did not advocate for their educational needs.

One participant described the parents' guilt later when

they realized the educational system did not help their child.

I guess they [my parents] feel hurt because I got better, you know they made mistakes...[they feel bad] that they never did something for me at that moment [as a child when I could not read] to try to help me more, they thought that special ed would do something for me... They [the school] tested me and they couldn't find anything wrong with me they just said I was slow ... they tested everything that they should test but they couldn't find anything wrong... they [my parents] felt it would be better for me because I would get special attention [in special ed]... (Interviewer: What do you think about having been in special ed.?) I think they were wrong, ... well how can a person go from reading from between 2nd and 3rd grade to 10th grade in four years?"

This participant described his parents ambivalent support permeating into how they viewed his abilities. His parents "bought" into the school systems' definition of the participants' abilities. His parents developed the same expectations that the school system had and began treating him accordingly. Subsequently, while his parents were trying to be supportive of him by doing what was best for

him (special education classes), they were also limiting him and being non-supportive because they did not see further potential for him. This led to his parents doing everything for him and not giving him opportunities that his siblings had.

Another participant, whose parents also had placed their trust in the school system and who was placed in special education classes, described how his parents and siblings limited his abilities. This was emphasized when he spoke about the difference in their interactions with him now that he is literate. Unknowingly and innocently they had limited him based on the educational system's label and perceptions of him.

I think they [my parents and brother] know [now] that I understand a lot better, ... the different situations, they're finally opening up to me ... as an adult, not treating me like that I'm nobody. I guess that's what I was treated like [growing up] I was nobody even at home, they treat me [now) *like a real person*. That makes me feel good ... [growing up] I wasn't around [brother's friends]. I was shoved away, I think my parents did that to me too, they protected me, sheltered me, they knew that I couldn't do this, so they wouldn't allow me to do it, so they kept me here

... I did the same things at home [as I do now in my marriage], the housecleaning, the washing, the cooking."

This participant's parents restricted him to learning domestic chores, because they adopted a very narrow view of his abilities and did not realize the limitations they were imposing on him. Paradoxically his parents efforts to help and be supportive were actually non-supportive and harmful to him as an adult.

The distinction that many of the participants in this category made was that their parents' intentions may have been good (supportive) but the consequences of those attempts were negative (non-supportive).

Some participants described a wide range of support levels among different members of their families of origin. One participant described how some members of his family were very supportive and how others became increasingly non-supportive as he learned to read. One participant described how a sibling, who also had a reading problem, seemed threatened by the participant's reading achievements and was actively non-supportive.

He [his brother] has kids and he has the attitude he's made it this far without reading, and that's fine and dandy for him, but he uses it to a point where, uh, what are you doing that for, you don't

need it. I don't need it and so you don't need it. I says, 'you want to stay the way you are, fine, I'm not staying where I'm at.' He resented to a point ... Within the family itself I got a lot of praise for what I was doing and he was just off the wall with it. Frankly I don't care, I'm not doing it for him, I'm doing it for me and my son.

Non-support. These family members tended to be embarrassed with regard to the participants' illiteracy or there were other family issues occurring which I would label as dysfunctional.

Marital, child and family of origin support levels were important contributors to how participants adapted to changes they experienced from learning to read. The various types and levels of support received from both nuclear and family of origin sources were determining factors in how much support participants looked for outside of the familial context to stay motivated.

Tutors and Support Groups Support

All of the participants in this study were extremely motivated and determined to learn to read. They all expressed that the support and encouragement they received from their tutors was of extreme importance. However, I identified a qualitative difference among the participants as to the perceived role the tutor's support had in the

their learning to read. This difference seemed primarily associated with the types and levels of familial support the participants received. Those participants who received high levels of support from their spouses and other family members talked about their tutors' support and encouragement as helpful and an important piece which contributed to the participants' learning to read **process**. These participants were very outspoken in their thankfulness and their appreciation of their tutor's support but did not attribute their ability to read to their tutor.

Those participants however, who received non-support from their spouses or ambivalent support from their spouses talked about their tutors' support as, not only important, but also as a lifeline ingredient which gave them the motivation to hang on and the **ability** to learn to read. These participants credit their tutors with their being able to learn to read.

Helpful support. The participants who described the support from their tutor as helpful saw it as what helped quicken the process of learning to read and made the process more enjoyable. The support helped them. The participants in this category did not see the tutor relationship as a hierarchical relationship and felt comfortable in setting their own limits with and expectations of the tutor. The participants were in control of the tutor/student

relationship. One participant's description of his relationship with the tutor depicts the helpful aspect.

I met with a tutor, and the chemistry just fit perfectly. I mean, she was just this great person, and we hit it off just tremendously. And I was very up front with her, I told her where I, what my situation was, where I was today, and where I planned to be in a few years with this program. And I said to her, if indeed you're uncomfortable with me at any time, I would like you to tell me. And if indeed I'm uncomfortable with you, I would like to be able to tell you with no hard feelings, with no strings attached. She appreciated that. And I [participant] will make a total commitment to you. I said that I'm going to be there, that I'm going to make every effort to be there, and I will expect the same from you. If either one of us can't, we're concerned by calling each other and saying, hey don't go to this meeting place. So, to understand, it was, just, very good, from the very beginning.

As I analyzed the support levels it seemed that the participants who saw their tutors' support as helpful were in the drivers seat from the beginning with regard to the tutor student relationship. They were going to make the

decisions about stopping and starting and whether or not it was okay to turn left or right. These participants did not seem to replace their spouses with their tutors for their emotional support. One participant told her tutor that she was not going to do homework in the summers and that if the tutor had a problem with that then they might as well not work together. These participants were able to assert themselves with their tutors from the first day of tutoring. Assertion was not something they learned, they came with it.

Lifeline support. In contrast, the participants who saw their tutors as lifelines were more willing to let the tutor set the parameters and did not feel they could ask for changes from the tutor if the participants felt they were necessary. This lack of assertiveness can be seen by looking at one participant's experience who had few familial support systems and had two different tutors. The lifeline quality of the tutor's support and was especially evident for this participant because of having both a non-supportive and a supportive tutor. It was as though the tutor was replacing the spouse for the support needed.

I was with my (first) tutor, the guy that was tutoring me, he would ... he yelled at me, you're doing this wrong, he wouldn't help try to figure out how to do it, we wouldn't work as a team. I did that for 5 years, I didn't understand what was

going on. [the participant continued with it because] I was willing to learn, I was going to do it one way or another. I guess I was committed, when I started I was going to get this done, no matter what was going to happen... [A second tutor match, which was obtained after receiving support from a new reader support group, made the big difference in the participant's learning ability] ... I just got into a bad [first] tutor situation,... the difference with the tutor that helped me really learn to read was... She was more, um, caring, didn't yell, we worked together we, we work as a team, instead of a battle field ... we are interested in the same subjects.

Another participant who viewed the tutor's support in terms of a life-line explained the vital aspect of the encouragement he received.

That pat on the back is the most important thing, to go ahead, you're doing good... I think that was the most important thing for me... it's like unbelievable when somebody can say to you 'wow you did that, god that's great...' You sit back and you go, what the hell, he's [tutor] really doing that [giving praise], you don't say that to them [the tutor]... and then all of a sudden yeah,

yeah, yeah, yeah!, damn I did get that, and that is good, you know, and maybe in your mind you're thinking it's so small but to them it's so big and you finally realize you're getting better... and it is big, that's like *the most important thing* I could say. They [new students] need support and they need someone to tell them that they're doing well... it's very hard to keep on patting someone on the back and you figure that you know it's not working, but it is.

Yet another description of the life-line quality of the tutor's support included the importance of the caring and investment the tutor had for the student.

Maybe that's what [long pause] ... I saw in my tutor, I mean he's not an emotional person but the care is there, you know? You can see the care that they want somebody to get better. Um that's why I got better, not because of my [spouse], not because of anybody else, but because of that person that cared, you know. When he [tutor] says no its because of you [the participant], it's because you wanted to do it... But when somebody pushes you to do something and says you can do it, [and] nobody ever said that before to you, you know it's a good feeling which I never had before.

Not only was tutor support an important factor for all participants but also for many the support received from new reader support groups was extremely beneficial.

... these guys have given me so much will power to go on and it really helped, I've really done a lot to improve myself.

All participants in the study received "high" support from someone. If it was not their spouse it was a tutor or a student support group. I strongly feel that some form of high level positive support was vital to the participants success in learning to read. Learning to read is not just a reflection of someone's "ability" but is also a reflection of the social and familial contexts within which they live. Based on these findings, I would highly question the possibility of anyone to being able to learn to read without strong and positive support from somewhere. I think this is particularly evident with the one participant who had low levels of family support and had non-support from his first tutor. He did not learn to read while involved with the non-supportive tutor, but he did when he obtained a highly supportive tutor.

My discussion, while having explored "support" in-depth is by no means totally exhaustive, it will continue to unfold and be expanded throughout the discussion of the remaining themes. The reader should, at this point now, be

generally familiarized with the importance and implications the varying types and levels of support had for the participants' lives and relationships and how support was connected to the other phenomenological themes. The following sections explore the remaining themes.

**Not Being Able to Read "Defined the
Participants' Senses of Selves"**

In the final stage of the data analysis I found myself trying to organize the themes with only a focus on the changes that occurred after the participants learned to read. With this approach the themes between participants were virtually impossible for me to organize. I stepped back from the analysis by taking several days off to just let the data "settle" in my mind. I found that I had been so focused on punctuating the changes after learning to read that I had been overlooking who the participants were when they were illiterate. Once I backed up and included the "process" of their lives, the themes then came together. Based on this, I do not feel it is possible to understand the impact that learning to read has on familial relationships without first knowing who the participants were and what their relationships were like prior to being able to read. The next two phenomenological themes focus on the participants' lives prior to having learned to read. The next two theme discussions examine how being illiterate

"defined the participants' senses' of selves" and how their illiteracy "defined their lives."

Many aspects of the whole phenomena of being illiterate significantly impacted the participants' self identities. All participants repeatedly described the early development of their self concepts in terms of their illiteracy. However two categorizations of self identities emerged; I have labeled these *compartmentalized* and *pervasive* self identities. The level of support received in the family of origin, most specifically from parents, seemed most connected to whether participants' identities were compartmentally or pervasively based on their illiteracy.

Those participants whose families were highly supportive of them and did not seem to attribute all of the participants' capabilities to their lack of reading expressed that not being able to read contributed significantly to a negative self identity, but the negative aspects seemed compartmentalized. The participant did not view their whole self negatively. They were able to remember clearly being able to identify personal strengths and abilities prior to learning to read. All aspects of their self identities were not viewed through the lens of their illiteracy.

The more non-support a participant received, the more pervasive the negative impact the inability to read had on

his or her self esteem and identity. For these participants, virtually all aspects of their self identities were viewed through the lens of their illiteracy. The more that a participant's parents defined the participant's total capabilities according to his or her lack of being able to read the more likely the individual was to believe he or she was incapable of doing most of what others were capable of. This contributed to an overall lower self esteem.

The self identities can be seen in relation to the impact on the marriage and the levels of family of origin support received in table 4.

Table 4
Sense of Self in Connection with Family of Origin Support Levels

Gender	Impact on Marriage	Family of origin support level	Sense of self based on illiteracy
M	improved	high	comp.
M	improved	high	comp.
M	improved	high	comp.
F	improved	high	comp.
F	improved	high	comp.
F	improved	high	perv.
F	ambivalent	non-supp.	perv.
F	ambivalent	ambivalent	perv.
M	ambivalent	ambivalent	perv.
M	deterior.	ambivalent	perv.
M	deterior.	ambivalent	perv.

I have identified six sub-themes as being connected to the development of all of the participants senses of selves, but to varying degrees. These sub-themes included: (a) labeling; (b) feeling different and being treated differently than others; (c) strengths being ignored, down played or overshadowed by their illiteracy; (d) their illiteracy status being unchangeable; (e) their needs being ignored and (f) humiliation and ridicule.

Labeling

All of the participants repeatedly described being labeled and described the effects those labels had on their own self concepts. Although as a clinician I have always been quite sensitive to the issue of labeling I found myself overwhelmed and angry with regard to the devastation these participants attributed to the labels they received. All participants prefaced their comments on labeling with descriptions of being different than others.

Most participants described knowing they were different than other children very early in elementary school with regard to reading ability. What struck me as significant was that it was not so much the actual inability to read that was so devastating, but the labels such as stupid and dummy that were associated with the inability to read. The power of the labels was truly phenomenal.

Many participants named the educational systems as the

location of initial labeling. It occurred formally through diagnosis, and/or by being placed in special education. It occurred informally by receiving different kinds of help in the classroom than the other children or being ridiculed by teachers. After being initially labeled by the schools, many of the participants then described being cruelly labeled by peers. Often the demeaning labeling continued beyond school years into such places as work settings. Those participants for whom the negative labeling seemed to contribute the most extensively to their negative senses of selves were those whose parents were supportive at the ambivalent level and those who attended special education classes. One participant described the power of labels received by peers.

I thought I had a regular diploma and I was really proud of graduating and everything. If I had known this [my H.S. diploma was not a real one but a special education diploma]... It was hard to go through school and be in a special class; you got picked on, you got called retard, you name it, and plus you didn't really learn a lot at school, but I stayed in because I wanted that diploma to say hey, I made it I was very hurt, angry, mad, whatever [about graduating without a diploma].

Another participant described the experience in special

education classes and the labeling from peers as devastating. The labeling was constant. I found myself likening this constant barrage of negative labels to a child who has been emotionally abused in family. The child is never right, there is something always wrong with him or her. Emotionally abused children are scarred by such abuse for their whole lives. Likewise these participants described a similar phenomena although they did not call it abuse. I feel that they did not because often the labels were initially sanctioned by the school system.

They tested me and they couldn't find anything wrong with me; they just said I was slow... I was made fun of a lot... it was very upsetting, very emotional... It gets me very upset when I think of that stuff... I think anybody has a point in their life where somebody made fun of them and it did bother them, but when ... it's something constant every day and people making fun of you, it's just never ending.

What I found was that the participants progressed from other people labeling them to belief in the labels and then to labeling themselves. The labels were internalized and then contributed to their "senses of selves."

Well that puts a stigma on you... puts something on your head saying you're a dummy. Then they put

you in special-ed with special kids. I'm not saying other things are wrong with them kids... but some of them actually were retarded... actually not in my class, but you see other kids like that, you familiarize yourself that maybe I am retarded, maybe I am stupid, maybe I am dumb. So you want to hide that as a child. And you were picked up in front of your house in a (special) bus, all the neighbors know and my parents they acted like it was a secret, they didn't tell nobody, but actually everybody knew.

The self fulfilling prophecy concept was clearly evident for the participants in this study. I found that participants spent much of their lives and energy trying to cover up the believed labels because they did not want to be seen as different.

This self-defining movement based on labels, is an excellent example of the recursive interactional patterns within systems. In the above example, the individual was greatly impacted by being placed in special education, even though no formal diagnosis existed. Even without a diagnosis, the participant's peers "knew" the diagnosis, because of course, the participant was in special education classes. By virtue of attending special education classes his peers labeled him with the seemingly appropriate labels

of retard and dummy. In turn the participant responded to the others' labeling by thinking, well I must be these things because I am in special education. He then altered his approach to others and the world accordingly. He began isolating himself and stopped talking as much to others. Nichols & Everett (1986) would call the acquisition of labels first order change because something about the participant changed. They would call the subsequent change in the participants whole sense of self which resulted in a new approach to the world as second order change.

Labeling for many participants was not limited to childhood but followed them into adulthood no matter how hard they tried to avoid it. One participant described the continued devastating effects of labeling into the work place. Even with fifteen years of a solid work history the participant was unable to shake the label.

I wanted to be a manager but, they've got me tagged, and I'm tagged for life there, I will never be no more than what I am and the head lady told me that... 'as long as I [head lady] am here you will not be ... more than what you are.' How would that make you feel that you're not going to go nowhere?

I cannot overemphasize the devastating effects of the labeling. For several participants the label "illiteracy"

resulted in active discrimination. One participant did not receive the same training that other employees in the department received. Another participant so feared the potential discrimination at work of being a non-reader that the participant had gone to great lengths to hide any involvement with literacy programs.

and they throw stones...that's another reason why I won't go public, cause I won't be ridiculed, I've been there ... they [co-workers] absolutely discriminate ... discriminate because they [co-workers] don't take your feelings into consideration, they say words that hurt.

By adulthood the participants knew the power that the labels had on their lives and did everything they could to hide their deficits. The hiding required enormous amounts of energy. For the participants, being labeled was a fact and way of life. Quite interestingly though, even with the participants' awareness of the effects of the labeling, they were unable to extricate themselves from believing in the labels. They continued to believe in the labels, incorporated the labels into their own definitions of who they were and into their behaviors, and tried to keep others from finding out about their illiteracy.

Feeling Different than Others
and Being Treated Differently

Feeling "different than" others was interpreted and internally incorporated into the participants senses of selves as "less than others" and "not as good as others." The extent to which this occurred was pervasive for those participants who received ambivalent or non-support from their parents and was compartmental for those participants who received high levels of support from their parents.

Early in grammar school participants' feelings of being different were based in comparing themselves to peers. Often they did not realize that the difference was a specific problem with reading; they just knew they were not the "same as" when it came to reading activities. Consequently, the participants began to see the difference as pervasive and an indicator of overall capabilities.

One participant described the process in the following way:

I noticed that I was having a lot more difficulty than the other students in grammar school, failing spelling tests, never being able to spell... I didn't really know that I couldn't read or that I was having difficulty reading, I just thought that I wasn't as bright as everyone else. That everyone finished their work before I did. They

didn't seem to have difficulty getting done or they would get good grades and I certainly wasn't, I was in low reading groups... Upon occasion [I] would have one on one help, these are things that set me apart from other people, but I guess I just didn't think I was as bright, I just assumed I'm not a bright person... I didn't think geez, I'm illiterate or geez, I can't read and I should be able to. You just kind of think of yourself as being different, as being not as bright, and of course that's reinforced by what other people, especially what other children will tell you, oh you're such a dummy, and you're stupid and that kind of thing and so I had a very negative self image.

Being treated differently than "normal" individuals had a significant impact on how the participants perceived themselves and subsequently altered their actions. The awareness of difference built on itself and became a self-perpetuating cycle for many participants.

and the more you know you're aware of it [inability to read and being different than others] the more you hide, because you want to be just like everyone else.

The feelings of "difference" were not only connected to the

participants' internal perceptions but also to external activities. The external sources included such activities as being picked up by "special" busses and being treated differently by their teachers. This recursive cycle between internal and external factors defined how participants acted and influenced decisions they made throughout their lives. The following is one participant's description of the impact of external sources of "difference" on her adult illiterate "sense of self."

Some of the teachers I had in special ed. were very mean... They treated us like we were retarded, that made it harder because when you went to school and you were getting that, and we had to ride a bus for like a half an hour from our home town to the school that we went to, and we had to ride with high school kids and they were mean and cruel and just going through all that. That was real hard and then when you did graduate and got out of school you didn't feel like, I'm going to go and tell people I can't read, [you felt like] I'm gonna hide it, because you didn't want the people making fun of you anymore, you didn't want them calling you names, hey, they don't know and you've just lived this life that no one knows.

Although I had proposed prior to the study that illiteracy impacted who the participants were I was still amazed at the areas of their lives that were impacted by it (areas that I viewed quite remote from reading ability). For one participant the feeling of being different due to illiteracy impacted her sense of how romantically lovable she was.

The first time he asked me to get married to him I backed out of it, I thought, 'no I'm not going to tell him I can't read, I can't do this, he won't love me no more' and I did; I had feelings for him but I was afraid to tell him that I loved him with everything else ...

Strengths Being Ignored, Down Played
or Overshadowed by their Illiteracy

The feelings of being different for some participants were so pervasive that their strengths were ignored or downplayed by themselves and often by others. Family of origin parental support levels were highly connected to the degree to which participants strengths were downplayed by their illiteracy. The higher the level of parental support the participant received, the more likely that the participant and the family compartmentalized the reading deficit and identified other areas of strength. In addition, the participants' strengths were negated less often and less pervasively than for those participants who received

parental ambivalent or non-support. The discussion of this sub-theme is consequently broken into two categories: those who received high levels of parental support and those who received ambivalent and non-support levels of parental support.

High parental support. Participants who received high levels of parental and family support were able to easily identify areas of strengths. I was struck by the fact that these participants often felt that not being able to read had some positive impact on their lives. They described their ability to "con" others in terms of strength and often felt their talents were enhanced by not being able to read. One participant shared that she felt very creative and that the creativity was enhanced by not being able to read. An example she gave of this was when she was taking care of an elderly relative with Alzheimer disease that no-one else could calm down. She was able to relate to him and step into his reality because of her creativity and excellent story-telling skills.

I... feel like I had conned my way through life. That when I started talking to him [elderly relative]... coming up with stories, wasn't hard to do. [learning to "con" people gave the ability to] to come up with an excuse quick [and so when the relative asked for people who had long since

passed away or when he became confused and did not understand]... I [could] come up with some kind of an answer.

When asked if there were other areas of her life that not being able to read had created positives for she replied:

"I think... coping with life itself."

Another participant in this category described non-readers as having numerous strengths and was very aware of his own personal strengths. Following is his description of the support he received and of his perception of strengths.

But you see... my situation, was very unique because... I always made a very good living, even though (I could not read)... We (non-readers) were overachievers, for most of us, anyway, because of our deficiency in learning how to read, you have to kinda prove to an employer, not letting him know naturally, that you couldn't read, but you'd have to work twice as hard to make an impression on him. So, I was, as I mentioned before, very fortunate, even though I started off with a very menial type job, I advanced myself very quickly. And was able to get with the right people, and again, I guess because of... being a likeable type person (which he worked on harder because he could

not read), that even my former union, and even my employer would give me an opportunity a lot quicker than they gave other people, and I was always asking (my boss), gee, can I do this and can I do that, and stay extra time. So, it allowed me to, advance myself very quickly. But even in the business I'm doing... I am a people person, and as I said today, you sell yourself first, and then you sell the product. If you do that, then everything else becomes very, very easy... That's what I used to do, before I learned how to read, I would be very up front, very honest with you, and... help you in any way to make your business successful. My basic experience (was) to... make it operable and make it profitable and uh, I did that very well.

This participant's illiteracy did not influence his thinking about his capabilities in his work. This participant was adamant about the inaccuracy of labeling non-readers as "stupid". These beliefs and the strong level of support he received allowed him to compartmentalize the negative effects that his illiteracy had on his sense of self. He described non-readers in the following way:

... you know, they could be someone who could be your very close friend, or your relative, or your

next-door neighbor, who could be just like me, and you'll never know. So see, you can't label us that we're stupid, crazy, or you know, retarded. We're not. What is important, and I say this to a lot of people that I [talk] to... We're [non-readers] not all built the same way, so each student has his own strong points and his weak points. That's important to... get across to a lot of people. But you know, we certainly pay taxes, and we work very hard, so we are normal and that's why sometimes we get offended by the word, illiterate. There's a stigma with that word illiterate, and a lot of people think, again, these people are retarded. I think there are a lot of [literate] people who are illiterate, [they] can't work a computer or go to another place in the world, they can't speak that language. [Illiterate] means that you have to learn, and we [as non-readers] didn't have the tools [to learn]... You're [the researcher] dealing with very, very special people. People who can't read are really very, very special and maybe I'm a little prejudiced towards it, uh, because I'm one myself, but we work hard. Most of us are overachievers.

Not all participants were able to compartmentalize the illiteracy with regard to their senses of self nor viewed themselves and other non-readers so positively.

Ambivalent and non-supportive parental support. Those participants whose parents were supportive at either the ambivalent level or the non-supportive level had a harder time identifying strengths they had prior to learning to read. In their descriptions of who they were they verbally downplayed any strengths they might have had. This was particularly interesting to me because they would talk about something they did well in terms of it being a deficit. This occurred much like when people give a compliment but negate it with a "but" statement. For example, "You really drew a nice picture but I think you can draw much better than this." The participants either did not see themselves as capable of having strengths or the strengths they did have were not nearly as important as their inability to read in their own sense of self identity.

One participant exemplifies this outlook quite clearly by pin-pointing feelings of failure directly to a received diagnosis of being functionally illiterate.

That's when... about the 11th grade, I was...
deemed functionally illiterate and turned from a
very quiet, kind of shy [child] who worked very
hard for the grades [I] got. I was always an

average student... but had to work three times as hard as everyone else to be an average student, [and turned into]... to a very rebellious [child]... Well, when I was told that I was functionally illiterate and they thought possibly I had a learning disability... I went home to my mom and I said, 'Mom, I think they think I'm retarded'... and you have to understand my mom; my mom was a woman of few words and she said, 'You're not retarded. Don't be stupid.' [Laughter] and I can laugh about it now, but I'm thinking, it was like, oh, great, I'm not retarded, I'm just stupid... And of course, she didn't mean it like that but... I was very hurt. It gave me a license to fail... that's really how I felt. [Interviewer: Were there grade problems before the diagnosis?] No, like I said, I worked very hard, [to overcome the reading problem]. [After the diagnosis] I began to drink and do drugs in school... and fight in school and really was very out of control... and really... I just didn't care. I didn't care about myself... [I] just felt like they gave me a license to fail."

The compartmental or pervasive "definition of self" according to their illiteracy contributed to all

participants' feeling that their illiteracy status was unchangeable.

Their Illiteracy Status

Being Unchangeable

The participants' inability to read was such an integral part of who they were, that the best they could hope to do was to hide it, mask it, adapt to it and/or work around it. For many, the notion of someday being able to learn to read was quite foreign. Their perception was that they had already been in school and had not learned to read and nothing would be different as an adult. One participant described it this way:

... but sometimes you feel you cannot get better. You don't think you [can], you know you can't get better; that's how I felt, I figured that there's nothing out there that can get me better and... I was crying a lot, very upset.

The feeling that the illiteracy was unchangeable led to suicidal ideation for several participants. To alter the viewpoint to one of hope which included the ability to change was very hard. One participant described these feelings this way:

Going back to how I felt was, when you cry a lot and when you get upset a lot, most of the time I was [upset]... I would think about suicide a lot,

constantly, it would always be on my mind. When you constantly think about that, your capabilities change and your self esteem gets even worse. Yeah so that was very hard to overcome.

A final contributing sub-theme to the participants sense of selves being defined by their illiteracy was that they felt that throughout their school years their real needs were ignored.

Their Needs were Ignored

The participants descriptions of their school years and were filled with scenario after scenario of their individual needs being ignored by the educational systems. Several participants described feeling like they were aberrations for their school systems because they were posing a problem for the graduation quota statistics. They felt that the schools were more concerned with meeting the graduation quotas than meeting their personal educational needs. Numerous participants described their process of receiving a real high school diploma without being able to read.

I found myself wondering at this point how this was possible, especially with those participants who were younger than I was. It was easier for me to understand the participants who were older because "schools were different then" in my mind. And yet there was a part of me that was not so surprised based on my experience as a professional

social worker and having networked with schools for my clients with "special needs." I often felt like I was pulling teeth to get services which were mandated by law. I found my own personal and professional experiences coming in to play as I analyzed this data and tried to make sense of it. The participants reported mixed messages as to whether their illiteracy was their fault or the system's fault. Often participants described a combination of feeling angry at the school systems and guilty themselves for not having learned to read.

One participant described his graduation process as one of mayhem without much reasoning and definitely without having acquired the skills to graduate. This participant felt quite forgotten in the system and felt like a nuisance to the system.

As far as schooling went I really graduated, they graduated me, they messed around. They kept me back a couple of times, they pushed me ahead a couple of times, I ended up graduating a year earlier than what I should have, so I was like pushed out and forgot about, that got me mad... Here I got a diploma, what's it worth? So it took me a while to get all that anger ... out of me and by me going to facing up to getting help kind of like putting all of that to rest.

Other participants explained that the schools did not know how to help them. One participant was made a janitor's assistant. This participant did not blame the school system for not learning to read but blamed himself.

A lot of people have a tendency of blaming the school system. I kind of blame myself... When I first went to grammar school... I guess I was kinda shuffled around... I kind of got lost in the shuffle... Then when I got to the 8th grade... I was doing so poorly that, what they did was, they took me out of class and they made me a custodian's helper. So what I would do was, I would go to [the first class]... in the morning, which was about 15 minutes, go back into the wardrobe, change into my dungarees and work the balance of the day with the custodian, doing all the chores that the custodian would do. That was my 8th grade. It was devastating, missing a whole year of school, of not having in prior years doing well, and then missing the whole 8th grade which was really essential for getting prepared for high school. They really did wrong, but I came out [graduated even though I could not read]...

Another participant also described being ignored, overlooked and left behind, by the teachers and the system.

it's just kind of like they... left me behind,
little girl in the corner... didn't know anyone,
didn't make friends, ...

The participants' illiteracy strongly contributed to their "senses of selves" in many different ways. In addition their illiteracy "defined their lives."

Illiteracy

Defined Their Lives

The illiteracy which contributed to the definition of the participants lives included such things as who they made friends with, what activities they did and how they approached. I identified seven aspects of how the participants illiteracy organized their lives, these included: (a) fitting in; (b) secrecy; (c) fear of public humiliation and ridicule; (d) isolation; (e) con-artist/overachievement/control; (f) dependence and (g) living through others. All of the participants talked about all of the areas but to varying degrees. As with how much of their "senses of selves" was derived from their illiteracy, it was the level of family of origin support, primarily parental, which seemed most connected to how much the participants' lives were defined by their illiteracy. As with the "sense of selves" I have called these two categories *compartmentalized* and *pervasive*.

Those participants whose families of origin were highly

supportive expressed that not being able to read defined their lives in a compartmental manner. The participants' families of origin did not seem to attribute the participants' overall capabilities to their lack of reading.

Those participants who received ambivalent or non-support from their families of origin described their lives as intensely and pervasively defined by their illiteracy. Virtually all of the individual's life activities were or seemed dictated by their illiteracy. The more that significant others in the participants' lives (especially parents) defined the participants' capabilities and activities according to the participants' illiteracy, the more likely the participants were to believe they were incapable of what others were capable of. This belief in the limitation of their abilities resulted in enormous amounts of energy spent on compensating for their inabilities. They organized their lives primarily around the illiteracy as opposed to adapting their lives to the illiteracy. For the pervasive group, even their marital relationships were more likely to be highly organized around their inability to read and included more descriptions by the participants of marital power differentials and lower levels of support than those participants in the compartmental category.

How much the participants' lives were defined by their

illiteracy can be seen in relation to the impact on the marriage and the levels of family of origin support received in table 5.

Table 5
Lives Defined by Illiteracy in Connection with Family of Origin Support Levels

Gender	Impact on Marriage	Family of Origin Support Levels	Life Defined by Illiteracy
Male	improved	high	comp.
Male	improved	high	comp.
Male	improved	high	comp.
Fem.	improved	high	perv.
Fem.	improved	high	perv.
Fem.	improved	high	perv.
Fem.	ambivalent	non-supp.	perv.
Fem.	ambivalent	ambivalent	perv.
Male	ambivalent	ambivalent	perv.
Male	deterior.	ambivalent	perv.
Male	deterior.	ambivalent	perv.

The compartmental and pervasive categories are discussed separately for those sub-themes in which it was crucial to understanding how the sub-themes contributed the definition of the participants' lives.

Fitting In

One way in which the participants lives were organized around their illiteracy involved trying to "fit in" with the literate population and trying to counter society's approach toward them because they are viewed as "different". One way of fitting in for several participants included how and when

they chose friends. Their need to fit in dictated to them who they could be with and what activities they could participate in. Their orientation toward activities and friends was not "who do I like and what do I like to do" but "who can I best hide my illiteracy with?" The participants needs and desires were ignored by themselves.

One participant described that it was easier to just not have friends and to not engage in any activities that required reading because to do so exposed the participants' illiteracy and opened the participant up to being seen as different and an easy target for ridicule.

Well I didn't really have any friends, I stayed with the family, and if I did choose friends I'd choose older friends, nobody my age. I didn't have nobody my age of friends cause I was afraid to talk because I thought [people would know I could not read]... if I said something wrong... Or maybe [if someone suggested] 'oh let's play a game'... I don't want to play the game [because I can't read], (and) you don't want to say 'I can't read.' Maybe you can't read the cards that went with that or you can't read the board, but now going through the program [I want to play games and talk to people].

I realized from this that this participant's inability

to read was translated by the participant into an inability to talk correctly and with intelligence. The illiteracy permeated not only reading activities but also talking activities. This permeation of the illiteracy was present for all participants.

Another participant described the isolating contributions of both his internal fears and the external forces imposed on him due to his illiteracy.

I just didn't have any friends when I was young, ... well I went to special-ed, it was very far away... nothing that was close into town ... [because of this I had] very few [friends around home]. And I didn't trust them basically because I was made fun of a lot ... I didn't have many friends because I was afraid they would find out...

Another participant focused life around the future and lived for the day the participant could achieve the goal of being "part of" instead of "different than."

When I grew up that's all I thought about was getting married, that's all I wanted, to get married and have a family, quote unquote, to be normal.

In addition to the issue of fitting in, all participants in the study described that their illiteracy

was kept secret from others at some level.

Secrecy

The levels of secrecy of the participants' illiteracy varied among the participants. For some participants, while growing up they were the only ones who knew, for others their parents knew, for others their parents and siblings knew, but for all participants their illiteracy was kept secret from their friends and the general public. Some participants kept their illiteracy secret from their spouses for up to 17 years of marriage; others chose to tell their spouses prior to marriage. As adults, when they increased their literacy, some chose to go public, but not all of the participants at the time of the interviews had chosen to do so.

Regardless of the level of secrecy, the participants spent much energy trying to keep their illiteracy secret. One participant's decision to finally come out of the closet was based on spending too much energy trying to maintain the secrecy and its detraction from learning to read.

The first two years [of tutoring] I didn't allow anybody to know what I was doing... and I realized that... I was spending more time worrying about what other people were gonna think about me not knowing how to read and I was spending less time worrying about how I was gonna learn how to read.

Another participant described the energy and fear that maintained the secrecy compared to the reality which occurred when the participant finally "came out."

All those fears that I had in finally coming out and breaking the shell that I had there ... they all turned around for me, they were all good, I was lucky, I'm one of the lucky ones. Everybody's there to give me the support and I'll tell you something all my relatives and everybody know and I think its wonderful to have that, it's like a big relief off you and maybe that's why I'm happier, I don't know.

As mentioned earlier some participants chose to keep their illiteracy secret from their spouses. Interestingly, none of the marital impact categories of improved, ambivalent or deteriorated nor the levels and types of support received seemed connected to which participants' kept their illiteracy a secret from their spouses. This was surprising to me because in my interviewer's journal I wrote, after several interviews, that I had a "hunch" that one theme which was emerging was that of secrecy. I thought that it would be a good indicator of what happened to participants marriages. Having written this down as a possible theme I was able to review the final stage of themes with this in mind. I did not find it highly

connected to the marital outcomes but I did find it connected to how much of the participants lives were defined by their illiteracy. As Agar (1983) suggested, the difference between my worldview and expectations provided a contrasting medium within which to compare and analyze the participants experiences. This difference highlighted secrecy as a theme but not as I initially conceived it might be.

The participants in the ambivalent marriage category were mixed with regard to their spouses knowledge of their illiteracy. The spouses of the two participants' in the deteriorated marriage category both knew of the illiteracy prior to the marriage. It is unclear to me what impacted the decisions for secrecy or non-secrecy. What is clear is that it was an important theme in the participants' lives. Quotes from several of the participants help illustrate the variety of secrecy levels within the participants' marriages.

1.) "I was married to him for almost five years and he never knew that I had a reading problem, I hid that."

2.) "He [my husband] wasn't aware until I had already been working with my tutor... and had made quite a bit of progress and actually was up for [a major award]... So, they were awarding the

thing... and... had contacted me and wanted to know if I would do a interview with a local... news program, and... I said 'Sure!'. At that point... [I] had started to do paperwork to go into college...and [my husband] still had no idea and... that was when I decided if I was going to go public, I had better tell him first... I never came out and said to him... I couldn't read and I just learned how to read. I just... never discussed it. It was like [for him] 'well, why are you coming out, why are you winning this award?'. 'Because I'm a good student. Because I'm doing really well. Well... it's not like I was functionally illiterate and now I'm not. It's like you know, I just help, they learned, they taught me how to read better.' He never really said anything... one way, or the other..."

This particular couples' marriage was highly organized around her illiteracy and the support level was ambivalent. It was apparent to me that the illiteracy/literacy was still not being discussed and that their communication patterns which were established while she was illiterate did not change much when she became literate. She described a need when she became literate for more communication and her husband did not share this increased need. This is an

example of first order change where the couples uses old interactional patterns in new situations. These types of interactional changes will be explored in further depth in the "changes in family relationships" theme section.

"(Have you all ever talked about it since then?)... No, it's not something we really discuss... You see I don't think he really understands the magnitude of (the problem of illiteracy).

Humiliation and Ridicule

Many participants felt compelled to keep their non-reading status a secret at some level. It became apparent to me that often this compulsion was out of fear of being publicly humiliated and ridiculed. All participants gave examples of events in which they were publicly humiliated as adults as a result of their illiteracy. For some the events were innocent occurrences and for others the humiliation was intentional and malicious. Some participants found themselves motivated by to learn to read by the events and for others the humiliations were just a part of life. The participants' fears and previous experiences with humiliation impacted how they approached life.

One participant talked less in public.

you never talked to people because you were

afraid, geez, you might say something to make them laugh.

Another participant felt comfortable talking about very few subjects and definitely would not talk in front of a group of people, even on a subject that he was quite knowledgeable about.

[Interviewer: Would you have done public speaking before when you couldn't read?] No, I wasn't confident enough, I thought... I was confident in myself but I wasn't confident enough to go talk to somebody about something cause I didn't think I was smart enough to talk about it. Even if I knowed it [the topic well]... I was afraid I'd be asked a question and I couldn't answer it ... there was a fear in there, being put in a position of being embarrassed so that basically was what it was, being put in an embarrassing position and make me look silly or something.

Isolation

For some participants, isolation was experienced only in certain areas of their lives or was transitory such as not being able to go to restaurants alone, not being able to do the accounting at work or not being able to read the mail. For other participants it was pervasive and it was the primary organizing factor of their lifestyles and

relationships.

One participant described how isolated and sheltered life as a non-reader had been and how this had impacted the participant's marital relationship now that the participant had learned to read. The extremeness of the participants' isolation was further clarified when viewed from the change the participant experienced when he learned to read and the non-support received from his wife.

My wife, ... we are having a lot of problems now, and it's just way out of hand, she can't accept that I can do things now that she won't let me go and do them... I've led a sheltered life and I've put my self into a prison within... I've allowed her to do everything because I was actually afraid to go out and go to the grocery store or go to the department store or pay a bill because of my illiteracy... I didn't want anybody to put me in a position to have to write or read something or fill out a paper, so I have allowed my wife, I guess I allowed my parents to do that for me too... So now since I want to do all this stuff she's having a hard time accepting that... She has a hard time giving me money, she won't allow me to have money [even pocket change]. Now I want to have my paycheck, I want to cash my paycheck. I

want to know what bills are to be paid, before I didn't know ... she paid everything, she did it all and now I want [to], because she's not doing a very good job. I'm tired of bill collectors ... I want to straighten things out and she won't allow me to do this. So we are arguing constantly over these things, trying to prove myself.

I felt that this participant allowed the isolation to occur somewhat consciously as an adult because it was easier to deal with the literate world that way. The isolation only became conscious, though, when the participant learned to read. Prior to his literacy he had no "other" to compare it to and did not know there was another way of living. The isolation prior to learning to read was insidious. He lived life one step removed from life.

It was very frustrating, but I did not know how to help myself... I didn't even think about it, I didn't know anything... I shut everything [out]. I guess I shut myself down... If anything bothered me I just went to bed and said to heck with it, I went to work... [I was] very lonely ... even now I can be in a whole crowd and feel alone. See I'd rather be in a corner somewhere than be with all these people... that's what I did at home... if I can fall asleep on the couch watching television,

[I] don't have to listen to this or listen to that, [don't] have to deal with anything that comes up.

For this participant isolation was not only a way to avoid feeling different, it became a way of coping with and protecting himself from the literate world of which the participant did not feel a member.

Another participant succinctly described the isolation of illiteracy.

I just had some kind of wall around me that I tried not to think about it.

One participant likened the isolation accompanying illiteracy to a dungeon.

[When you learned to read]... you finally found the window that you can look through, out of the dark dungeon you've lived in...

Con-artist/Overachievement/Control

In my view the overachieving and becoming a con-artist are actually different descriptions of a similar phenomena. The "overachieving" was described by some participants as "conning" other people. In other cases the participants described the "overachieving" in terms of heightened skills without an element of "conning." For others the overachievement was an attempt to add control to their lives. The differences were really in how the participants

presented the phenomena and the degree to which they felt they were hiding their illiteracy or compensating for their illiteracy.

Participants often cited excellent memories and excellent listening skills as forms of either "conning" or overachieving. One participant shared that the ability to fit in and to know what was going on was due to acute listening skills. Everywhere the participant went, the participant listened to everything everyone said. By doing this the participant was able to talk about issues that literate people read about.

... [we get through life by being] good con-artists, we listen, we were excellent listeners... we don't need a piece of paper, we hear...

Another participant described the protective feature of conning which helped him to fit in wherever he went.

you become a pretty good con-artist, not to hurt people or not to con people out of things, but it's a conning to survive, con your way for survival you know. It's just another instinct that takes over in a person that protects, it's a protection you know... so you just con your way on through.

Other participants described their need to overachieve as a way of exerting control over their lives in order to

fit in because the alternative of not fitting in was seen as too devastating by them. This devastation was based not only on perceived fears but on actual previous experiences.

For several participants both male and female the fear of losing spouses made them "overachieve" by becoming the perfect housewives, mothers and husbands.

... a mom that did everything, I felt that if I didn't do everything that he might leave. I was a vulnerable person, who was always afraid he would leave me if I don't do it all.

Dependency

and Living Life Through Others

I found that feelings of dependency on participants spouses contributed so significantly to the phenomena of participants "living life through others" that I have chosen to examine these together. Many of the participants described their lives as being one step removed from life. They were dependent on someone else's experience to experience life. Participants from all marriage categories reported this phenomena.

One participant, prior to learning to read, explained that his opinions were always filtered through his wife's opinions. This was because his opinions were created from her interpretation of something she had read. He became increasingly aware of this phenomena as his reading level

increased. Once he learned to read he felt that for the first time, he developed opinions first hand, not one step removed from an issue.

After I got into the program and I started reading I felt a lot more confident to do stuff... just talk to people about different things cause I didn't have to rely on somebody else reading something on something, I could go read it myself... and form my opinion on it then... [Before learning to read someone] would read it [to me] then [they] would express [their] opinion and [then I'm]... supposed to form my opinion. Well, I've already had an opinion expressed to me and... I'm taking you on what you say about it ... Now [after learning to read] I can, [when] somebody says something about something, I can go and read it and form my own opinion whether it agrees or disagrees with them... I'm more confident talking about things, politics anything like that ... religion, football games, basketball... if somebody says something about some player, like Magic Johnson, well you know the you hear a little bit on the news, and you know the news just gives you part of what they just hit the high points, well you can pick up a paper or

something, and the paper usually gives you more of a detail on it. Now I can read a paper...

This participant's emphasis on being able to create his own opinions highlights the power that the participants gave to literacy. Even though the participant watched television news reports of the same events that were in the papers, the participant was still hesitant to form full blown opinions based on the television accounts. The participant felt a need to be able to read about events because of a fear of missing something important. By basing an opinion on a television report the opinion might be off base and others would be able to tell that the participant had not read about it because the participant was illiterate. My own experience with the literate tells me that I and my literate friends often discuss issues which we had only heard about on television or the radio and we do not feel less informed. I interpret this to mean that illiteracy contributes to the perception of not feeling fully informed rather than the inability of the television to inform.

Another participant said his reactions toward life were conducted through his wife.

She was my sole mind, basically really, what she said I had to pretty well... had to go along with, because I didn't have the knowledge of what was going on. Now I mean, don't get me wrong, I've

got good common knowledge but there's things that you have to read to understand... It became very important to her that I learn how to read so that I could learn to react on my own to things when she wasn't there.

I was amazed at the level of vulnerability to which non-readers were constantly subjected. To react to the world through someone else required an enormous amount of trust. The above participant emphasized that he had to trust his wife tremendously to interpret and read things accurately to him. There was an immense level of dependence. However, because his wife was highly supportive and because she did not abuse the dependence it was not destructive.

Living life through someone else was a different end of the continuum of being totally isolated. Those participants that did not want to be totally isolated and could trust their spouses completely found their isolation less severe. It was as though one step removed from life was better than non-involvement.

One final quote from a participant which describes the phenomena of living through a spouse follows.

"He was my conversation, he was my world."

Changes in Senses of Selves

When Participants Learned to Read

The findings so far have focused on the lives and experiences of the participants as non-readers. In this section the findings shift to examine the changes that occurred for the participants in their "senses of selves" as they learned to read. Understanding how the selves of the participants changed is crucial to understanding the next theme, "family relationships did change."

The changes in the participants' selves were of a dynamic nature and are best understood by examining the changes as progressions. I chose the titles of the sub-themes to reflect the movement of the participants from one orientation to another. The sub-themes are as follows: (a) dependence to independence; (b) isolation to socialization; (c) negative to positive self concept; (d) optionless to options and (e) gaining power and control.

I found that the sub-themes in this section were present for all participants. The words pervasive and compartmental are used to describe the different magnitudes with which participants' senses of selves changed. The term pervasive applies to those participants whom I felt experienced an overall personal metamorphosis with regard to their identities and their orientation toward the world. The very structure of how they interacted with the world and

the individuals in it changed. These participants experienced second order changes in most areas of their lives. The pervasive level of changes in "sense of self" was more connected to ambivalent and non-supportive levels of family of origin support. I did not find this surprising since these are the same participants whose illiteracy pervasively defined their sense of selves and their lives. Therefore it stood to reason that since their lives had been pervasively defined by their illiteracy that more areas of their lives were changed when they learned to read.

For those participants whose "sense of self" when illiterate were more compartmentalized the family of origin support levels were higher. I surmised then that if their illiteracy had only compartmentally impacted their "sense of self" and how their "lives were defined" then the changes that learning to read brought impacted only those areas that had previously been defined by their illiteracy. Subsequently the changes in the selves were compartmentalized also. The changes though, that did occur in the participants "sense of self", were second order changes.

The impact on the marriage and the family of origin support levels can be seen in relation to the participants "changes in selves" in table 6.

Table 6
Impact on the Marriage and Family of Origin Support Levels
 in Relation to Changes in the Selves

Gender	Impact on Marriage	Family of origin support level	chang self based on literacy
M	improved	high	compart.
M	improved	high	compart.
M	improved	high	compart.
F	improved	high	compart.
F	improved	high	compart.
F	improved	high	pervasive
F	ambivalent	non-supp.	pervasive
F	ambivalent	ambivalent	pervasive
M	ambivalent	ambivalent	pervasive
M	deterior.	ambiv.	pervasive
M	deter.	ambiv.	pervasive

Before examining the sub-themes I feel it is helpful to explore how the changes in selves were viewed in totality by several participants. One participant likened the enormous and pervasive changes that she experienced to traveling and the many different kinds of luggage one must take for all of the new places. The analogy rang clear and true for my understanding as I compared it to all eleven interviews.

I think the tutor needs to be aware of the changes... that they [new readers] have... tutors have no idea, they go take their 18 hour course, and they look at this little tip of the iceberg, and they have no idea of the luggage that comes with it, and then as they're [new readers] learning to read we change luggage, we take things

out of the luggage, and we leave luggage at other places, and uh, they don't understand, they really don't.

To continue with the analogy in my own words; the travelers [the participants in this study], however, did not know where they were going. The travelers got caught and had to juggle the luggage while trying to keep up with the unexpected and unannounced travel changes. In trying to keep up the travelers often made mistakes about which pieces to bring and which pieces to leave and even used the luggage inappropriately. The changes in the selves were often unexpected by the participants.

Another participant discussed the subtle nature of the changes that occurred. The changes actually snuck up on this participant. The participant reasoned that since he had never been a reader before he had no idea what to expect nor how to prepare for the changes that accompanied learning to read.

I don't think I really noticed it [changes due to reading], and I think I was scared to know what was going to happen.

A final quote from one participant highlights the pervasive nature of the changes in the senses of selves created by learning to read.

You're your own person

Move From Dependence to Independence

A participant, who had previously described herself as needing to be the perfect spouse because she was dependent on their spouse and feared losing their spouse, experienced an enormous sense of freedom and independence when she no longer felt the need to be perfect. She no longer feared the loss of their spouse because they could not read, because now they could read. I sensed that it was now okay to take risks and to not do everything for everybody. The participant after learning to read wanted to spend time with reading activities and did not want to spend all of her time waiting on others.

[as a non-reader]... I was a yes man, yes sir anything you want, you want coffee, tea. And now [after learning to read], I [say] well get it yourself, I've got to read this, ... you know you change and it's good.

This sense of independence for many participants resulted in many changes in how the participants interacted with their family members and especially with their spouses. The spouses often were caught off guard by the new independence of the participant. This occurred especially for those spouses who had not known the participants had been illiterate and did not know that the participant was learning to read.

People start getting independent and you know they're feeling good about their self and they're really going and they're charging on and their spouse says something and [the new reader says] I just want to be independent, well you've shut your [spouse out], you've closed the door, this person [your spouse] can't come in now ... [independence] means you want out on your own.

Another participant linked the new independence to feelings of power.

... I was the person the world opened up to, I could do anything, it's a very fantastic feeling, you get power within yourself, that independence is so fantastic...

Participants shared that they learned to believe in themselves. From learning to read, participants realized they could accomplish things that they had previously thought were impossible. Their illiteracy had been viewed as unchangeable and they learned to read. I found that the participants developed a mind frame of "if I can change my reading status then all sort of other things that I thought were impossible are probably possible." Participants repeatedly reported the powerful feelings that accompanied realizing that the impossible was possible. I found that just as the illiteracy had permeated numerous aspects of the

participants' lives, so too did their literacy. One participant whose sense of self had been pervasively and negatively defined by his illiteracy discussed how the feelings of independence made him more immune to non-supportive statements.

Why does she [my wife] say those [hurtful] things to me...I thought about that so many times I don't really realize why she's saying it, I really have no idea why... [Now after learning to read] she knows better than to say anything cause I don't pay any attention to her now...

Not only was this participant able to stop absorbing hurtful things but it impacted his interactions with his wife.

Another participant described the change in how he related to his wife based on his newly gained independence.

I have come to a point where I don't need her permission, I stand forward and I just do what I want to do, it's my life, I have to be happy and... you cannot count on other people to make us happy if they're not, so we have to step forward and do what we want to do ...

As I was analyzing the data I realized that what the participants were describing as gains in independence I had experienced in adolescence and early adulthood. Adolescence

is the time when most of us start to make decisions with regard to the future direction of our lives.

... decisions are very important. I never made decisions when I was a kid [due to my illiteracy and now I can].

Move From Isolation to Socialization

With the gains in independence, the participants were willing to do things they had never done before and found themselves engaging in many activities they never would have dreamed of participating in before. One example of a participant who engaged in new social settings follows:

I bowl in a league now and I would of never of thought of doing something like that [before learning to read].

Another participant put it this way:

... you have the courage to get out there and talk to people. Before you never talked to people because you were afraid... you might say something to make them laugh.

I sensed that the for some participants the move from isolation to socialization was more of a move from an observer of life to a participator in life and/or from a receiver to a giver. Their relationships became more open to reciprocity. The participants were no longer dependent on others to enjoy themselves in public settings.

Well I'm more outgoing now, I just, I don't know, we can go places. If we go out to dinner some night to a nice restaurant I can read my own menu instead of having her to try to kind a just tell me what they are, what's on the menu. I can pick up my own menu and decide on what I want.

I found that a significant portion of the changes in socialization were connected to the participants' involvement in the literacy movement as advocates for those who were still illiterate. They spent much of their "free" time in this pursuit and became involved on committees and boards, activities in which they had never been a part of before. In addition, nine of the participants had received public recognition for having learned to read. Many had been interviewed by newspapers, radio stations and television stations. Numerous participants cited that their involvement in the literacy movement and the recognition they received from learning to read had the tremendous effects on their increases in socialization. I perceived the increase in socialization from their involvement in the literacy movement and the recognition they received as having fast forwarded them from isolation into socialization. The participants' description of these processes were much like other people who one day were unknown and the next day were public figures; especially

those who were not looking for the limelight. It is a sudden and abrupt change which often left the participants reeling around. This increased socialization at break neck speed and intense absorption in the literacy movement was at times overwhelming and somewhat out of control for the participants.

... first of all I've never been recognized for anything before and now I have, so it's pretty important to that individual... I only speak for myself, I'm not going to speak for everybody else... I wasn't looking for the limelight, but I'll be durned if I'm gonna pass it up, because I've never been there before... And it is fantastic that people come to you, it's fantastic that people approach you about all kinds of ideas about what it's like... and it's great that people come to you, and you get to put your input into it. But you find yourself getting very very deeply involved with one set thing, literacy and you need to devote a whole lot more time to yourself... or you cannot accomplish personal goals.

The changes seemed much like being on a roller coaster ride where the feeling is really great but you have no control of its coming and going.

... you know especially going to these conferences and people want to know [what] we're about, and what I'm about is overwhelming. You put yourself on these cloud nines all the time and... It's nice to be out there, but when it's all done and over with and a couple weeks later you know you fall down until you get to the next one and you're back up again and... We shouldn't... there should be something in there where we should be able to keep on going.

This participant along with several others suggested that literacy programs, along with teaching students to read, should also incorporate teaching how adjust to and moderate the accompanying changes in their lives.

Another aspect of the movement from isolation to socialization was finding out that there were other individuals who could not read and that the participants were not alone. When the participants described this to me the relief was evident on their faces. Reviews of the audio tapes confirmed my perception that their voices also reflected the relief and peace that accompanied finding out they were not alone. Sometimes there were sighs which accompanied the discussion surrounding this. Often the knowledge was what set the stage for their further socialization into the community as their reading levels

increased. One participant described that learning that others could not read provided the realization that learning to read was possible.

Going to the LVA meetings, hearing other people speak out, tell their stories and me sharing mine with some of them... it makes you feel that you're not the only one with a problem and it makes you feel you're not stupid, you're not retarded you're not ugly, you're not different. I mean your different but you can do something about it.

Another participant put it this way:

You're shocked ... You don't think there's that many people that... can't read. But there's more people out there than actually... we all thought. There's millions of people out there.

By being more of a participant in life, participants described attaining "life" skills that had been impossible for them before learning to read.

... [I've learned though that] you do struggle, We all, it's a part of life that I never realized before [when I could not read]. Life does go up and down and we have to go up and down so that's the important part that I never understood. My parents never brought me up like that, [they protected me and said] everything's gonna be fine

and dandy [so when I hit the real world] it was a big turn around.

A final quote sums up the movement from isolation to socialization.

...my world got broader...

Negative to Positive Self Worth

Participants made a direct link between being able to read and feeling better about themselves. For those who received recognition for their reading accomplishment, I asked whether it was the reading or the recognition that had increased their self esteem. They quickly and without hesitation said it was the learning to read; they pointed out that their self esteem increased early in the process of when they were learning to read prior to being recognized. I found that participants punctuated the beginning of the changes in self esteem at different ends of the same continuum. Some participants pointed to the increases in self esteem as being responsible for being able to make other changes in their lives. Other participants shared that increases in independence from learning to read increased their self esteem. Either way it was the learning to read that started the process.

... it's a big change in learning how to read, being able to read, it changes your life because you feel better about yourself...

Another participant said:

Self worth is... something you don't get unless you feel good about yourself. [and reading] makes you feel good about your self.

Still another participant said:

Here they are [new readers], they go to learn to read, they start feeling like somebody...

Two participants used the word "entitled" to describe changes in themselves from learning to read. Others described the same phenomena using other words but I think that the word entitled captures it the best. Participants learned to give themselves the same basic rights they had given others when they could not read. Through learning to read they realized it was okay for them to not be perfect and still to expect happiness and respect from other people. One participant stated it this way:

I think the best thing by learning how to read is just being I'm okay, that I have rights, and I'm entitled to open my mouth, and I'm entitled to be happy with just what I'm able to be happy with.

For other participants, being able to read and gaining self worth from that ability, contributed to new skills and experiences in their lives. These included changes in their lifestyles and how they approached other people. One participant described being able to better understand other

people because of increased self worth.

... but I think I have a much better understanding of other people ... when you have a better self worth ... you learn a lot more in life and you understand people more, like before I never could talk to you [the researcher] about anything ...

Increases in self worth also allowed participants to engage in activities that would have been avoided previously. One participant even cited that participation in the interview for this research was possible due to increased self esteem.

And since I've got into this program I feel better about myself and I talk with people; like I said I joined a bowling league and I never knew any of these people and I get along with them real well, became friends with some of them... I never used to share my story with no-one and it's just like I don't know you [the researcher] but I thought, hey, this would give me a chance.

Another participant attributed becoming more involved in the community to increased self esteem.

[As a non-reader] I would not have been running to these other people that I normally would of [community committees]... and I would say it came from more self esteem, being more independent due

to reading.

From Optionless to Having Options

Changes in the participants senses of selves and the accompanying independence and increased socialization contributed to an important shift in attitude orientation. The participants descriptions of their lives moving from a life of illiteracy to a life of literacy involved the opening up of many activities which they never thought were open to them. They had learned that what they had previously seen as unchangeable (their non-reading status) was changeable. Because things could be changed the participants felt they had many more options open to them. I do not have any participant quotes that directly address because it was not a theme that the participants identified clearly. Its development was based more on my synthesis of the data and grew out the overall interview themes for each participant. It was also a theme which I had entered into my interviewer's journal. It is derived mostly out of my sense that the participants were finally able to participate in the activities that most of the literate world participates in on a regular basis and without second thought. The participants, themselves, described many new options that opened up to them when they learned to read, that had previously been denied to them. The word denial invokes in me a sense of loss and limitation. What is

unclear is whether the participants would have viewed their world as quite so optionless when they were illiterate as they describe now that they are literate.

Gaining control and Power

Those participants who felt the most powerless previous to learning to read were those who had pervasively defined themselves and their lifestyles according to their illiteracy. Therefore when they learned to read they experienced the largest changes in power and control.

One participant described the gains in power and control as both surprising and overwhelming.

I mean it's just overwhelming from being a non-reader to being a reader and knowing the power and the, the control you can have of yourself and what you can do and where you can go.

One participant who felt very powerless as a non-reader and whose marriage had been highly organized around his illiteracy, felt that power was a major issue in his marriage when he learned to read. He strongly recommended that the changes of power be addressed very early in the learning to read process.

I would start [counseling] with the individual [new reader] and I would tell them [marital couple] to eventually get both of you, because you got all this learning and this power and you don't

know how to use it, and you're using it the wrong way, and you've got to learn how to use it, since you never had it, you've got to, .. or it's going to overpower you, that's what I felt when I was going through it.

For this participant, the gain in power was both euphoric and terrifying. The participant would not have traded it for the world but at the same time realized the controlling effect it had on him until he learned to use it "correctly." He and other participants described the euphoric effects of the power and the accompanying feelings that they could do anything and no longer needed to consult anyone else. Many participants discussed that they initially abused the power because they were unaware that it would come and that they had had no previous experience wielding it before. They described themselves as somewhat dangerous with the new power and that they were much like a novice with a gun who while practicing often shot the wrong thing.

One participant attributed much of the stress and pain of learning to read was due to having to figure out alone how to deal with all of the accompanying changes. She described several stages that she went through in learning how to use the power she had gained.

... because the stages that I had gone

through were horrendous. I have gone through being nobody to being somebody, to being superwoman, to being a monster, to being a balancing woman to, I am probably at the best growth of my life.

Another participant described the elation of discovery that power was within his grasp.

They [tutors at a conference] came up to me... and asked me what I was about... I was like on cloud nine for 2 months and that's when I came back and told my story, because somebody wanted to know what I had to say, they came up to me and wanted to know what I was doing. [They told us] what a great job and things we were doing... People need to know that they got the power to do that kind of stuff.

For many of the participants in this study, gains in power and control were crucial to their own personal development and being able to approach the world differently than when non-literate. The process of the attainment of power though was often frightening and potentially upsetting for their marital relationships. The changes in the participants' selves including the move from dependence to independence, isolation to socialization, negative to positive self worth, optionless to options and gains in

power and control were all potentially unbalancing for the participants marital relationships. While the process was similar for most participants, the manner in which the marriages adjusted varied greatly. It was those participants who received high and consistent support from their spouses in which the marriages improved, those who received ambivalent support in which the marriages were ambivalent and those who received non-support in which the marriages deteriorated.

**Changes Did Occur
in Family Relationships**

Changes in participants' relationships with spouses, relationships with children and relationships with family of origin members are examined in this section. All eleven participants expressed that their relationships with family members changed when they learned to read. All reported that relationships with their children improved. However, relationships with members of their families of origin and relationships with their spouses varied among the improved, ambivalent and deteriorated categories. I chose the following sequence to present the findings of the changes in family relationships: marital relationships; child relationships; and family of origin relationships. I chose this sequence to reflect hierarchically the levels of importance and magnitude of the changes as reported by the

participants.

Changes in Marital Relationships

All participants, by learning to read, interacted with the world with new senses of selves (second order change). This resulted in different interactional patterns with significant others including their spouses. All marital couples experienced first order relational changes. However only the improved marriages moved beyond the first order changes to develop second order relational changes.

Because of the new "self" of the participants many of their old patterns of interaction were no longer appropriate nor useful. These new personal interactions included becoming more active in deciding how they wanted to be treated and interacted with instead of being recipients and respondents. The changes which the couples experienced included communication patterns, roles, power, socialization and intimacy. Understanding the interface between the sense of selves second order changes and the different marital systems first and second order changes, provides crucial information as to why these marriages improved, became ambivalent or deteriorated.

In response to the participants' "sense of self" second order changes, the marital systems of five of the six couples in the improved marriage category experienced second order changes (the sixth is discussed later) after initially

and unsuccessfully trying to respond with first order changes. For those participants whose marriages were ambivalent or deteriorated, the marital systems experienced only first order changes with no creation of second order changes. Although the outcomes were different for the marriages, many of the types of changes were similar for all of the couples. The changes themselves varied in degree, connected to the levels of spousal support received and the degree to which the marriages were initially organized around the participants' illiteracy.

The ability of couples to move on to second order changes was connected to high levels of spousal support. Those participants who received ambivalent or non-support from their spouses were in the ambivalent and deteriorated marital categories and the marital systems experienced first order changes but were unable to or had not at the time of the interview moved on to creating second order changes. The impact on the marriage, spousal support levels and self and marital system types of changes can be seen in table 7.

Table 7
Impact on Marriages, Spousal Support Levels and Types of Change

Gender	Impact on Marriage	Spousal support level	types (orders) of change	
			self	marital sys.
M	improved	high	2nd	1rst
M	improved	high	2nd	2nd
M	improved	high	2nd	2nd
F	improved	high	2nd	2nd
F	improved	high	2nd	2nd
F	improved	high	2nd	2nd
F	ambiv.	ambiv.	2nd	1rst
F	ambiv.	ambiv.	2nd	1rst
M	ambiv.	ambiv.	2nd	1rst
M	deter.	non-supp.	2nd	1rst
M	deter.	non-supp.	2nd	1rst

The remainder of this section is devoted to understanding how the marriages in the three categories responded to the changes, resulting from the participants' increased reading abilities. This is accomplished by examining the marriages within the three different marital outcome categories; improved, ambivalent and deteriorated. Each category is explored in two ways (a) how the marriage was organized prior to the individual learning to read and (b) what changes occurred in the marital system as the participant learned to read and whether the changes were first or second order.

As the discussion proceeds, it is helpful to keep in mind that all participants discussed the changes that

occurred in their relationships in terms of process and/or stages.

Improved Marriages

The six participants whose marriages fell into the improved marital category all reported receiving high levels of support from their spouses. The participants perceived their spouses as either feeling unthreatened by their new senses of selves or feeling threatened but maintaining consistent support which did not change as a result of feeling threatened. All six participants' marriages prior to learning to read were only compartmentally organized around their illiteracy and subsequently around their literacy. They viewed their marriages as partnerships with zero or minimal power differentials both prior to learning to read and throughout the whole learning process. This does not imply that the participants did not experience dependency on their spouses; they did to varying degrees. The dependency however, was not described in terms of control as it was described by all of the participants in the ambivalent and the deteriorated categories.

One couple in the improved category organized their marital relationship so little around the participants illiteracy that very little change occurred as a result of the participant learning to read. The changes that did occur were of a first order nature and did not significantly

impact how they as a couple interacted. This couple is not included in the remaining discussion of improved couples.

The improved couples attempted initially to utilize old familiar patterns of interaction (first order change) to incorporate the participants' new selves into the marital system. The couples then proceeded to move beyond trying to old patterns with new twists (first order changes), to creating new patterns (second order changes) of interaction.

One couple did this with relative ease and smoothness because the changes were not of great magnitude. The other couples struggled with the movement toward second order change. What was very important to their marriages improving was the ability of the couples to create second order systemic marital change.

Organization of marriage prior to learning to read.

The illiteracy for the improved marital couples was seen as something to be adapted to. This was true for those participants whose spouses knew of their illiteracy and for those participants who had kept their illiteracy secret from their spouses. The marriages were viewed as partnerships with the division of responsibilities based on who was better at certain tasks. The participants' lack of reading abilities were seen more like one would see a spouse who knows how to fix the car and the other does not. The illiteracy was not viewed as one individual being smarter or

better than the other. The participants' value as a partner was not based on their inability to read. The participants were seen as having other equally valuable strengths.

One participant described that mutuality was the essential ingredient to being able to get closer.

We got closer I feel, because... knowing that he's there for me or I'm there for him, we talk about a lot of things, it's like support, it's like trust to one another, and if you can have that in a marriage you've got it made.

The first order changes experienced by the improved marriages. The couples in the improved category initially altered their marital interaction patterns to incorporate the new readers' new selves by utilizing first order changes.

Cause then he thought I was looking at other men and jealousy played a new role in there to because I didn't lean on him so much, I'm leaning on someone else, okay there was someone else, ... that was the new person growing in me.

These included using old patterns of interaction in new situations. One change that occurred for all of the participants in this category was that they stopped living life through someone else. Some of the spouses saw this change in the participant as threatening.

Now all of a sudden she is no longer my sole mind, I made the comment to her a while back that I really didn't have a life before literacy [and she did not like this comment because she felt threatened that she was not needed any more].

I guess there was a, I guess I did put a certain amount of threat on our marriage when I learned how to read because I guess she won't ever really admit to saying that it has changed our relationship tremendously, which it has, because I am no longer solely dependent on my wife for everything I need to do, mail comes in the house, I know what's going on... My wife will never really say that it's a problem but there's times I feel that my wife feels that I'm no longer solely dependent on her anymore and I guess that might be part of the negative side to it [literacy]. And that might be all in my mind.

I am choosing to examine this particular couples' process more closely because it reveals well the first order change process that all of the couples in this group experienced. Based on the change in which the participant interacted directly with the world, change in their marital interactions occurred while the couple attempted to keep the marital interactions the same. They attempted to

incorporate his new self into their relationship by using their same old interactional patterns (first order changes) of communication, going to the same places and doing the same activities. These attempts at using old patterns for a new situation did not work. As a couple, they had acknowledged that he had acquired the skill of reading. However, they viewed it as an isolated skill and did not understand nor comprehend the changed self that emerged from the second order changes which accompanied the participants' learning to read. Because of this non-acknowledgement by he and his spouse to incorporate and respond to the changes in his self, he felt an emotional distancing occurring between him and his wife which was not present prior to him learning to read. He felt as though he was losing his wife. This realization made him take a long and hard look at who he was as a new reader and more importantly how learning to read created changes in who he was and how he was interacting with his wife.

During the interview he and I identified two areas connected to his literacy that seemed to contribute to the distance in his marriage, (a) learning to read and (b) his extreme involvement with the literacy movement. He quickly distinguished between the two and said that it was the changes that accompanied learning to read which had the largest impact on the overall changes in his marriage

including the initial distance experienced in the relationship. The involvement in the literacy movement was a secondary contributor to the changes in the relationship. He described his involvement in the literacy movement as being on the level of a zealot. To me, it was like he was a new convert in which all else was forsaken. His family, particularly his wife and marital relationship, were placed on the back burner. She was left simmering and became confused as to why she was there and about the changes that were occurring. The confusion led to resentment of his new "love," the literacy movement. All of this occurred in an extremely supportive environment. His spouse was genuinely proud of his literacy accomplishments and consistently encouraged him to continue even when felt threatened. He and his wife were able to move beyond the distance which occurred and created new ways of interacting. They did this through altering their communication to include more self disclosure and to discuss the issues surrounding his gains in literacy.

Another participant described a very similar process with her and her husband. She learned to read and her approach to the world and significant others changed. Her husband felt threatened by the changes. They attempted to use old patterns of interaction to adjust to the changes and a subsequent distancing occurred. She described their

experience in the following way:

... then the problem was, once I learned how [to read] ... there was him and I also that could stand on our own two feet. I was not sinking in sand or sinking in water so to speak. He could not adjust to the fact that I could read and I could do things on my own that he didn't have to do anymore, like pay bills, fill out applications, enjoy a story and he didn't have to tell me. [I could] enjoy the newspaper and he didn't have to tell me what was going on... enjoy the reading of the bulletin board at work and he didn't have to tell me anymore, so I wasn't leaning on him for my information anymore. ... There was not the closeness we once had, we drifted apart, it wasn't a violent drift, but we had to make a new marriage.

She continued on with her explanation of the distancing and the confusion her spouse felt in the following way:

He stayed more to himself and stayed with his world and my world got broader, I was more interested in reading a story than watching a football game, okay I was more interested in learning to bake the cake that I never baked than to listen to him talk about fighting. He was my

conversation he was my world, now my world was drifting his way and he still wanted to continue on with the family that was always there. He could not accept the idea that she's got a mind and I'm not her focus point anyone, I'm not the main person in her life anymore, and once you cherish someone and [that person] doesn't cherish you back the same way they're used to, I mean it's hard to accept.

Once again the new reader had stopped living life through her spouse and was trying to make room for her new self in the marital relationship while the spouse was trying to hang on (first order change) to what used to be. The relationship as it had existed was cherished by him. Basically what was occurring, was that the couple was trying to adjust to the second order changes of the participant (new self) with first order changes in the relationship. The changes were scary for them as a couple. The marital relationship, in order to improve, had to make room for the new self of the participant. As can be seen this was not a particularly easy process and not all marriages made the necessary interactional structural shifts (second order changes). Those in the ambivalent and deteriorated categories did not.

Spouses often had a hard time understanding that they

were no longer needed as the "explainer" and often tried to get the participant back into the role of receiver.

Following is an example of how a husband attempted to utilize old interactional patterns with the new self that had emerged for the participant.

... the tax system came alive to me, I was the one coming home and saying, look hon, we can do this and look we can do that, and look what we'll get at the end of the year. Now this wasn't his wife doing this, it was his role to say this is the way it is, and this is the way, and look what we could do right here, but he didn't do that [his reaction was to discount her knowledge to try to get things back to the way they were, he would say the following things] ... 'You're crazy, you read it wrong, you just did not comprehend what that whole thing said.' And it was hard for him to accept that [I] did read it right and [I] did comprehend it and we did move, but we moved together [physically and emotionally] but it was hard."

New readers also described the effects of gained independence on their marital interactions. Often the increases in independence were viewed by the spouses as personality changes. Several participants mentioned that their spouses felt that the person they married no longer

existed. These changes often resulted in increased arguing and in feelings of loss for the spouses. The descriptions by the participants were similar to the descriptions that my clients give who are experiencing the grief from death or divorce. It was muddied though, by the participant's continued presence and the participant's desire to remain in the marriage.

I take more for myself, everything used to be for my husband because he was the smart one and I felt like I was underneath him and not with him [even though her husband treated her as an equal]. Yet we had a good marriage, but when I came even with him [in my own mind] and it was my ideas count now too, not always yours. [The researcher then asked, how did you guys go about that?] There was a lot of arguments, there was a lot of very, very tense times when he could not comprehend what was coming down the pike, this woman's not the one I married, I don't like this woman, she's not the dear sweet little person she used to be. You know you change and it's good; but he encouraged me to go on with reading when I wanted to stop.

I found that many participants' initial attempt at utilizing their gains in power and independence within the marital relationships was to create role reversals where

instead of the spouse making all of the decisions, the new reader could make all of the decisions. This is an example of using the same patterns in new ways (first order changes). These attempts contributed to creating distance between the spouses. The couples did not have experience making joint decisions around issues that they had both read about. Knowing how to compromise on these decisions was foreign to them. All of the participants in the improved marital category however, were able to gain awareness of their attempts at role reversals, often through their spouses pointing it out to them. These couples then moved on to creating new patterns of interactions which involved cooperation such as joint decision making.

The changes experienced from the participant being extremely involved in the literacy movement. Participants from all three marital categories mentioned that their involvement in the literacy movement contributed to changes in their marriage. It was mentioned as a secondary contributor and really dependent on their gains in literacy. I feel it warrants looking at more closely. Two aspects of involvement with the literacy movement emerged as impacting the marriages. These were the amounts of time the participants spent with the movement and the differing interest levels of their spouses. One participant described these in the following manner:

The only negative drawback that I have, that I can say in this program [being a literacy advocate] is sometimes it takes away from the family, or it takes you away from your wife and if you try to get too deeply involved in it, especially if your wife is not real interested in it... If you have two people that are really interested in the same thing that is great, but my wife is not real interested in the overall literacy movement.

When this participant realized the impact his involvement was having on his marriage he decided to decrease his level of involvement. It is interesting to point out that not all participants decided to decrease their involvement, but those that realized how their involvement was impacting their marriages talked about the fact that they could alter the level of involvement. What struck me were the similarities and differences between the participants descriptions of learning how to deal with the involvement and the other changes they experienced such as gains in independence and power. They used words like balance and moderate to describe all of them. What was different was that while gains in independence and power could be balanced, they could not be stopped; their involvement in the literacy movement could be either balanced or stopped. The involvement in the literacy

movement was a much easier "variable" to deal with.

I'm gonna quit it [involvement with the literacy movement]... because I need to spend more time, quality time with my [spouse] now than I have in the past because, now I have realized that I had taken a lot away in the past four years, away from, primary family life. I don't spend as much time with the things I need to do at home because of my involvement. Why I got involved was, first of all I wanted to help people, [and for the recognition I received].

The same participant went on to describe the potential negative effects on the new reader's family life.

[The participant's recommendation to new readers was] You need to spend the same amount of quality time with your family as you do with the literacy program [this does not mean a lack of dedication to literacy] ... I feel really dedicated that what I've got to do and what I can do in literacy as far as the movement is concerned in teaching people how to read, but I also feel like that if you're not real careful you can destroy the most important part about your life and that's your family. You'll grow apart, I'm telling you, you'll grow apart... It's a reality that can happen

How marriages changed and improved with new patterns
(second order marital systemic changes).

I found that it required both the participants and their spouses to make the second order structural shifts necessary in their marital patterns in order for the marriages to move to improved states. These new patterns were qualitatively different than how they had interacted prior learning to read and encompassed several areas of interaction which included communication, egocentrism to mutuality, responsibilities, time spent together, and intimacy. The areas are not mutually exclusive but have been punctuated for purposes of clarity. Some overlap will occur in the discussion of each area.

Communication. Communication was an area that all five participants cited as having improved due to the participants' improved literacy capabilities. The topics the couples talked about and how they talked changed. One clear example was how communication changed surrounding mail. On the surface this sounds like a small and first order change however; it perturbed their communication into second order change. Being able to read their own mail allowed the participants to discuss the material with their spouses on an equal footing, not from a position once removed and dependent on their spouses to interpret it for them. This significantly impacted what material was

discussed and how it was discussed. For being able to sort through the mail themselves and throw the junk mail out relieved their spouses of the task and allowed the participants the opportunity to focus on and choose the mail that was important. The participants then were the ones to be the first ones to read what was important and present the material to their spouses instead of it always being the other way around. Instead of the communication surrounding correspondence beginning with the spouse acting as interpreter the discussion began at another point.

[my wife would say] it's made it a lot better...she don't have to read things to me now. I can pick up the bills and stuff that comes in and read it and a lot of times I tell her, it's kind of a reversal of roles now. She don't have to set down and go through all of it. I can go through it and something that [I] think both of us need to talk about I can put that over to the side and the stuff that you don't, what I call junk stuff, she don't have to go through that to see what it is ... It takes more of a load off.

The participants often chose to focus on different things in the mail than their spouses had. Participants also gained privacy. They were no longer dependant on their spouses to read their private mail. The spouses had

previously had access to all areas of the participants' lives which involved any written material. This was often threatening to their spouses because they were being "kicked out of a previously accessible area. The changes connected to mail illustrates the drastic changes that can occur. It also illustrates how learning to read is more than a skill. The couples in the improved category were able to recognize the threatening aspects of the changes in learning to read created and to address the changes with new interactions (second order changes). I will use the mail example to again illustrate this in the participants' lives. One second order change that a couple developed was that they both became involved in the reading, sorting, prioritizing and interpreting of the mail which was addressed to them jointly and respected the privacy of their individual mail. This may seem like an easy and natural shift but it was not. If it had never been this way for them as a couple and they had 10 to 20 years of "illiteracy" pattern established the impact was potentially enormous. A first order change would have been for the participant to take over all of the mail duties or for them to continue to share all pieces of mail without the new element of privacy for the participant. The improved couples created a structural shift which involved mutuality. The couples in the ambivalent and deteriorated categories also experienced the changes in the

mail but their efforts to alter the interaction patterns as couples were "stuck" at the first order change level. The spouses tried to keep the interaction patterns the same.

Another area of different communication which impacted the marital interactions was the ability to be able to write spouses notes to share information. The participants who prior to being able to write had to rely on telephones or other people to deliver messages to their spouses when they needed to get in touch with them. Often if they were unable to reach their spouses by phone they hesitated to leave because they could not reach the spouse to inform them. Along with their literacy came a sense of freedom and assurance. The participant could be reached if necessary and was accessible in times of emergency. One participant described the phenomena in this way.

I guess the primary thing at home is I have better communications with my wife because now I can actually leave a note for her... If I had to be somewhere and I can't communicate by voice I leave a note for my wife which I never could do before.

Changes in participants' communication patterns also involved talking about different topics and talking about them in different ways. Their conversations were more varied and in-depth. Most participants found themselves interested in discussing politics since they had first hand

access to newspapers and magazines. The new variety and levels of communication also opened them to participating in new activities. One participant described that the new communication opened up the political and social world to her.

[The interviewer: Do you find yourselves talking about different things now that you can read?] Oh yes a lot, before I would never... I never read a newspaper and or magazines. I didn't watch the news, now he [my spouse] read the news all the time [in the] newspaper, he watched the 11 o'clock news, that wasn't interesting me so I never paid attention and he'd say something about it to me and 'who cares' you know... Before I never even cared; now I watch the news, I read the paper and you do have to care and I went out and voted for the first time in my life and that was through ...my husband and the LVA program ... it felt good to be able to go in that little tent thing and read what, who you wanted and things. Before I would of never thought of doing that.

Many couples found their communication had altered in new ways and found themselves discussing the changes. Previously the couples had avoided areas that necessitated discussing or alluding to the participants' illiteracy. It

was a taboo area. Consequently if a situation was a certain way because of the participants' illiteracy it was just not discussed or the conversation was halted before it got to the point where it was obvious that the illiteracy was at the core of the issue. However, when the participants learned to read it became legitimate to mention the reading level. Conversations occurred from an orientation of both the participants' and the spouses' strengths instead of the spouses' strength and the participants' weakness. New areas and levels of communication were opened. This included more self disclosure which contributed to increased intimacy.

Egocentrism to mutuality. Another area of change involved several stages. Participants from all marital categories described becoming egocentric when they learned to read. Their primary focus was on the changes that were happening to them and how to use those changes for themselves. Two areas in which participants were particularly egocentric, were listening skills and decision making. Since they were formulating strong opinions on all sorts of new topics, they had stopped listening to their spouses. They developed a pattern of interaction which involved the same thing a different way. Instead of them doing most of the listening they were doing most of the talking. They felt entitled and expected their spouses to

do become the listeners and receivers. The participants in the improved marriage group eventually recognized this, often at the insistence of their spouses, and then focused on listening to both of their opinions. The couples moved from an orientation between them of one member being egocentric to the other being egocentric to mutuality.

One participant had basically shut her husband out. Her husband however, demanded that his needs get met and not shoved aside just because the participant had new needs. Her husband was willing to share and cooperate in the talking/listening and decision making but not willing to be totally replaced.

... and then he finally says, you're not letting me finish, let me finish my idea on any project at home, okay. And, um, I had a hard time understanding yeah, you're right I'm not listening to what you're saying and sometimes his idea was a whole lot better than mine. [Before this] I didn't stop to listen because I was the person the world opened up to, I could do anything. It's a very fantastic feeling, you get power within yourself, that independence is so fantastic that you don't realize that he's over here and you're over here and your not listening to a word he said, on anything because you're finally that

person who standed up...

The participants were able to create more mutual patterns of interaction because the participants learned to balance their new gains. The movement toward balance required a conscious realization of the changes and the role reversals that occurred and the need for the relationship to move to a both/and instead of an either/or mode of interaction.

We created a new marriage which is stronger now, it's much more equal now and I take more than I used to.

Remembering the "coupleness" of participants marriages was important to balancing the new sense of independence gained by the participants. Many of the participants described forgetting or "shelving" the aspect of "jointness" for a while and instead adopted an orientation of two "individuals" with the primary focus on themselves as new readers.

Responsibilities. Another area which participants described as having changed in improved ways was the sharing of responsibilities. Participants found that by being able to share responsibilities with their spouses from a perspective of literacy they developed a better understanding of what life was like for their spouses. The participants were able to move out of their own illiterate

world and in to a common world of literacy with their spouses. Their experiences became more homogeneous. Initially, most participants accomplished this first through and egocentric understanding of the literate world and then on to an understanding of their spouses world. Because they became literate they could put on their spouses shoes. This was a perspective they were unable of having previously.

Now that they were literate, responsibilities were shared based on who had time and or desire instead of on who could because of reading ability. This gave the couples more time together to spend in different ways. Couples consequently interacted in new ways as a result of having more joint time available or having the same amount of time available but being able to use it in new ways. The time spent together was of a different type and better quality. Better quality meant they could spend the time focusing on each other instead of what needed to be done.

[Balancing the checkbook] and grocery shopping...

I can go to the grocery store and buy food.. I can make out a list and go to the grocery store and get it... it's no problem now. I've taken some of that load off of her... I kind of contribute into, kind of 50-50... [This participant had retired.

The interviewer asked: Has this been more a result of learning to read or retirement and only

working part time?] I think it's been more, I have to contribute it to reading, cause being able to go to the grocery store and buying a couple weeks of groceries you have to know what you're buying cause you can't go down the aisle, I wonder what is this, I wonder what that tastes like cause you might be buying soap suds, so ... being able to read I've been able to pick up that responsibility and help her out in that area... [It] gives a little more time to her to give to me then ... I can go to the store, where it would take a couple of hours to [go to] the grocery store of her time... she can give these couple of hours in our relationship now [to] each other. Instead of saying we're married, we're a couple and one here and one there. ... I even cook now [cause he can read the cookbooks]. I'd have to say reading more than the retirement, cause if I was still working I would still devote time in doing grocery shopping or something because of reading.

The participant furthered his comments on the improved quality of the time spent together in the following manner:

You know every little bit, you pick up 15 minutes here, 15 minutes there pretty soon you got some good quality time going with each other and

[that's] what you need's to be in a good relationship.

Intimacy. The final area which participants pointed to as having improved was one of the most significant and was a blending of all of the changes in all of the other areas previously discussed. The couples experienced new types of and increased levels of intimacy.

One participant described that learning to read was the building block on which the new and more intimate relationship was built.

people [couples] ought not to look at this as a take away from other people, they ought to look at it at the point that it's a definite overall plus. You both can learn to build on it, we have, me and my wife believe it or not have actually learned to build on me learning to read. We have things now that we never had before, we do things now that we've never done before.

Participants developed increased levels of awareness of who their partners were because they were able to share in so many new and different things and because their communication had evolved to including more personal discussions. They as couples were not guessing as much about what the other one thought. One participant described the phenomena in this way:

I feel like I know her a little bit better and I can understand her a little bit better and the things that she's talking about...

Another participant described that he and his spouse's relationship had moved to include close friendship beyond being just partners. They developed a much deeper level of intimacy. This increased intimacy was partially based in the transition of the participant from feeling like a receiver of information to a participant who had important and worthwhile input.

We're friends now, we were never equal friends before... You're more giving because you're giving into the... situation or relationship... if only one person puts in and the other one doesn't then its an unequal yoke, but if you're both putting in and you're both ready to discuss then you move ahead together, but it was very hard to make that adjustment to be equal again [the participant had gone through an 'egocentric' stage] ... you grow much further that way,... Because we discuss [the] paper, articles at work now, not telling what the paper or articles are saying, there was no input on my side but now there is input on my side with his side and we discuss things... It's not a teaching relationship, it's a discussing process:

the yoke is more equal."

The participants in the improved marital category were all able to successfully create second order interactional changes. Some of the couples struggled much more than others. Those couples who experienced fewer changes of less magnitude were the couples whose overall levels of support were extremely high and the couples whose marriages had previously been the least organized around the participants' illiteracy.

Ambivalent marriages

Organization of marriage prior to reading. For the couples in the ambivalent category, the support received from their spouses was ambivalent. The spouses in this category did not feel threatened until the participant actually started to learn to read. When the threatened feelings occurred, the spouses' positive support level either wavered or reversed. This was quite different than for the couples whose marriages improved, the support they received remained positive and consistent.

Two of the participants in the ambivalent group had highly organized their marriages around their illiteracy. Interestingly, both participants had kept the level of their illiteracy a secret from their spouses until they got into the tutoring program. Both had also organized their marriages so that they gained a feeling of control over the

continuation of their marriage. They felt a need for this control out of fear that their spouses would leave if they were not the perfect. Since their own sense of self was pervasively defined by their illiteracy and was a feeling of being "less than" their spouses, they put forth extreme amounts of energy to hide the "less than" aspects of who they were. They felt that if their spouses found out that they "really were not capable" then their spouses would leave. The participants chose to overachieve in order to "hide" their "real" orientation of "less than". The two participants accomplished this control in different ways. One participant became the perfect "housewife." She then became perfect in those areas she could to compensate for what she could not. This took the focus off of her deficits and boosted her husband's ego.

... I did whatever he wanted me to do, so that I could be married to him... but in that process, I was so grateful and so happy, because he was very good, is very good to me, my husband is just very good to me. He loves me dearly, and as long as... I was his little china doll, I did whatever he wanted me to do, anything. I want you to know that he came home to an immaculate house, immaculate children, his dinner was on the table by the time he hung his coat up, his starched

shirts were in the closet, and if he said, the movie at 4 was better than the movie that I was watching, we'd change that channel to channel 4, so that we would watch it. He could convince me to do anything because I knew no different. And after the children were born, this was just the way that it was. And... I have a very good life, but I did everything he wanted me to do. But he wasn't a bad person, but we did what he wanted to do, we went where he wanted to go, and that whole thing. And... for instance... say... he'd said, 'oh, you like that diet soda? that coke soda is so much better' and he'd convince me that coke was better than that diet [and I'd believe him] ... It was like somebody gave me a lobotomy... It was right if he wanted it and he liked it..

Another participant, in order to not lose her husband, did all of the things that required reading and were "required" by society of the wife even though she was barely capable of doing them. She would spend most of her energy making sure things got done. What would take a reader ten minutes to do such as filling out a one page information sheet at the doctors office, would take her all day or possibly several days but she would do them to maintain the perfection.

So I did everything... I liked doing everything... and probably because I felt so insecure that [he would leave me]. I never told [my husband]... very early in our marriage, we became like...separated [emotionally distant]."

Both participants described themselves as being "superwomen." For these two participants most of the responsibilities and emotional aspects of their marriages revolved around their illiteracy. The third participant's wife had known of his illiteracy prior to marriage. For this participant many of the emotional aspects of the marriage revolved around his illiteracy, but not as many of the responsibilities. The difference between the first two and the third seemed to be one of secrecy and not gender.

Changes which occurred for the couples in the ambivalent category. The couples in the ambivalent marriage category experienced similar changes and similar initial stages as those in the improved category. The ambivalent couples however seemed stuck at struggling with adapting to the changes by utilizing the same patterns [first order change] as used before the participant learned to read, but in a variety of different ways. In some cases, the participant and/or the spouse were also somewhat consciously saying 'I don't want to make those kind of changes and I am not sure I want to be in this marriage to make these

changes'. There was a strong sense from two of the participants in this category that they were aware of the egocentric aspects of their new independence and that they really enjoyed it. Even realizing the distance that it was creating, they were unsure as to whether they wanted to give any of it up or moderate it in order to obtain a balance of independence/jointness. They were not sure the marriage to their current spouses was worth that. This was the primary struggle for two of the participants in the ambivalent category.

One of these two participants had felt dependent and deprived from illiteracy (not from the spouse) for so long that the participant felt entitled to a primary focus on the self as an individual. The third participant did not seem aware of the egocentric aspect of the newly gained independence. The couples in this group seemed less "joint" and more "two individuals living together." It seemed that only one member of the couples at a time, either the participant or the spouse, were actively trying to make the changes necessary in the marriage to keep it from deteriorating. For one couple, the role of adapter shifted back and forth. This trading of roles is an example of couples trying to use the old patterns of interaction in different ways (first order changes). The attempts at reshuffling the roles did not result in improvements but

instead, in distancing.

Yeah it [learning to read] has [impacted the marital relationship]... when I learned to read and... was able to go back to school and found that I wanted to do all these things, I wanted to give up a lot of the control of the household chores. I didn't want to have to pay the bills anymore, I don't want to have to balance the bankbook, unless, I didn't want to take the time to do that, it didn't mean anything. I didn't need that control anymore over my world and I didn't want it, and he didn't want to pick it up after that. [I had been doing it] for years, [and my husband said when I wanted him to do it] 'you're doing fine'. He didn't feel like I needed... to give it away... It got the point where... if he would say, 'well did you pay such and such a bill?'... I was like, 'go, look!'... Where before I would say, of course, here it is... here's all the months, I was like super organized. Now [I] shove it in the shoebox [and say], 'if you need to go look it up, go ahead, look it up...

This participant wanted to reverse the roles but her husband did not. These "responsibility" issues created major stress in the marriages with the participants trying

to reverse the roles and with the spouses trying to get the roles back to where they were. The couples never moved beyond the first order change of role reversals to mutuality.

As a result of the pervasive magnitude of changes in the participants' selves, their spouses viewed the participants as having gone through drastic personality changes. The participants reported that their spouses felt that they know longer knew the participants. One participant described her husband as remarking that he had been married to three different women.

The spouses had been comfortable with the participants illiterate "self" and the organization of the marriage around the illiteracy. Consequently, when the participant learned to read, the spouses attempted to pull the marriage back to where it was. The participants and the spouses were headed in two different directions with regard to marital changes. This resulted in marital distance and stress. The spouses verbally agreed to suggested changes by the participants but the spouses either did not follow through, did so for short periods of time or in an on again off again manner. For example, if the participant became more involved in school and could no longer do all of the cooking the spouse would not pick up the slack. It seemed that many double messages were given in both directions.

"Why is this my job [participant's] ... That used to be my job, but I don't want it to be my job... At one point in time, I actually went on strike and I said... 'I'm not doing anything, I'm not cooking, I'm not cleaning' and we made up this contract and what his rules were gonna be and what my rules were going to be, and what responsibilities... and I made him sign it and... that lasted about, oh, I'd say about three weeks. And then, it's kinda, we're still at the point in time, where, I get really annoyed... I used to be this supercook, and super, supermom, ...and the house was always clean... That's his biggest problem is, all the things that used to be very important to me because they were things that I could do and did well, aren't as important to me anymore, and I, I don't want them to be that important. I want other things to be important, so he has a harder time with that. You know, a clean house, well, if it's clean, it's clean; if it's not, it's not. If dinner's not made, and if I've got assignments due, grab a pizza, you know the number, so those things I think are harder for him. Change is harder for him than it is for me.

Another participant described that her attempts to

change the organization of the relationship were initially met with support, then with non-support because the spouse felt threatened. These cycles continued to occur up until the present. The inconsistent support levels were initially in response to the participants learning to read and then as the marriage became more ambivalent they were more in response to the participant's changing commitment to the marriage.

I think that if I could speak for my husband ... My husband goes food shopping, he used to take me to the doctor, he did all the things, that if you had a non-reader [a spouse would do]. And then [her husband's perspective would be] to have her [the participant] learn how to read and don't need [him] anymore and not too sure if she loves me anymore, and that has to be a very devastating to the opposite person. [I] needed [my husband when I could not read] in every way, as being my husband... was my knight in shining armor, he was right up there with God, he totally took care of me, he took care of my children, he was always right, he had my undivided attention, and that's a cruel... powerful trip for someone to have on someone else, and then lose it. How do you think he would be, not having that? And I welcomed his

equal, an equal is the balance of the relationship that is equal, he was total, and it was totally like this; I mean, I balanced it where I was that nurturing, loving great kind of a woman, but he had the total control, and the total authority, I mean to the point of walking in and flipping the channel... and he's not a bad guy. But subconsciously that's what he did, he took on roles. He used to say, you know, it wasn't, easy for him to do all the things, when we were first married, and my husband had three jobs and took care of me, and took care of my sons, you know and that has to be a hell of a task... and knowing that there's no support [from the participant] financially... culturally, or whatever... I was very active in everything that I did, and he and I worked together as a team [him in control and her balancing this with her controlling this by being allowed to be controlled], and now we're not a team... I have, I need, I gone to a very selfish stage [4-5 years ago], to very, it was a period that I talk about, like you know your head gets bigger than your shoulders... I am superwoman and I can do anything and I'm always right. [Presently] I'm really at my best of who I am, and

... but... with my relationships and the people around me, you know, I'm a totally different woman [after having learned to read], totally! I was a... total... people pleaser... [Now] I love being by myself. [Before learning to read] I thought the whole world was having, the whole world was living, and I wasn't... [because] I wasn't in control and... I envisioned everybody was greater, I envisioned that everybody was doing everything, I was envisioning all these other things. Well [when I learned to read] I found they're [those things everyone was doing were] really not there, but in my mind, I believed... I [always helped everyone else] ... before to be, to be loved and to be liked and all that stuff of my insecurities and now I do everything because I really want to do it.

She continued on to describe the changes in her due to her gains in reading ability and how her husband felt threatened by these changes and attempted to push the marital system back to the way it was.

The growth period in me, I wish that you could see me before and see what I am now. [When I could not read we lived] on this island in this little suburbs alone and then I went for help, and he [my

husband] had to deal with someone else in our lives, and that was my tutor, and then it wasn't totally focused on him anymore... The... shirts weren't all setting in the closet anymore and dinner wasn't on the table 7 nights a week, and he wasn't flipping the channels on me anymore. And that was a rough period he went through... When we first married, for the first 17 years of our marriage... everything was going ok. I led my life being whoever anybody wanted me to be and enjoyed it... but there was a total emptiness and hole inside me and when I went to learn to read, I was just captivated by learning how to read and I just like I [got] sucked into it, but I knew I had to balance myself because I was fearful of losing my security blanket [my husband], and constantly took my husband for granted because he was always there. [I] started questioning if I loved him or not, and started re-valuing that I was somebody finally, and he got very jealous and fearful of my tutor he was very jealous... and [he responded with] 'why don't you be the person that you used to be, why can't you be the old [person I married]. I had [to] balance... not feeling guilty taking my tutoring time, and not being that

overworked wife, and that overworked mom, and that superpleaser... [to] where... [I could say] wait a minute I have rights and I'm entitled to this...

For the couples in the ambivalent category, somewhere throughout the whole "ambivalent" process the link between them broke and the communication deteriorated. The combination of the second order change of the self of the new reader and the marital systems attempts to use first order changes to incorporate the new self were too stressful. One participant felt that had they been more prepared for the changes or that if more supports were available to address the marital changes when the participant was learning to read things might have been different. The marriages in this category were still in a state of ambivalence when the study was conducted and the participants did not feel confident in the marital outcomes.

I think it very important to point out that even through all of the drastic and stressful changes experienced all three participants strongly stated that they would learn to read all over again. It was worth it regardless of the outcome. One participant summed it up this way:

Regardless of whatever the changes in your family may be, it's well worth to go and to learn how to read. If I had to do it all again I definitely would do it, I just wish that I could be more

wiser and not have set myself up to the like, the unbelievable. I mean it's just overwhelming from being a non-reader to being a reader and knowing the power and the, the control you can have of yourself and what you can do and where you can go.

As can be seen from the examples given in this section the marital couples experienced similar first order changes as those in the improved category. What was different was the absence of discussions of improvements made in the marriages.

Deteriorated marriages

Organization prior to reading. The marriages of the deteriorated couples were highly organized around the participants' illiteracy. Participants strongly felt that their spouses purposely made them feel that they were not capable of many things because of their illiteracy. Both participants had received this message from other sources, either their families of origin and/or the school systems. The role was one they were comfortable with and eased into it in their marriages with little transition. The spouses used the illiteracy as a controlling mechanism. One participant summed it up:

I think she took advantage of that (illiteracy).

For one participant the non-support manifested itself as opposition.

... but she was the opposite, always the opposite of what I was, it was like real conflict about doing things and it seemed like ... she would throw fits, like we would get into it if I didn't go her way and it was getting to a point where I just couldn't do anything without her being mad... She wouldn't believe what I was saying and [got all her advice from her mother.

For these participants their marriages were not partnerships.

First order changes that did occur and the deteriorated impact on the marriages. The deteriorated marriages experienced similar changes and stages that the improved and ambivalent marriages experienced, with one exception, power was more clearly central to the issue of change. Just as the ambivalent couples had, the deteriorated couples attempted to adapt to the participants' new selves using old patterns of interactions (first order changes). The couples never progressed in developing new patterns (second order changes) of interaction. One difference between the deteriorated couples and the couples in the other categories was that the spouses in the deteriorated category felt threatened prior to the participant learning to read and subsequently more threatened when the participant learned to read. Both spouses in the deteriorated category were

described as highly controlling and actively used the participants' illiteracy as a controlling device. Both spouses were consistently non-supportive.

The participants in this category were aware of the egocentric aspect of their newly gained independence and tried to moderate it so as not to threaten their spouses too much. The spouses were seen as saying "I don't want to make any kind of changes." Based on the perceptions of the participants, the couples in this group did not seem "joint" and were very much "two individuals living together." It was clear that the participants were the only members of the couples that were trying or had actively tried to make the necessary changes in the marriage to keep it from deteriorating.

Prior to learning to read, the participants in the deteriorated marriages senses of self and life were pervasively defined by their illiteracy. Consequently, the changes they experienced due to learning to read were of a greater magnitude and the subsequent adjustments in the marriage were of a greater magnitude than those in the improved category. One participant in particular, lived life through his spouse to an extreme degree. When he no longer needed to live through her, the couple was unable to establish new patterns of interaction and the marriage was unable to adjust to the new self of the reader. The spouse

attempted to keep the marital interactional patterns the way they had been previous to the participant learning to read by doing "more of the same, only more so". The marital interactional pattern was changed with a first order change in that the spouse just tried a change in intensity - the same behaviors only more of them. This included going out more and becoming more irresponsible so that the participant was left at home to do the same domestic activities that he had always done but no longer wanted to do.

[She] has taken all the power from me... Now I am sitting at home and not doing the things that I want to do... It's rough because I want to go do so much and she won't allow that to happen and... it's frustrating, like I'm beating my head against a wall and she doesn't support me anyway...

We have a, she has a problem that you know as long as she's in charge that I am supposed to do the dishes the laundry the housecleaning, the cooking, taking care of the kids, and she does nothing, as long as she's got me controlled in the house, not allowing me to go out, then she's got control of me.

Another example of doing more of the same which was not helpful to the marriage follows:

[After learning to read] ...I think it [conflict]

increased ... I don't' think the changes were for better, you know she would doubt me more now, [she would say] 'you don't know what the hell you're talking about'... Probably because... maybe she thought I wasn't getting educated ... I don't know, it was just something for conflict. It was another thing she used on me... These type of things were always ... in cycles.... as long as she was getting her way of doing things, but when I tried to talk to her about doing things [i.e. health insurance] ... I was trying to do things with her [after obtaining a tutor and gaining new skills] she got totally offensive.

The spouses attempted to move the participants back to way they when they could not read. One participant described the process as his spouse's way of maintaining control of him.

The movement to literacy for the participants' "selves" were positive but it was detrimental for their marriages.

My wife, ... we are having a lot of problems now, and it's just way out of hand, she can't accept that I can do things now that she won't let me go and do them... I've led a sheltered life and I've put my self into a prison within and I've allowed her to do everything because I was actually afraid

to go out and go to the grocery store or go to the department store or pay a bill because of my illiteracy that I didn't want anybody to put me in a position to have to write or read something or fill out a paper. So I have allowed my wife, I guess I allowed my parents to do that for me too... Now since I want to do all this stuff [and] she's having a hard time accepting that... She has a hard time giving me money, she won't allow me to have money [even pocket change]. Now I want to have my paycheck, I want to cash my paycheck, I want to know what bills are to be paid. Before I didn't know... she paid everything, she did it all and now I want [to know], because she's not doing a very good job, I'm tired of bill collectors... I want to straighten things out and she won't allow me to do this. So we are arguing constantly over these things, trying to prove myself.

The participants felt that they were the only ones in the relationship that were attempting to adjust the marriage. This frustration led to exhaustion which developed into a sense of hopelessness.

1.) "She's got to learn to change herself, I've tried for so many years to change her and it doesn't work..."

2.) "Like one time, I discussed with my tutor... about my wife's reading ability [which was not great but much better than the participants], she [tutor] said just tell her to come on with you and I can do both of you... She [wife] went right off the, she started swearing and all that and she said 'I ain't no dummy' I can do this and I can do that. [and the participant reported that he said] 'I didn't say that', I says 'how about improving yourself'... But... it was totally like against what I was doing, it wasn't a two way street as far as I was concerned,... There was no ... cooperation. (Interviewer: How much do you think your learning to read contributed to those issues?) It probably contributed a lot...

The participants responded to their spouses refusals to participate in accommodating their new "selves" into the marriage by mirroring the shutdown they felt from their spouses.

I guess basically I shut her down, I shut her right down and out ...

For these participants the support groups were the lifeline which kept them involved in the literacy process.

[the frustration came] more or less after [significant progress was made in learning to

read], in the last two year's it's really gotten rough... and then when I got involved in the student group ... these guys have given me so much will power to go on and it really helped, I've really done a lot to improve myself.

For the participants in the deteriorated category their attempts to alter the patterns of marital interactions to make room for their new "selves" was much like stretching a rubberband. The more the participants learned to read and tried to alter the marital interactions, the more resistance they got. Either the relationship needed to move back toward its original organization around the illiteracy or it would break. For one participant the relationship had already broken, for the other it was stretched very tightly.

Changes in Relationships with Children

Ten of the participants in all three marital categories described enormous changes in their relationships with their spouses; some couples marriages improved, some remained ambivalent and some marriages deteriorated. In contrast all of the participants described that their relationships with their children improved as a result of learning to read.

The participants did not discuss the relationship changes with their children as much as they did with their spouses. Usually they addressed the issue only after I asked how learning to read impacted their relationships with

their children. They all responded that the changes had been for the positive in two ways: (a) the participants became strong advocates for their children's education and (b) they became closer to their children. Whether these changes were of a first or second order nature could not clearly and distinctly be determined from the limited data provided by the participants.

Participants Became Strong Advocates for Their Children's Education

All participants who had school age children became actively involved in their children's education in numerous ways. All participants who no longer had school age children were either very involved in their grandchildren's education or planned to become involved when their grandchildren were old enough to be in school. Participants described the need to become aware and actively involved in their children's education because they knew either how easy it was to "con" one's way through school or because they knew how easy it was for children's needs to be ignored by the educational system. Participants did not want their children to miss what they had missed in school. A common phrase that I heard was:

"I am fighting for them."

One way that participants advocated for their children's education was to have them tested if they

suspected a problem. If problems were discovered the participants asserted themselves and "demanded" that the school address the problems. One participant described his involvement in getting his son help.

... for my son we, through my going back to reading and all that, we got him tested early and he was diagnosed... with a few motor skills behind what he's supposed to be. That right there ... through my own getting back to reading and that we caught his and right now he's still going to be in special ed but his reading ability is a heck of [a lot better] ... than mine.

Reading Contributed to Closeness with Children

Ten participants described an increased bonding with their children when they learned to read. Those whose children were still in grade school described an increase in bonding of the greatest magnitude. The participant with the overall highest levels of support and whose marital relationship did not drastically change reported that his learning to read did not really create major improvements in the already good relationships he had with his children. Those participants whose grandchildren were grade school age and younger, found that their relationships became closer. One reason for the increased closeness with the children was the ability to be able to read to the children and to help

with homework.

But now I can sit down with my sons and help them do their homework or they might say, 'hey mom can you help do this' and I can help them or I can read something they can't read. I think that's a big change there, just knowing that I can sit down and help those kids, help do their homework and that's why I'm keeping up and going to the LVA program because I want to learn as much as I can and become a great reader because when they're in 10th & 11th grade I still want to be able to help them. And if I have to say the main thing, I'm doing it for myself, but I'm doing it for my three kids, so if they need mom to help them I'll be able to help them.

Another reason given for the increased closeness was the participants' increased self esteem which was then transferred to the children.

I really try to build my children up and would not have done it before [learning to read].
[Interviewer: Why not?]... I really don't think so [that I could have built up their self esteem], why wouldn't I have done it, cause I had no self worth, so how can you give it to someone else if you don't have it [long pause]. They feed off

you, your children feed off you, they know how you feel, they know what's going on, they're not stupid they're very smart. It doesn't matter how old they are. Let her make decisions and she does [my daughter], decisions are very important I never made decisions when I was a kid.

A final reason that participants gave was that the children gained a new awareness of the participants and a new level of respect. One participant said that this new respect from the child resulted in the child taking what the participant had to say more seriously.

None of the participants felt that their relationships with any of their children deteriorated. This was not true for family of origin relationships. As with the marital relationships the family of origin relationships were altered in a variety of ways.

Changes in Relationships with Families of Origin

Participants reported a variety of family of origin relationship changes; some were for the better, some for the worse and some that did not change. Many participants reported that they experienced all three varieties with their family of origin relationships but with different members. As with the changes with the children, not enough data was received to determine clearly whether family of

origin changes were of a first or second order nature.

Improved relationships revolved around the family members feelings of pride for the participants' accomplishments and/or a newly developed awareness of and respect for the participants. One participant described the changes he experienced with both parents and siblings.

They... talk about, they make a real conversation with me ... everyday things... the elections, [before I learned to read] they wouldn't talk to me [about], who would you think would be the best president, who would you like to vote for, what was the issues, did you think about what this man said [and now they do], [now they talk to me about] normal issues that I'm not used to talking to them about. I'm learning a lot about my family, [my mom's] telling me about a whole lot of things that I didn't think happened and it did, about who I am... It feels good because they are opening my eyes, what they see is going between me and my wife, the stuff that I've shut out, that they're opening, reopening my eyes.

Another participant described that the positive change included a gained assertiveness on the participant's part and an accompanying parental respect.

Well my parents never looked up to me I always

felt they looked down to me....my father thought I was going to fail... I had to strive to get some kind of... I don't argue with him [as much] ... it came to a point where I'm going to argue back and I would always win after that...

The relationships that deteriorated were fewer and were connected to the family members feeling threatened by the participants' new ability to read. Many family relationships stayed the same, those that were poor remained poor and those that were previously good remained good.

Summary

The results of this study clearly indicate that the relationships within the family did change. Those relationships which experienced the most changes were the marital relationships, followed by the relationships with the participants' children and then the relationship with the participants' families of origin. The next chapter is devoted to drawing conclusions based on the result and discussion of this study.

CHAPTER
CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I link the results back to the literature and theoretical underpinnings of the study, address the relevance of the findings for family therapists, make recommendations for the fields of literacy and family therapy and for future research, address the limitations of the research and provide an overall summary of the study.

**Linking the Findings
to the Literature**

This section links the results to the literature in the following sequence: (a) to the literacy literature (b) the theoretical framework of the study, which are systems and cybernetic theory and (c) the family therapy literature.

Literacy Literature

Hunter and Harmon (1979) have suggested that illiteracy is more than a mere deficiency in skill but has farther reaching social implications. The findings of this study strongly concur with this conclusion. Being illiterate impacted the participants in this study in many more areas than just those which required reading. I found that the Participants "sense of self" and how their "lives were defined" occurred either *compartmentally* or *pervasively* by their illiteracy. This impacted their relationships both within the family and with the broader social world.

Participants often lived one step removed from life, they relied on someone else to understand and respond to the world for them. Consequently they were often not prepared as adults to do the things that we ordinarily assume are adult roles such as voting and being involved in their children's education. The impact of non-participation in these kinds of activities has even farther reaching social implications for society in general. Miller (1988) has suggested that all too often we have treated the symptoms of illiteracy such as poverty instead of treating illiteracy as the broader social issue that it is.

The results of the study also support the notion that people who are illiterate will go to great lengths to hide their illiteracy (Clabby & Belz, 1985; Seda, Spann, Pinkston & Burrows, 1991). All participants kept their illiteracy a secret to some degree. The participants feared the humiliation attached to being illiterate and/or the potential loss of loved ones. All of the participants in this study who came out of the closet about their illiteracy did so only after they had learned to read.

The findings of the study also strongly support the notion that learning to read is not merely an acquired skill which occurs in isolation (Barton, 1990; Coles, 1981; Coles 1984). The participants in this study found that learning to read opened up the world to them and their orientation

toward the world and others changed also. Learning to read impacted the participants' social networks as was found in a study conducted by Fingeret (1983). My study moved beyond the social networks and found similar changes within the familial context. As the participants learned to read dependency issues changed, their roles changed and communication patterns with family members changed. These are clear indicators that learning to read is not an isolated skill.

Numerous professionals have pointed to the connection between illiteracy and low self esteem (Clabby & Belz, 1985; Mezirow, Darkenwald & Knox, 1975). Mace (1979) made a connection between the illiteracy of individuals, poor self-image and feelings of incompetence. All of the participants in my study described low self-esteem as a result of illiteracy, although the degree of the negative self-esteem varied. Those participants whose identities were pervasively defined by their illiteracy also viewed themselves as incompetent and optionless. For several participants these feelings of inability led to serious thoughts of suicide which disappeared when gained feelings of competence and capable from learning to read.

The proclamation written by new readers at the Second National Adult Literacy Congress on September 10, 1989 in Washington DC identified, based on personal experience, many

of the previous findings. They suggested that the following problems existed and should be addressed by literacy programs: (a) illiteracy continues from generation to generation; (b) non-readers have poor self-images which contributes to personal and social problems such as drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and high drop-out rates; (c) the shame of illiteracy divides families; (d) learning to read changes dependency relationships in families and (e) new reader involvement in the literacy movement takes time away from the family. The results of my study indicate that non-readers do have poor self images, that learning to read can change dependency issues in those families for which they were an issue when the participants were illiterate and that new reader involvement in the literacy movement does take time away from the family. The findings however did not show that illiteracy was passed down from generation to generation nor that the shame of the illiteracy divided families.

A finding my study revealed, which the literature did not address, was that the received support levels of the participants was connected to how learning to read impacted the participants' marriages. In addition it was found that the level to which the participants' senses of selves and lives were defined by their illiteracy impacted the magnitude of the changes they experienced when they learned

to read.

Overall the findings of this study seem to verify the body of literature that suggests that literacy is not an isolated skill. Learning to read was not an isolated skill for the participants in my study but instead was a part of who they were and subsequently their movement toward literacy altered who they were. In addition, learning to read impacted each participant's familial relationships.

Theoretical Framework: Systems and Cybernetic Theory

Learning to read was found to create second order individual change for all of the participants. This occurred because, as non-readers their illiteracy was central to who they were and how they lived their lives. Consequently when they learned to read their sense of self changed. As Dell (1982, p. 32) suggested "following a discipline or practice changes the entire self rather than simply adding a skill to the pre-existing self." By learning to read, the participants altered the way they approached the world. The participants no longer needed to interact with a literate world from a non-literate perspective. Nichols and Everett (1986) have called such a fundamental shift in the nature of the self a second order change.

General systems theory suggests that what affects one member of the family affects all other members of the family

(Gurman & Kniskern, 1981). Relationships are recursive and dynamic. By virtue of learning to read and the accompanying second order change in their selves, the participants' interactional patterns were altered. The marital systems of the participants all experienced change, some couples experienced first order changes and other couples experienced second order changes. This indicates that the participants' learning to read did not occur in isolation but instead, in a recursive marital system. What order the marital changes were, was connected to and interrelated with numerous other findings of the study. To single out one change as the "cause" of the other changes would be to misconstrue the results. The themes of the study cannot be viewed or linked independently to each other and still maintain a full understanding of the results. Whether a participant's marriage improved, became ambivalent or deteriorated was interrelated with the levels of support the participants received, with how much their senses of selves and lives were defined by their illiteracy and the magnitude of changes experienced.

Family Therapy Literature

Strategic

The strategic point of view focuses on the change of systems and identifies problems as ones of process and transition.

Problems begin from some ordinary life difficulty, of which there is never any shortage. This difficulty may stem from an unusual or fortuitous event. More often, though, the beginning is likely to be a common difficulty associated with one of the transitions normally associated with life... (Weakland, Fisch, & Segal, p. 13)

Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch (1974) describe first order change as using the same patterns only in different ways. It was found that all of the marital systems in this study initially attempted to adjust to the "new selves" of the participants by utilizing the interactional patterns which they had used prior to the participant learning to read. The couples also tried rearranging the patterns by implementing role reversals or "doing more of the same." The first order changes created emotional distancing and increased stress in the marriages. The first order change patterns were not helpful. Fisch and associates (1982) describe this as, "something in people's attempted 'solutions,' the very ways they are trying to alter a problem, contributes most to the problem's maintenance or exacerbation"(p. 13).

The couples attempts to incorporate the second order change of the self into the marital relationship by using first order marital interactional changes, created problems in the

relationships. These "solutions" involved positive feedback which exacerbated the distancing which had begun for the couples.

The couples in the improved category were able to move beyond the first order change attempts to fundamental structural shifts, in how they interacted as a couple. They changed how they changed. Piercy and Sprenkle (1986) call this systemic change second order change. The couples moved from dependence/independence to mutuality. They did not just switch roles or change something about a pattern but interacted on a whole new level. The couples' communication patterns also experienced second order changes. How they talked about things was altered and this led to increased levels of intimacy. Learning to read perturbed the marital system as a whole into second order change.

First order and second order changes are neither inherently good nor bad. The findings suggest that it is the other themes such as levels of support and how much the participants' "sense of self" and "life were defined" by their illiteracy that was connected to whether the first and or second order changes were helpful or not. This is seen by looking at how the first order marital changes of one participant in the improved marital category were not disruptive to the marriage and were viewed by the participant as helpful. For all of the other couples, the

first order changes created distance. None of the other participants had nearly as high levels of support as this participant had and their selves and lives had been much more defined by their illiteracy.

Understanding the changes which accompany learning to read from a cybernetic theoretical orientation adds new dimensions to the understanding of the variety of changes and outcomes experienced by new readers. It is a complicated process which cannot be understood by viewing learning to read as a skill which occurs in isolation. Unless the areas of support and definition of self and life are examined, the process of any one new reader cannot be understood nor can the relationship changes be understood and predicted. These findings are highly relevant for family therapists in their clinical work.

Milanian

The Milanian perspective is one of dynamic evolutionary process. Problems occur when the families' old epistemology does not fit its current behavioral patterns (Tomm, 1984). Solutions to problems occur when the system can create or provide an environment in which it can alter its epistemology. This perspective speaks to the couples whose marriages were improved. The participants had all received high levels of support from their spouses. The environment had been provided within which change could occur. Piercy

and Sprenkle (1986) describe the process this way: "helps the family develop an alternative epistemology by creating an environment in which new information is introduced into the family system, information which invites spontaneous change" (p. 29).

In this case, the theme of "support" can be seen as the environment which invited spontaneous change to occur. Perhaps we as family therapists, when working with couples in which one spouse is learning to read, should help the couple establish a positive supporting environment.

Structural

The structural viewpoint is based on the belief that the system or any of its parts can only be understood in the relational interactions between them.

The psychological structure of the individual is viewed as interdependent with the person's social structure, and that social structure is treated as the medium through which the individual functions and expresses him/herself. The social system which is most often assumed to form the basis of the individual's socialization is the family... (Aponte & VanDeusen, 1981, p. 311).

When the self of the participants changed, it was the through their interactions with their family members, specifically their spouses, where the changes were

manifested. The boundaries of roles changed within the families of the participants. As participants learned to read, they no longer wanted to keep the roles they had had when they were illiterate. For the ambivalent and deteriorated couples, the change in roles also was related to power differentials. How the couple's relationship was organized around the participants illiteracy was highly connected to how learning to read impacted the marriage. Those couples in which the organization around the participants' illiteracy was high, included control and power differentials. These participants when illiterate, experienced the phenomena of which Aponte and VanDeusen (1981) call the *inhibition of developmental potential*.

... inhibition of developmental potential in which the individual, because of family organization, cannot act in ways appropriate to his/her age within the family (p.315).

When the participant learned to read, the marital system was inflexible and most of the spousal attempts were at bringing the system back to a state of homeostasis, which included the boundaries which existed when the participants were illiterate.

Relevance to Family Therapists

The findings of this study are highly relevant to family therapists and to the field as a whole. Three

individuals in this study who were experiencing major family changes due to learning to read were involved in individual therapy partially due to their relationship problems. Only one participant had told the therapist up front that he or she had a reading problem (and that was done only after they had made significant progress); the other participants only revealed their illiteracy when the therapists "blundered" into the discovery. For one participant, this "blunder" involved the participant not following through on assigned "homework" which required reading (i.e. reading a book or making phone calls to find out about resources or following through on dreams of going to school). The therapist implied that the participant was being resistant to treatment because of not following through. This should be enough of a reason for all therapists to conduct an initial assessment of reading ability. However, the relevance of the study extends beyond knowing what the reading ability of the "client" is, so that the therapist knows what kind of homework to assign. It extends into the very basic need for family therapists to be the "experts" at identifying and understanding the family interactions that are connected to illiteracy and also the changing family dynamics that accompany learning to read.

With 10 - 35 % of all American adults being functionally illiterate (Chisman, 1989), it is likely that

many clients with reading problems (or their family members) will see therapists. However, the likelihood of therapists recognizing this is very limited because non-readers cover the deficit so well. One new reader I spoke with within the last year said that during her divorce she had signed custody over to her ex-husband because she did not know what she was reading and was too embarrassed to ask and was in a position to be taken advantage of.

Many clients will not understand consent forms, release of information forms and other forms that they are signing. Unless the forms are thoroughly read to them they will not understand their rights. This inability to read and/or comprehend the forms has far reaching ethical implications for therapist to be aware of who cannot read. To miss the reading problem of a client is to potentially miss the very nature of who that individual is and the organization of his or her relationships.

If a therapist was working with a non-reader and did not know of the illiteracy I would highly question whether that individual was getting the best treatment they could be getting much less good treatment. Having done this research and being a therapist it has made me assess my fourteen years of clinical experience and mentally review many of the clients I had worked with. Knowing what I know now, I am sure that there were numerous individuals whom I missed and

some of my confusing and "resistant" cases seem much clearer. It was most likely me that was limited and not my clients.

It is also clear that learning to read can have major impacts on relational dynamics. For family therapists this is especially crucial because we specialize in relational dynamics. To neither identify nor understand that a marriage may be highly organized around one persons illiteracy and then attempt to make changes in the relational interactions without addressing the illiteracy should set the couple up for more failure.

It is clear to me that when illiterate individuals will not openly share their illiteracy with the therapist, it is the therapist's job to conduct thorough assessments. It is also clear that people do not "look" or "talk" like they are illiterate and occupation is also not a good indicator. The assessment needs to be one that is given for all clients. Care needs to be taken though, not to scare the non-reader away. My suggestion would be to include a question about whether the person can read or not, and, if he/she can, at what level, in the initial assessment questions. I feel very strongly that the burden of the responsibility for identifying and working with the issues surrounding illiteracy and literacy lie with the therapist.

Recommendations

Family Therapists

My recommendations for family therapists revolve primarily around training and awareness. A large enough percentage of our population in the United States is functionally illiterate that we as clinicians will likely work with individuals who are illiterate. We need to be aware of the issue. We should be trained to recognize and assess the dynamics much in the same way we are trained to assess for neglect, abuse or alcoholism. Only then can we provide the most effective treatment when the issue arises in our practices.

Family therapy programs should include illiteracy and the movement from illiteracy to literacy issues in their training and case examples. Clinicians need to take on the responsibility of becoming aware of the issue and developing referral sources if they do not feel skilled or knowledgeable enough to offer or continue treatment. Clinicians also need to make themselves aware of the literacy resources available in the community so that they can promptly provide a referral for tutoring if necessary. Some type of reading level evaluation needs to occur at the time clients sign consent forms or the order of when consent forms are signed should be changed. Finally clinicians need to include a question or two about literacy levels in their

initial assessments as a rule. We are not hesitant to ask about other very intimate issues. We should not avoid asking about literacy levels. It should become a routine part of our initial assessments and evaluations because to miss this is to miss a vital aspect of who a person is and/or is becoming.

Literacy Providers

Based on the results of this study I strongly recommend that literacy providers address the issues of changing family dynamics when an individual begins to learn to read. My recommendations include addressing the issues in several ways. First of all I recommend that during the initial evaluation of reading level that an evaluation of support sources be conducted along with a simple evaluation of how much of the individual's sense of identity and life is defined by their illiteracy. This can be a very informal process which can be completed through verbal questioning. The evaluators may want to ask "Who knows that you cannot read?," "What do your family members think about you learning to read?" or "What would they think if they do not know?," "What do you think of yourself as a non-reader?" and "How do you keep your inability to read hidden from others?"

This information is vital because of the importance of support and the connection to the outcomes of relationships from the changes that learning to read brings. If it is

found that the participant has very few supports then it would be beneficial to hook that person up with a tutor who may be able to provide more time and encouragement than someone who has overall high levels of support. Support levels and the sense of self and life definition are so important that I feel they should be factored in to the tutor/student matches just as proximity and gender.

Secondly, I would suggest that literacy programs provide training for tutors that does not view teaching someone to read as an isolated skill but emphasizes the change in "self" perspective. This overall shift in how tutoring training is conducted will help prepare the tutors to be responsive to the changes in the new reader.

The third suggestion that I make is to provide information for new readers or be aware of the available resources. This could include preparing and making available literature which addresses the changes experienced by new readers and ways that they have successfully adapted to the changes. It could include having a counselor on staff or knowing how to make referrals for counseling with regard to the changes experienced by new readers, their families and marriages. This could be accomplished by developing a relationship with one or more therapists in the community. It may be necessary to maintain some funds to help pay for the counseling. It is essential for the

therapist to be well versed in the issues of illiteracy and the changes that accompany learning to read. Since it is my sense that family therapists as a community know little about illiteracy and the change to literacy this may require that literacy organizations assist or "train" the therapists in the issues. As literacy providers we are not teaching a skill but changing a self. Tutors are not trained clinicians and to expect them to respond to their students concerns about changing family dynamics is asking too much of them, but we are also misleading tutors when we tell them that all we are doing is teaching an individual to learn to read.

It is important that literacy organizations embrace the concepts of the "changes in the selves" of new students and the accompanying "changes in their family interactional patterns". It is also important to the changes in "selves" as primary to learning to read and not as side effects. I say all of this while realizing at the same time that funding is tight. But I feel that it is important that future proposals for funding incorporate the viewpoint that attaining literacy is changing a self and resources should be available to address this change. The new student needs more than books and tutoring to adjust to the changes which accompany the new self that emerges.

Future Research

This study was designed as an exploratory study to discover the existence, occurrence, intensity and variety of issues which impact families when an adult within the family system moves from being illiterate to literate. The study brought forth a wide variety of changes experienced by the new readers and their families. The findings unearthed wealth of potential research areas. I will list some of the ones that the findings suggested to me.

- 1.) Conduct a study that looks not only at the new readers' perspectives but includes the family members perspectives. Are the changes viewed similarly or differently, would the impact of learning to read be described by the family members in the same way that the new readers do? Would the issues be different for the family members?
- 2.) Design a study that explores in more depth the changes specifically with the children of the new readers. Another study would be to explore more closely the changes with families of origin.
- 3.) Engage in studies to explore in more depth areas of change such as powerless to powerful or isolation to socialization etc. from a specific family therapy theoretical model. More thorough understanding of how the these changes impact relationships would greatly add to the understanding of how learning to read impacts family

relationships.

4.) A similar study to this one only with students who have dropped out of the tutoring process after making reading level gains. Does learning to read and the accompanying changes in families contribute to the high drop out rate of students in tutoring programs?

5.) Follow up on research after implementing some of the recommendations of this study. For example, if a literacy program offered counseling to all students, would it help prevent some of the negative impacts on marital relationships of learning to read?

6.) Research that surveys family therapists as to their awareness of and knowledge level about illiteracy and the impact on families from learning to read.

7.) Design a longitudinal study that follows students from their initial involvement with a literacy program to their completion and examine the changes they experience along a continuum.

8.) A final area of research would be to examine whether actual reading "ability" and the rate of advances in literacy are connected to the changes in the family relationships.

Limitations of The Study

Several limitations of this study are addressed in this section. In discussing the limitations it is important to

realize that I found myself grappling with the push and pull of quantitative versus qualitative methodological ideologies when critiquing my own work. McCracken (1988) warns the qualitative researcher about how easy it is to conduct a qualitative study and then to critique it utilizing quantitative standards. After a discussion with my major professor, I found that I had partially fallen into the "trap" of critiquing my own qualitative research from a quantitative perspective. What I found most interesting was that while conducting the research and analyzing the data I was aware of the tug to look at the data quantitatively but felt that I did not "succumb" to the tug, but that when it came to critiquing my own work (looking at its limitations) I utilized some quantitative standards. I had fallen into the trap of thinking that the "best" standards to critique my sample came from the representative sampling methodology. After the discussion and reviewing my process, I feel the following were limitations of this study.

One limitation was that changing family dynamics were looked at from a static punctuation in time. It is recommended that future research involve a longitudinal study which follows a group of new students through the process of gaining literacy. This type of study would add greatly to the understanding of the changing family dynamics. Another limitation was that the study looked only

at the new-readers' perceptions of the systemic changes that occurred within their families.

Another area of limitations was the setting of the interviews. All of the interviews were conducted within a course of three days and several interviews were conducted very late at night when the researcher and the participants were very tired. This limited to some degree the level of information received from a few participants. I was more concerned about this before I listened to the tapes. After listening to the tapes I could tell in which ones I was tired, but found that the topics were still covered in sufficient depth for the study. The location of the interviews also was not optimal. Attempts to secure a private room were made but unsuccessful and so the interviews were held in either the participants' rooms or in my room. Several interviews were interrupted by maid service, phone calls and roommates coming in not knowing that we were conducting an interview. On a few occasions these interruptions disrupted the flow of the interview. Having audiotaped the sessions, I was able to rewind the tape to listen to what the participant had been saying prior to the interruption so the participant could continue in the same direction. A final factor about the setting was that several interviews occurred between conference sessions which allowed us one and a half hours to complete the

interview. This included meeting each other at the location and getting settled in. This could have limited the amount of information I received although none of the participants did not express concern about the time factor. However I made certain that I knew whether they were under a time limit and made sure that we did not go over the allotted one and a half hours.

Overall, I was surprised by the amount and wealth of information received during this study. I had not expected to gather so much valuable information and I continue to be amazed at how helpful this study was to my understanding the changing family dynamics for new readers and the potential uses to which the results may be put.

It is of extreme importance to be aware of the limitations of any study. However, I feel that even the limitations provide useful information.

Summary

Need for the Study

The purpose of this research was to explore the changing family dynamics experienced by new readers and their families when a family member who was previously non-literate as an adult learned to read. Researchers and theorists in the field of family therapy have addressed families in a variety of contexts, but previous to this study the issues of illiteracy had not been addressed.

With 10% - 35% of the American population being functionally illiterate (Kozol, 1980), it is highly likely that family therapists will work with illiterate individuals or family members. It is also likely that many family therapists are unaware when they are working with a family in which a member may be illiterate or learning to read. If the therapist is unaware of the newly developed literacy of an individual in the family, the therapist would miss a crucial piece of the family dynamics and the changes that are occurring. Likewise, literacy providers are often unaware of the changing family dynamics of the individuals that they are teaching to read. This study contributes much needed information about the changing family dynamics (with a particular focus on marital relationships) to the family therapy and literacy fields. It also contributes to the new readers themselves so that they can better adjust to the changes that accompany learning to read.

Theoretical Framework

General systems theory and cybernetic theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. General systems theory and cybernetic theory suggest that what affects one individual in a family affects all the other members of the family and that the interactions are recursive in nature (Gurman & Kniskern, 1981; Piercy & Sprenkle, 1986). Therefore, learning to read was seen not as developing an

isolated skill but as impacting the interactions between all members of the family.

Cybernetic theory suggests that when changes occur, they are of two different types; first order change and second order change (Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974). First order change is when something within a system changes and second order change is when the system changes how it changes. Learning to read was theorized then, to not just change something within the system (first order), but to change the structure of the system. The new readers' gains in literacy were then assumed to perturb the system into change. The following two research questions were asked:

- (a) When adults who are illiterate learn to read do family interactions change (based on new readers' perceptions) and
- (b) If so, how are family interactions changed?

Methodology

This study was an exploratory qualitative study. I utilized in-depth interviews for data gathering. I chose this methodology because so little was known about the subject (Babbie, 1983) and because the purpose of the research was to discover what the issues were and the process of the interactions within the families (Smith, 1987). Keeney & Morris (1985) and Barton (1990) also suggest that qualitative methodologies are best suited for examining recursive processes.

The sample consisted of 11 participants. All participants were adults who had been evaluated as functionally illiterate as adults and who had learned to read as adults. A combination of purposive and snowballing techniques were used to obtain the sample. All participants in this study were conference attendees at the Literacy Volunteers of America Conference held in Denver, Colorado in November, 1992. Participants came from seven different states in the United States. Participation in the study was totally voluntary.

Interestingly, all persons who volunteered for the study were currently married with the exception of one participant who had recently divorced. Their ages ranged from 30 to 51. All participants were Caucasian. Six were male and five were female. Four of the participants had high school diplomas, four more had special education diplomas, and three had dropped out of school prior to graduation. All participants reported that upon initial evaluation before beginning tutoring were tested to be reading below the fourth grade level. Their initial reading levels ranged from zero reading ability to 3rd grade ability. Participants at the time of this study had gained anywhere from 1.5 to 8 grade levels in reading ability which occurred over 2-6 years of tutoring.

Results

The findings of this study indicate that learning to read does create changes in the family and that those changes are adapted to differently by families. Six marriages had improved, three marriages had become ambivalent and two marriages had deteriorated. The outcome categories of the marriages were based on the participants' descriptions of the marriages. I labeled marriages improved when participants themselves described their marriages as improved as they learned to read. I labeled marriages ambivalent when the participants talked about their marriages in terms of the learning to read having negatively affected their marital interactions. The participants were however, still married and the participants were struggling with whether or not their marriage would stay together or eventually end in divorce. The marriages which I labeled as deteriorated were clearly described by the participants as having deteriorated as a result of the participant learning to read. All participants reported that their relationships with their children had improved. Relationships with the members of the participants' families of origin varied from no changes to improved, ambivalent and deteriorated.

The bulk of the findings revealed the differences between the marital outcomes and the types of changes that participants experienced. Five themes emerged as connected

to the changes in family relationships, these were: (a) support; (b) illiteracy "defined the participants' senses of selves"; (c) illiteracy "defined the participants' lives"; (d) literacy "changes the participants' senses of selves" and (e) "changes did occur in the families". The changes in the family on which all of the participants primarily focused were the changes that learning to read created in their marriages. The changes in the families and specifically in the marriages were highly connected to the other four themes which emerged.

Support

The levels of support that participants received were highly connected to the other themes. Support acted as the central strand around which all the other themes were interwoven. Three levels of support were found for the support participants received from family members. These were high, ambivalent and non-support. High support was consistent and unwavering throughout the course of the relationships. Ambivalent support wavered between support and non-support throughout the course of the relationships and non-support was consistently non-supportive throughout the course of the relationships. Two types of tutor support were discovered and these were helpful and lifeline. Helpful support was seen by the participants as helping them in the learning to read process. Lifeline support was seen

as giving the participants the ability to learn to read. All participants in the study received at least one type of high level or lifeline support. All participants whose marriages improved received high levels of support from their spouses and viewed their tutors support as helpful. All of the participants whose marriages became ambivalent, received ambivalent levels of support from their spouses and the participants reported a mixture of whether the tutor support was helpful or lifeline. All of the participants whose marriages deteriorated received non-support from their spouses and viewed their tutors' support as life-line.

How much and what types of support participants received were strongly connected to the other themes. The changes that did occur in the families cannot be viewed only in terms of the support levels received. How all of the themes interfaced was crucial to understanding the processes of the changes in the participants' families.

Illiteracy "Defined the Participants' Senses of Selves"

All participants at least partially defined their "selves" according to their illiteracy, only the degree varied. Early in grade school the participants started feeling that were different than others. This was based on being treated differently by teachers either by receiving extra help or by being ridiculed. Either way the participants identified that they were consequently labeled

by their peers and often received both informal and formal negative labels. Numerous participants described that their needs were ignored by the school systems which further added to their low self esteems. Before long the participants internalized the labels such as dummy, retard and stupid. The more the labels were internalized, the more the participants downplayed any strengths they might have had. All of these aspects which were attached to their illiteracy contributed to their senses of who they were in negative ways.

Family of origin support levels seemed most closely connected to how much labels were internalized and how much they contributed to the participants' senses of selves. Those participants who received high levels of family of origin support while growing up, only compartmentally defined their "selves" by their illiteracy. They developed a negative self image surrounding things that required reading ability but the negative image did not permeate into all areas of their lives. For example they felt very poorly about themselves academically and might describe themselves as dumb, but this did not necessarily keep them from feeling that they were excellent business entrepreneurs. Interestingly, these participants were the ones who received high levels of support from their spouses.

Those participants who received ambivalent levels of

support and non-support from their families of origin were more likely to pervasively define their "selves" according to their illiteracy. They were unable to identify strengths and if they did, the strengths were downplayed or totally overshadowed by their illiteracy. All areas of their capabilities were defined through their illiteracy.

Interestingly these participants were the ones who also received ambivalent and non-support from their spouses.

Illiteracy "Defined the Participants' Lives"

How much the participants senses of selves were based on their illiteracy contributed to how much their lives were defined by their illiteracy. All participants described the following phenomena which varied only in degree.

Participants spent a great deal of time and energy trying to fit in and not be "different than" others. Many participants went to great lengths to keep their illiteracy a secret. This included choosing friends based on who would not notice their illiteracy or isolating themselves so that no one would notice. It also included "conning" people into thinking they could read (i.e. I left my glasses at home) or overachieving and excelling in other areas so that the focus of peoples' attention would be away from their illiteracy. Many participants chose what activities they would engage in, what topics they would discuss, and where they would go in order to avoid public humiliation. Participants often

felt dependent on others to not only do things for them but to some degree to live life for them. All of these combined led to the participants living life through others. Usually these "others" were their spouses. It was as though they were one step removed from life.

Those participants whose selves were compartmentally defined by their illiteracy also only compartmentally organized their lives around their illiteracy. They seemed to have an attitude of being a person first and one who cannot read second. They adapted in those areas of their lives that required reading and did not rearrange those areas that did not require reading. Aspects of these participants' marriages were organized around their illiteracy.

The participants whose senses of selves were more pervasively defined by their illiteracy organized their lives more pervasively around their illiteracy. They seemed to have an orientation toward life of being "I am illiterate and this influences everything I do." Their lives were pervasively defined by their illiteracy. Their marriages were also highly organized around their illiteracy.

Literacy "Changes the Participants' Senses of Selves"

All participants experienced second order changes in their "selves." These structural shifts in their selves impacted their orientation to the world and their

interactions with others. The "changes in selves" were ones of process and were dynamic in nature. The changes included to varying degrees, movement from: dependence to independence; isolation to socialization; negative to positive self esteem; optionless to having options and lack powerless to powerful. These changes impacted how the participants' interacted with their family members, specifically their spouses.

The more pervasive that the participants' selves had previously been based in their illiteracy, the more changes in relational interactions they experienced and the greater the magnitude of the changes. Second order changes in their selves did not mean that their marriages would experience accompanying second order changes.

Changes Did Occur in the Families

Marital changes. Whether the participants marriages improved, became ambivalent or deteriorated was interrelated with the levels of support the participants received, with how much their senses of selves and lives were defined by their illiteracy and the magnitude of the changes in their selves when they became literate. All of the participants experienced second order changes in their selves. By virtue of the second order changes in the self, the participants' interactional patterns were altered because their needs and orientation had altered. Whether the resulting marital

systemic changes were of a first or second order nature differed among the participants. Five of the six couples in the improved category experienced second order marital change, none of the couples in the ambivalent and deteriorated categories experienced second order marital change.

All of the couples were attempting to adapt to the new selves of the participants. All of the couples initially responded to the new selves with first order changes. They tried to use the same patterns of interaction they had used when the participants were illiterate only with new twists or a reshuffling of the patterns. For example, many couples attempted role reversals. If the new reader had been in a position where his/her spouse made most of the decisions, the participants now wanted to make all of the decisions. Couples also attempted to use the same patterns, only more of them. One participant who when illiterate had taken care of all of the domestic chores no longer wanted to do so when he became literate. His wife went out more so that he would have to do the chores to keep the pattern the way it had been. The first order changes created emotional distancing for the couples.

What separated the improved couples from the ambivalent and deteriorated couples was that they moved beyond utilizing first order change, to utilizing second order

changes. They created totally new interactional patterns. For example, instead of continuing to use role reversals the couples created an interaction based on mutuality. The couples found that they communicated differently and more intimately.

Neither the ambivalent nor the deteriorated couples were able to move beyond the first order interactional changes in trying to incorporate the new selves of the participants.

Children. All participants reported that their relationships with their children improved in two ways. The participants became strong advocates for their children's education and they felt closer to their children after having learned to read. There was not enough data collected in this research study to determine whether the changes were of the first or second order.

Family of origin. Participants described a mixture of changes with members of their families of origin. Some relationships improved, some deteriorated and some remained the same. Those relationships that improved seemed to be connected to pride in the new reader and a changed perception of who the new reader was. Those that deteriorated seemed to revolve around family members feeling threatened or intimidated by the participants gains in literacy. There was not enough data collected in this

research study to determine if the changes were of the first or second order.

In summary, learning to read impacts the family in numerous ways. The types of initial changes were often similar in the participants' marriages but the impact of the changes varied according to the spousal support levels. Changes also occurred in relationships with children and family of origin members and were also connected to the types and levels of support the participants received.

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APPENDIX A

National Literacy Congress Proclamation

A Proclamation which addressed literacy and the family was created by new readers at the Second National Adult Literacy Congress in Washington D.C. in 1989. The proclamation was written based on the new readers experiences when they were illiterate and when they began to learn to read. The proclamation defined how illiteracy and the movement toward literacy affected the family. Illiteracy was passed from generation to generation and contributed to many social problems such as substance abuse and teenage pregnancy. According to the new readers learning to read changed dependency interactions within the family and often involved lengthy amounts of time away from home.

The new readers made several recommendations for literacy programs. These included (Proclamations from adult new readers, 1989, p. 9):

1. Build awareness of the problems illiteracy causes in a family by increasing the use of media to develop videos, new readers' columns in newspapers, etc.
2. Literacy providers should train tutors to be aware of family issues which may occur and to be prepared to provide referrals.
3. Provide counseling for the new readers, spouses, and families.
4. Start programs to have new readers speak in schools, share their success stories and serve as role models.
5. Create literacy tutoring programs for children to help break the cycle of family illiteracy. Conduct early reading testing to identify children to be in those programs.

APPENDIX B

Letter to Literacy Volunteers of America President

Ms Jinx Crouch

Ellen C. Darden M.S.S.W.
Department of Social Work
and Human Development
P.O. Box 6958
Radford University
Radford, Virginia 24142
(703) 831-5266
(703) 382-6302

Ms. Jinx Crouch
President
Literacy Volunteers of America
5795 Widewaters Parkway
Syracuse, New York 13214

9-16-92

Dear Jinx,

Thank you for returning my call last week and for your interest and assistance in sharing my research with New Readers. Please find enclosed a letter which describes my research. It also describes why I have chosen to pursue the topic of new reading skills for adults and the impact on the family.

While I had initially intended to interview new readers in Southwestern Virginia, the timing of the implementation of my research interviews will coincide with the National LVA conference in Denver, and I would like to additionally interview adult new readers from other parts of the country. This would add tremendously to the study and provide all individuals involved with literacy programs including students, family members, and providers, with vital feedback and information from students. This would benefit everyone involved by aiding in the awareness of and adjustment to the many changes that occur.

Please share this letter and the attached letter with the new readers and others. Once again, thank you.

Sincerely,

Ellen Darden

Ellen C. Darden M.S.S.W.
Department of Social Work
and Human Development
P.O. Box 6958
Radford University
Radford, Virginia 24142

9-16-92

Dear New Readers, Providers, and Others,

I am currently conducting research for the completion of my doctoral degree in Family and Child Development at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. My study is titled ADULT NEW READERS: THE IMPACT ON FAMILY. I have chosen this topic based on three years of work with our local LVA program and on feedback from students, family members, tutors and providers. I have been working with our local support group which includes students, tutors and family members. One reoccurring theme is the changes in the students families as they become new readers and as new readers continue to increase their reading abilities. Through my LVA experience and my experience and training as a counselor I have found it extremely important to be aware of when I am working with a new reader and of the changes in the family. Many of my counseling colleagues are unaware of how learning to read impacts family dynamics and will also benefit from this study.

I have done extensive searches into the literature and to my knowledge, no formal research into this area has occurred. New readers, however, have addressed this issue formally. At the Second National Adult Literacy Congress in 1989, new readers wrote an official proclamation calling for the professionals and volunteers working with students to become aware of the changing dependency issues that students were experiencing in their families. The new readers also called for counseling to be provided to address these issues (I have attached a copy of this proclamation).

My research study will address these issues by conducting interviews with new readers. All participation will be voluntary and all information received will be held in the strictest confidence. No individual will be able to be identified when the results are written. I am hoping to conduct between 10 - 15 interviews for this study. The study is exploratory in nature and will help in understanding the issues and provide direction for future

studies on the changes in family dynamics.

I am asking for your input , permission and assistance in locating and interviewing new readers. I would like to be able to ask for new reader volunteers at the LVA National Conference in Denver and to be able to interview them in a private setting free from interruptions. I would not schedule any interviews during student sessions. I attended the conference last year in Florida and found talking to new readers very helpful and enlightening. Many that I heard and spoke with were open in sharing their experiences about the changes in their families. I hope to gain more understanding by talking to them in depth. I plan to make the findings available to anyone interested.

Thank you for your time and for your consideration of this research. Please do not hesitate to give me a call if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Ellen Darden

APPENDIX C

Brochure Used at

Literacy Volunteers of America Conference

**"I'm a new reader.
I'm happy to be able
to read. Another
thing that has hap-
pened is changes in
my family."**



Are you a new reader?

**Has it created changes in
your family?**

If so, you are not alone!

A 1989 Proclamation from Adult New Readers asked tutors and other helpers to find out about the changes faced by families of new readers.

Now you can help to make this happen, just by participating in an interview. The results will help students, tutors and other helpers understand the issues you face so more help can be provided to new readers and their families.

**I want to help new readers
and their families.**

May I ask for your help?

- I am conducting interviews at the National LVA Conference in Denver.
- There is a sign up sheet for interviews in the student lounge.
- I am very interested in your views and experiences.
- Your participation and the interview is **totally confidential and voluntary**.
- You do not have to answer any questions you don't want to.
- The interview will be taped orally (not by video-camera) to make sure I get your comments right.
- The interview will take about 1 to 1 1/2 hours.

My name is Ellen Darden.

I am a volunteer with Literacy Volunteers of America. I have a Master's in Social Work, and I am working on a Doctorate in family and child development.

In the new reader's support group that I attend, as I talk with friends in the group, I have found that they have experienced family changes. I am doing research in response to the request by the New Adult Readers to study family changes and out of personal concern for my friends in LVA.

I will share the results of my study with other people who want to help new readers. This will help them understand the needs so that more help can be given to families of new readers.

If you want to know more about me, you can talk with Ms. Jinx Crouch, the President of Literacy Volunteers of America, (315) 445-8000. You can also call my major professor for this study, Dr. Jim Keller, at Virginia Tech University, (703) 231-7201.

Thanks for your help!

APPENDIX D

Consent to Participate Form

Adult New Readers: The Impact on Family
conducted by
Ellen C. Darden
Doctoral candidate
Department of Family and Child Development
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Thank you for your participation in this study, it is greatly appreciated.

Description of the study

At the Second National Adult Literacy Congress held in Washington D.C. in October, 1989 adult new readers created a proclamation (statement) which called for literacy providers to be aware of the changes that occur among their families as they learned to read. The purpose of this research is to explore what the changing family dynamics experienced by new readers and their families are when a family member who was previously non-literate as an adult learned to read.

Your Rights

- * Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time.
- * You may choose to not answer any of the questions you are asked.
- * Your participation in the study is strictly confidential and all conversations will be treated in confidence.
- * "Excerpts from this interview may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be included in this report."
(McCracken, 1988).

Audio-taping

The interview will be audio-taped. During the write-up process your name will be substituted with the word participant.

Again thank you for your participation!

APPENDIX E

Letter of Thanks to Participants in the Study

Ellen C. Darden
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and Human Development
P.O. Box 6958
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(703) 831-5266
(703) 831-5118
(703) 382-6302

11-10-92

Dear ,

Thank you for participating in the research study, Adult New Readers: the Impact on Family. Your participation is greatly valued, very appreciated and will benefit other individuals who are learning to read.

Please find enclosed a copy of the consent to participate form. As we discussed during the interview if you have any writings, articles etc. that you think would be helpful for this study please send them to me at the above address. If you do not wish to send anything that is fine.

I plan to analyze the interviews over the spring and possibly into the summer. I am hoping to finish by May 1992, however, it may be later. When I am finished I will send the results if you requested this.

I enjoyed talking with you and again I want to say thank you very much!!!

Sincerely,
Ellen Darden

APPENDIX F

Biographical and Historical Data Sheet

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA INFORMATION

CASE # _____

Source of referral: _____

Type of participant: student _____

Date of initial contact: _____

Date of second contact: _____

Date of third contact: _____

Date and time of interview: _____

Place of interview: _____

Length of interview: _____

Date of followup call: _____

Length of followup call: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

Date of birth: _____ Gender: _____

Race: _____ Occupation: _____

Educational Level: _____

Wife/Husband's educational level _____

Wife/Husband's occupation _____

How long have you been able to read _____

Religion _____ Importance _____

Marital Status(current):

Married _____ Date _____

Divorced _____ Date _____

Separated _____ Date _____

Single _____ Date _____

Number of marriages _____

Number of divorces _____

Nuclear Family:

- 1.) _____ relationship _____
- 2.) _____ relationship _____
- 3.) _____ relationship _____
- 4.) _____ relationship _____
- 5.) _____ relationship _____
- 6.) _____ relationship _____

Family of Origin:

Participant's birth order: _____

Siblings:

- 1.) _____ Gender _____
- 2.) _____ Gender _____
- 3.) _____ Gender _____
- 4.) _____ Gender _____
- 5.) _____ Gender _____
- 6.) _____ Gender _____

Parents:

Mother: _____ Deceased _____

Father: _____ Deceased _____

Who else in family was illiterate as an adult: _____

Special comments: _____

How many marriages _____

APPENDIX G

Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

AREA I

Rapport building questions and history of individual's non-reading.

1. Tell me about the circumstances or factors that lead you to not being able to read as an adult.
 - a. How long did it take for you to decide to learn to read. (How old were you?)
2. Describe what went into your decision to learn to read. (Was there an event or circumstance?)
3. What was it like for you to not be able to read?
4. What is it like for you now that you know how to read?
5. What was it like growing up in your family and not being able to read?
 - a. Could some people in your family read? If so who?
 - b. Who knew you could not read?
6. How did family members respond to you learning to read?
 - a. Who in your family was supportive of your decision to read?
 - * Have any of them changed their mind?
 - * What was this like for you and your relationship with them.
 - b. Who in your family was not supportive of this decision.
 - * Have any of them changed their mind?
 - * What was this like and your relationship with them?

AREA II

Perceived family interaction while non-reader as an adult.

1. Describe your relationships with family members when you could not read as an adult.
 - a. Spouse
 - b. Children
 - c. Parents
 - d. Siblings
2. How did family members interact with you when you could not read?
 - a. Spouse
 - b. Children
 - c. Parents
 - d. Siblings
3. What did they think of you not being able to read?
 - a. Spouse
 - b. Children
 - c. Parents
 - d. Siblings
4. What were your family responsibilities when you could not read?
5. Were there things that family members did for you because you could not read?

AREA III

Perceived changes in family interaction during and after the individual learned to read.

1. Describe your relationships with family members now that you can read.
 - a. Positive changes
 - b. Negative changes
 - c. What changes in family relationships and dynamics would you attribute to learning to read?.
 - d. Spouse
 - e. Children
 - f. Parents
 - g. Siblings
2. What are your responsibilities in the family now that you can read.

VITA

Ellen Clough Darden was raised in northeastern, Ohio. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Baylor University and a Masters of Science in Social Work degree from the University of Texas at Arlington. She has fourteen years of clinical experience with expertise in the areas of developmental disabilities, substance abuse, battering, adolescence, marital therapy, family therapy, and group work. She is currently teaching at Radford University in the Social Work and Human Development Program in Radford, Virginia.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ellen Clough Darden". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, rounded initial "E" and a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.