Boys Who Love Books: Avid Adolescent Male Readers in the Secondary English

Language Arts Classroom

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Abstract

This study was designed to explore perceptions and lived experiences of avid adolescent male readers, in order to better understand their development as readers. This study explored: (1) how previous reading experiences influence the development of the avid adolescent male reader and (2) how the reading habits and preferences of avid adolescent male readers are socially constructed. Rosenblatt's (1978) Transactional Theory of Literary Work forms the theoretical framework of this study. Rosenblatt (1978) argued that as readers engage with texts, they bring an individual schema to these literary transactions. This prior knowledge and experience are the lens through which the individual reader understands the content of the text. Even when reading the same text, readers respond to the text in individual ways, based on their individual schema. Through the use of a naturalistic inquiry design, data was generated through a series of interviews with the participants. Data analysis was qualitative and iterative, triangulated with multiple interviews, interview mapping, thematic tables, dialogic memos, and researcher field notes. Data analysis led to a better understanding of the development of the avid adolescent male reader, including: (a) the role of family culture on reading identity, (b) peer group influence on reading habits of avid adolescent male readers, and (c) transactional responses of avid adolescent male readers both in and out of educational settings. Data generated during interviews illuminated the complex, individuated and interwoven nature of the elements present in the development of the avid adolescent male

reader. Finally, this study gives insight into how understanding the development of these

readers may provide teachers with instructional strategies and reading opportunities that

support all developing readers.

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General Audience Abstract

This study was designed to explore perceptions and lived experiences of avid adolescent male readers. This study explored: (1) how previous reading experiences influence the development of the avid adolescent male reader and (2) how the reading habits and preferences of avid adolescent male readers are socially constructed. Rosenblatt (1978) argued that prior knowledge and experiences are the lens through which the individual reader understands the content of the text. Even when reading the same text, readers respond to the text in individual ways, based on their individual experience. Adolescent male students who identified as avid readers were interviewed for this study. Participant interviews were transcribed and examined, then triangulated with researcher field notes. Analysis led to a better understanding of the development of the avid adolescent male reader, including: (a) the role of family culture on reading identity, (b) peer group influence on reading habits of avid adolescent male readers, and (c) transactional responses of avid adolescent male readers both in and out of educational settings. These findings illuminate the complex development of the avid adolescent male reader, and give insight into how understanding the development of these readers may provide teachers with instructional strategies and reading opportunities that support all readers.

Dedication

For Randall, who knew it was going to be a wild ride from the moment we met, and signed on anyway. Here's to our next adventure.

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the exact moment I needed it. Too many other friends to name here have cheered for me and helped remind me to enjoy life outside school. Finally, my husband Randall walked every step of this road with me and made sure I never felt alone.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"I like this book, Mrs. Horst. Are we going to read anything else by this author?" The book in question was *Silas Marner* by George Eliot, and the student asking the question was a sixteen-year-old boy in my World Literature class. It was April, and since August, the class and I had been on a whirlwind trip through literature, beginning with the epic of *Gilgamesh* and careening through thousands of years of African, European, Asian, and Slavic works. We were currently on a layover in the rugged landscape of 19th century Northern England, having our collective hearts broken by Eliot's depiction of unconditional love and acceptance played out against a backdrop of injustice, forgiveness, and the prison of social expectations. This class, eight boys and five girls, astonished me on a regular basis, especially with their absolute enthusiasm for the texts they were required to read. I was particularly charmed by the way the class took ownership of the texts. Gilgamesh became "Epic Bros are Epic" to anyone in the class, and there was much celebrating of the "epic bro-liness" evident in the deep friendship of Gilgamesh and Enkidu. In another instance, the class was so incensed by what they perceived as the inherent misogyny in the folktale "King Thrushbeard" that they completely subverted my lesson plan in order to write a new, and in their opinion, more fitting ending to the story. These students didn't just read the assigned texts, they *consumed* the texts, they talked back, they rewrote, they renamed, they remixed and reorganized; the texts became a space for us to make meaning together, and to better understand the experience of being human in the world. To paraphrase Rosenblatt

(2005), my class and I breathed life into what had been lifeless ink on paper, and it changed us.

During this same April, I had several occasions to talk with other English Language Arts teachers from surrounding secondary schools. As we discussed our classes, teaching strategies, and swapped stories, I heard the same refrain every time I talked about my World Lit class, "Well. It's always nice to have a Lit class that's mostly girls!" When I hurried to say that this class had eight boys and five girls, the response was always along the lines of "You're so lucky! Boys don't usually read!" These exchanges made me think. Taken as a whole, my literature students certainly varied in reading ability, attitude and motivation. I had a segment of girls who avoided reading of all types if possible, boys and girls who preferred to read the sports page instead of Dickens, boys who outright refused to do any assigned reading, girls who loved the assigned reading, and a substantial number of boys and girls who were interested in some types of school reading but not others. Sprinkled through my classes, though, were boys who not only loved to read on their own time, they liked (and sometimes loved) school assigned reading. They earned straight A's in my class, did extra reading, got excited about books…these boys were certainly holding their own as readers in my classroom and beyond the classroom walls. They read avidly and voraciously, across a wide variety of genres and media. I began to wonder if other teachers had this sprinkling of male students who loved to read, because this type of male student never seemed to be mentioned when we talked about our classes. It seemed unlikely that I might be the only teacher in the area with male students who enjoyed reading and discussing *A Tale of Two Cities*.

After a systematic search of the research literature, I have not found many of these boys present in research on male adolescent literacy. I know avid adolescent male readers exist because I have taught them, and I have raised them. My experience talking with other teachers about my World Literature class illustrates this gap in the research surrounding adolescent male readers. Adolescent male readers are often positioned as struggling, resistant, or reluctant readers in research, the media, and in educational policies. Adolescent male students as fluent, adept, expert readers are not well represented in research, in the media, or in educational policies. It is the stories of these expert, fluent, avid adolescent male readers that are the focus of my proposed research study.

Personal Significance

From my current vantage point, my interest in avid adolescent male readers seems to be a tip over into the inevitable. I am a fourth-generation teacher, raised to value lifelong learning, and to be a voracious reader. My parents, grandparents and great-grandparents highly valued reading as means of gathering knowledge, as entertainment, and as a method of understanding the world and one's self. I have no memory of learning to read; reading was a skill my brothers and I seemingly absorbed through the very air of our childhood home. Reading material of all types was stacked in every room of our home. New bookcases or bookshelves frequently appeared in order to house new volumes acquired during family outings to bookstores and libraries. Such is my family's hunger for books that we were all early adopters of e-reader devices; we were delighted to find that these devices held thousands of volumes, freeing up space on our bookshelves for even more books.

My friends (boys as well as girls), from kindergarten through graduate school, all shared my love of reading. My elementary and high school friends and I traded books, recommended books to each other, read together, and pooled our resources to buy books to share. My undergraduate and graduate schooling featured teachers, male and female, who read widely, wrote beautifully, and were delighted to talk to me about books of all types. After graduate school, I worked for many years in the retail book business, surrounded by male colleagues who loved to read. My husband and I first bonded over our shared interest in books, and our first gifts to each other were first editions of our favorite authors' books. When I left retail and started a career in early childhood education, the young children in my classes loved to be read to and loved books as magical gateways into imaginary worlds. I stocked my classroom with books and even the wiggliest preschooler found time to pull a book from the shelf and demand that I read it to the class. In my own family, we replicated my childhood experience with reading; my own children grew up immersed in a book-loving atmosphere and they, too, picked up reading quickly and at very early ages.

Along with my appetite for reading, my family infused me with a strong affinity for equity and social justice. Education, I was taught, was the means for bettering oneself, as well as a means to personal satisfaction and material success. Education was an inalienable right, and also a privilege…my brothers and I heard this refrain consistently from our parents, extended family, and our teachers. We were exhorted to make the most of our educational access, and reminded frequently that we had access and advantages that others did not. One aspect of making the most of our education was that we were expected to put it to good use by giving back to society somehow. With this

family ethos, it is not surprising that the majority of my immediate and extended family pursue work as educators, medical professionals, counselors, or work in public service. I was no different, once I began a teaching career; inequities inherent in the American educational system weighed on my mind. I carefully considered my students as individuals and worked hard to meet their needs in my classroom. As I moved from early childhood education into secondary teaching, differentiation took on new complexities. Adolescents bring complicated selves into the classroom, with needs both educational and personal that must be at least acknowledged before they can proceed with the tasks at hand (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2012). My students' relationships with reading varied widely and individually (and sometimes daily). Naively, it simply did not occur to me to wonder if my students' attitudes toward my reading assignments were affected by their sex. I was too busy simply trying to learn how to teach adolescents to step back and look at any larger issues.

Early in my secondary teaching career, I attended a workshop at a national conference, centered on teaching strategies for reading comprehension. I left that workshop feeling confused and defensive about my construction of the students in my classes. I was reluctant to embrace the notion that adolescent female students have an inherent affinity for English class that is lacking in adolescent male students. I began to seek out English teachers at other schools and talk with them about their students. Stories of struggling and successful students were plentiful in these conversations, but two things struck me; in general, any stories of struggling students involved male students, while the successful students were nearly always female. In this vein, conference workshops and professional development sessions often revolved around strategies to engage male

students and presumed that female students were, by and large, already engaged readers. I was puzzled. If other teachers had high achieving male students who loved to read, they were not talking or writing about them. Eventually, I chalked up my supposed success with male students to working in a small, private school and instead of speaking up at conference workshops, I thanked my lucky stars, kept quiet and enjoyed my students.

I left my classroom to pursue a doctorate in curriculum and instruction at Virginia Tech because it gradually dawned on me that I had questions and concerns about education in general and English education specifically that could be addressed only with an advanced degree. In order to give back to my profession, I felt that I needed to learn more about teaching English and about how adolescents and adults learn. In order to answer my burning questions about the intersections of adolescents, English Language Arts, educational policy, and best practices in teaching, I needed to learn how to conduct research. In order to address educational inequities beyond my classroom walls, I needed a larger platform and a way to amplify my voice.

Genesis of Research Idea

My research interests have meandered, though they are threaded together with the theme of equity, social justice, and reading. I am motivated to try to understand the experiences of those who are marginalized by systems and institutions, and I am particularly interested in how marginalized people experience educational settings. Education research in the area of adolescent literacy suggests that adolescent male students may be marginalized by instructional strategies and curriculum choices that appear to favor adolescent female students (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Newkirk (2002) suggests that this marginalization (and associated gap in achievement) could be attributed

the widespread stereotyping of male students as resistant to literacy and alienated from school-valued forms of literacy, and he goes on to argue that such a narrow construction of masculinity injures all students. Newkirk and other researchers, such as Smith & Wilhelm (2002), Alvermann (2001), and Moje et al. (2008), all examine ways in which male adolescent students resist and redefine literacy, especially in educational contexts.

I began to read literacy research with the questions a) *do* adolescent male students read? and b), *what* do adolescent male students read? These questions, I found, have created ample research opportunities for literacy researchers. Adolescent male students read widely, across many platforms and genres, though not always in ways which are valued by parents and teachers (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). They read for many reasons, and devote time to reading outside of school (Moje et al., 2008), though they may express disinterest in school assigned reading (Alvermann et al., 2012). As I read, I began to wonder about the male adolescents I did not see in the literature. Where were the adolescent male students who loved to read in the ELA classroom? The image of male adolescent English students as resistant, struggling, or reluctant does not represent every male student; I knew this from my own teaching and parenting experience, some male students read avidly, engage effectively with school assigned reading, and read widely outside of school. In the general panic over adolescent male school success, what are we to make of the adolescent male students who *do* read? Why do some of these students choose books as often (or more often) than they choose video games, texting with friends, or hanging out online? What about boys who excel in school-assigned, school-valued literacy practices? What social supports do these boys utilize? How do they perceive themselves in relation to other boys? How to they perceive themselves in relation to

girls? What could these students, these avid adolescent male readers, teach us about reading? What would they have to say about their experiences as readers and as students? How could learning about their perceptions and experiences help teachers reach students who fit the profile of a resistant reader? Is there a way to translate their experiences into instructional strategies to help all adolescent readers?

Theoretical Framework

Louise Rosenblatt (2005) theorized that reading is an experience of mutual shaping, in which meaning is made through a transaction or series of transactions between text and reader. Rosenblatt argued that each reader brings to the text their past experiences with language as well as cultural and social contexts unique to that person. These past experiences influence the meaning that each reader makes from any given text. Reader and text, connected by this transaction, cannot be separated. As readers transact with reading, they bring their unique experiences to the text; even members of seemingly homogenous groups retain that unique character of the transaction. Two students who read the same word may have very different experiences with that word and so will bring entirely different interpretations and associations to that word. For example, two readers who encounter the word "mountain" in a text may interpret that word differently. If one reader has grown up in the Appalachians and the other in the Rocky Mountains, they will both bring their previous experiences and understanding of the world (schema) to the word "mountain." Both interpretations would be equally authentic, but also widely disparate.

Rosenblatt (2005) makes a distinction between transaction and interaction. In an interaction, two separate entities act on each other (she gives the example of billiard balls

colliding) and leave the encounter essentially unchanged (p. 40). In a transaction, the past experience of the reader is brought to the text, and this influence changes the reader and the meaning of the text read, much like stream and banks work upon each other in an act of mutual shaping. The transaction between reader and text is a singular reading event, contextualized by the space and time in which it takes place; the transaction broadens the experience of the reader, and as a result, repeated readings of the same words are new transactions. The transactional reading experiences of the study participants were foregrounded throughout the series of interviews as participants and I discussed their perceptions and lived experiences. I also attended to the ways in which the interview structure and my past experiences shaped the meaning my participants and I made of our experiences together during the study. My research was guided by the following two questions:

1. What roles have previous reading experiences played in the development of avid adolescent male readers?

2. How are the reading habits and preferences of avid adolescent male readers socially constructed?

My intended outcomes for this study were: a) rich descriptions of the perceptions and experiences of avid adolescent male readers; and b) recommendations for English teachers who want to develop instructional strategies or curricular content to support the reading behaviors and habits of their adolescent students.

Description of the Study

As noted above, literacy research positions adolescent male students as reluctant to engage with reading, especially academic reading (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002), or

stereotypes male students as prone to violence (Newkirk, 2002), or as uninterested in any type of reading that is related to or similar to school-assigned reading (Brozo, 2006). These constructions do not represent the experience of every adolescent male student. Some male adolescent students read with fluency and enthusiasm, achieving at the same level as female peers (Moje, 2002), though these male students are not well represented in research on adolescent literacy. Wilson and Kelly (2010) noted that avid adolescent readers of either sex may be present in classrooms but poorly identified due to myths and common misunderstandings about the nature of avid adolescent readers.

This qualitative interview study addressed the gap in literacy research by exploring the experiences of a group of avid adolescent male readers. Qualitative research can foreground the experiences of participants, creating an opportunity to examine context, experience, and influences in the lives of the boys who read and achieve at a high level in English Language Arts classes. This type of research offers a means to amplify the voice, perceptions, and abilities of these students. A qualitative interview study design allowed me to foreground the voices and experiences of my participants.

The literature review in Chapter 2 provides a rationale for my qualitative interview study of adolescent male students who read with fluency, enjoy school reading, and achieve academically on a level with their female counterparts. In Chapter 3, I describe the site, participants, methodology, data generation, and data analysis of this study. Findings for this study are discussed in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, I analyze the study findings, limitations, and implications, and make suggestions for further research.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to provide review of empirical research pertaining to adolescent males and reading in order to illustrate a gap in the current research. The first section identifies and defines key terms and contextualizes this study of adolescent readers within the larger area of research on adolescent readers of all genders. Next, I outline a rationale for the study that asks the overarching question of what we can learn from avid adolescent male readers. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What roles have previous reading experiences played in the development of avid adolescent male readers?

2. How are the reading habits and preferences of avid adolescent male readers socially constructed?

Terms and Definitions

Literacy. Literacy is a broad term that Moje (1996) argued encompasses reading, writing, speaking, and listening as well as the "practices in which these processes are embedded" (p. 175). This broad definition includes such practices as writing texts and emails, consuming media online, discussing multimodal works, producing multimodal works, and critically interpreting reading across a variety of media, types, and genres (Cazden, C., Cope, B., Fairclough, N., Gee, J., Kalantzis, M., Kress, G., & Nakata, M.,1996). After the landmark 1996 publication by the New London Group of "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies," literacy researchers began to explore this concept of reading across diverging delivery paths, redefining and re-examining literacy in light of

the rise of leisure activities such as video gaming, online activity, and later cell phone access to entertainment and information. The New London Group (1996) suggested expanding the understanding of literacy, noting that literacies exist outside reading printed matter; indeed, that these New Literacies are as vitally important to navigating the world as more traditional forms of literacy (p. 5). Students might, the researchers suggested, be highly literate in ways not currently valued in educational settings. Reading is foundational to literacy, especially as people are expected, more and more, to read across multiple platforms (Cazden et al., 1996). For the purposes of this research, I will adopt a broad definition of reading in order to include the multiple types of reading in which avid adolescent male readers engage on a daily basis.

Reading. In order to address the question of what we can learn about reading from avid adolescent male readers, it is necessary to operationalize the term *reading*. In a position statement on reading, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) defined reading as "the complex act of constructing meaning from print" ("NCTE Position Statement," para. 1). This definition reflects the traditional and current practices in English Language Arts classrooms. Print used in classrooms can be further categorized into fiction (literature created from the imagination) and non-fiction (works that are informative and assume the author's responsibility to truth and accuracy). Book length fiction is the most prevalent genre for secondary English Language Arts classroom instruction, as this genre of literature forms the bulk of the body of work known as "the canon," a term that represents books considered to form a bedrock of Western thought, philosophy and critical thinking (Alvermann, Heron, & Alison, 2001; McKenna, Conradi, Camille, Jang, & Meyer, 2012). This focus on book-length printed works appears to

have fed the concept of *reading* as *reading print*, as evidenced by the NCTE position statement referenced above. In turn, this concept appears to have helped create a persistent public perception that reading printed matter is "real" reading (Alvermann & Hutchens, 2012; Moje et al., 2008). This *real reading* is commonly contrasted with other reading, such as reading shorter texts, web pages, periodicals, emails, or even non-fiction; alongside a tacit understanding, by adults and adolescents alike, that only "real" reading "counts" as reading (Alvermann, Young, Green, & Wisenbaker, 1999). This construction of reading printed, book length matter as *real* reading is pervasive to the point of ubiquity in research literature as well as in the general perceptions of adolescents, teachers, and parents. It is this exclusionary stance, suggests Moje (2002) that widens a disconnect between academically valued reading and adolescent male achievement in ELA classes. For this study, in contrast, reading is defined as "the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among the reader, the text, and the context of the reading situation" (Wixson, Peters, Weber & Roeber, 1987, p. 750). This definition is contextualized by the Transactional Theory of the Literary Work (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1995) that forms the theoretical framework for the research study.

Compulsory reading. In practice, a distinction is often drawn between compulsory reading assigned in school and reading for pleasure. In order to be considered a successful student in a high school ELA class, as student needs to score well on standardized assessments, demonstrate comprehension of assigned reading, and synthesize information present in the assigned reading. To do this, the student must read school-assigned texts with comprehension and demonstrate this comprehension through discussion, writing assignments, and performing well on assessments both formative and

summative. Compulsory reading is likely to include selections from the canon, and may

or may not have been chosen with an eye toward relevance in the lives of the students

who will read these works (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Love & Hamston, 2003).

For this study, compulsory reading is defined as any reading activity assigned by a

teacher and required to be completed for a grade (Hughes-Hassel & Rodge, 2007;

Newkirk, 2002).

Pleasure reading. Though compulsory reading remains the gold standard for

English classes, reading for pleasure is presented both in the media and in scholarly

works as on the decline in American society, especially within the adolescent segment of

the population (Alvermann et al., 1999; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 1999; Knoester,

2010). Pleasure reading, in this dissertation, is defined as reading by individual

adolescents for the purposes of personal entertainment or information gathering

(Alvermann et al.,1999; Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Moje, et al., 2008). The

pleasure reading habits of adolescents, however, is a shifting, complicated landscape, as

adolescent reading habits are embedded in social practices and bolstered by social

networks that shift, grow, and change as adolescents construct intersectional identities

(Alvermann & Hutchens, 2012; McKenna et al., 2012; Moje, et al., 2008). For this study,

pleasure reading is defined as any reading activity chosen by the reader, occurring outside

school assignments or requirements (Moje et al, 2008).

Avid adolescent male readers. Wilson and Kelly (2010) noted that myths and

assumptions surround the development of avid readers and their presence in English

Language Arts classrooms. Avid readers read for their own purposes but may not be

motivated or engaged in school reading, especially if this reading interferes with reading

they find more personally relevant, authentic, or useful (Chandler, 2013; Millard, 1996; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). For this study, the avid adolescent male reader is defined as a male between the ages of 13 and 18 who reads ardently and fluently (at or above grade level) with comprehension in a variety of media, contexts, genres of their own choosing, and achieves at a high level academically (Howard, 2013; Wilson & Kelly, 2007).

Literacy Research, the Decline in Reading, and Adolescent Male Students Who Read

In the well-known and still-cited study, *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner, 1983), the authors framed an apparent decline in book reading as a crisis in literacy skills for American adolescents. Nearly 25 years later, a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) study in 2007 supported the popular perception that adolescents don't read. This study, *To Read or Not to Read,* noted the "simple, consistent, and alarming" story told by the data: teens and adults had, to a large degree, stopped reading outside of school or professional requirements (p.5).

Adolescent Male Readers in The Classroom. My experience as an English Language Arts teacher in a secondary school both reflected and refuted the findings of studies such as these. I designed curricula to support the struggling readers in my classes, and I searched constantly for instructional strategies that would help me meet these students where they were as readers, then scaffold their developing interests and skills in order to help them achieve in my reading intensive classroom. Some male students confessed to me that they did not like reading at all, and preferred other activities outside of school. Their conversations with me, however, revealed that they read quite a bit outside of school, though they did not define their gaming, texting, and Internet activity

as reading. I worked hard to bridge their preferred reading activities to the type of reading they needed to do in order to become proficient in academic literacies such as reading classic novels, deciphering a textbook, writing an essay, or taking a test.

Some of my male students, however, did not need this help. They read classic literature with attention, focus, and comprehension. These male students demonstrated their comprehension on assessments, always did their reading assignments, and sometimes even enjoyed the classic novels, poems, and short stories we tackled together in class. These students had a relationship with reading that looked familiar to me, as an avid reader myself, and as a parent of avid readers. As a parent, I have watched my two sons progress through school and saw that their relationship with reading caused both excitement and consternation in their English teachers. My children's teachers, I noticed, expected reading competency and engagement from my daughter, but expressed surprised delight at my sons' interest in reading, especially when my sons read for school. This was familiar territory; I, too, was delighted to have adolescent boys in my class for whom reading was enjoyable instead of onerous. My children's engagement with reading reflects my experience growing up in a family that highly valued literacy of all types. My two brothers are motivated and engaged readers, as is my father. As I began reviewing research literature for this review, I became increasingly baffled and disturbed by what I see as a gap in the body of literacy research. Adolescent male students who do read, especially those who do well in ELA classrooms, rarely appear in literacy research literature.

Adolescent male students who read. Adolescent male students do read, though not all adolescent male students choose to read school-assigned work such as the classic

literature assigned in ELA class (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Male adolescents often choose reading that bears little resemblance to the type of reading valued by teachers and parents: digital reading (texting, emails, websites) instead of books, magazines instead of the canon, or gaming instead of textbooks (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000). Adolescent males may appear disengaged in the classroom yet be avid readers in genres and media that they find informational or interesting (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Newkirk, 2002). Literacy research on male adolescents is focused almost exclusively on students who struggle to engage with and succeed in school reading. Some male students, however, do not struggle with school reading. These students may engage with reading in their ELA classrooms with competence and interest. Adolescent male students who excel in ELA classrooms, however, are not well represented within the body of research on adolescent male literacies.

Reading Research and the Adolescent Male Reader

In this section, I review studies that examine the relationship between reading, literacy research, and adolescent male reading habits and preferences. These studies highlight the difficulties inherent in understanding adolescent reading behaviors and motivations, as well as reported gender differences in the reading motivation and engagement reported by adolescent male and female readers. I begin this section with a review of research literature on the reading behaviors and preferences of all adolescents. After this overview, I review research on the reading habits and preferences of adolescent males specifically.

Adolescents and Reading Identities. Building on previous work in the study of adolescent male students and reading (see Pitcher et al., 2007; Wigfield & Guthrie,

1997), McKenna et al. (2012) further examined the ways in which adolescents construct "positive reading identities" (p. 284) in school related contexts. In setting out to examine adolescent reading attitudes, motivation, and identity, McKenna et al. found a significant gender difference in reading attitude and motivation, in particular with regard to male students and the affective domain. Though McKenna et al. argued that an understanding of attitude toward reading "in multiple dimensions" would be of potential use in developing instructional strategies aimed at engaging and motivating all readers, the results of this study suggest that adolescent male students, in particular, are more inclined to disengage with reading that does not align with their constructed identity as a reader. The researchers recruited 5,080 students were in the U.S., in a nationally representative sample. The instrument used in this study was designed to examine the relationships among four dimensions of attitude (academic print, academic digital, recreational print, recreational digital) and the possible relationships between attitude, grade, and gender in US middle school students.

Academic digital reading. In the area of academic digital reading, female students reported a statistically significant more positive attitude than male students. In recreational digital reading, however, male students reported a more positive attitude than female students. Attitudes toward academic print were more positive for females than for males. For recreational print, females had a significantly more positive attitude than did male students. The study results also showed a high correlation between academic print and academic digital reading, suggesting that for the students in this study, medium made little difference in regard to attitude toward school-assigned reading. The researchers noted that this correlation may have been due to teachers' tendency to employ the same

instructional techniques with digital texts that they employed with printed texts, a "high tech version of the transmission-oriented pedagogies" with which the teacher might be most comfortable (p. 299).

Reading, sex, and attitude toward reading. McKenna et al. (2012) noted that the effect of gender expectations on attitudes toward reading is consistent with common expectations for students—adolescent female students are more engaged with reading, adolescent male students resist reading--except for the finding that the gender difference favors males in regard to recreational digital texts. These results indicate that all students, but boys in particular, may be better served by instructional reading strategies that take into account not only the cognitive but also the affective domain.

In addition, McKenna et al. (2012) suggest that motivating adolescents to read is of particular importance to male adolescent readers, who "seemed to lose interest" in reading by late adolescence (p. 395). The researchers found that as adolescent male participants progressed through secondary school, they became less interested, motivated, and engaged with school assigned reading, but more interested, motivated and engaged by digital reading practices. The implications for this finding suggest that responsive teachers may be able to leverage this interest in order to create a classroom environment with a wide variety of reading materials and platforms to engage all students, but particularly male students. Further, the finding that students in this study interpreted "reading" as pertaining to only printed, school-assigned texts points to the previously mentioned issue of teachers', students', and parents' perception of what constitutes reading.

Reading, Motivation, and Engagement

In a qualitative study of 160 third, seventh, and eleventh grade students, Mathers and Stern (2012) examined the link between motivation, engagement, leisure reading, and reading achievement. The authors build on the work of Ivey and Broaddus (2001), which exposed a "mismatch between what students need and the instruction they are likely to receive" (p. 353), and they point out three important mismatches between students' needs and instructional practice: a) adolescents are social, but school is not, b) students like to choose reading but teachers prefer to assign reading, and c) students need time for reading but free reading time is problematic in most school schedules. Mathers and Stern's study examines this mismatch with two linked research questions: a) how do the beliefs about reading of middle and high school students differ from elementary students' beliefs about reading? b) what reasons do elementary, middle, and high school students give for their beliefs about reading.

The study was set in the northeastern US, in a small urban school district, with an enrollment of around 1,100 students K-12. The student population was diverse, with a student enrollment of 1,100 K-12 students comprised of 17% African American, 83% White, with 33% of the student population on free and reduced lunch. Students responded anonymously to questionnaires about their reading beliefs. The researchers found that students reported the role of power and the role of pleasure as strong influences on their reading behavior. The majority of students in all three grades felt that reading was important, and that it made people smarter and more successful. Seventy-five percent of third graders answered yes to the question "Do you like to read?"

compared to 58% of the other two groups. This finding conflicts with perceived attitudes about uninterested adolescent readers, both male and female.

Affective factors for these participants appeared to be strongly correlated with reading. A majority of students who reported that they enjoyed reading cited personal interest and choice as major factors in their positive feelings toward reading. Affective factors were increasingly important for students when considered across age groups. Personal choice of reading material became more important as the students matured. This finding is relevant to this review, as it supports findings of studies such as Knoester (2010) and McKenna et al. (2012) in demonstrating that as a student matures, interest in reading drops precipitously throughout adolescence, especially in boys. Put another way, as interest in reading generally declines through adolescence, choice and interest become increasingly important as the student matures.

The researchers concluded that effective instructional strategies create an environment where student choice, social context, personal connection, and socially embedded literacy practices intersect. This approach would seem particularly well suited to the particular needs of adolescent male readers, for whom research shows an increasing need for autonomy, variety, and social context to support reading as they grow through adolescence and into adulthood.

Reading, motivation, and reading outside school. Research on reading and motivation has attempted to address the question of why and how students are motivated to engage with reading in and out of formal educational settings. Guthrie and Wigfield (1997) defined motivation as "beliefs, values, needs and goals that individuals have" (p.5). In educational terms, the more closely classroom activities and lessons match the

needs, goals, values and beliefs of students, the more likely it is that students will, in turn, be motivated and engaged by reading in classroom settings. Examining the intersection of adolescent reading and motivation, Pitcher et al. (2007) conducted a large scale, international study of adolescents in multiple educational settings, including public, private, charter, and alternative schools. The researchers explored motivation to read as a "key to improving reading instruction at the secondary level" (p. 379). Researchers administered the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP) survey to 384 adolescents across the U.S. and the Caribbean. The participants were racially and ethnically diverse, and ranged from grades 6-12. Fifty-four percent of the participants were female; 46% were male. In addition to a survey, the researchers used a 14-item conversational interview to interview 100 of the study's participants.

A finding of particular interest to this review is that, while both the survey and interview data yielded a picture of adolescents who were highly literate in and highly skilled in multiliteracies--particularly electronic forms of communication such as texting, email, and online reading--the adolescents in this study did not often identify themselves as readers. Put another way, the students in this study did not view reading other than printed novels, or school assigned reading, to be *real* reading; unless they were engaged in reading books (generally for school), they did not see themselves engaging in reading or as readers. Instead, the researchers noted that these participants might have been "defining reading and readers only in academic context…not viewing their out of school literacies as valid reading and writing" (p. 394). This finding, researchers note, has strong implications for classroom instruction: aligning academic reading with beliefs,

values, needs and goals held by adolescents may bridge the gap these students perceive between school assigned reading and their own identities as readers.

Summary. Reading, for adolescents, is conceptualized as binary and exclusive; with compulsory reading is considered to be of value, while other reading is less valued (Millard, 1997). When researchers asked adolescent male students about their reading habits outside of school, the students reported reading across a widely varied range of genres; television, film, digital reading, texting, email, periodicals, lists (such as sports scores and statistics), gaming, fiction, non-fiction, and informational texts such as manuals, though they did not always identify this activity as reading (Alvermann & Hutchens, 2012; Gallagher, 2009; Moje et al., 2008; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). This suggests that even if male students read fluently and avidly, they may not identify non-print, non-academic reading to be real reading, or identify themselves as readers.

Adolescent Male Readers and The Achievement Gap

Early childhood and elementary teachers build upon the interests of young students in order to develop a love of reading using strategies which are gendered, raced, and classed (Nolen, 2007; Renninger & Hidi, 2002). Reading is modeled in classrooms as a desirable social activity, and teachers promote student interest in reading with specific strategies such as reading to students (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993), and modeling interest, questioning, prediction, and selecting books with student interests in mind (Nolen, 2007; Paley, 1984). As children grow, these reading preferences persist and intensify as boys and girls form and perform identities that align with or resist social expectations of "boy" and "girl" (Butler, 1999; Pascoe, 2010). During adolescence, gender performativity intensifies as children struggle to access and attain the acceptance

and understanding of peers (Butler, 1999; Pascoe, 2011). Gender performativity may be amplified by assumptions held by teachers, parents, and society at large regarding gender and literacy. Even as this performativity intensifies and students' identities accrete, many secondary schools de-emphasize the connection between students' individual interests and reading in classroom settings (Gallagher, 2009). As these students progress through secondary school, an achievement gap opens between male and female students (Moje et al., 2008). Additionally, academic literacies in most US middle and high schools foreground the literary canon ("the classics") rather than encouraging student choice in selecting reading, and favor academic writing skills such as essays and research papers over writing fictional stories. This privileging of canon works may also figure in the documented decline in adolescent engagement with school assigned literature (Alvermann, Gillis & Phelps, 2012).

      Disengagement with reading. This disconnect between student interest and motivation to read may serve to widen the engagement gap for all secondary students. Knoester (2010) and McKenna et al. (2012) noted that as students in their studies progressed through middle and high school, both male and female students tended to become less engaged with reading and less motivated to read, though male students experienced this shift more profoundly, and in ways that more negatively impacted their academic performance. This achievement gap may be deepened as boys disengage with academically valued literacies while more deeply engaging with literacies that are less valued by teachers and adults (Knoester, 2009; McKenna et al., 2012). One result of this recalibration of reading behaviors is that many adolescent male students do not seem to view out of school literacy practices as real reading (McKenna et al., 2012). This may be

a factor in the weakening of adolescent identification as readers. These trends, however, do not represent every adolescent male student. There exists a segment of this population of adolescent male students who remain avid, committed readers throughout their adolescence and into adulthood, and these readers may be obscured in classrooms and in literacy research, behind a screen of lingering assumptions about reading and gender.

Disengagement with reading: A closer look. Watson, Kehler and Martino (2010), however, cautioned that studies that appear to offer simplistic explanations of boys, resistance, and reading behaviors may do so by ignoring or obscuring the intersections of gender, race, socio-economic status, and language. It is important, they note, "to understand that not all boys are at risk and that their poor performance is not inevitable" (p. 357). Manuel and Robinson (2003) further examined the extent to which these lingering assumptions about gender and reading persist in teacher perceptions regarding adolescent male literacy practices, and their findings provide a nuanced view into this segment of adolescent male students. The researchers chose a random sample of 12 to 15-year-old adolescents from two schools, one in an urban setting, the other a regional school. These students were surveyed in order to identify the students' reading preferences in the context of school as well as out of school. Thirty-five of the responding students were female, and 34 were male. Survey questions were organized around common assumptions about adolescents and reading held by parents, teachers, and the general public.

Assumption 1: "Teenage boys don't read as much as teenage girls." The authors found that 8.82% of the male participants reported reading over 4 hours a day, while 0% of the female participants reported reading that much every day. This finding suggests

that for some adolescent male students, who Manuel and Robinson term "committed readers," reading is an activity absorbing enough for them to dedicate considerable time on a daily basis.

Assumption 2: "Teenage boys don't like books." The authors asked the adolescents in their study to rate their reading preferences. The participants, both male and female, indicated that fiction was their favorite type of reading; 40% of both boys and girls preferred fiction to other types of reading, including the Internet. This finding counters the popular assumption that boys prefer other types of reading to fiction, and challenges the findings of researchers such as McKenna et al. (2012) and Moje et al. (2008). This finding does support Alvermann (2002; Alvermann et al., 2012) and Moje (2002; Moje et al. 2008) in suggesting that literacy practices in English classrooms are gendered, complex, socially embedded, and individualized.

Assumption 3: "Girls' preference in fiction is the romance genre." The authors asked the study participants to identify what type of books they preferred to read in their leisure time. Here the researchers found that while the majority of both boys and girls preferred to read in genres such as action/adventure, mystery, and fantasy, more girls preferred to read books considered romance and classics (47%), while more boys (54%) preferred to read books such as crime/detective stories, and science fiction. This, the authors point out, highlights the difficulties in choosing books to appeal to an entire class, and supports the practice of student choice as a method of increasing reading motivation and engagement for all students. A majority of the male participants, 58%, preferred to choose their own reading without assistance. A very small percentage of the male participants (8.8%) indicated that teacher-selected books were enjoyable. Very few of

the male participants in this study, then, had reading interests and preferences that aligned with school-valued texts.

A finding in this section of the research report is of particular interest to this review. In the first, over half the boys (55%) had read their favorite book more than once, and 32% of the boys had read their favorite book four or more times. Given the assumption that male students lose interest in reading books as they grow into adolescents (McKenna et al., 2012), it is significant that male students who do enjoy reading may also enjoy re-reading favorite books. For teachers and parents who struggle to help male adolescent students to complete books, this finding may offer some insight. If teacher-selected books (the classics) hold little interest for adolescent male students (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997; McKenna et al., 2012), educators may do well to support the practice of rereading familiar texts in order to support the reading interests of their male students and as a means of scaffolding adolescent male reading behaviors into school-valued reading practices.

Assumption 4: "Girls use of the computer and internet is significantly less than that of boys." In this study, 50% of boys reported spending at least an hour a day on the computer, and 57% of the girls reported spending the same amount of time. However, when hours spent on the Internet climbed to 4 and over, boys drastically outnumbered girls, with 14.71% of boys spending more than 4 hours online, and 2.86% of girls spending that amount of time online. Significant to this review, students in this study did not identify leisure time spent on the computer as reading.

Assumption 5: "Adolescent boys have a poorer self-image as readers than do adolescent girls." Only 5% of the boys considered themselves to be "poor" readers. In

contrast, 17% of the boys identified as "average" readers. The majority of both boys and girls in this study identified themselves as above average readers. Interestingly, when asked how they could improve their reading skills, 80% of the boys and 94% of the girls believed that their reading would be improved if they read more. This troubles the notion of adolescents as unaware of strategies to improve their reading. Additionally, this study supports the findings of McKenna et al. (2012), who suggested that "cultural expectations may cause girls to harbor more positive attitudes toward reading than boys" (p. 952). While this study offered insight on teachers' perceptions of gender and reading in ELA classrooms, further research with a larger sample size and more complete demographic information about participants would add important depth to the conversation regarding gender assumptions and reading achievement in ELA classrooms.

Reading and the home/school dichotomy. Adolescent male students who score well on reading tests tend to have a high degree of intrinsic motivation to read, both in school and out of school (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Likewise, there appears to be a strong connection between non-compulsory leisure reading and school success for adolescents (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). Studies such as Anderson, Wilson and Fielding (1988) and Broaddus and Ivey (2002) have suggested that this connection to independent reading and school success is more marked for adolescent male students, though it is these students who are more likely to experience a significant decrease in independent reading as they move through adolescence and toward adulthood. This section of the review will discuss possible reasons for this decrease in independent reading, linking the waning interest in reading to the importance of peer relationships in adolescent identity formation.

School-assigned reading and interest. Rybakova, Piotrowski and Harper (2013) note that both male and female adolescent students can find it difficult to connect to canonical books, though female students appear to have a somewhat easier time with this connection. Reeves (2004) notes that one reason for this disconnection might be that "the secondary school reading curriculum is saturated with literature written by adults for adults, and leaves little space for adolescents' interests that are often connected to the psychological work of becoming an adult" (p. 61). Many studies draw a clear connection between motivation to read and perceived usefulness of the reading material (Alvermann, Gillis & Phelps, 2012; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Put another way, for adolescent students, the more personally interesting or useful a text, whether print-based or digital, the more likely that student will read it with comprehension. Teachers who utilize schema theory, using young adult literature to activate and build on students' prior knowledge, can then successfully bridge gaps between young adult literature, the canon, and out of school literacies (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2012; Moje et al., 2008).

Lenters (2006) noted that while literacy acquisition in young children has been an area of intensive research and intervention, literacy interventions for adolescents have historically received less attention, funding, and research. Building on Bintz' (1993) research paradigm of the "resistant reader" rather than the "struggling" or "reluctant" reader, Lenters notes that many reading researchers who focus on adolescents report that their adolescent participants rarely cite poor reading ability or reading difficulties as a reason that they do not read. Rather, Lenters reports, both male and female students most often cite interest and choice as their major obstacles to independent reading both in and out of school. Resistant readers, in this context, actively oppose, resist, and remake

reading in order to serve their own needs instead of conforming to a school-preferred social identity as *reader,* rendering their identity as readers invisible to teachers (and sometimes, to themselves). Adolescent male students who concoct elaborate ploys to avoid assigned reading might nevertheless highly value their out of school reading, avoiding school-assigned reading in order to spend more time on reading materials they find pleasurable or useful (Alvermann et al., 1999; Bintz, 1993; Moje et al., 2008). As adolescent male students resist school-related reading, they turn to reading matter and modalities that serve to enhance, reinforce, or remake their identity as readers. These identities can be socially influenced and reinforced by the reading habits and preferences of family and friends (Millard, 1997).

Rich print environment and reading role models. Home environments that are rich in print texts and that place a high value on reading and literacy can have a positive effect on a child's attitude toward reading (Alvermann, Gillis & Phelps, 2012). Studies such as Bean and Moni (2003) and Moje et al. (2000) have supported this connection between home literacy practices and student engagement with reading. In a 1999 study on home literacy practices and reading engagement, Chandler interviewed 12 male high school students, all of whom were avid readers of horror fiction by Stephen King. Eight of these students had been introduced to King's work by a parent. Additionally, all of the participants had received copies of King's books from parents or other relatives. The majority of the participants in this study (8 of the 12) regularly discussed their current reading with their parents. Chandler concluded that one factor crucial to the participants' continued engagement with reading was regular interactions with their parents. This may be particularly important as, McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth (1995) and McKenna et al.

(2012) have noted, adolescent disengagement with reading increases with age, beginning in the middle school years. If, as adolescents grow older, teachers, parents and schools devalue or even undermine student interest in popular fiction, this may worsen student attitudes toward reading. Chandler's participants seemed to benefit directly from positive interaction with parents around reading material that both parent and student found interesting and enjoyable. It is possible, then, that a family culture which values leisure reading on a level with compulsory reading might help offset increasing adolescent disinterest in reading, particularly for male students, whose disinterest seems to grow more significantly (Moje et al., 2008: Brozo, 2006). Furthermore, many teachers, like their adolescent students, also tend to view literacies as binary and exclusive, that is, they see academic reading as separate from "home" or "informal" literacies such as online activity, gaming, or texting (Alvermann, Heron, & Alison, 2001; Carbone & Reynolds, 2013). These teachers, like their students, tend to view compulsory reading as *real* reading while viewing other literacy practices as frivolous or of little value in an academic context (Carbone & Reynolds, 2013, Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Yet, when teachers and students collaborate on literacy learning that focuses on blurring the home/school dichotomy, reading achievement rises, classroom communities thrive, and student engagment and motivation increases (Carbone & Reynolds, 2013, Hill, 2009). Pedagogies such as inquiry-based learning or service learning, that explicitly value and promote the students' home literacies, breaks down perceived dichotomies that privilege academic literacies (in which students may feel powerless or inadequate) over out of school literacies (in which students may be accomplished, engaged, and highly literate). This blurring or softening of the home/school dichotomy may be of particular

value to adolescent male students, who tend to prefer reading in modes and genres not traditionally valued in ELA classrooms (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

      Summary. Literacy research has demonstrated that rather than excluding or narrowing definitions of reading and literacy (and thereby excluding an outsider perspective in the classroom), teachers who can perceive of the classroom as an inclusive space where many types of literacies are valued may be more open to instructional strategies that bridge the home/school divide and scaffold literacy instruction in a way that engages and enhances students' academic literacy learning (Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhem, 2002). When instructional strategies take into account student interest and involvement, achievement rises, literacy rates increase, and student motivation to read rises for all students in the classroom.

Socially Embedded Literacies and Reading

      The increasingly complicated nature of adolescent literacy was foregrounded in the "multiliteracies" movement that took hold in the mid-1990s with the landmark 1996 publication by the New London Group of "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies." Literacy researchers began to explore the concept of reading across diverging delivery paths, redefining and re-examining literacy. The rise of leisure activities such as video gaming, online activity, and later cell phone access to entertainment and information, rang loud alarm bells for many researchers who saw these activities as possible competitors for the time and attention of adolescents, and as such, these differing forms of literacy posed a possible cause for a decline in reading. The New London Group suggested expanding the understanding of literacy, noting that literacies exist outside reading printed matter; indeed, that these New Literacies are as vitally important to navigating the world as more

traditional forms of literacy. Students might, they suggest, be highly literate in ways not currently valued in educational settings. This challenge, to reconsider and redefine *reading* directly contradicted the popularly understood experience of *real* reading, that of reading printed matter (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Adolescents, The New London Group proposed, were in fact reading more expansively and with greater comprehension when accessing information across multiple modalities. Proponents of *real* reading countered that these non-traditional forms of literacy shortened attention spans, had negative effects on comprehension of printed matter, and resulted in disengaged and unmotivated students who resisted compulsory reading (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Reeves, 2004). Adolescent male students, these proponents argued, were at an especially high risk for negative impacts on their engagement with reading, particularly in school contexts (Alvermann & Hutchens, 2012; Bintz, 1993; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997).

Reading and social networks. The study of New Literacies further highlighted the tension between school-related, print based reading and the use of digital literacies as leisure reading. Millard (1997) examined this tension between school valued reading and reading for pleasure. The focus of her study was the socially embedded practices with which adolescents approached both school and home literacy. Millard's study captured the growing tension between traditional reading and the expanded understanding of literacy as it pertained to adolescent reading behaviors. By focusing on *reading* rather than *literacy,* Millard attempted to illuminate the ways in which adolescents conceptualized and interacted with reading, in both school and home settings.

Millard surveyed 225 boys and girls, aged 10 to 12 in the South Yorkshire region of England. Though the study's main focus was an exploration of the gendered nature of

leisure reading habits of adolescents, Millard's findings also indicate that while the secondary students did not report reading *more*, on average, in their leisure time, they were not reading significantly *less* than previous surveys of adolescent leisure reading. Millard's study is significant in that it took into account both gender and the rise of online reading and video games as competition for the limited after-school leisure hours of adolescents, thereby addressing directly the concerns of popular media, parents, and teachers. Millard suggested that although many activities were available for the leisure time of the students in her study, the avid readers (both male and female) in the group continued to value and place a priority on reading, even though they devoted time to other pursuits. The student participants in this study were highly motivated to read by interest, utility, and their social networks. Within social networks, male students showed a higher degree of interest in books or reading material recommended to them by their parents or their friends. Male participants, overall, were more motivated to read material that they found personally useful, such as manuals, gaming guides, or books related to their hobbies and interests, whether this material was printed or digital. The common lore of 21st century literacy research contradicts this finding while simplifying or ignoring the notion that adolescent males are, in fact, not illiterate…they read widely and with interest though their interests may not coincide with school-valued reading.

Millard highlighted this complexity, reporting that male adolescents were disadvantaged in two distinct ways in school settings: their reading interests were unacknowledged by school curriculums and any school-related expectations of literacy tended to favor literacy practices and reading interests most associated with female students. Millard also made a case for further research in the area of digital literacies and

literacy education, noting that teachers who value the "often contradictory worlds of the home, the community and the classroom" (p. 155) will have the most success in engaging all students, but particularly male students, in developing a high degree of literacy in all genres of reading. Millard's study asked adolescents the "what, how, and why" which Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, and Morris (2008) would suggest as a subject of study a decade later.

The evolution of socially embedded literacy practices. The possibilities for constant connection and endless flow of entertainment and information in 21st century digital modalities have created opportunities for adolescents to practice reading skills in expanded multimodal ways only hinted at by the New London Group (Bae & Ivashkevich, 2012; Moje et al., 2008). Adolescents (now, as in Millard's 1997 study) are highly motivated to connect with peers, and most heavily utilize electronics to create and maintain these connections (Meyers, Erickson & Small, 2013). This notion of widespread media use by adolescents is further supported by a large, longitudinal study, the *Generation M2 Report*, published by the Kaiser Family Foundation (Rideout et al., 2010). In this study, researchers examined the media consumption of more than 2,000 children (ages 8-18) nationwide. The findings of this study emphasize the always-connected nature of adolescent media consumption across social strata, race, and gender. However, adolescents tend to view their online or electronic activities as something other than reading, or as a type of reading that is of less value than compulsory reading (Millard, 1997).

Social networks, pleasure reading, and adolescent literacy practices. Moje et al. (2008), like Millard, explored the often-contradictory world of adolescent literacy,

with a particular focus on the social networks in which these practices are embedded. The authors examined their research questions through the theoretical framework of sociocultural literacy, which foregrounds the idea that adolescents are required to participate in multiple, sometimes contradictory discourses in order to incorporate these many discourses in order to navigate the daily challenges of school, work, and life. Data for this study were collected in two waves, and consisted of both a large-scale survey and ongoing ethnographic work. Participants were 1,045 students in sixth through tenth grades from public, private, and charter schools in a large, Midwestern city. Ethnographic data included interviews and observations.

The researchers found that, despite the popular belief that "kids don't read," 92 percent of the youth they surveyed reported reading "some kind of text" for pleasure outside of school at least a few times a week, though the "text" in question varied widely, and was not likely to include novels. The researchers also report no differences in the average frequency of pleasure reading based on race or language, though female students were more likely to report reading solely for pleasure. In a finding significant to this review, a bivariate correlational analysis of the survey data showed that students understood the construct of *reading for pleasure* as reading literature (novels, short stories, picture books). In other words, when the adolescents in this study considered *reading for pleasure*, they considered *reading* to be print-based fictional writing, as opposed to reading informational or digital text. This finding supports that of Millard's study, in which students, parents, and teachers, defined reading as reading printed books rather than reading other texts or in other contexts. These findings appear to extend the popular perception and understanding mentioned above; to many adolescents *real* reading

means printed book length material, and real readers choose to read printed books in their leisure time. Moje et al. point out that reports indicating that adolescents don't read might be influenced by these differing definitions of reading, either on the part of researchers or on the part of the adolescent participants.

Reading, the researchers found, was both constituted and situated within social networks. The reading activity of adolescents, both male and female, was highly influenced by peer and family networks. Many adolescents, at least in this study, did in fact read outside of school, but they did not necessarily read texts valued by adults. Additionally, the findings of this study suggest that it may be difficult for adolescents to value their own reading activities as *real* reading if their reading activity differs from the reading valued by the adults in their schools, families, and communities. Adolescents' understanding and value of *real* reading is, the researchers suggest, dependent upon the adolescents' critical understanding as they negotiate multiple discourses both inside and outside formal educational settings.

Moje et al. grounded this adolescent critical understanding firmly in the socially embedded literacy practices of adolescents. Put another way, the researchers found that adolescents' choice of reading material, as well as their motivation to read, was strongly influenced by family literacy practices and the reading habits and choices of their peers.

Family influence on adolescent reading habits and preferences. Knoester (2009), conducted a study that focused on family influences on adolescent reading habits and the relative invisibility of the social networks accessed by adolescents. Knoester conducted a qualitative study of 10 middle school students in 5th-7th grade, purposefully sampled from "Jefferson School," a small, urban, ethnically diverse, K-8 public school in

a large city in the eastern United States. Knoester, a former teacher at the school, recruited participants from former students because his familiarity with their reading habits and their former reading assignments allowed for a unique insight into changes in the participants' reading habits, interests, and social practices over time. Data collection consisted of 10 sets of interviews, each conducted in person or over the telephone. Knoester interviewed the student, a parent of the student, and the student's homeroom teacher about the student's literacy practices and interests. This approach allowed the researcher to compare student responses with those of adults who were familiar with the reading habits and interests of these students. Transcribed interviews were analyzed using the constant comparison method, and the researcher utilized grounded theory methodology to inductively code and analyze transcripts.

Knoester found that all 10 students read frequently (most read daily), and read a variety of texts, both print and digital. Students and parents both remarked that one factor that motivated the students to read was that students were permitted to choose their own books, rather than have books assigned to them as school reading. Though participants self-identified at various levels of reading proficiency, they all read at or above grade level.

Knoester concluded that though the students consistently engaged in independent reading in ways which highlighted the accompanying social interactions, these interactions were largely invisible to both students and their parents, but not to teachers. Students chose books or topics that had been recommended by peers, and chose reading material expressly for the purpose of furthering discussion with their friends. They read with parents, and read books recommended by parents, and in turn recommended books

to their parents, friends, and teachers. The teachers interviewed, however, very clearly saw and leveraged the social nature of "independent" reading. They relied on the "buzz" created by peers recommending and talking about a book, recognizing that if a book is well-liked by a friend or trusted source, a student is more likely to be motivated to read that book. Knoester's core finding, or central theory generated by data collection and analysis, was that "choosing to read, for these adolescents, was connected to desires to cultivate relationships" (p.7). This finding aligns with Gee's (1996) theory of primary and secondary Discourses, in which people form identities through associations with "various local, state, and national groups" outside their primary "home and peer-group(s)" (p. 137). Findings also included four ways in which these students strategically cultivated relationships with others:

- Discussing books

- Reading in shared areas of interest

- Reading with family members and friends

- Reading aloud to others

It is of interest that Knoester, as a researcher, was particularly well placed to examine the participants' social networks, especially in regard to family reading habits. The researcher's familiarity with the community of the participants, including the school culture, possibly allowed a more nuanced understanding of the social contexts in which reading took place. Teachers are uniquely situated in students' social networks, and are uniquely equipped to interpret student interests that can then be leveraged to increase student motivation and engagement with reading.

Summary. This section of the chapter has examined ways in which adolescent male students may tend to more highly value and more frequently engage in digital literacy practices. Further, the preceding section has demonstrated that the perception of adolescents (both boys and girls) as passive receivers of media ignores the complexity, individuality and creativity with which children respond to media productions in socially embedded ways. Rather than excluding or narrowing definitions of reading and literacy (and thereby excluding an outsider perspective in the classroom), teachers who can perceive of the classroom as a space in which to include and value many types of literacies are capable of bridging the home/school divide and scaffolding literacy instruction in a way that engages and enhances students' academic literacy learning (Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhem, 2002).

A Reading Identity

In this section, I will review studies that examine the socially embedded reading practices and reading identities formed by adolescent readers. Adolescents do not form habits and perceptions in a vacuum. Literacy practices such as reading and writing are embedded in social practices that are in turn tied to constructs such as identity, self-efficacy, and self-image (Bandura, 1977; Gee, 1996; Graves, 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Adolescents are motivated to read by factors such as past reading experiences, beliefs about the outcome of the reading experience, and beliefs about how much value significant others (such as family members and peer groups) place on reading (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995). Among other characteristics, engaged adolescent readers connect their reading to a wider social community, and many adolescents' engagement with reading is tied directly to leisure time and friendships (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997).

In other words, adolescents engage in reading books because they perceive themselves to be participating in a social practice valued and supported by their home setting and social network.

Adolescents seem to be adept at making choices about reading material based on utility or pleasure, and their choices, particularly for boys, are often motivated by their social networks (Newkirk, 2002). Literacy is embedded in social practices, possibly more for adolescents than for adults (Knoester, 2009; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Adolescents, particularly males, choose reading over other activities for a variety of reasons, particularly because of peer and family influence (Mathers & Stern, 2012; Millard, 1996).

Adolescent males and reading identities. Hamston and Love's 2003 study foregrounded the complex patterns of agency displayed by adolescent male students as they actively resisted cultural and social expectations to read printed matter (*real reading*). The participants in this study each constructed a dynamic identity as a male reader by selectively accepting or resisting aspects of their family's enculturated literacy practices. Each family highly valued education and reading, and each boy was identified as academically capable, without reading or learning disabilities. The selection of capable readers who nevertheless underperform in school-assigned reading allowed the researchers to pluralize the notion of reluctant male reader, and to illuminate the dialogic processes by which the parents attempted to collaborate, coerce, or support the reading behaviors of their sons. This study built on and supports the work of researchers such as Millard (1997), who point out the importance of family culture in the identity formation of boys as *readers* or *not readers*.

Each of the boys in this study articulated a belief in the importance of reading, both for academic achievement and for career success. They, and their parents, conceptualized reading as reading printed matter, mostly novels and newspapers. The parents each expressed a strong desire for their sons to read a wide variety of print-based writing in order to be literate, informed adults. Reading digitally based writing such as email, websites, and texting, however, tended to be discounted as real reading by both parents and sons. This view conflicts directly with the adolescent male students' stated preferences for their leisure reading, which they saw as a form of useful information seeking. Put another way, the male students in this study stated a strong preference for leisure reading that was informational and directly useful to them (football scores, video game magazines), and they tended to access this information in multi-modal ways (newspapers, magazines, internet), though they also tended to dismiss these forms of reading as frivolous or *not real reading*. The researchers noted this conflict explicitly in their conclusions and implications, suggesting that limiting leisure reading to a single concept (print-based reading only) privileges a certain type of reading in a way that may present a problem for teachers who want to support resistant male students. Hamston and Love drew on the research of Millard (1997) and also Rogoff's (1995) framework of discourse analysis, and Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, in order to argue that curriculum designers who include a range of literacies for students, (including digital modes of reading) need to capitalize on adolescent male competencies and cultural capital in order to engage them in academically useful literacy practices.

Reading identities and social networking with peers. Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic (1999), argue that boys' literacies in media and digital technology are aligned and

calibrated by their participation in social networks, and boys use their reading skills not only to consume culture, but also to remake, remix, and resist societal narratives inherent in dominant social structures such as public education. In resisting, they subvert the school's "mission" of normalization, engaging society without "docile bodies" which have been remade to fit society's norms (Foucault, 1977). Adolescent boys construct and perform masculine identities by many means, including hyper masculine behaviors that reject or oppose social constructions of "feminine" (Butler, 1999; Pascoe, 2010). Instead of passively conforming to social expectations and constructions of "student" and gender, boys have agency in shaping their identities as well as their literacy practices along a variety of modes and within a complex web of social networks, both in and out of school settings (Newkirk, 2002; Pascoe, 2010).

     Social networks and reading practices. Hamston and Love (2003) examined the socially situated literacy practices of "academically capable" teenage boys identified by teachers and parents as "reluctant readers" (p.162). The authors begin their article with a reminder that literacy practices are highly contextualized and intersectional, and that examining research on literacy and boys should properly begin with "which boys" and "which reading practices" (p. 162). After administering a questionnaire on leisure reading habits to 75 families from "Hilltop College," a private school in a middle class community in Australia, the researchers chose three families for an intensive case study. The families chosen span the range of reading abilities, family literacy practices, and reading behaviors represented in the 75 questionnaires.

     The authors argue that masculine identity is not static, but "develop(s) dynamically through an individual's daily interaction with significant others" (p. 165).

These interactions are, in turn, contextualized by "broader social structures" in which family, school, and youth culture is embedded. Hamston and Love used Rogoff's (1995) framework of cultural activity to analyze the relationships between parents and children as they participate in multiple literacy transactions. In addition, the authors utilize a socio-cultural lens, drawing specifically on the work of Bahktin, Bourdieu and Vygotsky in order to examine the ways in which language and discourse are mediated by the lived experiences of the parents and boys participating in this study.

Reading identity and social expectations. Bozak (2011) further examined this intersection of gender, societal expectations, and reading by interviewing adolescent male students in single-sex classrooms. The purpose of this study was to explore the socially embedded literacy practices of male students by exploring how they constructed reading identities in a single-sex setting. By examining the perceptions, literacy practices, and achievement scores of these students in a single-sex school, the researcher hoped to interrogate the reported achievement gap between male and female adolescent readers. Bozak focused on reading as a gendered activity, and on the ways male students might construct reading identities in single-sex classrooms. In this study, the principal of a Catholic, all-boys high school invited university researchers to conduct research aimed at understanding adolescent male students' literacy practices and beliefs about reading. Participants in this study were 330 9th-10th grade students, and 8 English teachers, all affiliated with an all-male high school in a Northeastern state in the U.S. Data collected consisted of student questionnaires, teacher questionnaires, and student achievement test scores. Student questionnaires were designed to explore student beliefs in their reading

ability and their teachers' perceptions of student reading ability. Teacher questionnaires were designed to gauge teacher perceptions of student reading ability.

Bozak found that the majority of participants in this study identified themselves as "good readers," though teachers' perceptions of student reading ability did not always match the student perception. The male students in this study reported a strong "reading identity," which contrasts the findings of previously mentioned mixed-gender studies that report more negative scores in motivation and achievement for boys, as they grow older (e.g. McKenna et al., 2012). Bozak noted that the more positive reading identity reports might be attributed to the single-sex classroom setting, though more research into single sex classrooms and reading achievement is needed. Because the construct of "reader identity" has been positively correlated with reading comprehension and reading achievement scores (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997), it is possible that teachers who explicitly acknowledge and validate reader identity may strengthen that identity, thereby encouraging students to engage with in school literacy. Put another way, Bozak noted that teachers who validate and encourage student literacies, in and out of school, create an inviting space for students, especially boys, to engage with, rather than resist, in school literacy practices. Future directions for study, according to Bozak, should include both an exploration of teacher practices that create in students an affirmation of reading identity or an aversion to school-related reading, as well as the opening of a dialogue around teachers' perceptions of barriers to change in the employment of literacy strategies.

Reading achievement scores, for the participants in this study, were significantly positively correlated with the reading motivation scores from the questionnaires. When

the standardized test scores for the content areas (English, math, and science) were correlated with the questionnaire factors, significant relationships emerged between reading scores and the following constructs: Recognition, Challenge, Involvement, and Reader Identity. A small but significant negative relationship was found between reading achievement and Compliance. The Reader Identity construct, the researchers noted, is an important finding for this study, as it was strongly positively correlated with numerous motivational constructs in the HSLPQ and teacher and student surveys. The authors suggested that while asking teachers to design curriculum with a focus on engaging students with literacy and changing student motivations might be overwhelming, asking teachers to help students identify themselves as readers is a much less complicated undertaking. Bozak's findings support those of other literacy research studies (e.g. McKenna et al., 2012; Schiefele,Schaffner, Moller &Wigfield, 2013) that point to increasingly negative motivation and achievement for adolescent male students as they grow older.

   Summary. The research examined in this section indicates that adolescent male students do value reading, though not always in the same way or to the same degree that reading is valued in school settings. Adolescent male students are motivated to read when the texts align with the needs, values, and beliefs of the individual. Social community, likewise, is vitally important to these students, and their literacy and reading habits are most influenced by parents, peers, and (to a lesser degree) schools. Reading, for many adolescent males, is inextricably intertwined with social networks and social capital. Adolescent males are less likely to identify themselves as readers because they associate reading only with printed matter. This self-perception persists even though

adolescent males may be highly literate and skilled within other contexts, such as digital reading, texting, or email. As adolescent students grow older, motivation to read declines and attitudes toward reading become more negative, though this change is less dramatic for girls and more marked for boys. Some of this may be attributed to adolescent males' increasing interest in literacies that are not traditionally valued in an academic setting, such as internet use, reading popular fiction, and television viewing, and in students' decreasing interest in academically valued reading. This shift in the needs, interests, and motivation of adolescent male readers, serves to widen the male students' perceived gap between pleasurable reading and required or *real* reading. These gaps are remarked upon often in the literature as a barrier to boys' reading achievement in school and as an obstacle to boys' literacy skills as these boys grow into adults (Bozack 2011; Brozo, 2006). Less attention has been given to the possible affordances that these differently literate (Millard, 1997) students may be accessing with their non-academic reading habits. Even fewer studies have focused on adolescent male students who chose to read novels for pleasure, instead of or alongside other literacy practices.

Avid Adolescent Male Readers

Avid readers love to read, they look forward to reading, and they read purposefully, but this purpose and motivation is intrinsic, rather than extrinsically motivated (Ivey, 2014; McKenna et al., 2012; Wilson & Kelly, 2010). These readers pursue reading outside, and sometimes in spite of, school-assigned reading. Wilson and Kelly (2007) note, however, that intrinsic motivation does not always translate to academic achievement for secondary students who are avid readers. Students reading for school are focused on gaining knowledge rather than personal pleasure (p. 101). Avid

readers, male or female, are not well represented in research, though female avid adolescent readers have a slightly higher profile in the research literature.

Common beliefs surrounding the avid reader. In 2007, Wilson and Kelly interviewed ten avid readers, from sixth through eleventh grade in order to investigate these students' motivation to read and their reading habits. Each of the students was identified as avid by a middle school reading specialist or a high school reading coach, using the definition of *ardent, enthusiastic, dedicated* readers. Each student completed Pitcher et al.'s (2007) Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile Survey (AMRP) in order to measure motivation constructs such as self-concept and value of reading. Interviews were conducted using the Pitcher et al.'s (2007) Adolescent Motivation to Read Conversational Interview (AMRCI). As the researchers began analyzing the data, they found that some commonly held beliefs regarding avid readers and academic achievement were not supported by the data in this study. Wilson and Kelly distilled these beliefs into four "myths of the avid reader," noting that they began "to question whether our image of an avid reader was really an accurate depiction" (p. 102).

Myth 1: Avid readers enjoy Language Arts. The participants in this study all enjoyed reading for their own purposes but resisted reading in Language Arts classes. These students found school reading "not engaging or motivating" and "unconnected" to their interests (p. 103). Though their own reading was seen as "multifaceted" and multipurposed, these students experienced a disconnect when considering the importance of school literacies, such as "what the anatomy of a sentence is" (p. 103).

Myth 2: Avid readers are highly successful in school. The school which these students attended defined academic success as "a higher than average score on the state

mandated assessment" (p. 104). Students falling below the average score were enrolled in an extra reading course. The researchers included student grades in Language Arts class to this definition of school success. They found that, within these parameters, the study participants were not consistently successful despite their motivation to read outside of school. In fact, one of the middle school students and all of the high school students were enrolled in both the regular Language Arts class as well as the extra reading course, despite their motivation to read. The authors found that motivation to read did not always translate into school success. The avid readers in this study seemed to follow the well-documented arc described by other researchers, a decrease of interest in school-related reading as students move through secondary school.

Myth 3: Avid readers read a variety of texts. Wilson and Kelly found that the students, rather than reading widely, chose books based on "a connection they developed with the author, plot, or study of text" and they valued "speed over reflection" (p. 105). These avid readers like their average reader counterparts, preferred familiarity over novelty. This preference is one of the reasons adolescent readers, avid or average, are drawn to series of books, and has been well documented in reading research (Gallagher, 2009; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Moje, 1996).

Myth 4: Avid readers seek to converse over books they have read. The majority of students in this study reported that although they considered reading to be easy for them, and they valued reading, they were self-conscious and sensitive about their reading; fewer than half the students reported sharing books with friends or talking about books with friends. Wilson and Kelly give no context for this study, they provide no demographics, other than the range of grades and number of participants, and no

information about the setting in which this study took place. It is difficult, in light of this, to put their findings, particularly this one, into context. While avid secondary readers may indeed be reluctant to identify as avid readers at school, it is difficult to believe, given the preponderance of research on teens and connectivity since 2010, that average and avid readers do not discuss books using social media platforms. It is entirely possible that these students are engaging in what Newkirk (2002) calls "acts of resistance" in which students, especially boys, resist engagement with the school valued identity of "reader" in order maintain an outsider stance that affords them the room to critically engage with school culture on their own terms.

The researchers' implications for teachers urge further exploration of teaching strategies that seek to bridge the gap between home and school literacies. Specifically, Wilson and Kelly call for teachers to take initiative in creating instructional strategies that make learning personally relevant to students, building on students' personal connections to their outside of school reading in order to scaffold student interest in canon literature. These suggestions are similar to those made in many other studies of adolescent readers, whether they are average, avid, gifted, or struggling readers.

Avid readers and complex reading identities. Howard (2013) takes an even more nuanced approach to the study of avid adolescent readers, and in doing so, addresses some questions raised by Wilson and Kelly. Howard collected data from a series of nine regionally representative focus groups of 12 to 15-year-old secondary students in the Halifax regional school system in Halifax, Canada. A total of 68 students volunteered to participate in the focus groups, which were held in schools throughout the district. Seventy percent of the participants were female, and thirty percent were male.

After collecting and transcribing data, Howard used the inductive grounded theory process to code and analyze the data. The data analysis yielded a look at different types of adolescent readers in a more detailed and fine-grained way than Wilson and Kelly's study.

This study places readers into three main categories, occasional, avid, and reluctant. The author then develops a taxonomy of teen readers, though Howard focuses on the Avid Reader category, which is divided into three types. The avid reader types are described as Avid Social Communal, Avid Detached Communal and Avid Solitary. The designation Avid Solitary is further divided into Avid Voluntary Solitary and Avid Involuntary Solitary. As may be evident from the designations, these readers vary by their social literary practices. For example, Avid Social Communal readers view their pleasure reading as inextricably bound to friendship groups. They share and recommend books freely; reading and rituals of friendship reinforce each other through active, daily social practice. This group of participants was overwhelmingly (91%) female, and their book choices encompassed a "fairly narrow" range of books, mostly popular series, magazines, and book marketed toward teen girls.

The Avid Detached Communal Readers also value sharing books socially, though they tend to read above the grade level of their peers, preferring books marketed toward adults rather than teens. These readers are reluctant to share books with real life friends and classmates and instead seek out a communal experience on social media or in book clubs in libraries or other neutral spaces. They resist book recommendations from friends and family and instead seek out books on their own that fall outside the "popular" teen

book titles. This group was also overwhelmingly female (87%), and they tend to view themselves as trendsetters or even gatekeepers to new reading experiences.

The Avid Solitary Readers, Howard explains, are solitary either by choice or involuntarily. The Avid Solitary Readers group was 40% male. The readers in the Voluntary Solitary group are not influenced by peer recommendations, and they do not seek out communal experiences in conjunction with reading. Some of these readers have strong book selection criteria and strategies, while others struggle to find enjoyable books and can become discouraged.

The Involuntary Solitary Readers have little to no social support for their reading and literacy practices. Only two teens, both female, in this study fell into this category. Both lived in economically disadvantaged rural areas, and neither teen had friends who read for pleasure or supported this activity. These readers did not seek out a reading community, either face-to-face or online, and they had somewhat weak book selection skills, often choosing books at random.

Howard suggested that teachers and librarians take the time to identify the type of reader with which they are working. Once that information is clear, instructional strategies can be tailored to suit the needs of readers in these categories, for example: highly social readers benefit from a classroom that offers socializing opportunities; detached readers might respond more positively to programs that facilitate online networking outside their group of real life friends; the voluntary solitary readers might benefit from a program which offers electronic lists of books and the ability to share book reviews online; and the involuntary solitary readers would likely benefit from a program

the offers socializing and reading as well as book selection guidance from peers, librarians, or teachers.

Summary. The studies detailed in this section suggest that avid readers, like any other adolescent readers, are not a monolithic group. Their motivation and engagement with leisure reading as well as with school reading, is influenced by their beliefs, values, self-concept, and purpose for reading. These reasons for reading are complicated by issues of gender, SES, language, culture, and race. All adolescents seem to experience a decline in reading interest as they move through secondary school, but research suggests boys have a greater risk of disengagement with academic literacies, and a gender gap that favors girls in reading achievement has persisted for decades. Adolescent male students can be avid readers, though they may view reading differently than their teachers and female classmates.

Even adolescent male students who read avidly in their leisure time may not connect these reading skills to academic reading such as the classics taught in English classrooms (Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Teachers who seek to expand students' literacy learning, particularly that of male students, would do well to become familiar with the already established literacy practices of their students, even the ones they find difficult to understand or off-putting, in order to build connections between their students' lives outside the classroom walls and inside the confines of the classroom (Newkirk, 2002). Rather than excluding genres and types of media, such as gaming or graphic novels, teachers should work to create an inclusive classroom that honors the interests of all their students.

What can Avid Adolescent Male Readers Teach Us About Reading?

Avid readers are *already reading*. They have reading experience, a reading history, they read for a purpose, and they have preferences. Students who like to read may have wider vocabularies, may achieve at higher levels in school, and may be primed for greater success as they move into their adult lives (Iyengar, 2007; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013; Rideout, Foeher, Roberts & Brodie, 2010). Like reluctant or struggling male readers, avid male readers may not see the value in school-sanctioned reading (McKenna et al., 2012). Unlike reluctant or struggling readers, avid male readers have reading experience and understanding that can be leveraged by teachers to scaffold literacy learning in the classroom. One place to begin would be acknowledgement that student-selected leisure reading is "real" reading and is valued in school settings.

Avid adolescent male readers and identity. Pervasive cultural myths surround adolescent male readers, and current research suggests general trends and general dispositions, but often fails to capture the nuanced nature of high achieving adolescent readers in general and boys in particular. This is particularly true in examining the intersection of gender and literacy. Both research and common knowledge show a reading-related gender gap which favors female students, and few researchers have looked into the complex reasons adolescent males engage with, succeed, or even excel at school related reading. Recent research into the perceptions and experiences of adolescent male students who identify as avid readers is scanty. Adolescent male readers, in research as well as in popular perception, are most often framed in a deficit light. Researchers such as Smith and Wilhelm (2002) and Newkirk (2002), offer a more

nuanced view of these readers, though their studies focus, still, on boys as resistant readers in school contexts.

Male adolescents who read avidly represent a gap in the current research literature on reading. Much research focuses on adolescent males, masculinity and youth culture, adolescent male resistance to reading, and male students' preferences for alternative, interactive literacy practices, but very little of this research focuses on the adolescent male students who love books, especially those who excel in English Language Arts classrooms. This gap leaves many unanswered questions; if these students excel in school-approved literacies, is that enough? Does excelling in reading mean that these students are having all their needs met by the educational system? If avid adolescent male readers excel at reading in school, are they then praised for something that is just an expectation for girls in school? Because few studies address this segment of the student population, my intended research study will address this gap using qualitative methods to examine the perceptions and experiences of adolescent avid male readers in high school English Language Arts classrooms. The methods and methodology for the proposed study are detailed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This study was designed to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of a group of 8-10 adolescent male readers between the ages of 14-17, in order to better understand the role of their previous reading experiences on their development as avid readers and the role of social relationships on their reading habits and preferences. Rosenblatt's (1978) Transactional Theory of Literary Work forms the theoretical framework of this study. Rosenblatt (1978) argued that as readers engage with texts, they make meaning in highly individual ways. Each reader brings an individual schema to these literary transactions; the individual uses prior knowledge and experiences as a lens through which to understand the content of the text. Even when reading the same text, readers respond to the text in individual ways, based on their individual schema.

A review of the literature related to adolescent male reading behaviors, and adolescent male resistance to academically-valued reading revealed a gap in the literature concerning adolescent male students (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Watson, Kehler, & Martino, 2010). Literacy research that positions adolescent male students as resistant, struggling readers does not represent every male students' experience as a reader. Some adolescent male students read with fluency, comprehension and enjoyment, although they may read in ways that are not valued by teachers or parents (Brozo, 2006; Moje et al., 2008). These students, who read avidly and proficiently, contradict the deficit view of adolescent males as disengaged, uninterested readers (Lenters, 2006; Wilson & Kelly, 2007). Much literacy research focuses on ways in which adolescent male readers struggle with academic literacies and disengage from school reading (Bozak, 2011;

Reeves, 2004). Very little research sets aside the deficit view of adolescent male readers in order to explore the experience of avid adolescent male readers (Knoester, 2009; Newkirk, 2002). The intent of this study was to add to the literature that explores the reading behaviors of adolescent male readers, specifically the reading behaviors of adolescent male students who enjoy reading. This study extends the work of researchers discussed in the literature review by focusing on the experiences and perceptions of avid adolescent male readers.

Research Questions

In response to the gap found in the literature review, this study was designed to address the overarching research question of what we can learn about reading from avid adolescent male readers by asking:

1. What roles have previous reading experiences played in the development of avid adolescent male readers?

2. How are the reading habits and preferences of avid adolescent male readers socially constructed?

My goal for this study was to provide a rich, thick description of the lived experiences and perceptions of avid adolescent male readers. Through a series of three semi-structured interviews, the participants and I explored their perceptions of their previous reading experiences and their social relationships in relation to their development as avid adolescent male readers. By gaining a better understanding of the participants' perceptions and lived experiences, researchers and teachers may achieve insight as to how adolescent male students develop into avid readers, and how to better support less avid readers to remain engaged with reading.

Participants

Participants for this study were six adolescent males, aged 13-17. The participants were enrolled at three high schools in Virginia. Two of these schools were public schools, one was a private K-12 school. One school was located in a small city, one in a large town, and one in a rural county. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that qualitative research requires a participant sample that is based on "maximiz[ing] information" rather than "facilitat[ing] generalization" (p. 203). With this in mind, I chose six participants across the selected schools to offer a variety of perspectives and experiences for this study. In order to obtain a participant sample that is designed with "informational, rather than statistical considerations" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 203), I selected students who fit the description of avid adolescent male reader, based on their self-identifying responses to a recruitment survey. Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

a) Male student between the ages of 14 and 17.

b) Self-identified as an avid reader.

c) Willingness to participate in a series of interviews about their current and past reading habits and preferences, and their current and past social relationships.

d) Signed parental consent was able to be obtained either in person, or through email contact.

As compensation, I offered the participants a $10 gift card of their choice at each interview.

Students. As described in the recruitment process, all male students who identified as readers were invited to participate in this research study. However, across the six participants, all were White, lived with two parents, and described their living environments in ways consistent with perceptions of middle-class homes. While not an intentional aspect of this study, this perceived *privilege* and the participants' demographics certainly provide context for the research design as well as the findings described later. I have constructed profiles of each participant, which further contextualizes their experiences in the discussion of findings in Chapter 4 (see Table 1; all names are pseudonyms). These participants are not faceless, fungible, hypothetical students; rather, they are living, breathing, complex, contradictory young men who grapple with the liminal, formative challenges of adolescence in a swiftly flattening landscape of endless information and unlimited access to entertainment. I have drawn their profiles from interviews with the participants, my field notes, and analytic memos. Their experiences are evidence of the complexities, obstacles, and affordances faced by high school boys who love to read, and who achieve at high levels in their English classrooms, in a variety of educational spaces, both formal and informal.

Table 1.

Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Grade	School	Locale
Alex	17	10	Public	Rural
Dylan	17	12	Private	Small Town
Spencer	16	11	Public	Rural
Jeff	17	11	Public	Rural

Participant	Age	Grade	School	Locale
David	15	10	Private	Small Town
Chris	13	9	Public	City

Alex. Alex describes himself as "a good student, I guess" and he carries a course load of dual enrollment English and math courses as well as advanced science courses. He juggles a very busy schedule that includes helping with siblings and the family farm, working an afterschool job, attending church activities, and socializing with a large and varied group of friends. Even with his limited free time, Alex pursues reading as often as he can and he often mentions that he reads more during the summer or on school breaks than he is able to during school terms. He actively seeks out information on current events and prides himself on being politically active and aware. Despite his love of reading and his history as a precocious reader, he refers to almost all school assigned reading as "dull" and can recall only a few school assigned books that he enjoyed reading.

Dylan. Dylan describes himself as "a very good student" and "a reader." His career goal is to "be a writer" in some form, either as an English teacher in a higher education setting or as a journalist. Dylan has an extensive vocabulary and an active, curious mind. He is an avid fan of a wide variety of bands and music genres, and he speaks about them thoughtfully and with an extensive understanding of music history. He reads widely and with attention to the social and historical context of books and authors that he enjoys. Reading, for Dylan, is both enjoyment and a way to broaden his horizons and expand his knowledge of the world. He is politically aware and cognizant

of his developing obligations as an active citizen. His ability as a writer informs his reading choices, and he approaches books and other reading from the perspective of a writer. Dylan enjoys engaging in political discussion with friends and family, and in being the "different" perspective in a school community he defines as politically conservative. He "read(s) a lot about current events and things in the past and stuff like that, so…this year especially, I've had a lot of people come to me and… ask me about politics or something that's in the news and I really enjoy talking about it." Although he cites a few school assigned books as "boring," he generally enjoys reading for school as much as his choice reading, and he enjoys analyzing all the reading he does.

Spencer. Spencer is a soft-spoken, serious adolescent. He thinks before he speaks and considers his words carefully before answering. His overwhelming passion is music, and he is an accomplished musician. He describes himself as "an A/B student" who is a "regular teenager" with a large number of friends and a very busy social life. Although Spencer describes himself as interested in politics, subjects other than music run a distant second for his attention. His preferred reading material is music-related, and varies from sheet music to biographies of musicians, to manuals on building musical instruments as well as music history. He describes his school experience in generally negative terms, up until his present English class—which he enjoys—noting that he resents classes that consist of "sitting in a class with papers and papers and papers, trying to write."

Jeff. Jeff is a voracious reader with the widest variety of interests amongst the participants. Jeff describes himself as a "good student" who "pays attention in class" and gets good grades. He is involved in a wide variety of extracurricular activities. Despite

his very busy schedule, Jeff prioritizes reading as both entertainment and as a way to broaden his knowledge about the world. He is interested in current events, but he does not consider himself to be actively involved in any political scene. Jeff describes school as "boring" and sometimes "really dull," but he does, in fact, find much school assigned reading interesting. Jeff's leisure reading tastes range from 17th century French satire to parliamentary procedure. He prefers reading plays, and feels most connected to texts that are plays.

David. David is in advanced classes, and is enrolled in junior or senior level English, math, and science courses, even though he is not himself a junior or senior. David describes himself as "a good student" and he manages a very full schedule. David speaks quickly and concisely, preferring to be prompted for more information, rather than offering his thoughts immediately. He expresses himself in as few words as possible, and is often equivocal when asked to express an opinion. David describes school as "boring" and "bland," and school reading as "bland." He struggles to connect to school assigned texts and doesn't think of "old books" as having usefulness in his daily life or relevance to his experiences. Although he enjoys spending time with friends and in group activities, he identifies first and foremost as a serious student and he is focused on achieving his career goals. His pleasure reading is primarily information based, and centers on innovations in technology and biological applications of those innovations. Despite his apparent ease with these complex, adult level texts, he feels school assigned reading, especially textbooks, is "dull" and "overly complex."

Chris. Chris describes himself as "a good student" and he enjoys school but does not always enjoy school assigned reading. Chris is highly aware of current events and

political issues "as they relate" to his areas of personal interest, and he considers himself a student activist within his school community. In our conversations, he shares information easily, openly, and with an impressively mature perspective. He answers questions quickly and unreservedly, and with candor. Chris maintains many extracurricular activities, along with a very active social life with a large and varied group of friends. He describes himself as complex, and resists any requests for self-description that he feels reduce him to a singular characteristic. He reads voraciously and widely, with a preference for "big, thick" books and fantasy series. Chris prefers books that he sees as having a "message" or a "deeper meaning," and he sees school assigned reading as having more "worth" or "deeper meaning" than the leisure reading he chooses.

Role of the Researcher. Mishler (1986) asserted that one of the most effective ways that people make sense of their experiences is through the telling of their stories. I wanted, then, to facilitate a level of conversational comfort that would encourage these adolescents to share their stories with me. At each interview, I learned more about my participants as we discussed their experiences and stories, and the data generated then informed questions and probes for the following interviews.

As we progressed through the interviews, I relied on my experience as a secondary teacher to prompt conversation and encourage the participants to consider questions about their experiences as students and as readers that perhaps they had not previously pondered. During this process, I wrote notes and memos about the dialogue that emerged during our interviews, considering my role carefully. I shared my own experiences and stories with each of the participants, and they responded with narratives of their experiences as students and as sons. My experiences as a parent of avid readers,

and as an avid reader myself offered me an avenue of understanding even while it increased the difficulty of interrogating my own assumptions as participants discussed their perceptions. Together we created new knowledge and new perspectives on reading, the experience of being an avid reader, gender roles in school, and the ways teachers and students both support and exasperate each other.

Data Generation

As researcher and participant engage in the interview process, they construct knowledge within the social context of their dialogue (Mishler, 1986). Baker (2004) suggests that the interview can be understood as a process that generates data rather than a means of collecting data. Rather than collecting already constructed information, my participants and I generated new data as we constructed meaning together in semi-structured interviews. With this in mind, I will use the term data generation rather than data collection.

Procedure

    Recruitment surveys. After this study was reviewed and approved by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board as appropriate for human subject research with a vulnerable population, I recruited participants from one rural high school, one high school located in a small town, and one in a small city. Two of these schools were public, and one private, and the total enrollments for these schools ranged from 265 to 800 students. During August and September of 2015, I contacted the teachers and principals at these schools, obtained research approvals from district superintendents and principals, then distributed recruitment surveys to 7 English Language Arts teachers. The teachers distributed the surveys in their classes, allowing time for the students to

complete the surveys, then collected surveys from students who were interested in participating in this study. Once this step was complete, I collected the completed surveys. Altogether, I distributed 500 surveys in the three high schools. I was able to collect 46 completed surveys.

I read each survey carefully, and noted which potential participants fit the criteria outlined above. After selecting a pool of 35 potential participants, I began contacting the parents or guardians of each student. In accordance with IRB guidelines, I contacted each parent or guardian a maximum of two times, either by phone or email. Of the 35 potential participants, 6 students fit the research criteria, were willing to participate in the study, and had parents or guardians who completed and returned signed consent forms to me.

Interviews. Participant interviews began in November of 2015 and ended in December 2015. In keeping with Lincoln & Guba's (1986) naturalistic inquiry, I structured three interviews along the lines of their three phases of data collection: orientation, overview, and conclusion. In mid-November, I began to meet with participants. I met each participant three times, for a semi-structured interview lasting between 35 and 50 minutes. The interview schedule was dependent on the schedule of each participant and their families. Most interviews were conducted a week to two weeks apart (see Table 2). Engaging participants in a series of three interviews contextualized their experiences, and provided a space for inquiry into the narrative of their experiences and perceptions (Mishler, 1986). A series of interviews also provided greater triangulation of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Questions for interviews two and three were informed by participant responses to the questions discussed in the earlier

interviews. This allowed me to follow the lead of my participants, rather than reproducing an academic-like setting in which they, the students, were expected to provide answers to questions asked by an authority figure.

Table 2.

Participant interview schedule.

Participant	Interview 1	Interview2	Interview3
Dylan	11/13/15	12/3/15	12/10/15
Spencer	12/5/15	12/16/15	12/22/15
Chris	11/10/15	12/4/15	12/11/15
Jeff	12/2/15	12/8/15	12/15/15
Alex	12/7/15	12/14/15	12/22/15
David	11/15/15	12/6/15	12/13/15

I utilized Lincoln and Guba's (1985) three phases of naturalistic inquiry in order to structure the three interviews. Each of the interviews was focused on a specific goal, and a plan for each interview is detailed in the interview guides included in the following tables. Interview questions were designed to map onto one of the two research questions guiding this study. I conducted interviews in public libraries, coffee shops, and a school conference room.

Interview one. The first interview served as an orientation and overview of the participant's reading habits, their motivation to read, and what books interest them most (see Table 3). This interview established an informational baseline and allowed me to establish a dialogue with each participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Students are motivated to read material which is of interest or is useful to them, and often resist

reading that they perceive to be without relevance to their interests (Alvermann, Gillis, &

Phelps, 2012). I used open-ended questions (Kvale, 1996; Mishler, 1986) to elicit

narratives from the participants.

Table 3.

Interview 1 questions and justifications.

Question	Justification	RQ
Tell me where you would look for current events if you wanted to know something.	Reading experiences. (Alvermann, Gillis & Phelps, 2012; Moje et al., 2008)	RQ1
How would your teacher, family, friends, describe you?	Interests, connection (Alvermann & Hutchens, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985)	RQ2
How would you describe yourself?	Identity (Newkirk, 2002)	RQ1
Tell me about your favorite games and/or movies.	Reading modes/genres (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002) connection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)	RQ1
Tell me about what you read. (What else does reading mean to you?)	Social networks (Newkirk, 2002)	RQ2
Can you describe a time you felt really connected to a book?	Reading identity, conceptualizing reading (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Moje et al., 2008)	RQ1
Probes: • Tell me more about that • Can you give me some examples? • What are some of your reasons for liking it?	Naturalistic Inquiry, Dialogic Interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1986: Mishler, 1986	RQ1&RQ2

Interview two. Interview two took place one to three weeks after interview one (as dictated by participants' family schedules), and was a focused exploration of the participant's reading habits, reading choices, and social relationships related to reading, in and out of school settings. This interview was designed to help me to understand how these avid readers constructed their identities as readers, how they perceived their reading habits and preferences, and how their understanding of themselves as readers intersected with the expectations of teachers, friends, and parents. I used open-ended questions to create opportunities for dialogue with participants and to create space for participants to offer their narrative accounts of their experiences as avid readers (see Table 4).

Table 4.

Interview 2 questions and justifications.

Question	Justification	RQ
Can you tell me about what your friends like to read?	Social networks (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002)	RQ2
Tell me about a time you recommended something to read to someone else.	Social networks (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002)	RQ2
How would you describe the things to read in your house?	Family as social network (Millard, 1996; Knoester, 2003)	RQ2
What influences your decisions about books you choose to read?	Social networks (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002	RQ2
What should I have asked you that I didn't think to ask?	Connection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)	RQ2
Probes: • Tell me more about that • Can you give me some	Naturalistic Inquiry, Dialogic Interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1986: Mishler, 1986	RQ1, RQ2

Question	Justification	RQ
examples? • What are some of your reasons for liking it?		

Interview three. Interview three took place one to two weeks after the second

interview. In this interview, I followed up on any issues remaining from the first two

interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and explored the participant perceptions of their

compulsory and pleasure reading. Questions in interview three were structured to follow

the narrative threads remaining from interviews one and two. During this interview, I

condensed, interpreted, and "sent back" the meaning that the participant and I had

constructed together during our first two interviews (Kvale, 1996, p. 189). I used open-

ended questions designed to elicit more clarification from participants (see Table 5).

Table 5.

Interview 3 questions and justifications.

Question	Justification	RQ
How would you describe the reading you do for school?	Conceptualizing reading, reading identity (Millard, 1997; Newkirk, 2002)	RQ1
Tell me about a time you really liked a school reading assignment.	Reading identity, engagement & motivation (Newkirk, 2002; McKenna et al., 2012)	RQ2
Tell me about a time an English teacher was really effective.	Motivation & engagement, reading identity (McKenna et al., 2012; Newkirk, 2002)	RQ2
Can you describe what kinds of reading you would assign if you were a teacher? • Why would you choose that?	Motivation & engagement, reading identity (McKenna et al., 2012; Newkirk, 2002)	RQ2
What kinds of things have you been thinking about since our last talk?	Connection and closure (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)	RQ2

Question	Justification	RQ
• Tell me more about that • Can you give me some examples?		
What should I have asked you that I didn't think to ask? • Tell me more about that • Can you give me some examples?	Connection and closure (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)	RQ1

Semi-structured interviews were a fitting choice for this study because I was most interested in exploring the ways in which adolescent male students experience reading as avid readers. Conducting a series of three semi-structured interviews provided a context for my participants and me to dialogue with one another and engage in collaborative meaning making over a longer period of time, which adds to the credibility and trustworthiness of this study.

Field notes. Before and after each interview, I wrote extensive field notes describing the setting, the participant, and our dialogue during the interview. These field notes helped me to formulate new questions, keep track of insights and make connections to previous participant statements, further facilitating the emergent nature of qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Many of my field notes contained the seeds of analytic memos, and dialogic memos. These field notes further facilitated ongoing analysis of transcripts and recordings. The main reason for field notes as a source of qualitative data was to provide rich, thick details for data analysis. These notes, along with interview transcriptions, also provide a written record of the study. Field notes were kept in two forms, digital files on a computer hard drive, and handwritten notes in a research journal.

Analysis. Creswell (2014) described inductive data analysis as a spiral in which coding is used to continually refine the researcher's understanding of the data in order for the researcher to generate empirical assertions grounded in the data. To analyze the qualitative data from participant interviews, I drew heavily from Transactional Analysis, which blends elements of thematic analysis and narrative analysis in order to explore the "transactional nature of language" used by the researcher and participants as we constructed meaning together and generated data (Stewart, 2011).

Qualitative analysis of interviews. The largest data source for this study was the interview transcriptions, which were analyzed using thematic analysis methodology. The interviews were recorded, and analysis began with *interview mapping*, which took place as soon as possible after each interview. Mapping the interviews consisted of listening to the recorded interview multiple times, and noting the time stamps for the moments in our dialogue in which participants addressed topics that related to my research questions. Mapping each interview gave shape to each story told by participants, and acted as a springboard for the dialogic memos I wrote as a part of this qualitative data analysis. Interviews were then transcribed verbatim as soon as possible after each interview map was complete. Interview mapping supplemented transcription. Because of the semi-structured nature of these interviews, I introduced the topics via the questions in the interview guide. During the mapping sessions, I began, however, to identify emerging themes and to consider how the interview situation and my interaction with participants might be influencing the data.

Open coding. After mapping interview mapping, I sent interview recordings to be professionally transcribed. As I waited to receive the transcriptions, I listened to each

interview recording many more times in order to begin the process of open coding. The exploratory nature of the study lent itself to open, inductive codes rather than an a priori coding scheme. As codes emerged, themes began to emerge across interviews and participants. As I received written transcriptions, I imported the files into MaxQDA®, a qualitative data coding software program. Coding software offered me the ability to visualize and organize data in multiple ways, as well as validating emergent codes and themes across participant interviews, both within individual sets of interviews for each participant and across the entire corpus of the data.

Thematic tables. After coding the interview transcripts and developing themes across the entirety of the transcripts, I built thematic tables. These tables allowed me to view, organize, and further refine themes across the range of participant responses (see Appendix A). Organizing participant responses in this way not only facilitated identifying themes, but also created a way for me to sort the more robust themes from weaker themes that were unsupported or weakly supported by participant utterances. In viewing data across thematic tables, more codes emerged as I viewed the data across all participant responses rather than as points of isolated data (see Appendix B). Development of codes was inductive and iterative and continued simultaneously with data generation and interviewing.

Next, I deeply explored the thematic tables and transcriptions in order to focus on the ways in which each participant's experience as an avid reader had been shaped by transactions with school, home, and friends. I attended to the transactions that in the interview in order to understand how my participants structured their stories as we discussed their experiences as avid male readers (Stewart, 2011). In doing so, I viewed

this research, particularly the interview transcriptions, as transactional spaces. The semi-structured nature of these interviews allowed me to follow the lead of the participants and to use open-ended questions and probes to encourage genuine dialogue during our conversations. Throughout this iterative analysis, I refined codes as themes continued to emerge and coding became more reflective of the meaning constructed during the interview process (see Appendix C). In addition, I interrogated my experience as a teacher in order to examine how that experience might have influenced my understanding of my participants' narratives, as well as how it influenced participant responses. In order to more fully interrogate my positionality as a researcher, I wrote dialogic memos during this phase of data analysis.

Dialogic memos. Qualitative research acknowledges the researcher as an instrument, integral to the study design. In this role, the researcher must be transparent about how the researcher's life experience influences the study design and data analysis (Kvale, 1996). In order to achieve this transparency, I needed to clarify the subjectivities brought to this study as a former English teacher and as a parent of two sons who are avid readers. In order to create an honest and open narrative, I used dialogic memos to create opportunities for self-reflection and reflexivity. Transactional Analysis builds on the idea of the conceptual memo in order to create the dialogic memo as a space in which the researcher can not only record concepts as they stand out during data generation and analysis, but also identify and explore transactions present in the interviews and make meaning from these transactions (Stewart, 2011). Maxwell (2005) noted that memos not only document the researcher's analytic thinking during data analysis, but also produce deeper analytical thinking. Dialogic memos differ from analytic memos in offering the

researcher space for not only a deeply reflexive examination of the processes of generating and analyzing data, but also space to examine the ways in which dialogue shapes the generation of data during the interview process. In these memos, I constructed new dialogues with myself and with participant responses in order to understand and explicitly examine how the participants and I mutually reshaped our understanding of our experiences through our dialogue. In these memos, I found a space to record moments of transaction, make meaning of those moments, and to reflect on the methods used for data generation and data analysis (Stewart, 2011). My experience as a parent and as a secondary English Language Arts teacher offered me "a pathway deeper into understanding" of the dimensions of avid male reader experiences and development (Patton, 2002, p. 546). These experiences conferred a depth of understanding about the lived experiences of the participants in this study. Use of dialogic memos to clarify and consider my own subjectivities added accuracy and a new depth of understanding to my data analysis (see Appendix D).

Analytic memos and reflective journaling. As I coded and created tables, I turned to analytic memos (Charmaz, 2012) and reflective journaling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as a space in which to examine emerging codes, test emerging themes, and create a record of my ongoing analysis of my participant responses. This reflective, reflexive writing sometimes began in my field notes, then diverged as I considered how my subjectivities, and the prior experiences of the participants both afforded and constrained the interview events we shared.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the methods used to address my research questions regarding what we can learn about reading from avid adolescent male readers. I have described the site, the participants, and methods for data collection and analysis. The next chapters will present the findings and discussions from this research study.

Chapter 4

Findings

In Chapter 1, I discussed my personal history and understanding of avid adolescent male readers. I have observed my avid adolescent male students with pleasure, a little pride, and some consternation. What, I wondered, were the circumstances that helped to forge a connection with reading that is strong enough to survive the distractions, challenges, and obstacles of secondary school? In Chapter 2, I reviewed literacy and reading research that provided a partial answer; maintaining motivation to read is often subject to access to plentiful and varied reading material, the reader's freedom to choose material that is of personal interest, and unrestricted time to read. The participants in this study made it clear that these variables are essential to their continuing motivation to read and their engagement with complex texts, both school-assigned and pleasure reading. In Chapter 3, I outlined the process of the research study and the generation of data associated with the study. In this chapter, I will describe the findings of data analysis. First, I will address findings associated with the first research question: What is the role of previous reading experiences on the development of avid adolescent male readers? Next, I will address findings which emerged in relationship to the second research question: How are the reading habits and preferences of avid adolescent male readers socially constructed?

As I talked with each of the participants, I asked them to describe their reading experiences, for school assigned reading as well as for their pleasure reading. These questions and probes were designed to help me understand their individual perceptions of school and pleasure reading. I was curious about their willingness to tackle extremely

complex texts that they chose as pleasure reading, in an organized and academic way, even as they described far less challenging school assigned works as intimidating, or boring, or too complicated. Literacy research cited in Chapter 2 indicated motivation and engagement as the sole agents for this scenario (McKenna et al., 2012). I began to wonder if something else might also account for this gap in perception. As I participated in dialogue with the participants, listened carefully, read and re-read my field notes and memos, I began to understand that the participants were describing their experiences with Rosenblatt's spectrum of efferent (reading to gain information) and aesthetic (reading for pleasure) reading transactions in ways that illuminated for me the complexities and contradictions inherent in the perceptions of these participants.

In this chapter, I will utilize the descriptions of the participants' lived experiences in order to discuss the roles that previous reading experiences have played in their development as avid readers and the ways in which their reading habits and preferences are socially constructed. I have used Rosenblatt's (1978, 1995) Transactional Theory of Literary Work as a lens through which to explore the participants' descriptions of their experiences with and around reading, and in this chapter I discuss which emergent themes were captured by Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory and the themes which Transactional Theory failed to capture.

By exploring the experiences of these participants, I illuminate the development of their identities as avid readers. The ways in which adolescent male readers are constructed in literacy research, discussed in Chapter 2, illustrates the need to explore not only the complexities of how adolescent male readers construct and maintain identities as avid readers but also the need to understand how social supports can be employed by

families and teachers to aid adolescents who may resist reading both in and out of school settings.

In this chapter, I use the accounts provided by six adolescent male high school students who identify as avid readers in order to describe how they conform to, resist, and understand the expectations surrounding their experience as male students who love to read. The following themes emerged during data analysis: (a) family culture, (b) reader identity, and (c) transacting with texts. These themes lent understanding to my conception of the development of avid adolescent male readers and allowed me to organize the experiences of my participants. As the themes emerged, I explored each one through Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Literary Work (1978, 1995) in order to illuminate themes within that theoretical framework. Like the narratives of the participants, these themes were complexly intertwined, and highly individuated. This complexity and individuality resonated across the themes as I analyzed data, and made it possible for me to understand more fully the difficulties and contradictions inherent in the development of the avid adolescent male readers in this study.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to better understand the lived experiences of avid adolescent male readers. In this chapter, findings are presented in alignment with the research questions. Themes relevant to research question one are presented first, followed by the themes relevant to research question two. I discuss the themes for each research question in the context of the theoretical framework and in each section, foreground the voices of the participants in order to support and illuminate the data generated during the participant interviews. Finally, I provide a section of illustrative

vignettes which offer a more complete picture of the individual expression of the term "avid adolescent male reader" within this study.

Roles of Previous Reading Experiences on the Development of Avid Adolescent Male Readers

As I explored the prior experiences of the participants in relationship to reading and their perception of the influence of their social relationships on their reading habits, an alignment between Rosenblatt's continuum of efferent and aesthetic reading and participant perception of school assigned reading and pleasure reading began to emerge. Rosenblatt (1978) argued that the transaction between reader and text is a dynamic space, into which readers bring the totality of their life experiences. To substantiate these themes, I relied on data generation yielded from three interview transcripts for each of the six participants, numerous field notes, dialogic memos, and reflective journaling. I approached the data inductively, with open coding rather than a priori codes. As the process of coding progressed, themes began to emerge from the data, which I grouped into thematic tables in order to deeply explore them. In the next section, I discuss these themes in relation to family culture, reader identity, and transacting with texts.

The Role of Family Culture in the Previous Reading Experiences of Avid Adolescent Male Readers

Each of the six participants described growing up in a two-parent home, and each discussed at length the value that their parents placed on reading. Reading, as described by the participants, is an entertainment and an escape encouraged by their parents, while other leisure pursuits widely considered typical for adolescent males, such as video gaming, have been discouraged. The participants described a family culture that enabled

and supported them as early readers with precocious abilities and tastes. The participants

described a family culture in which parents served as early reading role models, in which

they grew up in a print-rich home environment, and in which reading books was

privileged over other forms of reading. Such early and sustained experiences with

reading appears to have offered the participants a "matrix of experienced meaning" on

which to structure their ongoing reading transactions (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 75).

    Reading role model. Rosenblatt (1978, 1995) argued that reading, rather than a

passive activity, is instead a transaction between individual and text. The text is

transformed from "simply paper and ink" into an event that is contextualized by the space

and time in which the reader comes to the text.   This transactional relationship is

informed by the totality of the reader's prior experiences. As I explored the previous

reading experiences of the participants, family culture and family history as influential

factors in prior reader experience emerged as a theme which aligned with Rosenblatt's

theory. In our first interview, Jeff made a comment that resonated with me as I wrote a

field note after our interview. We had been discussing what we were each currently

reading and he commented that he had picked up his latest book while "we [he and his

family] were in the bookstore on vacation." This statement, though I did not follow up on

it during that interview, seemed to me to be a revealing comment on Jeff's family culture.

Spending time in a bookstore as part of a family vacation suggested to me that I needed

to further explore the ways in which the participants described their family's culture and

the influence of that culture on their development as avid readers.

    In order to more fully explore this emerging theme, I asked each of the

participants, in our second interview, directly about the influence of their parents on the

participants' reading habits, about the reading material in their homes, and family

expectations surrounding reading. Each participant described a relationship with reading

that began with strong reading role models in the form of one or both parents. According

to the participants in this study, their parents read often. For example, David said,

"Mom's the biggest reader. She's constantly reading. She'll stay up 'til like 4:00 in the

morning reading sometimes. Then she'll complain all day about how tired she is

(interview 1)." Chris commented on his parents' reading and how their reading was

reflected in family culture: "My family, my household family, we don't have cable, we

don't watch TV all that often (interview 2)." A little later in our second interview, Chris

went back to the question of family culture and reading, noting that:

> Chris: I presume we talk about books where other people talk about TV shows.
>
> PHH[1]: I think that's an interesting statement. Can you give me an example of
> that?
>
> Chris: I don't know, I just I've never really been in a family where they would
> like watch TV and talk about it, but I'd assume that people would talk to each
> other about what they've been watching… we talk about books, not really dinner
> table conversations, but like, passing conversations.

Chris's description illustrated a family culture that privileged reading over other pursuits.

I asked Alex in our second interview about his parents' reading habits, specifically

whether or not they had their own space for their own books and Alex said, "They do"

and then went on to describe his father's reading in detail, "Japanese stories…Japanese

culture, martial arts, informational [reading]." In the same interview, Alex described his

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[1]Researcher initials

mother's reading in similarly specific terms, "She's been trying to get the *Game of Thrones* from me because she wants to read that.   And she read *The Hunger Games* when I was reading it too." Alex, from this description, is aware not only that his parents read, but aware of what they read. Spencer, likewise, described his mother's reading in general terms but was more specific about his father's reading preferences, saying "[I don't know] what you can categorize mom's stuff into.   Dad likes a lot of history stuff. Let's say mom likes a lot of fantasy stuff too, lot of fiction.   We all read nonfiction stuff as well, but a lot of fiction (interview 2)." Spencer expanded on my question and commented on the reading preferences of his family as a whole:

PHH: Do you read the same books? Like pass them around in the family?

Spencer: We used to do that with a lot of the Rick Riordan books and the *Ranger's Apprentice* books, which is a very good series, but not too much anymore.   They still do it with Riordan books when they come out, but I'm kind of like out of that equation.

PHH: Well yeah, people's reading tastes change as they get older.   So I wonder if you'd find a family series or book again that you might be interested in.   You probably will.   So what kind of history does your dad like to read?

Spencer: A lot of European history stuff. And some American history stuff too. He doesn't read that much but he read a lot as my age and as a young adult.   He read a lot of fantasy stuff.   Let's say probably one-fourth of our library has come from his stuff, then mom's stuff, then new stuff.

PHH: What does your mom read? What kind of fantasy?

Spencer: Not really sure.   Can't think of it off the top of my head (interview 2).

Spencer's family, according to his description, shared books, and Spencer was familiar enough with his parents' reading that he was able to describe their preferences, reading history, and make an estimate as to the origin of books in their home library.

When I asked Jeff more directly about his parents' reading habits in our second interview, he responded without hesitation, "They read a lot of newspaper stuff and my dad's into humorous stuff too. He's the one who got me interested in *Mad* magazine stuff. And they read a lot of nonfiction too (interview 2)." Like Chris, David, Alex, and Spencer, Jeff was not only aware that his parents read, he was able to report what his parents typically read.

In contrast to other participants, Dylan made note of the fact that he perceived that his parents' time for reading is limited by their roles or activities other than reading. In our second interview, he discussed his parents' reading preferences and habits, and those of his family:

> Well it's basically like half our family likes to read. All of our family kind of understands the importance of reading…But my dad, and my mom don't read a ton mostly because they have the least time out of all of us. I know [middle sister] tried to start reading more…but she reads a decent amount of time. And then [oldest sister] is constantly reading.

As we talked, it became apparent that Dylan had found other reading role models both inside and outside his family. Dylan was the youngest child in his family; his oldest sister is eleven years older, and she had become an active partner in his reading development. For example, Dylan said, "She is usually the one recommending the books to me (interview 1)." In our first interview, Dylan told me that he and his oldest sister,

who lived across the country, share books, "she reads it first and then sends it to me, because I don't have enough money to buy books." This reading relationship represents a high degree of investment on both sides; mailing physical books back and forth and creating time to discuss these books requires planning and commitment. Outside the family, Dylan told me that he has a "book buddy" who is a staff member at his school: "[staff member], who I would also classify as a friend, he reads all kinds of stuff. And I when I find an interesting like piece of journalism or if I find a book I want to read, I'll get him to read it with me. It makes it more enjoyable to read."

Each of the participants described parents and sometimes siblings or other adults who read regularly, with whom they share books, and a family culture that valued reading as evidenced by the time invested in acquiring and reading books. Reading appeared to be a foundational family value for the participants in this study, and the families, as described by the participants, appeared to embody that value rather than giving it lip service while investing their time in other pursuits. The participants described their parents' reading in matter of fact terms, as an unremarkable part of their family's daily life and experience.

Real Reading. Growing up and being expected to read books, specifically, rather than reading newspapers, magazines, or online texts, has heavily influenced the way that these participants defined reading and the value that reading held for them, both inside and outside their classroom experiences. In interview one, I asked each participant what he was reading (see Table 3 in Chapter 3). Each of the six participants responded with the title of a book or comments about books. Alex responded immediately, "I recently started *Game of Thrones*." Jeff responded with "I started *Candide* by Voltaire." Chris

noted that, "I'm in between books at the moment," but that "I was in between books a while back so I re-read *Game of Thrones* for the third time." David commented that "I'd say all of my reading is for school.   Just, a ton. Right now, *Jane Eyre*." Dylan responded with a book title as well, "*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*." Spencer answered not with a specific title but with a genre, "frequently I read stuff about musicians that I want to learn about or recording stuff." As noted in Chapter 2, literacy researchers (see Alvermann et al., 1999; Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Moje et al., 2008) suggest that print reading, particularly novels, is privileged by adolescents, parents, and teachers as *real* reading, while other forms of reading, such as texting, emails, online information, or periodicals is viewed as lower value reading, or even as distractions from real reading. In order to explore this perception more fully and to understand how meanings of reading are shaped by family influences, I asked participants directly about their definitions of reading.   Each participant considered the question carefully before answering. Five of the six participants persisted in using printed books as their reference point for reading. In interview 1, Alex responded "Well, for me...reading is sitting down and enjoying a good book." Jeff commented that "I just thought of the library, mostly (interview 1)." Dylan responded in our first interview that reading, for him, also meant enjoying the physical artifact of a book: "I really enjoy having a book and having it on the shelf and stuff like that and this is weird, but I like the smell of new books." Spencer commented on his view of reading by referencing his family culture directly, saying he prefers to read books because "my parents were old school and I kind of grew up without TV and without all of that stuff.   I didn't even know what internet was until I was like 10 or 11 (interview 1)." He then went on later in that interview to note his reasons for

choosing books over other forms of reading, "Usually I want to learn something or I just found this series that I read when I was a kid and I want to read it again." David, however, with his intense interest in technology, offered an expanded view of reading for his family:

> Reading isn't just sitting down with a book, reading – you read for school, you read text messages, emails, you read articles on the internet. You read just anything; you go to the grocery store and you read, you're driving, you read. You're always reading (interview 1).

In our first interview Chris offered, after a long pause, "Reading can be most anything but I feel like the immediate reaction is most influenced by my mom who is very big on reading [books]" and then went on to describe a phenomenon that was shared across the participants, "So when I think of reading I immediately think of us all in the living room reading." Participants' previous experiences with reading and family culture appears to have influenced their understanding of reading. Each participant, when asked about reading, put himself in the context of their family structure, either literally ("in the living room") or more abstractly ("being with my family").

Participants described a family view of reading that had been absorbed by each avid adolescent reader in this study. Five of the six participants spoke about reading as not only highly valued in their family, but also as being expected to read *books*, rather than engage in other activities (such as video gaming, chatting with friends online, or consuming media such as television programs or streaming video online), or presented with reading books as their only acceptable option for a large portion of their leisure time. Chris, and the other participants, with the exception of David, defined reading as reading

books. This understanding of reading appears, from participant descriptions of their families, to have been formed and reinforced by their family culture.

Rich print environment. Part of the participants' family investment in reading is literal. The participants described a family home filled with a wide variety of reading material. During our second and third interviews, I asked each participant to describe the things to read in his home. Because reading and literacy research overwhelmingly correlates to a rich print environment with early, sustained literacy (Alvermann, Gillis & Phelps, 2012; Bean & Moni, 2003; Chandler, 1999), I wanted to explore the literacy environment present in each family. Although I expected to hear that each home contained books, and possibly magazines or newspapers, computers, and smartphones, I was interested in the similarities in each participant's response. The home environment reported by these participants was not just print-rich, it was described as *saturated* with a wide variety of books and other print materials. When I asked Chris to describe the reading material in his house, he immediately thought of the physical layout, before the types of books:

> The things to read? Well we have like a mini-library and we have lots of bookshelves around the house. Like, our house is really old and there's this random hallway room that's like just like 5' by 5'. And two of the walls are bookshelves and then I have a bookshelf in my room. My brother has a bookshelf in his room. I have another bookshelf next to my computer. There's another bookshelf downstairs (interview 2).

Chris described a home environment in which books are spread throughout the house as well as sequestered into shelves "owned" by family members. This description, of

household or family books (library) and individual bookshelves owned by individual

family members, was replicated by each of the participants. Spencer described the set up

in his house this way:

> They're [the books] in the basement.   We have a kids space which is
>
> basically a lounge space with a computer and desk for all of us.   We have
>
> a bookshelf with that.   The computer's pretty much on the shelf and then
>
> the books are above it and below it.   It's just a really cool set up… It's
>
> like a library.   That was kind of ours to read (interview 2).

Alex echoed this, saying:

> Alex: I've got a bookshelf right outside of my room, there's some there's some
>
> pretty good books on it… I've a lot of younger siblings, so it's a lot of books
>
> geared to younger children.   Of course I loved them when I was a younger child.
>
> PHH: Your mom and dad have a bookshelf?
>
> Alex: They do.   My dad has a lot.   My dad is very interested in martial arts and
>
> Japanese culture, so it's a lot of those kinds of books.
>
> PHH: So, he's got some books, you've got some books you're keeping, and your
>
> younger siblings have some books.   Does your mom have some books?
>
> Alex: Um, she does.   A lot of it's like, motherhood stuff.
>
> PHH: Best description ever (interview 2).

David described his family's reading material this way:

> We have books. We'll go out and buy like book sets occasionally.   It's not as
>
> often.   I have things to read on my iPad, on my laptop, on my phone, but I still
>
> download books like [on my] Kindle.   I mean we don't really do much of

magazines or anything but newspaper. I usually read through the newspaper or skim through the newspaper. Um, I think just the internet encompasses like a huge portion of that [kind of reading] (interview 2).

A little later in our second interview, David and I discussed his family's literacy environment again:

PHH: It sounds like you guys use tech a lot to read, as an avenue to get to the information you want. So how many books would you say you have in your house?

David: Hundreds.

PHH: Cool. Just because you have tech doesn't mean you don't have books. And just because you have books doesn't mean you don't have tech. What are the books like in your house? If you were just standing glancing around, what would I see?

David: If you went into our basement, my mom has two huge book cases a lot of which, she went to school to be a teacher, so she has a lot of books, educational books that she used – I think it's things that she's read. Like she has book cases full of her books…There's just two book cases full of the books we've [the children in the family] read. Like, we have all the *Nancy Drew*'s, all the *Hardy Boys* – like all of those series. All of the Frank Peretti books.

PHH: Do you have bookshelves in your room?

David: I used to. Right now I have like two crates of books because they got taken off. The bookshelf broke.

PHH: That many books, huh?

David: Yeah, I guess.

PHH: Do your brothers have books in their rooms?

David: [noise of affirmation]

PHH: Mom and dad have books in their room?

David: Yeah.

Dylan's description, when I asked him about his family's reading material, sounded similar to other participant descriptions:

Dylan: Well, there's a lot of like religious books because my family, especially on my mom's side, they have a lot of books by pastors and Christian authors and stuff like that. So there's that stuff...

PHH: I get it. What else is laying around?

Dylan: A lot of books that [oldest sister] used to read. There's a ton of Jane Austen. You'll just find Jane Austen books like lying around places…

PHH: Sounds like you turn a corner or open a drawer and "oh!"

Dylan: I remember I was in our laundry room the other day and I just turned around and there was *Persuasion* just sitting there and I was like "Ok."

PHH: Why do you think they're sort of scattered all over the house?

Dylan: I don't know. [Oldest sister] just had too many of them. [My sisters] they both have liked Jane Austin so much, but I mean they're mostly in boxes and stuff like that. But you will find one occasionally just sitting somewhere where it doesn't make sense for it to be.

PHH: That's kind of a nice surprise. It's not like finding a snake or something.

Dylan: Much better than that (interview 2).

Jeff's description highlighted not only the number of books in his home, but also the variety of the books his family owns:

> PHH: So how would you describe the things to read in your house?
>
> Jeff: Really really diverse. There's a lot of classics. I was looking through it the other day and I found a French dictionary from 1857.
>
> PHH: Holy cow.
>
> Jeff: Yeah, we have a lot of really old books.   And we have a big magazine collection that's – that goes from like *People* magazine to *Mad* magazine.
>
> PHH: Really?
>
> Jeff: Yeah.   And there's a lot of nonfiction too.   There's a lot of biographies. We have a lot of books in our house.   And also, when the school was clearing out their reference section to put in a computer lab, I took home the entire *Encyclopedia Britannica* (interview 2).

Along with a saturated print environment, the other participants also described varied content in their home libraries. Spencer, for example, described this diversity as we discussed his family's books:

> PHH: So how would you describe the things to read that are in your house?
>
> Spencer: Um, lot of fantasy books, lot of old science fiction stuff that we got at used bookstores and from libraries.
>
> PHH: I remember talking about that.
>
> Spencer: A lot of history books. My dad majored in history…We have a lot of history books and a lot of religious books which are interesting to kind of flip through sometimes.   And a bunch of fantasy stuff a lot of classics.

PHH: Tell me about some of the classics that you have.

Spencer: We have, I think *Lord of the Flies*, *Grapes of Wrath* – I'm not sure. I know we had a *Great Gatsby* somewhere, I just haven't found it. I think we have *Moby Dick*. Maybe *The Call of the Wild*. I don't think we have any Hemingways though. We might (interview 2).

In our second interview, after talking with Chris about the physical set up of books in his home, I asked him to describe the types of books in his home library:

PHH: So what's on those bookshelves?

Chris: Wide assortment of things.

PHH: Ok.

Chris: I would say a majority of the books they read they get from the library but on occasion, they can't find it so they buy it. And that's just like that collection. Or books that we got for a gift. It's just kind of a random sampling of the books we've read over the years. Books that we like the most, like we have a copy of *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, like, re-readable.

PHH: So you said a wide variety, so give me an example of that variety.

Chris: I'll just walk up to the bookshelf and point to a series and my dad will be like "Oh yeah! You'd like that." That happened with the Belgariad books, and then there's this series that I've seen on the bookshelf but I've never read called *My Ishmael*. That's one of the books in the series and there's like, political books, books written by comedians, uh, there's like a ABCs of jazz, just random stuff.

PHH: I don't know if that's random or it just reflects a really wide range of interests to me, at least that's what it sounds like. What books does your family

tend to keep? You said "books that we really tend to keep."

Chris: Yeah, Dad will buy book giant sets of the fantasy series that he really likes.
Like the *Belgariad*. *Harry Potter*, we have the set. *Aragon*, we have the set.
All of those sorts of things.

Summary. The role of family culture as an influence in the development of avid adolescent male readers, as a finding to this study, aligns with Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory in that participants' prior experiences have included families that place a high value on reading, provide a rich print environment, and privilege printed books over other types of reading. A home environment saturated with things to read was a characteristic that emerged as a common finding across the participants' descriptions of the reading material in their homes. When I asked the participants directly about the things to read in their households, they each described books throughout the house, although Spencer, David and Jeff described the bulk of the family books sequestered into a room of their own. Additionally, each participant described bedrooms equipped with bookshelves for each family members' books. These bookshelves not only gave the participants a place to collect books of their own, they gave participants easy access to those books. The participants brought these experiences, perceptions, and understandings to their reading transactions, both inside and outside educational settings. These experiences afforded the participants a particular relationship with books and reading that may create a greater opportunity for academic achievement and an expectation of reading as a means toward achievement as well as a pleasurable activity.

The Role of Family Culture and Academic Expectations on the Development of the

Avid Adolescent Male Reader

Family culture, as discussed in the previous section, appears to have strongly

influenced the development of the participants as avid adolescent male readers, as well as

fostering a social a social construction of academic achievement and expectations.

Millard (1986) suggested that family relationships function as our earliest, most

influential social network in the development of reading habits and preferences. The

participants in this study described family influences on their reading habits as highly

influential, particularly in terms of expectations for academic achievement.

Academic achievement and high expectations. As I read through transcripts for

each interview a theme emerged, related to family culture, regarding academic

achievement and family expectations. Millard (1997) and McKenna et al. (2012)

asserted that families provide the earliest and most influential social networks regarding

reading development and literacy. In interview one, when I asked each participant to

describe himself, each participant described placing a high value on his own

achievement, and also described a pressure to perform as a good student. For example, in

our first interview, David emphasized his academic and professional goals along with his

academic achievement, "I'm a pretty good student…I'm interested in biomedical

research going into college. Want to go to UVA." Likewise, Spencer commented on his

academic achievement and his behavior at school: "I'm an A/B student and I usually pay

attention and am not very disruptive in class (interview 1)." Jeff struggled to describe

himself in our first interview, so I asked him how he thought his teachers would describe

him, "I think they'd say I'm pretty smart – not to be like egotistical or something. Maybe

a little weird…funny, maybe." Alex, however, was more self-aware in his description and more expansive:

> Alex: I don't want to brag on myself or anything but I am one of the better
>
> students. I'm one of the better students in my grade. I think I'm ranked number
>
> seven – by GPA number seven.
>
> PHH: Out of?
>
> Alex: Out of 144 people. So I'm up there. I'm in two dual enrollment college
>
> classes right now.
>
> PHH: English and what else?
>
> Alex: I'm taking the dual enrollment English class, English 111 and 112.
>
> PHH: Ah. Ok.
>
> Alex: All smooshed into one semester. So there's that and, and I'm in dual
>
> enrollment pre-calculus. Yeah, that and I have Chemistry and I'm in band
>
> (interview 1).

Alex's description of his classes and his rank in his class indicated that he not only maintained a rigorous academic schedule but also that he was successful in this endeavor.

In our first interview, Dylan described himself as "A good student. I take a lot of AP classes…I'm an A student. This seems…seems…I don't want to sound conceited." In contrast with these easily offered descriptions of themselves, Chris resisted my request to describe himself, and pushed back at the idea that he could be easily categorized:

> That's an interesting question because I don't usually like describe myself
>
> because that feels very self-aware…like I'm bragging. I really don't like to do

that all that often because what I usually…it seems strange but it's like you have to experience me, I believe (interview 1).

I continued to probe for a self-description, and Chris continued to be unwilling to narrow down what he felt was a complex, complicated self for the sake of a simple descriptor. Later in the interview, Chris and I were discussing a book that he had connected with (*Ender's Game*), and in that context, Chris finally described himself this way:

Chris: …nobody wants to be set apart, especially in high school so I have always gotten good grades. I've always been…my kindergarten teacher told my mom I was the "cream of the crop" and my mom never forgot it. [laughter] So I walk down the hall and I hear someone say "He's the smart kid." So that's just what I hear and I really identified myself behind that. So, I really identified with Ender because he's the kid who's chosen to be the savior of the human race.

PHH: Wow. Don't you hope that never happens to you?

Chris: Right. A lot of pressure (interview 1).

Each participants' description of himself as a "good student" or "smart kid", coupled with their descriptions of a home saturated with print material and a family suggested me to that I should ask in subsequent interviews about family expectations for their academic achievement. I wanted to capture, if possible, whether the participants felt intrinsically motivated to achieve or if they were achieving at high levels academically because they not only had the opportunities and resources but also felt the pressure of family expectations for their achievement. To explore this, I formulated specific questions regarding academic achievement and family expectations. For example, in response to these questions, Spencer commented on the pressure he felt to achieve academically:

For me personally, my parents think that everything matters and that I have to make sure that everything I do – straight As all the time, which is almost impossible in AP US history class and dual enrollment class. Usually I try to find a way then relates to my interests in the music career later on down the road (interview 3).

Spencer's comment about relating school to a long term goal (music career) interested me and the iterative nature of qualitative data analysis prompted me to further explore whether commitment to a goal beyond high school might be a common thread through the participant perceptions of their school experiences in other participant interviews. Alex approached the subject of academic expectation in this context when he described specific plans for his academic career beyond high school as well as his professional goals:

PHH: What do you want to do in college?

Alex: I'm going to school for business.

PHH: So, do you have some prospects in mind?

Alex: Well, actually my idea is, what I I really love is baking…So I want to own a bakery. What a lot of people will do is go to cooking or culinary school for the skills and open a bakery, and they don't know how to run a business and it just flops. So what I figured I'd do instead is to go to business school and while I'm in college, get a job working at a bakery. So I can get the skill and the business aspect.

PHH: And you're getting skills while somebody's paying you to get those skills.

PHH: Well, you've got family support for this idea?

Alex: Uh huh.   Well, actually the whole "go to business school and work on a bakery or at a bakery on the side" was my dad's idea (interview 3).

This exchange illustrated that Alex, like the other participants, had a long term goal in mind. In interviews one and two, Alex described school as "boring" and "bland," and I had considered, in a dialogic memo, his high level of engagement with a system that he described as largely uninteresting.   Alex's investment in his goal suggested that he was able to remain engaged in academics because high school served a larger purpose for him beyond immediate grades. I noted this commonality with other participants as well, they often used negative terms to describe school and school work ("bland" or "boring"), yet their descriptions of themselves as a "good student" or "A/B student" illuminated for me either a gap in their perceptions, or a strong motivation to persevere with unappealing tasks in order to serve a specific goal. For example, in our first interview, Dylan described school as "boring" but went on to describe his long term professional goal of being a writer: "I want to write. I love sports journalism and I would like to do that…or maybe be an English teacher, like, a college teacher." In interview three I asked Dylan about this specifically, and he went into much more detail about his career goals:

When I was in 6th grade I had the idea to be a writer. I still have a ton of career ideas. I was telling my mom last night, I could be a psychologist or you know, a surgeon, or I could be a writer. Because, you know, I've a bunch of ideas for that. It kind of came to me in 6th grade, that idea, and it wasn't really something I wanted to do for a while.   Then the last couple of years as I've gotten more into social media, especially because I've kind of learned about more writers, especially like on the journalism side of writing. It's been really cool to me that I

can read these people and they get their perspective out on the world. I think that's something that I'd really enjoy doing, having people hear how I see the world and stuff like that. I think it's kind of fascinating and that was something I wrote about in my research paper, the thing I interviewed about. It was like a lot of writers…the number one thing with writing for them is being able to get their voice heard. I think that's something that appeals to me so…once I started really following the news, on Twitter especially, and Ta-Neshi Coates he's uh, kind of the guy that when I first read his writing I was like "I want to be a writer."

Dylan described his high school classes in terms of utility in the context of his career goals. Because his goal was to write, he framed his school experience in that specific context, "I've had [my current English teacher] for four years, so you know. It's hard to pin – to go back to one time because having her for four years, but I can see myself as such a better writer than I was when I started (interview 3)." A little later in the same interview, Dylan and I discussed his current teacher again, in terms of skills he described as important to his possible long term goal of teaching:

> It's kind of amazing to me because she can go two classes talking about one book or like two classes talking about one topic within a book, when it takes me like 2 minutes to cover everything I know about it. I've started to get more engaged in her class because for a long time I've just added the comments that I really think are good, and now I'm trying to start having conversations with her. I think that's something that she's been really willing to help me with. That's…trying to figure out what I'm thinking about something instead of just having the one thing I say. Not trying to say like the best thing but just trying to work through things.

Dylan's metacognitive understanding of school as a source of applicable skills for his future career choice indicated that he perceived the usefulness of classes and assignments as a source of professional skills.

David's professional goal, quoted earlier ("biomedical researcher"), is one that requires a focus and dedication to academic achievement in high school and beyond. When I asked him about school in our first interview, David told me, "it's not my favorite thing," but went on to say "I like school. I hate homework." In interview 1, we discussed his long term goals:

> PHH: Biomedical research, that's so interesting. Do you want to be a doctor?
>
> David: Yeah.
>
> PHH: Like a doctor who sees patients doctor or a research doctor?
>
> David: I don't know. I haven't decided yet. I want to go into that field somewhere. So hopefully get accepted into UVA, you know, my goal.

David often commented on his high school coursework, and expressed plans for a schedule of advanced classes, for example:

> PHH: What classes are you taking right now at [your school] to get you ready for that?
>
> David: I don't know. It really starts like next year. Like my junior and senior year because you can kind of play with your schedules a little more. But, you know, I took AP chemistry, like this year I can only take biology. I can't take AP bio. But…
>
> PHH: What about math?
>
> David: I'm in pre-calculus this year. So I'll finish AB and BC.

PHH: Which English class are you in?

David: Um, so last year ….

PHH: "So let me tell you." [laughter]

David: I took classic lit and I was told that if I took classic lit, I could take an AP class this year.

PHH: Right

David: That didn't happen.   So I went back a year to world lit.   So I'm not super thrilled about that (interview 1).

David's comment about not being "super thrilled" about having to take a non-AP English class is an example of his drive toward high academic achievement. In order to achieve his long term goal, he expressed an understanding of the importance of seeking out a rigorous academic experience in order to support his long term goal of a profession as a biomedical researcher.

When I asked Jeff about his school experiences and professional goals in interview one, he said "My grades are ok and um, I'm not having troubles with – too much of anything, so I'd say it's pretty good, pretty well." When I asked about his specific courses, he shared his current courses "DE [dual enrollment] English…AP history…Biology…" Our second and third interviews were compressed due to Jeff's schedule and family obligations and I chose to concentrate on other questions in our interview time. Because of this, I was unable to follow up on his long term goals, and academic achievement. Jeff spoke about college attendance in a matter of fact way, however:

But next semester there's a British literature survey class that if you take it you

don't have to do English in college. I might have to– if I do that and don't do any English in college I just might have to write a little on my own just to keep the skills fresh because it's a whole year I won't be do anything and all of college – I won't have to do that (interview 3).

Summary. The participants in this study expressed an expectation of college or university attendance. Millard (1986) argued that families are the first social structures we encounter, and among the most influential on reading motivation and engagement. Parental expectation expressed by the participants suggested that participants have families that value academic achievement, expect this achievement (good grades, college attendance). In school assigned reading, the participants describe reading for their own purposes (long term academic and professional goals), even though they may not recognize this purpose in the context of school reading. This expectation appears to have enabled the participants to remain engaged with school assignments and to engage with less-valued reading as a means toward long term professional goals.

The Role of Reader Identity on the Development of Avid Adolescent Male Readers

A family culture that values reading appears to have also aided the avid adolescent readers in this study in developing a strong identity as a *reader*, one that persisted in spite of and against cultural stereotypes of boys as resistant or reluctant readers. In all three interviews, I asked participants to describe themselves, either directly or in relation to their peer group. Each participant used a variety of terms that addressed the common theme of expert reader across each interview. This metacognitive awareness of self as reader is captured in Rosenblatt's (1995) argument that the reader

cannot be a passive participant in the transaction, but rather "contemplates his own shaping of his responses" throughout the act of reading (p. 31).

Expert reader. The participants in this study described a family culture that valued books and a home environment saturated with print material. This appears to have afforded these participants a high degree of fluency, comprehension, and precocity as readers, a theme that emerged during the interviews as participants described themselves, both directly and in relation to discussions about books the participants had read or were currently reading. During each of the interviews, I asked each participant to describe his favorite books and genres, and about school-assigned books that he either liked or disliked. These probes invariably produced an interesting dialogue. I quickly discovered that the avid adolescent male readers in this study not only had strong opinions about books, they were highly articulate in expressing their opinions, and they often spoke about books with both sophisticated language and a self-awareness of themselves as *reader*. These responses went far beyond "I liked it" or "I didn't like it," often encompassing a discussion of personal relevance, writing style, and the mechanics of the writing in question. Put another way, the participants spoke about books with terminology that positioned them as experts. For example, in our second interview, Spencer and I discussed a book he had been reading for pleasure (*The Wizard of Earthsea*), and his experience with an overlap in his pleasure reading and his English Language Arts class. He gave an example from English class where he was able to connect content ("psychological stuff like a person's shadow, archetypes, and all that stuff") to events happening in his pleasure reading:

I made the connection that the shadow released in the book, where Ged releases

the dead shadow, kind of could be interpreted as his own shadow because as soon

as he faces it, it kind of attacks him. It was really cool…just thinking about it.

Analyzing the text. Analyzing what I knew about the shadow of evil and all that

stuff and put it together and it just made sense.

The participants in this study also seemed comfortable critiquing the structure and

mechanics of the books they read, both for school and for their pleasure reading. For

example, in interview two, Alex commented on a school-assigned text: "I didn't think it

was super well written. There were a couple plot holes I found. And like, it had the

potential to go somewhere but it just didn't." Jeff, described the problems he felt were

inherent in a series he had been reading, said:

Jeff: Because it didn't really close things together. Like they won but everything

was still messed up and like and that Katniss has a really sad life afterwards.

PHH: How would you fix it?

Jeff: Make her sister not die maybe. I didn't understand why that was in there. It

didn't seem like it fit in with the rest of the book. I felt like the writer put it in

there and just [it was an] unnecessary plot twist at the very end (interview 2).

In interview two, Chris and I discussed what makes worthwhile or enduring books, and

he noted that in his opinion, in order for a book to be worth teaching and rereading, it

must have a deeper meaning inherent in the text, and offered his opinion of books with a

message:

To Kill a Mockingbird has a really strong anti-racism message and classist

message and *Fahrenheit 451* has a really big technology-taking-over-the-world

message. Stuff like that, so in order for things to be remembered for – to be more than just an experience that ends when you leave the movie theater, or when you finish the book, you need a message.

A little later in the same interview, Chris and I returned to this topic and he said,

I mean books like *Fahrenheit 451* don't have a very well developed storyline, but the meaning is very obvious. And I like *Fahrenheit 451* for what it is, but I don't think it – I think it could do with taking back on the meaning and putting more in the storyline just to make it a little more interesting. And then *To Kill a Mockingbird* does [that] very well. It's a good balance. Then there's books like *Aragon*, which I'm sure have a good meaning, but it's focused so much on the storyline…

Dylan commented with a high degree of awareness of himself as reader, on a book he had finished recently for pleasure reading, and with an opinion on the writing style and skill of the author, informed by his expertise with reading:

I didn't even like the story that much, but as I was reading I just loved the language in it…And it was weird, because we were talking about ornate and simple language in AP Language a few weeks ago. That was a weird mix of both to me. Because I felt like they [the author] used like extravagant language for a lot of things he described but he did it in a way that was really like simple to understand. And I think it takes a lot of skill to do that (interview 2).

Summary. The participants in this study each described books they have read in terms that show a metacognitive understanding of themselves as a reader transacting with texts. Comments that go beyond "like" or "dislike" and speak to structure, mechanics,

and content of the text are expected from readers who have a long and varied reading history and a metacognitive understanding of themselves as reader. The participants' utterances about their reading experiences gave me insight into their relationship with reading, and their transactions with texts. They each described common expectations for their transactions with texts; fluency, an ease of comprehension, and a familiarity with different text structures that allows them to effortlessly bring their prior experiences (schema) to their reading transactions. The family culture described by the participants appears to have provided them with the practice necessary to develop the skills, experience, and role models to experience and interact with texts as expert readers.

The Role of Transacting with Texts on the Development of Avid Adolescent Male Readers

As I read each interview transcript through the lens of Rosenblatt's (1978) Transactional Theory, a theme emerged across participants and interviews that supported Rosenblatt's theory of the reader response spectrum. This spectrum is anchored on one end by the aesthetic reading experience and on the other by the efferent reading experience. The aesthetic reading experience is characterized by feeling connected to or lost in a book, swept away by the experience. In contrast, the efferent reading experience is characterized by reading for a specific purpose, such as gathering information on a topic. Readers may move along this spectrum during the same reading transaction, swinging between these poles according to the reader's purpose. As I coded participant interview transcripts, a theme began to emerge regarding the reading experiences of the participants. The avid adolescent readers in this study were a not passive audience for the

texts they read; rather, they described reading transactions as active and participatory, and they were critical of the texts with which they transacted.

Participant descriptions of their pleasure reading experiences focused on their relationship to the texts they chose to read, their purposes for reading, and their experiences as readers. David, Jeff, and Spencer described their reading experiences in language that seemed to place their reading purpose toward the efferent end of the spectrum. For example, David described his reading as,

[L]ots of other stuff, like short articles, and like newspapers, like magazine articles and like that kind of stuff. A lot of the stuff I read, I read to learn about things… So I'll read to learn to do. So like you know, over the summer I got a truck, so you know I'll read to learn to do to it [repair the truck] (interview 1).

At first, David's comments about "read[ing] to learn" seemed to place his stance as a reader closer toward the efferent end of Rosenblatt's continuum. After reflection, I began to understand that his comments were captured by Rosenblatt's argument that the "socio-physical setting" or mood of the reader is the defining factor in the reader's choice of text. Although David described himself as "reading to learn," in this example he is discussing reading texts to help him repair the truck that used to be his grandfather's. He "loves that truck" (interview 1) and has many fond memories of it in the context of visiting his grandfather. This appears to be an example of the role of the socio-physical setting on the reader's choice of texts and the complicated nature of the efferent-aesthetic continuum of reader response. Put another way, participants described seeking out texts with which they felt an emotional connection. Although David described himself as

"reading to learn" he chose topics based on an emotional connection with the content that he sought out.

Jeff offered an example of his reading stance in our second interview, when he commented that he had been browsing his family's home library and begun reading *Roberts' Rules of Order* because he "wanted to brush up on parliamentary procedure a little more for the clubs and stuff. I just thought it would be interesting to see how the modern business functions, like meetings and stuff. It's good tips for later in life" (interview 2). In this instance, Jeff is describing an efferent reading stance in his pleasure reading, though he also described reading experiences with reading plays in which he felt "like a part of it…like you're just watching it and involved in it" (interview 3).

> Spencer described his preferred reading stance in more efferent terms as well:
> Quite frequently I read stuff about musicians that I want to learn about or recording stuff… I'll be looking at – there's a book on how to build guitars which is I think one – I find pretty cool. I put guitars back together and take it apart and stuff. I find some theory books now and then that I read through. Usually I want to learn something (interview 1).

However, like David and his truck, Spencer had an emotional connection to music, as an avocation and as a long term career goal. In this instance, he described reading to acquire information, with content that is central to his current interests and his long term goals. His reading stance hovered closer to the middle of the efferent-aesthetic continuum, supporting Rosenblatt's (1978) assertion that transactions with the text depend upon the "nature, state of mind, or experience" of the reader (p. 27).

Chris and Dylan, during our interviews, used descriptions of their reading experiences that seemed to place those experiences closer toward the aesthetic end of the spectrum. For example, Chris described reading as that "wonderful feeling when you're reading a book and you love the book and you're just reading and you're invested in the story and you're just totally in it" (interview 1). Later in our first interview, I asked Chris to tell me about the last time he was "totally in" a book, and he responded:

> Probably during the *Ranger's Apprentice* and *Percy Jackson* series. I would read those and this sounds really weird, but during the *Ranger's Apprentice* I would hear about the awesome stuff they're doing, and how they're going to fight somebody and I would just get like so excited and jumpy that I would run around the house for a little while and go sit down and read some more. I felt like I was the amazing athlete person running around. I read a book and I'm just absorbed.

Chris described being so caught up in the experience of reading these books that he placed himself in the position of the protagonist. His description of reading as "that wonderful feeling" speaks to Rosenblatt's (1976) aesthetic stance. Chris described an intense personal relationship to these texts in a way that captured the joy he felt during these reading transactions.

As Dylan and I discussed the books he has enjoyed and the book he was reading at the time, his descriptions echoed that of Chris's in terms of personal relationship with his chosen texts. He described his reading stance this way:

Dylan: I love Charles Dickens.

PHH: Yeah. A boy after my own heart.

Dylan: I think it's fun to read him and think about the stuff he's describing

because he describes it so well.   It's like – when I was reading *Great*

Expectations, I had this really detailed, vivid picture of what he was writing.   But

yeah, I guess the most important thing with writing is the unique perspective.

But I don't know – and I mean there's obviously more, but it's hard kind of hard

to articulate what that is.

PHH: It sounds to me like you're saying that you like a well written book with –

that is able to be in a unique perspective.

Dylan: Yeah, in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, which I've been reading

recently. I'm like halfway through now and that is fascinating because you don't

know whether what you're reading is actually happening or not. That was

something – like I kind of knew that was supposed to happen beforehand because

I knew it was written by one of the patients and the ward or whatever but it's so

fascinating to hear things and it's like you have this expectation of what's

happening and then something completely different will happen because you

know, what he's describing gets taken over by what he sees.   And yeah, that has

– I'm so interested in that (interview 1).

Dylan, while he described reading with an aesthetic stance, also used language that

indicated he read with the metacognitive awareness of himself as a writer seeking

information about writing. This metacognitive understanding of himself as reader

illuminated Rosenblatt's (1976) argument that as readers develop and gain experience

with transacting with texts, their critical understanding of texts develops as well. Within

this critical awareness, aesthetic and efferent reading stances exist concurrent with each

other. Dylan's metacognition suggests that his transactions with texts have reached a

level of critical awareness that suggests a high level of maturity as a reader.

Alex also seemed to describe reading with a primarily aesthetic stance, but with a metacognitive awareness of himself as *reader*. During our first interview, he told me that he sometimes gets so wrapped up in books that "I'll stay up all night…I have to know what happens," a statement that suggested an active, aesthetic reading transaction. In our second interview, we discussed books he had read and enjoyed. Alex resisted the idea that he might have an aesthetic stance, and he pushed back at my use of the term "connection":

> I don't usually—I don't feel like I read books like other people sometimes.
> Because I don't really, like, I can never really connect myself to the book. I'll
> read it to experience things from other people's point of view.   From the
> characters' point of view.   The reason I say that is when people in school book
> and literature groups [talk about] its connections, it's a lot of time it's "How does
> this connect to you?" I always try to work with that.   I can summarize a book.

Alex's comment that he can "summarize" a book in relationship to being asked to "connect" to a book suggested to me that Alex not only had a critical understanding of reading transactions but also that he was a highly metacognitive reader.   In our third interview, Alex and I discussed "connecting to books" in the context of school-assigned reading:

> [T]hat's one reason I can have a hard time reading books is I remember what
> happens and what people say…I think that my perception comes from school
> where we were doing the projects and the teacher says "Alright.   Connect this.
> Connect yourself to the book." And it's –this was like "How does this [connect]?

Show something in the book that applies to you." And that's happened a few times and I'm like "well that person takes naps. I take naps." Like that's what I think of when people say "connect" I sit here and read a book and I'm like "cool. They're doing that thing." So I feel, whenever I read a book I feel like I'm on the outside looking in.

In this third interview, Alex described himself as an "analytical" reader, and in the excerpt above, his comment about being "on the outside" suggests that even with books he might enjoy, he has a critical understanding of the text alongside a highly developed metacognitive awareness of himself as a reader. Like Dylan, Alex's understanding of himself as reader, along with his relationship to texts he has read, seems to have produced in him a highly-developed sense of the situated nature texts and of the resulting response from themselves as readers. Alex's description echoes Rosenblatt's statement that each reader's stance is inseparable from an "ever-present matrix of feeling" through which the reader evokes a text (p. 45), regardless of where on the continuum the reader's response to the text falls.

Summary. Rosenblatt (1978, 1995) argued that readers bring the totality of their previous experiences to each reading transaction. Also, reading experiences can act as a supplement to lived experiences (Rosenblatt, 1976). Avid adolescent male readers appear to utilize their previous reading experiences, along with their histories as successful readers to bring broader horizons and an expectation of success to their new reading transactions. Additionally, these factors appear to lend two of the participants a metacognitive awareness of their own expertise as readers, specifically in the context of school reading. Findings in this study support Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory,

particularly in the context of reader-response theory.

Conclusion

The family culture described by participants in this study appears to have enabled and supported these participants in their development as avid adolescent male readers. Participants described reading as highly valued in their family. Reading, defined by the participants (*real* reading) meant *books* for them as well as their families. Participants described a family culture that valued reading as the preferred option for a large portion of leisure time. Participants in this study approached texts and describe texts in ways used by expert readers. They commented on personal relevance, structure, mechanics, and meaning of books read for school and for pleasure, and display a metacognitive awareness of themselves as *reader*. The participants described an ease and familiarity with texts that demonstrates their ability as reading experts and expert readers. Each participant described their reading transactions in terms that, viewed through the lens of Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory, illustrates the relationship between author and reader, the prior experience that individual readers bring to the text, and the ways these elements combine in the experiences of the participants to produce reading transactions that are highly individuated and situated within an identity as an expert reader. The participants in this study described a relationship with texts characterized by Rosenblatt (1978) as *I-Thou*, a relationship that both affords and constrains their responses to texts. In their pleasure reading, participants recognized their own purposes for reading, and they acknowledged an emotional relationship with texts, as well as clearly describing taking as stance as an expert reader.

The Social Construction of the Reading Habits and Preferences of Avid

Adolescent Male Readers

In the previous section, I described how the roles of family culture, reader identity, and transacting with texts in previous reading experiences have influenced the development of the avid adolescent male readers in this study. Literacy and reading are socially constructed ideas (Moje et al., 2008; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002), and adolescent reading habits and preferences are heavily influenced by and embedded in social networks (Millard, 1997; Moje et al., 2008; Newkirk, 2002). A family that values and supports reading has an early and powerful influence on developing avid adolescent male readers (McKenna et al., 2012; Millard, 1997). In this section, I will discuss how the reading habits and preferences of avid adolescent male readers are socially constructed. I will first discuss the theme of reader identity as a social construction influenced by peers, followed by a discussion of the participants' perceptions of reading, and the notion of the "lone reader."

The Role of Reader Identity on the Social Construction of Avid Adolescent Male Readers' Reading Habits and Preferences

Participants in this study identified themselves as *readers*. Their previous reading experiences, family culture, academic achievement, and peer relationships have contributed to this identity. As noted in the previous section, an identity as *reader* informs their transactional relationships with texts, and has afforded them an expectation of success in their reading transactions. This reader identity is complex, and contains facets that complicate and confound attempts at simplification. The participants described their reading habits and preferences as socially constructed by their peer

relationships, and educational expectations. Five of the six participants, despite these social influences, also described themselves as set apart, outcast, or different from their group of friends in terms of reading identity. One participant described himself as part of a strong peer group of avid adolescent male readers with similar reading habits and preferences. The themes of social influences on participant reading habits and preferences is not fully captured in Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Literary Work (1978, 1995) except in the context of the reader's prior experiences brought to bear as the reader evokes the text. Millard's (1996) work, which foregrounds family and social relationships as influences on reading behaviors and preferences of adolescents, however, does more fully capture this emergent theme.

Peer groups. Research literature examined in Chapter 2 foregrounds adolescents' peer groups, along with family networks, as highly influential not only in reader identity formation ("I am a good reader") but also in choice of reading material (Millard, 1997; Moje et al., 2008; Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). In order to explore these influences, I asked the participants directly about their peer groups, their friends, and what factors influenced their reading (see Table 4 in Chapter 3). The participants described their peer groups as influential in their reading choices. For example, David said, "If I sit down to read a novel, most of the time it'll be prompted by somebody else actually recommending it to me. Or – specifically telling me to – or school forcing me to" (interview 2). A little later in the interview, he expanded on this statement,

> David: I'm not one to look through iBooks for a book, but if somebody
>
> recommends a book, then I'm not hesitant to pay for it. Download it or not pay

for it and download it.   You know, just get the books electronically somehow.

PHH: Sure.   So who does most of the book recommending to you?

David: I don't know.   Just stuff I hear at school, see at school. That kind of stuff.

PHH: You ever see somebody reading a book and ask them about it?

David: Yeah…The first one I thought of was like *The Hunger Games*, but that's been a while.

PHH: That's ok.

David: But I didn't read that because I heard about – I saw somebody else reading it.   I was like "I've seen this so many times.   What is this?"

David's experience seeing book covers "so many times" and wondering about the book, then reading the book, support the research literature that focuses on peer interaction, peer relationships, and reading choices and habits (Millard, 1997; Newkirk, 2002). His description of seeing book covers, rather than talking about the book with peers suggests that social peer groups are influential beyond direct conversation about reading and books.

In our first interview, Jeff said that his friends recommended books to him "here and there." And a little later in the interview, Jeff expanded his description of his experience with peer recommendations in this way,

PHH: So where do you find things to read? How do you find your next book?

Jeff: Well, I might hear about when I'll go search it up and look for at the library or we have a lot of books at our house, so probably around there somewhere. Books, like, classics.

PHH: So you might just go spelunking through the family books to see what you

find? Or you said you hear about it. Can you tell me more about how you might

hear about a book?

Jeff: Well, um, I'll – someone might recommend it or something.

PHH: Ok. Do you go to somebody for recommendations?

Jeff: I might go to a teacher or something. I have a couple of friends that like to

read too, so they they read some pretty good stuff.

PHH: Ok. So teachers, friends, spelunking through the books?

Jeff: And if it's like advertised on TV or something.

Jeff appeared to be describing multiple peer, family, and social relationships that

influenced his reading choices and habits. In our second interview Jeff described being

influenced to read a book, in very similar terms to David's description above:

Jeff: I'll see the movie and I'll decide that I'm interested in the book and I'll see

how they differ and stuff. I made a goal of myself to read all of *The Hunger*

Games books before the first movie came out.

PHH: Did you?

Jeff: Yeah, I was able to squeeze it in right as the thing, right as the first movie

came out. I finished *Mockingjay*.

PHH: What did you think?

Jeff: Well, I haven't seen any of the two most recent releases. I saw one,

Catching Fire, I don't remember – the first one. I like both the book and the

movie exactly the same.

Both David and Jeff described becoming interested in the popular title *The Hunger*

Games after seeing the book being read, seeing the film advertised, and hearing friends

talk about one or both.   For Jeff and David, peer groups appear to have influenced their reading habits and preferences in regard to popular titles. In interview two, Chris described an experience similar to David, that of seeing a book often enough that he finally became curious about it:

> Chris: Um, sometimes they'll [friends] be like "Oh this is a good example of the genre you read, so check it out."
>
> PHH: Do you take them up on it?
>
> Chris: Occasionally.
>
> PHH: Have you ever found a good book that way?
>
> Chris: Yeah.
>
> PHH: What was the book? Or give me an example of that.
>
> Chris: I think *Percy Jackson* series was an example of that.
>
> PHH: So that was recommended by a friend?
>
> Chris: Yeah, people were reading it in school so I was curious.

Chris's descriptor of "curious" in this context echoes the language used by Jeff and David. Their descriptions all emphasized the influence of peer groups on these participants' reading choices, as well as the importance of easy access to books, either in print form or through online means. Embedded in their descriptions, also, is an understanding of the influence of popular culture and popular media on reading choices and reading habits of adolescents.

Dylan, in interview two, described his experience with peers who read, "I do have a bunch of friends who have read *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* – those two are the main things if I was going to talk about a book with them that I'd talk about." Dylan,

however, found his most valuable reading relationship outside his family with a staff member at this school, "And then [staff member] who I would also classify as a friend, he reads all kinds of stuff." A few minutes later in this interview, Dylan expanded on this relationship and how it worked:

> PHH: I'm glad you and [staff member] have got a buddy thing going.
>
> Dylan: Yeah, I don't think I would be loving high school if I didn't.
>
> PHH: So what do you and he read together? What do you usually?
>
> Dylan: We haven't read a ton of things yet, but I think I said last time – we're going to read The – *A Brief History of Seven Killings* over Christmas break hopefully. And yeah, I mean a lot of the time I'm just sending him journalism pieces and stuff like that to read. Stuff I find interesting, or stuff I find infuriating most of the time (interview 2).

Dylan's description of his peer group differs somewhat from those of Jeff, David, and Chris. Although he described reading popular, well-known titles with film tie-ins, he also described his primary reading influences as his older sister and an adult friend rather than seeing his peers reading or talking about a title. This experience of seeking a reading role model outside his family may be why Dylan was the only participant to solicit book recommendations from me. In our third interview, he said to me "Hey, if you ever want to send me recommendations for books and stuff like that, that sounds great" (interview 3). When Dylan described seeking out books, he did describe use of popular culture or media, but in a substantially different way than other participants. He did not mention film tie-ins or advertisements, instead, he told me he was currently "choosing books from the Mann-Booker prize short list. I want to read them all" (interview 1). In interview

two, as we discussed book choices, he told me "I follow authors on Twitter and social media. I can keep up…they recommend books." He described, in interview one, being heavily influenced by his older sister, who lived across the country, saying "she recommends books to me…it's mostly her, I don't have money for books right now." Dylan described social influences on his reading habits and preferences that differ from other participants. Although he is influenced by social networks of which he is a part, including social media, he described popular culture as less influential on his reading habits, overall.

Spencer and I discussed friends, book recommendations, and what influenced his choice of reading in interview two. Spencer began by mentioning the influence of popular culture and media on his reading preferences and habits:

Spencer: And like for instance, I read the books before I saw the movies: *The Lord of the Rings*. Um, if I had seen the movies I would definitely want to come back and read the book. But that was one where I read the books and watched the movies.

PHH: Have you ever seen the movie and then read then motivated to go get the book?

Spencer: Occasionally yeah. I can't say that I've done it off the top of my head. Some of the Star Wars. I know the movies were created first, but sometimes I want to go back to read the books the books are created after just because.

I asked several times about whether he and his friends recommended books to each other and Spencer answered "Not really. We just don't talk about it all that much. This – um, phenomenal book we might talk about it. Outside of English assignments, not really"

(interview 2). I asked what he and his friends talked about and he told me "A lot of music stuff." After a few more minutes of discussion, Spencer told me that his school, as part of their school club structure, sponsored student-led book clubs. I asked Spencer to describe the way these book clubs worked:

> Spencer: Um, well there's the high fantasy kind of – like not the dragons and all that stuff, more urban fantasy rather. But then there's also the other fantasy stuff. And in high school the variety is more – is basically those. There's not really a lot of nonfiction stuff to choose from.
>
> PHH: So you pull things from the school library to read?
>
> Spencer: Yeah. Usually our librarians have multiple copies of books they have designated for book club and they'll lay them out. They'll have X amount of books and we'll split into groups and come in and read and meet up after six weeks or so and tell them what we thought of the book and answer questions and talk about it.
>
> PHH: Awesome. So this is a school sponsored book club?
>
> Spencer: Yeah.
>
> PHH: It's not part of the English class?
>
> Spencer: It can be because my freshmen year we did have that as a requirement for something because it was cool but I felt – I felt it was unnecessary because we were all kind of doing it anyway, so …
>
> PHH: Right. So you get time during the day to meet?
>
> Spencer: Yes. During club days when, it's kind of like a school break while we're at school, which is weird. We either stay in class or go to book club or

clubs. Just stuff. Most of this – we read out outside of school. We read the books out and then come back and just talk about them, which I thought was pretty cool (interview 2).

Spencer's description of school-sponsored book clubs gave me a window of understanding into a reason that he might not have described reading with or reading books recommended by his friends. The book club structure, though somewhat artificial and part of the school environment, gives the students who choose to participate a space to read a common, high-interest book and practice their skills reading and discussing books with their peers in an informal educational setting. This setting may wholly or partially replace more spontaneous talk about books between friends, especially with Spencer's description of his friendships' focus on "music stuff."

Alex described being part of a robust peer group of other avid readers. When I asked Alex to describe what his friends read, he answered immediately with names and titles:

Alex: One of my best friends is an extreme Stephen King nut.

PHH: He and I would get along well.

Alex: He reads a whole bunch of Stephen King. My, one of my other friends just bought everything that H.G. Lovecraft ever wrote.

PHH: Wow.

Alex: When he got it, it was like a deal on his Kindle, all of it for a dollar.

PHH: Wow. That's a lot.

Alex: He's got a lot of reading.

PHH: Sounds like you got lots of friends that like to read.

Alex: Yes. [One particular friend] and I recommend things to each other from time to time. When I told him that he should read the *Gregor* series, which he did, and we both thoroughly enjoyed it (interview 2).

Alex's description suggested to me that he and his friends spoke about the books they read, in enough detail that he could remember specific titles that specific friends like to read, or specific authors in which his friends were interested. This further suggested to me that his friendships, unlike those mentioned by Jeff, David, and Spencer, included a larger degree of sharing of and talking about books of interest.

Summary. Participants in this study described family culture and family expectations as influential in their book reading habits and books choices. Participants also described relationships with peers as influential in their reading habits and book choices. The participants described seeing books being read by other students as an influence on their own reading habits. Another influence, reported by the participants, was films made from books popular within their social circles, grades, or school environments.

Peer Groups and the Social Construction of the "Lone Reader" Identity

As participants described their reading choices, their friend groups, and the ways in which they choose books to read, I began to notice a contradiction in their responses. While each participant reported being influenced to read books based on the reading choices of friends and family, five of the six participants also reported a perception of being a serious reader in a group of friends less dedicated or motivated to read. The code "Lone Reader" emerged from participant descriptions of their reading experiences and descriptions of their friends' reading, and supported the Reader Identity theme that

emerged during data analysis. Despite these socially constructed reading habits and preferences noted above, five of the six the participants also described themselves as set apart from their friends, a social construction of "reader" that emphasized their difference from their closest peer groups. Findings indicated that for these participants, peer social interactions seemed to reinforce their self-description as a lone reader. The participants used different but similar terms to describe this "Lone Reader" identity. For example, in interview one, Chris used the descriptor of being "set apart," telling me "I don't try to set myself apart, but I definitely am set apart." In the same interview, Chris went on to describe himself this way, "Yeah, so people I know do read stuff, but I definitely read the most out of everyone I know. Everyone in my peer group." In interview two, we revisited this discussion of reading and peer groups, and Chris emphasized his earlier point:

> I don't really have a lot of literary friends, like, people who read the same as me, because I read a lot more than most of the people that I know. I brought *Lord of the Rings* to school and people thought it was the Bible. Cause it was a big book, had a little ribbon.

Chris's memory of this event made him laugh, but what he described seemed to be a genuinely large gap in his perception of his reading habits and preferences and those of his peers at school. His perception of fellow students as unacquainted with large hardbound books (to the point of mistaking such a book for the Bible) speaks to not only his perception of how and what his peers are familiar with as reading matter, but also to Chris's construction of himself as a reader in relationship to his peers. This description of being set apart would return in later interviews, for Chris and for some of the other

participants, in their descriptions of themselves in relationship to their peer group in general, as well as friends specifically. For example, in interview three, I asked Chris if he wanted to be less "set apart," perhaps within a group of friends who valued reading as much as he did:

> Chris: I feel like if it was a group of serious readers they would spend a lot more time discussing it. So I don't really discuss books with my friends all that much. But it doesn't really affect it any – like it's just like not a common interest. Like if one person likes sports and another doesn't, then they just don't talk about sports.
>
> PHH: Yeah. So for you it's not a problem that this is not part of the friendship?
>
> Chris: No, it's just one less common interest. I like reading books and I like seeing the movies with friends, but I don't usually – like discussing books with friends just – like you're just rehashing what happened. Like you're – like you both read the book then you discuss what happened, but you don't really add anything to it usually.

Chris's comment that reading is "just one less common interest" and that talking with friends about books would be "rehashing" the plot suggested that Chris, while highly valuing reading for himself, was not (at least at that time) interested in forming friendships around books and reading. While he described, as noted in previous sections, being influenced to read or investigate books because of his social networks, in this exchange he appeared to acknowledge and even feel comfortable in his identity as a lone reader. His comments appear to indicate that he has actively constructed and maintained this identity and that he has found other interests upon which to build his friendships.

Like Chris, Jeff described himself as set apart or different from his peers, but his description emphasized reading choice rather than reading habits. Jeff suggested that his reading tastes differed significantly enough from those of his friends and that he was not sure his friends would even be interested in the same books. In interview one, Jeff told me that his current pleasure reading book was *Candide*. Also in our first interview, Jeff described a memory of unsuccessfully attempting to interest his friends in a title that he loved in middle school:

Jeff: Have you ever heard of the *Origami Yoda* series?

PHH: Oh yes.

Jeff: Because I know Tom Angleberger [the author] so I was really trying to get everyone interested in my class. The whole thing is – I just thought it was really cool that I knew a successful author and stuff – I wanted to make everyone else like it so I would be looking like I know something.

PHH: Were you successful?

Jeff: A little bit yeah. The people who might who would've been interested but just hadn't heard about it up to the point were interested but the rest were kind of like "Meh."

In our second interview, I asked Jeff to tell me more about what his friends and peers enjoyed reading and what he enjoyed reading. Jeff noted again that he considered his reading preferences to have set him apart from some of his friends:

PHH: Is that what most of your friends read? Fantasy or…?

Jeff: Yeah kind of. I have a couple of groups of friends.

PHH: I think we talked about that last time. So you've got one like fantasy group

of friends.

Jeff: Yeah, yes, the others are – they're just similar to that except not quite as nerdy than some groups.

PH: Ah, nerd pride. So what do the non-nerds read?

Jeff: There's some that like those Nicholas Sparks and John Green books. I really don't like those much at all. Let's see. There's some like the, there's some that like those post-apocalyptic teen books.

PHH: Like *The Hunger Games*?

Jeff: And *Divergent* and stuff.

PHH: So things that are popular and in the media and people are talking about…?

Jeff: Yeah.

I probed a little further about the gap between his perceptions of his pleasure reading and the pleasure reading choices of his friends, prompting the following exchange:

PHH: Do you ever like look at the stuff you're reading and then look at things your friends like to do and read and think "I wish I could introduce them to like…?"

Jeff: Maybe a little bit, but I don't want to impose on them or anything… Well I mean it's [his pleasure reading]– a lot of it's an acquired taste and everything and I have recommended [only] one or two things that they would maybe read or anything (interview 2).

In our interviews, Jeff appeared to perceive himself as set apart or different from his peer group because of his reading habits and reading choices, rather than on the basis of reading or not reading. He appeared to perceive himself as not only set apart but also

comfortable with that separation when he noted that he was unwilling to "impose" his tastes on his peers through recommendations. His comment that his reading choices are "an acquired taste" suggested to me that Jeff feels that his reading choices would not be acceptable or would not be interesting to his peers.

In our interviews, Dylan also described a gap between himself and his peers (especially his male peers) but instead of the term *set apart* (used by Chris), or *different* (used by Jeff) he used the term "outcast" and then immediately qualified it as "too strong a word" to accurately describe his perception. I found this term interesting, and asked him to explore that word a bit more. He explained that, "Well, you know…I'm kind of the guy in each group that, maybe, you know, won't enjoy or maybe you won't invite me to the movie just because I'll analyze the movie too much" (interview 2). When I asked Dylan to further describe this experience, he responded:

> I find it hard to get close to people that don't share similar interests to me, so
>
> people who don't read a lot, I end up not getting very close to them and that's not
>
> universally true, because I have a lot of close friends that don't read, but it's a lot
>
> harder for me. If people are ignorant, it's really hard for me to be friends with
>
> them. So, I think those groups of people, that a lot of them don't read, me being
>
> the reader, and…the person who pays attention to current events, has kind of led
>
> me to not getting that close to them. A lot of times that means I don't get invited
>
> to stuff, or don't hang out with them as much (interview 2).

Dylan's description, contrasted with Chris and Jeff's words, suggested to me that Dylan viewed the reading gap between himself and his friends as both more negative and more problematic than Chris or Jeff's descriptions of their perceptions. Dylan's use of

"outcast" indicated a sense of wistfulness, in contrast to Chris and Jeff, who described their "lone reader" identities in more diffident terms. Dylan's comment that he might not be invited to outings because he might "analyze the movie too much" suggests that where Jeff and Chris perceived an intellectual distance from their peers ("an acquired taste" for books and no "literary" friends) that held no special emotional resonance, Dylan perceived this distance as unwanted and undesirable. It appears that Dylan perceives himself as different not only because of *what* he reads but also *because* he reads avidly, and that he would enjoy a group of peers who also read avidly.

Spencer and David each described themselves as readers and each, like Chris, emphasized that reading was not important or essential to maintaining their friendships. For example, in interview two, David explained that "I don't think some of my main friends are really big readers. Both of the [female friends of his] tend to read a lot and they just read pop fiction kind of stuff." I asked David what interested he and his friends, and what they spent their time doing:

> David: We do fantasy football together and we all spend weeks reading about
>
> who we – what players we wanted to pick and all of that kind of stuff…
>
> PHH: That's a lot of research. How much time do you guys spend?
>
> David: A lot. [laughter] more than probably …
>
> PHH: Honestly, how much time do you guys spend doing that?
>
> David: What, just fantasy football in general? If it's a Sunday, then I'll probably
>
> spend all day watching it and texting back and forth about stuff (interview 2).

When I asked David in interview three if reading with or sharing books with his friends was important to him, he shrugged and said "We do other stuff." However, his

description of the "stuff" that he does with his friends included hours of reading and research for their hobby of fantasy football. His offhand "We do other stuff" along with his description of his fantasy football hobby indicates that David, like Jeff and Chris, focused his friendships on activities other than reading and also that he did not consider the research that he and his friends did to be real reading.

Spencer had described the focus of his friendships ("music stuff") in interview one, and in interview three, I asked him to describe more specifically his experience as a reader in a group of friends who do not read as much as he does. Spencer paused for a long moment and then commented:

> It's just not really much to say about it. It's not kind of – I read more than so-and-so does. It doesn't really matter all that much. Usually when I'm hanging out with my friends, we're usually not reading, so… we do band rehearsals…a lot of my friends and I are in different bands and sometimes we group together and do projects and make another band. So that stuff – at band rehearsals we're more focused on playing music and listening to music and maybe reading lyrics or creating guitar tabs and stuff.

Spencer appeared to perceive that the focus of his friendships and peer group relationships, music, precludes reading as a shared social activity. His comment that within his peer group, reading "doesn't really matter all that much" suggests that while Spencer himself enjoys reading, he is comfortable with a lone reader identity and that he considers music as a strong bond within his peer group. His diffidence is similar to that expressed by other participants as they described their perceptions of themselves as avid readers within social peer groups of adolescents who do not value reading as highly.

In contrast to the other participants, Alex described himself as someone who "used to read" (interview 2). In our third interview, I asked Alex to describe being an adolescent male who likes to read and he again demurred, citing schoolwork and academic expectations as a limiting factor for his pleasure reading:

I used to read more than I do now…My friend, I'd say we're pretty much on the same page. We're kind of taken over by the difficult classes and trying to trying to keep up with school. [We] don't really put as much value on reading as we do getting good grades in math classes and such.

However, a few minutes later, we had the following exchange, which illustrated that, despite Alex's perception of himself as someone who "used to read," he and his friends do read actively together and discuss books:

I read the *Gregor* series and my friend did and we talked about it and stuff. My [other] friend reads a bunch of Stephen King. We made fun of him for a long time because we were like "All you read is Stephen King! That's all you read." And then he got my other friend to pick up a couple of the books and he [the other friend] was reading a Stephen King book for a while. And [first friend] was the one who had the *Game of Thrones* and I picked that one up. It's kind of gone together on that. I'll probably end up reading Stephen King in – at some point if I get time.

Alex's description contrasted with those of the other participants in his perception of himself as a reader and in his perception of himself as a "lone reader." Because Alex and his friends share books, read similar books, and choose books in similar ways, he is the lone participant to not describe himself in lone reader terms.

Summary. Each participant described an identity as a reader, and these self-descriptions were individuated although they share some common themes. Five of the six participants described themselves as set apart, or otherwise outside their peer groups, either due to their reading habits, their reading choices, or both. In contrast to the other participants, Alex described himself as both less of a reader and as a part of a friend group that reads together and discusses books. Whether describing themselves as a "lone reader" or as someone "who used to read," each of the participants appears to calibrate their identity as readers within the context of their peers' reading habits and choices. This reading identity appears, in turn, to influence the reading habits and choices of each participant. Reader Identity formation is a complex and individual process, made even more complicated by the social pressures and expectations of adolescence. The participants' descriptions illustrate the complexity and difficulty inherent in defining adolescent reader identity.

Participant perceptions of school reading and pleasure reading

In the previous section, I described the intersection of social expectations and peer groups on the Reader Identity of each participant. For five of the six participants, this intersection appears to have assisted in the development of a "Lone Reader" identity in contrast to their perceptions of the reading habits of their peer groups. Avid readers, though they read extensively and for their own purposes, live within a web of social networks that influence their perceptions of school assigned reading (Moje et al, 2008; Millard, 1997; Newkirk, 2002). Findings suggest that participant resistance to school assigned reading was influenced both by social expectations (school as "boring" or "bland") and by their identities as expert readers who resist teachers' efforts to control or

extend the participants' responses to school assigned texts. In the next sections, I provide a discussion of participant perceptions of school assigned reading, followed by an examination of participant perceptions of transactional reading and effective assignments.

School reading. The avid adolescent male participants in this study described their pleasure reading in various ways. Each participant chose complex texts for their pleasure reading, and each participant used terminology and language that positioned them as expert readers, yet participant descriptions of the books assigned for school revealed that although they often enjoyed individual books assigned to them, they resisted the projects assigned with those books. The participants' rhetoric on this topic illuminated for me a gap in their perception of reading for school and reading for pleasure. In order to explore this gap, I asked each participant a series of questions in interview three about their perceptions of school assigned reading, school assigned projects, their teachers, and their experience as English Language Arts students.

Dylan, in interview one, had described his preferred reading as "early 20th century authors—Hemingway, Steinbeck, Kerouac—it was just…socially and historically it was an interesting time." Dylan also commented in the same interview that he loved "Charles Dickens…just…his language and descriptions of things. And it was a really interesting time in history." In our second interview, when he described some school reading as "intimidating," I wanted to find out what might be intimidating about school reading for a high school senior who described an advanced taste in his pleasure reading. We had the following exchange:

> PHH: Give me an example of a book that would be hard to read or hard to get into or intimidating? I like that word.

Dylan: Well, I just read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for school and my copy of it was 695 pages and it was just really really thick. It was just like – one of the things I like about reading is to be able to look back at the progress I've made, but with that book, it was like I'd read 200 pages and I was like "Ok, so 495 to go."

PHH: Yeah, is that true for the books you read for fun too?

Dylan: Not usually. When I have time and don't have other assignments I need to do, it's not intimidating at all to pick up a really thick book and read it. I mostly am thankful when I get a smaller book to read for school. I'm like "I'll read this today and I can get back to reading whatever I want to read" (interview 2).

Dylan's comment about time to read, and lack of assignments to go with a book interested me. In our third interview, I asked Dylan to describe his school reading. Instead of responding with his opinion of the books, he started by describing how his reading interests aligned with his current school reading assignments:

Early 20th century and before that. That's actually what I like, around that time period. So I really enjoyed…we talked about this before, this like Victorian and early 20th century, I enjoy both of those periods a lot. It's finally kind of coincided because for a long time I wasn't reading very many books [that] I actually really enjoyed for school.

Even though Dylan described the books assigned for his current AP English class as "enjoyable" (interview three), he also describes wanting to finish reading them quickly so he can go back to his own reading, "*Her Land* and *Animal Farm* [are] both not very big and I just read them in a day and then got to do the reading that I wanted to do, even though I really enjoyed *Animal Farm* especially" (interview 3). He does encounter

books or assignments that he has not enjoyed, for example, "even though I didn't love

Pride and Prejudice, I felt bad. Like I didn't want to be a typical boy…" (interview 3)

and before his current class, "I guess probably intro to lit in the 8th grade was the last time

I like really read a bunch of books I actually enjoyed" (interview 3).   Though his

descriptions of school reading are generally favorable, Dylan described his pleasure

reading as more enjoyable and more attractive to him than school reading, even school

reading that he has enjoyed. The factor he mentioned most as influencing his opinion of

school reading was the deadline or time pressure associated with reading on a school

schedule, rather than reading for his own purposes and on his own schedule.

Jeff, whose descriptions of his pleasure reading revealed a taste for plays,

musicals, history and 17th century French satire, described his current school reading as:

> Not too bad, actually. I liked *To Kill a Mockingbird*.   We read a lot of Edgar
>
> Allen Poe short stories, so that was very nice. I'm satisfied with a lot of the
>
> things that are assigned.   We're reading *The Great Gatsby* right now so I'm
>
> pretty happy with that.   So we're reading *The Great Gatsby* as a last minute thing
>
> for the DE [Dual Enrollment] English class (interview 3).

This aligns with Jeff's description of his pleasure reading; he enjoys complex texts and

does not find these texts intimidating and this appeared to carry over into his enjoyment

of school assigned texts such as *The Great Gatsby*. For example, he described his

reading this way in interview one, "I have a really eclectic taste of … because I read

novels a lot of the time but I read nonfiction stuff a little bit more, like there's– I have this

huge illustrated encyclopedia of the British monarchy." Although his interests seemed to

be congruent with his school assigned reading, I asked Jeff to think about English

assignments that he had not liked, and he responded almost immediately with:

> There was one thing I didn't like: in 8th grade we had to – we were doing a lot of
>
> textbook stuff in 8th grade. Textbook reading stories and that was terrible
>
> because there's like "Millie went down to the store and got a pet dog." Or
>
> something like that. It's – stuff like that. Not stimulating at all (interview 3).

Jeff's comments here appear to indicate that he, like other participants, has a negative

view of assignments that he perceives as boring or not useful, while he appreciates and

even enjoys assignments that he finds intellectually stimulating and engaging. For

example, when I asked Jeff to describe an assignment that he particularly enjoyed, he

responded with:

> [T]his year we had the, we did the fictional narrative and I had a field day with
>
> that. I think it really helped a lot of us writing wise because we got to do some
>
> things we liked and we got some critiques for it. We just improved on what we
>
> already have (interview 3).

Despite his appreciation for his English course, and his ability to balance advanced

classes, Jeff noted that he was happy to be taking a British Literature survey the next

semester because "if you take it you don't have to do English in college" (interview 3).

This comment suggested that even though he was doing very well in a dual enrollment

English class and found the reading material to be congruent with is taste in books, he

was taking steps to bypass further English courses in his college experience. This

comment seemed to suggest that while Jeff largely enjoyed reading books for his

advanced English course, he resisted the assignments associated with school reading, and

viewed school assignments in a negative light even if he enjoyed the actual reading

associated with the assignment.

Chris's description of his school reading in interview three echoed his description of *real* reading discussed in interview one, that is, books that carry a message beyond pure escapism. He said that his current school reading consisted of

> a lot of the old books that have like been time tested kind of. *Great Gatsby* and stuff, all these books that have been written a long time ago, but are still popular because of the messages they carry and stuff...*Fahrenheit 451, Night, To Kill a Mockingbird, Grapes of Wrath…*

I asked Chris what he thought of these books, since he strongly preferred fantasy for his pleasure reading, and he responded that "they're all good books" and then went on immediately to add "A lot of people don't like them because they have to read them, and then answer questions about them. Just--they don't like having to do that sort of thing, but I usually enjoy them." The recognition, that "people don't like them" not necessarily because of the content of the books, but because teachers assign required work, seemed to underscore the descriptions of the other five participants in this study. I asked Chris about the work that he had been assigned for English class:

> PHH: Even in your pleasure reading, from everything you've said to me, you're not a superficial reader. Would it be fair to say that you don't appreciate teachers who take a superficial approach?
>
> Chris: I don't like teachers who do superficial. But I also don't like teachers that do way too deep.
>
> PHH: Tell me more about that.
>
> Chris: Teachers who try to analyze every single part of a book that doesn't really

need to be analyzed.   Like, if they are talking about like what happened in every

single scene as a way to like convey the biggest meaning possible to find

throughout the book – some things are just to get the plot forward (interview 3).

I asked Chris about the kinds of assignments that he did not appreciate or in which he

saw little value. He explained that, while he enjoyed reading, even reading for school, he

disliked "lots of group projects. And projects where you had to try and and interpret

something in a different way. Like create an art piece about it…Because those are

always like, I'm good at reading…I'm not that great at drawing" (interview 3).   For him,

assignments that he does not like, or sees no value in, take away from his experience as a

reader and from his willingness to engage with the assigned reading. Chris's comment

about teachers who overanalyze books suggests that while he may enjoy the actual

reading, he resists the assignments that surround the assigned reading, especially those he

considers to be not relevant to his skills or interests.

When I asked Spencer to describe his reading for school, and he responded with

"Boring. Usually. The last book we had to read for English, *Great Gatsby*, it was

interesting and we didn't have very many projects to go with it" (interview 1). This

comment about projects echoed the statements by other participants. While he described

his school assigned book as "interesting" he also expressed approval of the lack of "many

projects" that accompanied that reading.   Spencer expanded a bit on this after I asked

him if he could remember any book that was particularly boring and he was able to recall

a title immediately:

Back in 10th grade we had to read, no this was between 9th grade and 10th grade we

had to read *The Color of Water*. Which was a very difficult book to get through

as a freshman/sophomore. The way it was written and a lot of that stuff inside of

that.   It was – to a kid's age [a kid that age] it's not really that interesting. And

then with all the assignments we had to do with it, it was just awful (interview 2).

Spencer's comment about the assignments that accompanied this book emphasize that not

only his dislike the content of the book, but also that he found the combination of book

and assignments to be memorably distasteful. I explored this a little farther in our third

interview,

> PHH: Has that been the case like all the way up through school? Or was there
>
> some point in school, like some grade, where you were like "School really is
>
> fun!"?
>
> Spencer: I'd say now actually.
>
> PHH: Ok.   That's fair.
>
> Spencer: Because well, with the last English classes being so different from all the
>
> other ones I've ever had.   This class is more focused on writing.   We got that
>
> taken care of in the beginning in this semester, but then we kind of slowed down
>
> and read a little more.
>
> PHH: Is that what it is about this class that makes reading more appealing? Not
>
> necessarily the assignments, but having less emphasis on reading and more
>
> emphasis on writing and more time to read?
>
> Spencer: Not really.   I'd say the absence of a lot of assignments that go with the
>
> book, because usually the teachers give you vocab and questions, all that stuff to
>
> go – big packets of stuff to go with the book.   So read this chapter – this chapter
>
> – which in some cases can be ok if it's an ok book, but I usually don't have a lot

of fun with it.

PHH: So just the fact of maybe being able to to read without having to to pay attention to little minute details?

Spencer: Kind of. More like having the pressure of taking time to write down something that you've already read about. More like than just keeping it in your head.

PHH: So you get to just read instead of …?

Spencer: Than worrying about answering everything.

PHH: Yeah. So you're reading maybe for the actual purpose of reading, rather than reading to answer questions.

Spencer: True (interview 3).

Spencer's comments about assignments indicate that he may be amenable to reading, even when assigned books may not be congruent with his reading preferences, if he does not feel burdened by accompanying projects and school work. In particular, his comments about assignments being "ok" if the book is "ok" but "worrying about everything" and "big packets" handed out by teachers, indicate that he finds that these kinds of assignments interfere with his transactions with school assigned texts.

Like the other participants, Alex also described a negative perception of the projects and assignments accompanying assigned books. When I asked him to describe his school reading in our first interview, he responded that "lot of it's kind of bland. We have a lot of Shakespeare and stuff, I don't really like Shakespeare. I didn't like *Romeo and Juliet* at all." We discussed books and assignments that he found "boring" or "bland" and a particular title immediately came to mind for Alex, "we did *The Color of Water*

which was super dry, in my opinion. That summer reading thing. No one in my class enjoyed it. We were all like 'Why are we doing this? This is horrible'" (interview 1). Alex had enjoyed some of his assigned school reading from the canon, "*To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Great Gatsby*. I enjoyed *Tom Sawyer*" (interview 3). Along with reading books from the canon, Alex was the only participant to describe the experience of choosing his own books to read in English Language Arts class. Student choice reading is considered to be more engaging and motivating for students, especially students who resist or struggle with school assigned reading (Moje, 2000; Newkirk, 2002). Alex, however, described a more mixed experience with this practice (interview 3):

> So in eighth grade, I think the book I did was *Double Helix*. I don't remember
> who it was by but I didn't really enjoy that one either. And then, I ended up
> choosing *City of Bones* [for another assignment]. And regretted that decision
> immensely--the plot holes and everything, and it was just like there was times
> when you [the author] could do something cool, but you didn't.

Alex's choice of words "plot holes and everything" suggested that his identity as a reader, or as an expert reader was a factor in his enjoyment or connection with a book he had chosen to read for school. Book choice, in pleasure reading, includes the option of abandoning books. Alex, though he was given the option of choosing a book to read for his English class, did not have the option of choosing a different one when he did not enjoy it. As we discussed books and assignments, Alex remarked that, "to make a book a chore is my opinion, the worst thing you [teachers] could do" (interview 3). I asked him what teachers do to make a book a "chore" and Alex's response, like those of the other participants, touched directly on time and scheduling:

I understand at school you have to give it a deadline, but the way that they do it, they – a lot of times it's like "you have to read so many pages in this amount of time." Well, I am busy doing math homework, I have a job, and I don't have time to read this book. And a lot of the times, we would be reading things and a lot of people in my class would just use *Spark Notes*. I think we read *The Hound of the Baskerville*s, and one of my friends was like "Yeah I didn't open that once and I still passed because I didn't have time to read that book" (interview 3).

Alex's comment about reading "so many pages in this amount of time" and deadlines prompted me to probe further into what might make assignments associated with school reading more tolerable or less likely to be engaging. As I asked questions, we had the following exchange:

PHH: would you say that was a big factor for not enjoying things? Being timed?

Alex: Like, definitely timed. Cause I remember I had to read that book all in the night before we had to take a test and stuff on it. I read pretty much the whole thing beside some pages because I was just – I ran out of time.

PHH: Wow. So if so books you're assigned that you do enjoy are – almost have to hit this really high bar?

Alex: Yeah. Like for *Ender's Game*, that was one. The other books that are being read are like *The Hobbit* and like *Ender's Game*, they're like thicker than that so there's more to go through. But I really enjoyed that one so…I was willing, more willing to put in the time, to take care of that. But for books that I just didn't enjoy, it was like "this isn't even worth my time." I'm not getting anything out of this. I'm going to go do my math homework.

PHH: So it's almost like if you're not enjoying the book having those extra

obstacles are almost--added to it, like vocabulary and answering questions and all

those things that most teachers do to ruin a perfectly good book.

Alex: Yeah

PHH: It makes it so there's no chance that you'd like the book.

Alex: Uh huh.   But if like the book is good and I'm actually enjoying it, I'm far

more willing to do the things that they're putting out there for us to have to do as

a gradable school project.   But if they pick a book that kids my age won't like, or

is worded poorly or has plot holes like *City of Bones*--like there's a couple of

things that I was like "wait that doesn't make sense even a little bit.   How can

they do that?" kind of deal. Because I mean, that does – it just takes away from it

(interview 3).

Toward the end of this interview, Alex and I circled back around to assignments that he

found interesting and he reiterated his previous comments:

Alex: So when the projects – so when the book is good and the projects are good

– it's good. When the book is good I'll be willing to do projects that are less fun

but when the book is no good, I don't want any part of it.

PHH: So even if the project is something really cool, you're not that interested?

Alex: Yeah. It's like "I didn't enjoy this anyway…I didn't enjoy this" (interview

3).

Alex's comments about engagement and motivation suggest that for him, enjoyment or

connection with a book is an integral part of his motivation to see assignments as

purposeful. He describes being more "willing" to do less engaging projects that are

associated with a book that "is good."

Summary. All six participants described factors that, for them, limited their willingness to engage with an assigned book or projects; time constraints, reading to a pre-determined schedule, a book they did not find engaging, or assignments that they perceived as excessive or as not purposeful. As the participants in this study each transacted with texts, they preferred to read on their own schedules and to complete assignments that they perceived as purposeful. They also described resentment for "too many" assignments or a number of assignments that they perceived as onerous or busywork. Participants described a preference autonomy over their school reading that mirrors or replicated the autonomy they enjoyed in their pleasure reading.

Transactional reading and effective assignments. The participants in this study described extensive reading experiences and a long reading history. This positioned them as experienced readers both inside and outside formal educational settings. They described resentment for the constraints on autonomy over their own reading transactions. In interview three, I asked participants directly to think about and then describe school assignments and books that they had enjoyed or found particularly effective. During data analysis two commonalities emerged as the participants described these assignments; a teacher who read aloud to the class, and/or autonomy over assignments associated with the assigned reading. As I continued to analyze, the codes "Read Aloud" and "Effective Teacher" emerged to support the theme "Efferent vs. Aesthetic Reading." For example, Jeff noted that he found his current teacher's treatment of *The Great Gatsby* effective because "we're just sitting down and [current teacher] is reading it out. It's, we're just following along on the page. So we're not individually

reading it. It's kind of like an audio book that's a real person" (interview 1). Alex commented that he most enjoyed a recent book because

> [we] read it as a class and my teacher, she was reading it aloud to us. She was
>
> like "This is my all-time favorite book and I'm doing this." So she would read
>
> aloud and then she would stop and we'd talk about it…it was more than just "I'm
>
> reading words" (interview 3).

Spencer commented that he felt his current teacher was effective because "she's reading it [the assigned book] aloud to us" (interview 3) and he found this to be more engaging than simply reading it himself. David, when asked to talk about a time he thought a teacher was effective, remembered an elementary teacher of his who "read us this book and she gave us each a copy of it" (interview 3). The act of reading, for these students, was transformed by the act of listening to a teacher read aloud rather than reading the words themselves. The read aloud by teachers seems to have moved a school assigned book further along the efferent-aesthetic continuum toward the aesthetic reading experience. Rosenblatt (1978, 1995) argued that readers must connect with texts emotionally (aesthetically) first, before they can be guided into an efferent stance. Read-aloud, for these participants, appears to have offered them an opportunity for strongly aesthetic stance with the school assigned text, with the teacher as a proxy or short cut for the reader in this transaction.

Dylan, however, responded to these questions differently, and noted that effective assignments for him were the ones that were meaningful in the context of the content of the assigned reading, but gave him time to reflect deeply, and to move, as a reader, from an efferent stance to an aesthetic one at his own pace:

Dylan: *Twelfth Night* is I think one of my favorite Shakespeare plays. We had to

give a presentation on it, so I did a PowerPoint presentation on it and then I

finished it and then I didn't get to do it for a whole week. So it was like my

thoughts weren't exactly…usually I do it the night or the night before the night

before--finalize everything--so I'm really fresh with the topic, but then that time I

wasn't. And it actually turned out to be better because my thoughts weren't

exactly what was on the PowerPoint. I had thought it through more almost, more

developed. I told [my teacher] beforehand, I was like "If this is different from

what's on the PowerPoint, it's just because I know this is probably more

accurate."

PHH: You'd been thinking about it.

Dylan: But it was like, it actually came together pretty well. But I got to thinking

more deeply about it. And I even went off notes for a while because I like to do

that presentations like that (interview 3).

The unexpected extra time before his presentation allowed Dylan time to not only deepen

his understanding of the text, but also to shift his stance as reader within this reading

transaction, from efferent to aesthetic. Dylan, as noted in earlier sections, described a

strong aesthetic stance in his pleasure reading. This suggested to me that Dylan's

assessment of this assignment as effective is influenced by the chance to read and transact

with a school assigned text in the way he, as an expert reader, prefers.

Chris, when asked about assignments that he considered to be effective for him,

instead described a teaching approach that he felt was more positive for him, "[current

teacher] really like talks about – to you about the stuff that we're learning about.   Kind

of as equals.   Not like 'read this, do this … dada dada'" (interview 3).   I asked Chris to

expand on this idea a bit more:

> Chris: I find it makes it easier for me to like do the work because I don't look at it
>
> as "Oh I have to do this work for the sole like whatever."   I'm just like "oh yeah I
>
> can do this.   Like this makes sense" because he's explained to me what's going
>
> on and what's happened.
>
> PHH: Ok.   So how does that help you learn do you think?
>
> Chris: I probably come at it with a different view, instead of just get the
>
> assignment done, like really think about it.
>
> PHH: So maybe his trying to like close that power dynamic gap engages you
>
> more?
>
> Chris: Yeah.   Gives me a better attitude about it (interview 3).

Chris, who in earlier sections described a strong aesthetic stance in his approach to

pleasure reading, seems to be describing a preference for a teacher whose approach

aligned with Chris's own reading preferences, and who emphasized a more equitable

relationship with students ("Kind of as equals").   This approach also seemed to offer

Chris a better understanding of the usefulness or purpose of the assignment, making the

assignment meaningful in relationship to the text and in the context of the overall purpose

of the class.

Summary.   Each of the participants described struggling not only with

scheduling and deadlines for assignments but also assignments that they perceived to be

less meaningful, useful, or personally relevant.   The language that participants used to

describe their perceptions of and resistance to school assignments appears to be identical

to language used by struggling and reluctant readers (Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). This finding suggests that the avid adolescent male readers in this study resist and resent assignments that interfere with replicating their pleasure reading experiences. Their perception of themselves, developed and reinforced at home and in school, as expert readers, appears to both afford their persistence and stamina in completing assignments they do not consider effective, as well as sharpening their discernment regarding what they perceive as assignments that lack purpose and meaning.

Conclusion

Each participant described pleasure reading consisting of complex texts, read for their own purposes. In addition, each participant used language that positioned them as expert readers. In the context of their school assigned reading, although the participants described enjoying individual books, they spoke about the accompanying assignments and projects in negative terms. I explored this finding in interviews two and three. Millard's (1986) theory of the social construction of the reading habits and preferences of adolescents captured the emergent theme of "Reader Identity" during data analysis. The participants in this study described their friends, and popular media as influential in their reading choices and preferences.

In their descriptions of school assigned reading, participants noted that some school assignments and projects interfered with their preferred stance as aesthetic readers. This interference, either in terms of time constraints, subject constraints, or simple volume of assignments, served to prevent students from centering their attention on their relationship with the text, instead privileging the efferent reading of these texts. Put another way, participants resented what they perceived as a forced transaction from an

efferent rather than an aesthetic stance in their school reading, or being forced to move to an efferent stance before they perceived themselves to be ready. Despite their experience and success with reading, these avid adolescent male readers appeared to resist and resent school assignments, using language similar to that of struggling or resistant readers presented in the research literature examined in Chapter 2 (Alvermann et al., 1999; Moje et al., 2008; Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

This resistance appears to be complexly intertwined with the social expectations for participants as avid adolescent male readers and with their own perceptions of themselves as avid readers. Social expectation, reinforced by culture and peers, that school assignments are necessary but often devoid of meaning or personal relevance, may reduce opportunities for even avid readers to engage with projects. Put another way, expressing dislike of and resistance to school assignments appears to be a foundational aspect of student perceptions of school culture. Adolescent male students who strive for academic achievement at high levels may participate in resisting school assignments in order to stand out less in their peer groups. Further, findings suggest that participants' perceptions of themselves as expert readers, as well as their extensive experience transacting with texts, both affords and constrains their responses to school assignments. On the one hand, their experience transacting with complex texts offers them tools to persevere with assignments in order to achieve their long term academic goals. On the other hand, their extensive personal experience with reading transactions creates resentment for teachers and assignments that they perceive to interfere with their preferred sequence of movement from aesthetic to efferent stances, which they have experienced and perfected in their pleasure reading.

Illustrative Vignettes

In order to more fully illustrate how the participants perceived their experiences as avid adolescent male readers, I offer two vignettes that capture the exploratory nature of this study. Miles and Huberman (1994) note that qualitative researchers often find "rich 'pockets'" of "meaningful" data that may be illuminated with the use of vignettes, which the authors define as a more tightly "focused description of a series of events taken to be representative, typical, or emblematic in the case" explored in the study. The vignette also "has a narrative, storylike structure that preserves chronological flow and that normally is limited to a brief time span, to one or a few key actors, to a bonded space, or to all three" (p. 81). The vignettes that follow illuminate the complicated and sometimes contradictory perceptions the participants in this study held regarding their reading habits, preferences, and experiences.

Six avid adolescent male readers were interviewed for this study. Two of the six participants, Dylan and Alex, are presented here. The first vignette, Dylan, is a representative example of an avid adolescent male reader most congruent with the description of this type of student which emerged in research literature examined in Chapter 2 (Howard, 2013; Wilson & Kelly, 2007). The second vignette, Alex, is representative of the unexpected, individualized way adolescent male readers conform to and resist cultural norms, family culture, and social expectations in forging a reader identity (Howard, 2013; Newkirk, 2002). Data generated with these participants supports the themes presented in this chapter. Inductive data analysis offers opportunities to foreground participant experiences in order to more deeply explore their lived experiences. Where inductive analysis offers the researcher the opportunity to view

participants' lived experiences broadly, the vignettes in this section, are a means to further illuminate the complex and individual expressions of avid adolescent male reader.

Dylan

In our interviews, Dylan is engaging and talkative. He speaks with a mixture of assurance and diffidence; not hesitating to offer his opinion or ideas but often pausing to choose the correct wording or to order his thoughts before speaking. He is well spoken, with a rich, expansive vocabulary and an eager curiosity about others. Dylan's career goal is to be a writer or a sports journalist and he seeks out opportunities to gain the skills needed to succeed in that field. Dylan describes himself as a high achieving student and has enjoyed his academic career. In our first interview, I asked him how he felt about school and he responded that "I like it. My friends are here. I'm an A or A/B student…AP classes." He also told me he had just been awarded "a scholarship…I applied and got it and then, like, moved up to the next round, so I'm waiting to hear about that" (interview 1). In our third interview, I asked about this scholarship and Dylan told me "I got it!" with great excitement. We spoke often about his upcoming college experience, and the colleges to which he had applied. He expressed himself as "eager" to "meet my kind of people," as statement that shed light on his perception of himself as set apart or "outcast" in his school and his peer group.

Dylan perceives himself to be an expert, serious reader in a group of friends and classmates whom he sees as less serious or less expert readers. He described classmates coming to him for recommendations for books to read for school, and helping them with their writing assignments:

I actually enjoy peer reviewing. Today we were talking about how we weren't

going to have peer reviewing for our next paper.   And I was like "You guys can

just give your papers to me if you want to.   I'm glad to do it." And everyone was

like "are you serious?" I was like "yeah" (interview 2).

Dylan's reading and writing skills position him as the "go to" resource for other students

in his school. He reads widely and with an eye toward his future career goals. For

example, though he prefers "early 20th century" writers for his leisure reading

("Hemingway, Steinbeck"), much of his reading is sports journalism, and he can speak

about various journalists and their subject matter with insight and expertise. For

example, he commented thoughtfully on a particular writer when he and I began

discussing his wide range of reading interests:

He used to write for this website I really like called *Grantling*.   He just has an eye

for detail, and can get stories from people that others don't see writers do very

often.   Sports journalism has this huge problem where they [journalists] ask all

cliché questions.   They're all questions that the people are ready to answer, so I

don't even watch press conferences--even though theoretically I should be really

interested in those--because it's just like the same questions over and over again.

You know, "What did you do wrong in this game?" and they're like "Well we just

didn't play hard enough." Which you just – that's not how it works.   So he

actually like really researches topics and really gets to the root of why people did

certain things in his stories and it's just really fascinating to me (interview 2).

This getting "to the root" is a theme in Dylan's reading and writing. He does not read

superficially. Instead, he reads with a metacognitive awareness of the social, political,

and historical context in which the text was created. As an example, we discussed his preference for early 20th century literature, and he told me:

> I think the that time period in America was really weird for writing because it was it was like so depressing, but also so much was going on…I don't know why I enjoy Hemingway so much, but I feel like he was really thinking deeply about stuff and had an interesting perspective on things. And that applies to other authors in that time period (interview 3).

This metacognitive awareness, coupled with his self-identification as a "good student" seems to have given him a level of comfort and ease in his English class. Dylan is sometimes sought out by other students who ask him to "recommend a good book" for English class projects. A "good book" for this purpose would be "not too long" and "easy to analyze" for other students. Dylan's comments about recommending books for school assignments illuminates his self-identification as a good student. Though he may perceive this characteristic in himself, it is reinforced when other students seek him out for advice and recommendations as well as help with writing assignments. He "almost took over for [teacher] for a while in the class we talked about satire" (interview 2) in his AP Language class. Specifically, he talked to the class about Swift's satirical essay "A Modest Proposal" because "everyone else hated it and I loved it." He enjoyed explaining to the other members of class that the essay was "not thinking about eating babies, it's it's how absurd what he's saying is. I mean Swift was amazing." In our third interview, he described himself as "good at" English in a way that he felt sometimes put him at odds with other male students, beyond assisting his teacher in teaching a concept to the rest of the class. He brought up a specific example as we talked; his class had just read *Pride*

and Prejudice, and his reaction to the book, he felt, was complicated by gendered

expectations of how adolescent male students should respond to books:

> Even though I didn't love *Pride and Prejudice*, I felt bad. Like I didn't want to
>
> be a typical boy, because I didn't like *Pride and Prejudice* that much, but it's not
>
> because I'm a boy, it's just not my favorite. I still think Jane Austen is really
>
> good. And I was talking to [his sister, a reading role model] about it because I
>
> was really frustrated by our discussions our class had on it…a few people who
>
> liked it said it shouldn't be ranked where it is in top books. And some people in
>
> my class were saying it's just a love story…And I'm like "That's not true at all.
>
> That's not a love story you know. It's a story about that class and that period of
>
> history" (interview 3).

I was impressed with Dylan's self-awareness in this statement. I asked him to tell me a

little more about his perception of gender, academics, and expectations for adolescent

male students in his school. He thought for a moment and then gave me another

example:

> Last year I was the only male student in AP literature. I started with four [and]
>
> within 2 weeks I was just the last one. It was kind of depressing. I was trying to
>
> hold on to a few of them and be like "Hey if you just pay attention, it's not that
>
> bad." But that didn't work. But I do think that [gender] has something to do with
>
> it, because I think a lot of the big guys here kind of take the stereotypical
>
> masculine route in terms of the way they approach life and stuff like that. It's
>
> frustrating to me. It's like, you know, "Why would you just limit yourself based
>
> on what a lot of people expect of you, instead of…what actual smart people who

can think on their own think." That's definitely part of it. Because even the people that I view as intelligent, thoughtful people, they still don't read very much and I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that they are male and if they did read then they might be looked at differently or something like that (interview 3).

The perception of being an "outcast," described earlier by Dylan, was both illuminated and complicated by his description of his metacognitive awareness of his resistance to gendered stereotypes of masculine and feminine attitudes toward reading and toward English class assignments in his classes. His stance struck me as somewhat contradictory; his appreciation for school reading both distances him from male peers and draws peers to him as a resource for their coursework. In this way, Dylan's facility with reading and writing, and his self-identification as a good student, particularly in English class, align closely with the description of avid adolescent male reader that emerged from literacy research examined in Chapter 2 (Howard, 2013; Moje et al., 2008; Newkirk, 2002).

Alex

I always looked forward to interviews with Alex, as we had similar interests in movies, television shows, and video games. He was charming and intelligent, as well as self-effacing, with a quick wit and a sharply sarcastic sense of humor. Our conversations were often far-ranging and I sometimes struggled to keep our discussions on track because it seemed we had so many common points of interest. Alex's long term career goal was to be a baker in his own shop, and he often expressed a preference for hands on learning experiences. Although Alex described himself in our first interview as "one of the better students" in his grade, he noted in the same interview that he also perceives

himself as "a little lazy" because he struggled to stay engaged with school assignments like essays and research papers. This self-contradiction proved to be characteristic of the complicated, complex perception that Alex expressed regarding his reading habits and experiences. In our first interview, he remembered that "I was reading from a very young age" and his memories of reading supported that statement. He remembered finishing the Harry Potter series of books "in third grade," a daunting task for even a precocious reader. Despite a love of reading and identifying as a reader, Alex told me in our second interview that he was having trouble finding time to read because "this year and last year with class and homework and…I don't usually get off work until five.   So I don't usually get home until five, then I have homework, and then I'm ready to bed.   So I don't have a whole lot of time to get anything [read]."

Along with a limited amount of time for pleasure reading, Alex's description of himself as a reader and a student contrasted with Dylan's description of himself as a reader and a student. Rather than feeling as if he was an "outcast," Alex described his "small friend group" of peers, all of whom he insisted read more than he did. In interview three, Alex and I discussed his friends and peers in the context of reading habits, and he told me that "I have friends who read all the time" while he perceived himself as spending more time doing "normal teenage stuff" doing things "like playing video games." I found this seeming contradiction interesting. In interviews one and two, Alex had described a rich variety of reading experiences and a long history as a reader. He also commented many times that "this year and last year" he had been so overwhelmed with school work and with an after school job that he was unable to read for pleasure because "grades are more important" (interview 2) than pleasure reading.

On the one hand, he enjoyed reading for its own sake; on the other hand, he prioritized school work over pleasure reading.

His comparison of himself to his friends emphasized that he was not the most serious reader in the group, including telling me in interview three that his friends who read more "couldn't believe" that he had been invited to participate in this study because they told him "you don't read anything." Despite his plans to "read all summer" (interview 2) when he was out of school, his current circumstance seemed to have shifted his perception of himself from a reader to a person who used to read. When I pointed out, in the same interview, that he actually read quite a bit, for English class as well as for other subjects, he stammered a bit before answering that "yeah I do but I – I used to read more than I do now." Even after pressing this issue a few more minutes, I was unable to determine whether or not Alex was being self-deprecating or simply thought of himself as less of a reader because of his severely limited time to for pleasure reading. This perception reflected Millard's (1986) concept of *real* reading as printed fiction read for leisure. Alex's responses to my questions reveal a perception of himself as a less serious reader than his friends, a good student who nonetheless does not stand out in his peer group. This contrasts with Dylan's perception of himself as a good student who feels separated from his peer group by his facility with reading and his interest in school assigned reading.

In our third interview, I asked Alex about gendered expectations for male adolescents in the context of reading or English class. His response was substantially different from Dylan's. I asked him if he ever felt labeled or like a "book nerd." Alex pushed back against my question, telling me "I don't like really care if that's what my

label is because I'm kind of more of a 'Hi! This is me. See what you will kind of deal" (interview 3). When I asked about his perception of being an adolescent male who loves to read, Alex pushed back again, "I don't really care. It's like, I'm just me" (interview 3). I observed that he seemed to be resistant to peer pressure, and Alex remarked that "Yeah, well drama is too much for me" and "I try to have my fair four friends, because with small groups like that, small groups of people that think the same way, there is no drama." Alex's characterization of his "small group" that "think(s) the same way" directly opposes Dylan's description of his friend group, in which he perceives himself as standing out rather than fitting in because he perceives himself as thinking differently than his peer group.

Summary

These vignettes further illuminate the individuated nature of the avid adolescent male reader. The participants in this study demonstrated that while they identify themselves as readers, this identification does not overshadow their individual, complicated, developing selves. Literacy research obscures the individuality of avid adolescent male readers, eclipsing the complex nature of adolescents as they struggle to discover themselves in relation to the world, their peers, and their families. Through this chapter, and especially in these vignettes, I have foregrounded participant narratives in order to illustrate the individual expression of avid adolescent male readers. There are many ways to be an avid adolescent male reader; literacy research that does not take into account the positionality of the individual loses an important component needed to address the needs of students in secondary English Language Arts classrooms.

Conclusion

Findings described in this chapter provide supporting evidence concerning the reading habits and preferences of avid adolescent male readers. Analysis of data generated during interviews were used to inform the following research questions: a) what is the role of previous reading experiences on the development of avid adolescent male readers? and b) how are the reading habits and preferences of avid adolescent male readers socially constructed? Researcher field notes and memos were used to provide a thick description of research sites, and participant narratives as well as a detailed record of participant/researcher interaction. Thematic tables (see Appendix C) were used to deeply explore emerging codes and themes and to search for patterns emerging across participant interviews. Use of dialogic memos allowed for researcher reflection and a space to document the researcher's role in data generation (see Appendix D). Dialogic memos also provided thick description of the transactional nature of participants' school and pleasure reading, which supplemented the descriptions of their perceptions and lived experiences detailed in interview transcriptions (Stewart, 2011).

Data Analysis

Data was triangulated across participant narratives, dialogic memos (see Appendix D), and thematic tables (see Appendix C) (Stewart, 2011). Analysis of interview transcriptions yielded emergent themes of (a) family culture, (b) reader identity, and (c) transacting with texts. The themes proved to be complexly intertwined; in order to obtain meaningful findings, I explored the themes separately in relationship to each research question. In this way, I was able to use the thematic tables to look across participant narratives as a whole, exploring each research question's relationship with

each theme separately. In addressing the research questions and themes, Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory (1978, 1995) captured the themes of family culture and transacting with texts, while failing to fully capture the theme of reader identity. In order to more fully capture this theme, I explored interview transcriptions in regards to both research questions through the lens of Millard's (1986, 1997) theory of identity and construction of the developing reader. Millard's theory more fully captured the dynamic nature of adolescent reader identity for the participants in this study.

Previous reading experiences and the development of avid adolescent male readers. The first theme in the context of research question one was family culture. Rosenblatt (1978) asserted that each reader brings to each text an individual schema formed of the totality of their prior experiences. In order to explore participants' previous reading experiences, it was important to explore the family culture in which the participants were introduced to reading. Participants described similar family culture characteristics across interviews and narratives; a reading role model, the definition of *real* reading as reading printed books, a home environment saturated with print material, and a family that highly valued reading as both an entertainment and as a means to academic and professional success. This description, across all six participants, provides insight into the relative perceived privilege and resources of the participants' family structures. The participants shared certain demographics: White, with two parent families, houses large enough to hold a staggering array of books, and the resources to acquire them. This perceived *privilege* and the demographic information offers added context to the research setting, the design of the research, and the findings related in this chapter.

For the second theme related to research question one, Reader Identity, Rosenblatt's theory illuminated the prior reading experiences of the participants. The extensive reading experiences of the participants contextualized their descriptions of approaching texts with a metacognitive awareness of that positioned them as expert readers within their peer groups as well as inside and outside school settings.

Finally, participants described their family culture as highly influential in forming their relationship with reading. Millard (1997) argued that family relationships are important as our first social networks, and that these relationships are influential in forming an identity as reader or non-reader. Parental expectations, described by the participants, suggested that participants perceive their families as highly valuing academic achievement. Further, participants describe perceptions of families that expect this achievement (good grades, college attendance). The participants describe reading for their own purposes (long term academic and professional goals), even though they do not always recognize this purpose in the context of school reading. This expectation for academic achievement, coupled with their expressed long term professional goals, appeared to equip the participants to remain engaged with school assignments, engaging with less-valued reading as a means toward long term professional goals despite short term lack of interest.

The social construction of reading habits and preferences of avid adolescent male readers. In addressing the second research question, participants described their perceptions of peer group influence on their reading habits and preferences. Five of the six participants described a perception of some degree of separation from their peers

resulting from reading choices or reading avidly, while one participant perceived himself as part of a group of friends who were fellow readers.

School is a significant part of most adolescents' social networks (Millard, 1997; Moje et al., 2008). Student perception of school assignments appears to be a powerful influence on the reading habits and choices of the participants in this study, as well as on their identities as readers (Howard, 2013). Participants noted, in their descriptions of school reading, that school assignments and projects interfered with their preferred stance as aesthetic readers. This interference prevented students from centering their attention on their relationship with the text, instead privileging the efferent reading of these texts. Put another way, participants resented what they perceived as being forced to transact with school reading in ways that they felt contradicted or contravened their preferred stance as readers, even if their preferred pleasure reading was congruent or more complex that their school assigned reading.

Summary. Study findings discussed in this chapter suggest that avid adolescent male readers share certain characteristics that appear to aid in their development as avid readers. Nonetheless, findings also indicate that avid adolescent male readers retain their individuality within their perceptions of their reader identity. Further, although the participants in this study described perceptions of themselves as expert readers and good students, they also reported struggling with engagement and motivation in regards to school assigned reading in ways similar to those of resistant or reluctant readers, as reported in literacy research (McKenna et al., 2012; Newkirk, 2002). The following chapter provides a discussion of these findings and how they relate to the research

questions, as well as the implications for teachers and parents, and suggestions for future

research.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the previous reading experiences and social relationships of adolescent males on their development as avid readers. I designed this qualitative interview study using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) naturalistic inquiry methodology. Participants and I generated data through a series of three interviews with each of the six participants. In order to develop the interview protocols, I utilized Mishler's (1986) discourse paradigm of interviewing. During data analysis, I examined participants' responses inductively, triangulating data across the participant interviews, using thematic analysis to deeply explore each interview as a discourse contextualized by place, time, and respondent-researcher interaction (Stewart, 2011). Emerging themes were examined and further triangulated through the lens of Rosenblatt's (1978, 1995) Transactional Theory of the Literary Work. Evidentiary findings provided answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the role of previous reading experiences on the development of avid adolescent male readers?

2. How are the reading habits and preferences of avid adolescent male readers socially constructed?

In this study, I explored the participants' perceptions of their experiences as avid adolescent male readers through their descriptions of their previous reading experiences, their perceptions of reading transactions inside and outside school, and their perceptions of the influence of their social networks on their reading choices. Literacy researchers suggest that adolescent males resist school assigned reading, even as they enjoy reading

for their own purposes, and reading that may not be valued by parents or teachers (Brozo, 2006; Moje et al., 2008; Watson, Kehler & Martino, 2010; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Additionally, McKenna et al. (2012) noted that while adolescent males may remain motivated and engaged with reading on their own terms, these same adolescents tend to lose motivation and engagement with school assigned reading as they progressed through secondary school. These studies, however, fail to capture the experience of male secondary students who excel in English Language Arts (ELA) classes, and who remain engaged with school assigned reading as well as reading for their own purposes outside of school. For this study, I was interested in exploring the lived experiences of this group of adolescent male students, who excelled in their ELA classes, and read for their own pleasure. My findings with avid readers support the notion that adolescent students can find school reading to be boring or uninteresting; however, my study reframes assumptions about school assigned reading, the value of reading and the complexities and contradictions present in the development of avid adolescent male readers.

Analysis of interview transcriptions indicated that while participants were considered by themselves and others as "good" readers, they nevertheless sometimes struggled to maintain their motivation to read school assigned books. Their continued engagement with school texts rested on the elements that aided their development as avid adolescent male readers: (a) their family culture, (b) their reading identity, and (c) their experience transacting with texts, both in and out of educational settings. Alvermann (2001) and Moje et al. (2008) argue that, while trends and patterns emerge across adolescent experiences with reading, adolescents transact with reading and with education in highly individual terms. Findings in this study indicate that the elements

mentioned above were contextualized and individuated by each participants' perception

of their family culture, their relationships with peers, and their understanding of

themselves as a reader. In this chapter, I present a discussion of the findings in order to

provide insight into how this group of avid adolescent male readers perceived their

development as readers, as well as reasons for their continued engagement with reading.

I will first discuss the implications of previous reading experiences on the development

of avid adolescent male readers. Next, I examine the significance of the social

construction of the participants' reading habits. In addition to the implications and

significance, I will discuss the limitations of the study and make suggestions for further

research.

Implications

With my first research question, I explored participants' perceptions of how

previous reading experiences influenced their development as avid adolescent readers.

Thematic analysis of the data generated from interviews was further contextualized by

dialogic memos and field notes. This analysis led to a deeper understanding of the

participants' previous reading experiences both in and out of classroom settings. Further,

data analysis provided insight into (a) how previous reading experiences are captured

within Rosenblatt's (1986) theoretical framework, (b) how previous reading experiences

worked within the context of family culture to foster an identity as a reader, (c) how

previous reading experiences are contextualized within family culture. In the following

sections, I discuss the significance and implications of these findings.

Previous Reading Experiences and Family Culture

Findings emerged during data analysis that indicated the importance of a family culture that values books and reading. Rosenblatt (1978) asserted that readers transact with texts as active, rather than passive participants. In these transactions, the active reader brings the totality of his or her experiences, including previous reading experiences, to the text. Therefore, the same text may be contextualized by the individual reader in light of his or her specific experiences with the content as well as his or her individual experiences with previous texts. Literacy research strongly supports the positive influence of a rich print environment on the development of an avid reader (Alvermann, 1999; Moje, 2002). Additionally, literacy research indicates that a reading role model is important to the development of an identity as a reader (Chandler, 2013; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). In the following sections, I will discuss the implications of family culture, rich print environment, and previous reading experiences on the development of the avid adolescent male readers in this study. I will also discuss the significance of the participants' previous transactions with texts on their reading identities and their development as avid adolescent male readers.

Family culture and books. Families that highly value reading and books have a positive influence on children's attitudes toward reading (Alvermann, Gillis & Phelps, 2012; Bean & Moni, 2003). The participants in this study shared a common characteristic of a family culture that highly valued reading and privileged print books over other types of reading. In addition, as participants described their reading experiences and families, they each described the experience of a reading role model (either inside or outside their family) who provided an example of an avid reader and

actively encouraged participant engagement with reading. As I continued to analyze the data, looking for patterns across transcripts and within each set of interviews, the participant descriptions of their families, taken together, created a more detailed portrait of family culture and the development of the avid adolescent male reader.

A primary characteristic of an avid reader is membership in a family in which reading is valued (Ivey, 2014; Wilson & Kelly, 2007). Similarly, engaged and motivated readers tend to have parents who model reading behaviors (McKenna et al., 2012; Millard, 1997). Participants' descriptions of their families offered me a much deeper understanding of the degree to which their family culture influenced their reading behaviors and preferences. In our discussions, participants frequently spoke about their family's reading in a matter of fact manner. Participants' descriptions of this bias toward reading as both entertainment and avenue to learning appeared to be foundational to their development as avid readers. For the participants in this study, reading is an unremarkable, expected activity. Reading for pleasure and reading for information are both well represented in participant descriptions, though reading for information tended to be online information gathering, while pleasure reading was largely described in terms of printed books. Participants saw their parents and siblings reading, were encouraged to read (sometimes instead of participating in other leisure activities), and were expected to be familiar with and fluent in a variety of types of reading. Put simply, the participants were expected to absorb and emulate their family's culture of literacy.

Although the participants in this study saw nothing unusual in this expectation of literacy, several elements appear to have come together to pass on a remarkable legacy of literacy. Each participant described a stable two-parent family, with parents in long term

marriages. In addition, each participant described both his parents as employed full time. With parents in long term marriages, this speaks to a certain level of privilege or advantage, suggesting that families with a stable structure may have more time, resources, and ability to pass on their culture regarding books and reading. Along with a strong family culture, an active reading role model—either in the family or close to the family—appears to be an important factor for passing on an appreciation for reading for its own sake as well as a means of engaging with the world. These findings support and emphasize the findings of Wilson and Kelly (2007), and Howard (2013) who describe reading role models as "influential." For participants in this study, reading role models may have an influence stronger than that described in current literacy research.

Role models and Family Culture. These role models surpassed "influential," and instead *embodied* the family culture, creating a bridge from abstract knowledge to practical skills for developing readers. As developing readers are expected to participate in their family culture, they are guided by one or more role models, and also encouraged to consider reading a "normal" part of their family interactions. While these participants appear to be remarkable, successful readers, they are doing what is natural and expected, much like a young child in a family of musicians might exhibit early, sustained ability with a musical instrument. Jeff's comment referencing his family's visits to bookstores while on vacation indicated to me that activities that families value may be prioritized within family cultures, and accepted as an unremarkable part of family membership. Spending family vacation time in a bookstore together indicated that Jeff's family valued reading as a family activity, and Jeff's casual comment demonstrated that he perceived nothing unusual about this use of time during a family vacation. The perception of

reading as "normal" or unremarkable lends insight into the role of family culture on reading habits of the avid adolescent male readers in this study, and supports the findings of Millard's 1997 study of reading behaviors and identity formation. Where current research suggests that such family culture and support is influential, findings here suggest that this family culture and support go beyond "influential." Indeed, for avid adolescent male readers in this study, family culture and support appear to be essential elements so foundational that the participants do not perceive the resources at their disposal to be anything other than mundane. This may not only privilege young developing readers as *readers*, but also grounds them so thoroughly in a literacy-rich culture that they see nothing remarkable or unusual in their extraordinarily supportive literacy environments. For the participants in this study, findings suggest that the development of *avid* readers may be aided significantly by growing up in a family in which reading at a high level of fluency and competency, coupled with a wealth of resources and support, and simply expected as part of the normative practices of daily life.

Family culture and a rich print environment. The expectation that the participants would participate fully in a family culture that highly values books and reading is further emphasized in these findings by the participants' matter of fact descriptions of the wide variety of printed matter in their homes, as well as their casual references to ownership of this printed matter. Current literacy research notes that a characteristic of readers who remain engaged with reading throughout secondary school is a home environment rich in reading material (McKenna, 1995; Moje, Young, Readence & Moore, 2000). A rich print environment was another characteristic of the family culture of the participants, although the physical home environment described by

the participants in this study was not just rich in print material, it was saturated with books, magazines, and newspapers. Of particular interest, the participants described not only books, but books divided up and "owned" by various family members. Their descriptions noted that each member of their family had a bookshelf or an area in the house in which they collected his or her own books, while a common area held books considered to belong to the family as a whole.

In considering these descriptions, two characteristics stood out during the process of data analysis. First, the sheer number of books and other printed matter that would be required to be present in order to be divided into, according to participants' descriptions, public and private mini-libraries. Printed matter takes up space, and keeping printed matter in family living areas, as described by the participants (living rooms, hallways, bedrooms, basements, stacked on stairs) implied that the homes in which participants lived have room to house books as well as family members. Second, housing a significant number of books indicated that the family has invested (literally) in books and in a culture of literacy. This literal embodiment of the importance of books and reading may have offered the developing readers in these families a relationship with books that is more casual or intimate than the average adolescent reader. These participants have access to a wide variety of books, from a young age, with family owned "public" books as well as their own "private collection" at their fingertips, in their own homes. This finding suggests that the reading competency displayed by the participants in this study may be due, in part, to their familiarity with books as everyday objects within their homes. The participants may have a deep conceptual knowledge of books and literacy that has functioned, alongside "particular norms of everyday practice" (Moje et. al, 2008,

p.100) to develop a literacy foundation upon which to build a relationship with reading that was able to withstand the pressures of secondary school, extracurricular activities, and indifference to school assignments regarding reading.

Family culture and transacting with texts. Throughout the data analysis, I considered each emerging theme through the lens of Rosenblatt's (1978) Transactional Theory. Participants described extensive reading experiences contextualized by the cultural and social contexts unique to him. The ease and familiarity with books that the participants described can be understood within the context of their lifelong understanding of books as everyday objects within the home, the use of which has been normalized to the point of being taken for granted. The participants in this study brought to each reading transaction many positive experiences with books and reading. This positive relationship with reading as a foundational aspect of literacy aligns with the findings of Lenters (2006) and Wilson (2007), who argued that male secondary students who remained engaged with reading tended to be supported with a strong family culture of literacy, a rich print environment, and parents or other reading role models who remained actively engaged in the reading behaviors of the adolescent.

These participants have had many, many transactions with texts upon which to launch new transactions with new texts. If, as Rosenblatt (1976) argues, the reader must "draw on his past experience with life and language" in order to "breathe life" into the "inkspots" on the page, then the participants in this study are bringing a history of reading success to any new texts that they encounter, both in and out of school settings (p.78). Their success with reading across a variety of genres and types of reading material has translated into a certainty of success with these texts. Rosenblatt further noted that

literature can provide to the reader, especially the adolescent reader, a "broader and deeper insight" through reading transactions (p. 107). As the reader gains a metacognitive awareness of the "dynamic nature" of these transactions, literature becomes a supplement to personal experience (p. 107). This echoes the comments of the participants who felt set apart or different from their peers, particularly Jeff and Dylan, who felt that they had "broader horizons" than their peers. Transacting with texts is an active, not a passive act, during which the reader "forges an experience" through synthesis of the multiple strands that make up this experience (Rosenblatt, 1975, p. 297). The participants in this study are practiced in transactional experiences, though this does not mean that adolescent readers, even very experienced adolescent readers, do not need the guidance of teachers as they create more and more complex evocations in response to ever more complex works of literary art. Rather, findings suggest that this experience and practice may offer avid adolescent male readers tools and stamina to remain engaged with texts they find less appealing, such as school reading (McKenna et al., 2012). Another factor at work may well be that their long term goals provide sufficient motivation to overcome their resistance to reading they find less purposeful (Bozak, 2011). This factor may indicate that for avid readers, family culture (high expectations) coupled with a rich experience with reading transactions may work together to build not only an avid reader but also a reader with the stamina and drive to power through "boring" assignments and reading content in order to achieve academically at high levels.

Family as Both Culture and Social Network

During data analysis, findings emerged regarding the influence of the family as a social network on the reading habits and preferences of avid adolescent male readers.

This finding blurred the line separating family culture and social networks, and defied the division between the first and second research questions. Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of the Literary Work (1978) did not fully capture this finding. Millard's (1997) work examined the socially embedded nature of literacy in the context of gendered expectations of adolescents both in and out of school settings, and viewing participants' perceptions of their families and reading choices was more fully (though not completely) captured there. Millard found that both male and female adolescents were motivated to read by strong social networks consisting of peer groups and family, though Millard noted that family social interactions seemed to be more influential for the adolescent male participants in that study. Family expectations and role modeling, as noted above, also appear to be significantly influential on the reading habits of participants in this study.

Millard (1997) suggested that families provide our earliest interaction with a social network and are therefore among the most influential in reading behaviors. The adolescent male readers in this study described early memories centered on reading with family members, particularly parents. More significantly for this finding, participants in this study described their parents, particularly their fathers, as influencing or having influenced their choice of reading. The participants noted this mainly in their choice of genre. Jeff, Chris, and Spencer, in particular, describe the experience of enjoying fantasy or science fiction books as a genre because of early reading experiences in which books in these genres were recommended to them or given to them by their fathers. Knoester (2009) argued that family influences were of primary importance to the development of adolescent readers, though this influence was often invisible to adolescents and their

parents. The willingness of adolescents to seek out or accept reading recommendations from family members is, Knoester noted, "connected to desires to cultivate relationships" that motivates both parent and child to seek out and maintain a channel of communication involving reading (p.7). This desire appears to be supported by the findings in this study related to family and reading. The participants' descriptions of their homes and families often included accounts of browsing family bookshelves for new reading material and being influenced not only by the choice of books acquired by their parents, but also having parents point out books that they might enjoy. These recommendations, taken up by the adolescents, resulted in conversations with the recommending parent regarding the book, which led to more recommendations, keeping open a line of communication regarding books and reading. Four of the six participants described reading a particular series, *Game of Thrones*, along with their parents, or after a parent recommendation. This description is similar to Chandler (1999), who found that for some adolescents, reading popular fiction with or recommended by parents seemed to be associated with higher levels of engagement with school assigned books and higher levels of academic achievement. Families may be influential for the participants in this study beyond the absorption of a family culture that values reading and academic achievement. A family social network may have influenced the reading preferences of adolescents beyond the influence of role models. While a role model embodies the reading habits and behaviors valued by the family culture, the social influence of the family, particularly a parent, may function to influence the book choices made by an adolescent. Put simply, a reading role model may encourage a child *to* read, while the family social network appears to significantly influence a child's choice of *what to* read.

Summary

In this section, I have explored participants' perceptions of how previous reading experiences influenced their development as avid adolescent readers. Participants positioned themselves (and were positioned by others) as expert readers and good students, although they also reported that they have struggled to maintain their motivation to read school assigned texts. Despite their perception of school texts as less appealing, the participants' continued engagement with school texts may be explained by the elements that have aided their development as avid adolescent male readers: (a) their family culture, (b) their reading identity, and (c) their experience transacting with texts, both in and out of educational settings. The participants described a common characteristic of a family culture that highly valued reading, privileged print books over other types of reading, and each had access to an older reading role model (either inside or close to the participant's family). Further, families functioned as a site of enculturation as well as the earliest social network to influence the reading choices of participants. These elements, taken together, may help the adolescent readers in this study to develop a literacy foundation upon which to build a relationship with reading that can withstand less interesting school assigned texts. This foundation, built on a long and varied experience with reading transactions, may have built up the stamina of the participants, enabling them to persevere with less appealing reading content in order to meet expectations of their family culture as well as to achieve short term academic goals in pursuit of their long term professional goals.

Influence of Social Constructions on the Reading Habits and Preferences of Avid Adolescent Male Readers

In addition to understanding the role of previous reading experiences on the development of avid adolescent male readers, I examined the perceptions of study participants regarding the social construction of their reading habits and preferences. Dialogic memos and field notes supplemented and contextualized the thematic analysis of the data generated from interviews. This analysis led to significant findings regarding the social construction of participants' reading habits and preferences. In the following sections, I provide insight into (a) how the social network of family influenced the reading habits and preferences of these avid adolescent male readers, (b) how participants perceived the interaction of their identity as a reader within their peer groups, (c) how participants' perceptions of themselves as an expert reader both afforded and constrained their transactions with school assigned texts. Adolescents read for a variety of reasons, and engage with texts for their own purposes (Howard, 2013; Newkirk, 2002). Adolescent reading habits, nonetheless, are influenced and mediated by social factors such as peer groups, popular culture, and social expectations surrounding school assignments and school culture.

Peer Group Influence on Reading Preferences. Current literacy research points to peer groups as highly influential on adolescent reading choices (Knoester, 2009; Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Reading choices made by adolescents are often socially constructed and embedded in social networks (Moje et al., 2008). In contrast to these studies, analysis of data in this study showed that while each participant's reading preferences appeared to have been influenced by family, influence

by their social network of peers was more ambiguous and more difficult to discern. The avid adolescent male readers in this study did comment that they were influenced to choose popular titles after frequently seeing the books at school or seeing the titles advertised on television, or sometimes hearing friends discuss the titles in the context of upcoming or current movies or television shows. The following series were mentioned in this context by every participant: *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *Game of Thrones*. Advertising for these books, and their movie or television adaptations would have been difficult to avoid for the average American teenager, as these products are marketed heavily to adolescents in many ways, including social media, commercials, print media, and library posters. Despite heavy marketing campaigns, adolescents are not passive consumers (Garcia, 2014). The avid readers in this study responded to these texts with a critical awareness of popular culture and of themselves as expert readers. However, participants did not discuss the advertising for these titles. Instead, they commented about seeing the books being carried or read by their friends or other students at school. David, in particular, commented that he was intrigued by seeing the same cover (*The Hunger Games*) "over and over" in his friends' hands, and then picking up the book for himself in order to investigate. This finding suggests that the participants in this study may be influenced to read popular titles that are common reads within their peer group or school environment (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 1999).

Peer groups and ambiguous influence. However, findings in this study trouble the current research regarding reading choices and peer group influence, especially when considering reading choices other than popular fiction. These contrasting findings demonstrate the complexity and difficulty of examining adolescent reading behaviors,

especially in the context of peer social networks. Adolescents interact with culture in individual, sometimes contradictory or paradoxical ways (Bae & Ivashokovich, 2012; Pascoe, 2010). This individuality was apparent in the participant responses when I asked them to describe their relationships with peers and their perceptions of themselves as readers within the context of their peer group relationships. The descriptions of their peer groups was consistent across participant responses. Five of the six participants noted that they considered their friends to be grouped according to shared interests; for example, a group of friends who enjoyed listening to and talking about music, a group of friends from drama club, or a group of friends who enjoyed outdoor activities such as hunting. Alex, however, commented that he and his friends had a shared interest in reading, often reading the same books and then discussing them, though he and his friends had many other interests. The other five participants, when questioned about sharing books with friends or recommending books to friends, responded negatively, pushing back against the idea that they might consider forming a group of friends in which reading was a common interest. Dylan, who used the word "outcast" to describe his social situation in the context of friends who read, nevertheless found friendships centered around his interests in sports journalism and music; though he described a desire for friends who read seriously, he also described himself as well-supplied with friendships. In the same way, Chris, David, Jeff, and Spencer described themselves as part of a web of social relationships and friendships that focused on other activities such as music, sports, or other extracurricular pursuits. For participants in this study, books and reading seemed to be less important among their peer groups than suggested by literacy research, both in terms of social networking and in terms of influence over participant reading preferences.

As I analyzed data, I considered the insistence of most of the adolescent males in this study that reading was simply not important in their peer groups. It may be that, as Bozak (2011) found, reading and a reading identity are, for adolescent males, inextricably bound to social networks and social capital and that the adolescent males in this study access and compile social capital in other ways. Brozo (2006) found that adolescent males who also identify as readers may fear a loss or lack social status among their peers. Participants in this study, however, pushed back at this notion of loss of social status, and instead reaffirmed the strength of their peer relationships as well as their perception of the relative unimportance of reading and books within their peer groups.

Peer groups and invisible reading. The more deeply I explored participant utterances on this theme, however, a contradiction seemed to become clear to me. It became more and more evident that participants were, on the whole, reading in some way with their friends. Their descriptions of activities with friends opened a window into the non-academic reading that appeared to be invisible to the participants and their peers (Knoester, 2009). David described spending dozens of hours a week reading and researching with friends in order to support their participation in a fantasy football league. Dylan commented throughout our interviews about recommending sports websites to friends and discussing the work of various journalists with his friends. Spencer and Jeff described spending entire weekends with friends, forming new bands, and reading music and music books with these groups. Chris resisted the idea that he might read at all with friends, though as a member of drama club, reading and memorizing lines is at the center of their interactions. Only Alex, as noted above, shares books with friends whom he also considers to share his love for reading and does not talk

about reading with friends in other contexts. These responses indicate that while social relationships with peers may have had some influence on the participants' reading choices regarding books, it was less influential for this group than is suggested by current literacy research. It is also possible that five of the participants in this study all fall into Howard's (2013) Avid Solitary Reader group, either by preference or circumstance, with Alex in the Avid Social Communal group. Conversely, participant perception of their friends as "non-reading" may be interpreted by the participants' understanding of *real* reading as printed matter rather than reading done online or in pursuit of personal interests rather than school assignments (Knoester, 2009; Moje et al., 2008). Knoester's argument that socially embedded literacies remain largely invisible to adolescents appears to be borne out by participant descriptions of their peer groups, reading, and leisure activities with these groups.

Reading Identity and Transacting with Texts in School

Findings regarding participant transactions with school assigned texts were mixed. One the one hand, participants identified themselves as good students and avid readers both inside and outside of school. On the other hand, participants also described themselves as disinterested or struggling with school assigned reading at least some of the time. So, while participants possessed positive reading identities, they also held a negative view of school assignments even if they enjoyed the book upon which the assignments were based (McKenna et al., 2012). The adolescent males in this study, as noted in the previous section, are experienced, expert readers with many reading transactions in their histories. These transactions not only offer these expert readers a broader background of experience to bring to the texts they read, they also offer these

readers a history of success with reading that can be brought to bear on their transactions with new texts (Rosenblatt, 1976). With an expectation of reading success, readers can approach new texts with more confidence and less anxiety (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), which then builds intrinsic motivation to read as well as aiding the adolescents' positive reading identities. These elements are evident in the rigorous English courses in which the participants are enrolled and in their academic achievement as well as their identification as "good students." Rybakova, Piotrowski and Harper (2013) and Reeves (2004) argue that secondary students remain disconnected from canonical texts because the canon, written by adults and for adults, leaves little space for adolescent interests. The findings from analysis of interview transcriptions created a more complex picture; when asked about books they enjoyed, participants mentioned canon texts such as *The Great Gatsby* and authors such as Hemingway as they discussed books in which they found a sense of connection or emotional resonance. Participants may connect to or enjoy these books for a variety of reasons; it is significant, however, that despite enjoying canonical works and being expert, experienced readers, participants described assignments in much the same way resistant or reluctant readers describe assignments (Lenters, 2006), as boring, not useful, or too time consuming.

Participant descriptions indicate that even expert readers who achieve at high levels academically may perceive assignments as unengaging, even if they enjoy the books at the center of these assignments. As the participants discussed their reasons for struggling with assignments, they noted that they resented having an enjoyable book turned into a chore by the requirement to read on a fixed schedule, complete multiple complex assignments on a fixed deadline, or being asked to complete assignments that

the participants perceived as serving no purpose. While these reasons align with research

on reading, homework, and motivation (Alvermann et al., 1999; Bintz, 1993; Wigfield &

Guthrie, 1997), Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory (1978, 1995) provides another lens

through which to view participant responses.

       Transactional theory and school reading. Rosenblatt described reader

responses to text as occurring along a continuum, anchored by the efferent stance at one

end of the continuum and the aesthetic stance at the other.   Rosenblatt (1976) asserted

that during reading, readers move along the continuum, depending on the social,

emotional, and personal context in which the reading event takes place. Participants in

this study described their pleasure reading in terms of reading for their own purposes, and

used languaged that placed them toward the aesthetic part of Rosenblatt's continuum.

Even comments from participants concerning their reading to learn were colored with

language describing the reading as an emotional experience (reading automotive manuals

to repair a truck passed down from a beloved grandparent, for example). However,

regardless of their stance, the participants in this study were deeply experienced in

reading for their own purposes and to suit their own needs. When required to respond to

a text from an efferent stance for an assignment or a series of assignments, rather than

responding to the text in a more spontaneous and emotional way, they resisted.

Rosenblatt (1995) notes that students must "respond freely" to a text before a teacher can

initiate a "process of growth" through assisting the student with "a critical scrutiny of his

response to literary works [so that] he can come to understand his personal attitudes and

gain the perspective needed for a fuller and sounder response to literature" (p. 108).

Teachers who are unwilling or unable to offer assistance with this "process of growth"

and who rely on assignments that emphasize rote responses may hinder the transactional responses of their students. Conversely, teachers who model the transactional response to text for their students may achieve a higher degree of critical analysis from their students as well as a higher degree of motivation and engagement, particularly for adolescent male students, that may combat the decline in reading motivation and engagement noted in research literature.

This resistance may also be influenced by classmate attitudes and social norms that regulate individual and group attitude toward school assignments (Lenters, 2006; Millard, 1997; Moje et al., 2008). Adolescent males in this study may enjoy school assigned reading, resisting the stereotype of school reading as boring or unenjoyable; at the same time, it is possible that they are unable or unwilling to also resist the stereotype of school assignments being a chore or an imposition on the student (Alvermann, Heron, & Alison, 2001; Carbone & Reynolds, 2013). Put another way, it is possible that even highly motivated, expert readers are unable or unwilling to lose social capital by bucking the normative social expectation that school (or anything relating to school) is unenjoyable.

Summary

The adolescent male readers in this study described early memories centering on reading with family members, particularly parents. Findings suggest that, for the participants in this study, their development as *avid* readers may be aided simply by growing up in a family in which reading at a high level of fluency and competency is a normative practice. Their deep conceptual knowledge of books may have functioned, along with normative practice, to create a foundation upon which they have built a

relationship with reading that has withstood the challenges of secondary school and adolescence. A family culture of high expectations, added to extensive experience with reading transactions helps readers to develop as avid readers with the stamina and the intrinsic motivation to complete unappealing assignments and less relevant reading content in order to achieve academically at high levels. Within their family networks, a reading role model may encourage a child *to* read, while the family as a social network influences a child's choice of *what to* read. Social networks of peers may influence the participants in this study to read popular books in order to participate in a social and cultural phenomenon. For avid adolescent male readers in this study, books and reading seemed to be less important among their peer groups than suggested by literacy research, both in terms of social networking and in terms of influence over participant reading preferences. While adolescent males in this study may have successfully resisted the stereotype of finding school reading to be unappealing, it is unclear from the findings if they are then unable to resist the stereotype of school assignments as an unpleasant chore.

The findings in Chapter 4 were separated according to the two research questions. In the lives of the avid adolescent male readers of this study, however, these themes are not so neatly parceled out. Rather, the discussion in this chapter illuminates the complex nature of the development of avid adolescent male readers. While some strongholds in research literature were supported by the findings of this study, other findings were mixed. For example, five of the six participants in this study rejected the idea that they might be marginalized in English Language Arts classes, or stigmatized in their peer groups, due to gendered expectations of academic achievement in English classes. For instance, Dylan, while noting that gendered performance expectations were a concern for

him, also de-emphasized the role of possible stigma associated with gender and an identity as an avid adolescent male reader. Participant responses to interview questions were individual and idiosyncratic, even as patterns and themes emerged across interview transcriptions. This suggests that the themes discussed in this chapter cannot be easily teased apart, and they should be taken together as a whole when considering the development of avid adolescent male readers. Family culture, access to books, social supports, and an educational setting supportive of the transactional response to reading all appear to function together in the development of the avid adolescent male readers who participated in this study. In the following sections, I will discuss further exploration of the avid adolescent male reader, including the limitations of the current study and implications for future research.

<div align="center">**Further Exploration**</div>

Findings for this exploratory study suggested that avid adolescent male readers share common characteristics in their development, such as a family culture that highly values books, unrestricted access to books, social networks that support reading, and a supportive educational setting. This study, however, did have some limitations, which constrain the implications of these findings. In the following sections I situate the study within the current research literature. In addition, I identify opportunities for future research in the development of avid readers.

Limitations of the Study

Qualitative research, especially inquiries that utilize interview data, may raise questions regarding the validity of the data generated during the interview process. Kvale's (1996) metaphor of researcher as a miner, chipping away at the participant in

order to uncover responses relevant to the study purpose, has been used to illustrate the potential for researcher bias to corrupt the data gathered during the interview. In contrast to this metaphor, I approached the interviews for this study as an opportunity for the participants and I to socially construct meaning together. Rather than chipping away at the adolescent participants, I took Mishler's (1986) view that interviewing offers opportunities for "discourse between speakers" (p. 36) rather than adhering to a rigid stimulus and response model of interviewing. Researchers must certainly take care to construct interview protocols that minimize the risk of participants telling interviewers simply what they think interviewers want to hear. All parties, however, bring to the interview their biases and individual perspectives. These biases and perspectives form the social, spatial, and temporal context in which the "speech event" of the interview takes place and these biases and perspectives cannot be extricated from the data generated during the interview (Mishler, 1986, p. 35), and therefore, all these biases and perspectives influence the meaning constructed by all parties active in the interview process. In order to mitigate the limitations of one method of data generation, I triangulated data with multiple participant interviews across a longer period of time.

This understanding of data as "generated" by researcher and participant (Baker, 2004), rather than discovered by the researcher, obviates the notion of data as pure or corruptible. Instead of pure or uncorrupted data as a measure of reliability, qualitative researchers must work to ensure that their theoretical and methodological frameworks are compatible with and inform the purpose of the inquiry (Maxwell, 2005). The decisions of the researcher, made at each stage of data generation and analysis, must fit the theoretical and methodological frameworks that structure the research design.

Throughout the life of this study, and especially during data generation and analysis, I employed reflective and reflexive methods, such as dialogic memos, to interrogate how my choices aligned with the theoretical and methodological frameworks which underpin this inquiry. This alignment of frameworks to purpose increases the validity and trustworthiness of the study as a whole.

Qualitative research proceeds in naturalistic settings, with iterative methods and a focus on context. In qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that a participant sample should be selected to "maximize information" rather than "facilitate generalization" (p. 203). With this in mind, I selected six participants who offered a variety of perspectives and experiences in order to deeply explore the lived experiences of the avid adolescent male reader. This sample of participants was selected for "informational, rather than statistical considerations" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 203). The study, designed to explore the unique experience of the participants as they have moved through their worlds, offers the kind of meaning making, dialogue, and speech events that are individual in nature and highly contextualized (Mishler, 1986), rather than the type of large scale participant sample that can be generalized through statistical processes to a larger population.

Situating the Study

Participants in this study shared certain demographic data points that became apparent during data generation; all participants identified as White, and had been raised in a stable, two parent, two-income family. Sampling criteria did not preclude a more diverse sample; 500 recruitment surveys were distributed across all English Language Arts classes in three high schools, with age as the only demographic collected from the

responses to these surveys. Other demographic factors, such as age and descriptions of family structure and income became apparent as participants and I discussed their family culture. Similar demographic profiles are likely due to the snowball sampling methodology used, as well as the geographic region in which the study took place. These factors, rather than a limitation, provided valuable insight into the research questions for this study. These same factors do, however, afford an understanding as to how future research studies may very well offer deeper insight into the research questions with participants who are people of color, from low-income homes, or who have been raised in a single-parent home.

Findings from this study shed light on the critical role of the teacher as both a guide to and a means of access to literacy. Teachers who provide early, sustained modeling of reading habits, and who actively encourage students' critical assessment of the students' evocations of the text may mitigate the adolescent disengagement with reading noted in literacy research literature (McKenna et al., 2012). As noted in Chapter 4, the avid adolescent male readers in this study perceived school assignments as disengaging and demotivating. Teacher role modeling and encouragement would be no less necessary for these students, who enjoy reading and have a high level of proficiency as well as a high level of academic motivation.

The situated nature of qualitative research requires acknowlegement and a perception of the process by which participants and researcher have mutually shaped the data generated during the study. This understanding offers opportunities to reposition a research interest in new directions. The iterative nature of qualitative research dictates that well-designed studies raise more questions and offer new roads for researchers to

travel (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study, designed as an exploratory examination of the perceptions and lived experiences of a group of avid adolescent male readers, produced substantial opportunities for further exploration on this topic.

Avid Adolescent Male Readers and Implications for Teachers and Schools

As discussed in Chapter 1, literacy research positions adolescent male students as reluctant or resistant readers, while positioning adolescent female students as more adept at reading (Alvermann, Gillis & Phelps, 2012; Newkirk, 2002). This position fails to capture the experience of adolescent male students who read avidly and achieve at high levels academically in English Language Arts classes. Examination of the research literature in Chapter 2 offered a more nuanced and complex picture of the adolescent male reader, indicating that adolescent males may be highly literate and very experienced readers, though not in the types or genres of reading valued academically (Alvermann & Hutchens, 2012; Moje et al., 2008; Newkirk, 2002). This more nuanced look also fails to fully capture the experience of adolescent male students who are expert, avid readers both in and out of educational settings. This group of readers, therefore, has remained largely invisible to literacy researchers and, if attended to by teachers, regarded as a happy anomaly (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

Avid adolescent male readers in the classroom. Teachers considering the common characteristics of avid adolescent male readers may be able to provide or replicate some of these elements in order to offset possible deficits in these areas of development for their students, such as student access to a varied classroom or school library, extended time to read, and modeling a critical evocation of text for students in order to facilitate student development of critical awareness. Current literacy research,

however, has demonstrated that teachers who honor student choice in reading, value the home or out of school literacies of students (particularly male students), and who utilize literacy strategies designed to demonstrate to students the personal relevance of school assigned reading are successful in raising the literacy levels and motivation of all the students in their classrooms (Moje et al., 2008; Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Teachers who have the support and resources to replicate, as closely as possible, the characteristics of a developing avid adolescent male reader for their students, may be rewarded by more engaged and motivated students across the board.

Avid adolescent male readers and school culture. As discussed in Chapter 4, even the expert, avid readers in this study resisted school assignments and sometimes school reading. Participants in this study also described a preference for reading with Rosenblatt's (1978, 1995) aesthetic stance, in which the reader responds to texts with emotion and connection rather than critical analysis. Although the adolescent readers in this study described their pleasure reading as occurring along the efferent (information seeking)-aesthetic (emotional connection) continuum, when describing their school assignments or school reading, they described a strong preference for remaining in an aesthetic stance and resented their teachers' attempts to move them into an efferent stance with assignments the participants perceived as not purposeful or useful. They described feeling particularly resentful of reading to an imposed deadline, and of assignments they felt were not purposeful (vocabulary assignments, for example). Rosenblatt (1976) asserts that although the aesthetic stance and reader evocation of the text must precede an efferent stance, it is the teacher's responsibility to guide the student toward a critical analysis of the text as well as the student's own evocation of the text. This guidance,

then, remained lacking for the participants in this study, either in their perceptions of school assigned projects, or in their resistance to these assignments.

Further implications for teachers. Implications for teachers include teaching with open-ended discussions and assignments whenever possible. Teachers who can model transactional theory for their students by discussing the aesthetic reading stance, helping students to critically assess their evocations of the text, and then modeling both an efferent stance and a critical analysis of their response to the text, may find more engaged and motivated readers in their classes. This modeling, while it may or may not be called transactional theory by the teachers who include it with other strategies in the pursuit of best practices, allows teacher and students to come together to co-construct meaning with a common text (Rosenblatt, 2005). Researchers suggest that this approach to literature may be especially salient for students who struggle to engage with school assigned reading (Alvermann et al., 1999; Newkirk, 2005). Findings discussed in Chapter 4 suggest that this approach would be no less salient, and just as important for avid adolescent male readers.

Avid readers, struggling readers, and engagement. Participants' attitudes toward school assignments foregrounded the difficulties in motivating and engaging students within the context of a secondary English Language Arts classroom. Participants in this study described an ease and fluency in reading, motivation to achieve at high levels academically, and an understanding of the neccessity of completing assignments. Yet each participant also described various levels of disengagement and resistance to school assignments, using language similar to that used by struggling readers when describing school assignments. This illusrates both the urgency and

complexity in developing engaging instructional strategies for teaching literature; if avid, engaged, expert readers find current strategies to be difficult and disengaging, how much more difficult and disengaging must struggling readers find these same strategies and assignments?

The experiences of participants in this study shed light on the importance of rethinking current instructional strategies and school culture. Instructional strategies that align more closely with experiences of avid readers may also support the motivation and engagement of readers who struggle with or resist reading educational settings (Alvermann, 2012; Moje et al., 2008). Changes in school culture and instructional strategies that allow students more room to replicate their preferred pleasure reading experiences will require, in this standards era, policy changes.

In practice, teachers are constrained by school policies that emphasize the importance of standardized testing and teacher accountability, as well as by non-teaching tasks expected by their school culture (coaching, club sponsorship, professional development). Additionally, these policies erode teacher autonomy and effectively eliminate teachers' ability to offer their students the unhurried time to read described by participants in this study. Another obstacle toward replicating the participants' pleasure reading experiences in educational settings is the physical layout of many schools, in which the majority of available reading is sequestered in a library. Participants described not only large chunks of time to pursue their reading interests, but easy physical access to a large variety of books. Currently, schools are not equipped, set up, or laid out in a manner that allows teachers and students to experience a rich and varied print environment. In order to offer students an educational setting that more closely

approximates the home environment described by these avid adolescent male readers, teachers and schools require a level of autonomy that is possible only with substantial and sustained changes to current educational policies.

Further Study of Avid Adolescent Male Readers

The limitations of this study, noted above, also offer a number of opportunities for further exploration of the development of avid adolescent male readers. Future study may include (a) replicating this study with a larger sample of avid adolescent male readers, (b) replicating this study with a larger sample of adolescent male students who struggle with reading as well as avid adolescent male readers, or (c) a longitudinal study of avid adolescent male readers that follow the participant sample from sixth grade through high school graduation.

Future iterations of this study may include first, a larger sample size to better address issues of transferability that limit the current study. A research design focused on a more representative sample of avid adolescent male readers may offer insight into characteristics such as family culture and social networking which emerged in the current study. Examining these characteristics within a population sampled from a school district or region rather than selected across a small number of schools would be beneficial in assessing the interplay of social networks and family culture, in particular. Another benefit of a larger sample size would be attention to the intersectional nature of adolescent readers. As adolescents form and reform their identities, they do so in contextualized, individuated, intersectional ways (Hamston & Love, 2003). These intersections--race, gender, sex, socioeconomic status, disability--are important factors to be considered in the development of avid adolescent male readers, and may further

illuminate the findings noted above. Further study of intersectionality, reading identity, and the development of avid adolescent male readers builds on the work of Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic (1999), Moje et al. (2008), and Alvermann & Hutchens (2012) as well as the work of the current study. In addition, attention to recruitment would be important, given the difficulties encountered with recruitment for this study, specifically, bypassing the teacher involvement in recruitment. Direct involvement from the researcher(s) may increase student responses to surveys, as well as eliminate the lag between survey completion and hand off from teacher to researcher. Phone calls or meetings between parents and researcher may also increase the number of parental consent forms obtained in order to include participants in the sample (Patton, 2002). This factor, parental consent, was instrumental in the small sample size for the current study.

Second, a research design that incorporates a larger, purposefully selected sample of adolescent males, including both struggling or resistant readers and avid adolescent male readers would address one of the significant findings in this study; the similar terminology used by avid adolescent male readers in this study and the struggling or resistant male readers described in the current literacy research literature (Bozak, 2011; Ivey, 2014; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). A research design that incorporates a larger sample of adolescent male students, purposefully selected from the same school and grade, may provide further opportunity to explore the perceptions of male students as they experience academic reading, social expectations of male readers, and the influence of peer social networks on academic reading specifically. A research study with this design would build upon the current study as well as the work of Wilson and Kelly (2007) and Newkirk (2002). A deeper understanding of the shifting identities, social

networks, and intersections inherent in adolescence may create opportunities for researchers and teachers to bridge pedagogical gaps present in current instructional paradigms in order to open new avenues of agency and access for marginalized students.

Finally, given the exploratory nature of this study, a longitudinal study would provide an opportunity for the researcher to more deeply explore the significant findings discussed in this chapter. As adolescents progress through secondary school, their motivation to read declines precipitously (McKenna et al., 2012). Findings from the current study indicate that participants in this study did not experience a decline in motivation or engagement with reading. This may be explained by the interaction of family culture, and social networks, though further study is needed to further clarify what, if any, interaction exists that offsets the findings noted by McKenna et al. (2012). Following a larger, diverse cohort of male students throughout their secondary school career would provide researchers the opportunity to generate data over time, and triangulate their findings from various data sources, such as observations, interviews with students, parents, and teachers, and reading logs. A larger, more diverse data corpus would add to the trustworthiness, transferability and credibility of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, studies that further explore the experiences and perceptions of avid adolescent male readers may examine in detail not only how avid adolescent male readers develop, but also how and why they remain engaged with school assigned reading. A better understanding of this engagement will be of practical interest to teachers, perhaps informing new literacy strategies or better application of current strategies.

Conclusion

I have spent a good part of my life contemplating teenagers. As a parent, teacher, and researcher, I have been granted extensive access to the "backstage" area of adolescence, and I have been witness to the complicated, contradictory, often turbulent selves that belie the more confident, collected faces that adolescents turn toward the world. Understanding how adolescents experience the world, especially in educational settings, is profoundly important to me. As I have progressed through my career as an educator, I have begun to understand that issues of privilege and equity in education are challenging and almost infinitely nuanced. Perception of equity changes with perspective, and perspectives change over time and distance, which makes achieving parity in education a moving target and a difficult prospect. Some students may be marginalized in certain educational settings despite being privileged in other ways. This study provides some insight into how a group of adolescent males developed as avid readers, and how they remain engaged with school assigned reading. This insight may offer new perspectives on instructional strategies currently in use in secondary English Language Arts classrooms to engage and motivate struggling or resistant readers regardless of sex.

Findings here suggest that avid adolescent male readers share some characteristics. First, they are products of a family culture that highly values reading books, has high expectations for academic achievement, and a home environment that is saturated with books and other printed matter. Second, when these elements are present, the developing avid adolescent male reader has unrestricted access to books within his own home, reading role models who embody the family culture of reading and valuing

books, and a stable family structure that has the resources, time, and support to enforce

expectations of high levels of academic achievement. These previous reading

experiences offer the developing avid adolescent male reader many opportunities to

transact with texts, and these positive experiences serve to offset a lack of motivation to

complete school assigned reading or the projects assigned with the reading (research

question 1).

Children are powerfully influenced by their first social networks, their family.

Avid adolescent male readers in this study were influenced by their family members'

reading preferences in genre, with most participants describing their father as a

particularly strong influence on *what* they read, while describing both parents as

influential in motivating them *to* read. In contrast to current literacy research on

adolescent males and social peer groups, the participants in this study reported peers as

an influence in the context of popular novels (often with film tie ins), but did not describe

their peer groups as influential on their reading choices. This may be related to the

findings regarding participants' perceptions of themselves within their social networks

and peer groups. Although they identified as avid readers, most participants did not

perceive their peer groups to be readers; however, they described themselves as content

with friendships focused on interests other than reading (research question 2).

The findings and implications from this study provide opportunities for future

research. I plan to continue to explore the relationship between adolescent male readers,

family culture, social networks, and reading. Future research will allow for further

exploration into transactional response to literature, literacy strategies in the secondary

classroom, and adolescent motivation to read. I plan to examine further the link between

avid adolescent male readers, resistant male readers, and their perception of assignments that accompany school assigned texts. If, as Tolkien wrote, "The road goes ever on," the findings and implications noted here are the first steps on a much longer journey.

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Appendix A: Thematic Table

Theme	Code	Sub Codes
School	Teacher Relationship	Effective teacher
		Read-alouds
	What would you do if you were a teacher?	Canon books vs. contemporary books
	Reading Gap	Resisting School Reading
		Pleasure reading vs pressure reading
		Love a school book
		Assigned reading vs. choice reading
Efferent Reading	Information seeking	
	Reading to learn	
Aesthetic Reading	Lost in a book	
	Text to self	
Social networks	Friend groups	
	Popular media	Online information
		Pop culture
Avid Adolescent Male Reader	Reading history	Precocious reader
		Imagination
		Adult not YA
	Reading expert	Book seeking
		Deeper meanings
		Reading definition
		Sharing reading material
	Book connection	Physical artifact
Identity	Complex self	Resist expectations
		Resist school
	Good student	Text to class/relevance
	Lone Reader	Odd one out
	Metacognition	
Family culture	Academic achievement	Good school citizen
	High expectations	Gaming
		Not a gamer
		Pressure to read
	Rich print environment	
	Parental guidance	Reading role model

Appendix B: Code Iteration Examples

Code	First iteration	Second iteration	Third iteration
Metacognition	Evidence of thinking about reading	Critical awareness of self as reader	Critical awareness of self as reader supporting Rosenblatt's I-Thou
High expectations	Academic expectations of self	Expectation to be a good student	Expectation from family—be a good student because that's what we do in this family.

Appendix C: Transcription/Code examples

Theme	Codes	Transcription
Family culture	Rich print environment	there's a lot of nonfiction too. There's a lot of biographies and if – we have a lot of books in our house. And also um, when the school was clearing out their reference section to put in a computer lab, I took home the entire *Encyclopedia Britannica*.
	High expectations	I'm taking a lot of high level classes. I'm just finishing up my math so I can – well look good my senior year so colleges will think "Ok so this kid's taking math this year."
Identity	Lone reader	well most of my friends don't read very much
		my friends not reading that much doesn't really open their perspective a whole lot so they kind of have the the same point of view that everyone around here has because they don't read a lot and they don't pay attention to things outside of like their comfort zone
	Metacognition	I got to think about it more deeply because I started to understand what Shakespeare was saying and you know, it's really intricate the way he put together his language. I think sometimes when it gets translated to modern English we miss that. So I think I started to understand like the comedy that I often miss with stuff like that.

Theme	Codes	Transcription
		So, yeah that was really enjoyable. And I've really enjoyed Shakespeare more since then because I was never really a fan of him before that, but yeah.
School	Teacher relationship	She's very high school minded because, um, ok. She's one – probably one of the youngest English teachers that I've had. So she's much, she's much more sympathetic to our workload. Yeah, we don't have to do that many assignments and she's really helpful critiquing our writing and stuff like that.
		He's a really great English teacher, he just gets side tracked a lot because he just likes to have conversations with people. Like, he really like talks about – to you about the stuff that we're learning about. Like in the – like kind of as equals. I find it makes it easier for me to like do the work because I don't look at it as "Oh I have to do this work for the sole like whatever." I'm just like "oh yeah I can do this. Like this makes sense" because he's like explained to me what's going on and what's happened.

Appendix D: Analytic memo example

-These guys all know exactly what their dads read but have no idea what their moms read.

-All oldest children except one, who is so much younger than his siblings that he might as well be an only kid.

-Already read/love reading

-read adult books, not drawn to YA unless there's a compelling social or media connection

-Family culture that values reading

-rich print environment at home

-Dads who love to read and are open about that

-Families that not only give lip service to reading but almost FORCE it on their kids.

I'm generally unsure of what I'm doing in interviews. I wish more insights from participants had emerged from the conversation but I think that's hard to do
      -with adolescents
      -in a semi structured interview

I think in practice, these interviews were actually structured, as I understand it. I did change a few things as we went along…wording, order of questions, and one question in the final interview…but for the most part, I think that I stuck too close to the questions and ignored the "just get them talking" edict. Despite this, this is an interesting group of adolescent boys, and they have interesting things to say. They all describe themselves as smart, as good students, and they try to get good grades, lots of extracurriculars…to look good to colleges and to be good citizens. They work incredibly hard and seem to have very little downtime. I'm concerned about all of them…they seem to have so little time to relax.
Of course, this could be because they are talking to me (teacher, adult) and they want to justify their time. It's kind of like being the boss or the supervisor and having them jump to justify how they spend their work day ("I'm busy! Really busy!"). But I know from being a parent and a teacher that they probably really ARE that busy.

What would happen if we gave students not only choice but great huge swaths of time to read? One thing they all complain about is reading to someone else's schedule. What if they could choose any book and choose their own schedule? Would the book just drop to the bottom of the priority list for other assignments? Would that mean giving up some of

the canon? Kids who are going to college will get some exposure to those books…what about other kids? Maybe their choice would lead them to books that they hope to further their goals and to be helpful in that way? Like the musicians in this study focusing on books about musicians and music history and the music industry.