THE LITERARY LIVES OF MARGINALIZED READERS: PREadoLESCENT GIRLS'
RATIONALES FOR BOOK CHOICE AND EXPERIENCES WITH SELF-SELECTED
BOOKS

By

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To “The Girls’ Club”
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Reading is often considered a literacy practice at which girls excel and enjoy. However, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a substantial amount of girls do struggle with reading. Research indicates an association between reading engagement and reading achievement, yet a dissonance between what teachers and students consider to be “engaging reads” exists. The purpose of this hermeneutical study was to better understand why girls identified as struggling readers selected particular books for personal use and their subsequent experiences with those books. A secondary purpose was to better understand their conceptions of reading as they interacted with their selected books.

Over a period of eight months, seven culturally diverse girls in fourth and fifth grade borrowed books from a collection of more than 160 picture and chapter books they helped create. At the study’s conclusion they selected up to 15 books to own. Primary data sources included open-ended interviews about their book selections and book experiences, initial and final semi-structured interviews, and spontaneous conversations about the books and the participants’ book interactions. Additional data sources included the researcher’s field notes and reflective journal. The data sources were analyzed using discourse analysis and thematic analysis.
The participants typically selected books which, while not necessarily endorsed by schools or teachers, would help them and their relatives read successfully. Their book selections also indicated their desire for successful role models, to understand the mysteries of life and friendships, and to establish peer communities. Mass media had considerable influence upon the girls’ book selections.

Participants initially considered reading to be punitive and reductive in nature. As the study progressed, most of the participants’ conceptions of books and reading broadened and were enriched. Books and reading often served as conduits for power, peer acceptance, cross-cultural understanding, familial bonds, and self-validation. However they also stimulated discomfort due to conflicting perspectives about books and reading. While the participants stated they would read their selected books, their behavior and subsequent interviews revealed that the social and economic capital of certain books within larger communities were sometimes more valuable than reading the written words.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“If you drop gold and books, pick up the books first, then the gold.”

--Anonymous

Books are considered one of life’s treasures by many people, especially literacy educators. Books can transform people and help people imagine beyond themselves. They become journeys that people take in order to leave home, and thus find home (Rochman, 1997, p.vii). Yet not everyone’s literary journeys are filled with pleasurable adventures, imaginative vacations, or philosophical transformations. Instead, the journeys become arduous and painful depending on access, genres, and reading competencies. A good friend once said that sometimes reading for her is akin to accidentally pouring salt instead of sugar onto her cereal. She wants to indulge in something sweet and fulfilling—“a good read”—but inadvertently picks something that makes her choke on its bitterness. A book too difficult or uninspiring can indeed be disengaging. Unfortunately students labeled as struggling readers often experience bitterness when they desire something savory. As literacy educators we actively search for avenues that will help struggling readers gain access to the transformative worlds offered by printed words or traditional forms of text. Yet sometimes we inadvertently steer them down paths that are disconnected from their worlds.

Technology is rapidly changing our definitions of text, reading, and reading instruction. “New literacies” which are multimodal and encompass technologically-oriented devices such as digital cameras and computers, and Internet-based mediums such as pod casts, are altering how we perceive and use language as well as how we define literacy. Yet with these technological advances, a book, in its traditional format, remains resolute at the top of the literary hierarchy. It continues to be the prime indicator of one’s literary, and at times, social worth (Booth, 2006). Given this predilection for a book, our connection to lives between and beyond lines of written
words, it seems pivotal to understand what books engage children. This way we can help nurture an appreciation and desire for the written word and help ensure children are members of some type of “literacy club” (Smith, 1997). While the relationships between technology and reading or other literacy practices have captured the attention of many literacy researchers, it seems educationally counterproductive to disregard or forget the consistent power and presence of the written word in book format, especially in elementary schools. Books, at present, remain the preferred mode of reading for elementary-aged children and their teachers.

Problem

Reading has often been considered an activity at which girls excel (Simpson, 1996; Sullivan, 2003). Gender achievement comparisons on national and international reading assessments indicate that a large percentage of girls continually surpass boys in reading (Elley, 1992; Mullis, Martin, Gonzalez, & Kennedy, 2003; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005). However, those comparisons typically involve students who scored above the “Basic” or “Average” level of reading competencies, thereby indicating reading proficiency. The scenario looks less promising when reviewing the results of individuals who scored below “Basic” or “Average,” levels which indicate the individuals cannot understand what they read (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006).

Beginning in 1992, at least one third of U.S. fourth-grade girls have scored below the Basic Comprehension level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for reading. Similarly, the average score for fourth-grade U.S. children who are of low socioeconomic status (SES) has remained below NAEP’s Basic Comprehension level for reading from the onset. Since 1998, Florida has mirrored these statistics for both demographics, with over 33% of fourth-grade females and 38% of low SES students scoring below the Basic level (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005). It seems evident that there are a substantial
number of girls and low SES youth in general who do not demonstrate reading competency. This counters the popular assumption that girls are always the more literate of the sexes (Booth, 2006; Brozo, 2002; Cherland, 1994; Radway, 1984; Simpson, 1996; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

Girls who do struggle with reading are potentially overlooked due to their adherence to socially-gendered scripts of being a “good girl” or “good female student” (Kos, 1993). Their socially acceptable behavior overshadows their reading difficulties. Consistent data indicating the disproportional amount of boys in remedial reading classes and their underperformance on standardized reading assessments when compared to girls (Brozo, 2002) convinces educators to shift their focus to boys and perhaps lose sight of the girls who also struggle with reading. An investigation of girls’ book rationales and experiences could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the conceptions of books and reading of girls who might potentially “slip through the cracks.” It would also generate additional understanding about the ways in which girls engage and disengage with books and reading.

On a broader scale, there has been a consistent decline of adult literary readership in the U.S. for over 20 years (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004). Additionally, the amount of children who experience difficulty reading or who express apathy towards reading is increasing (Cramer & Castle, 1994; Gersten, 1996; Verhoeven & Snow, 2001). Contemporary education researchers are investigating reading and literacy from multi-modal perspectives in the hope of better informing educators about the multiple ways in which children potentially engage in reading practices. Such research is also broadening educators’ conceptualizations of reading material to include children’s popular culture items such as comics, graphic novels, Pokémon trading cards, video game user guides, etc. (Alvermann & Xu, 2003; Cook, 2005; Dyson, 1993,
However, at present, books remain the primary reading material in classrooms.

Literacy educators want their students to cherish books and strive to ensure they consider the act of reading a worthwhile and engaging endeavor. They want to help prevent their students from becoming “reading orphans,” or individuals who loath or are cautious to approach printed text (Booth, 2006). Yet educators are faced with many obstacles in their pursuit of these goals. Access lies at the core of these obstacles, with multiple variables restricting economically disadvantaged or struggling readers’ physical and instructional access to a wide variety of reading materials.

For children who reside in economically disadvantaged communities, accessing reading material outside of their schools can become problematic. Within the boundaries of SES, great disparities exist between what is available within high and low SES communities. More affluent communities have access to a wider variety and larger amount of reading material when compared to less affluent communities (Allington, Guice, Baker, Michaelson, & Li, 1995; Neuman & Celano, 2001; Smith, Constantino, & Krashen, 1997). Further, for children residing in low SES communities, public institutions, such as libraries or schools, serve as the primary, if not sole, resource for a variety of reading materials (Fleener, Morrison, Linek, & Rasinski, 1997; Krashen, 2004; Lamme, 1976; Mellon, 1990; Pucci, 1994). It is therefore imperative that schools house and make readily available a variety of reading materials that would suit a diverse population of children who have difficulty accessing texts beyond their classroom walls.

Schools do make conscientious efforts to provide ample reading materials in both their libraries and classrooms. However, individual conceptions of reading and books influence these well-intentioned efforts. Educators and students often differ on what is considered as an
“engaging read.” The International Reading Association’s (IRA) annual *Teachers’ Choices* and *Children’s Choices* book lists, Brooks, Waterman, and Allington’s (2003) national survey of teachers and their students regarding the preferred series books for children, and Munde’s (1997) conclusions that adults and children embrace contrasting definitions of a “humorous book,” reveal those consistent differences. In all aforementioned instances, what adults perceived to be enjoyable or humorous books for children contrasted what children indicated were enjoyable and humorous. Such dissonance has negative implications on the recreational reading selections found in both school and classroom libraries. Further illustrating the potential disconnect between children, books, and reading are studies which reveal that the school environment, inclusive of both classroom and school libraries, does not necessarily house books that children state they want to read (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Krashen, 2004; Worthy, 1996; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). While there may indeed be a plethora of reading material for students, such material is not necessarily desired or enjoyed by those required to read them.

From a sociocultural perspective, many children also have difficulty finding literature that reflects their cultural communities. Culturally relevant literature includes books that “reflect the racial, ethnic, and social diversity that is characteristic of our pluralistic society and of the world” (Sims Bishop, 1997, p.3). Looking at culturally relevant literature from the perspective of race, approximately 18% of the books published between 2002 and 2006 were written by and/or about individuals from marginalized groups (e.g. African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans) in the U.S. (Cooperative Children’s Book Center, 2007). As of 2000, which is when the last U.S. census was conducted, these marginalized groups constituted approximately 30% of the U.S population (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001). Based on these statistics, current literature available to children does not appear to reflect the cultural diversity of not only
the reader but also the larger U.S. society. This is highly problematic since children desire books whose characters mirror themselves (Rudman, 1984) and interracial children have experienced difficulty finding role models in literature (Wardle, 1993). Furthermore, culturally relevant literature helps individuals navigate varying perspectives about their own cultures and roles in society, while providing opportunities for understanding of others’ cultural surroundings, insights, traditions, and beliefs (Cai, 1998; Harris, 1997; Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001; Yokota, 1993). Thus, not only do children need access to a variety of reading material, they need access to reading material that reflects their own and others’ cultural communities.

Disparities in “accessible reads” are further exacerbated by the Matthew Effects (Stanovich, 2000). Within school environments, more proficient readers are allotted more opportunities to read and less proficient readers are provided fewer opportunities to read, a phenomenon corroborated by Duke (2000) and McGill-Franzen and Allington (1993). Therefore, the analogy of schools as faucets for economically disadvantaged children who may or may not struggle with reading (Entwistle, Alexander, & Olson, 1997) may be somewhat inaccurate. When economically disadvantaged children are in school, educational resources are supposed to be “turned on,” providing them with access to books, libraries, and teachers. When school is not in session, these resources are cut off. In the case of struggling or marginalized readers, such resources may be turned on in school but are held just out of reach. Or the resources are so decontextualized that they lose their literary sustenance.

Politics also influence students’ access to physical and instructional resources. Because books and reading are considered so influential in the evolution of self and society in the U.S., they continue to be the loci of political, social, and educational attention. Recent reading initiatives such as Reading First, under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (U.S. Department of
Education, 2002), have begun to alter conceptions of what constitutes reading and “quality texts” without necessarily including the input of the child reader. These mandates limit the scope of literary resources allowed for purchase with federal funds and prefaces adults’ determination of what constitutes a “good text” for children. The voices of the very individuals impacted by such policy, struggling readers, are muted. They are compelled to read materials from commercial reading programs and basal textbooks which often fail to accurately represent the wealth of diverse heritages and experiences of students (McDermott, Rothenberg, & Gormley, 1997; Smith, Phillips, Leithead, & Rawdah, 2004).

Knowing that successful readers read more (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Donahue, Finnegan, Lutkus, Allen, & Campbell, 2001), that over time elementary school students who did not engage in recreational reading lost substantial academic ground (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988), and that students prefer books they select themselves (Gambrell, Codling, & Palmer, 1996), it seems pivotal to conduct book selection studies with individuals who are identified as struggling or marginalized readers and have limited access to reading material outside of school. These studies will better enable teachers and librarians to provide all children with a repertoire of reading material they wish to read or engage with as they develop their literacy competencies. They will also illuminate readers’ conceptions of reading and books that help formulate their reasons for selecting particular books.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to better understand the book selection rationales and experiences of preadolescent girls who are considered marginalized readers. This understanding will help determine if children’s book selection rationales and experiences extend beyond reading the books. Do children select books purely for the sake of reading or are there other reasons for these selections that do not necessarily involve reading the words on a page?
Through this study I also provide a more detailed composite of the girls’ conceptions of reading. Therefore, the two questions which guide my investigation are 1) What rationales undergird preadolescent girls’ self-selections of books for personal use and 2) How does access to culturally relevant literature reflect and reshape their conceptions of reading and books?

Significance

Research involving struggling or marginalized readers’ opinions about reading and desirable texts will hopefully help increase the presence and availability of engaging texts in school communities. Book selection or preference studies are optimal avenues to determine not only what are considered “engaging reads” but also the foundations of those considerations. Researchers have conducted book selection studies for many decades; however, only a handful have included interviews with students about their own book selections (Ivey & Broaddus; Mohr, 2003; Williams, 2005), have actively involved the students when creating a collection of books for selection purposes (Williams, 2005), or have indicated a focus on economically disadvantaged students or struggling readers (Martinez, Roser, Worthy, Strecker, & Gough, 1997; Williams, 2005; Zimet & Camp, 1974). Additionally, none of the book selection studies have formally extended beyond students’ stated rationales and included what happened after the students obtained the books. Thus, there appears to be assumptions on the part of researchers and educators that children select books for the primary purpose of reading and that they, in fact, read the books.

These assumptions, while well-grounded in experience, potentially neglect the sociocultural and sociopolitical influences upon children’s conceptions of reading and their book selections. Like reading, the reasons why we select books are varied, complex, and influenced by personal experience and societal expectations. By taking rationales at face value, we potentially overlook important information regarding how and why children respond to books and reading in
particular ways and the social and educational implications of those responses. Through this study I wish to provide needed insight into how reading is currently conceptualized and into the roles books play in the students’ lives within and beyond the written word and outside the parameters of formal school. Educators will hopefully use this information to increase their students’ access to and engagement with books and reading.

**Definition of Terms**

To ensure understanding, the following terms used throughout the study are defined below.

**Marginalized Readers/Struggling Readers:** These terms are used interchangeably and indicate individuals who are disconnected from school-based literacy practices, have language or cultural practices different from those valued in school, or reside outside of the mainstream community due to their ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, etc. (Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore, 2000). In this study marginalized or struggling readers were determined by the following criteria:

(a) Are eligible for free/reduced meals in schools and have limited access to reading materials outside of school

(b) Professed extreme dislike or apathy towards reading in a preliminary interview and scored lower than the 50th percentile on a validated Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) (McKenna & Kear, 1990)

And/Or

(c) Scored below the minimum standard (<3 on a scale of 1-5) for the reading portion of the latest statewide standardized reading portion of the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT)

**Preadolescents:** Children who are between the ages of 9 and 12. They are also commonly known as “tweens” because they are situated in-between childhood and adolescence.

**Economically Disadvantaged/Low SES:** These two terms are used interchangeably and indicate students who have qualified for free or reduced meals in public schools, as indicated on student records.
“Girls’ Club”: The name created by the seven girls who participated in this study. This moniker was used only in the girls’ conversations with individuals outside of the study or when the girls wanted to make a distinction between them and others not involved in the study.

**Book Selections:** Books that were ultimately chosen by individuals from a selection of books made available to them (Spangler, 1983; Summers & Lukasevich, 1983). In this study, this term may be used interchangeably with book preferences because the individuals selected certain texts over other texts, indicating a specific preference based on actual selection.

**Black and White:** Identifications of race used by the participants in the study. Black specifically refers to African-Americans and White refers to European-Americans. I only use the terms African-Americans or European-Americans when citing other researchers’ work which included those terms.

**Culturally relevant Literature:** Books that represent multiple ethnic cultures as well as other cultural communities defined by religious, sexual orientation, and physical characteristics (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2005).

**Mass Media Books:** Books about popular culture celebrities, such as musicians and athletes and books that represent popular TV shows (TV tie-ins), or books which have been cinematically transformed. This genre of books can also be used interchangeably with culturally relevant literature on occasion, as it represents the peer culture of the girls that is not necessarily endorsed by mainstream society.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

A quest for improved understanding of the book selection rationales and experiences of preadolescent girls considered to be marginalized readers necessitates an entrance into the world of reader engagement as it relates to books and children. Identification and contemplation of the interplay between readers and texts serves as the entrance. Central contributors to children’s book selections and subsequent interactions are individuals’ perceptions and conceptions of reading and themselves as readers, the types of books accessible, and the ways in which they are motivated to engage with books and reading.

In the first section of this chapter I define and discuss “engagement,” especially in regard to engaged reading. This delineation involves a discussion about the encompassing nature of engagement and taxonomy of motivation articulated by Wigfield and Guthrie (1997). I continue with an overview of transactional theories of reading, as proposed by Iser (1978), Bakhtin (1981), and Rosenblatt (1938/1995), and I discuss the influence of culturally relevant literature upon children’s reading conceptions and engagement with books, both of which are considered influential factors in reading engagement. Culturally relevant literature in particular deepens the discussion of what books children articulate as “engaging reads.” I then discuss how reader engagement affects academic achievement.

The second section of this chapter begins with reviews of studies focusing on children’s perceptions and conceptions of reading and their self-concepts as readers. How children envision the act of reading and themselves as readers influences their type and level of motivation and engagement. It also influences what books they select. I then segue into children’s book selection studies, which focus on children’s reading preferences, interests, and ultimate selections. Within that review I enumerate various rationales, focal participants, and methods of determining
children’s book selections. I include the typical composite of participants in these studies based on SES, gender and age, and disaggregate studies based on primary data collection methods of artifacts or interviews. I then share examples of studies that involved similar data collection methods to mine and inspired this particular study.

By outlining the interrelatedness of reader engagement, children’s considerations of reading and themselves as readers, and book choices, I demonstrate the importance of building and expanding upon current conceptions of book selection studies. I also explain how this study not only contributes to the growing body of research regarding children’s book selections but will also enable further consideration of how both articulated rationales and behaviors indicate what literature and reading literature means to children in their own lives.

**Engagement & Engaged Reading**

Notions of engagement underlie any study involving children and books. Educators actively seek a myriad of ways in which children can engage in learning since engagement inspires people to amplify their attention, critical thinking skills, and planning towards what they are doing. This is especially true while reading. Yet what do we mean when we use the term “engagement” and what does it involve?

According to the *Oxford American Dictionary* (1986), the definition of “engage” includes “to bring attention to,” “to occupy oneself” and “to interlock . . . so that it transmits power.” Considering these perspectives, one could consider an “engaging book” as a book that envelops the reader and stimulates imagination and critical thought. Similarly, engagement can be regarded as a personal state of authentic involvement, contribution, and ownership. According to Guthrie and Anderson (1999), engagement in reading is “a motivated mental activity with vital consequences for world knowledge and social participation” (p.18). Thus reading can be considered a person’s engagement in a conceptual and social world.
Researchers offer different components integral to engaged reading. Ownership, or the command and self-efficacy of literacy practices (Au, 1997), intrinsic motivation (Oldfather & Dahl, 1994; Turner, 1995), and incidences of obedience or “on-task” behaviors (Tobin, 1994) are just a few indicators of engaged readership. Other researchers such as Cambourne (1995) and Guthrie, McGough, Bennett, and Rice (1996) conceptualize engaged readers as individuals who are motivated by personal goals, use multiple approaches to texts, are cognizant of developing new understandings, are responsible, and are social participants in reading or other literacy acts. Regardless of one’s stance, motivation appears fundamental to the idea of engagement.

Motivation, as something which compels people to act (Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998), often involves setting and achieving goals (Urdan & Maehr, 1995) or identifying and solving problems—things that prevent goal attainment (Prawat, 1993). Motivation is inclusive of beliefs and goals which guide people’s actions. Within the dynamics of reading, researchers have either looked at specific aspects of motivation or general approaches to motivation. Some researchers study reading motivation within the context of reading attitudes or reading interests (Mathewson, 1994; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995; Schiefele, 1996) while others ground their research in an engagement perspective. This perspective merges “cognitive, motivational, and social aspects of reading” (Baker & Wigfield, 1999, p.452). Adherents to an engagement perspective describe readers’ motivations as multidimensional and relevant to many different purposes. They also separate reading interest from motivation because interest typically accompanies a specific topic while motivation encompasses more general attributes. An interested reader probably looks at one particular text at any given time, while a motivated reader could have many interests (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).
**Taxonomy of Reading Motivation**

Because one’s self-concept, psychological locus of motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic), situated location, and reason for achieving are all pivotal when deciding what, how long, and what degree of involvement to invest in an activity, Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) created a theoretical taxonomy of reading motivation. This taxonomy, based on a consensus of reading motivation theory research (Baker & Wigfield, 1999), consists of three categories: competence and efficacy beliefs, intrinsic purposes, and extrinsic purposes. Table 2-1 provides an overview of this taxonomy.

Table 2-1. A synopsis of Wigfield and Guthrie’s (1997) taxonomy of reading motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence and efficacy beliefs</th>
<th>Intrinsic purposes</th>
<th>Extrinsic purposes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy: Belief in ability to succeed at reading.</td>
<td>Intrinsic: Interested in or curious about reading for reading's sake.</td>
<td>Performance Goal Orientation: Acting to gain social acceptance (e.g. praise, grades, rewards, competition, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge: Willingness and desire to try difficult reading material.</td>
<td>Learning Goal Orientation: Desire to improve or master something</td>
<td>Social Reasons: Sharing thoughts and meanings with loved ones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Avoidance: Desire to avoid reading.</td>
<td>Curiosity: Desire to read about something of interest</td>
<td>Compliance: Reading to meet others' expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement: Enjoyment experienced from reading. Some liken this to &quot;getting lost&quot; in a book. Nell (1994) refers to this as &quot;absorption&quot; or &quot;trance.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Importance: Perceived value of reading.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contributing to this taxonomy is Nell’s (1988) determination that having the ability to read, possessing positive expectations of reading, and having a variety of books to choose from that are of specific interest to individuals, will foster a love of reading. In addition, physiological and cognitive changes occur when one engages in ludic reading, or pleasurable reading.

According to Nell, ludic reading typically occurs if all three aforementioned antecedents exist
and individuals read at least one book every week. While Nell’s study focused solely on motivated and competent readers, his conclusions could have implications for studies involving struggling or apathetic readers.

Like Nell, Csikszenmihalyi (1990) focuses on intrinsic motivation, as actualized through the concept of “flow” or the blend of the cognitive (consciousness) and physical (action). When we are engaged in “flow” while reading, we become part of the text; we are an integrated entity enveloped in concentration. The recollection of “flow experiences” constitutes an element of intrinsic motivation and reinforces reader engagement. Schools, with rules and regulations and an emphasis on competition and evaluation, tend to mitigate the opportunities for children to experience reading “flows,” especially those who feel self-consciousness about their reading capabilities.

Antecedents to Motivation and Engagement

Individuals’ interactions with texts may prove critical to reading motivation and ultimately reader engagement. Implicit models of reading, transactional theories of reading, and the variety of accessible children’s literature are all precursors to motivation and reader engagement. Schraw and Bruning’s (1999) implicit models of reading refer to individuals’ beliefs about their roles as readers. Iser (1978), Bakhtin (1981), and Rosenblatt’s (1938/1995) transactional approaches to reading offer the possibilities of individuals reading to develop personal meanings and social relationships, which could increase their motivation to read and subsequent engagement with reading. Another precursor for reader engagement is the type of literature available. Children who are typically marginalized within mainstream culture appear engaged in literature which reflects their thoughts and life experiences.
Implicit models of reading

Influenced by Louise Rosenblatt’s (1938/1995) theory of reading response, Schraw and Bruning (1999) have distinguished three different models that affect individuals’ motivations to read: the transmission, translation, and transaction models. They believe that every individual brings at least one of these models to the act of reading and each model indicates the type and degree of interaction with texts.

The transmission model, akin to the literary theory of New Criticism, prefaces the complete passivity of the reader. The text, as sole authority, offers meaning to the reader rather than the reader generating meaning from or with the text. The reader is completely beholden to the text or the individual who can “correctly” interpret the text. According to Schraw and Bruning (1999), this model represents minimal satisfaction with and motivation for pleasure reading. Within a translation model of reading, which Schraw and Bruning consider to be an appendage of the transmission model, both the text and the reader have independent meanings but readers must accurately “translate” the written text based on their own cultural understanding. In this instance, reading becomes more internalized as readers interpret the texts based on their own world knowledge; yet the interpretations must also be representative of the author’s intentions. While somewhat different, both transmission and translation reading models necessitate minimal input from the reader.

Contrastingly, the transaction model encourages readers’ personal and active construction of meaning when encountering texts. Reading is no longer simply a means of communication; it has a broader purpose and multiple functions. Readers interpret texts differently depending on personal, social, and situational constructs. A personal relationship can develop between readers and texts. They are partners with the author and text and hold an equal amount of literary clout. This active orientation resides in the personal and generates more motivation to read.
Schraw and Bruning (1999) conducted a study to determine whether or not individuals brought only one model to the act of reading and the implications of those models on comprehension. Their findings included evidence that adults bring both models to each reading act and emphasize one more than the other at various times. They also found that readers embodying the transactional model of beliefs tend to comprehend more and think more critically than those adhering to a transmission model. The transaction model enables readers to “engage in deeper, more constructive reading” (p.295), which they consider to be evidence of highly engaged reading.

**Transactional theories of reading response: Iser, Bakhtin, and Rosenblatt**

Reading, as a generative act, requires a negotiation between reader and text. Meaning is subjective due to the individuality of the reader and her socio-historical heritage. Early transactional theories focus on the aesthetic process, also known as literary reading (Straw, 1990). Iser (1978), known for his phenomenological approach to reading, emphasizes how and under what conditions meanings occur when readers and texts meet. As readers travel through texts, they might experience “wandering viewpoints” when their views or conceptions alter based on the texts’ content. These viewpoints, based on what readers are seeking, speak to multiple interpretations of texts.

From Iser’s point of view, the dialectical nature of text and reader accentuates the reader’s creativity. It is the reader’s experience which determines the real meaning of the text. Meaning occurs when the reader fills in “conceptual gaps” and determines what has not been “said” in the text through what is “said” in the text. The text and reader dialogue with one another. According to Suleiman and Crosman (1980), the reader is not a historically situated individual within this fluidity between revelation and concealment (Iser, 1978). Rather, the reader’s psychological mindset is trans-historical; the creative experience is similar regardless of
the individual. Reading a text is like looking at the evening stars. The stars exist; however, the lines which connect them vary (Iser, 1978). While Iser’s theory does indicate a transaction between reader and text, it appears to preface the text slightly more than the reader.

Theories of reading often include theories of language and representation which are conjoined by theories of interpretation (Davidson, 1993). Theories of language focus on the nature of language and thought and notions of the individual and collective. Theories of representation emphasize text characteristics or features while theories of interpretation offer how one creates meaning with texts. All three elements, language, representation, and interpretation, are essential to a theory of reading (Bakhtin, 1981).

Bakhtin emphasizes how theories of reading need to be grounded in the view of language as socio-historical, dynamic, and dialogic. The text, framed through socio-historical forms of language, offers a heteroglossia of past and present voices. Likewise, the individual as a unique being influences and is influenced by the society in which s/he resides. Therefore, meaning created by the interaction of text and reader and reified through language is individual and collective, personal and social. The individual reader is embedded within a community of readers. Further, language, and hence interpretation, are temporally, geographically, and socially situated. The situated context of meaning involves both the past and present. Like Iser, Bakhtin stresses the importance of the reader; however, he favors the text as an artistic representation of language and society.

The importance and presence of the reader intensifies in Louise Rosenblatt’s (1938/1995) theory of reader response. Similar to Bakhtin, Rosenblatt (1978) believes knowing or understanding requires a transactional or dynamic relationship between author and text, subject and object. However, unlike Bakhtin, this relationship is highly individualistic. Each reader is
unique and brings to the transaction their own “ethnic, social, and psychological history” (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, p. xix). A text is merely inkblots on paper until the reader transforms the inkblots into “meaningful symbols” (p.24) through an interactive and introspective process.

Central to Rosenblatt’s reading tenets are two distinct stances embodied during and after reading. These stances, aesthetic and efferent, operate on a continuum of possibilities. The purpose of reading heavily influences which stance the reader occupies. For Rosenblatt, aesthetic reading involves what the reader experiences, thinks, and feels during reading and is imperative for pleasurable reading. Efferent reading emphasizes learning over experiencing. When reading efferently, the reader focuses on what new information is learned from reading and what information was acquired after reading. While very distinct, these two stances fall on a continuum where readers “mix” the stances depending on purpose, consciousness, environment, and mode of reading.

Iser, Bakhtin, and Rosenblatt’s views of reading emphasize the dialectical relationship between readers and texts and how such a relationship invites aesthetic reading. Aesthetic reading, in turn, contributes to intrinsic motivation for reading, which then leads to greater reader engagement. When readers become authentically involved, contribute to the creation of meaning, and “own” the experience, they are more likely to continue reading and immersing themselves in conceptual and social worlds.

Culturally relevant literature

The availability of authentic culturally relevant literature, as literature that accurately represents the racial, ethnic, and social diversity of our world, seems integral to experiencing an aesthetic or pleasurable read. When one reads stories that are familiar in circumstance and characterization, one feels connected; one becomes “absorbed” (Nell, 1988). These connections and experiences ostensibly increase reader motivation and perhaps reader engagement. Books
have the power to “promote favorable attitudes and foster positive behaviors” within and among readers (Sims, 1983). Therefore, a discussion about motivation and engagement would be incomplete without the inclusion of authentic culturally relevant literature and children’s responses to such literature.

Since Nancy Larrick (1965) identified the paucity of available culturally relevant literature through her review of 5,000 children’s books, researchers have explored the influences of culturally relevant literature on children’s attitudes and responses. According to Pirofski (2001), Viola Florez-Tighe (1983) and Rudine Sims (1983) are considered two initial advocates for the necessity of such literature in children’s lives. Florez-Tighe’s (1983) study of the use of African-American literature with basal readers underscored how culturally relevant literature enhanced young African-American children’s linguistic and cognitive development as well as the desire to read. Sims’ (1983) interview with a ten-year-old African-American girl about her preferences for and responses to culturally relevant literature revealed that while the girl expressed a preference for reading books that mirrored her experiences, she also wished to read books that included novel experiences. Both studies brought to the forefront issues of cultural relevance when discussing children’s engagement and the benefits of reading.

Researchers state that children receive multiple benefits of using multicultural literature in classrooms, including additional knowledge of their cultural past, improved self-concept and identity, and increased reading pleasure (Harris, 1990; Sims Bishop, 1997). Yet minimal research involving young African-American children’s preferences for and responses to African-American children’s literature exists. Available research offers differing viewpoints.

Grice and Vaughn (1992) interviewed 13 African-American and European-American third-graders from low socioeconomic communities to explore the appeal of 24 picture books
upon the children’s cognitive (comprehension) and affective (identification and enjoyment) domains. All of these children were considered struggling readers. Of the book collection, 21 of the 24 were considered culturally conscious books (Sims, 1982) and were selected by the researchers. Over a period of six weeks, the teacher read aloud each of the picture books and either the teacher or the researchers subsequently interviewed the children about each book. Grice and Vaughn determined that socioeconomic class, rather than race, might play a larger influence in the appeal of and connection to particular books. They also surmised that the students’ limited cultural and historical awareness might have contributed to their minimal preference for culturally conscious books. Grice and Vaughn’s conclusions indicate that the presence of protagonists of similar race to the readers may promote reader motivation but not necessarily reader engagement.

Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd’s (2001) interviews with African-American adults and third-grade children revealed their preferences for books that were relatable to their own lives and that “looked like me” (p.811). Similarly, the three African-American fifth-graders in Smith’s (1995) study, two of whom were struggling readers, chose books that included African-American experiences. Her interviews with each child revealed preferences for texts with written and visual descriptions and themes that most “closely mirrored their own life experiences and culture” (p.571) over those that did not.

Davis (2000) noted that her participants, six African-American female sixth-graders, selected books that represented themselves; however, those representations were not always based on racial identification. The “relatedness” of the stories also included similar situations and problems and evidenced successful problem-solving. Through archival data collection and in-depth interviewing, Davis concluded that the girls were “motivated, reflective, on task, and
engaged” (p.268) with their selected texts. McGinley and Kamberelis (1996) also found that African-American third and fourth-graders’ responses to multicultural literature contributed to their personal development and their cultural views. However, Taylor’s (1997) study of 24 low-ability, low-SES African-American and Latin-American fifth-graders in an urban school offers a more varied response.

In Taylor’s study, all students read 24 picture books selected by Taylor. These books were considered either melting pot or culturally conscious stories (Sims, 1982) and were either “mainstream” (realistic fiction) or “folklore” literature (Taylor, 1997, p.39). After reading each book the students completed a questionnaire asking for their opinion about the book in general and whether or not they could place themselves in the story. They then wrote about their favorite and least favorite books (p.39). The three favorite books of the African-American children were culturally-conscious books; however the five least favorite books also included culturally conscious books, which left Taylor uncertain about the implications for African-American children in this study. Unfortunately, Taylor did not include the students’ reasons for enjoying or disliking the offered books, which might have provided critical information regarding not only their preferences but also their levels of engagement.

Williams (2005) determined that sources of familiarity, which included the children’s everyday lives, constituted the preeminent reasons for economically disadvantaged third and fourth-grade Black students’ book selections. These books, which included biographies of pop culture musicians, famous athletes, and TV characters, generated discourse communities among the participants and their peers. Selection and ownership of these books also conceivably improved the children’s motivation to read.
These referenced studies indicate that while culturally relevant literature positively contributes to African-American students’ self-concept, social awareness, and reading engagement, the selection of and desire for “engaging” literature includes and extends beyond the racial identification of the protagonists. Additionally, children of different racial and ethnic heritage identified with culturally relevant literature that extended beyond their own racial identification.

**Educational Impact of Engaged Reading**

While the aesthetic realm of reading, in and of itself, is important, evidence of scholastic gains as a result of reader engagement is what convinces education officials and policy makers that transactional reading experiences with culturally relevant literature are beneficial. Reader response studies involving culturally relevant literature, especially African-American literature, indicate that engaging in the aesthetic realm bolsters the cognitive realm. Harris (1995) determined that an elementary curriculum with African-American children’s literature enabled students to engage personally with the text and elevated their comprehension and discussion of characters and plot sequences. Copenhaver’s (2001) investigation of elementary students’ literary understandings from a cultural viewpoint resulted in a determination that “cultural backgrounds provide significant resources for making meaning of story” (p.347).

Engaging in reader response, when transactional and inclusive of diverse and accurate reading material, personally and academically benefits individuals. Both texts and transactional experiences with texts appear to contribute to intrinsic reading motivation, and intrinsically motivated readers not only typically engage in reading more often (Oldfather & Wigfield, 1996), they also have positive attitudes toward reading (Greaney & Hegarty, 1987; Mathewson, 1994; McKenna et al., 1995). Further, active and frequent readers improve their comprehension
abilities or overall reading achievement (Campbell, Voelkl, & Donohue, 1997; Cipielewski & Stanovich, 1992).

Engagement in reading seems to also partially compensate for individuals’ limited educational histories and economic situations. Engaged readers from low socioeconomic areas and minimal educational experiences have performed better on reading achievement tests than less engaged readers from higher socioeconomic and educational communities (Guthrie & Schafer, 1998; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Clearly reader engagement benefits students’ personal and academic realms.

**Students’ Views of Reading**

When discussing reading achievement and reader engagement, children’s perceptions and conceptions of reading should not be overlooked, regardless of age. Although Reid (1966) and Weintrub and Denny (1965) concluded that young children were often unable to articulate their conceptions of reading, Cairney’s (1988) study of how primary-aged children responded to their basal readers established children’s capabilities of understanding the purpose of reading and reading materials. Additionally, Roettger (1980) determined that students’ conceptions of reading influenced the relationship between one’s ability and attitude towards reading. Purcell-Gates and Dahl (1991) ascertained a connection between 35 economically disadvantaged, primary-aged children’s reading conceptions and their acquisition of reading skills in a skills-based reading environment. These studies, among others, link reading achievement, attitude, and reader engagement.

**Reading Studies Focused on Students’ Perceptions or Conceptions of Reading and Readers**

During the late 1970’s and 1980’s, which Turbill (2002) defines as the “age of reading as meaning making” and the “age of the writing-reading connection” respectively (para. 12), researchers conducted many studies focusing on children’s conceptions of reading and
themselves as a reader. The majority of accessible studies centered upon children during their primary school years (Bondy, 1985; Borko & Eisenhart, 1986; Cairney, 1988; Rasinski & DeFord, 1988) with some studies including a combination of primary and intermediate level students (Canney & Winograd, 1979, 1980; Filby & Barnett, 1982) or focusing on third, fourth, or sixth-grade students (Johns, 1974; Johns & Ellis, 1976; Roettger, 1980). Researchers continued to focus on primary-aged readers during the 1990’s until the early 2000’s (Arya, 2003; Guice, 1992; Knapp, 2002; Landis, 1999; Möller, 1999; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996). All of the aforementioned studies were conducted in school classrooms and relied on student interviews or questionnaires. The participants represented a span of socioeconomic and sociocultural communities and included both females and males.

During the 1980’s researchers adopted a relational approach to their work, comparing “high” and “low” ability readers, readers in skills-based and whole language classrooms, or comparing empirical data on the students’ reading capabilities to their classmates’ opinions on who where the “better readers” in school. Researchers since then have sought to better understand the relationship between reading contexts and reading concepts without necessarily comparing readers based on ability or curriculum design. They have focused on the various ways in which children construct their reading conceptions and the contextual influences upon those conceptions (Arya, 2003; Guice, 1992; Knapp, 2002; Landis, 1999; Möller, 1999; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996). Research concerning children’s conceptions and perceptions of reading have forged a consensus that the organization of literacy instruction in schools strongly influences children’s reading concepts and their self-conceptions of themselves as readers.

A patterned composite of students’ considerations of reading arose from these studies. More proficient readers tended to describe more meaning-based or holistic approaches to
reading, which included learning from the text, reading a variety of books, and socializing with books, with only one group of proficient readers indicating they had to read fast (Guice, 1992). Less proficient readers tended to focus on surface level, or skill-based aspects of reading, emphasizing decoding abilities, stressing the need to perform well and practice, control their reading environment, and read fast. The less proficient readers emphasized procedural aspects of reading without any mention of meaning or pleasure.

Karla Möller’s (1999) case study investigation of how first-graders perceive reading and themselves as readers at the end of the school year led her to conclude that students’ purposes and perceptions are intertwined. Focusing on five students, Möller twice observed classroom reading instruction lessons involving her participants and subsequently interviewed each participant independently. These readers were of either African-American or European American heritage, represented both genders, and spanned the continuum reading abilities. Möller concluded that, for her participants, reading was a utilitarian act reserved for teacher or adult-related reading activities and a social act with their peers. Each reader exhibited different emphases for reading; however, there were commonalities amongst all five, regardless of ability. The five major categories of reading were 1) Practice; 2) People; 3) Power; 4) Personal preference; and 5) Performance.

The primary reason for reading for these first-graders was to practice in order to develop their vocabulary and decoding skills. The length of the words and text, as indicators of maturation, were particularly important for all of the readers. All of the readers also mentioned the social nature of reading. They either read together to improve their reading capabilities or to share good books with each other; although one student who experienced the most difficulty reading mentioned reading socially only once.
Reading also enabled the students to acquire pleasure and power. Not only was reading fun, regardless of the student’s reading ability, but it also enabled them to express themselves in powerful ways, such as writing their own books, controlling what they read and responded to, and learning new information to share with others. Reading as performance was a category which included some discrepancies. The students discussed how performance, through reading aloud to their classmates, was both exciting and scary. It involved risk-taking, which the less proficient readers indicated they were not comfortable doing but did in order to improve. Möller’s study suggests children have “rich” reading perceptions which are influenced by the children’s situated experiences and concurs with Johnston’s (1997) determination that the act of reading and individuals’ thoughts about “reading” and “readers” are constructed.

Sixth-graders in Guice’s (1992) five-month case study also exemplified the social aspect of reading in combination with scholastic influences upon students’ reading perceptions. Framing her study within reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995) and employing grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) strategies, Guice sought to better understand how 21 sixth-graders perceived themselves as readers. The majority of her participants were White middle-class children who attended private school. While both genders were represented, there were more males (n=13) than females (n=8). During the initial and final phases of her study, Guice observed and audio-recorded the students’ language arts class and selected eight students as her focal participants to individually interview. In the intermediary phase, she investigated how social interactions at home and school influenced their preferences for and definitions of texts.

Through her investigation, she found four distinct types of readers which were largely based on the rate and quantity of text read: 1) Not a Good Reader/Doesn’t Like to Read; 2) Pretty
Good Reader/Sometimes Likes to Read; 3) Pretty Good Reader/Likes to Read; 4) Good Reader/Likes to Read. The girls either considered themselves not good readers or good readers, while the boys considered themselves pretty good readers. Each student’s evaluation of readership was largely based on her or his perception and attitude of reading. Those who considered themselves good or pretty good readers enjoyed reading and those who did not consider themselves good readers didn’t enjoy reading. The students who didn’t like to read preferred short books and considered “good books” as those read at home, not at school. They also were reticent to engage in social activities related to reading. Further, the females were more concerned about books they could enjoy while the males were concerned with the length, topic, and requested their male peers’ approval of the books.

At the conclusion of the study, Guice created a theory of community of readers which highlighted the interwoven concepts of reading perceptions, self-perceptions of readership, and socially-situated interactions. Each concept informs and influences the other. Students’ self-concept as readers influenced their book selections and book responses. Likewise, their book experiences and responses influenced their self-concept of readers. Guice’s theory supports Padak, Vacca, and Stewart’s (1993) assertion that “children’s views about reading may be related to what they do as readers” (p.363) as well as Cairney’s (1988) claim that “every reading event occurs within a rich social context, part of which is the shared beliefs that participants have concerning reading, materials, and instruction (p.420).

**Literacy Studies Involving Conceptions of Reading and Readers**

Other studies which indirectly discussed children’s considerations about reading or themselves as readers include Margaret Finders’ (1997) study of adolescent girls and their “underground” literacy practices in middle school, and Bonnie Norton’s (2003) study of
preadolescent children and comic books. These two studies look at how children differentiate between “unofficial” and “official” texts and how society influences those distinctions.

Finders (1997), interested in young adolescent girls’ “underground literate world,” conducted a year-long ethnographic study at a rural middle school. The girls in her study, known as the “social queens” and the “tough cookies,” were primarily European-American girls who were members of middle or working-class families. In this study, Finders focused on the “unofficial” literacy practices of the “social queens” (e.g. writing notes, signing yearbooks, and reading magazines) and the “tough cookies” (e.g. reading magazines and home interior magazines, cookbooks). While the “social queens” considered their “unofficial” literacy practices as indicators of social status and community building, the “tough cookies” considered reading and writing private endeavors which would lead to academic success and individuality.

The “tough cookies’” school-based literacy practices typically matched the school’s literacy expectations of learning information, revealing literate competencies, and broadening understanding. Their out-of-school literacy practices helped them avoid household responsibilities, bond with their mothers, and simply play. Contrastingly, the “social queens” “played with power” (p.80) and their “unofficial” literacy “performances” were constructed with particular audiences in mind. The practices were collaborative, collective, and maintained social roles, unlike their “official” literacy practices, which they felt were isolating and mandatory. Finders’ investigation beckons further consideration about how the “literate underlife” of adolescent girls provided the girls with the freedom and responsibility that adults had previously told them would occur within the “official” literate spheres of middle school.

Intrigued by her sons’ love for comic books, Norton (2003) investigated the ways in which Archie comics engaged academically, culturally, and linguistically diverse fifth, sixth, and
seventh-graders. The students were primarily sixth-graders (n=23) and included an almost equal number of girls (n=19) as boys (n=15). In their individual questionnaires and interviews the students not only indicated Archie comics were humorous, but also that the comics provided a sense of control over their reading process. Like Finders’ (1997) adolescent girls, their comic book culture, as “literate underlife,” created opportunities for the students to learn, debate, and engage in reading outside the parameters of the school curriculum.

The students also shared with Norton how reading in school, even during independent reading time, did not include such comics. Their teachers preferred chapter books and considered the Archie comics to be a “waste of time” or “garbage” (p.144). Archie, as a comic book, was not a “proper book” (p.145) and was typically read at home as a reward for finishing homework. The students felt connected to Archie comics, while texts in school were abstract and disconnected from their lives outside of school. In response to the students’ commentaries, Norton encourages teachers to reflect on why Archie comics and reading material of the like are considered “trivial” and speculates that the pressures of accountability and educators’ distance from childhood pleasures contribute to their stance towards comics. She advocates more research with multimodal texts like Archie comics to better understand reader engagement.

The focus of Finders’ (1997) and Norton’s (2003) studies resides in how children conceptualize and distinguish between “official” texts which are accepted by adults and schools and “unofficial” texts which are endorsed and enjoyed by children. They also suggest a renewed look at book selection studies and their significance to reader engagement.

**Book Selection Studies**

Research involving children’s book selections is extensive due in part to the awareness that children’s reading interests are inherently mobile and are influenced by access and social mores (Wolfson, Manning, & Manning, 1984). The idiosyncratic nature of book selections and
perhaps reading necessitates continual investigations of what children state are desired texts within specific domains. Such studies assist educators in streamlining what to purchase for recreational reading purposes given their limited budgets, what to include in curriculum units, and what texts to offer which will help expand and challenge their students’ interests (Sturm, 2003).

Reading researchers often use the terms “reading preferences,” and “reading interests” interchangeably (Galda, Ash, & Cullinan, 2003) when referring to children and books despite the difference in approaches. According to Summers and Lukasevich (1983) and Monson and Sebesta (1991), reading preferences indicate the possibility of readership while reading interests tend to identify what has been selected to read. Reading preference studies focus on the broad continuum of book choices, while reading interest studies focus on more detailed choices. Some researchers also argue that the term “reader preference” construes passivity amongst those selecting books and does not necessarily indicate an authentic desire for the books offered (Spangler, 1983). For example, I am told to choose between a Stephen King horror novel and a self-help book about elevating my self-esteem, but what I really desire at that moment is “light” reading material such as a “chick lit” novel by Sophie Kinsella. My ultimate selection of the self-help book, thus indicating a preference, symbolizes a forced selection of the “more interesting” choice within a given set of options rather than my true reading interest. I might be interested in reading a self-help book at a later date, but for the interim, I currently want Kinsella’s book. Within academic environments where reading is mandated, children may often feel compelled to select any book in order to honor their teachers’ or librarians’ requests.

Reader interest studies, on the other hand, ostensibly enable children to become more invested in the selection process because interests appear to be more intrinsically related and
involve freedom of choice (Spangler, 1983). Children are choosing what books they are interested in reading with no apparent pressure to select one book over another. However both reader preference and reader interest studies tend to overlook the socio-historical and psychosocial influences of reader preferences and interests. With the exception of a couple of analytical studies such as Dressman’s (1997) study of third-graders’ book preferences as socially mediated performances, book selection studies do not typically include an analysis of the sociocultural influences of children’s book selections.

Further similarities between the two types of studies include shared goals. Researchers conducting both types of studies wish to discover what specific books or genres of books might foster increased engagement with reading and why those books are so appealing for children. While I understand the differences between the two types of studies, as articulated by reading and children’s literature researchers, I do not distinguish between the two in this review. I categorize reading preference and reading interest studies as “book selection studies” because both types of studies share similar data collection methods, participants, and overarching goals.

**Lineage and Foci of Book Selection Studies**

Book selection studies date back over a century. The initial studies (late 1800’s to the 1920’s) included questionnaires distributed to 900 to 3,600 elementary-aged students, depending on the study. Over the past century most researchers concentrated on preference differences based on children’s gender and age (Sebesta & Monson, 2003) and sought understanding of desired books based on particular genres (e.g. fiction, nonfiction, poetry) or topics (e.g. humor, adventurous, animals, friendships). During the first few decades of the twentieth century researchers sought to elucidate whether or not children were reading “ideal” books (literature with high literary merit) through book selection studies. The impact of the curriculum, not the child’s interest, served as the impetus for such investigations.
In the 1930’s, researchers began disaggregating preferences based on the participants’ perceived intellectual ability (Lazar, 1937). A significant shift towards a more “child-centered” focus and the inclusion of “underground reading material” (e.g. comic books) in the 1960’s accompanied the Whole Language Movement (Haynes & Richgels, 1992). This move indicated a focus on recreational reading choices outside the academic framework of classroom instruction. Within the first half of the twentieth century the subject of interest in book selection studies shifted from content to the individual. Instead of asking how book selections reflected learning, researchers asked how book selections reflected the individual.

After the 1960’s, book selection studies seemed to occur more frequently as a response to research indicating a marked decline in reading interest as children mature (Anderson, Tollefson, & Gilbert, 1985; Cline & Kretke, 1980; McKenna et al., 1995; Shapiro & White, 1991) and to the “fourth-grade slump” (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 2000). These studies provided educators with information about potential books to use in instruction (Reutzel & Gali, 1998) or attempted to ensure a mismatch between children and books occurred infrequently, if at all (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). The trend of researching how books could better fulfill individual reading interests for both academic and personal reading continues today.

Participants of Book Selection Studies

Up until the 1980’s intermediate or secondary level students were the target population of book selection studies. The focus on older youth has provided educators with a rich source of data indicating that after age nine, girls and boys express preferences for different genres or content (Harkrader & Moore, 1997; Landy, 1977; McCarty, 1950; Simpson, 1996; Williams, 2005; Wolfson, Manning, & Manning, 1984). Studies involving children nine years or older align with researchers’ assertions that after eight years of age children can better articulate their rationales and experiences (Kortesluoma, Hentinen, & Nikkonen, 2003). However, studies
focusing on children younger than nine years old have also occurred (Fisher & Natarella, 1982; Itzkowitz, 1982; Mohr, 2003; Smith, 1962), and have provided insight into the influences of teachers and book access within the classroom during a period of time when children are learning to read, not reading to learn.

Researchers conducting studies since the mid 1990’s have focused particularly on the ethnicities of participants (Castaneda, 1995; Taylor, 1997; Williams, 2005), multicultural literature (Mohr, 2003) and popular culture (Greenlee, Monson, & Taylor, 1996; Ujiie & Krashen, 1996; Williams, 2005). With the exception of a few studies (Martinez, Roser, Worthy, Strecker, & Gough, 1997; Simpson, 1996; Williams, 2005), most research reviewed did not include the socioeconomic status of the individuals, nor, with the exception of the late 1930’s-early 1940’s studies, did researchers note children’s perceived reading abilities. Gender and ethnicity appeared to be the two crucial variables when ascertaining the preferences of children.

Recognizing that access to texts could significantly influence what one reads, it is disconcerting that researchers of contemporary book selection studies are extrapolating the preferred reading materials of those who not only have literary access but are also considered proficient readers as the reading preferences of those who do not have access or may not be as proficient of readers. This assumption is quite risky as it potentially overlooks specific literary wants and needs of those already marginalized in schools.

**Data Collection Methods in Book Selection Studies**

Collection methods for book selection studies have often included written documentation such as reader surveys or questionnaires (Harkrader & Moore, 1997; Haynes & Richgels, 1992; Wolfson, Manning, & Manning, 1984), reading logs (Anderson, Higgins, & Wurster, 1985; Castaneda, 1995), and library circulation records (Bard & Leide, 1985; Isaacs, 1992; Kutiper & Wilson, 1993). These indirect methods of determining what children prefer or select to read
enable researchers to collect a substantial amount of information from a large population within a limited amount of time. They also allow for a greater capacity for generalizing the results to a wider audience. However, reading surveys and questionnaires are often not validated instruments (Sebasta & Monson, 2003), require the respondent to have a particular level of reading ability, and often include preconceived categories which could hold different meanings for the participants. Furthermore, the use of fictitious titles necessitates researchers infer their conclusions rather than directly convey what children actually said. Their inferences may or may not coincide with the participants’ intentions or meaning and does not take into account the allure of titles.

Reading logs, especially within scholastic environments, implicitly convey the need for individuals to share positive thoughts about selected books. The tendency to write about “the part I liked best” potentially belies the actual engagement of the readers and might not capture the reasons why children selected particular books. It appears erroneous to equate an enjoyable part of the book with the reason why the book was originally selected or to assume one enjoyable part indicates enjoyment of the entire book.

Circulation records such as library check-out logs do not guarantee that the children enjoyed the books they borrowed, and do not distinguish between which check-outs were mandated, which were used for the purposes of completing homework assignments, or which were voluntarily read, unless confirmed by the borrowers themselves. Nor do these records reveal the ways in which the children used the books (e.g. someone read it aloud, viewing only the illustrations, etc.). It is assumed the child read the books and read them for pleasure. Great uncertainty accompanies this particular type of data collection method and readers must trust and rely upon assumptions or inferences by researchers without indications of validity. These
artifacts also do not account for the visual dependency often indicated as a primary reason for book selections among elementary-school students (Campbell, Griswold, & Smith, 1988; Lysaker, 1997; Reutzel & Gali, 1998). Most importantly, children’s “voices” are lost amidst an array of data points and researchers’ conclusions.

Cognizant of the limitations which accompany surveys and questionnaires, researchers have begun using multiple methods of data collections which included gathering archival data, observing behaviors, and conducting interviews (Casteneda, 1995; Greenlee, Monson, & Taylor, 1996; Mohr, 2003; Williams, 2005). Observations could also be considered indirect sources of data in some respects due to the emphasis on the researchers’ perspectives of witnessed behaviors and events. However, interviews allow students to directly articulate their rationales for their book selections and leave little room for misinterpretation, especially if researchers use clarifying questions throughout the interviews.

Researchers who conduct interviews with students about their book selections immediately after the selection process are able to elicit richer descriptions of the students’ conscious and unconscious thoughts and actions in relation to books. Interviews enable more detailed recollections and rationales for children’s book selections as children express their preferences in their own words without much interference from the researcher. Interview probes also help clarify children’s rationales or encourage deeper exploration of children’s preferences. Children become active agents in studies that involve interviews. However, like book selection studies involving archival data, most interviews are conducted within a classroom or school library; are situated within curricula frameworks such as reader workshops or literature circles; or are extrapolations of in-process scholastic endeavors.
Additionally, with the exception of Williams’ (2005) study, the books included in these types of studies were selected by the participants’ teacher, librarian, or the researcher, without any initial input from the participants themselves. Since teachers, librarians, and researchers are adults often concerned with ensuring children’s academic success and the children lack opportunities to provide their own input, scholastic or adult-themed overtones could dominate the books included in the studies. Book selection studies that are either situated within a scholastic environment or focus on scholastic endeavors cannot necessarily be considered recreational reading choices outside of school or classroom instruction; yet they often are.

Studies situated outside the scholastic boundaries of a classroom or school library might provide additional insight into children’s book selections for recreational reading. Moreover, studies extending beyond children’s articulation of why they select particular books and including what happens with the books after the selection process might also enrich our current understanding of students’ range of engagement with self-selected books.

**Book Selection Studies Identifying Children’s Book Selection Rationales**

A couple of research studies within the past decade have focused on the contextual factors associated with children’s book selections. Concerned about the lack of representation of special education students’ book choices and the students’ book selection processes, Swartz and Hendricks (2000) investigated what factors influenced the book selection processes of 31 special education middle school students (6 female and 13 male). Their selection criterion was based solely on the students’ inclusion in a special education program. The researchers engaged in book chats with groups of up to six students at a time and discussed why the students selected particular books.

For the purposes of the study, Swartz and Hendricks initiated the book chats by asking the students to recall books they had read and why they had chosen those particular books. Their
initial inquiries about the book selections were streamlined with questions focusing on “authors, length, titles, covers, illustrations and characters” (p.611). The researchers then introduced five books of their choice, read the title and author of each book to the students, and then asked the students to indicate which of the aforementioned elements (e.g. author, length, and titles) would persuade them to select that particular book. A summary of the book was also provided to generate “richer” responses. The students’ responses were divided into the following 11 categories.

1. Topic/subject matter
2. Author
3. Writing style
4. Characters
5. Cover/Illustrations
7. Title
8. Length
9. Recommendations
10. Movies/television shows
11. Combined strategies

Approximately half of the students selected a book based on the cover or illustrations, titles, and peer recommendations. Two thirds of the students selected books based on the topic or subject matter or the back-of-the-book summaries. One third selected books based on the book’s character or due to the influence of movies and TV. Those that selected books due to media familiarity stated they wanted to compare and contrast the book to the movie or TV show and preferred the book to the movie or TV show.

Kragler’s (2000) distinction between the reading abilities of fourth-grade, White middle-class boys and their book selections led to some interesting findings. The boys had access to a wide variety of reading materials in school and in their classroom. Analyzing the teacher’s reading conference forms with each boy, which included questions about their book selection
processes, Kragler determined that regardless of reading proficiency, the students’ book selection rationales were similar and included the following categories, 1) Peer recommendations; 2) Physical characteristics; 3) Topic; 4) Same author/series; and 5) Previous experiences. What differed were the frequencies within each category. Less proficient readers mentioned the book’s physical features and their familiarity with the author or series the most and rarely mentioned selecting books based on peer recommendations. Less proficient readers also mentioned the influence of movies and videos on their book selections, although it didn’t happen frequently. All readers did not select books appropriate to their reading ability. The more proficient readers selected books that were at their independent reading levels and were easy to read, while the less proficient readers typically selected books that were too difficult and were at their frustration reading levels.

In another study, Fleener, Morrison, Linek and Rasinski (1997) sought to better understand how 32 fifth and sixth-grade students (19 females and 13 males) from academically and socioeconomically diverse communities in Oklahoma and Texas selected books for personal reading. The researchers individually interviewed the students about their book reading habits and twice observed their library behaviors. Responding to interview questions about their reading habits, the students indicated that the surface features of books, such as the titles, covers, and length, were some of the most popular reasons for selecting particular books. While students of all reading abilities selected books by the covers, less proficient readers selected more books due to their length and illustrations than more proficient readers. They also were more influenced by teacher recommendations and relied more on home, classroom, or school libraries for their book selections than more proficient readers. Conversely, more proficient readers indicated that
their peers’ book recommendations were more important to them than family members or teachers’ suggestions.

Economically disadvantaged Black children in the intermediate grades often selected books based on their book’s connection to their everyday lives (Williams, 2005). In this grounded theory study, Williams selected a subpopulation of 40 females and males from a larger pool of children (n=293) who were participating in Allington and McGill-Franzen’s (2001) study on how access to books potentially ameliorates the summer reading achievement gap. In this study, the participants chose up to 15 books from a range of 400 to 600 books to own every summer for three consecutive years. The books offered each year fluctuated due to participants’ requests and included books about popular culture figures such as celebrities, superheroes, and famous athletes.

Williams recorded the “spontaneous talk” of her 40 participants as they selected their books to help determine the children’s book selection processes. She then subsequently interviewed 30 of those participants, with equal representation of females and males, to gain a deeper understanding about what influenced the participants’ book selections. The audio recordings and interviews revealed that almost 90% of the 30 participants mentioned media sources such as TV, movies, video games, or music, as the reason why they selected particular books. Girls mentioned media sources more than boys during their spontaneous talk and interviews; however, boys selected more books based on media sources than the girls. The books’ physical features also assisted the girls and boys in their selection process, with 90% selecting at least one of their books based on the books’ covers, titles, or items such as stickers which accompanied the books. Adults, family members, and friends were also popular influences in the participants’ book selections.
Considerations of Book Selection Studies

Due to the hundreds of book selection studies which have focused particularly on genre or topic (McKay, 1968; Sebesta & Monson, 2003) with relatively little change in children’s indicated book interests, it appears unnecessary to conduct another constant-comparison book selection study based on gender and genre. Yet it does seem prudent to conduct an in-depth book selection study that includes the participants’ active involvement in preparing the book offerings, their direct articulations of why they selected particular books, and their subsequent interactions with or distance from those selected books.

As exemplified in this review of children’s book selection studies, children are rarely active contributors to the study’s book offerings. Additionally, many book selection studies either focus on middle class children who have more access to a variety of reading materials than economically disadvantaged children or do not indicate the socioeconomic status of participants. Studies which do include economically disadvantaged children do not often distinguish between more and less proficient readers and as previous studies suggest, readers of varying reading abilities select books for different reasons.

Looking at contemporary book selection studies, personal recommendations by family members, teachers, or peers, children’s everyday life sources based on popular culture, and books’ physical attributes are consistent determinants of children’s book selections regardless of an individual’s socioeconomic status or reading proficiency. Differences in which determinants are more dominant in more and less proficient readers’ book selection processes do exist; although why they exist have not explicitly been offered by researchers. More studies which include marginalized readers are needed in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the contextual details that surround and involve book selections. This type of study would also help confirm or disconfirm underlying assumptions that books are selected for
the sole purpose of reading as well as deepen educators’ understanding of the contexts within which books are selected.

**My Approach to Book Selection Studies**

My review of previous book selection studies and current conceptualizations of reader engagement fostered through motivation, transactional reading experiences, access to culturally relevant literature, and personal conceptions of reading, indicates a need for a more comprehensive approach to book selection studies. Previous researchers have often overlooked marginalized individuals and children with minimal access to reading material outside of school. They have also focused only on struggling male readers (Kragler, 2000) when desiring to specifically look at one group of individuals’ book selection processes and interests. Female struggling readers as a distinctive group have been left out of the picture. Moreover, book selection studies have rarely included substantive interviews and have taken children’s book selection reasons at face value without delving into how children’s socio-historical perspectives and motivations influence their selections.

In this particular book selection study, I seek to fill a “conceptual gap” by focusing on girls who have minimal access to reading materials outside of school and are identified as struggling or marginalized readers. The participants will share ownership of the initial book offerings and have sole ownership of their subsequent book selections and interactions. This approach to ownership addresses one component of reader engagement.

Additionally, in this study I go beyond the girls’ stated rationales and inquire about their interactive or transactional experiences with their self-selected books. These transactions conceivably increase reader motivation and engagement and might provide a more comprehensive understanding of the rationales for particular books and how these rationales are guided by personal conceptions. Personal conceptions, as motivational factors, influence the
appeal of particular books and one’s subsequent experiences with those books. Therefore, to better understand the relationships between children and books I simultaneously investigate children’s book rationales, their book experiences, and their conceptions of reading. Because I wish to improve my understanding about the interactions of readers and texts and I ground that understanding in the participants’ discourse, Gadamer’s (1975) approach to hermeneutics seems well-suited for this particular study. A more extensive discussion of this approach occurs in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

“Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”
--Albert Einstein

While quantitative researchers’ inquiries often focus on the “objective whys” of a phenomenon rooted within an objectivist framework, qualitative researchers prefer to work within interpretive or constructivist frameworks as they seek to illuminate how people’s words and actions construct social reality while observing individuals within natural settings (Creswell, 1998; Lareau, 2000). They aim to provide rich and detailed stories of individual lives, especially those whose experiences have often been marginalized or their voices unheard (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Such stories embrace pluralistic possibilities rather than singular notions of truth. Truth is not truth; our understanding of “truths,” as mediated through language, are heavily dependent upon on socio-historical and sociocultural constructs.

In this study I sought to better understand the book selection rationales, book experiences and reading conceptions of preadolescent girls who were identified as “marginalized readers.” Two primary questions: 1) What rationales undergird these girls’ self-selections of books for personal use? and 2) How does access to culturally relevant literature reflect and reshape their conceptions of reading and books? guided my investigation. In this chapter, I begin with the epistemological and theoretical foundations of this study. I then progress to the research design, with detailed descriptions of the research setting, participant selection criteria, multiple trajectories of data collection, and data analysis. I continue this discursive journey with my process of establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), statements of influence (subjectivity) as the researcher, and conclude with the limitations of the study.
Epistemology and Theoretical Framework

Research requires epistemology, or “how we know what we know” (Crotty, 2003, p.8) to guide the study’s methodological alignment. For this particular study concerning preadolescent girls’ conceptions of reading and their experiences with self-selected books, I operated under a subjectivist epistemology. Subjectivism, according to Crotty (2003), adheres to the notion that meaning is often ascribed to objects from various sources within our unconsciousness (p.9).

While the “investigator and investigated subject are assumed to be interactively linked” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.110), the investigator’s values or worldviews influence the inquiry. Meaning and knowledge are represented through language. Unlike constructionists, subjectivists, immersed in the world, interpret without stepping back and conscientiously noting how their interactions within the world have impacted their conceptualizations.

A subjectivist epistemology involves intentionality, the consciousness of “knowing something” (Crotty, 2003, p.44). Individuals become engaged within the world and the subject and object are conjoined at some level. Even though, like constructionism, subjectivism adheres to the notion that there is never a final and correct interpretation, it differs from constructionism in that subjectivists believe meaning is created or negotiated (Bernstein, 1983) rather than constructed (Crotty, 2003, p.43-44). Meaning becomes imbued with “prejudices” of the interpreter as the interpreter conjoins her interpretation with the assumed meanings of the texts.

Since I am exploring how girls individually conceptualize reading and books from a cultural and socio-historical standpoint, a subjectivist epistemology that requires the researcher adopt an interpretive lens and include social environments seems appropriate for this particular study.

A definitive marker of social science is one’s proclivity to examine the “relationship between human thought and human social life” (Hekman, 1986, p.10). Hermeneutics, as a philosophy to guide someone in understanding Dasein or “being in the world” (Heidegger,
1962), has a rich history that extends back thousands of years to Plato and other Greek philosophers (Bleicher, 1980; Crotty, 2003; Hekman, 1986; Teigas, 1995). Etymologically speaking, the term *Hermeneutics* is a Latin derivation from the Greek word *hermeneuein* which means “to interpret” or “to understand” (Crotty, 2003, p.88). Some have linked the term hermeneutics to Hermes, the “god of gaps” who served as the liaison between Zeus and mortals (Bleicher, 1980). He conveyed messages from the gods to humans. Extending that image, earlier hermeneutic philosophers believed that acts of understanding bridge humans to the spiritual “Other.” Understanding is a communion of human and celestial spirit, a union illustrated in the Reformation’s hermeneutical emphasis upon eliciting the “original meanings embedded within Biblical texts and classical literature” (Teigas, 1995, p.27).

Hermeneutics has evolved from the classical sense of deciphering Scriptures to a contemporary investigation of the everyday world in which “we encounter ourselves and conduct our lives via reflective consciousness” (Teigas, 1995, p.33). According to scholars such as Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000), Bleicher (1980), and Ormiston and Schrift (1990), hermeneutics has progressed from method (classical hermeneutics as explained by Ast, Schleiermacher, and Dilthey) to philosophy (existential hermeneutics as theorized by Heidegger and Gadamer) to critique (critical hermeneutics as argued by Habermas). I briefly describe the theoretical progression of hermeneutics, ending with Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy because it serves as a theoretical undercurrent of my study.

Classical hermeneutics departs from the objective dogmatic replication of “truth” to a belief which encompasses the psychological and the grammatical, the individual (part) and the entity (whole). Georg Ast (1778-1841) is first credited with creating a circular structure of understanding, later termed by Dilthey as the hermeneutic circle (Ormiston & Schrift, 1990). In
order to comprehend the “spirit,” as transmitted through texts, one must know language or the “grammar” of a text. One must “capture” the meaning through knowing shared expressions.

Influenced by Ast, Schleiermacher (1768-1834) adopted a psychological view to hermeneutics. He sought to create a general hermeneutic method extending beyond biblical texts. Schleiermacher’s vision was rooted in the notion that language is vital to the interpretive process. In order to understand the written word, in terms of shared syntactic and semantic understandings, one must also understand the “speaker” or author of a text: the individual “application” or psychological impetus behind the chosen words. Through this process, one should comprehend the text more fully than the author (Ormiston & Schrift, 1990; Teigas, 1995). During Schleiermacher’s time, people inquired about how people communicate rather than how to read a text. Even though communication (an exchange) was a focal point, the duality of subject and object, with an emphasis on authorial intent as a guide for interpretation, remained steadfast in both Ast and Schleiermacher’s hermeneutical methodologies.

Like Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) considered hermeneutics as a method of understanding recorded ideas and thoughts. However, Dilthy grounded his hermeneutics within the concepts of Erlebnis (lived experience) and Verstehen (understanding) and separated human sciences from the natural sciences (Ormiston & Schrift, 1990). One can explain facts of nature; however human life must be understood. Dilthey rejected the notion of a singular “correct interpretation” and insisted on the inclusion of history as a way to illuminate approximations of “truth.” Intuition is not enough. Comparisons through a I (subject of a community) / Thou (object as the totality of mind and universal history) dichotomy is needed for an object or event to be reconsidered. For Ast, Schleiermacher, and Dilthey, the goal of
interpretation is to obtain a particular meaning imparted upon something by the creator or author (Bontekoe, 1996).

The progressive trajectory of hermeneutics takes a radical turn with Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Heidegger was concerned with a more phenomenological sense of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is not just symbolic communication but is also an ontology of Being (*daesin*) as a being-in-the-world (*in-der-Welt-sein*). We cannot separate ourselves from the world, therefore the subject-object binary advocated by objectivist and classical hermeneutics, dissolves. Consciousness is developed through historically lived experiences (Laverty, 2003). Understanding is the way we are, not how we come to know the world (Polkinghorne, 1983).

Heidegger’s hermeneutic circle involves forestructures or preunderstandings to understanding. These forestructures are the cultural meanings which exist before one understands and are embedded within historical constructs. Preunderstandings provide the forestructures to understanding and are permanent fixtures in one’s consciousness. Thus a circular movement occurs. One progresses from preunderstandings to new understandings, which then become more contemporary understandings and enrich the degrees of understanding and engagement with texts, etc. However, without knowing one’s preunderstandings, one can impede new interpretations, resulting in a vicious circle (Bontekoe, 1996). Thus, one cannot “bracket” or set aside one’s prejudgments, prejudices, and predispositions in order to gain new perspectives (Moustakas, 1994, p.85).

Similar to his mentor Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) believed that understanding is neither subjective nor objective, but historically conditioned (Hekman, 1986). Additionally Gadamer concurs with Heidegger on the following three principles:
1. Ontology is grounded in the world in that it “closely observes the ways in which humans exist and how they encounter the world” (Gadamer, 1975, p.234).

2. Prejudices (Heidegger’s forestructures), which indicate our situatedness in history and time, are inherent. Interpreters cannot directly approach or engage with a text and look at what is present. Instead they must examine or reflect upon what is within them as they encounter the text. (p.266)

3. The hermeneutic circle of whole and part does not dissolve into perfect understanding…but becomes realized and is inherently mobile. Understanding is a fluid interplay between custom and the interpreter.

Gadamer extends Heidegger’s philosophy through two other principles: 1) an emphasis on language and 2) the fusing of horizons (“effective-historical consciousness”). Influenced by linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt who claimed languages present different views of the world (Teigas, 1995), Gadamer states that language mediates “I” and “Thou.” It is through language that “I” (an individual) encounters “Thou” (the world). Language modifies “I’s” understanding of “Thou” rather than impressing understanding upon “Thou.” A relationship forms from these modifications and reifies that the notion that language doesn’t create the world but creates what we consider to be the world. Language serves as the conduit for understanding (Gadamer, 1975, p.401). Language can never be private; it always involves others and hence, “carries culture” (Gadamer, 1976, p.96). It is the “key that unlocks the door to understanding” (Hekman, 1986, p.117). Therefore, when one studies Being as “being-in-the-world,” not only does one study the object of interpretation, but one also studies the medium of inquiry—language.

According to Gadamer (1975), horizons are our particular perspectives or vantage points. Language enables those immersed in hermeneutic thought to fuse multiple horizons, which symbolizes the effectiveness of historical consciousness (understanding). One horizon, the past of the studied object (the text) within which previous horizons are embedded, is met with another horizon, the interpreter in the present. Even though these horizons are omnipresent, fusions occur
during interpretive acts. Simplistically speaking, our future is informed by our present, which is informed by our past.

In any circumstance, horizons, while seemingly isolated and fixed, are perpetually mobile, are ever-changing, and are negotiated as if one were engaged in play. For this study, the fusion of horizons occurs on at least two intersecting planes. From the perspective of the researcher and the research process, my views and opinions of reading and books (my prejudices) are layered and intermingled with the participants’ articulations of their accumulated reading and book experiences. What I have taken for granted, based on my past experiences, will be called into question when encountering the girls’ thoughts, ideas, questions, and interpretations. Through dialogue, reflection, and analysis, new understandings will arise which will then become new horizons within which I continually engage in new interpretive acts.

From the vantage point of the girls, their prejudices of reading and books inform their encounters with new texts and experiences. Books are both literal and metaphorical texts. The horizons of these texts, conveyed through authorship and social mores, fuse with the girls’ horizons via interactive experiences, resulting in potentially new horizons, or understandings for the girls. Their new understandings will then inform my understandings, as conveyed through dialogue, and the cycle continues.

Recognizing that teachers and students typically operate from different horizons that may not “fuse” when it comes to reading and books and that elementary-aged students who have been scholastically labeled as “struggling readers” have rarely been asked to share their thoughts about reading and books, I sought an improved and more comprehensive understanding of marginalized readers’ conceptions of reading and books. I focused on girls because they are often absent from discussions about struggling readers. My desire necessitated a framework that
would encourage girls to share their individual beliefs and opinions. I wanted girls’ voices to resonate within the center of an interpretive circle or throughout an interpretive spiral that has previously left them on the periphery of reading research. However, I also wanted to further investigate the social influences upon those conceptions and actions. Hermeneutics seems to complement my desire to understand their thoughts and behavior and the social discourse used to mediate those conceptions.

Selection and Description of Setting

In this study I focused upon preadolescent girls who were considered “struggling” or “marginalized” readers based on the aforementioned criteria in Chapter 1. Initial investigation of possible sites included elementary schools that had a substantive population receiving free/reduced meals at school, an indicator of low socioeconomic status (low SES), and a high percentage of intermediate grade (grades 3-5) students who did not pass their statewide reading assessment. Aware of a common yet erroneous inclination in the United States to equate all African-Americans with low SES status, I purposefully sought out schools that also had a high number of European-Americans who were considered of low socioeconomic status.

I selected two elementary schools in a rural North Central Florida community as initial locations for the study. At both schools at least 80% of the student population were eligible for free/reduced meals at school and had more than half (50%) of the students aged 9-11 scored below passing on the latest reading portion of their high-stakes Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Additionally, both schools offered extended-day enrichment programs (EDEP), commonly referred to as “after-school care.” These EDEP sites had a substantial number of girls in attendance. Given the geopolitical circumstances in this region, one of the schools had a high European-American population that was economically disadvantaged and another had a high African-American population that was economically disadvantaged.
I considered an EDEP site at an elementary school the best location for this study. Conducting a study at an EDEP site would minimize any potential transportation issues for the study’s participants as well minimize any potential for participants’ discomfort or unease if the study, as a “novel experience” was conducted in an unfamiliar environment by an unknown adult. Participants’ homes—or private spheres where personal reading might typically occur—would have been the optimal locations. However, my initial position as an “adult stranger,” especially one conducting research about a topic which the participants were unenthusiastic about, might have considerably altered what was observed and said in the “normalcy” of the participants’ homes. Additionally, conducting a study at an EDEP site allowed me to volunteer prior to the study in order to gauge the viability of the site and to begin establishing rapport with the participants.

The month prior to the study, I offered to volunteer at each school’s EDEP to help determine the viability of the locales for the study; however only one school, Meadowlawn Elementary School (a pseudonym), accepted my offer. The local school board, principal, and EDEP director welcomed both me and subsequently the study to this location. Meadowlawn’s EDEP site became my primary research site during the academic school year. The informed consent forms for the parents and guardians and the assent form for the participants can be found in Appendix A. After the school year concluded, I visited the participants at their respective homes or other community areas when asked and when possible. Table 3-1 provides an overview of Meadowlawn Elementary School’s demographics in terms of school population, ethnic diversity, and the percentage of intermediate grade students who did not pass their latest standardized reading achievement test.
Table 3-1. Meadowlawn Elementary School statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meadowlawn demographics</th>
<th>Racial/Ethnic affiliations</th>
<th>2005 Reading FCAT scores (Scored below average [&lt;3])</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student population (K-5)</td>
<td>Black 383</td>
<td>71% 3rd grade 54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of free/reduced lunch</td>
<td>White 89%</td>
<td>24% 4th grade 58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic 2%</td>
<td>5th grade 54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiracial 3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native American &lt;1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data compiled from Florida Department of Education (2005) and GreatSchools, Inc (2005)

The local school board subsidized Meadowlawn’s EDEP program which enabled many of the free/reduced meal students, including the participants, to attend for a reduced charge of $4.00-$8.00 a week per child. EDEP, which operated out of the school’s cafeteria, enrolled 50-75 K-5 students Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday from 1:45-5:30pm, and Wednesday from 12:30-5:30pm, depending on the time of year. When I first began volunteering, almost an equal number of girls and boys participated in EDEP. However, as the academic school year progressed, more and more children, especially girls, stopped attending the program. The director of the program indicated the withdrawal as typical after the winter holiday season due to many families’ financial circumstances.

Meadowlawn’s EDEP site incorporated academic components, such as homework tutoring services, writing clubs, and science exploration clubs, with more extracurricular components such as cheerleading, step, and cooking clubs. The extracurricular clubs rotated on a six-week schedule or until the club leader was unable to attend EDEP. Students were organized by grade levels into three groups (K-1; 2-3; 4-5) and had one adult facilitator overseeing each group, with an assistant if and when possible. Between two and four college and high school
volunteers filtered among the groups each week; however, their schedules were not consistent. Due to limited finances, the director relied heavily on volunteers to oversee the club activities. When those volunteers were absent, the children played various sports and games outdoors or board and card games. A sample EDEP weekly agenda is provided in Appendix B.

Community outreach programs such as the Big Brother/Big Sister mentorship and AmeriCorps reading tutors were incorporated into Meadowlawn’s EDEP program. A sprinkling of children had mentors, many of whom were sporadic in attendance, and AmeriCorps provided reading tutors for children in grades K-2 who were school-identified as needing additional instruction.

EDEP had a total of 50 well-used picture books and novels published in the late 1970’s to early 1990’s, which, according to the director, had been there for at least five years. These books were the only texts available for those who did not bring reading materials for their daily 20-minute, independent Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) program or their weekly Book Buddy program, where an older child read to a younger child. The EDEP children confirmed the longevity and condition of the books.

During the SSR and Book Buddy reading activities the children read while the adult facilitators and volunteers played games or monitored the reading activity. During SSR the children were not allowed to converse. Any talk resulted in a reprimand of “Now you have to sit by yourself and write a reading response because you were talking.” Even I was reprimanded once when one of the girls asked me how to say a word in her assigned reading and I responded. Additionally, when some children misbehaved, the consequence was reading. They were told to “go get a book, sit down, read, and behave yourselves.” The influence of this particular EDEP’s
approach to reading and reading response upon children is worthy of a separate study; however, I only note these circumstances here for situational understanding.

According to the director, the school library closed when EDEP began, so the children could not check out books during EDEP. The director could check out five books per week on her library card, but she refused for fear that the books would inadvertently leave EDEP and never return. At the conclusion of this study, I wrote and obtained a $2,000 grant to initiate a multicultural lending library and in-house reading program and worked with the director and the children to determine what were the most desired books. This grant enabled the director to purchase almost two hundred culturally and academically diverse books for EDEP after my departure from the site.

Throughout the study, racial and community tensions permeated the atmosphere at EDEP and the surrounding neighborhoods. Meadowlawn Elementary and EDEP were sometimes placed under lockdown because of external circumstances. At times local law enforcement bordered the school when neighborhood or the affiliated high school rivalries extended into the school, resulting in younger relatives verbally and physically defending their siblings, cousins, aunts, and uncles. A sheriff deputy who was also a member of the immediate community would speak monthly on topics including anger management, sexual impropriety, drugs, and what life in jail was like. According to the director, the male youth were typically the targeted audience for these talks, although female youth were also in attendance.

From December 2005 until the beginning of June 2006, I visited the EDEP site two to three times a week for an average of 2.75 hours per visit. The only exception occurred during the initial and final book fairs. Because of the structure and duration of the book fairs, I had to visit the EDEP site each day of the school week. During my typical weekly visitations there were
numerous occurrences of tension between children that went beyond everyday disagreements between unique individuals. They would commonly refuse to talk to or play with each other because their peers “are not my people.” Verbal arguments ensued when children appropriated particular linguistic and cultural styles outside of their own cultural discourse and were told by their peers to stop acting “White” or “Black” and to “do your own dances” or “sing your own songs ‘cause you ain’t never gonna be like me/us.” I continually reorganized how I interviewed and interacted with the girls in this study as a result of those tensions.

**Selection of Participants**

While researchers formally identify those who have participated in the study as “participants,” I believe that the term “participants” conveys an aura of distance from the researcher and implies a sense of rigorous objectivity which does not exist within the subjective realm of qualitative research. This study was indeed subjective and personal for it involved people and their thoughts and experiences as reified through language. The relationships formed within this study compel me to use a more informal term when discussing the participants collectively. This term was also commonly used by the participants when referring to themselves as a group: “the girls.” Therefore, “girls,” while more casual than “participants,” more accurately refers to those who invested eight months of their lives to this study and is used in place of “participants.”

While volunteering at the EDEP site in December approximately 20 girls aged 9-11 were eligible for this study. However, when I received IRB approval, only 12 of those girls still attended EDEP. Of those 12 girls, eight racially-diverse girls aged 9-12 were selected using criterion sampling (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993), also known as purposive sampling (Patton, 1990). These girls were school-identified as “struggling readers” and regularly attended EDEP. Again, two of the criteria used to determine a struggling reader were: 1) eligibility for free-
reduced meals and 2) exhibition of a “below average” performance on the individual’s reading comprehension portion of her most recent statewide reading assessment. The local school board provided the statistical data needed for sampling and a school official confirmed that the girls were still considered to be “struggling academically in reading.”

Administration of McKenna and Kear’s (1990) Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS), a validated 20-question survey of elementary school-aged children’s attitudes towards in-school and out-of-school reading reduced the eligibility to eight girls. For the ERAS, the girls circled the Garfield facial expression that best represented how they felt about a particular aspect of reading that was simply and briefly described in each question. The expressions were on a four-point Likert scale of emotions: very happy, a little happy, a little upset, and very upset.

To ensure understanding, I read they survey aloud to each girl as she followed along. I then documented any of the girls’ utterances while they were completing the survey for informal comparisons to their survey responses. Those who scored below the 50th percentile overall were considered to be disengaged with or harbored less positive attitudes towards reading. Even though the majority of girls initially vocalized to me their disdain for reading prior to knowing about the study, the ERAS survey provided confirming evidence for some of them. For others, it revealed they were engaged in reading but their performance on reading assessments did not mirror that engagement.

It is important to state that I could not automatically assume that the potential girls’ economic status indicated a lack of accessible reading material. However, I was influenced by research which indicated that within the boundaries of socioeconomic status (SES), great disparities exist between what amount and variety of reading materials are available within high SES and low SES communities (Neuman & Celano, 2001; Smith, Constantino, & Krashen,
When comparing impoverished and suburban communities in the northeast U.S., Neuman and Celano (2001) discovered the ratio of reading material to people situated in some impoverished communities was 1:300. In more affluent settings the ratio was 1:3. In the low SES communities, public institutions (e.g. school and public libraries) served as the primary, if not sole resource for reading materials. Clearly in these settings, one’s income status determined availability of and access to reading material.

Additionally, I could not equate a school-defined struggling reader as someone who doesn’t like to read. A scholastic label of “struggling reader” may not diminish the individual’s will and pleasure of reading outside of the classroom. However, contemporary reading research cannot be discounted. Based on numerous studies within the past two decades, Stanovich (2000) determined that proficient readers are allotted more opportunities to read in school and less proficient readers are provided fewer opportunities to read in school. Duke (2000) and McGill-Franzen and Allington’s (1993) determinations that the more one struggles with something, the less likely s/he chooses to do that activity and the less like s/he will enjoy such activities bolsters Stanovich’s conclusions. Donahue and his colleagues’ (2001) conclusion that successful readers read more than unsuccessful readers provides additional support for the assumption that low SES children who are identified in schools as struggling readers are potentially individuals that not only have minimal opportunities to read but are also reluctant to read, depending on their struggles. Therefore my criteria for this study were low SES children who have limited to no access to reading material outside of school, who have scored below the minimum standard on a high-stakes standardized reading assessment, and/or those who have expressed extreme dislike of reading through the ERAS survey.
The number and age of the girls in this study are particularly well suited for qualitative research that involves individuals’ articulations of previous and current experiences. In order to ensure rich or “thick” investigations of individuals’ conceptions and experiences, qualitative researchers such as Boyd (2001) recommend between two and ten participants depending on the scope of the study, when one reaches “saturation,” or when no new data can be made from the participants’ offerings (Creswell, 1998, p.65, 113). Additionally, Downen (1972) and Kortesluoma, Hentinen, and Nikkonen (2003) indicate children between the ages of 8 and 12 better articulate their experiences and rationales for book selections than younger children. Participants nestled within the “tween” stage (ages 9-12), the cusp of adolescence, are located within the temporal periphery of when their peers’ opinions often dictate their reading selections, among other social and academic decisions (Guthrie & Anderson, 1999). Therefore, the girls in this study appear to be optimal given the foci of this study: to explore and understand girls’ conceptions of and experiences with books selected for personal use. Additional trends which support my focus upon “tweens” include the existence of the “fourth-grade slump” (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990), the grade of most 10 and 11-year-olds, and the rapid decrease in children’s expressed engagement in recreational reading as they mature (McKenna et al, 1995).

**Participant Overview**

As previously stated, eight girls initially participated in the study. Midway through the study, one ten-year-old girl moved away and another nine-year-old girl’s guardian withdrew her from the study stating her niece didn’t need to “mess with foolishness called reading.” Another girl moved to Meadowlawn and joined midway into the study. These seven girls created the “girls’ club” a term the girls created and used to distinguish themselves from others at EDEP, even when they were not getting along.
Table 3-2 is a generalized composite of the girls, based on demographic data provided by the county school board and the results of the ERAS. Each girl has a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. For their ethnic identification, I use descriptors such as Black and White instead of the census descriptors of African-American and European-American because the girls used Black and White to identify themselves and others on numerous occasions when talking about themselves, others, or the books. I have identified Candy as both White and Native American because her grandmother mentioned her Native American heritage to me on more than one occasion. Candy, on the other hand, did not want to be identified as being Native American.

Table 3-2. Demographic composite of the seven girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girl</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>SES status</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>FCAT score</th>
<th>Overall ERAS percentile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Reduced</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Reduced</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Reduced</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candy</td>
<td>White/Native American</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alondra</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Reduced</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Biographical Sketches of the Girls

JAIME possesses a sense of maturity and life vision one would expect from an older individual. While quite shy in large groups, she often stood out as a role model for her peers. When she talked, people listened, even if they were in disagreement. Her combination of sharp wit and intellect, accompanied by her ability to culturally code-switch between her academic and social worlds, would appear to make her very popular in school. However, Jaime often shied away from her peers and many social activities unless specifically invited. Her self-
consciousness about her physical self greatly contributed to her shyness and aversion to social events.

Jaime aspires to be a singer or forensic investigator and considers books and reading to be “the most awful thing anybody can do.” To Jaime, books “trick” people but it’s something she has to do if she is going to “make it” in school. Her mother, who had recently earned an associate degree, stressed that Jaime must go to college and that the best way to prepare for college is reading and academically succeeding in school. Her mother also stressed to me that Jaime is and probably will be the only reader in the family. While her grandmother emphasizes pleasure and academic reading, her mother, sister, and brother adamantly stated they are not readers.

To Jaime, newspapers are for “old people and such” and magazines aren’t things to be read, but to be looked at. A couple of years ago, she lost a lot of books in a house fire and currently obtains books from the public library on occasion or from her math teacher at school. Jaime and her family have a lot of family games around the house. They love to figure out mysteries or play who-done-it games. Her memories of positive reading experiences focus on 2nd or 3rd grade where she could draw what she heard or read while reading a book. However, she couldn’t recall any positive experiences after 3rd grade.

ALICE immerses herself in basketball, music, and friendships. Rarely does a day go by when Alice is not singing or rappin’ while showing someone new dance moves. Her insatiable energy extends into her extracurricular activities, where each weeknight she has basketball practice, piano lessons, confirmation classes, or she babysits her sister or cousins. On the weekends, she gets a “break” and visits her aunt. She loves making lists of friends’ names, phone numbers, song lyrics, and poetry. Living with her mother, grandfather, sister, and brother, Alice
indicated she often bears the responsibility of ensuring her siblings are prepared to academically succeed and takes that responsibility seriously.

According to Alice, her mother’s books and her grandfather’s newspapers are the primary reading materials in her home. She indicated her mother loves to read but for Alice reading is a way to “get out of chores because I pretend I don’t hear them calling my name, like I’m really into the book or somethin’.” Because of their restricted privileges at the public library, Alice and her mother visit Books-a-Million and “rent” books. They purchase books for Alice’s mother and return those her mother doesn’t enjoy. While Alice accompanies her mother, she doesn’t purchase any books. She looks at the magazines while her mother shops for books.

Alice appears to be extremely conscientious about race relations and language differences in society. She often spoke of incidents or opinions from a racial standpoint, indicating that particular thoughts, words, and actions were more “Black” than “White” and vice versa. She also altered her discourse to more standardized English at times during her audiotaped sessions and reverted to what she referred to as “our language” when not recorded. She viewed reading as “something you have to do to succeed,” but since her graduation wasn’t dependent on passing the annual reading assessment, “reading doesn’t matter that much anymore.”

MORGAN, a fraternal twin and the youngest of three siblings, is what she and other girls consider to be a “girly-girl.” She loves pink, Hello Kitty, wears the latest clothing “trends,” and loves to do arts and crafts. She is typically optimistic and humorous when in social settings. However, after her parents’ recent divorce, Morgan craved much individual attention and someone to talk with about life. At school and EDEP, she often got into verbal arguments with other girls in the study, which became frustrating for everyone. Morgan attributed her
disconnect with the other girls to cultural differences and often requested that I spend time with either her and Alondra or just her.

Academically speaking, Morgan fares well in most subjects, with the exception of reading. Comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency prove problematic for Morgan and she becomes easily frustrated. Morgan feels conflicted. People ask her to read books that are too difficult for her and are about topics “old people” would like, but she thinks she should be reading those books, especially since her mother used to work at the library. She loves books like the Captain Underpants series or anything that is “funny.” She says that because she tries so hard in reading, her teacher will pass her.

JACKIE is what her teacher considers to be a “delight but also a force to be reckoned with.” Extremely articulate and personable, Jackie is often identified as a “born leader” if she doesn’t stray off the tight-rope wire to success. Because of her quick temper and sharp tongue, she often engages in arguments with others and is sometimes suspended from school or EDEP. Jackie loves music, stepping, and cheering and is constantly on the move. Like Alice, she was often heard singing and stepping while studying or interacting with her peers.

Living with her grandmother, two cousins, brother, and baby sister, resources and living space are tight. Jackie is often the caretaker of her baby sister or younger relatives while her grandmother works. She often talks about speaking to or wanting to visit her mother and father in jail. Her grandmother, who expressed regret for not attending college, emphasizes academic success and reading; however, the reading materials in the home consist of bills and notices. Jackie does well in school, but says that if she had books that she could really like, then she’d read better.
Jackie’s grandmother checks out books for her because, according to Jackie, her grandmother doesn’t trust her. Jackie loves the Mary-Kate and Ashley series books because “they talk about girls and stuff they like to do, like talk on the phone and stuff.” Her time spent at the library involves playing computer games or looking at the Disney Channel website. According to Jackie, she and her family like to play monopoly and other family games, but “no one really reads unless it is for school.” Her last favorable memories of reading were in Kindergarten and 1st grade, when she read with her friends. She loves to get poetry books by poets like Shel Silverstein but thinks that she’s not good at “doing poems that rhyme. I’m kinda better at thoughts and feelings.”

CHRIS considers herself to be alone amongst her community of peers. Extremely shy and physically maturing earlier than other girls, she feels pressure from older children, especially males, to act different from how she wants to act. She is also teased at school because of her physical maturation and her current economic situation. Her family’s financial hardship was self-evident to her peers. She is often silent in school and only speaks when she feels she “has to.” Chris shares household and caretaker responsibilities with her aunt, who also cares for her older sister and three younger cousins. Her interests included hip-hop, rap, and crunk music, watching shows on the BET (Black Entertainment Television), MTV (Music Television), and Nickelodeon channels, making friends, and drawing pictures.

Academically speaking, Chris has difficulty with most elements of reading, such as phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension, and tells me she “acts out to get out of reading.” When she does act out, she is sent to the school’s special education classroom. Like Alice, she feels the pressing need to read no longer exists because she can’t be retained for failing her fifth-grade reading assessment.
CANDY arrived midway into the study. A professed lover of reading when she was “younger,” Candy is “learning to dislike reading more and more at this school.” Upon arriving at Meadowlawn Elementary, Candy made valiant attempts to gain friends quickly and felt she was often bullied at school because she was White. Her reoccurring illness often sent her to the hospital for treatments, and custody disputes between her parents prevented her from remaining at one school for an extended period of time. Both of those circumstances contributed to her difficulty making friends. After Candy’s father was incarcerated and her mother left the area to avoid an arrest warrant, Candy’s grandmother gained temporary custody of Candy and her older sister, which led to more stability and her ability to participate in the study. Candy loves to talk and to share her thoughts with others, and has recently found God. She also expresses an insatiable amount of curiosity about the world and how to successfully live in it. Candy loves “adventurous books” but says she refuses to “remember” books if they are “boring.”

ALONDRA was born deaf, but at a young age received cochlear implants. She often speaks and uses American Sign Language simultaneously. Living with her little sister and both parents, Alondra loves animals and wants to be a veterinarian in the future. She has a passion for art, enjoys brainstorming ideas for new inventions, and enjoys playing video games with her father. She describes her relationship with her mother as “kinda sad and hard” but has a “good” relationship with her father. Both she and her younger sister are occasionally absent from school because they embark on family trips to experience different places and events that they would be unable to experience while in school. Alondra works to improve her reading comprehension.

While Alondra was initially excited to participate in this study, approximately two months into the study she asked if she could keep her participation a secret. After she began borrowing books, more people indicated they wanted to be her friend. She wasn’t sure if she was
gaining new friends because they liked her or because they liked and wanted the books she was borrowing. Because of this uncertainty, she wanted to pretend to not be a part of the study. Her request was honored; however, time spent with her was less than the other girls because of the difficulty of spending individual time with her in front of the other girls and EDEP children.

**Developing Rapport**

When I first approached the girls as a volunteer I told them I was looking to “hang out” with girls their age to better understand what they like and dislike. I also told them I wanted to get to know them and see if we would get along because in the near future I wanted to do a study about girls and books. The girls were eager to interact; however, when any mention of reading or books arose during my first month of volunteering, they adeptly changed the subject after proclaiming their dislike of reading and books, especially reading in school.

During my initial interactions with the girls, we both realized I didn’t fully understand their conversations. The girls asked me if I wanted to create a notebook to write down all the new words I heard and the movies or songs they like to listen to. I agreed and created a notebook, which they entitled “Girls’ Club Notebook.” Three girls in particular, Jackie, Alice, and Chris, ensured I wrote down words like “psychabooda,” “fye” “grillin’ or roastin’” and “home skillet biscuit,” as well as created a “greatest hits list” that included songs by Ciara, Ne-Yo, Pretty Ricky, T-Pain, and the Franchise Boyz. My sociolinguistic “education” tapered off as I became more familiar with the terms. Much to their amusement, I was never able to pronounce those words correctly. No matter how I said it, the girls laughed and told me it was “OK to use your words. Just know what we mean when we use our words.”

I was concerned that my racial identity as a White person would negatively influence Alice, Chris, Jackie, and Jaime’s narratives, especially given the racial tensions present at the school and in the community. At the beginning, those four girls included the word “White” as an
identifier when they talked about their everyday experiences with each other and me. After one
girl uttered the word “White,” another would nudge her or gesture toward me and an apology of
“Whoops! My bad, sorry ’bout that” would ensue. After the first instance I discussed the use of
White and Black as identifiers with them and stated why their use of those words didn’t bother
me, especially if that was how they typically spoke. I also used the word “White” as a descriptor
in my speech with them. The apologies were less frequent as the study continued and ceased in
March. By March I felt I had developed not only rapport but also acceptance when Alice
introduced me to her friend saying “She’s cool. She’s White, but not White White.”

Throughout the study the girls referred to me as their “friend,” “mentor,” “tutor,”
“buddy,” and “somebody who cares.” They also fluctuated between “Miss Jennifer,” “Jennifer”
and “Miss J” depending on the activity and situation. They typically referred to me as “Miss
Jennifer” when they spoke to their guardians or when they wanted to get my attention; however,
I became Miss J” or “Jennifer” when we were amongst ourselves. They also felt compelled to
tell me when my hair needed to be “done up,” and suggested I use makeup their mothers or
aunties used to make me “look younger.” These labels and conversation topics indicated the
level of rapport and situated positions I held throughout the study.

Many of the girls’ parents or guardians struck up conversations with me when they
picked up their children. During these conversations, they volunteered information about the
girls’ academic performance in school and relayed what they noticed the girls doing at home
with the books. They also inquired about why I didn’t include particular award-winning books
and where I found “such beautiful books that the school don’t seem to have.” I often took Chris
and Jackie home after EDEP and was invited to many of the girls’ homes for meals or to “hang
out for awhile and relax.” All of these events signaled a level of rapport that contributed to the trustworthiness of the study.

The Study

This eight-month study, which occurred between January and August 2006, had three distinct phases. Both the Pre-Study phase and the three phases of the study are outlined in Table 3.3. A brief description of the study’s three phases follows the table. I discuss in detail how the books were selected for the study and the book fair process in Chapter 4.

Table 3-3. Study timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Study</th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rapport building</td>
<td>Participant selection</td>
<td>Initial book fair</td>
<td>Home visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Cont’d. in Phase 1)</td>
<td>Book selections for study</td>
<td>Book borrowings</td>
<td>Final interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site viability</td>
<td>Initial interviews</td>
<td>On-going interviews</td>
<td>ERAS (survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Cont’d. in March)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Final book fair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations of and interactions with the girls occurred throughout the study.

The first phase (Jan.-Feb.) included identifying girls for the study and continuing to establish rapport with those girls. The girls and I collaborated on a list of approximately 150 desired books for the initial book fair, and the girls participated in semi-structured interviews concerning their reading histories, previous book experiences, and their conceptions of reading. We also completed homework, chatted, and participated in various outdoor and indoor activities such as playing four-square, drawing, and playing cards.

During the second phase (March-June) the girls participated in an initial book fair where they selected up to 15 books they were individually interested in. After selecting those books, each girl individually spoke with me about her rationales for those books. The girls also
borrowed books, participated in on-going, open-ended interviews or spontaneous conversations regarding reading and books during this time. The open-ended interviews differed from spontaneous conversations in that for the interviews, I initiated the dialogue, whereas the girls initiated dialogue for the spontaneous conversations. In May, the girls participated in a final book fair where they selected up to 15 books they wanted to keep and subsequently explained why they desired those particular books. They received their books during the last week of school in June.

The girls’ attitudes towards books and reading significantly affected activities, events, and conversational opportunities during Phase 2. When I visited the EDEP site, the EDEP director considered me the “unofficial” group leader of the girls. This meant the girls were to remain with me unless other arrangements were made for them to participate in other activities or interact with other children at EDEP. However, as mentioned earlier, tensions between the girls necessitated the reorganization of which girls I interacted with on what day. Therefore I created a visitation schedule with the EDEP director and the girls which indicated on what days particular groups or pairings of girls would “hang out” with me. Table 3-4 provides the basic visitation schedule and the activities we participated in during my visits. This schedule served as a reference guide and was very flexible. Absenteeism, early pick-up by guardians or family members, the girls’ desire to congregate with their peers who were not involved in this study, and their requests for personal one-on-one time with me routinely altered the schedule. Despite establishing “designated days of interaction,” with each group of girls, I greeted and briefly chatted with all of the girls when I arrived at EDEP and individually said goodbye to all of the girls as they or I departed.
Table 3-4. Overview of weekly Extended Day Enrichment Program (EDEP) visitation schedule and activities with girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jaime, Alice,</td>
<td>Played various sports and games</td>
<td>Completed content area homework</td>
<td>Alondra and Morgan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>outside (e.g. cheering, stepping</td>
<td>and reading response homework,</td>
<td>(collectively or individually)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>four-square, playing tennis,</td>
<td>participated in the mandatory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cards or board games, taking</td>
<td>20-minute sustained silent read-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>walks and talking)</td>
<td>ing (SSR), looked at and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>exchanged books in the study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>in the computer room</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30-3:15pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:15-4:00pm</td>
<td>Completed content area homework</td>
<td>Looked at and exchanged books</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and reading response homework,</td>
<td>in the study in the computer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>participated in the mandatory</td>
<td>room or my car, talked about</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20-minute sustained silent</td>
<td>the girls' books or reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reading (SSR), looked at and</td>
<td>experiences outside, in a quiet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>exchanged books in the study in</td>
<td>area of the cafeteria, in the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the computer room or the</td>
<td>computer room or the behavioral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>behavioral management classroom.</td>
<td>Conversations about the girls'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>lives also occurred during this</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00-5:00pm</td>
<td>Continued interviews and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conversations, played cards, and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>helped clean up the EDEP site if</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>still present at EDEP.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated Table 3-4, the girls typically borrowed books and engaged in some form of dialogue within the two-hour timeframe (3:15-5:30pm), with the latter hour (4:00-5:00pm) designated specifically for the purposes of the study. However, sometimes the girls would begin speaking about books or their reading experiences while playing sports or other games outside. Jackie even created a step routine about her reading experiences. Most of the girls left between 5:00 and 5:30pm.

Between 3:15-4:00pm, the girls would often ask me for assistance with their math and social studies homework. If one of the girls wanted to read with me during SSR, we would move to the computer room or on the stage in the cafeteria and read the book together, alternating turns based on a particular number of pages. I typically read twice as much as the girls. Other times, the girls independently and collectively requested I read aloud to them. On a couple of occasions in April and May, Jaime and Chris said they used two of the read-aloud sessions for their reading.
response homework. Depending on the day, those read-aloud sessions comprised both the aesthetic and efferent reading stances. Sometimes the girls listened and commented on the book; other times we talked about the vocabulary and plot sequences. Because these types of experiences were beyond the scope of my study and because I wanted to ensure the girls understood my genuine interest and concern for them beyond the purposes of the study, I did not audiotape any of these experiences. I did, however, summarize these experiences in my field notes for documentation purposes only.

Because many of the other EDEP children wanted to look at the books, the girls had to borrow and return their books in as much of a private setting as possible. Therefore, we used an empty computer room which adjoined the cafeteria or the empty behavioral management room. The trunk of my car became a third location for book exchanges. The use of my car is explained in more detail in Chapter 4.

The girls’ dislike of reading and, at times, books contributed to the infrequent occasions to discuss their book interactions or experiences. Instead we talked about their lives, their interests, popular musicians, actors, and the latest gossip about celebrities. Some girls also asked questions about how to act around boys, how to tell them “no,” and other questions related to their emerging adolescent selves. Books were not necessarily at the top of their “must discuss” list!

Given the girls’ prior and current experiences with reading and books at school, I initiated interviews every couple of weeks. The frequency and details of their on-going interviews are detailed later in this chapter. I did audiotape the girls when they initiated conversations with me about their reading experiences. As the study progressed, the girls initiated more conversations with me about reading or their book experiences.
The third phase (July-Sept.) included my administration of the ERAS and final semi-structured interviews with the girls about their book experiences over the summer and their overall experiences as a participant in this study. This phase was added to the study because most of the girls or their guardians asked if I could visit them over the summer and because particular data collected during the school year raised additional questions about their book experiences. Collecting data when school was not in session helped clarify some lingering questions. Unfortunately Alondra relocated during the summer, and I was unable to conduct a final interview with her.

Data Collection

Multiple data sources collected in this study reflect my desire to understand the girls’ conceptions and experiences from multiple vantage points or horizons. Just as teachers use multiple methods to better understand how their students are conceptualizing the knowledge included in their lessons and to better understand their students on academic and personal levels, so too do researchers employ multiple data sources to ensure more comprehensive and salient understanding occurs. Each data source included below assists the development of my understanding of why the girls selected particular books, their experiences with these books, and the influences of the books and school practices on their conceptions of reading and books.

Data Sources

I gathered multiple data sources to develop a more holistic understanding of the relationships between children, books, and reading. Table 3-5 provides an overview of the data sources, the frequency of collection, and if they were included in the analyses. More detailed descriptions of the data sources analyzed and an explanation of why other data sources were omitted from the analysis follow Table 3-5.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>When collected</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Used in analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured initial and final interviews</td>
<td>Learn about each girl's reading history and her conceptions of reading.</td>
<td>Beginning and end of the study</td>
<td>2 per individual</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended book selection interviews</td>
<td>Learn about each girl's rationales behind their book selections.</td>
<td>Beginning and end of the study</td>
<td>2 per individual</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended, on-going book experience interviews</td>
<td>Learn about each girl's experiences with her selected books.</td>
<td>Throughout the study</td>
<td>3-5 per individual</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher's documents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher's field notes</td>
<td>Document each girl's behaviors and thoughts that were not audiotaped.</td>
<td>Throughout the study</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher's reflective journal</td>
<td>Reflect and evaluate pre-understandings; contemplate new understandings</td>
<td>Throughout the study</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data source</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>When collected</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Used in analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Artifacts</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book selection lists</td>
<td>Document what books the girls initially and finally selected.</td>
<td>Beginning and end of the study</td>
<td>2 per individual</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual book logs</td>
<td>Register each girl's borrowed books and her evaluation of the books.</td>
<td>Throughout the study</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ERAS</strong></td>
<td>Initially used as a tool for participant selection. Provided additional data regarding each girl's reading attitude towards reading at the study's beginning and end.</td>
<td>Beginning and end of the study</td>
<td>2 per individual</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Not all sources were used in the analysis. I did not include three types of artifacts in the data analyses: the girls’ book selection lists, books logs, and artistic documents. I used the book selection lists only to order each girl’s selected books and verify the books mentioned during each interview. I omitted book logs and artistic documentation from the analyses because almost every girl stated she thought the book logs and artistic documents were representative of school-based practices, which is why the girls did not routinely engage in the artistic endeavors and why they documented what they thought I wanted to see or read, not necessarily what they truly believed. Therefore I could not rely on these documents as indications of their true thoughts and opinions and omitted them from the analysis.

**Qualitative Interviews**

Because language serves as “an intersubjective activity that brings speakers together” (Teigas, 1995, p.145), interviews were a primary data source. Interviews enabled the girls to articulate and understand core components or issues of any given experience from an individual’s unique perspective (Kvale, 1996). Additionally, interviews were integral to this particular study because no one can truly determine the reading experience itself. Because reading is an internal experience, one must, at best, attempt to ascertain an individual’s experience, or consciousness of reading, through language. Since people’s words are “microcosms of [their] consciousness” (Seidman, 1998, p.1), language is the only avenue to access that consciousness.

**Interviewing children**

Because the girls were younger children and I was an adult, I took into consideration numerous factors when envisioning and enacting the interview process. Open-ended interviews (Kvale, 1996) seemed optimal for this study. They involve a single introductory statement and question by the researcher. The open-ended nature of this type of interview is conversational and
allows the interviewee to control and navigate the discussion. Additionally, open-ended questions are often short and descriptive to better ensure long, detailed descriptions of the experience (deMarrais, 2004, p.56). This type of discussion minimizes the tendency for the interviewees to seek out what the researchers are looking for and allows for a richer vocalization of the lived experience.

Like many adults, children appear to provide more meaningful answers when engaged in an open-ended interview (Hughes, 1989). Additionally, my position as an adult, especially an adult that used to be a teacher, potentially conveyed a sense of status and power to the girls. This potential status might have minimized the girls’ willingness to say things they might have thought were unacceptable to me (Hill, 2005). Additionally, interviewees usually anticipate what the researcher is looking for (Foddy, 1994) or wish to respond with the “right answer.” Having open-ended interviews increases the possibility of individuals’ personal opinions, rather than socially or politically correct answers.

Keeping children engaged in interviews is also important. No matter how interesting the topic or the type of interview, children tend to become restless when conversing in an interview setting for longer than 20 minutes. The availability of artifacts tends to help children feel less restricted, become more engaged in the topic at hand, and tends to enrich their conversations (Greene & Hill, 2005). Therefore artifacts such as the photos taken by the girls and the books selected by the girls were included in many of the interviews.

Throughout the interview process I continually considered the children’s horizons: “thinking about the child’s point of view, looking for their feelings, and listening to what they say” (Hill, Laybourn, & Borland, 1996, p.142). I took notes on these observations throughout the interview and integrated these observations into the transcripts when necessary. I also engaged in
non-verbal interview behavior, such as maintaining eye contact and nodding my head, which indicated genuine interest (Spradley, 1979). Verbal behavior such as affirmatives (e.g. *uh hunhs, ummms, I see*) conveyed my attentiveness and willingness to listen rather than interrogate. I asked follow-up questions, or probes (deMarrais, 2004; Kvale, 1996), which helped clarify and deepen my understanding of the girls’ descriptions. Probing also became a part of member-checking, a method used to help establish the trustworthiness of the data. The aforementioned interview guidelines and the foci of my research questions helped me shape the types of interviews conducted. Two different types of interviews (Bogden, 1998) for three different purposes occurred throughout the study. I digitally recorded each interview and uploaded them onto my computer for subsequent transcription. The interview protocols, organized by type and purpose, are found in Appendix C.

**Interview authenticity**

I transcribed each girl’s collection of six to nine interviews using Silverman’s (1997) transcription conventions to ensure the highest degree of accuracy (Kvale, 1996). The transcriptions were of each girl’s verbatim talk and included repetitions, self-corrections, and hesitancy markers, among other speech elements. The transcription legend can be found in Appendix D. In order to ensure reliability of my transcription process, especially in regard to the written representation of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) used by some of the girls, I asked an African-American colleague to listen to some of the audio files and read my transcripts to ensure accuracy in the documentation of AAVE. Some of the girls were also interested in seeing their words in print, so I shared the transcripts with them and asked them if it “sounded like them” or “sounded right.” Most girls said that the transcripts were fine; however, some corrected my spelling for some slang words or AAVE terminology.
Types of Interviews Conducted

Initial and final semi-structured individual interviews

With the exception of Candy, each girl participated in one individual interview at the beginning of the study and one individual interview at the end. Candy’s initial interview occurred in April, when she joined the study. These interviews were the most structured interviews because I sought historical information and the girls’ initial conceptions of reading and books in the first interview and their concluding conceptions about reading and books during the last interview.

The initial interviews, which lasted 45-90 minutes, took place in a private location, such as the computer room, at EDEP. While these interview durations seem quite lengthy for girls aged 9-12, the interview was not a typical “face-to-face” interview. Because the girls’ attention spans ebbed and flowed throughout the interview, we took “energizing breaks” throughout the process. We practiced cheerleading, walked around the playground, typed out codes on the computer, or engaged in art activities for 5-10 minute intervals and then resumed the interview. The girls, from the onset, clearly negotiated the processes for these particular interviews and enjoyed intermingling activities with the interviews. When they told me they felt they had talked enough, which indicated a saturation point, we stopped the interview. The final interviews ranged 20-60 minutes and reflected more typical seated, face-to-face interview settings; however, these interviews were conducted in each girl’s home or another location outside of school suggested by each girl.

Book selection open-ended individual interviews

With the exception of Candy, who joined the study in April, each girl participated in one initial and one final book selection interview that occurred immediately after she participated in a book fair. Because the girls were already borrowing books in April, Candy did not have equal
access to the entire offering of books. Therefore, when Candy joined the study, she immediately began borrowing from the selection of books available and participated in only one book selection interview in May. These individual interviews, which lasted 15-45 minutes, were more conversational in tone and included two guiding questions “What book did you pick?” and “Why did you pick that book?” for the 15 selected books. Given the repetitive nature of the questions, many girls quickly took the lead of the interview. During the interviews the girls often interacted with their selected books. Some of the girls became immersed in the book that they had selected and “forgot” they were speaking with me. On those occasions I took notes and after a few minutes asked them what in the book had caught their attention. The immediacy of the books also enabled the girls to show me what they were referring to as they were talking about their reasons behind selecting this book. I also took notes of the book’s features and page numbers which then accompanied the transcript of the audio file.

In between the initial and final book fairs the girls had the opportunity to borrow any books in the study. While some girls borrowed the same books they had selected during the initial book fair, others borrowed different books. Because the girls could borrow books at any time without my being present, I was unable to ask many why they selected different books within the immediacy of the selection during the three months of borrowing. Any stated rationales after the immediacy of the event could have been potentially intertwined with the girls’ thoughts after they had read or interacted with their books. The time gap between the girls borrowing books and their on-going interviews about their experiences with the books mitigated the possibility of accurate recollections of why they selected the books in the first place. Therefore I did not often ask the girls why they chose books which differed from their original
selection of books. However, if the girls mentioned in their final interviews why they selected particular books to borrow without solicitation, I included their statements in the analysis.

**On-going, open-ended individual interviews and spontaneous conversations**

Over a period of three months, each girl engaged in three-to-five on-going, open-ended individual interviews regarding her experiences with the books she currently possessed. These individual interviews lasted 10-30 minutes depending on the quantity of books selected, the girl’s desire to talk about the selected books she had selected, and the number of books of which she spoke. During these interviews some of the girls used their digital photos or artwork related to the books they checked out as conduits for conversation. The use of digital cameras is discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Table 3-6 provides an overview of the frequency of each girl’s on-going interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girl</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May/June</th>
<th>Total on-going interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alondra</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I originally initiated the on-going interviews with each girl. I waited a couple of weeks after the girls began borrowing the books to begin conducting on-going interviews to allow ample time for the girls to potentially interact with the books and to reduce the resemblance of interviews to school-based activities where the girls had to read and answer questions about the books. The interviews often occurred after I played games with the girls or helped them with their homework.
Over time, a couple of girls, such as Jackie and Candy, began initiating conversations with me by asking questions such as “You wanna know about these books I’ve got?” They even “turned the tables” after they were done talking about their book experiences and wanted to know what I thought about their selected books. However, many of the girls, such as Chris and Jaime, stated they wanted to be “left alone” with the books, which resulted in less frequent and shorter interviews. Additionally, when the girls’ teachers began assigning them novels to read at home, the girls did not interact with or read their selected books from the study as much. This development also reduced the number of interviews with the girls.

**Conduits for the Interview Process**

Because the girls emphatically stated their dislike of reading and/or books, I anticipated some degree of apathy or resistance towards conversing with me about books and reading. Additionally, I was unsure how many of the girls preferred oral discourse over written discourse as well as their levels of experience and familiarity with discussing books or engaging in reflective practice. I therefore offered the girls three alternatives to traditional “face-to-face” ongoing interviews about their book experiences. These alternatives potentially fostered a more enjoyable experience; elicited personal recollections more readily then relying solely on memory; captured the “immediacy” of the book and/or reading experiences throughout the week; allowed me to view their experiences through their eyes; and enabled the girls to not only lead the interviews but develop rich dialogue. These options were audio-based documentation, artistic responses, and visual documentation.

**Audio-based documentation**

This alternative, similar to think-aloud protocols (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995; Wilhelm, 2001), allowed each girl to verbalize her thoughts within the immediacy of the act and capture those thoughts on a digital recorder. Because I didn’t want the girls to consider the interviews as
interrogations and because I was able to only visit the EDEP site two-to-three times a week, there would be large gaps of time in-between our conversations or interviews. This method of data collection minimizes the girls’ need to recall events that occurred over a week ago. It also better enables rich details about their book and reading experiences to materialize more organically than a face-to-face interview (Alton-Lee & Nuthall, 1993).

**Artistic responses**

Responses to books through artistic lenses (e.g. drawing, writing, drama, dance, etc.) embrace an aesthetic approach to reading and books (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995; 1978). As interpretations that embody multiple sign systems, artistic responses involve personal experiences (Albers, 1997; Bussert-Webb, 2001) and enable people to “speak” without using more conventional means of expression: verbal and written discourse. People artistically responding to books shift between creating and reflecting, and typically engage in inquiry (Whitin, 1996). Considering the girls’ situated positions in relation to school and reading, their pronounced lack of agency in reading activities, and their love of artistic activities, I considered artistic responses an optimal alternative to the traditional approaches to reader response and interviewing.

**Visual documentation**

Individuals, especially children, are becoming more visually oriented due to their familiarity with digital cameras, computers and video games (Supon, 2003). The allure and prevalence of visual information necessitated a renewed look at how one collects data in qualitative research, especially when conducting research with individuals who were born in the Digital Age. Photographs are becoming an increasingly viable approach to collecting data (Schwartz, 1989) as they enable people to glimpse aspects of social and psychological worlds that can be elusive (Ziller, 1990). Not only would taking digital photographs, as tools of
engagement and creativity, motivate individuals to document their experiences in order to share them with others in the future, it would enable them to use a language they might prefer, a semiotic language.

Similar to digitally recording one’s thoughts and experiences, taking digital photos can “capture” an event in its immediacy, thereby reducing recollections far removed from the original event. While a picture can say a thousand words, so too can a word conjure a thousand pictures. Therefore intermingling photographs with interviews in this study not only emphasized the interviewee’s individual stance and interpretation from multiple perspectives, but also furnished individuals who might experience a loss of words with a tool for enriched and animated conversations. The photographs served only as springboards for conversations and were excluded from analyses.

**Girls’ Selected Alternatives**

Four girls initially opted to use digital cameras, two girls opted to draw their experiences, and one girl wanted to solely converse with me. However, as the study progressed, three of the girls—one using a digital camera and two drawing their experiences—decided to stop using these tools and only conversed with me. One of the girls stopped using a digital camera because others involved in her reading or book experiences refused to have their photos taken. The experience became frustrating rather than engaging for her. Of the two girls who wanted to draw, one of the girls stated that even though she put her art supplies in a “special place,” her younger siblings had used all the paper I had provided her and had broken the markers, colored pencils, and crayons I had given her. She then began using the digital camera; however, her photos were of her family and, according to her, not related to the book experiences. She opted for the digital camera because she wanted her family to have family photos. The other girl who opted to draw never brought in anything to talk from during the interviews. Therefore by the end of the study
three girls used digital photos during their interviews or spontaneous conversations and four girls relied solely on conversations.

I loaned the girls their digital cameras and created multiple “digital camera workshops” days at EDEP where the girls learned the various functions of the digital camera and practiced taking photos. All photos taken were erased at the end of each workshop. The girls and I also brainstormed ideas on how to use a digital camera for documentation purposes. These ideas were placed on a laminated bookmark and attached to each digital camera as a reminder for the girls. The girls were not limited to the ideas on the bookmark.

The girls’ digital photos were for interview purposes only. Each week I brought a laptop computer to EDEP. When the girls brought in their cameras, we downloaded their photos with each girl labeling her own photos. I then printed the photos to use for upcoming interviews. During the interviews the girls organized the photos and revealed the significance of these photos to their book experiences. Unless the girls wanted to keep their photos, I destroyed them.

**Researcher’s Documents**

The researcher’s documents included field notes and a reflective journal and served as part of the study’s audit trail. These documents enabled me to synthesize and postulate what transpired during my EDEP visits. They also helped ensure coherence and agreement existed among the data sources.

**Field notes**

During each visit, I documented various activities and thoughts articulated by the girls. On some occasions the girls did not want to be audiotaped but allowed me to take notes on what was being discussed. On other occasions I was unable to immediately record what I observed or heard. When this occurred, I privately audiotaped these circumstances in my car or in a separate room at the next possible moment and then transcribed those recollections at home.
Reflective journal

A reflective journal enabled me to continually move “to and from” my own prejudices and the girls’ perspectives. In this journal, I not only illuminated my subjectivity but also documented my mistakes, problems, and thoughts (Lareau, 2000). Journaling required a continual and reflexive critique of how my assumptions, presuppositions, etc. might be influencing my behavior and choice of diction around the girls. This process is critical for a fusing of horizons and for new understandings to develop.

Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, and Poole’s (2003) reflective journal design seemed well suited for the reflexive and reflective emphasis of this hermeneutic study. The journal process involved three main areas of reflection. I first began journaling my preunderstandings, my predictions for what was going to happen, my worries, and anything I needed to remind myself to do while visiting the EDEP site or interviewing. After each interview or site visit, I reviewed, reflected, and documented the learning processes of what I had experienced or thought had occurred. During that journaling experience, I noted modifications and any misconceptions I had had, as well as documented potential new understandings as a result of the interviews or interactions with the girls. I then considered how the new knowledge could be applied in future interviews or interactions. For example, after I had conducted a couple of on-going interviews and reviewed the recordings I realized that I was unconsciously implying through my language that I thought the girls should be reading the books. This convinced me to write a reminder at the top of each blank observational note page for each visit: “Books ≠ Reading!”

Journal writing occurred throughout the data collection and analysis stages and honored Gadamer’s (1975) assertion that reflection would … “make new questions and help further progress” (p.139). This journal not only served as an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) but also contributed to the validity of my final interpretations.
Artifacts

Multiple artifacts were collected during the study which assisted with the study’s organization and richness of data collected. The three types of artifacts collected but excluded from the data analysis for this study are described below.

Initial and final book selection lists

Each girl completed two “Top 15” book lists that indicated what books they initially thought they wanted and what they books they ultimately selected to own. These lists were used to verify and align the students’ book selections with their rationales. The book list template can be found in Appendix E.

Book logs

The girls’ book logs were individual folders that contained a register of what books each girl borrowed, the date when borrowed and returned, a brief description of the type of interaction with the book, and an evaluation of the book. Due to logistical reasons, I transported the book logs to EDEP every visit. These logs were housed in a file box and were organized by each girl’s pseudonym. The girls accessed their individual folders at any time during my visits. The girls occasionally relied on their book logs to recall book titles. A template of the book log can be found in Appendix F.

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS)

I used this survey as part of the sampling procedures to ensure the girls met the given criteria for the study. I administered the survey a second time for triangulation purposes and to bolster the validity and reliability of the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis serves as one way of processing data in order to make it socially accessible (Hatch, 2002). A qualitative research study is often like participating in an adventure race that
requires arriving at multiple destinations within certain timeframes and without a Global Positioning System (GPS) device. One must create a systematic process of navigating the natural terrain while using specific techniques to reach each destination in the best shape possible. Therefore, selecting or creating a systematic inquiry process is beneficial when conducting qualitative research. The nature of data collected in this study necessitated two different types of analysis: Discourse Analysis (DA) (Gee, 2005) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The initial, final, and on-going interviews were analyzed using Gee’s (2005) DA approach, and the book selection interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis approach. I did not analyze my field notes using DA because these documents included my spontaneous and indirect transcriptions of the girls’ comments as well my subjective observations, queries, etc. Therefore, I analyzed the field notes thematically as a means of bolstering findings derived from using DA. Table 3-7 provides an overview of the analysis methods used with particular data sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Analysis method used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial and final semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Discourse Analysis (DA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended, on-going book experience interviews and spontaneous conversations</td>
<td>Discourse Analysis (DA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended book selection interviews</td>
<td>Thematic Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>Thematic Analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rationale for Discourse Analysis**

Since the 1980’s, the popularity of discourse analysis has risen and is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary (Coyle, 2000). Linguists, psychologists, sociologists, and educators all have
come to see the veracity of discourse analysis to help illustrate how meaning is constructed or conveyed through language. Generally speaking, discourse analysis, as an analysis of language, has been an umbrella term for other analyses such as narrative analysis, conversation analysis, linguistic analysis, and critical discourse analysis among others (Potter, 2002). Each method, while immersed in the study of language, approaches the analysis from different lenses. While I am using Gee’s (2005) approach to DA, it is important to distinguish between the multiple approaches to analyzing discourse and then illuminate how DA aligns with the purposes and theoretical framework of this study.

Narrative analysis investigates written and oral stories generated by individuals. Researchers conducting narrative analysis interpret representations of experiences or “how protagonists interpret things” (Bruner, 1990, p.51 as quoted from Reissman, 1993, p.5). Conversation analysis focuses on the meanings and contexts involved in the turn-taking nature of conversations, yet the social context is not necessarily emphasized. Linguists utilize discourse analysis as a method of determining how utterances or sentences unite to form particular discourses (Potter, 2002, p.144). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as developed by Fairclough (1989), like Gee’s (2005) Discourse Analysis, looks at both the linguistic and social structures; however, critical discourse analysts hone in on how texts reproduce societal power structures and social inequity (Peräkylä, 2005). Poststructuralists such as Michael Foucault (1926-1984) also approach discourse analysis from a critical view as they investigate how “statements” historically evolve into subjects and objects (Peräkylä, 2005).

I seek to better understand the cognitive (thoughts) and socio-physical (book selections and interactions) experiences of particular individuals as articulated through discourse. My initial concerns were not focused in the critical or group interactive aspects of critical discourse
analysis, sociolinguistic discourse analysis and conversation analysis. However, I was concerned with the socio-historical influences of the girls’ conceptions of reading and books. Therefore, Gee’s (2005) Discourse Analysis model seems to provide a good foundation to achieve this new understanding.

While Gee’s model of discourse analysis as well as others’ approaches to discourse analysis are largely associated with social constructionism, a theoretical framework which seeks truths and how they are constructed through individual and institutional interactions within society, I believe this approach is also complementary to the hermeneutical stance I employ for this study. Both emphasize language as a mediator for meaning and the socio-historical contexts of meaning.

Just as discourse analysis investigates human experiences as constituted by discourse (Gee, Michaels, O’Connor, 1992), Gadamer’s (1975) theory of hermeneutical understanding is rooted in language and time and emphasizes language and conceptuality. Language, as a medium of engagement, indicates how we are “in the world” through “being in language.” It is a dialogue between individuals and between individuals and society (Gadamer, 1975; Malpas, 2005) and it articulates our views of the world. The prominence of language in hermeneutics is akin to the small “d” discourse, or “how language is used ‘on site’ to enact activities and identities” (Gee, 2005, p.7). Language, through its ability to provide “breathing space for thought,” places things and events in context where one can determine their significance (Bontekoe, 1996, p.130). It is not arbitrary, but rather “carries culture” (Gadamer, 1976, p.96).

The effective-historical consciousness (fusing of multiple horizons) in Gadamer’s hermeneutics was discussed earlier in this chapter. However, this concept serves as an important example of how Gee’s Discourse Analysis method can be used in a hermeneutical study. Socio-
historical and sociocultural activities, which can be considered integral to Gadamer’s “preunderstandings” (consciousness) and “horizons” (points-of-view), help constitute Gee’s capital “D”/Discourse. Discourses with a capital “D” are the ways in which society and language intermingle. Discourses help to formulate one’s identity which helps mold one’s linguistic and psychosocial behavior (Alvermann, 2000). From Gadamer (1975)’s perspective, one’s horizons are heavily dependent upon one’s preunderstandings or prejudices, which help create one’s identity. In order for understanding and progress to occur, one must reflect on how these preunderstandings (and thus horizons) were created and negotiated within culturally and historically situated moments. The interpreter must “understand the horizon of action . . . it does not end with probing subjective intentions or ‘getting inside someone’s mind’, but also includes investigating meaning in the social context in which it occurred” (Hekman, 1986, p.148). Gee’s integration of both the linguistic and social components in discourse analysis seems to reflect the role of the researcher in a hermeneutic study.

**Rationale for Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis, a widely used analytic method, is rarely acknowledged as substantive (Boyatzis, 1998). Compatible with objectivist, subjectivist, and constructionist frameworks, thematic analysis is widely used across different methods as a foundation for discovering or constructing meaning. Like other analytic methods that include “themes” such as discourse analysis, interpretive phenomenological analysis, and grounded theory, thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is an inductive and interpretive procedure that does not necessarily “give voice” to participants but takes decisive action about the salience and connective threads between participants’ thoughts and actions. By engaging in thematic analysis one can not only recognize how individuals make meaning of their experience, they also include how meaning is made within socio-historical
constructs. Thus, I believe thematic analysis to be complementary to and supportive of discourse analysis.

To help answer one of the research questions or this study, what rationales undergird these girls’ self-selections of books for personal use, I conducted book selection interviews with the girls. While the interviews were open-ended, leading with Why did you decide to pick this book, many of the girls’ responses embodied a more sequential and deterministic tone than narrative tone. While some girls did converse in narrative, others limited their talk to statements such as “because I liked the cover.” Even with probes, the brevity of the girls’ discourse challenged the possibility of creating stanzas and narratives used in DA, much less analyze the linguistic features. Additionally, each girl spoke of at least thirty books. Therefore, a thematic analysis seemed most appropriate for these particular interviews. The themes would complement discourse analysis by detailing the broader social contexts that influenced the girls’ choices for books.

Data Analysis Procedures

Discourse Analysis Process

All interviews except the initial and final book selection interviews were analyzed using Gee’s (2005) Discourse Analysis model. This method incorporates macro and micro levels of analysis which represent the social (building blocks) and linguistic structures (words, lines, and stanzas) respectively. Focusing on both enable the union of meaning and structure (Gee, 2005).

After each interview was transcribed, I performed the following actions:

1. I reviewed the transcript and found important meaning units to create stanzas. Stanzas are “clumps of language units” that deal with a unifying topic or perspective (p.107).

2. I labeled each stanza to create larger narratives and sub-narratives.

3. Afterward, I honed in on the narratives to find instances within these accompanying stanzas that indicate a potentially important issue.
4. I then began a microanalysis of the stanzas, looking at what linguistic details are significant to the Discourses in the data. These details help to determine the seven building tasks (Gee, 2005, p.11-19) language helps build

   a. significance
   b. activities
   c. identities
   d. relationships
   e. politics (distribution of social goods)
   f. connections
   g. sign systems and knowledge

Due to scope of this study, I selected five building tasks which resonated the most in the narratives. These building tasks were a.) significance; c.) identities; d.) relationships; e.) politics; and f.) connections

5. I then refer to and attempt to answer the 18 questions generated for those four building blocks as outlined on pages 110-113 in Gee’s (2005) *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*.

6. With the questions answered, I engaged in a validation process of convergence, where I saw how my answers to the 18 questions overlap and are connected to the emerging motifs and revised the themes when necessary.

7. I then organized my new findings and substantiated these findings with specific linguistic details.

8. I finally created more comprehensive motifs and addressed the research questions of this study. These findings were then compared with observational notes as well as the findings from the thematic analysis, which is another validation component, coverage.

**Thematic Analysis Process**

Seeking to answer one of my research questions, *What rationales undergird these girls’ self-selections of books for personal use*, I analyzed the girls’ initial and final book selection interviews and my field notes using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis process. This process would complement DA and augment findings for my other research question: *How does access to culturally relevant literature reflect and reshape the girls’ conceptions of reading and interactions with books?* The thematic process, as an inductive analysis procedure, is divided
into five phases detailed below. These phases seem remarkably similar to the tertiary coding procedure used in grounded theory: open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

1. I transcribed and familiarized myself with the transcribed data through repeated readings prior to creating codes. I jotted down thoughts and ideas as I transcribed and read the transcripts. I placed those thoughts and ideas aside for the time being.

2. I then open coded the data based on meaning units, retaining some of the context with the code. The codes used as much of the girls’ words as possible. Some meaning units potentially had multiple codes.

3. I then gathered the codes and began combining the open codes into larger codes or potential themes. Some codes could become sub-themes, or themes within a theme. I also searched for what I might have left out of the coding and thematic processes. My initial codes helped at this point.

4. Reviewing or “clustering themes” (Boyatzis, 1998) automatically occurred again as leading or “candidate” themes emerged. I determined the degree of “fit” between the themes and the data by asking whether the themes reflect the meanings in the data as a whole. A “saturation point” was achieved.

5. In this last stage, the “essences” of each theme and the “story” within the theme were created. I then considered how these stories are interconnected with each other across themes and wrote a short description (approximately two sentences) about each theme. The findings were then discussed in the context of the present study and provided additional support for the discourse analysis.

**Trustworthiness of the Study**

A study is only as good as the research design. In order to ensure this study conveys the girls’ thoughts of and experiences with reading and books, I must look at the data from multiple vantage points and angles. This process better ensures triangulation, or as Richardson (2000) says, the “crystallization” of the study. To help ensure such crystallization, I collected data from multiple data sources: 1) interviews, 2) archival data such as the girls’ book logs and book selection lists, 3) detailed observational field notes, and 4) a reflective journal. Immersion in reflection translated to constantly monitoring on paper my own prejudices and wonderings as the study progressed.
Much of my reflective process happened immediately after each visit to EDEP. However, I also reflected when I reviewed the audio files and when I transcribed. My unconscious seemed to often work overtime. Rapid-fire thoughts occurred just before sleeping, while exercising, dining out, or discussing research methods with a group of colleagues also conducting their dissertations. During these circumstances, I recorded my thoughts and then transferred them to my computer upon arriving home. During the transfer, additional connections or contradictions manifested, which added to the depth of the reflective process.

During the study, the girls helped ensure their comments were accurately documented. Many of the girls requested to see “what I said on paper” which I obliged. Additionally, I offered them my interpretations of what I thought had occurred and they confirmed and disconfirmed my thoughts. Some avenues of misinterpretation included why they didn’t pick up a book or the significance of the books remaining in a plastic bag in the bottom drawer of their dressers. On a few occasions the girls indicated surprise and interest in my interpretation. For example, when I mentioned to Morgan a pattern I thought I saw in her book selection process and why that pattern might exist, Morgan replied “Hunh. I never thought of it like that. That’s kinda cool. How can you think like that?” But she then countered with “I actually think it’s because…” This feedback represents intersubjective validity and tests my “understanding through a back-and-forth social interaction” (Creswell, 1998, p.207); something Gadamer emphasizes is a necessary component to hermeneutics and reflects one level of what Gee (2005) refers to as “language-in-use.”

Specific to Gee (2005)’s Discourse Analysis are four elements to validity: convergence, agreement, coverage, and linguistic details (p.114). The data converges when the analysis provides substantive answers to as many questions for each building block as possible.
Agreement occurs through member checking or confirmation by other researchers’ findings that support my findings. Coverage ensures that the analysis is applicable to various data sources, such as transcribed interviews and observational notes. The thematic analysis of the book selection rationales would complement DA and strengthen its validity. The final component for validity in Gee’s DA, is how the linguistic structures within the discourse marry the communicative ideas. For example, when discussing the motif of reading as a punitive experience, I cite the prevalence of modal verbs of necessity with first-person pronouns (e.g. I have to) and how they are “married” to nouns such as “criminal.” Both semantics and syntax convene.

Subjectivity (Prejudices)

Central to hermeneutics is an act of reflectivity and reflexivity. One needs to be “aware of one’s own bias so that the text can present itself in all of its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s fore-meanings” (Gadamer, 1975, p.269). The researchers’ ideologies and interpretations are inherent in the research process and the researcher is always connected to the individuals and topics involved in the study. Additionally, as Gadamer proposes, the historicity of life is embedded within one’s consciousness and interpretation of the world. Therefore it is crucial that I note my previous experiences, current conceptualizations, and orientations.

Childhood reading experiences

As a European-American female, I grew up in a lower middle-class community in the southeast region of the U.S. but was raised by parents who held middle-class values. As a child, I read to escape the realities of my life and vicariously travel the world. At nine years of age, I found utter delight in sitting in the bushes outside of my house reading fictional or fantastical adventures conjured by Lloyd Alexander, Madeleine L’Engle, Hugh Lofting, or Frances Hodgson Burnett (ironically all British authors), as ants danced around my ankles. My parents
shared their love for books and reading, and with the help of my next-door neighbor, instilled in me a passion for reading. They modeled how reading was one way of finding life’s “treasures.” If we couldn’t do something or go somewhere, we could always read about it.

Interestingly, my sister and brother do not share the same affection for reading. My brother reads under professional duress and my sister reserves her reading experiences to popular magazines such as *People* or *Sports Illustrated*. Books have never really been a part of their lives. Additionally, both experienced difficulties with reading as they progressed through public school. My brother, known for inserting Garfield comics into his textbooks at school, contemplated dropping out of high school due in part to his reading difficulties and disengagement. I recall his frustration and felt powerless because at the time I didn’t understand why reading was so difficult for him. My familial experiences enabled me to learn about the accolades and pitfalls associated with reading in a culture that prefers print literacy to oral literacy.

**Public teaching experiences**

My teaching experiences in the U.S. and Japan have been situated within rural, impoverished environments at the elementary and secondary levels. Whether I taught English literature, English grammar, functional literacy skills, language arts, or reading, the focus of each class was literacy. My first “teaching” position was in a U.S. 4th/5th grade class for individuals already targeted as potential drop-outs. These individuals struggled academically and socially. While I was supposed to help them with their anger management and life-coping skills, I realized that the program had one noticeably absent component: literacy. Reading and writing difficulties were the nucleus of my students’ frustration and disengagement in school. I subsequently created, rather haphazardly, a literature-based curriculum to help these students become more proficient readers and writers, improve their self-esteem, and begin enjoying reading. That first
year was one of the most challenging years of my life. It highlighted the importance of print literacy in this country and reaffirmed that books can ultimately change people’s lives on multiple levels.

In Japan, I typically had a high percentage of secondary students who disliked or had difficulty reading English. While I had brought in various reading materials to help my struggling students, they often renounced my offerings until I included something I deemed particularly “unworthy” of reading (e.g. comic books or popular teen magazines). I superficially thought I was meeting my students’ needs. However, when reflecting on those experiences, I believe that while I provided them with access to something they valued, I also inadvertently conveyed my “literary conceit” towards such material. During my tenure at the middle and high schools I had stressed that they could read the materials as recreational reading materials in the class; however, they could not bring their out-of-school reading texts and experiences into the classroom discourse. I think this “hidden curriculum” potentially mired the possibility of helping struggling or apathetic readers becoming lifelong readers and reminded me of how influential teachers’ attitudes were upon reading and learning.

Despite my awareness of the multiple roles and values associated with popular culture texts, I still negotiate that tension surrounding the dichotomous notion of “high-quality literature,” such as award-winning books and “popular culture literature” such as comic books, manga, and film or TV-based books. I feel both have value in children’s lives but I continually vacillate between when and how to value these texts within an academic environment. Before this study I did value “high quality” literature more than “popular culture” literature.

After teaching an undergraduate children’s literature class and a graduate secondary reading class at UF, I believe that everyone can enjoy reading; it’s just a matter of recognizing
that there are times when one may become temporarily disengaged with reading and considering 
how to renew one’s reading engagement. In my undergraduate children’s literature classes, 
approximately one third to one half of my students stated they “struggle with reading” or 
“disliked reading.” By the end of the term, approximately half of those self-identified 
“struggling readers” voluntarily informed me that they found some joy in reading. When probed 
as to what helped them determine that, they all indicated “choice” and the ability to “find books 
that matched me” as the most significant reasons for their change in perception. In a culture that 
prefaces individual choice, it is no wonder the debilitative effects a lack of choice and too many 
choices have upon the enjoyment and subsequent efficacy of reading and other literary 
experiences.

My interest in researching struggling girl readers is also personally motivated and based 
on my teaching experiences. When teaching at the collegiate level, I’ve always encouraged my 
students to become reflective practitioners and modeled this practice to them as often as possible. 
Approximately two years ago, I was sharing yet another story of a struggling reader that had 
previously been in my classroom, when I stopped mid-sentence. I asked my students if they 
noticed anything interesting about all the stories I had been sharing with them over the course of 
the class. They looked at me with slight bewilderment. I informed them that I had just realized 
all of the individuals in my stories of struggling readers and their experiences with literature 
were boys. One of my students replied, “But isn’t that the case? I mean, what girl can’t read?” I 
informed the class that I have had female struggling readers but for some reason I couldn’t recall 
their stories or experiences with books, much to my chagrin.

After class, I began emailing and calling my colleagues asking about their struggling 
readers and they too said that their immediate story recollections were boys. They “knew” they
had had struggling girl readers but they couldn’t recall their stories as readily as they could the boys’ stories. This experience compelled me to pursue research involving girls who experienced trouble with reading.

**Reading research experiences**

I had the good fortune to assist Dr. Anne McGill-Franzen and Dr. Richard Allington on a three-year grant that investigated how to minimize summer reading loss among economically disadvantaged elementary aged children who had minimal access to books. One of my responsibilities included formally interviewing children about why they selected the books they did and informally asking them what happened with the books after they took the books home. Their responses revealed that while the children may not have read the books, the books themselves held particular importance to them. These findings strengthened my belief that books have situated values that extend beyond the printed word.

I also believe that many individuals will opt for books that are heavily immersed in their lived worlds outside of the classroom; books about popular TV shows, movies, or other visually-stimulating texts, that the students can create communities around, as Dyson (1993; 2003a) has evidenced. To me, while the immediacy of reading is quite private, it is also a social endeavor. Previous experiences also impact the “reading” of texts as well. Thus, reading is embedded within sociology, within self and society. While I hold these beliefs, I cannot assume that the girls embody the same beliefs.

Through all of my previous teaching and research experiences I have begun to conceive of reader engagement as a process which ebbs and flows within the interludes of life. I have also solidified my belief that language is value-laden within socio-historical contexts and is inherently interpretive; conversation is a dialectical and dynamic activity which allows for the emergence of multiple meanings. Who we are with, where we are, and what we hear all influence what we say.
Limitations

Limitations involving the context of the study include:

1. Race and status could have minimized the depth and breadth of data collected. Our conversations and interactions were most likely influenced by the racial dissonance prevalent at the research site, the ethnic and cultural differences between the girls and me, and my status as a former teacher who loves to read and is White.

2. My interactions with the girls outside of the study, which the guardians and girls requested, could have influenced the type and method of conversations within the context of the study. I did not use any data from those interactions in this study.

3. The girls’ articulations of their difficulty engaging in reflective practice potentially reduced the richness of their thoughts and experiences.

4. The appeal of the books offered extended beyond the girls and included their peers. The girls obtained books for those not involved in the study, including a teacher, therefore skewing the data collected.

Limitations regarding the design of the study include:

1. The number of participants and the situated location of this study minimized the potential to generalize the results; however, the findings from this study led to further inquiries and future research.

2. While the study occurred in a familiar place for the girls, the site contained an “academic atmosphere” which might have subconsciously affected the girls’ and my conversations in terms of content and discourse.

3. During the book fairs, the display of books might have impacted the girls’ selections.

4. Transcriptions are constructions themselves, as I, the transcriber, determine which aspects are salient and significant and which are not. They are stories with me as an editor. Thus, as Mischler (2003) reminds us, one needs to make a concerted effort to match the transcription process with the analysis method to ensure the necessary characters, plotlines, and dialogues are present.

5. Interpretation, as the nucleus of social science, is a nebulous process. Discourse analysis and thematic analysis are two processes that ultimately end with the researcher producing the final product. Thus, there runs a risk that my prejudices might have overshadowed the girls’ experiences.
CHAPTER 4
BOOK CHOICES, FAIRS, AND EXCHANGES

“A great library contains the diary of the human race.”
---George Mercer Dawson

Understanding the contexts surrounding children, literature, and reading is paramount when discussing book interactions. The historicity of literary experiences and contemporary social networks considerably influence which texts one ultimately selects. The ways and means in which one accesses texts also influences the acceptance or rejection of particular books at any given time. In this chapter I invite a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding the girls’ book selection processes. The characteristics of the books which the girls collectively requested at the beginning of the study and subsequently selected throughout the study, as well as the surroundings in which the selections occurred, provide necessary context to the girls’ reactions, involvement, and perhaps distance from the range of books offered. I intersperse my observations and interpretations of the girls’ particular behaviors and commentaries during the book fair to provide additional forestructures to my findings discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. I will discuss the girls’ reactions, involvement, and distance in those chapters.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the girls participated in book fairs at the beginning and conclusion of their participation in the study. The girls selected books to borrow and possibly own during the initial book fair and selected up to 15 books to own during the final book fair. Each girl received new copies of their preferred books to keep. Most of the books remained the same for both book fairs. However books requested by the girls after the book fairs, such as We are Puppies (Grooms, 2005) or additional books from the Alvin Schwartz’s Scary Stories series, were also honored.
Selecting the Books for the Study

Student’s Verbal Input

Developing rapport with the girls and determining what books to include in the study occurred simultaneously. A collaborative approach was essential and was guided by Guthrie and Anderson (1999) and Schraw, Flowerday, and Reisetter’s (1998) assertions that building on student interest and allowing student choice can stimulate an interest in reading, even among struggling readers. At the beginning of the study, the girls repeatedly articulated how voiceless they felt in regard to school-based reading activities and schoolwork in general. Their pronounced lack of agency in their school-sanctioned reading practices and their recreational reading selections further supported my decision to honor their choices and ensure their active participation in the decision-making processes. The girls suggested, confirmed, and signed-off on what books were offered in this study.

From the onset, I paid close attention to not only the girls’ articulations about their hobbies and life experiences but also any mention or display of what books the girls borrowed from the libraries or classrooms, their commentaries about their daily reading response homework, and any other casual conversation about their reading activities at home or school. These personal offerings and commentaries occurred within authentic after-school activities such as playing card and board games, participating in the ever-appealing favorite ice cream and favorite color “personality tests,” and occurred during homework time.

When the girls commented that they could “never” find a book in the library because “all they got are old books,” I inquired about what reading materials they wished they could find and borrow from school and eventually extended my inquiries to include what reading materials they wanted me to bring. Whenever I wrote down the girls’ suggestions, they engaged in good-natured teasing about my memory, or lack thereof. Comments such as “Oh yeah, that’s right,
you’ve got that ole’ type a memory. You wanna write this down” peppered any conversation where one of the girls wanted to ensure I included or understood something. The girls’ verification of what I wrote, initiated by statements such as “Let me see if you got all that down right,” revealed their desire for their voices to be authentically and accurately heard. Their sense of agency reverberated throughout the study.

The girls’ requests ranged from specific titles such as The Bad Beginning (1999), the first book of Lemony Snicket’s Series of Unfortunate Events series, or Roald Dahl’s (2002) Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, to general categories such as “funny books,” “books about Black people’s history,” and “basketball books.” For category-based recommendations, such as “funny books,” I probed for possible examples to better understand what constituted a “funny book.” Since many of the girls seemed unable to provide more specific details, I found various books that could potentially be funny and asked them if those books were indeed funny to them. Similarly, for topics about which I was a novice, such as basketball, I would bring in a variety of books and the girls would affirm or negate my selections. The affirmed books were then added to the list of books I purchased for the study.

Curiously, on a few occasions the girls mentioned magazines in their conversations but did not include them as suggestions for the study. The girls might have excluded magazines from their list of desired texts because they already had access to magazines through their friends. Additionally, since schools and classrooms do not traditionally house magazines such as Vibe, The Source, URB, or J-14, the girls might have thought those magazines were unattainable or “unacceptable” given the academic environment in which the study occurred. Due to the girls’ apparent access to magazines, I decided not to offer magazines in the study and focused on texts that were not readily available to the girls but were emphasized in school: books.
**Book Fliers and Catalogues**

Because the girls stated they were familiar with Scholastic Book Club ordering forms, I distributed the eight-to-ten page color fliers from Scholastic’s *Trumpet, Troll, Arrow, Lucky*, and *Classroom Cares* book clubs, and asked each girl to independently circle what books they were interested in. These fliers were visually appealing with a heavy emphasis on the book covers and minimal attention to the book’s content. The books selected by the girls were then added to the list of potential books for the study.

Cognizant of the vast amount of mainstream, middle-class, European-American books published and distributed by Scholastic, I also asked the girls to circle possible books from two publisher catalogues that had more multicultural literature offerings. The 18-page Penguin Young Readers’ *Celebrating African-American Heritage* catalogue and the 15-page multicultural literature section of Lee & Low’s catalogue were black-and-white and contained more print than the Scholastic Book Club forms. The girls could have kept all book club forms and catalogues for as long as a week; however, most finished their selections in one day while at EDEP. I then tallied their book preferences and added books that were either requested at least twice or emphatically requested by one of the girls to the ever-expanding book list.

The girls expressed excitement while looking at the Scholastic Book Club forms. Some remarked that they had never been able to participate in the Scholastic book ordering process; they had only been spectators of their peers’ participation. While looking at the Penguin and Lee & Low catalogues, every girl spontaneously verbalized books she recognized, liked, and disliked. Interestingly, with the exception of Ruby Bridges’ *Through My Eyes*, (1999), the girls did not select familiar books for the study. Familiarity was the underlying reason for the books’ exclusion. A book’s novelty seemed to be a primary factor in the decision-making process. Six of the seven girls did not finish looking through the publisher catalogues stating there were “too
many words and not enough pictures.” Morgan asked if I had made a mistake in giving her the multicultural Penguin and Lee & Low catalogues because those catalogues “don’t have people like me. I’m not like them.” She uttered similar comments throughout the study.

**Researcher’s Influence**

Selecting books from a one-dimensional advertisement is not necessarily the optimal method of selecting books for future interactions. Recognizing this as well as acknowledging the scarcity of books available to the girls at school and during EDEP, I brought in culturally relevant picture books such as *Hewitt Anderson’s Great Big Life* (Nolen, 2005) and *Our Gracie Aunt* (Woodson, 2002a) and culturally relevant historical novels such as *Trouble Don’t Last* (Pearsall, 2002), *Bicycle Madness* (Kurtz, 2003) and *Numbering All the Bones* (Rinaldi, 2000) to determine if the girls might also be interested in these books. Because of the girls’ pronounced aversion to books and reading, I left the books in my satchel during my EDEP visits.

Curious about my life, as revealed in my satchel, some of the girls burrowed through my satchel. They’d ask to borrow a pen or calculator in order to rummage through my bag. When they encountered the books, they would take them out and wonder aloud “who would carry books ‘round with ‘em?” After sharing that I often carried books around with me because I never knew when I’d have an opportunity to read or because I wanted to see what they thought of the books, some girls would borrow them during EDEP. Sometimes they returned the books without commentary and other times they revealed whether or not they thought it was a good book. A few of those books, such as *Our Gracie Aunt* (Woodson, 2002a) and *Bicycle Madness* (Kurtz, 2003) were later requested for inclusion in this study.

This study was appealing to other children attending EDEP. Those children not involved in the study referred to me as “the book lady” and requested books from me. I occasionally found post-it notes with their requests for horse books, animal books, sports books, or “any book
you think I could like” tucked into my satchel or my jacket pockets. While I could not honor those requests due to the parameters of the study, I did give them to the EDEP director to see if she could borrow those books for the other children. It seemed as access to desired books was one crucial element missing from both the girls’ and their EDEP peers’ lives.

Making the Final Cut

The girls’ collective requests resulted in a list of over 180 books. Sensitive to the possibility that the girls’ limited experience with a variety of books might curtail their knowledge of what they would enjoy, I included books which I thought the girls might enjoy but were unacquainted. While research has shown the disconnect between what teachers or adults think children enjoy reading and what children say they enjoy reading (Booth, 2006; Brooks, Waterman, & Allington, 2003; Pascoe & Gilchrist, 1987), I believe my previous teaching experiences, combined with my recent three-year participation in studies that focused on books children enjoyed, enabled me to have a small voice in what books should be offered. These books, which were primarily award-winning, multicultural picture books and novels, constituted a nominal percentage of the total books offered. My additions increased the book list to approximately 220 books.

Each of the girls reviewed the book list which included each book’s title, author, genre, and a brief summary. The girls’ responses to that list, as indicated by comments such as “You mean you really are gonna get what we said we wanted?” appeared to be a mixture of surprise, disbelief, and happiness. Some of the girls vocalized more elaborative commentaries when assessing the final list of books. These commentaries, exemplified by Alice below, confirmed previous observations that culturally relevant and unfamiliar books were desired by some of the girls. Alice’s comment also confirmed previous statements uttered while looking at the book fliers that familiar books were not necessarily preferred books.
Alice: Uhh, let’s see what you got.
Raven? Now I don’t like Raven.

JG: You don’t like Raven?

Alice: Raven?
She act like a little White girl.
SpongeBob for sure! ((reading off the list))
*What Do You Do to Deserve a Sister Like You?*
Ooh, I want these two! *101 Ways to Fool Your Teacher* and *101 Ways to Fool Your Parents.*

JG: Alright.

Alice: I’m gonna go home and read that like crazy.
Yeah, I’m gonna go home and read that like crazy . . .
*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.*
*The Princess and the Pizza.* I read that book.
Nah, don’t keep it.
I don’t like those because we already read that kinda book.
Oh, *Allen Iverson,* I *do* want somethin’ like that.
That’s more my kinda thang.

I deleted books based on unanimous rejections, topic overrepresentations, and budgetary constraints. The final book list for the first book fair consisted of 150 books published primarily between 1995 and 2006 and represented multiple genres. The lexile range of the books was between 160 and 1430, accounting for a range of potential reading abilities.

After the first book fair, the girls specifically requested books to include in the next book fair. These books included *Are You There God It’s Me Margaret* (Blume, 2001) and *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (Lewis, 2005). These additions resulted in a total of 161 books that represent the same repertoire of genres and fall within the same lexile range of the books purchased for the first book fair. Appendix G contains a comprehensive list of the books offered in this study. Tables 4-1, 4-2, and 4-3 provide the distribution of the 161 total books by genre, types of books, and cultural relevance.
Table 4-1. Book offerings by genre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>Number of books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Realistic Fiction*</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Fiction</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Non-Fiction Auto/Biographies]</td>
<td>[11%]</td>
<td>[17]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Literature</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Fiction</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Narrative poetry novels such as *Locomotion* (Woodson, 2004b) that could also be considered Realistic Fiction were only accounted for in the Poetry genre.

Table 4.2. Book offerings by series and type of book

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Series*/ Non-Series</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>Number of books</th>
<th>Book type</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>Number of books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Series</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Picture Book</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Series</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>Chapter Book</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For the purposes of this study, I used Meekins and Wolinski’s (2003) definition of series books as books that have a continuous character, format, and/or setting.

Table 4.3. Cultural relevance of book offerings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Relevance</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>Number of books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural African or African-American</td>
<td>60% [49%]</td>
<td>97 [79]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Other&quot; (Animals)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this study, cultural relevance was defined by the visual or written descriptions of the protagonists as members of various microcultures in the U.S., such as African-Americans, Latinos, and Asians (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2005). The “Other” category included non-fiction books about various animals and animal fantasy books such as Avi’s (1995) Poppy or Doreen Cronin’s (2000) *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type*. While animals in the fantasy novels can personify different cultures, I excluded them from the cultural categories because of the high degree of individual interpretation involved in determining the cultural representations of each animal. These books were placed in the “Other” category.

The percentage of books with multicultural protagonists virtually mirrors the racial demographics of the girls in the study. Four of the seven girls (~57%) considered themselves of Black heritage and almost 50% of the books selected by the girls had Black protagonists. Additionally, almost all of the girls commented at some point in the study that they didn’t realize there were so many books with Black protagonists available and that they were happy to see these books, even if they didn’t want to read them. They rationalized that while they didn’t necessarily want to read every book with Black characters, they knew of others who would if they were aware of their existence. Approximately 25% of the books had White protagonists and two of the seven girls who participated in the book selection process (the third girl joined the group after the books had been selected) identified themselves as White (~28%). While people do not solely select books based on the race or ethnicity of the characters, the racial or ethnic representation of the characters can matter. Both the statistics and commentaries indicate at the very least the girls desired culturally relevant reading materials.

To ensure the girls’ voices were heard in the book selection process, I reviewed and organized the books into three distinct categories. These categories indicate that
approximately 84% of the books offered were either directly requested by the girls or directly connected to the girls, supporting the girls’ agency in the decision-making process.

**Participant request (52%)**: Books specifically or indirectly requested by the girls such as “I want the Lemony Snicket book” or “I want scary books.”

**Interest-Based (32%)**: Books that were directly related to the girls based on conversations I had with the girls. For example, one girl repeatedly said she loved to invent things so a book about female inventors and their inventing processes was included after approval from the girl. The girls approved these books.

**Researcher’s “Best Guess” (16%)**: I used my experience, expertise, and intuition in selecting books and topics that I thought the girls might like.

**Availability of Selected Books in School**

I cross-checked our book list with each of the girls’ classroom libraries and the school library to ensure that the books offered in the book fairs were not already available in the girls’ school. Due to the overall scarcity of books in the classrooms, duplications were limited to only the Paula Danziger’s *Amber Brown* series and Lemony Snicket’s *Series of Unfortunate Events* (aka *Lemony Snicket*) series books. When reviewing the girls’ classroom libraries, only one of the girls’ teachers had a substantial library of almost 200 books. Those books were largely popular series fiction chapter books with middle-class European-American protagonists such as Ann Martin’s *The Baby Sitter’s Club* series or Marcia Thornton Jones’ and Debbie Dadey’s *Bailey School Kids* series. Another teacher had approximately 25 books in her classroom library, all of which were targeted for emergent readers and had African-American protagonists, such as Bill Cosby’s *Little Bill* series or were written by award-winning African-American authors such as John Steptoe or Eloise Greenfield. Approximately 16 of those books were on loan from the library and rotated every week or two. Another teacher had approximately 80 books of which
the Wishbone series books dominated. Two teachers stated they did not have a classroom library and relied solely on the school library.

The school library housed approximately 18% of the books on the final book list. These books were primarily series books such as Mary Pope Osborne’s Magic Tree House series or award-winning books such as Kevin Henkes’ Olive’s Ocean (2005). For the popular series books, only a couple of copies were available in the school library. Because four of the seven girls had restricted library privileges due to previously lost books and were only able to select from the “lending library” cart, they could not borrow those popular series books. When I visited the school library, the lending library cart included approximately 100 chapter books with predominately European-American, middle-class protagonists. With the exception of the Amber Brown series, the books the girls desired were absent from the lending library cart. My observations indicated that not only did the girls in this particular study have limited access to reading materials outside of school, but they also appeared to have limited access to reading materials they wanted inside school.

**Book Fairs in Action**

The book fairs involved multiple steps outlined below. I describe each step in greater detail in subsequent sections.

1. The girls helped set up the books for each book fair.
2. I asked each girl how she typically selected books.
3. Each girl independently and privately selected 15 books she thought she wanted.
4. Each girl collected her selected books and shared with me her reasons for selecting the books in an open-ended interview.
5. After the interview, the girl returned her books to the tables, left the room, and the next girl arrived.
6. After every girl identified her books and completed an interview, all the girls were able to borrow any books in the study.
Setting Up the Book Fairs

I conducted the book fairs during the first week of March 2006 and the last week in May 2006. The EDEP director allowed both fairs to be conducted in an empty classroom with multiple round tables and desks available to display the books. In this room, the girls had ample space to wander around and look at the books. I used a private classroom to ensure privacy and eliminate non-participants from looking at the books and perhaps “accidentally borrowing” them. As mentioned in Chapter 3, each girl independently selected 15 books they thought they would want to keep. I assigned a unique number to each book which allowed the girls to easily document what book they wanted on their book order form. A sample of the book list form can be found in Appendix E.

I displayed the books on round tables, with hardcover books standing upright and paperback books lying face up. The girls assisted in arranging the books on the tables for the book fairs because 150 books could prove visually overwhelming and I wanted the girls to have as much contact with the books as possible. I had hoped this strategy would minimize the potential for the girls to overlook books they might really want.

While setting up the books, most of the girls expressed excitement. “Oohs,” “Yes’s!” and “Ooh looky here!” permeated the air when they saw both culturally relevant and popular culture books such as Ruby Bridges’ (1999) *Through My Eyes*, biographies of popular singers such as Omarion, Bow Wow, and Beyoncé, or TV-inspired series books (TV tie-ins) such as *W.I.T.C.H.* or *Unfabulous*. These particular books created spontaneous communities of animated discourse concerning the pop stars or TV shows. Jaime even expressed her incredulity of the book fairs themselves when she said, “You bought all these books for us? You’re some kinda crazy person to spend money on all these books. No one does that . . . I don’t know why you did it, but it’s cool.”
Additionally, some girls held up books such as *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type* (Cronin, 2000), asking no one in particular, “Hey, you remember readin’ this one?” The girls would then immediately comment on what they thought of the book and then placed the book back on a table. Other inquiries specifically directed to me involved the plots of unfamiliar books, such as Sharon Creech’s (2003) *Love that Dog*. Some girls stopped displaying books to flip through or begin reading a book that caught their attention. The girls’ comments, conversations, and behaviors, while not audiotaped, were documented as much as possible. These communicative acts implied that while the girls previously professed disinterest or dislike of books and reading, they were readily engaged in the book fair processes. In this setting, access and agency seemed interwoven with engagement.

**Assessing Book Selection Strategies**

Before each girl began selecting books, I asked her how she typically selected books. The girls indicated that even though they knew all the different strategies for selecting a book, such as using the “five-finger rule,” reading the back of the book or the inside jacket, flipping through the pages, etc., they selected books based on the book title or cover alone. Jamie’s explanation for selecting a book by its cover is representative of the girls’ sentiments, “Why go through all that trouble when you still can’t find something you like? It’s just as good to look at the cover. You get the same thing at the end—a boring book.” For these girls, continually “striking out” when trying to find a “good book” understandably led to adopting the quickest and “easiest” method without regard to the conclusion, because it is always the same—a disappointing one.

**Selecting and Talking about the Books**

Every girl privately selected books they thought they would like in order to minimize peer influence or pressure to select particular books while looking at the book selections. The girls’ book selection processes lasted between 10 and 25 minutes during the initial book fair and
between 4 and 15 minutes for the final book fair. The girls attributed the alacrity of their book selections during the final book fair to their certainty of desired books. After finding their books, the girls arranged them in the order in which they wanted to discuss them with me. Each girl had a distinct way of organizing the books and refused to speak to me until she had organized her books thematically (e.g. sports, music), by series, book type (picture or chapter book), or author.

These open-ended book selection interviews were often the first occasion in which the girls delved into the books. While looking through the books, they told stories either related to the book or a mixture of their lives and the book’s “life”; described the cover’s appeal; took me on “picture walks” with them; and even expressed surprise that the book wasn’t what they thought it was going to be about. Alondra, Candy, Chris, Jackie, and Morgan changed their minds during the interview and substituted different books for the originally selected ones. Other times, some of the girls, such as Jackie, Candy, and Alice, became so entranced with some of the books’ peritextual elements they forgot they were speaking with me. I noted their presumed immersion into the books and after a few minutes I would ask the girls if I could join them in their books. Upon hearing my voice they looked up startled, flashed somewhat sheepish grins, and apologized. I quickly informed them they didn’t need to apologize; I was just curious about what was so intriguing about the book. The girls then returned to the interview.

The girls responded to my inquiries about their book selection rationales in a surprising way. Jackie, Jaime, Morgan, and Chris all indicated that they were initially unsure how to respond to the question “Why did you select this particular book?” According to Alice, she initially didn’t want to answer the question because “it’s not what teachers ask for. We just need to answer correctly reading. You didn’t wanna know if we got it like correct and all.” Jaime and Morgan also indicated my questions were outside of their comfort zone. During the first book
selection interview Morgan countered my question with her question of “Aren’t you supposed to ask me questions after I read the book?” Additionally, Jamie expressed similar sentiments during her final book selection interview after I had asked her about why she selected a particular book.

04 I don’t know why.
05 You keep on asking some hard stuff.
06 I ain’t never had to think about what I’m thinking.
07 I just think it.
08 Anyway.
09 No one really care what I read and why!
10 No one’s ever asked me why I pick a book.
11 How you supposed to know until after you read it?

Morgan and Jaime’s statements, which are representative of some of the other girls’ sentiments, indicated the potential absence of metacognitive awareness (lines 06-07) and critical thought (lines 09-10) within the girls’ classrooms and suggested that reading is not something others considered something worthwhile to talk about (line 10) especially not before one reads (line 11). Additionally, one might surmise from Morgan’s statement that one only asks comprehension questions, or questions emphasizing an efferent stance, after reading. What matters is if you can respond after reading, not before. For Alice, you had to respond correctly. The girls had to grapple with the idea that I did care about what they selected and why they selected it. I was more concerned about their opinions than what they “learned” from the text.

The girls’ statements were surprising. A question I had considered to be relatively simple, “Why did you select this book?” became an object of frustration and possible contention at times. The girls visibly relaxed after I explained why I thought knowing why people select particular books would be important to educators and librarians, and emphasized that I was not looking for particular answers, any answer was fine. I believe the girls also felt more comfortable after my repetition of the same question and when I never asked them “What was that book about?”
After their interviews, a few girls discovered additional books they wanted more than what they had previously selected. I quickly asked them why without beginning another formal interview while they changed their list of wanted books. Because each girl selected and discussed their book selections privately with me, the book fair lasted an entire week. Only after every girl had completed the selection and interview process were the girls able to borrow books for personal use.

“Bootleggin’” Books

Due to logistical purposes the girls borrowed and returned books only when I was at EDEP. Over the course of three months, the girls typically borrowed three to five books for an average of three weeks. During their Spring Break, many of them borrowed six books “just in case I have nothing to do.” While the quantity and frequency of book loans were encouraging, the evolution of the borrowing experiences beckons contemplation about the social influences upon individuals’ interactions with books, especially those who have a tenuous relationship with books and reading.

For the first couple of months most of the girls wanted to discreetly borrow books. If I brought the books into a private room at EDEP, the girls asked for “homework help” in that room. Their “homework” entailed casually looking at the books and placing their borrowings into their backpacks without any witnesses. However, the girls avoided the books if they were displayed in public, such as the stage in the cafeteria where EDEP was held. Noticing this trend, I began keeping the books in the trunk of my car when a private room was unavailable. Similar to their previous actions with books stored in my satchel, the girls would look at the books in my trunk under the guise of borrowing school supplies or tennis rackets for EDEP free time. I willingly played the “game” and each week I “forgot” to bring in these needed materials. The girls, individually or collectively, would accompany me to my car and begin searching through
the plastic bins of books in my trunk in search of something they might like to borrow. At times
the girls would quickly flash a book at me, requesting a quick “book talk.”

Once the girls selected their books, they kept them in my car until their parents or
 guardians picked them up. The girls would then transfer the books or backpacks into their cars
before saying goodbye to their peers at EDEP. While this particular behavior diminished as the
study progressed, I often felt like a bootlegger trying to sell/peddle “underground merchandise.”
Books, not illegally downloaded music or DVDs, were the market items. The girls’ comments
and behaviors during this process stimulated many yet unresolved wonderings.

The girls occupied a central position in determining what books were offered in the study
and expressed a desire for a wide range of books. They expressed joy in actively participating in
book selection processes, seemed resolute in what books they wanted, and expressed awareness
of the multiple ways in which they can select books. Yet what happened after they possessed the
books? In the next two chapters the girls will share their thoughts and opinions regarding reading
and books after they’ve accessed their desired books. These thoughts and opinions will help
shape our understandings of how reading and books coincide and how, at times, “never the two
shall meet.”
CHAPTER 5
THE GIRLS’ BOOK SELECTION RATIONALES

You actually listened to us? I mean we can look at these an’ stuff? I mean pick ‘em up an’ take ‘em?
--Jackie (looking at Our Gracie Aunt)

You sure we ain—aren’t gonna get in trouble with these?
--Morgan (holding up The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe)

Now hold on here. A reading study? You said this was a book study, not no reading study. I ain’t doin’ no readin’ thang.
--Alice

The responses above represent some of the girls’ introductory comments during their first book selection interviews. The girls’ reactions hinted at their personal literary histories which include episodes of unheard desires or unfulfilled promises, book values and censorship, and potentially punitive reading experiences. Additionally, Alice’s distinction between books and reading opens a porthole to investigating how books might be operational outside the context of or in addition to reading for some, if not all, of these girls.

In this chapter I orient the girls’ articulations for their book choices throughout the study by using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis model. I also intersperse some microanalysis elements of Gee’s (2005) Discourse Analysis (DA) when possible. This analysis aided me in answering my first question, “What rationales undergird these girls’ selection of books for personal use?” The thematic overtones of the girls’ rationales in this chapter provide a strong foundation for the expansion, contraction, and shift of the girls’ conceptions of reading as they interacted with these books discussed in Chapter 6. The girls’ stated rationales will contribute to a broader understanding of how books and reading resided in both parallel and intersecting literary spheres for these particular girls. However, before discussing the girls’ rationales, I must provide some parameters and guidelines to the data included in this chapter.
Framing the Girls’ Rationales

Because of the purpose of my study, I chose not to analyze the girls’ selected books in relation to each other and in relation to the overall offerings in the study. Nor do I hypothesize why some girls chose the same books throughout the study while others changed their minds, or why some books, while desired by the girls, did not make their “Top 15”; although each inquiry is noteworthy in its own right. I have included a list of each girl’s book selections in Appendix H. There you can see the similarities and differences within the girls’ selections at the beginning, middle, and end, while also noting the similarities and differences across the girls’ selections. I do, however, reference book titles in this chapter when discussing the girls’ articulated rationales for their books. These titles help frame the girls’ rationales and hopefully facilitate contemplation about the connections and distinctions between particular genres or specific books and the girls’ reasons for wanting them.

Within this chapter, words in quotations are direct quotations of the girls from either the book selection interviews or from my field notes. I have included quotes from my field notes when I felt additional context and information were needed to better represent the significance of the girls’ statements. I have not altered the girls’ diction or syntax to ensure I am representing their words, and hence, voices, as accurately as possible. While a transcription legend is located in Appendix D, I will review common transcription markers to better ensure a more “fluid read.” Anything underlined was emphasized by the speaker. A colon (: ) indicates an elongation of sound by the speaker. The length of the sound is proportional to the number of colons. Underlined words indicate emphasis by the speaker. Single parentheses ( ) indicate simultaneous talk between two speakers. Double parentheses (( )) signify my additions to help clarify the context or reference. Any personal name is a pseudonym and I am JG.
One of the underlying purposes of this study was to provide a venue for girls who are marginalized in school to share their thoughts about and experiences with books. While I have chosen to organize this chapter in themes, I did not wish to diminish the girls’ individualities or dilute their independent voices. The girls are indeed unique and have their own schemas of books, reading, and the world. However, they also share and use a language shaped by their larger cultural communities. Due to the high degree of common discourse and sentiments and the tendency for each girl to have multiple reasons for selecting many of their books, I believe a thematically structured chapter minimizes redundancy and illustrates the overarching strength and connectivity between the girls’ rationales. Within each discussion of the prevailing themes, I include girls’ specific statements to express their individual thoughts or to illustrate thematic nuances that run the risk of being masked within the collective. Each girl is present in every theme discussed in this chapter; however, within the sub-themes, some girls’ voices are more dominant than others. Therefore, organizing the girls’ rationales thematically enables me to show both the “part” (individual self) and the “whole” (communal ideologies).

So what were the rationales of girls who were identified as marginalized readers and had limited access to desired reading materials inside and outside of school? Did the girls select books by the covers—a popular selection method used by children (Haynes & Richgels, 1992)—as they had asserted prior to the book fair? Or did deeper and broader undercurrents steer their book selection processes? According to these seven girls, there were a plethora of variables associated with book selections that both reinforced and countered the popular adage “you can’t judge a book by its cover.” While the girls may have begun their responses with “because of the cover,” what lay beneath the “cover” literally and figuratively appeared to be quite enriching.
Core Book Selection Themes

My analysis of the girls’ book selection interviews resulted in three overarching themes that narrate the girls’ fluctuation between the known and the unknown, the desire to belong and stand out, and the desire to ultimately reside in personal, academic, and social comfort zones. The girls’ rationales indicated their quests to reinforce or obtain competencies in all three domains of life. These three themes, *book access*, *connectivity to personal and social lives*, and *empowerment*, encompass academic, personal, and social domains and include a variety of sub-themes. In this chapter I provide a brief description of each theme, discuss the themes and sub-themes according to each girl, and identify the relationships between the themes and Wigfield and Guthrie’s (1997) taxonomy of reading motivation when appropriate. I have italicized and underlined the themes within the descriptions, but have only italicized the sub-themes.

Book Access

The theme of *book access* included the girls’ selections of books due to the books’ *accessibility* and *novelty*, regardless of topic, genre, or type, as well as the girls’ ability to choose without negative consequences. The girls often selected books, particularly at the beginning of the study, due to their *familiarity* with particular books, book series, or book topics via *school* or *mass media*. *Book access* was the least prevalent of all three themes, and as the study progressed was mentioned less and less by every girl except Morgan. Among other reasons, the familiarity of the books Morgan experienced during the study constituted why she selected the majority of her books at the end of the study. Morgan’s experience in this study is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6. This is not to say that the girls did not select their final books because of their familiarity with them; the girls just didn’t state familiarity as a reason.
Accessibility and novelty

During their initial book selection interviews Jaime and Chris stated they sometimes selected books simply because they could or because they preferred these books over the books available to them in the library. What mattered to them was that “I could get ‘em if I want” (Jaime) and that “these ((books)) here are better than what I be seein’ in school” (Chris). Jaime and Chris’ general statements about their initial book selections indicated that the books themselves may not be what they desired, despite their active role in the decision making process. Rather it was the freedom of choice that seemed to be initially more important to them. Based on their statements, I wondered if they selected some books for the study just because they could, regardless of their interest in the books themselves. Perhaps they were unsure if they really wanted those particular books, or didn’t want those books but didn’t know what else to offer as substitutes. It was as if they had participated in the selection process prior to the book fairs, but unknown factors mitigated that participation.

Other girls such as Jackie indicated in their initial and final book selection interviews that they selected books because they were unaware of their existence. When speaking about picture books by Jacqueline Woodson, such as *Coming on Home Soon* (2004a) and *Our Gracie Aunt* (2002a), and Ethel Footman Smothers’ *The Hard-Times Jar* (2003) during her initial interview, Jackie shared the following about the allure of unknown books.

JG: So if I remember correctly, you said that you really wanted Black history books (Jackie: Un hunh), but I don’t really see any Black history books here. Can you talk to me about that?

Jackie: Um, well, let’s see. Ummm see well I thought I was gonna want to get those books but then when I seen the-these, I just wanted these. These are about real life and we’re in them. Like not like just history. All the books here ((in school)) is about us in history. I didn’t even know these books were out here!
Jackie’s statements, “it’s about real life and we’re in them” and “all the books here is about us” included the collective pronouns “we” and “us.” Her use of those pronouns when speaking about her personal book choice signified a collective sense of identity (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) and validation (Sims, 1983). She, as a Black person and a member of distinct cultural community, is not a historical figure but a contemporary individual who experiences “real life” just like anyone else. When offered a choice between Black history books, which she stated are the most prevalent books with Black characters in her school, and contemporary fiction books, she opted for the realistic fiction due to their representational effect (“it’s about real life and we’re in them”). More discussion about books as indices of personal validation occurs under the second theme, *connectivity to personal and social lives*.

Comments such as Jackie’s were echoed by Alice when determining what books to include in the study. Alice was adamant about not having Black history books in the study because “I’m tired of always seeing Black history books. Keep ‘em out” (field notes, February 16, 2006). The girls’ discourse reinforced the need for a variety of culturally relevant literature that enables people of different cultures to appreciate themselves as central figures within a realistic story rather than the focus of the story or the subject of a history lesson.

When encountering mass media or potentially controversial books, some of the girls expressed apprehension about selecting those books. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, Morgan questioned the viability of reading *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (Lewis, 2005) from *The Chronicles of Narnia* series. During her first book selection interview she wondered if she would get “in trouble” because “we don’t have it ((in the school library)) because it’s like about Adam and Eve and like stuff like that. So we can’t have it.” Morgan’s concern about her access to a book which the school disallowed indicated the level of influence
Morgan’s school policy had over her selection of books for personal use as well as her fear of retribution if she defied that policy. Apparently, Morgan was denied access if books that contained “controversial topics” such as “Adam and Eve.” Morgan sought assurances of her “safety” if she selected a book banned from school, even if were for personal use. Morgan’s use of “we” as a collective pronoun suggested that all students seemed to lack access to books such as *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and were potentially prevented from reading those types of books in school.

Some of the other girls also needed assurance or confirmation that the books offered in the study were acceptable. Since the girls were not allowed to read picture books, they inquired on multiple occasions during and after the first book fair whether or not it was acceptable for them to select or borrow picture books and if I was going to “get mad” at them if they did. Their initial hesitancy to interact with picture books, as illustrated by their requests for permission from me, further reinforced the girls’ internalization of their school policy regarding permissible reading habits or book preferences. Additionally, even though the girls requested books based on popular Nickelodeon or Disney Channel TV shows such as *SpongeBob SquarePants, Unfabulous, The Cheetah Girls*, and *That’s So Raven*, they were surprised to see the books in the book fairs.

Candy’s response was representative of the girls’ uncertainty about choosing mass media books based on popular TV shows.

Candy: “Aah!! *That’s So Raven! The Cheetah Girls! Unfabulous!* Whoa! Another Cheetah Girl! Another Raven! You actually lettin’ us read these? It’s OK?

JG: Yeah, sure! You said you wanted them, right?

Candy: Yeah, but I didn’t think you’d actually get ‘em for us! Cool!

(Candy, book fair participation)
After reviewing Candy’s and others’ statements, I noticed issues of power and agency resonating within this theme of book access. It appears as if I, as the adult and researcher, served as a gatekeeper for books. In this study, the gates were continually open but the girls were initially wary of entering. They expressed disbelief that they would actually have access. Judging from Candy’s comment that “I didn’t think you’d actually get ‘em,” they considered my listening to them and honoring my promise almost innovative. However they appeared to adjust quite rapidly. During the final book fair, the girls did not seek assurances, permission, or indicate any wariness about selecting books which reflected their popular culture interests or books which the school might disapprove of. The books considered “new” during that book fair were books that had been present throughout the entire study but may have been inaccessible because other girls had borrowed them for most of the study’s duration.

School-based familiarity

Five girls also selected chapter books during the initial and final book fairs because they had either seen or interacted with the actual books or books from the same series at school. These books were primarily from The Land of Elyon, Junie B. Jones, Amber Brown, Series of Unfortunate Events (aka “Lemony Snicket”), and Magic Tree House series. Only two non-series books, Click Clack Moo (Cronin, 2000) and Through My Eyes (Bridges, 1999) were selected because of school-based familiarity. Every girl, with the exception of Jackie and Alice, selected books due to their familiarity of the book’s character or purpose. Alondra and Chris appeared to select more books with which they had had previous encounters. Alondra picked Junie B. Jones is (Almost) a Flower Girl (Park, 1999) because “I know it’s good. I know who this author is . . . We’ve got them in the library” (initial book selection interview). Chris selected Amber Brown Wants Extra Credit (Danziger, 1997) because “I already got Amber Brown is Not a Crayon.
That’s a library book . . . I know it’s funny because so I got this one ((Amber Brown Wants Extra Credit)) ‘cause I like the other one” (final book selection interview).

Alondra and Chris’ statements reinforced the school library as the primary location for the girls’ access to books (Fleener, Morrison, Linek, & Rasinski, 1997; Krashen, 2004; Lamme, 1976; Mellon, 1990; Pucci, 1994) and indicated a sense of security that “sure bets” were both readable and enjoyable books or were books deemed worthy by the school. The abundance of series books that were selected due to school-based familiarity was striking and elicited wonder about the presence of non-series books, especially books considered culturally relevant, in the girls’ schools. While researchers have indicated that reading series books does not hamper one’s interest in reading non-series and award-winning books (Greenlee, Monson, & Taylor, 1996; Nixon, 2000), what implications does a limited variety of books, most of which are series fiction, have upon children? Moreover, if children are searching for what they “know,” series books appear to be what they “know,” and teachers provide only books that the children “know,” how diverse are the book collections in the girls’ schools? How will students experience a repertoire of books that also capture the uniqueness of life instead of just the predictability of characters, storylines, and resolutions?

Teachers and classroom-based instruction as locales of familiarity were virtually nonexistent in the girls’ book selection rationales. Only Candy, Morgan, and Jaime indicated selecting one book each because of a teacher’s instructional decision. Candy selected Ruby Bridges’ Through My Eyes (1999) because “I read about her. I know about her. We read this in my third grade class” (final book selection interview), while Morgan and Jaime, who had the same teacher, selected the first three Lemony Snicket books for a different reason, as indicated by my following conversation with Jaime during her final interview.
Jamie: I chose these three ‘cause I read these book. Well, my reading teacher read them to me.

JG: Remind me of your reading teacher again?

Jaime: Well, my old reading teacher, Ms. S., (JG: Um humh) and um she read them to me. But I want, I want to read them to myself because some um pages she didn’t read all of it so I want to read it for myself and then read the whole book.

JG: Oh, I see. Do you know why she didn’t read some of the pages?

Jaime: ‘Cause she thought it wasn’t important enough, important enough for us to know.

JG: So why do you want to read those pages?

Jaime: So I can figure out what’s on them. Yeah . . .

(Jaime, final interview)

For all three girls, their teachers’ inclusions of books for either shared reading or reading aloud resulted in their desire to not only independently re-read certain books, but also possess them. Yet, based on what all seven girls shared with me, the library had more influence upon their selections than their teachers, with both teachers and libraries having minimal influence. This finding is similar to Mohr’s (2006) determination that teachers were absent from first-graders’ book selection rationales. It also offers a different perspective from researchers’ previous determinations that teachers have a strong influence upon children’s book choices (Fleener, Morrison, Linek, & Rasinski, 1997; Wray & Lewis, 1993; Williams, 2005) and provides additional context to the overwhelming influence of mass media upon the girls’ book selections. Perhaps the current classroom climate for these girls minimized the opportunities for teachers to read-aloud or engage in more holistic approaches to reading instruction and contributed to the girls gravitation towards another familiar domain—mass media.
Media-based familiarity

The girls often selected books based on the books’ associations with popular culture and everyday life. This particular sub-theme, media-based familiarity, is intertwined with other themes such as connectivity to personal and social lives and sub-themes such as relationships, learning about the self and the world, and finding models of success. Therefore, discussion about mass media books and their familiarity will be threaded throughout multiple discussion points in this chapter.

TV shows and movies. During the initial book fair all of the girls indicated a strong desire to read books based on popular TV shows such as That's So Raven, Zoey 101, SpongeBob SquarePants, and Unfabulous, or movies, such as Aquamarine, Lemony Snicket’s Series of Unfortunate Events, Because of Winn Dixie or The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. Fewer girls cited a desire for such books during the final book fair. Biographies or autobiographies of popular musicians such as Destiny’s Child, Bow Wow, and Omarion, and male basketball stars such as Carmelo Anthony, Vince Carter, and Allen Iverson were also selected during both book fairs and remained consistently popular throughout the study. All of these books, and others, were selected because the girls already had a strong foundation in the topic and either wanted to engage in something enjoyable that was related to their everyday lives or wanted to expand their knowledge about particular individuals. I discuss those two reasons later in this chapter.

Books which were adapted as movies appeared to become more desirable because they had become part of the girls’ media-related popular culture. When discussing why they selected Aquamarine (Hoffman, 2001), Alondra and Morgan shared the same sentiments in their initial book selection interviews.

Alondra: The preview on TV told me that it was gonna be good. I didn’t know if the book was good but if they made a movie of it, it should be good.
Morgan: I picked this one because it might be an interesting book and plus the movie, the um, the description of the movie on the, um, the commercial was really really good. So I think it would be an excellent book. It’s on TV.

Even though the book was published prior to the movie, the movie trailer for Aquamarine “sold” Alondra and Morgan onto the viability of the book. A book’s transformation from the printed word to the cinematic world, from “high culture” to “popular culture,” appeared to authenticate and elevate its appeal for Alondra and Morgan.

Morgan also extended her enjoyment to books based on TV shows, often called TV tie-ins. She selected Zoey 101 #1—Girls Got Game (TeeNick/Mason & Stephens, 2006) and Unfabulous #3—Starstruck (TeeNick/Reisfield, 2006) “because I like the shows a lot. And I think that since the shows are good, the books should be good” (initial book selection interview). Similarly, Jaime attested to the viability of selecting mass media books based on TV shows when she selected That’s So Raven #10—Psyched (Ponti, 2005), because “basically I’m a fan of Raven Simone. I watch her shows. They’re good so it’s a good book. I know it. That’s basically it. It’s a cool book to read” (initial book selection interview). Candy concurred with “even though these aren’t award-winning books, these are TV shows and they are interesting. So they are just as good” (book selection interview).

In all these instances, TV commercials or the TV shows themselves, rather than teachers, librarians, family members, or friends, “book talked” the books to the girls. These “virtual book talks” established the books’ appeal and increased the “certainty” that the books selected were not only “good choices” but were “cool” to read. The potential for a “risky book” choice was minimized through a cinematic validation of the book. In fact, for Candy, the books are “just as good” as the TV shows. This suggests Candy held the TV show in higher regard than the book.
The reflexivity between mass media books and TV shows or movies automatically assigned positive values to the books for these girls. A book’s transformation from the printed word to the cinematic world appeared to elevate not only its appeal but also its status. Clearly mass media books were appealing; virtually every girl who selected mass media books indicated similar sentiments to Jackie. Mass media books would make “reading kinda fun and watching kinda fun” (initial book selection interview). Other researchers have cited the appeal of the partnerships between TV shows and books as a motivational factor for book selections and reading (Hamilton, 1976; Swartz & Hendricks, 2000; Wendelin & Zinck, 1983).

The appeal of cinematic worlds created from books was so great that some girls such as Candy and Alondra selected mass media books because they could not often afford to see the movies. They wanted assurance that if they were able to spend money on a movie such as *Aquamarine* or *Lemony Snicket’s Series of Unfortunate Events*, they were going to enjoy it. Looking at or reading the book would enable them to ascertain whether or not spending their money would be wise.

Alice, Chris, and Jackie also selected mass media books for the aforementioned reasons, but extended the concept of familiarity and appeal to include reader engagement and competency for their younger relatives.

**JG:** And why do you want *That’s So Raven* books?

**Alice:** Because my sister likes *That’s So Raven* and I gotta get her to start likin’ readin’. So I can read it to her and she’ll get inta readin’ so she won’t be havin’ no--any trouble in school. I can also be practicin’ reading.

(Alice, final book selection interview)

**JG:** So, tell me why these are books ((*That’s So Raven*)) you wanted to pick?

**Chris:** Because I like to read them to my cousins because they like the Raven show on the Disney Channel. . .
JG: So how do these books fit in?

Chris: It goes with the TV show. Then they can learn to like reading. I’ll be practicing my reading and getting them to like reading.

JG: I see. Would that happen with other books?

Chris: No. I need to give them something they like first so they’ll get to like reading.

(Chris, initial book selection interview)

In these two examples, Alice and Chris recognized the importance of reading and believed that enjoying reading is one avenue to becoming a better and successful reader, especially in school. If you are a successful reader, you avoid “trouble” in school. Given that both Alice and Chris had experienced “trouble” in school related to their reading capabilities, including transferring to different classrooms, their decision to help their younger siblings or cousins experience reading in a pleasurable and enriching way is significant.

For Alice and Chris, books based on the popular culture of children’s everyday lives appeared to be the most viable means of fostering their relatives’ reader engagement and reader success in school. The girls claimed responsibility for “getting” their sister and cousins to enjoy reading (“get inta readin’,” “like reading”) and that responsibility included modeling the reading process through read-alouds (“I can read it to her”). This was especially true if they read a book that emulated a known and loved topic (“My sister likes That’s So Raven,” [Alice] and “I need to give them something they like first so they’ll get to like reading” [Chris]). Yet the girls excluded themselves from this aesthetic domain of reading. For them, reading these particular books meant “practicing,” not enjoying. It is as if enjoying reading was unattainable for these girls, or at least with these particular books. Jackie also expressed similar beliefs when she selected Carmelo Anthony’s partial autobiography (Anthony & Brown, 2004) and Before They Were Stars (Smallwood, 2003) for her younger male cousins.
The girls’ book selection rationales and predicted behavior with TV-based books (helping others read and avoiding “trouble” in school) echo educators and researchers’ advice on how to engage readers: share books with others, model good reading behaviors, and supply them with books in which they are interested (Allington, 2001; Guthrie & Humenick, 2004). While the girls indicated they would demonstrate the aforementioned activities to their loved ones with popular culture books, they were unfortunately noticeably absent as recipients of those same activities. In these situations they were the providers but not the receivers.

**Popular culture musicians and star athletes.** Books focusing on popular singers and musicians such as Omarion, Bow Wow, and Destiny’s Child were desired by all of the girls except Morgan and Alondra. The other five girls cited wanting to know about the singers’ lives and how they were able to become successful at such a young age. “We ((referring to MTV and BET TV channels)) talk about them a lot so I wanna know more” (Alice, initial book selection interview). In this instance, Alice indicated her passion for music by identifying herself as a part member of MTV and BET (“we”). Those two channels focus on the music and pop culture trends loved and identified by youth. Alice also desired books about famous basketball stars such as Allen Iverson, Carmelo Anthony, and Lebron James. These star athletes were loved by not only Alice but also her grandfather and father. By selecting basketball books, Alice believed she could “learn more about how they become stars and how they begin to like basketball” (initial book selection interview). According to Alice, this new-found basketball knowledge would enable her to impress her grandfather and father when they watched basketball together. Desiring additional knowledge about the pop culture icons and athletes was another consistent reason for selecting mass media and will also be discussed in the forthcoming section, *learning about the self and the world.*
Considerations of accessibility, novelty, and familiarity

Some of the girls, like Jaime, stated enjoying reading about celebrities and asked me “well don’t everyone like readin’ about celebrities sometimes?” (initial book selection interview). She and the others have a point. Nightly celebrity TV programs such as Access Hollywood, Entertainment Tonight, and CNN’s SHOWBIZ Tonight, as well as “reality” shows such as American Idol, Dancing with the Stars, Survivor, and MTV’s The Real World, most of which consistently make the Top 10 list in the Nielson TV viewing rankings, indicate U.S. citizens, by and large, have a penchant for fame, fortune, and celebrities. This fondness extends to reading material. Since 2005, celebrity entertainment readership has significantly grown, while traditional news readership’s circulation continues to decline. As of 2004, People and US Weekly, two leading celebrity entertainment magazines had comparable circulation averages to traditional news magazines such as Newsweek and U.S. News. People and US Weekly had average circulations of 3.7 and 1.4 million respectively, while Newsweek and U.S. News’ circulation was approximately 3.1 million and 2.0 million respectively (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006). Additionally, AdWeek named People magazine the number one magazine for advertisements in 2006, indicating its increasing popularity among the general public (TimeWarner, 2007). Alex Mardsen, a noted biographer of celebrities, attributed his successful career to the fact that “. . . celebrities sell” (“Obituary Alex Madsen,” 2007, para. 7).

People read for a variety of reasons and purposes. Celebrity magazines such as US Weekly and cultural magazines such as National Geographic, displayed in doctors’ and dentists’ office, verify our thirst for multiple types of reading materials. If adults indulge in these types of reading material for pleasure, then why are children admonished or restricted from engaging in similar reading practices, especially when reading for pleasure? What advantage is there to modeling particular reading behaviors and then reproaching children for exhibiting the same
behaviors? Perhaps both mass media and award-winning literature can occupy adjoining spaces on our bookshelves as they do in our professional offices.

Gaining access to new books or retaining access to familiar books as rationales for book selections seems logical and even expected considering the girls’ restricted access to books and their difficulties with reading. However, beneath the surface of “access and familiarity” lies a deeper and more comprehensive commentary on the various perspectives the girls had of books and reading and the influential factors involved in selecting books.

Under this theme of book access, books appeared to serve as mirrors of cultural and personal validation for these girls. Not only were the girls able to access books both previously denied to them and representative of their peer culture (e.g. The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, That’s So Raven), they could also interact with books that reflected their cultural personhood within contemporary settings (e.g. Before They Were Stars, The Hard-Times Jar). Books appeared to be vehicles for access to cultural texts and media denied to the girls due to financial circumstances. They also seemed to be vehicles for literary success and pleasure. Some of the girls (Candy and Alondra) sought books that were made into movies so they could “see” in print what their peers see on the screen. Others, such as Jackie and Jaime, stated they repeatedly enjoyed the movies or shows depicted in the books without having to watch TV. Books also appeared to enable the girls to assist their loved ones in academic pursuits (e.g. reading). The girls (Alice and Chris) wanted to mitigate their younger relatives’ reading difficulties and elevate their reading engagement and motivation by connecting their sister’s and cousins’ everyday lives with books, just as educators advocate.

All of these rationales appear to indicate intrinsic motivations for reading (Baker & Wigfield, 1999). The girls wanted to improve or master something, read something familiar and
of interest, and appeared to value reading. Mass media books, while familiar and of interest, are often considered to be extrinsically motivating because they provide access to social worlds and social acceptance (Baker & Wigfield, 1999). However, the girls indicated more intrinsic motivations when discussing mass media books. They wanted to read the books out of curiosity or to master a goal (e.g. learn more about athletes’ lives and celebrities), and to improve or master something (e.g. reading). Since people who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to continually and successfully read (Turner, 1995), perhaps mass media books do have more value than some adults and educators realize.

All of the girls’ parents and guardians voluntarily informed me that they felt reading would ensure their children’s success, which is why they wanted them to become readers. The girls wished to continue and extend their parents’ and guardians’ desires with their younger sisters and cousins, yet appeared to overlook themselves in the process. But perhaps their rationales should be viewed from an additional lens. The girls also selected books for personal use based on their desire to connect with the self and the larger society. The second theme, connectivity to personal and social lives, constitutes the most comprehensive and most prolific theme amongst these seven girls.

Connectivity to Personal and Social Lives

The theme of connectivity to personal and social lives includes three sub-themes: literary life-worlds, establishing and strengthening peer and familial relationships, and learning about the world. In this section, I provide examples that represent more than one of the aforementioned sub-themes. Additionally, some examples overlap with other sub-themes discussed earlier, such as media-based familiarity. To illustrate, Jackie selected cookbooks not only because cooking was an important part of her life (literary life-worlds) but also because she wanted to spend more time with her grandmother (establishing and strengthening peer
relationships). Candy selected mass media books not only because of their familiarity (media-based familiarity) but also to learn about her Black peers’ culture (learning about the world) and to become friends with her Black peers (establishing and strengthening peer relationships).

The interwoven nature of the girls’ rationales across themes and sub-themes and across individuals reflects Gadamer’s (1975) emphasis upon understanding the individual and social selves, in addition to Gee’s (2005) notions of agreement (similar results are associated with different data sources) and the complementary relationship between linguistic structures and communicative ideas. The recursive nature of these themes encourages deeper contemplation about the variety of conscious or unconscious considerations people entertain when selecting a book and how they, regardless of ability or desire, seek self and social improvement through books that were quite possibly written for different purposes. The thematic entwinement also speaks to reading response and the socio-historical nature of reader response. Readers engage in both efferent and aesthetic responses to books based on their personal schemas or theories of the world. Such schemas are rooted in the reader’s previous experiences and preferred mode of discourse. The thematic qualities of the girls’ articulations offer a less conventional view of reader response. Reader response can occur as one first encounters a text, not necessarily when one opens a book and begins reading.

**Literary life-worlds**

Familial experiences and texts-as-self are elements of the girls’ literary life-worlds. When talking about why they selected some of their books, girls such as Jamie, Alondra, Candy, and Jackie, included brief plot summaries of the books that were a mixture of illustration and title-inspired storyline predictions and recollections of their own lives. For these girls, the books, regardless of whether they had previously read them or not, were desired in part because they reflected their life experiences. At times, the book’s illustrations or titles reminded them of
previous familial interactions or the storylines paralleled the girls’ feelings associated with particular memories. The books validated and sometimes comforted the girls. It is as if, according to Candy when talking about Becoming Naomi Leon (Ryan, 2005) “she ((author)) stole my life or somethin’--a part of it. How did she know?” (field notes, May 10, 2006).

Even though the girls may have only referenced textual features (e.g. title or illustrations) when discussing their connections to their books, I use the term “literary” instead of “textual.” I prefer literary because, regardless of whether or not they read the book identified as being similar to their lives, the girls have created integrated stories of their personal lives with the books’ visual or semantic storylines. The girls author “stories” even though the books already have “authors.”

**Familial experiences.** Particular books reflected current or historical life experiences for Alondra, Jackie, Candy, and Morgan. While some girls’ recollections as rationales were somewhat innocuous, such as wondering if the characters in Don’t Say Ain’t (Smalls, 2004) experienced the same reprimands the girls received from their grandmothers when they use the word “ain’t,” others were more serious. The girls selected Visiting Day (Woodson, 2002b), Buttermilk Hill (White, 2006), and Bird (Johnson, 2006), because they addressed realistic and often distressing life events such as visiting loved ones in jail and experiencing their parents’ divorce.

When individually speaking to me while playing tennis, Candy and Jackie occasionally spoke of how they missed their dads and described some of their dads’ experiences in prison. After viewing Visiting Day (Woodson, 2002b) on separate occasions Candy and Jackie said they felt and acted as the girl did; however, Candy refuted the possibility that one can sit on her dad’s lap in jail, as Woodson depicts in Visiting Day (2002b). Their identification with the protagonist
in Visiting Day was one of the reasons why they selected the book. Jackie also communicated her longing for her mother, who was also sent away for undisclosed reasons, when she stated why she had selected Coming on Home Soon (Woodson, 2004a) and Our Gracie Aunt (Woodson, 2002a) both of which addressed the issue of absent mothers. So moved by all of Jacqueline Woodson’s picture books, Jackie emailed Woodson at the end of the study and shared how wonderful it felt to know that Jacqueline Woodson understood her.

. . . I LOVE your books like..... Sweet, Sweet Memory and Visiting Day; those two books are just like my childhood life. But the book that I like the most is.... Our Gracie Aunt, that was the first book of yours that I had read. To me I think I have a lot in common with you like.....you went to visit your dad in jail just like I did. I think that I felt the same way as the girl did in the book—like she was happy that she was going to see her dad with her grandmother. When I saw my dad, I ran and gave him a hug and we talked, but we didn’t have long because he had to go back to his cell . . . When I first read your books it made me like to read books, but when I read other books I didn’t really like reading. In most of your books, you had a part of you and it was real but it was fiction and I had never read books like that before . . .

(Jackie’s email sent August 28, 2006)

In this excerpt, Jackie detailed how Woodson’s books mirror Jackie’s life (“those two books are just like my childhood life”; “I think I have a lot in common with you”; “I think that I felt the same way as the girl did in the book”) and the positive impact of those books on her life (“When I first read your books it made me like to read books”). Jackie referenced some of her experiences (her visitation with her dad in jail) and spoke of her awareness that life stories can be shared in fictional narratives (“In most of your books, you had a part of you and it was real but it was fiction and I had never read books like that before”). Jackie’s proactive approach to share the positive impact of these books with the author reified her previously expressed enthusiasm for “discovering” and selecting books that realistically portrayed Black individuals like her.

Morgan’s rationale for selecting Buttermilk Hill (White, 2006) and Bird (Johnson, 2006) involved her emotional struggle with her parents’ divorce, which happened a year earlier.
Ooh, *Buttermilk Hill*. Yeah, that’s about a divorce and the girl’s feelings . . . and *Bird*, I thought it would be cool if I had this one because of what happens to her. Her goin’ to look for her dad because he leaves . . .

(Morgan, final book selection interview)

During my EDEP visits, Morgan did not wish to talk about her parents’ divorce but did talk about how she wished she could spend more time with her dad, like she used to when her parents were married. Days prior to her weekend trips with her father, Morgan excitedly talked about what they would do together; however, when I saw Morgan after their weekend trips, Morgan appeared quite reticent. Morgan’s desire for books involving a girl grappling with her parents’ divorce and a girl searching for a dad align with her wishes to retain the type of relationship she had with her dad before the divorce.

**Text as self.** Surprisingly, personal interests or hobbies, as an extension of the self or a reflection of one’s life habits, were not commonly articulated factors which connected the girls to their selected books. There were only a couple of instances where the book’s content or storyline was the primary reason for its selection. Out of the seven girls, only Jaime, Morgan, and Alice stated selecting books due to personal interests. In both her initial and final book selection interviews, Jamie actively sought the biographies of singers such as Bow Wow, Beyoncé, and Destiny’s Child because she loved to sing and wants to be a singer later in life. She also chose books such as *Becoming Naomi Leon* (Ryan, 2005), *Fairy Dust and the Quest for an Egg* (Levine, 2005) and *Because of Winn Dixie* (DiCamillo, 2001) because they talked about “girls um and how girls felt and stuff like that” (initial book selection interview).

Jaime expressed interest in finding books with female characters in part because in school she was reading award-winning books, such as *The Whipping Boy* (Fleishman, 1986), *The Cay* (Taylor, 1994), and *Which Way, Freedom* (Hansen, 1982), which all had male protagonists. While Jaime thought the school-assigned books “might be interesting,” she really wanted to
identify with female protagonists. “I just want to read something with girls in them. It’s kinda cool to see girls doing things in books.” Even though other girls did not necessarily echo Jaime’s wishes, Jaime’s comment reminds educators that a classroom of diverse books, which includes gender diversity, is important when offering reading materials to students (Gooden & Gooden, 2001; Sadker, Sadker, & Klein, 1991), especially those who are relying on the classroom for reading materials. As indicated by Jamie and supported by research (Booth, 2006; Smith, 1983), books possess little value to those who feel disconnected from the stories.

Morgan selected Avi and Rachel Vail’s (2005) never mind! A Twin Novel because of its similarity to her life. The novel’s protagonists were fraternal twins just like her and her brother. When first learning about the book, Morgan expressed disbelief that a book was written about her situation. That disbelief transformed into enthusiasm when she indicated she would compare the novel’s twin characters to her and her brother; “I’m gonna see if what they ((the characters)) do is what we do.” She also selected Alvin Schwartz’ Scary Stories series because “I always like to scare my family,” and “I really really love scary stories” (final book selection interview). Alice, on the other hand, selected books due to her interest in men’s basketball. Almost half of the 15 books she selected involved basketball as a sport or basketball stars. Alice loved playing basketball. For her it was “fun. It’s just so much fun. You get to play with your friends no matter if you lose or win. I love playin’.” Both Morgan and Alice sought books they could relate to and could enjoy very much: being a twin and playing basketball.

The relative infrequent evidence of selecting books due to personal interest, excluding family relationships, complemented and countered other researchers’ contentions that children select books based on their hobbies or interests (Greenlee, Monson, & Taylor, 1996, Williams 2005). The girls did select books that contained stories which supported their lives as girls (e.g.
books discussing girls’ feelings, presence of female protagonists) and reflected their hobbies (e.g. singing or playing basketball); however, these books were infrequent selections. Perhaps their interests were not captured within the books offered, or perhaps, as Alondra revealed during her first book selection interview, “I do it, so why do I want to read about it?”

Establishing familial and peer relationships

Relationships were cited as a very common reason for selecting books. The girls’ rationales suggested books were conduits for familial and peer relationships. The books, either as literal stories or symbolic vehicles for interaction, assisted the girls in their quest to become closer to their peers and family members. Alice, Candy, Chris, Morgan, and Jackie all professed selecting books either to share with friends and family or to use those books as tools to dismantle walls of peer resistance.

Some of the girls acknowledged selecting books to share with their loved ones. Alice wished to share *O* (Grandberry, 2005) with her mother because she “knew” her mother would enjoy looking at the book. Alice also said that she selected basketball books not only because she loved basketball but also to “show” her grandfather that “I like watching basketball with him.” According to Alice her grandfather wouldn’t read the book, but he’d know she possessed it. Alice often spoke of her grandfather and stated that he was the one she looked up to most. Books about basketball, as an additional medium for their shared love of the sport, conveyed to her grandfather, as an adult role model, her enjoyment of not only the sport but also their time spent together. Alice even selected mass media books that she did not like herself, such as *That’s So Raven* TV series books, so she could read them to her five-year-old sister who loves the TV series. Alice’s desire to read or share books seemed to be embedded within the sphere of building relationships with or helping her family members. The relationships which books might foster seemed rather compelling for Alice.
Morgan and Chris opted for *Nutty Knock Knocks* (Rosenbloom, 1986) so they could read to their sisters, brothers, aunts, and cousins. They indicated their families enjoy sharing jokes and believed this book would provide some “good times.” Jackie and Candy also wanted more “fun time” with their grandmothers, so they selected *The Everything Kids Cookbook* (Nissenberg, 2002). In Jackie’s opinion, this cookbook enabled her to spend some time with her grandmother, who is always busy caring for her and her four younger relatives while working, and “handling other family business.” She wanted to do something fun, rather than something related to work or school, with her grandmother. Candy offered a similar response and included Sandra Markle’s (2005) *Family Science* experiment book as a way to enable her grandmother, sister, and her to “hang out together.” In all instances, not only did the girls state they intended to read or use the books, they also intended to do it in loving environments where social interactions existed. For the girls, books feasibly increased the possibility of enjoyable familial experiences, as indicated in the Trackton community (Heath, 1983). In the Trackton community, reading was considered both social-interactional and recreational.

The books were not always selected to be read by the girls or even by their relatives. Some were considered “peace offerings” towards family members to recreate a sense of closeness with siblings or to rectify quarrels. Morgan selected *Fairy Dust and the Quest for an Egg* (Levine, 2005) because her sister, who was a senior in high school, really liked Tinkerbell. According to Morgan, if she showed her sister the book “maybe she’ll know we are kinda like ya know the same an’ stuff. I mean um maybe I can like Tinkerbell more” (initial book selection interview). In this instance, Morgan sought to reconnect with her sister through a book containing a media figure her sister liked but she didn’t: Tinkerbell. While Tinkerbell wasn’t necessarily liked by Morgan (“maybe I can like Tinkerbell more”), the symbolic significance of
the book (she’ll know we are kinda like the same an’ stuff) would, in Morgan’s mind, renew
their sisterly connection.

Like Morgan, Chris also desired a closer relationship with her high school sister. Chris
selected *Double Dutch* (Draper, 2003) and *Pop People: Lil’ Romeo* (Morreale, 2004) because “I
gotta get good wit’ my sister again. She’s mad at me and she’ll like ‘dis.” (field notes, March 30,
2006). Chris also chose *O* (Grandberry, 2005) so that she could look at it with her sister. When
probed about this possibility, Chris said she thought that while they were looking at the pictures
she could talk to “my sister like I used to” (initial book selection interview). However, she said
they probably wouldn’t read them. In all three instances, Chris selected books that both she and
her sister might like or just her sister might like in order to improve their relationship as sisters
and friends. While the books were not necessarily going to be read by either girl, Chris thought
they could bridge the intrafamilial gap.

Actively searching for peer acceptance, Candy selected a plethora of books aimed at
becoming friends with her Black peers. Candy’s selections ranged from culturally relevant
literature such as *Francie* (English, 1999) and *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), to mass media
books such as *Bow Wow* (Bakston, 2004), *Destiny’s Child* (Gittins, 2002), and the *Cheetah Girls*
series by Deborah Gregory. Her intent was the same regardless of the book: to figure out how to
get along with her classmates and school peers, especially “the Black kids.”

During her book selection interview Candy described her need for friendship and thought
if she read about “Black people maybe I’ll understand who they are when I’m not around and I
can get along with them.” For her, books were the best resources for solving her problems. She
extended her resources to books about popular musicians such as Destiny’s Child and Bow
Wow. She believed she would gain their acceptance if she could prove her “worth” through dancing.

If I can dance like the girls, they won’t tell me I can’t dance their stuff . . . They tease me and stuff, tellin’ me that I can’t step. Maybe if I read this book (*Destiny’s Child*), I can step and they won’t be mean to me no more.

Candy’s beliefs parallel Kraaykamp and Dijkstra’s (1999) assertion that “artistic tastes and cultural activities are means of establishing social group membership and constructing social networks” (p. 210). They provide an inner “sense of solidarity” (p. 210) while removing social inequity based on social status (DiMaggio, 1994). However, those particular books didn’t seem to help Candy reach her goal. Candy often talked about how she and her Black classmates always argued and while she thought reading books was the only way to enter their world and become a part of a peer community, she just wasn’t “finding the right books.” While Candy was friends with Chris for awhile, I often heard children teasing Chris for interacting with Candy and observed Chris distancing herself from Candy in public. Frustrated with her initiative, Candy ultimately began selecting TV tie-in books. Her rationale reiterates the power of peer communities, the need to “fit in,” and the status of books within her immediate peer community.

JG: So why did you pick so many TV books now?

Candy: I like the TV books better now.

JG: You do?

Candy: Yeah. They don’t listen to me about those.

JG: Those . . .?

Candy: Books, like the *Naomi* one. They say that not TV books are stupid.

JG: But TV books are OK?

Candy: Yeah!! TV books help me get along with the kids because it’s something they be talking about and know.
In this excerpt Candy illustrated her necessity to possess membership in a particular community. Since she joined the study, Candy sought opportunities to gain entrance into her peers’ social and discourse communities. TV tie-ins were the next genre of books to help her achieve that. Candy’s sense of solidarity is evidenced through her pronoun modification from the contrastive pronouns “they” and “me” to the collective pronoun “we.” Additionally, Candy began with verbs “listen” and “say” which could imply one-sided conversations. However, she concluded with the verb “talk” alongside the word “same.” Candy semantically and syntactically conveyed her advancement in her quest to become a member of her peers’ community. Interestingly, while the other girls selected non-fiction books which specifically addressed friendship difficulties, such as the American Girl Library’s *A Smart Girls’ Guide to Friendship Troubles* (Criswell & Martini, 2003), Candy did not chose that book. The reason for this is still unknown but could be connected to the power of popular culture.

Candy’s “discovery” that particular books were not necessarily reflective of one’s peer’s culture (“They say not TV books are stupid”) is rather interesting in respect to the reading material endorsed by many educators for their students. Candy initially liked culturally relevant books more than non-TV books, as indicated by her use of “now” after “I like TV books better.” Her reading preferences were more aligned with educators’ preferences for high-quality literature (Hunt, 1991). However her peers’ reception of “non-TV books” influenced her book preferences. Her inability to share common discourse with her peers with culturally relevant literature (“They don’t listen to me about those”) and her ability to exchange similar discourses
with TV books ("TV books help me get along with the kids because it’s something they be talking about") shifted her purpose for books and perhaps reading.

Candy recognized that within certain social domains she should refrain from discussing books unless they were books about popular culture. According to Candy, her classmates “don’t listen to me about those” but they do talk about TV books. Her developed cognizance of the acceptance or rejection of texts from a sociocultural standpoint is a foundation upon which she can hopefully build and create some level of friendship with some of her peers (Dyson, 1993; 1998; 2003a; Hepler & Hickman, 1982; Marsh & Millard, 2000).

When we wish to gain entrance into different communities, we often consider the similarities between us and capitalize on those similarities as introductory dialogue. Some might consider such dialogue linguistic (Delpit, 1992) or sociocultural (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) but both address the need to possess cultural funds of knowledge, or skills and practices that have been culturally developed for social and individual success. For these three girls, popular culture and mass media were the “dialogue” necessary to establish or maintain friendships. Morgan, through her use of a book including the fairy Tinkerbell, Chris, through books with musicians such as Omarion and Lil’ Romeo, and Candy, through TV tie-in books, all signify the impressive influence popular culture has upon children as they socially navigate their peer and social communities. Within the peer community inside and bordering the periphery of this study, books and reading were not necessarily valued as reading material, but the book’s subject matter and potential status as a cultural object were. Thus, Morgan, Chris, and Candy, among others, sought what they considered conducive to obtaining their goals of maintaining or establishing relationships.
Considerations of literary life-worlds and familial and peer relationships

As described here, books validate life experiences which are both unique and common. The girls’ rationales for particular books that mirrored their lives and provided some degree of security remind us that by asking why books are selected, we, as educators, can learn much about our students’ lives, especially about topics or events that they may not be willing to offer without some element of protection—such as a book. Teachers can consider books as social and personal informants, as the girls did. Talking about books even before they are read can reveal compelling information about children’s individual needs, feelings, and desires. Discussions about books can assist educators in creating highly contextualized and relevant learning experiences for the classroom.

Learning about the world

While the books mentioned thus far were socially-situated for the girls in multiple ways, there were other books the girls selected in order to broaden their knowledge about their personal lives and the global society. Within this particular theme, non-fiction books were the dominant genre in the girls’ quests for scientific and social facts. The following books, listed with both the title and author, constituted the majority of books selected by Alondra, Morgan, Jaime, or Alice to improve their understanding of the world from a global perspective. The first eight books are non-fiction books with the last book a contemporary piece of traditional literature.

1. Magic Tree House #8: Twisters and Other Storms (Will and Mary Pope Osborne)
2. Magic Tree House #12: Sabertooths of the Ice Age (Will and Mary Pope Osborne)
3. Time for Kids Almanac 2006 (Time for Kids Magazine)
4. Hottest, Coldest, Highest, Deepest (Steve Jenkins)
5. The Weather Detectives (Mark Eubank)
6. Chocolate: A Sweet History (Sandra Markle and Cherise Merideharper)
7. Signing for Kids (Mickey Flodin)
8. Various biographies of popular musicians (as mentioned throughout this chapter)
9. Why Is Heaven Far Away? (Julius Lester)
While Morgan, Jaime, and Alice selected these books for educational purposes, Alondra seemed the most engaged in learning about life and its particulars. She sought books that “told the truth about stuff like wars, how countries are different, and um fun facts about how the earth changes” (initial book selection interview). Alondra also expressed a desire to know history “so I know why things are like today” (final book selection interview). Her selection of *The Magic Tree House* series and the *Weather Detectives* books reflected her fascination with weather systems, the geographical changes of Earth, and the evolution of animals. She appeared to want to immerse herself in discovering why life is in a perpetual state of flux. She also wanted to “just know things other people did.” Her sentiment was shared by Morgan and Alice who selected *Signing for Kids* (Flodin, 1991), *Chocolate: A Sweet History* (Markle & Merideharper, 2004), and *Why is Heaven So Far Away?* (Lester, 2002). Even though Alice and Morgan selected more books that reflected their lives within the immediate contexts, they indicated they wanted to learn information and “facts we may not learn at school” (Alice, initial book selection interview).

Other girls expressed concern about maintaining friendships in the future. Every girl in the study believed that *A Smart Girl's Guide to Friendship Troubles* (Criswell & Martini, 2003), *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul-The Real Deal #2* (Canfield, Reber, & Hansen, 2005), or books based on popular TV shows such as *Unfabulous*, *That’s So Raven*, and *Zoey 101* and *SpongeBob SquarePants*, would tell them “the real deal about friendships and stuff” (Jackie, initial book selection interview). The girls selected books they felt would provide them with factual or illustrative “tips” on how to maintain friendships and negotiate the rough terrain of friendships during adolescence. They wanted to know how to handle gossip, how to talk to their parents or guardians, and how to not “mess up good friendships” (Jaime, initial book selection interview)—all important details in life. Their expressed needs and concerns, mediated through
their book selection rationales, confirmed research indicating the importance of preadolescents and adolescents’ establishment of close friendships for personal and psychological benefits (Burhmester, 1990; Parker & Asher, 1987; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998).

Within this sub-theme of learning about the world, the girls considered books as authorities. While some girls questioned the reality of some realistic fiction books, such as Candy’s challenge of Jacqueline Woodson’s portrayal of a daughter and father interaction in jail in Visiting Day (2002b), they did not consider challenging any of the non-fiction books. Non-fiction books, as “truth books” (Alondra, Candy) were the authorities on any given topic. In fact, the girls stated that even though they learned a lot about their favorite singers on TV channels such as MTV or BET or the Internet, they wanted the book to verify the accuracy of what entertainment channels facts about their celebrities. Additionally, they thought the TV tie-ins might reveal where the TV show “got it wrong” (Jackie, Candy, Jaime). For these purposes, books remained supreme to visual media-based sources.

What was intriguing about the girls’ declaration of a book’s authoritative nature was their acknowledgement that not all “truth” is truth, especially when conveyed virtually. Only print-based information retains its “truth.” The girls’ critical thoughts when discussing media-based information about celebrities and their passivity when discussing informational books suggest the girls may have had little experience with reading response or critical thought when reading informational texts. However, the girls “took ownership” of their academic and social learning, especially regarding popular culture topics typically absent from the school’s official curriculum. The girls’ proactive approach to books which reflected popular culture conveyed a sense of comfort, engagement, and perhaps power, as the girls compared, challenged, and learned more about topics which connected themselves with others.
Empowerment

The third overarching theme, *empowerment*, involves three components that relate to the girls seeking assurances of personal and academic success as well demonstrate their control and social positioning as individuals in possession of books. Again, descriptions and examples of empowerment overlap with the themes already discussed. The three sub-themes under empowerment are *successful reading*, *role models of success*, and a term the girls’ used: *frontin’ books*.

**Successful reading**

At the beginning of this study I assumed that girls selecting books for personal use would exclude school or academics. Yet the girls inserted their academic lives into many of their discussions. They chose books that would enable them to authentically complete their nightly reading homework and books with particular text features that would assist them in successfully reading a book. Instances of authentic reading, in terms of successful reading in school, are described in more detail below.

**Reading response homework.** Alice, Chris, and Jackie indicated during their book selection interviews that they selected books that would help them complete their nightly reading homework. Every night the girls had to read for at least 20 minutes and then write either a half-page or full-page response to their reading, depending on their teachers’ directions. During my interactions with the girls prior to the first book fair, I observed them writing their reading responses on previously read books, without having re-read them, or copying the backs of books as their reading responses. According to the girls, they didn’t read books for their reading responses because the activity was boring and pointless to both them and their teachers. Reading responses didn’t matter “because the teacher doesn’t read ‘em anyway. They just check it if it’s the right size. How long it is” (Alice, field notes, February 22, 2006). The perceived
worthlessness of authentically completing reading responses resulted in the girls’ active pursuit of alternative methods of completing the assignment. To them and perhaps their teachers, the value of the activity resided in the length and not the content. Their responses to or opinions about the books were of no concern to their teachers; it was an exercise in following directions rather than an authentic avenue of communication.

Given the girls’ pronouncements about the meaningless act of writing a reading response I was surprised when the girls stated they had selected certain books to complete their nightly reading responses. I wondered if the girls would read the books. The books selected for their reading response homework included realistic fiction picture books such as Our Gracie Aunt (Woodson, 2002a) and realistic fiction novels such as Locomotion (Woodson, 2004b), series books such as Geronimo Stilton, biographies or informational texts such as Before They Were Stars (Smallwood, 2003), O (Grandberry, 2005), and Dear Mrs. Parks (Parks & Reed, 1997), and mass media comics such as SpongeBob SquarePants: Friends Forever (Hillenburg, 2003).

The girls emphasized that they would read their selected books for their reading responses, which according to Chris, “would be the first time ever” (field notes, March 31, 2006); however, their reasons for reading varied. Jackie wanted to read a picture book, The Hard Times Jar (Smothons, 2003), to “see if she ((Jackie’s teacher)) would notice I read a picture book” and to show her teacher that “picture books can be good books for me to read” (Field notes, March 23, 2006), while Morgan and Chris indicated they were “running out of books to use” (field notes, March 14, 2006). Chris and Alice shared similar sentiments towards reading and responding to their books. Alice read some of her books because “when you read, these kinda books help you. It helps you read and build your thoughts for writing” (final book selection interview). Chris read the books because “I can. I can read them. My teacher don’t
know the difference but I do. I can read ‘em” (field notes, April 13, 2006). In this instance Chris used “can” to indicate reading competency not text availability of the Olivia Sharp series. Chris found other books, such as the Geronimo Stilton and Ziggy and the Black Dinosaurs series books, which she could independently read and often read aloud excerpts to me during the study.

The girls’ reasons elicited doubt about the girls’ previous claims that reading responses were pointless. Perhaps they used word “pointless” as a mask for the possibility that they either didn’t have books to respond to, or the books available were unreadable. The girls’ reasons for reading the books for their reading response homework were anything but “pointless.” Jackie challenged classroom policy by reading a picture book. Alice stated how reading could academically benefit her. Morgan and Chris testified to the need for continual access to a variety of books. All of their statements attested to the potential power accessible books have for students who are marginalized in school. These girls, who have consistently professed their disdain for reading and have expressed frustration with a decontextualized reading activity, exhibited behaviors expected of successful readers. They took ownership of their reading by finding books they could and wanted to read for their regardless of the teacher’s opinion (Chris); understood they needed to continue to read and re-read (Morgan and Chris), wanted to “share and educate” their teachers about the value of books they have deemed worthy and appropriate to read (Jackie); and explained the academic and personal benefits of reading (Alice). Struggling readers are often portrayed as apathetic or alliterate (Poppe, 2005), which these girls countered through their book selection rationales.

Personal and academic self-efficacy permeated the girls’ rationales for selecting books to complete their reading response homework while proving to their teachers and themselves that they had the ability to successfully read a book. For some of these girls, procedural engagement,
which involves obligatory completion of reading activities, appears to have shifted toward a more sustained commitment of completion, or substantive engagement (Nystrand, 1997).

**Physical text features.** Critical determinants for the girls’ book selections were books which had short chapters or were relatively short, contained simple vocabulary and “not so small words,” and included captivating illustrations or photographs. Those illustrations or photographs often assist readers’ comprehension of the text and realistically portray life (Keifer, 1994; Nodelman & Reimer, 2002). When referring to a book’s physical features, each girl typically mentioned one or two specific features which she felt would increase her engagement with particular books.

Textual simplicity and brevity seemed to be optimal for Chris, Candy, Jackie, and Alondra. Chris and Candy preferred either picture books or books with “short chapters and words that aren’t too small.” They defined words that “aren’t too small” by the font size. Books with a smaller font size, such as the font in a typical novel, indicated a level of difficulty beyond their comfort zones. Additionally, books with large font were considered “babyish.” Therefore, they searched for books with font sizes that were slightly larger than a typical novel and smaller than text in a beginning reading book. Chapter books from the *Geronimo Stilton* and *Ziggy and the Black Dinosaurs* series, independent books such as *Ida B* . . . (Hannigan, 2004) and *So B. It* (Weeks, 2005), and picture books such as *Visiting Day* (Woodson, 2002b), appeared to fulfill their literary needs. Jackie indicated her preference for picture books because “they’re not as long as chapter books so they’re more interesting to” (final book selection interview). A book’s thickness also influenced Alondra’s selection of books. Alondra often preferred “thin books” . . .because I can get more outta these than a big thick book. Thinner ((books)) help me like read and help me read more stuff. I can keep on reading more than the next day. I can read another book the next day, next day, next day. The fat kind ((books)) make me like read for weeks, weeks, weeks, months, months.” (final book selection interview)
The girls’ preferences for books that were short or “thin” spoke to variability of reading endurance and its significance to anticipatory recreational reading practices. For Chris, Candy, Jackie, and Alondra, pleasurable books were short books. The brevity of such books ostensibly enabled quicker reading experiences, provided opportunities for comprehension, and as indicated by Alondra’s statement “I can get more outta these.” Her use of the adjective “more” three times, and “another” once also reinforced the perceived benefits of thin books. Conversely, shorter books might also have indicated a desire to avoid reading (Baker & Wigfield, 1999) or the opportunity to have completed their reading homework faster. Even if the girls did seek opportunities to read faster, they were conceivably reading or wanting to read, both of which were not behaviors in which they were earlier engaged.

Alondra preferred books with many illustrations. For her, illustrations evoked a desire to “touch the pages and try to get into the book” (final book selection interview). Picture books such as We are Bears (Grooms, 2002), Our Gracie Aunt (Woodson, 2002a), and Children of the Earth, Remember (Schimmel, 1997) or the Time for Kids Almanac 2006 (Time for Kids, 2005), included illustrations that “matched the words,” “let me see what they are feeling,” and conjured a sense of calm in Alondra. Her calmness enabled “all the voices screaming in my head to talk less” (final book selection interview).

Alondra described the screaming voices as her parents simultaneously ordering her to complete her chores or demanding her attention. From Alondra’s perspective, the demands of reading, paying attention to the semantic and syntactic nature of the words at the very least, was cognitively overwhelming and confusing, like one would feel if multiple people were forcibly requesting her assistance: overwhelming. The illustrations and simplified text in Alondra’s
selected picture books enabled her to not only comprehend the book (eradicating the screaming voices) but also enjoy the book.

In their book selection interviews, Morgan, Jamie, and Chris also attested to similar benefits of illustrated books. For Alondra, Morgan, Jamie, and Chris, illustrations fostered improved comprehension by scaffolding their understanding of the events and emotions experienced by the characters. Their improved comprehension helped elevate the girls’ sense of pleasure and accomplishment because they knew they could read and comprehend the text. Confusion, as “voices screaming in my head,” subsided with some of their selected books and led to re-reading illustrated books and “learning different things sometimes” (Alondra). Given the relative ease and pleasure experienced with these books, as articulated by the girls, ownership of these books made sense.

The influential presence of covers. In my discussion of how particular physical text features contributed to the girls’ decision to select particular books for successful or engaging reading, I did not include the girls’ statements that the covers, in and of themselves, were the reason why certain books were or were not selected. Most of the references to covers were within the context of additional rationales. At times, however, some of the girls indicated they did or did not select the book because of the cover. When discussing Fairy Dust and the Quest for an Egg (Levine, 2005) during her final book selection interview, Jamie described the allure of covers. “The picture on the front of the book draws me into the book and makes me want to open it up and read it.” Alondra shared a similar view to Jaime when she stated that Fairy Dust and the Quest for an Egg “has a good painting that makes me want to know the mystery inside” (initial book selection interview). As suggested by Jaime and Alondra’s use of the word “make,” covers envelop the reader into a visual fantasy and beckon entrance into the literary fantasy. This
invitation reiterated researchers’ determinations that covers were some leading contributors to book selections (Carter, 1988; Kragler & Nolley, 1996; Swartz & Hendricks, 2000).

Book covers also established an assumed connection between Jackie and picture books. When revealing why she chose *Circle Unbroken* (Raven, 2004) during her final book selection interview, Jackie discussed the impact of the book’s cover.

Jackie: The cover makes everything look so real. It shows a girl who looks like my cousin playing in the rain. (JG: Oh, really?) . . . See, this illustrator ((E.B.Lewis)). He is always putting us girls with little braids in the hair.

JG: Oh, I hadn’t noticed that. I’ve never thought about that before.

Jackie: ((smiling))Well, you might have been lookin’ wit’ different eyes.

JG: ((Laughing)). I guess you’re right!

Jackie: Yeah. I picked it because I like the way the cover looks. I wanted something for me.

In this instance, and others, Jackie readily identified with the character on the cover as a Black girl who participates in similar activities as she and her cousin. Just as Jackie has previously mentioned, her pleasure in finding books that depict her, a Black female, in realistic and contemporary settings, resided within the book’s realistic illustrations. She also exhibited intertextual understanding when she noted E.B. Lewis’ tendency to illustrate Black female characters with “little braids.” Reviewing his illustrations for Jacqueline Woodson’s *Our Gracie Aunt* (2002a), *Coming on Home Soon* (2004a), and *The Other Side* (2001), all books Jackie selected in this study, one can see this particular pattern.

Looking at her statements from a linguistic perspective, Jackie made a distinctive racial or ethnic distinction between me and her. She used the collective phrase “us girls” as a method of unification of Black girls and distinction from me, a White adult female. Additionally, she appeared to reinforce her claim to the book, thereby denying me and others ownership of or
participation with this book. She wanted the book for herself and she picked the book because she liked the cover. The emphasis on the pronoun I in her declaration of why she selected the book was significant. She was clearly in control of the situation, unlike other instances when Jackie phrased other reasons for selecting different books with the book as the subject (e.g. “The book has nice pictures”). Also, by commanding my attention with the word “see,” pointing out a noticeable fact about the book, and then implying my racial and ethnic identity could prevent me from “seeing” what she saw, Jackie positioned herself as an empowered individual staking her claim. Yet, by using the qualifier “might,” she left the possibility open for my being able to see things in similar ways to her.

Covers also dissuaded girls from selecting particular books. When looking at the book Seymour Simon’s (1994) Big Cats, Alondra indicated that the cover looked “too nasty to even open. But I wanted to see it. I just couldn’t” (initial book selection interview). Alondra considered the cover to be too graphic for her taste and preferred to see “cute” cats. Morgan was also adversely affected by book covers. When she heard about The Breadwinner (Ellis, 2001) without seeing the cover, she expressed interest in the book. However, upon viewing the cover, she responded, “No, I don’t think so. I don’t want to read about those kinda people” (field notes, March 28, 2006). When I asked her if she would be interested in the book if it had a different cover, she said she would. However, she would not look at the book the way it was currently presented. As demonstrated by Alondra, Jaime, and Morgan, book covers are powerful influences of book selections, and I felt it remiss not to briefly mention that covers, while not a dominant rationale for their book selections, were mentioned on occasion as one reason for the girls’ book selections.
Implications of successful reading

Increasing students’ reading endurance, or the ability to read and comprehend texts of a particular length and texts indicative of one’s specified grade level (Florida Department of Education, n.d.), is a common goal of literacy educators and often occurs within the classroom. However, when reading for pleasure or voluntarily reading, people, especially those who find reading difficult, do not often take literary risks. They seek out books that reside within their comfort zones and provide joy or “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Nell, 1998). If people are continually provided books that require more effort than desired or incite frustration, they are more prone to not read—as these girls indicated. While it was unknown if the girls improved their vocabulary or ability to read denser material for longer periods of time because of their book access, they appeared to be partaking in more pleasurable reading experiences than before and they indicated the existence of reading for intrinsic purposes.

It is understandable and beneficial to challenge readers to read more difficult and dense text in the classroom. Yet it also seems sensible to allow children to read independent texts, which can include picture books. This option did not seem available for these girls. For children who have limited access to reading material outside of school, it is important that we do not unequivocally restrict their reading options to books that are difficult to read. Books which can be read independently and are deemed interesting to children are necessary, as these girls suggest.

Models of success

Some of the girls indicated they wanted texts which included individuals who embody strength, conviction, and success, or who convey assurances of the strength within females. Alondra, Jackie, Jaime, Candy and Chris spoke of females who exemplify success, while Alice
referred to male athletes as her role models for success. Regardless of gender, the girls sought models of success.

Molly Grooms realistic picture books about animal behavior confirmed to Alondra that “we are strong, loyal, and we are learners” (final book selection interview), while Beah Richards’ (2006) *Keep Climbing Girls* encouraged her to “keep climbin’, climbin’, climbin’ al::::: the way up high, like reachin’ my dreams.” Alondra also desired books that illustrated females in powerful roles, such as Ruby Bridges’ biography *Through My Eyes* (1999) and Catherine Thimmesh’s (2002) *Girls Think of Everything*. She wanted these particular books because “it tells you about women who did important things and invented stuff. People don’t know that women could invent stuff so men invent other stuff and they can’t even think about it. It’s cool to get books like these” (final book selection interview). Alondra, herself an inspiring inventor, often spoke of how people thought she couldn’t do much because she was born deaf. She also talked about how she thought her mom was strong but she often let other people help her “too much.” Alondra spoke of having to “tell people I can like do stuff, ya know?!” and thought that while she could do anything, her convictions were not shared by others around her. While she believes women are equal to men, “we don’t know enough about what women did” (initial book selection interview). Because Alondra has struggled with convincing people of her capabilities as a deaf woman (“I have to tell people I can like do stuff!”) and grappled with her belief that her mother was too dependent on others, (“other people help her too much”), she desired books that countered the stereotypes of women as inferior women and exemplified the tenacity and vision of prominent women “we don’t know enough about.” She wanted books that encouraged her to “keep climbin’ . . . reachin’ my dreams.”
Similar to Alondra, Candy spoke of wanting “books that are about our natural rights as girls” (final book selection interview) and Chris selected Olivia Sharp books because “Olivia shows you can make it on your own” (final book selection interview). Additionally, Jackie selected some books, such as The Real Lucky Charm (Richardson, 2005) to prove to her male cousins her right to play the same athletic sports as they. Jackie elaborated,

She ((the protagonist)) can play basketball just like her brother can, if that’s her brother . . . She’s allowed to play basketball just like anybody else is. Now I can show that to my cousins and then I’ll play.

(initial book selection interview)

In these three instances, the girls conceived of realistic fiction books as literary models of society that could conceivably “prove” to disbelievers that women were competent, independent and equal to men. In Jackie’s case, affirmations of women’s rights needed to be shared with her cousins to ensure understanding. For Jackie, her thoughts weren’t as persuasive as a book’s words.

Mass media books also provided guidance for the girls seeking images or models of success. Jaime read pop music icon biographies, such as Beyoncé (Tracy, 2004) to figure out how they “made it even though it’s tough. I wanna make it” (final book selection interview). Likewise, Candy and Chris considered mass media books based on TV shows, such as the Disney’s W.I.T.C.H. series and TeeNick’s Zoey 101 series to exemplify female empowerment. According to Chris and Candy, Zoey 101’s storyline involves girls who are nice and can be “cool” and “rule the school as a crew” (Chris, initial book selection interview), while the W.I.T.C.H. characters use their “powers” to “defeat super villains . . . fight for other people . . . and save the world” (Candy, book selection interview).

Chris and Candy’s interest in books with girls who are popular in school connects to their own experiences in school. Based on what I observed and heard from the EDEP director,
other girls, and additional EDEP children, Chris and Candy were constantly teased at school for their current living conditions. They also said they only had one or two “for real” friends that they talked to in school. Girls often commented on Chris’ wardrobe of only two outfits for school, her “nappy hair,” or her “need for a perm like yesterday.” She endured sexual innuendos from her male peers due to her early physical maturation, and according to Chris, was laughed in class if she read-aloud. Candy, who could pass for a second-grader in terms of stature and often had sunken eyes due to her medical condition, was often teased by her peers. She was also “grilled” by her Black peers when she attempted to gain entrance into their community.

According to Chris, Candy “tries too hard to be liked.” Their social positions in school might have influenced their desire for books that included “nice people as cool people,” (Zoey 101) and books with superheroes who help save the world (W.I.T.C.H.). They could vicariously “make it” in school through the characters seen on TV and in their books.

Frontin’ books

One of the last areas of empowerment is frontin’ books. For this particular sub-theme, the girls indicated that the value of the book was the book itself, rather than that storyline or topic. While I expand on this particular theme in Chapter 6, I feel it necessary to introduce this concept when talking about their book rationales. According to Chris, Jaime, Jackie, and Alice, “frontin’” means showing off in front of your friends or others. For some of the books, most of which were mass media books, the girls stated they merely wanted to own them and show them to others, while not providing others access to the books they flaunted. Alice in particular wanted to inform as many of her peers as possible that she had basketball books such as Carmelo Anthony (Anthony & Brown, 2004) or the partial autobiography of the singer Omarion. She would walk around with those books in her hand “announcing” what she had. According to Alice, those books were “hers” and she didn’t want anyone else to read them. Only if they were nice to her
would they be able to hold the books. Jamie and Crystal said they either read or looked at the pictures of the biographies of pop music icons Bow Wow, Destiny’s Child, and Lil’ Romeo, but some of the other girls and the EDED director said they witnessed Jaime and Crystal frontin’ those books, not necessarily reading them.

Morgan, on the other hand, preferred to flaunt the hardcover editions of the first three books of the Lemony Snicket series. She indicated that the hardback editions were “special looking and will last a long time” (final book selection interview). Within these books were folios that said “This book belongs to . . .,” which Morgan stated was “the coolest part of the book.” She indicated she wanted to select these to “show everyone that I own these.” Candy opted to select Lemony Snicket series books so she could “get even” with her sister. Her sister wanted the books but didn’t have access to them. In her book selection interview she stated she was going to enjoy “shoving them in her face and not lettin’ her have them.” The girls emphasized books as status symbols. Books, historically and currently, convey social class, power, and status (Booth, 2006; Finkelstein & McCleery, 2005; Summers, 2005), as the girls indicated through frontin’ particular books.

All of these books mentioned as “books to front” are immersed in and reflect the popular culture of the girls’ everyday lives. They focus on successful singers and musicians the girls and their peers listen to on a daily basis, involve star athletes they watch on TV, or are the original print versions of current movies. Each of these cultural arenas is distributed through popular media outlets not only for children but also adults. Music, sports, and movies are everyday topics which could conceivably be threaded through everyday conversations and could be tools for negotiation for other items or positions the girls value. It seems logical that books, not necessarily considered a coveted item in popular culture but highly valued in school and
mainstream society, would become emblematic of social status amongst their peers in school once they involved popular culture. In this particular study, not only do the girls possess something of scholastic value—a book—they also possess something coveted by their peers: information and photos of their role models and artifacts of popular movies. With these books, the girls indicated they could competently navigate two worlds as a means of acquiring social capital and achieving academic and personal success. At times, reading a book doesn’t matter nearly as much as having a book. Book ownership, as capital, is paramount.

**Significance of the Girls’ Stated Rationales**

The book selection rationale themes discussed in this chapter introduce a range of motifs, some of which are described in Chapter 6, and will help develop an understanding of how access to culturally relevant literature shifts and reshapes the girls’ conceptions of reading and interactions with books. A review of the themes and the girls’ presence and absence within each theme and sub-theme is in Table 5-1.

Each of the three themes and their respective sub-themes indicates the girls’ desire for academic and social acceptance and security within cultural spheres which often define an individual through cultural and social acceptance. The girls appeared to solicit ways and means to not only look successful to other people but also feel successful about themselves, with differing definitions of success. For some, success meant reading with comprehension, for others success meant conversing with family members or their peers.

Based on what they shared, the girls seemed to understand what they already possess in order to become successful and confident and what they feel they need to acquire in order to expand their capabilities and social finesse. What appeared rather striking was their demonstration that gaining knowledge and understanding, when related to the printed word, is construed as a passive event. With the exception of one realistic fiction picture book and the
celebrity biographies on occasion, these girls considered books as transmitters of information. The girls do not actively create knowledge nor do they often transact with the text. While I did not observe the classroom instruction of the girls, their comments about needing to “find the correct answer in books” and “pass standardized tests” during my visits suggest their classrooms quite possibly embody a transmission approach to learning, especially in regard to reading. A transmission approach to books often decreases the motivation to read (Schraw & Bruning, 1999), which is quite disconcerting.

Contrastingly, when the girls wished to seek connections with their family members or friends, the books became mere tools, with the girls as the operators. The girls recognized the value and status of the books within different contexts and used that knowledge to create social bridges towards those they wished to connect or reconnect with. As evidenced by Candy, they felt competent to attempt to enter different cultural peer groups through books. They also ran the risk of being rejected by their sisters if their sisters refused their “peace offerings” or “talking sticks” as indicators of developing more convivial relationships. For these girls, books potentially wielded different degrees of power, ranging from the academic to the social.

While I do not wish to justify the girls’ selections of books from a psychological standpoint, I cannot discount the emotional, social, and physiological changes girls experience as they begin to physically mature and grapple with the transition between elementary and middle school. The desire for independence occurs as children begin to form their identities. This desire often involves separation; however, psychologists indicate that independence also occurs within one’s social network of loved ones, friends and other peers, and the larger society (Conger, 1991; Steinberg, 1993). Separation is socially cushioned. Therefore, children feel the need to both
distinguish themselves from and be accepted by others. These needs and contexts seem evident in the girls’ stated rationales for their selected books.

It seems beneficial to also consider the psycho-social influences upon children’s book selections. We must consider looking beneath the veneer (or cover) of blanket statements such as “I liked the cover”/ “because it looks good,” and delving deeper into how literary elements such as authorship, writing style, covers, and characters, could reveal an array of conceptions of and approaches to books and reading that fluctuate between the personal and social, subjective and “objective.” The girls’ rationales imply that we do not necessarily “just pick up a book and read it.” For these girls, while the process of selecting the books typically lasted less than fifteen minutes, their rationales were numerous and illustrative of the intricacies of life. A lingering question remains: What actually happened once the girls were in possession of their selected books?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Girls present</th>
<th>Girls absent</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book access</td>
<td>Accessibility and novelty</td>
<td>Alice, Candy, Chris, Jackie, Jaime, Morgan</td>
<td>Alondra</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School-based familiarity</td>
<td>Alondra, Candy, Chris, Jaime, Morgan</td>
<td>Alice, Jackie</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media-based familiarity</td>
<td>Alice, Alondra, Candy, Chris, Jackie, Jaime, Morgan</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectivity to personal and social lives</td>
<td>Literary life-worlds</td>
<td>Alice, Alondra, Candy, Jackie, Jaime, Morgan</td>
<td>Chris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establish and strengthen familial and peer relationships</td>
<td>Alice, Candy, Chris, Jackie, Jaime, Morgan</td>
<td>Alondra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning about the world</td>
<td>Alice, Alondra, Candy, Jackie, Jaime, Morgan</td>
<td>Chris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Successful reading</td>
<td>Alice, Alondra, Candy, Chris, Jackie, Jaime, Morgan</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Models of success</td>
<td>Alice, Alondra, Candy, Chris, Jackie, Jaime</td>
<td>Morgan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Frontin' books</td>
<td>Alice, Chris, Jaime, Morgan</td>
<td>Alondra, Candy, Jackie</td>
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CHAPTER 6
THE GIRLS’ READING CONCEPTIONS AND BOOK INTERACTIONS

While the girls’ book rationales encompassed a variety of themes that addressed personal access, community connections, and instances of academic and social empowerment, their book interactions and commentaries revealed a distinct difference between their desire for the books and their interactions with these books. Over the course of seven months, the girls’ book interactions revealed beliefs that reading could bolster their social and academic success. However, the girls also defined books and reading as separate entities which when individually enacted cultivated instances of engagement and disengagement. Books and reading were not necessarily inseparable partners on some occasions. At times, books, as cultural objects, became the stories themselves rather than conveying the stories, and “reading” signified the ability to interpret both the written and social worlds (Friere & Macedo, 1987).

In this chapter I detail the conceptual journeys of seven girls who experienced a myriad of emotions while interacting with or distancing themselves from books. Their experiences, while not all pleasant, were indicative of life’s idiosyncrasies and demonstrated the continual investigation of how reading and social justice initiatives are conjoined. The girls’ experiences and commentaries also substantiated the importance of not only access to a variety of books of particular interest to children, but also the necessity for educators’ continual immersion in self-reflection on how they construct literary worlds, the sociopolitical influences of those constructions, and the ultimate impact of such constructions upon students.

Using Gee’s (2005) Discourse Analysis model, I determined three overarching motifs which helped answer my second question, “How does access to culturally
relevant literature reflect and reshape the girls’ conceptions of reading and interactions with books?” These three motifs, reading as a routinized and punitive school-based practice, the reductive “nature” of reading, and books as conduits for personal relationships, illustrate Halliday’s (1975) claim that “the reality that the child constructs is that of his culture and subculture, and the ways in which he learns to mean are also those of his culture and subculture” (p.143).

There were some distinct conceptual shifts among some of the girls. Access to and interactions with books did not necessarily replace previously held conceptions. The girls’ experiences reinforced or reshaped existing conceptions in a recursive manner. Therefore I could not compartmentalize their conceptions into discrete categories and discuss their conceptions on linear trajectory from Point A to Point B. Instead I discuss girls’ conceptual reflections and transformations for the first two motifs. I then discuss each girl’s conceptions of reading and interactions with books for the third motif. Within the stanzas included in this chapter, my statements are italicized and words included in the microanalysis process are in bold. Any underlined words were emphasized by the girls.

**Reading as a Punitive and Routinized School-Based Practice**

**Reading Defined?**

The girls included their school-based reading practices in their discussions about their previous and current reading experiences. They initially portrayed reading as a functional act in which they were to successfully master a set of skills (Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Willis, 1995) and perform well on standardized reading assessments. When asked what reading meant to the girls, the majority stated reading was solely a scholastic endeavor which involved only books, as indicated by Chris and Alice’s clarifying
questions, “You mean like reading books?” or “You mean what I do in school?” After I responded with “Whatever the word ‘reading’ means to you,” the girls independently offered images of teacher-directed activities such as round-robin reading, completing worksheets, answering comprehension questions, reading out of textbooks, which included their *Success for All*© reading basals, and being “forced” to read stories of little interest. While the girls mentioned magazines, they said they didn’t “read” them; they just “looked at them.” Some girls, such as Jackie and Alondra, seemed surprised by my question and engaged in some cognitive and perhaps social negotiation when responding. They appeared to grapple with what they thought I wanted to hear and what they wanted to say, as indicated below.

Alondra:

78 Reading **means** that (1.0) **um:::**
79 it **means** you have **um:::**
80 when the teacher **tells** you time to **rea:::** or read a textbook.
81 A textbook is kinda like a thick book for reading class,
82 and reading reading you could **uh:::** read **um:::** any kind of book
83 **but really** a textbook.

(initial interview, March 9, 2006)

Jackie:

43 Reading **i:::**; let’s see, **umm**, (1.5)
44 I think that reading is something
45 that **could be special** for me to do.
46 And then it **helps** me, like, **um::**, I don’t know.
47 It help me **e:::**; **helps** me.
48 The more I read, the better, well,
49 more I read, the better I write.
50 It’s—so reading **helps** me learn
51 **like OK**, if I’m, I read a passage or something, ((leaning forward))
52 **well, put it like this**. Readin’s gonna be with you your whole life
53 so **might as well** find out how to read for your kids
54 and that’s all.
55 So **reading** to me **can be special**.
56 **But** it’s kinda just tests and doin’ worksheets and stuff.

(initial interview, March 10, 2006)
Alondra and Jackie’s use of hesitancy markers and fillers, such as “uhh,” “ums,” and elongated words, their repetition of verbs or gerunds such as “means” “helps” and “reading,” and their pronounced silence at the beginning of their responses indicate the act of inner dialogue reified through oral discourse (Bakhtin, 1986). The girls negotiated what reading meant to them through their utterances, or the inner dialogue of what is being said or not said. After some initial hesitation, Alondra determined that a teacher and textbook are required for reading to occur and that reading occurs in a classroom (lines 80-81). Alondra provided me with “privileged information” when she stated you can read “any kind of book” but then revealed the unwritten policy—“but really a textbook” (line 82). For Alondra, “reading” does not necessarily involve personal choice either in terms of time (line 80) or materials (82-83), although, according to Alondra, it was portrayed as such in school.

Jackie, on the other hand, exemplified Bakhtin’s (1986) notion of heteroglossia, or multiple voices which are present in dialogue. Jackie used two different Discourses, school-based (formal) and conversational (informal), to discuss what reading meant and could mean to her. She initially used Standard English to define reading (lines 44-45) and included a modified version of a phrase announced daily by her teachers and principal, “The more you read, the better you read, so read!”(lines 48-49). However, she ultimately created a linguistic comfort zone, or her conversational discourse, in line 52 when she leaned forward, elbows resting on her legs, and stated “well, put it like this.” Her use of more informal variants of words such as “going” and “doing” (lines 52, 56) or “kind of” (line 56) and her lack of hesitancy markers and fillers (e.g. uhs, ums) also attested to her consideration of me as a trusted individual seeking knowledge from her.
Jackie’s positioning of the two Discourses, formal/school-based at the beginning and informal/conversational at the end indicated her desire to articulate what she “should” say to someone, especially if it was a former teacher who loves reading. Reading strengthens her reading and writing capabilities. However, she opted for a more intimate discourse to convey her true feelings. While reading is something she can’t avoid (line 52), it could be special to her (line 55). She could help her future children, which is an aspect of intergenerational beliefs of literacy access and success among African-American communities (Gadsden, 1992, 2000) and working-class communities (Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001). Parents, guardians, and elders strive to ensure the younger generation achieves academic and social success and attempt to strip away the constraints currently in place. For Jackie, that success included reading (line 53). However, at the time, she was taking tests and completing worksheets, both of which she potentially considered meaningless because of her use of the adverb “just” to imply a diminished status of the action. When I asked Jackie about her Discourse change during a member-checking session, she said she wasn’t sure if she should tell me her real feelings, but decided to take a chance and see if it would be “alright.”

Further confirmation of the embedded nature of school within personal reading practices occurred when all of the girls except for Candy and Alice expressed confusion when asked if they thought reading in school was any different from reading out of school. The girls’ responses included “Wha’chyu mean reading out of school? What’s that?” (Chris), and “I don’t get it. How do you read outside of school?” (Jackie). For them, school and reading were synonymous. Alice did indicate she read at home; however her out-of-school reading consisted of “sitting down and I got a book in my
face” and reading at church for her upcoming confirmation. Reading for pleasure wasn’t evident in her life at the beginning of the study. Candy was the only girl who clearly delineated between home and school-based reading. Candy considers reading outside of school “skimming” or “looking through a book.” According to her, skimming is different from reading because it involves choice and she doesn’t have to answer any questions. It is simply pleasurable.

177 It’s fun to **skim**
178 because when I’m **skimming** with my books,
179 or **reading at home with my books,**
180 then I know that I **pick out** books that I **wanna** read.
181 **Um humh**
182 and then I **don’t have to** do what the teacher tells me at home.
183 I **don’t have to** answer any questions about every little thing in it.
184 My **grandma**—she’s **not school-related**
185 so she **doesn’t make** me read books I don’t wanna read.
186 It’s also **fun** to cuddle up **with my grandma** before bed
187 and **feel all cozy** inside.

(Candy, initial interview, April 13, 2006)

Candy’s home reading experiences appear to be the antithesis of the other girls’ reading experiences both at home and at school. Skimming is personal and communal as she selects her own books, reads them for pleasure, and reads with her grandmother before bedtime. Candy clearly delineated between home and school reading and conveyed her disregard for school-mandated reading when she distinguishes her grandmother from school (line 184). She also emphasized her literary freedom with her grandmother through her repetition of the phrases “I don’t have to” (lines 182-183) and “she doesn’t make me” (line 185) when referencing her grandmother.

Similar to Alondra informing me what a textbook was, Candy defined skimming as “reading at home” (lines 178-179). She, like Alondra, wanted to ensure that mutual understanding about reading existed between us. Cognizant of my position as an adult
researcher still gaining entrance into her social and literary worlds, Candy invited me into her literary discourse community. In a follow-up interview with Candy, I accidentally used the term “reading” when I wanted to say “skimming.” I was still attempting to merge Candy’s reading horizons with mine. Candy, seemingly amused by my correction, responded with a smile, “It’s OK Miss Jennifer. I know it’s hard to use my words. You can say reading and I’ll know what you’re talking about. It’s OK.” Her distinction between “her” words and “my” words illustrates her awareness that we were operating with two different cultural constructs of reading and she was attempting to “fuse” our horizons. While I still wrestled with her multiple definitions of reading, Candy expertly “code-switched” and compensated for my lexical limitations.

Candy’s linguistic adeptness and compassion during my apprenticeship into her linguistic community, as evidenced above, was consistent throughout her narratives of skimming in subsequent interviews. Unfortunately her stance as teacher, facilitator, and informant disappeared when discussing school-based reading. In that context Candy described herself as a dejected individual immersed in a castigatory atmosphere. Unfortunately, the other girls’ descriptions mirrored hers.

**Reading as a Punitive Endeavor**

The girls voluntarily discussed school-based reading throughout their on-going interviews and spontaneous conversations. Oftentimes, the books borrowed during the study appeared to be catalysts for such discussions. With the exception of Alondra who enjoyed her reading class, all of the girls explicitly or implicitly discussed their reading classes as locales of literary imprisonment. Statements of habit and resignation, such as “it’s always this way” peppered Jaime, Candy, Jackie, and Alice’s recollections of reading comprehension and vocabulary exercises. Additionally, statements of constraint
or imperatives, such as “you hafta” or “you gotta do this” and “they make us”
accompanied the descriptions of the activities. Allusions to prison also surfaced during
our discussions, as indicated by Alice’s comment when asked about how she felt about
reading.

And so how do you feel about reading?
200 I feel nuthin’.
201 The same that we do every day in school.
202 Can you tell me more about that?
203 It don’t really matter.
204 It’s just sum’em ya gotta do to get outta here.
205 You do your time.
206 So you don—
207 —so if I’m bored, I just read.
208 It looks like I be reading.

(Alice, initial interview, March 9, 2006)

This excerpt is indicative of how Alice referred to reading in subsequent
interviews during the beginning of the study: reading was a habitual and meaningless
activity. Her reference to the relative unimportance of reading in school for her (line
203), her “doing time” until she is “released” (lines 204 and 205), and her illusionary act
of reading (line 208) provide a deeper understanding of Alice’s earlier proclamation in
Chapter 5 that she wanted to participate in a book study but not a reading study. Why
volunteer to participate in an endeavor over which you have no control and believe
unimportant? Her emotional disconnect from school-based reading (line 200) and her
awareness of the possibility of an engaging read becomes more pronounced in her
discussion about reading about Carmelo Anthony.

01 Hey Miss J, that book ((Carmelo Anthony)) was good! Real good!
02 I read it like in one night!
03 For real?
04 For real.
05a Man, like I missed reading about 20 pages in class today
05b ‘cause I was so sleepy from readin’ this here book.
06 Wow!
07 Yeah. (1.0) Hey, I’m doin’ my readin’ responses on ‘dese books
08 I’m saying, I’m not copying off the back of the book no more.
09 I actually read ‘em. They pretty cool too . . .

(Alice, spontaneous conversation, March 16, 2006)

Alice subsequently discussed what she enjoyed and learned about Carmelo Anthony. In this instance, Alice actively sought me out to share her positive reading experience. Her pleasure in reading about Carmelo Anthony led to a night of little sleep and enthusiasm to authentically complete her reading response. This scenario is in stark contrast to her previous description of routinized reading exercises she was compelled to do if she was to matriculate, or “get outta here.” In this instance, as well as other instances in her subsequent interviews, books in which vested interests exist invigorated Alice to engage in reading.

Candy also expressed pronounced boredom with school-based reading and referred to prison during her first interview. She described reading “long boring pages, continuously looking at the clock wondering when reading will end, and compared her experience in reading class to her “dad waiting to be released.” Like four of the other girls, one of Candy’s relatives was incarcerated during the study, and she often spoke of him and her visits with him in prison. Candy’s reference to reading class as prison and herself as an “inmate” shows the interplay between her “official” and “unofficial” worlds (Dyson, 2003a, 2003b). In order to effectively convey her feelings, she recalls personal experiences that both she and I recognize as significant to her.

Morgan offered a different perspective on the “imprisoning state” of reading during our first on-going interview which included some discussion about Sharon Creech’s (2003) Love That Dog. Morgan read parts of Love That Dog fluently and
indicated she comprehended the text by discussing the text with me after reading it aloud.

However, she began our conversation as follows.

01 Do I **have to** talk about every book I get?
02a No, *not at all.* I’d like to know what happened with you and the books,
02b but if you don’t want to share—
03 —OK good.
04 *Why don’t you?*
05 I always **have to** answer *every question* about *every book* I read.
06 Sometimes I just wanna be **alone**, ya know?
07 *OK. Sure.*
08 It’s like the **spotlight is like on me**, like like the shows on TV.
09 *Always asking questions.*
10 It’s like no one trusts us.
11 It kinda **makes** me feel like um:: uh um::: like a **criminal**.
12 Really? *Oh my!*
13 Yeah.

(Morgan, on-going interview, March 30, 2006)

Morgan’s depiction of herself as a criminal suspect being interrogated and presumed guilty by individuals such as law enforcement officials (lines 08-09) is a reminder of the Initiate-Respond-Evaluate (IRE) protocol (Lindfors, 1999; Mehan, 1979) where the teacher initiates a question, the student responds, and the teacher evaluates her response as either correct or incorrect. For Morgan, this mode of questioning every time she reads (lines 01-05) is distrusting (line 10) and accusatory (line 11), with her “crime” potentially being her difficulties in reading and her marginalization in school.

Noticeably absent from Morgan’s commentary, as well as the other girls’ commentaries were recollections of educational discourses such as instructional conversations (Tharp & Gallimore, 1993), dialogic inquiry (Wells, 1999), and literature discussion groups (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996). All of these discourses involve interactions where different and multiple perspectives are offered and valued during meaning-making processes (Almasi, 1996; Bruner, 1986; Langer, 1999). Instead, the girls
described instructional experiences similar to more traditional forms of instruction where skills are emphasized for struggling readers (Allington & Walmsley, 1995). In fact, just as the girls sought confirmation that they could borrow mass media books (Chapter 5), they wanted assurances that they would not receive any “trouble” or “consequences” if they spoke truthfully about their thoughts about reading and books. Thankfully, they had stopped seeking assurances by the end of the study.

Paying particular attention to Gee’s “d” or “language in use,” I noticed the girls frequently used verbs that connoted involuntary action such as “force” or “make” when referring to their school-based reading practices. They also repeatedly used modal verbs of necessity, such as “have to/hafta,” “need to” or “got to/gotta.” These modalities referenced assigned readings, types of books, mandatory library check-outs, reading responses, and answering comprehension questions or “treasure hunts” in their basal readers. The girls’ continued use of these modal verbs represented their lack of agency and pleasure in their reading practices and emphasized coerced practices. School does impart and control school curriculum to some extent (Shannon, 1995; Slattery, 1995); however, continual references to forced reading which elicited “anger,” “boredom,” and “sadness” (all terms used by the girls to describe how they felt about their school-based experiences) are disconcerting. These references also suggest how school-based reading initiatives, while well-intentioned to increase reader engagement, might be counter-productive. If students feel forced to read against their will, their motivation is likely minimal.

It is interesting and perhaps encouraging to note the relative decline of modal verbs of necessity as the girls progressed through the study. The girls’ individual
freedom to interact with their books and the various communicative opportunities afforded the girls may have contributed to this reduction. As the girls continued to interact with books, social issues replaced school issues. Table 6-1 indicates the frequency of use of such verbs throughout the study’s duration for each girl.

Table 6-1. Frequency of modal verbs of necessity for each girl

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Initial interview</th>
<th>Ongoing interviews &amp; conversations</th>
<th>Final interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alondra</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that Jaime’s increased use of these modal verbs from her on-going to final interview sessions is a result of her comparisons of her book and reading experiences during this study and while in school. Jaime discussed how she enjoyed “not having to do a reading response on the books” and how she “didn’t have to pick boring books that ole’ people would want read but not me” like she does in school.

**Subverting the Locus of Power through Book Access**

Access to a variety of books empowered some of the girls during the study. Midway through the study, some of the girls began expressing anger and frustration with their school reading policies. During the member-checking sessions, the girls attributed their instances of critical thought about their school practices to their ability to select and interact with the books in this study. While discussing *Locomotion* (Woodson, 2004b) in April, Alice began expressing some of her frustrations with reading.
Man-you know reading been controlling me for all ‘dese years
Now I’m in control I don’t hafta answer any your questions
or talk about nuttin’ about ‘dese books. I can just have ‘em.
You said so.
Whoa! Where’s this coming from? Yes. You don’t have to answer
any questions. What’s going on?
Nuttin’. I’m just tellin’ you how it is.
O:::K:::

(April, spontaneous conversation, April 19, 2006)

Alice’s emphasis on her new-found agency or empowerment, defined as “control” (line 300), is compelling. In this excerpt, Alice reminded me of the study’s stipulations and how she was in no obligation to answer any questions. While Alice may not feel completely in control, based on her emphasis that I told her she didn’t have to answer any questions (line 304), she does assert that she can and will possess a book with no strings attached (line 301). For Alice, it is reading that has controlled her, not books (line 289), and through her participation in this study, she challenged that locus of control.

Alice and the girls are lifetime members of the high-stakes assessment generation who have only experienced public school through the eyes of the NCLB legislation and the Reading First national initiative. These legislative acts focus on improving reading instruction through “scientifically-based reading research programs” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). According to NCLB, passing high-stakes reading assessments determines third-graders’ retention or graduation and all students’ assessment scores play a significant role in determining a school’s social and academic “worth.” These assessment scores help determine a school’s grade, which is linked to federal financial assistance, not to mention the community perception of the school as an “A” or “D” school. Given the inordinate amount of pressure felt by school administrators, faculty,
and students to pass high-stakes assessment tests with severe consequences upon failure
(Allington, 2002; Kohn, 2000; Lent & Pipkin, 2003), Alice’s feelings are understandable
albeit worrisome.

Alice, Chris, Jaime, Jackie, and Morgan consistently referred to FCAT reading
practices during their interviews and conversations. Those references suggest their
teachers devoted an inordinate amount of instructional time to prepare for the FCAT and
curtailed the girls’ opportunities for pleasure reading or even autonomous book
selections. The girls could not “be with books,” as Jaime, Morgan, and Jackie stated they
especially enjoyed about the study, but had to “do reading”—and do it well.

Chris further illustrates the power of book access to foster critical awareness
about her school-based reading practices with her diatribe which greeted me at the EDEP
entrance.

03 I get so mad.
04 Every day on the announcements
05 ((principal’s name)) says after lunch menu,
06 “The more you read, the better you read, so keep reading.”
07 I get so angry! I mean, do they have to say it every day?
08 Why they be pushin’ it?
09 We get it all the time.
10 But they got no books to read.
11a How we supposed to be readin’ when they got no good books to
11b read?
12 I just wanna not read
13 I be gettin’ so angry—
14a always pushin' sayin’ ‘read, read, read’ ((speaking in a teacher’s
14b voice?)) Sayin’ ‘Whatcha' doin’? Nothing? Then Read!’ ((grunts))
15 I hate it. I hate them. (2.0)
16 But we got books from you
17 We kinda got a chance
   (Chris, spontaneous conversation, April 11, 2006)

Chris’ school based reading policies, which included daily words of
encouragement to read (and to pass the FCAT reading assessment), and Chris’ minimal
access to reading materials clearly resonated in her monologue of frustration. Chris mentioned anger three times (lines 3, 7, 13) and hate twice (line 15), used the verb “pushin” twice (lines 8, 14a), and hinted at rebellion by not reading (line 12). She also questioned the school practices which reminded her daily to read but offering few opportunities to read what she can or wants to read (lines 10-11). Chris even implies that her school is setting her up for failure (lines 10-11, 16-17). A sense of injustice accompanies her conception of reading as a punitive endeavor, and this sense of injustice formulated as she participated in this study. Through the power of words, via book access, Chris, like Alice, rose up (Christensen, 2000) and challenged instituted practices at school that contributed to her marginalization.

Chris mentions in her final interview that because of this study she knows there are “books out there, just I didn’t know about it. I never seen books like these.” The books she particular enjoyed were various and included the Ziggy and the Black Dinosaurs and Geronimo Stilton series, which, based on her reading them aloud to me, were on her instructional or independent level of reading. Her aunt substantiated Chris’ (and her) unawareness of and delight in finding culturally relevant books such as Hewitt Anderson’s Great Big Life (Nolen, 2005), Our Gracie Aunt (Woodson, 2002a), and Girls, Keep Climbing (Richards, 2006), when she asked where I found “such amazing books for Black children that I wish I had had growing up.” Chris’ aunt then shared that she had asked Chris’ teacher to find books similar to those so Chris could bring them home to read to the family.

What was so startling about Chris’s commentary about her school’s policies and book access is that she rarely expressed anger during the study. While she had previously
questioned the reading response policy in March, her inquiry did not have same degree of passion and conviction as this one. In fact, Chris, a quiet girl on any given occasion, tends to withdraw from conflict or when she feels angry. Her aunt said that Chris is a girl of few words, but when she speaks, she needs someone to listen. In this particular instance as well as others, Chris felt compelled to share with me, an outsider to the school and a link to accessible books, her concerns. Her preference for everyday language, as indicated by her use of AAVE, which she did not often use during the on-going interviews, confirmed her passionate commentary as heart-felt and spontaneous rather than contrived for an anticipatory audience.

Morgan and Jaime also mentioned in their final interviews the democratic and emancipating nature of this study for them. For Morgan the “best part of the study was that I get to pick out the books I want instead of, like, the teachers assigning them to us. I could like vote for the books.” Jaime concurred with Morgan in her final interview, “I really liked how we got to pick books and then be alone with them. We could be free with them. That way they were for us.” Chris, Morgan, and Jamie all hint at the need for personal and pleasurable reading that begins with the availability and active selection of the books. Books were to some degree emancipatory.

**Considerations of Book Access as an Agent of Change**

Alice, Chris, Jackie, Jaime, and Morgan conceptualized reading as primarily a compulsory act performed in school with mandated textbooks and stories of little personal significance. As documented in Chapter 4, prior to this study their “recreational reading” choices for home reading were either selected by the teacher or couched amongst a minimal selection of books deemed “boring” by the girls. For these girls, previous reading experiences generated feelings of apathy or animosity. The girls likened
themselves to incarcerated individuals or felt penalized for their current reading capabilities, and were biding their time before they “got out” or were “released. They were obedient and obliging to their school’s reading requests; however, after gaining access to books the girls indicated they desired, some of them began to verbally criticize their school’s reading policies and practices and question the viability of the systems in place. The books appeared to stimulate or offer opportunities to honestly talk about their dissatisfaction with reading education at school.

The girls’ use of everyday language, as opposed to Standard English, or as Alice said, “speaking proper,” indicated their “genuine” attentiveness, interest, trust, and comfort in speaking about reading and their book experiences. The girls felt comfortable asking for assurances that their responses would not result in punishment. They also felt comfortable posing rhetorical questions about why their school demands daily reading but fails to provide them with a variety of reading materials. Such questions reflect an awareness of the injustices they believe present in their school. If anything, the girls’ revelations document their dedication to their education despite their marginalization in school.

The Reductive ‘Nature’ of Reading

Reading “is” Fluency

Not only did most of the girls initially consider reading to be a habitual exercise with negative consequences in school, they also often described reading from a reductive perspective. With the exception of Alondra, who defined herself as a good reader because she knows a lot of vocabulary, every girl explicitly or implicitly defined successful reading as fluent reading. Fluency permeated their responses when discussing their interactions with their books. The girls evaluated their reading abilities based on fluency,
which most defined as rate ("fast") and accuracy ("perfect"). Their definition of fluency aligns with a popular definition of fluency as rapid, automatic, and accurate reading (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Perfetti, 1985; Stanovich, 1986). It also reflects the current emphasis on fluency as the primary predictor of reading success, as defined by the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000).

While the girls’ initial definitions of reading were not exclusively related to fluency, they did indicate their school valued fluency as a critical determinant for successful reading. Table 6.2 provides an overview of the girls’ self-appraisal of their reading capabilities and the criteria they used for their evaluation. The self-evaluations and criteria used in the table are the girls’ actual statements from their interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Reading self-evaluation</th>
<th>Criteria used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>I'm a better reader</td>
<td>My fluency is way up there this year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alondra</td>
<td>I'm a good reader</td>
<td>I read a lot of captions on TV and I learn a lot of big words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candy</td>
<td>I'm a good reader</td>
<td>I sometimes can read the words fast enough and I have a lot of reading experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>I'm a reader</td>
<td>I'm reading faster.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>I’m a good reader</td>
<td>I read and I read real fast. I sound good when I read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
<td>I'm a good reader</td>
<td>I read perfect. No mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>I'm not that good of a reader</td>
<td>I don't read fast. But I do read with expression. In reading class we read the words but not the stories.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As one can see from the table, fluency is noticeably present and comprehension is noticeably absent from the girls’ concept of successful reading. Alice even used the lexical term “fluency” when defining herself as a good reader. For comparison purposes, a table indicating the girls’ criteria and self-evaluation of themselves as readers at the end of the study can be found in Table 6-3 at the end of the chapter.

Fluency remains an integral step in “developing effective and efficient readers” (Allington, 1983, p. 561), and one of the primary goals of reading instruction in schools is to assist children in becoming fluent readers (Morrow, Kuhn, & Schwanenflugel, 2006/2007). Reading teachers are making a concerted effort to improve their fluency instruction as a way of improving their students’ reading comprehension, especially those designated as struggling readers (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, & Jenkins, 2001). Additionally, the National Reading Panel Report’s (2000) recommendation for intensified fluency instruction, and the advent of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills ([DIBELS]; Good, Wallin, Simmons, Kame’enui, & Kaminski, 2002) fluency assessment administered within Reading First schools, are additional indicators of the current focus on fluency. Despite the well-intentioned efforts of educators to include a once overlooked component of reading instruction, fluency is a means of developing proficient readers, not the ultimate goal of reading instruction (Allington, 1983; 2001). Perhaps educators have overcompensated for prior neglect and are designing fluency-oriented instruction based on a “surface construct of fluency” (Pikulski & Chard, 2005).

Fluency, once considered accuracy, automaticity, and prosody, seems to have been reduced to a competition pitting students against each other, with the winner being the person who correctly read the most amount of words in the least amount of time
Rasinski (2004). Resultantly, the girls considered themselves either “good” or “bad” readers based on their rate and accuracy, not whether they understood or even connected to the stories read. Reading continues to be an impersonal performance of skill rather than “thoughtful literacy” (Allington, 2001) for these girls.

While every girl except Alondra spoke of fluency on multiple occasions throughout the study, Alice appeared the most influenced by the need to become a fluent reader. Fluency permeated Alice’s “official” and “unofficial” worlds. When recollecting a previous reading experience which involved her mother, Alice shared the following

200 I was reading this book
201 And I went on my momma’s job
202 And she said, um, “I can be done with that in 20 minutes”
203 And I said, I said, “I can too
204 but I just be ((laughing)), I just be too busy,
205 so I can’t read it that much,
206 so I gotta read it day by day.”
207 And she said, “Oh, I thought you be reading real slow.”
208 And I was like, “No, I don’t read slow.”
209 I got fluency. ((smiling))
210 Yeah.
211 Fluency.

(Alice, initial interview, March 2, 2006)

While Alice’s narrative could have involved any type of reading experience, she chose to share a dialogue of her and her mother which held an air of competitiveness (lines 202-208) based on one’s reading rate. Even her last three statements, “I got fluency. Yeah. Fluency” (lines 209-211), punctuated by deliberate silence in between each line and accompanied by a smile, appears poetic and contains an element of satisfaction. Those three lines exemplify tonal semantics of AAVE (Smitherman, 1977), which emphasize particular sounds in order to convey importance. In this particular
instance, fluency, hence, school-based discourse, helped define Alice’s out-of-school, familial reading experiences.

Alice, cognizant of the school’s emphasis on fluency as an indicator of reading success, also bore the responsibility for ensuring that her younger siblings did not experience “trouble” in school. While discussing her interactions with That’s So Raven books Alice shared how concerned she was for her brother’s and sister’s reading performances.

98 My brother. He reads this one to me.
99 He’s not a readin’ person
100 But I try to let him read to get his fluency up.
101 ‘Cause his fluency is very low an’ he in the fourth grade.
102 An’ I just have to read and read
103 And ‘den I read to him
104 To try to figure out to tell him how fast he need to read.
105 Ya gotta have good fluency!
106 In school that’s what we always talkin’ about.
107 And he like Raven.

(Alice, on-going interview, March 28, 2006)

Alice, committed to helping her brother succeed in reading, believed fluency, or reading fast, was the critical factor for success in school. Acknowledging his difficulty in reading based on his reading rate (lines 99, 101), Alice modeled the reading process for him. However, in doing so, she engaged in multiple re-readings (line 102) which could also benefit her (Faust & Glazer, 2000; Nist, 1996; Samuels, 1997). Alice is genuinely striving to ensure that both she and her brother are academically successful. From her point of view, their reading rates constituted their success, not understanding. Literature discussions or even basic comprehension questions did not enter their experiences with these particular books. Her adoption of school-based discourse, as evidenced by her repeated use of formal terms (fluency; lines 100, 101, 105), her validation of her
approach (line 106), as well as her reiteration of what appears to be a school mantra “You gotta have good fluency!” (line 105) reinforces her commitment to both reading and school. Alice shared at least three additional instances of fluency-related discussions and behaviors at home throughout the study and mentioned reading to her sister to help ensure her sister avoids “trouble” in school. Chris and Jackie described similar activities with their younger relatives in their on-going interviews.

When reviewing the types of books Alice, Chris, and Jackie chose to read to their younger relatives, the majority of the books were mass media books such as That’s So Raven or non-fiction books about famous athletes. According to the girls and indicated by Alice (line 107), these books were chosen because their relatives were familiar with and enjoyed either the TV shows or the athletes. When thinking about the possibility of a reciprocal relationship between comprehension and fluency (Pikulski & Chard, 2005; Samuels, 2002), it is interesting that the girls consciously chose books with familiar plots or storylines and engaging topics for their younger siblings and cousins. Their familiarity with either the episodes or the athletes would enable them to focus solely on reading the words accurately and quickly rather than attending to the plot. This then complicates the notion of fluency contributing to comprehension and vice versa by bringing in the social context and personal schemata of the individuals reading.

To further illustrate the pervasiveness of fluency, Jackie, Chris, Morgan, and Jaime re-enacted a fluency session during one of my EDEP visits in March. While I was speaking with Alondra, the girls replicated a fluency assessment form on a white board, complete with a box for errors, time, and copied the first couple of pages of the picture book Freedom School, Yes! (Littlesugar, 2001). They then requested my presence to
observe their fluency performances. They modeled the fluency assessment to perfection, including the introductory script a teacher often reads. Although not every girl could read the excerpted passage fluently, all of the girls were proud of their accomplishments and sought my acknowledgement and praise that they were competent individuals who could participate in literacy activities with immediate success. They asked me how they “did,” if I was impressed with their abilities to read fast, and if this was something I wanted to videotape to show others.

Jackie, Morgan, Jaime, and Alice also would ask me if I wanted to time them reading aloud to see if they were reading “fast enough” or “good enough,” and Candy spoke of her classmates laughing at her and even bullying her if she didn’t read their basal story fast enough. I better understood their rationales for “thin” or “short” books mentioned in Chapter 5 when the girls indicated they used those types of books for their own fluency practice. Recalling the girls were considered marginalized or struggling readers and professed an avid distaste for and perhaps distrust in reading, I was impressed by the diligence and desire to become successful readers. However, their operational definition of a successful reader seemed restricted to fluency and barren of vocabulary development, comprehension of characters and plot, personal connections, and lively discussions. Knowing that, one can empathize with Chris who said “I try to read fast enough but I still have trouble. I don’t get it. Why?”

**Modes of Questioning**

In addition to initially defining reading as an activity which involves speed and accuracy, the girls conveyed beliefs that reading requires little thought and that reading responses are simply retellings. These beliefs were reified during their on-going interviews as they responded to my questions. Our “reading horizons,” or reading
schemata which are formulated by our socio-historical experiences, clearly resided in
different referential spheres. This was true for each of the girls; however, Morgan,
Alexis, Jackie, and Jaime seemed to be affected the most.

Even though I had piloted my open-ended questions on struggling readers in past
large and small scale studies with struggling readers, particular questions such as “What
kind of experiences did you have with this book,” or “What came to your mind when you
are reading the book?” caused quite a bit of consternation. I was met with physical
expressions such as furrowed brows, wide-eyed looks, and frowns. The girls’ verbal
responses to these questions during the months of March and April included some of the
following statements.

My teachers ask me what I learn from it, but they don’t say what is in my mind,
what I think. Can we talk about something else? (Candy)

We don’t talk about books. We do our reading responses and answer questions
about the book. What do you want me to say? (Chris)

What you said don’t make any sense. What does my experience or feelings have
to do with the book? (Jackie)

These questions are hard! No one asks us these kinda questions. I don’t know if
it’s right. Can I just tell you about the book? (Jaime)

The girls were quite honest about their inexperience with conversations. They felt
confused or uncomfortable about discussing their aesthetic experiences with text and they
wondered about the relevance of their personal responses to the act of reading or even
book interactions. Their familiarity consisted of efferent reading with the intent to
correctly answer comprehension questions or correctly retell the story. Reading or even
talking about books outside the domain of recollection was initially inconceivable, as
evidenced by their use of “no one” and “we don’t ~.” Both the girls and I seem to have
been members of different communities of reading practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

Yet the incomprehensibility of my requests for their personal comments and opinions about the books did not necessarily result in the girls’ explicit avoidance. With the exception of Candy, who suggested we change the topic to something she was knowledgeable about, the girls responded with their own inquiries. They sought understanding about the relevance of my question to their previous experiences and even asked what I wanted to hear from them. Their inquiries suggest their desire to gain entrance into a different community of readership that was an integration of what they knew and what I knew—a fusion of horizons.

Because of the girls’ unfamiliarity and stated discomfort with my initial questions, I welcomed the girls’ retelling of the books they had read. I also modeled what I meant by experiencing books or connecting to the book through clarifying statements or sharing how I or other children their age might respond to books. While Alondra, Chris, and Candy opted to consistently respond in the form of retellings, two of the girls, Morgan and Jackie, claimed ownership of the interview process on four separate occasions by switching roles with me and becoming the interviewer after they had completed their retellings. They asked me to not only retell the stories of books they had selected (their horizons) but also asked similar questions to mine about my experiences, feelings, and personal thoughts (my horizons) of those books. Whether the role reversals were for me to experience what they experienced when I asked questions or an attempt to determine how to respond “correctly” to my queries is unknown; however, over time, the girls
commented less frequently about the types of questions and provided both retellings and personal connections.

Morgan’s efforts to join the reading community I had created through my mode of questioning caused conflict within her school-based reading community toward the end of the study. During one of our interviews Morgan asked if I could just ask her what the books were about. While she thought the questions I asked were “kinda cool and different” she had begun to respond to books in class as she would respond to me and was “getting them wrong.” She was becoming confused about how she wanted to respond and how she should respond, and she wanted to eliminate her confusion. Even though I agreed not to ask those particular questions as follow-up questions after her book retelling, Morgan and I unfortunately did not engage in any subsequent interviews. When I asked to speak with her, Morgan told me she didn’t want to talk about the books and cited “being tired” or having too much reading homework to do.

The experiences depicted thus far in this chapter can often be found in articles about adolescent readers, often male, who are perceived or portray themselves as disengaged or alliterate readers (Alvermann, Hagood, Heron-Hruby, Hughes, Williams, & Yoon, 2007; Brozo, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Wilhelm, 2001). The frequency of narratives concerning struggling male adolescents’ reading experiences is logical since an overwhelming number of school-aged males are placed into remedial reading classes and consistently under-perform on standardized reading assessments when compared to females (Brozo, 2002). Additionally reading can be a socially prescribed activity geared toward females (Brozo, 2002; Millard, 1997; Pidgeon, 1994; Willinsky & Hunniford, 1993). However the individuals within this narrative are elementary-aged females and
they are experiencing what education researchers have distinguished as adolescent perceptions and behaviors. While I’m not advocating an extrapolation of seven girls to the entire school-aged female population, I believe it is significant that literacy researchers’ findings related to adolescents’ perceptions of reading are similar to the perceptions articulated or demonstrated by these elementary-aged girls. Since elementary school has been purported to be “last frontier” for engaged learning based on exploration and inquiry, and any subsequent literacy learning in secondary school lacks pleasure due to an emphasis on competencies (Williams, 2004), I am concerned about the girls’ articulation of experiences that exclude exploration and inquiry and emphasize skill-based academic literacy. The third motif, books as conduits for personal relationships, also elicits concern about the lasting effects of the current de-emphasis on culturally relevant literature in schools (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2005/2006).

**Books as Conduits for Personal Relationships**

While the girls’ discourses during the first half of the study consistently conveyed reading as a punitive and reductive experience which often lacked personal connection, their discourses during the second half of the study indicated conceptual shifts about reading and offered different perspectives about books and their association to reading. Increased opportunities to spend time with books lead to more frequent conversations outside the realm of school. The girls began describing books and reading as tools which were both “social glue” and “social dividers” (Dolby, 2003, pg. 258). They also reinforced previously stated sentiments during their book selection interviews that books and reading could serve as opportunities to understand the self and society.

In Chapter 5 and the first half of this chapter, I presented the girls collectively under each theme or subtheme to indicate the threaded commonalities of the girls’
rationales and experiences with books. However, for this particular theme, *books as conduits for personal relationships*, I feel it is more beneficial to discuss each girl individually. Like reading responses, establishing relationships are personal endeavors which are couched within particular social and cultural environments. While all of the girls considered books as artifacts or tools, how they wielded the tools and what they wanted to build or tear down often differed. Because each girl emphasized different ways of developing or distancing relationships or connections with themselves and others, I believe individual descriptions would honor their individual approaches to books and reading. At the end of this section, I will discuss what overlapping features existed between the girls.

**Establishing Power and Solidarity: Alice’s Book and Reading Experiences**

Referenced earlier in this chapter, Alice spoke of how this study had enabled her to take control of her reading process, which had “controlled” her for many years. She further conveyed her sense of new-found power in her discussions of her book experiences. During the study, Alice publicly proclaimed herself the “gatekeeper” of books she had specifically requested for the study that represented her interests, such as the professional basketball athletes, or any book that particularly personally resonated with her, such as Jacqueline Woodson’s (2004b) *Locomotion*. Alice reminded the other girls and me with a stern “You know ‘dese my books!” on at least eight separate occasions that certain books were unattainable/untouchable because she had “called ‘em.” She shared stories with me where she would promise a friend she’d share her books with her only to “forget” and return the books without sharing them. She also refused to return books, such as *O* (Grandberry, 2005), citing both her desire to re-read it and because others wanted access to it.
Alice seemed to relish her ability to control what books others could gain access to, even her family members and neighbors. She often laughed or smiled when she spoke of her rejection of other’s requests to borrow or look at the mass media books and clearly enjoyed her status as a literary gatekeeper. The following example illustrates her joy in being in “control” of particular books.

174 Hey **you wanna hear** what happened? ((smiling widely))
175 *Sure!*
176 Well, **I told my mom** about the book ((O))
177 and she wanted to take a look at the book.
178 **I told her I’d take** a picture of it **for her** ((still smiling))
179 and she said “For real?”
180 and I said yeah.
181 **I told her** this was **my book**
182 but **I’d let her** have pictures to see what she be missin’. ((laughing))
183 My auntie’s friend wanna get a picture of ‘dis book,
184 so I took her one.
185 But I got the book.
186 They just got some ole’ pictures.
187 I got the book. ((laughing))

    (Alice, on-going interview, April 20, 2006)

Alice demonstrated her command of not only sharing the story but also the events which created the story from the onset. She invited conversation by tapping into my curiosity and accompanying her invitation with a smile (line 174), something she rarely did during the study. Alice focused on how she teased her mother with *O* (Grandberry, 2005), a book which chronicles the life of Omarion, a young and popular R&B musician both she and her mother indicated they love on a couple of occasions during the study. Alice possessed the book but her mother and auntie were privy only to selective photos of the book taken by Alice. Just as adults have determined what books Alice could experience or read in the past, Alice determined what her mother could experience. Based
on her continual smiles and laughter throughout her narrative, Alice relished her newfound role in this particular situation.

Alice also indicated her sense of power and control through her repetition of “I got the book,” (lines 185, 187) and her ability to “tell” (lines 176, 178, 181), her mother and her auntie’s friend that she would “let” them have reminders of “what they were missin’” (line 182). These “reminders” were poor replicas of the original which she possessed, judging from Alice’s use of the words “just” and “ole’” (line 186) between the statement “I got the book” (lines 185, 187). In this scenario, Alice clearly delights in her ability to restrict access to a cultural artifact—an autobiography of a very popular musician—to others who desire it.

Furthermore, Alice expressed entrepreneurial behavior related to the athlete biographies and other mass media books. She twice admitted to allowing her male peers borrow the books in exchange for completing her homework. However, according to Jackie, she sometimes received a failing grade on her homework because the answers were incorrect. Jaime, Morgan, Chris, and Jackie further attested to Alice’s perception of the social value of particular books during my conversations with them. According to the girls, Alice fronted the basketball books around her classmates, “carrying them around, showing them to people but not lettin’ anyone read it. They could just look at it and laugh at the pictures.”

The summer brought a new opportunity for Alice: becoming a literary broker. During our final interview over the summer, Alice mentioned selling her Lil’ Romeo book to a neighbor because “it be old now. He’s ((Lil’ Romeo)) all grown up but they don’t really know that. Besides I had already read it. Now I be readin’ a newer book
about Romeo that you got me and I got me some money.” Alice also stated that she charged others a fee to borrow some of the books she wasn’t going to read; however, she did not state which books those were. Cognizant of the social value associated with mass media books, especially books about popular athletes and musicians, Alice considered book ownership to be financially advantageous. Not only did she gain access and ownership of books, she created opportunities which benefited others who also had limited access to books and economically benefited her. The appeal of a book is not always intrinsic; it is something to be viewed in context to the larger socioeconomic and sociopolitical surroundings (Hunt, 1991).

In addition to exhibiting entrepreneurial behaviors related to books, Alice conceived of books as bridges for familial communication. During her initial interview and when speaking to her peers during my visits, Alice spoke of her bond with her grandfather. She described their experiences together, usually in reference to watching basketball games on TV or playing basketball. However, her mother and grandmother, noticeably absent from much of her conversations, became central figures in her narratives about her experiences with books such as *Dear Mrs. Parks* (Parks & Reed, 1997), *Carmelo Anthony* (Anthony & Brown, 2004), and *Mr. Chickee’s Funny Money* (Curtis, 2005).

Despite her barrier to the book *O*, Alice’s mother apparently read and approved of *Carmelo Anthony* and *Mr. Chickee’s Funny Money*, which surprised Alice. Whenever Alice spoke of discovering her mother had read her books, she would conclude either wistfully or with incredulity “An’ she actually read ‘em!” Alice also spoke of emulating her mother during her reading experiences.
With these here books I would walk ‘round the room and not hear anyone ask me anything. Is that what happened? Yeah, a lot of ‘em. Most of ‘em. Like the ones that all were all about basketball. My momma do that too. I say “Ma!” and she don’t hear me. Then she’ll say “Girl, you know I be readin’ my book!” and I’m like “Mmm Hummh.” So with these books I be doin’ the same thang and we be laughin’ about it.

(Alice, final interview, August 28, 2006)

In this excerpt, not only did Alice indicate her engagement in the storylines (line 189) but she also enjoyed enacting similar reading patterns to her mother—pacing the floor and being inattentive to one’s surroundings because of her textual immersion (lines 196-198). In subsequent interviews or conversations, Alice stated she doesn’t talk to her mother about the books themselves; however, when discussing their similar reading behaviors, she “felt good” and was happy to talk about other commonalities she had to her mom, such as their favorite musicians, dance, and church. For Alice and her mother, the act of reading contributed to their relationship more than a book’s content.

The books Alice borrowed also improved her relationship with her grandmother. During her initial interview, Alice stated she felt distant to her grandmother and cited limited opportunities to interact with her. However, showing her grandmother Dear Mrs. Parks (Parks & Reed, 1997) resulted in a sense of intimacy between the two. Dear Mrs. Parks is a compilation of Rosa Park’s responses to children’s requests for additional information about her life or seeking her advice on a variety of topics. While not necessarily a history book, this text generated a discussion of her grandmother’s experiences during segregation and the Civil Rights movement.
I showed this Rosa Park book to my grandma
An’ **we actually talked** about it.
She said it was a good book, **too**.
She tole me her experiences back then.
And **we talked** about how she ((Rosa Parks))
did a lot for like **us Black** people.
**We** don’t usually talk about stuff like that.
**We’ve** been **talking more** lately. (3.0)
*Um humh*
Um, I’m thinkin’ I’m gonna give this book to my grandma.

(Alice, on-going interview, April 25, 2006)

Interestingly, while Alice typically restricted her peers and adult family members from access to the books she desired, she offered this book to her grandmother, someone whom she had indicated was emotionally distant from her. Her grandmother approved of Alice’s gesture (lines 252-253) and shared personal experiences from an era rife with racial animosity and turmoil for African-Americans in the United States. Alice’s use of the word “actually” (line 251) and admission that such conversations were rare (line 256) indicated her surprise when her grandmother accepted her physical offering (book as artifact) and symbolic offering (request for personal interaction). She formulated a “fictive kinship,” or collective identity (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) with her grandmother and their shared heritage through her use “**us Black people**” (line 255) and her references to both her and her grandmother as “**we**” instead of “**I and she**” (lines 256-257). When asked about this statement during member checking, Alice confirmed that she wanted to make sure I knew she was talking about her as a Black person and not as a child.

This positive experience with her grandmother created conversations between her and her grandmother, as indicated in line 257, which contributed to her decision to give the book to her grandmother (line 259). While Alice didn’t share every book she selected
or borrowed with her grandmother, she told me she did think about what her grandmother might like to see with her, such as Julius Lester’s (2002) *Why is Heaven So Far Away.* On a separate occasion Alice spoke of how reading the Rosa Parks book assisted her in navigating the complexities of life, “like injustice and how you can make education help you be successful in life.”

For Alice, access to culturally relevant books enabled her to assume a hierarchical position of power amongst her peers which provided her with other academic benefits beyond the simple pleasure of ownership, such as completed homework, or extra money from book sales. Books also helped bridge familial relationships with her mother and grandmother that, based on Alice’s statements, were previously distant and detached. These books paved entryways to renewed dialogue about their heritage as not only African-Americans but also as people who enjoy reading

**Obtaining Social Worth: Chris’ Book and Reading Experiences**

Like Alice, Chris considered books to be, in part, means of elevating her social status. Books improved Chris’ image as a student and reader to her teacher and she benefited from the books without having to physically read them. Chris’ previous statements about her book selection rationales, included in Chapter 5, continued in her two on-going interviews.

101 I got these books (*Quinnie Blue* and *Lies and Other Tall Tales*)
102 because Ms. T. asked me to bring in books like the other one.
103 What other one?
104 The Big Life one (*Hewitt Anderson’s Great Big Life*) with all the pretty pictures of Black people
106 Oh, Ok. Why did she want those books?
107 ‘Cause people in my class like books about Black people.
108 We like to hear her read ‘em to us.
109 So that’s why you’re bringing them in?
110 Well, I wanna show her that I’m good.
111 I can do good in reading.
These are **good books**.
They’re short enough to read in class
and then we all get to hear ‘em
and **I got them** for her.

(Chris, on-going interview, April 13, 2006)

Chris’ class (line 107) is a special education class she transferred to when she misbehaved in school. During the study, Chris was a member of this class until the last few weeks of school. In these particular stanzas, Chris not only mentioned the appeal of and desire for books with Black characters, she indicated the pleasure of read-alouds (lines 107-108). While Chris earlier indicated she was a good reader because she was “reading faster,” (see pgs. 18-19), she expands that definition here to include individuals who can identify “good books” and assist a teacher in accessing those books.(lines 110-115). In this case, a good book was one which included Black characters and appealing illustrations (lines 101-108), was short (line 113), and could be read-aloud in class. By serving as an intermediary between people and books, Chris seemingly became a valuable member of her class.

The books *Quinnie Blue* (Johnson, 2000) and *Lies and Other Tall Tales* (Hurston, 2005) also held personal interest for Chris. Two weeks earlier Chris experienced some difficulty reading aloud and comprehending both books. By loaning her teacher these books, Chris would not only represent a “good reader,” (lines 110-111) and help her class gain access to “good books,” (112-115), she would also enjoy stories which were inaccessible due to their level of difficulty. When I sought confirmation from Chris of my interpretation, she responded with a wide grin, twinkling eyes, and shrugged shoulders. I interpreted her gestures as an affirmation.
Books also helped strengthen relationships between Chris and her family members. While Chris didn’t mention the effectiveness of the books she selected as peace offerings for her sister (see Chapter 5), she did speak of reading with her younger cousins. In contrast to Alice, Jaime, Candy, Jackie, and Morgan, who all initiated contact with their family members through books, Chris’ cousins were the initiators in their book-based interactions. During her on-going interviews, Chris spoke of her cousins as nuisances, consistently “bugging” her to read to them her “nice books.” However, by the second interview, Chris admitted reading to her cousins was beneficial for everyone.

260 Once I got some books I could read, it was fun.
261 We had a good time together.
262 Although she would start cryin’ if she didn’t get to turn the page, 263 and then she’d leave out. (JG: Really?)
264 but she’d just come back (JG: Um humh)
265 I could get to enjoy reading
266 and I didn’t need to read fast.
266 We get along better after readin’.
267 Readin’ can be kinda fun.

(Chris, on-going interview, May 11, 2006)

The cyclical nature of Chris’ narrative, beginning with fun (line 260) and ending with fun (line 267), emphasized the pleasure Chris experienced during her shared reading time. Not only was it personally pleasurable to read books she could read (line 260), it was pleasurable to spend time with her little sister (lines 261, 266). Her use of ability statements (e.g. “I could read,” line 260; “I could get,” line 265) provides striking contrast to her earlier depictions of reading as constitutive of speed and her participation in a punitive, school-based endeavor. While she did associate reading with reading rates (line 266), her association reflected speed to be unnecessary for an enjoyable experience. There was even a hint of recognition of the potential pleasure of reading in line 265 when Chris stated “I could get to enjoy reading.” Chris reiterated the potential joy of reading at
the end (line 267) and alluded to the mutual benefits of shared reading (line 266). Chris’ shared reading experiences with her younger cousins were the only occasions where she expressed to me a genuine joy for reading books.

**Extending the Self: Jaime’s Book and Reading Experiences**

Jaime’s book experiences varied slightly from Alice and Chris’ experiences. Unlike Alice and Chris, Jaime often shared her *Bow Wow, Beyoncé* and *Destiny Child* books with her friends and suggested that if they wanted access, they could talk to me about “settin’ up a different kind of girl’s club.” She also shared *That’s So Raven* books with a boy she thought was cute because

43 he’s a fan like me
44 and I kinda like him.
45 I let him see it because we don’t have those books here at school
46 and I know he’d like to see it.
47 But I wouldn’t let ‘em take it home
48 ‘cause it was mine.
49 We aren’t like that just yet.

(Jaime, on-going interview, May 25, 2006)

When peers who were not Jaime’s friends asked to see her books, she adamantly denied them access.

127 They would come up and askin’ to see the pictures
128 and I told them no!
129 They didn’t do nuthin’
130 to deserve to see ‘em.

(Jaime, on-going interview April 26, 2006)

Recall that Jaime ultimately wanted to be a famous singer and selected R&B and pop musician biographies to gain insight into the world of musical fame and fortune. For her, those books not only represented her interests, but also her desires. For Jaime, access to particular mass media books, which were reflections of her identity as a girl interested in music and popular culture, was a privilege earned through trust and established
friendships. Book access also symbolized her attempt to communicate with a boy of romantic interest (line 44). In each instance, her peers “read” the book as a symbolic artifact, a physical representation of Jaime’s self, as opposed to “reading” the book as a literary text. These books were social stories rather than literary stories, and only Jaime determined who had “access.”

Like Chris, Jaime also bonded with her little brother through books. However, unlike Chris, Jaime consciously used books as the primary medium to develop her relationship with her brother.

43 When school was out
44 I was like really busy at my mom’s day care every day.
44 But when I got home I’d say
45 “John, I’m gonna read you a bedtime story”
46 and he was like “OK, but can I choose it?”
47 And he chose Bow Wow.
48 So you were reading Bow Wow to him?
49 Yeah. And we sat next to each other and I read that to him.
50a Then I started reading Charlie and the Chocolate Factory to him a few days
50b afterwards
51 No wait, I started reading Beyoncé.
52 Then I read that one ((Charlie and the Chocolate Factory))
53 We had time to bond more ’cause we hadn’t had much time to bond.
54 He could like get to enjoy reading some more too.

(Jaime, final interview, August, 24, 2006)

Jaime’s Discourse in this narrative is that of a mother and her interaction with her brother John is similar to that of a nurturing parent-child relationship. Jaime told John that she would read him a “bedtime story” (line 45), but allowed him to choose his own book, something parents often do with their children before bedtime. She then described an intimate setting where they sat side-by-side (line 49) and over the course of a few days, experienced different texts. This scenario evokes memories of being read to as a young child, which Jaime indicated in an earlier interview her mother used to do. Jaime
also used “bond” (line 53) as a term of endearment and indicated reading experiences based on love could be enjoyable (line 54).

As with Jaime’s friends and potential boyfriend, mass media books were preferred texts to establish or strengthen personal relationships; however, in this instance, reading the literal and social stories associated with this text contributed to reader engagement. All of the books Jaime mentioned (lines 47, 50a, 51, and 52) were either associated with musicians both of them enjoyed or a movie both had seen. My interpretation was confirmed during Jaime’s last interview at her home where her and her brother talked about enjoying the same music and movies.

Books situated within the cultural spheres of pop culture were the preferred medium through which Jaime connected with others. Jaime did independently read books such as What Did I Do to Deserve a Sister Like You (Medearis, 2001) and spoke of how it reminded her of her relationship between her and her older sister; however, this particular book was of personal, not social, significance. For Jaime, the social connectivity of mass media books enabled her to personally orient herself among her peers while improving her relationship with her brother.

**Crossing Borders: Candy’s Book and Reading Experiences**

Social orientation and family positioning permeated Candy’s discourse of her book experiences. However, unlike Jaime, whose books were indices of the self for her peers, Candy considered books to be manuals on how to improve her family dynamics, as well as passports into her peers’ cultural worlds. Books instructed her and others on how to successfully interact within their peer and familial worlds.
Non-fiction books such as the *Everything Kids Cookbook* (Nissenberg, 2002) and *Family Science* (Markle, 2005) motivated Candy to interact with her grandmother and sister and create lasting memories.

100 These books were interactive and inspirational.  
101 Like I could do things with um other people because of these books.  
102 Like, um, *Family Science* has the word family in it  
103 —that’s a good word.  
104 I really wanted my family better (*JG: Un hunh*)  
105 and I thought we could read this book *((Family Science)) together  
106 and do the experiments together without buying nothing expensive  
107 *Un hunh*

112 So one night my sister came up and asked me “What’s that you’re reading?”  
113 and I said “It’s just *Family Science*”  
114 and she said “Cool, can I look at it with you?”  
115 So we just looked at the experiments together.  
116a And the next day we did some of the experiments together with stuff  
116b around the house.  
117 It was so much fun!  
118 We got to do it together.  
119 We got along better and I had a family again.

(Candy, on-going home interview, July 8, 2006)

As one of the only people Candy said she interacted with, Candy’s older sister Sarah played an important role in Candy’s life. While at EDEP Candy sometimes wondered aloud what might improve her relationship with her sister and help her family stop arguing. Candy’s intertextual application of the book title, *Family Science*, to her family (lines 102-104) and her positive evaluation of the word “family” gives credence to her view that books, and reading, could have a positive effect on individuals, especially families. For Candy, the availability of books such as *Family Science* created opportunities for fun family-oriented activities (lines 115-119) which excluded arguments between Candy and her sister. They enabled the family to read together (lines 105, 115),
Candy, who identifies herself as White, extended her trust in books as mediators for interpersonal interactions with her peers. During our interactions at EDEP Candy shared that she was continually bullied, which was confirmed by her peers and the EDEP director. Candy indicated her uncertainty of what to do because regardless of what she said or did, they still bullied her. However, upon spotting books with Black characters, Candy informed me she had a plan. She believed culturally relevant books, whether high-quality multicultural literature or media-based literature, would pave the way towards her social and cultural eligibility in a community in which she was a minority. Books, and their authors, were agents of change

Award-winning multicultural literature such as Jacqueline Woodson’s (2001) *The Other Side* and Karen English’s (2002) *Francie* initially “inspired” Candy. Alluding to *The Other Side*, Candy wished to “cross the fence and get along with others. To just be girls no matter what skin color we are.” She wanted the physical confirmation of a book that “Black girls are like me. We can read, we help each other, and we can wear dresses. The only thing different is that we got different skin colors.” Similarly, the TV-based comic book, *SpongeBob SquarePants: Friends Forever* (Hillenburg, 2003), reinforced Candy’s optimism that she could find a way to become friends with her Black peers. In the episodes included in this book, the diverse “sea creature” characters constantly bickered but ultimately remained friends. According to Candy, “the *SpongeBob* book made me feel special because it showed me I could be close to one of the Black people or
person who is not my color. While the Black kids say they hate me, they might soon like me. It worked for Mr. Krabs and SpongeBob and they’re different from each other.”

Regardless of the book genre, Candy, situated in a position of “Other,” strove to contest her social identity and discover commonalities and connections between her and other individuals. She also sought confirmation that her goals were achievable. Candy fervently believed she could gain friendships with those who expressed dislike of her if she could learn, from literature, their cultural commonalities. In this sense, literature operated personally and socially by “providing children with a means to understand, affirm, or negotiate social relationships among peers . . . (McGinley & Kamberelis, 1996, p.56). Children need not only to see themselves, but also see others and the complexity of self and others within culturally situated contexts and ideals. For Candy the stories she read became “maps of possible worlds” (Bruner, 1986, p.69); the literary narratives linked her “sense of self” and her “sense of others” in her social world (p.69).

Ruby Bridges’ experiences in Through My Eyes (Bridges, 1999) were also inspirational to Candy. After re-reading that book, Candy concluded Bridges, as an individual who had experienced prejudice, could serve as her ally. She indicated wanting to write Bridges and ask her if she would put her in her next book due to the similarities between their experiences.

71 I got troubles like she did although it’s flipped.
72 I’m White and the people who don’t like me are Black.
73 But she’d know what to do.
74 She’d understand my situation.
75 And then maybe she could tell them what to do.
76 They could read the book and
77 know that it’s wrong.
78 They don’t need to treat me like this.

(Candy, on-going interview, May 10, 2006)
Candy’s narrative reveals her trust in books and authors as authoritative figures who children listen to and learn from. If she cannot eliminate bullying, perhaps Ruby Bridges, an African-American who also endured a similar type of “bullying” could instruct or guide children to treat each other respectfully. As indicated by the shift from “I” to “she” after describing her situation (lines 71-73), Candy assigned the responsibility of remedying the situation to Ruby Bridges, an adult from a similar cultural community to which Candy desired entrance. By writing a book, Bridges will “tell them what to do” (line 75) and apparently they will listen (line 77). Candy acknowledges the persuasive power of cultural authority within social contexts.

Candy emphasized the social authority of texts to not only instruct her and her peers but also to take her on a journey of hope and optimism. Candy’s book experiences included an array of books as described in Chapter 5. During her on-going interviews, she expressed the importance of textual variety to her social success.

138 When I get into school
139 they expect me to read as much books as I can
140 so I can be eligible or be fit into that school.
141 Then I can talk to other people and get along with them.
142 OK. So you read these books like The Other Side and SpongeBob to fit in?
143 I read for the fun of it
144 The fun of it?
145 Reading to be eligible can be fun.
146 I get to think about all the friends I’ll get after reading these books

(Candy, on-going interview, July 8, 2006)

In this particular stanza, Candy interwove a formal/school-based Discourse (e.g. reading proficiency generates academic success) with an informal/community-based Discourse (e.g. read widely for social eligibility and interaction). She used both “eligible” and “fit in.” Her assertion that her peers considered wide reading as the fundamental
factor of social eligibility (lines 138-141) alludes to Mark Dressman’s (1997) discussion of reading and book preferences as performances. Children’s choices often “enact the habitus, or material logic” of their culture (p.319). Reading and books, often school-sanctioned materials, as revealed by the girls’ sentiments in Chapter 5 and this chapter, were considered optimal channels for social access. Reading books ostensibly provided cultural knowledge rather than academic knowledge for Candy and therefore was enjoyable.

What seems quite interesting is that the media (music, TV, and movies) enjoyed by Candy and her peers are readily available without the presence of books. Yet Candy entrusted books to help her solve her social problems. Merely conversing about music, dance, etc. without the presence of books didn’t suffice. She had to consult books, via reading, to ensure success. Popular texts, such as mass media books, are often rejected by school officials (Marsh & Millard, 2000), yet they are imperative for Candy. Candy integrates the values of both the “official world” of school (books as tools of knowledge) with her “unofficial world” (popular culture as tools for social interaction). From Candy’s perspective, books and reading should result in friendship (lines 145-146).

Unfortunately, upon the conclusion of this study, Candy had yet to solidify any friendships with her Black peers and indicated in her final interview in August that she no longer enjoyed reading or books as much as she thought she would.

There’s a lot more work getting a book that I like that relates to others and that I don’t have to answer questions about. Books can help and hurt you. But they mostly hurt you . . . They remind you of things you don’t want to remember. They hurt your heart.

(Candy, final interview, August 28, 2006)
Discovering books that are both personally and socially engaging is, as Candy indicated above, a difficult and perhaps daunting task. This is especially true if people hold different conceptions of books and purposes for reading. Books affect the soul as they elicit positive and negative memories.

I cannot definitively say that the pain Candy described in her last interview is from her failed attempt to navigate the social terrain of her peers through books. However, prior to this statement Candy spoke of the failed attempts to find Black friends after reading culturally relevant literature which reflected her Black peers’ interests. She also spoke of reading books which evoked memories of her father and mother, both of whom she missed. While Candy found books that she could personally relate to and books she thought her peers would personally relate to, those books generated ill-feeling within Candy to the point that she felt “hurt.” Candy’s experience is a reminder of how a variety of books is not only important to learn different types of written discourse and academic knowledge, it is also important for the growth and happiness of the soul. Candy might benefit from finding books that enable her to escape, or enter another world where she can engage in story which carries her beyond her own life and allows her to “take a break” from herself (Blackford, 2004, p.19).

Desiring Cross-Cultural Understanding: Jackie’s Book and Reading Experiences

The variety of books selected by Jackie throughout the study was not necessarily present in her discussions about her book experiences. Jackie’s discussions, dichotomous in nature, included only a handful of books, such as Greatest Stars of the NBA: Allen Iverson (NBA, 2005), The Real Slam Dunk (Richardson, 2005), and The Other Side (Woodson, 2001). Jackie either discussed the mass media books, which she did not read but loaned to her friends and family members, or she discussed books which she did read
but didn’t necessarily find a conversational partner for. Her discussions were situated within the cultural arena of her peers and cousins (mass media) and the social domain of interracial relationships (multicultural literature). Despite the topical schisms (mass media/multicultural literature) in her discussions, both types of discussions attested to Jackie’s consideration of books and herself as purveyors of knowledge which should be shared in order to improve relations between Blacks and Whites.

Books became platforms upon which Jackie could discuss her concerns about race relations. Her concern for increased racial harmony dominated her discourse about books and reading. In Chapter 5, Jackie revealed her surprise of and enthusiasm for books which reflected herself as a Black girl. During her on-going interviews, those books, such as *The Hard-Times Jar* (Smothers, 2003), enabled her to share with me her past experiences as a Black minority in a predominately White school which she attended a few years ago.

69 See, this book’s about, well, when I moved with my mom
70 I thought I wasn’t gonna have any friends at ((school’s name))
71 Because it’s like a school where mostly like White people go. (*JG: un hunh*)
72 And I didn’t think that like, this one girl ‘dat ‘dere--
73 --And she White too--
74 And she and she’s mean to me (*JG: Oh my!*)
75 And now I don’t care or nuthin’
76 ‘cause I met a couple of other friends there and they’re nice to me
77 There was one girl there that’s my color and her and I got along good.
78a And *it’s just sayin’* that I was like afraid ‘dat I wasn’t gonna make any
78b friends at my new school
79a *Gotcha. So why is this the part of your experience with this book that you
79b want to share?*
80 Well this book talks about it.
81 I mean, no books talk about things like ‘dat.
82 But this one kinda do
83 It talks about the hard times.

(Jackie, on-going interview, March 30, 2006)
Particular aspects of *The Hard-Times Jar* resonated with Jackie due to her parallel experiences. To provide context, *The Hard-Times Jar* involves an African-American migrant family who experience economic hardship which prevents them from purchasing anything “extra” such as books. Any money saved is placed in a “hard-times jar.” When Emma turns eight, she begins attending a predominately White school and experiences a classroom library for the first time. Within the story Emma describes her hesitancy to attend school, much less a school largely comprised of White children. While the textual narrative centers upon Emma’s economic hardships and her desire for books, Jackie’s narrative focuses on one event in the book—her entrance into the “all White” world of public education (lines 69-71) and finding friends (lines 78a-b).

When sharing the story with me, Jackie expressed her concern and negative experiences as not only a new student but also a minority (lines 69-71; 78a-b). She also evidenced life-text connections (Cochran-Smith, 1984). At the beginning of lines 69 and 78a, she begins talking about the book (e.g. “the book’s about”; “it’s just saying”), but then switches to first person-I. Her story is embedded within the textual story. The book “spoke” for her. Jackie’s personal connection to the text increased its significance for her, which Eeds and Wells (1989) noted was common with fifth and sixth-grade students and Sipe (2000) documented with the read-aloud experiences of second-graders.

While Jackie indicated her problem was resolved (lines 74-76), she stressed the importance of having books which reflected similar experiences and concerns as her (lines 80-83). The “hard times” for Jackie were neither economics nor finding books. Jackie’s “hard-times” were finding friends and a “place” in a community in which she perceived herself as an outsider in terms of race and experienced hardship (lines 70-73).
The theme of race relations and the need for books to address this theme continued in April, when Jackie talks about another picture book she had selected and apparently read.

05 This book (\textit{Freedom School, Yes}) is \textbf{like that other one} by that woman
06 Who’s that person who writes, um, Jacqueline something
07 Oh yeah! \textit{The Other Side}. Yeah.
08 Um, it’s about like how Black people and White people get along.
09 \textbf{I don’t really see those kinda books}
10 And \textbf{we need those books} ‘round here.
11 For real.
12 \textbf{We need to be readin’ such kinda books}.

(Jackie, on-going interview, April 11, 2006)

In this example, intertextuality, or the connections made between texts and/or the connections between texts and life (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Short, 1992; Sipe, 2000), is ever-present. Just as Jackie noted similarities in E.B. Lewis’ illustrations, as mentioned in Chapter 5, she connected the historical fiction picture book \textit{Freedom School, Yes} (Littlesugar, 2001) to \textit{The Other Side} (Woodson, 2001) (lines 05-07). She compared books (line 05) and then united them by referring to both books (and perhaps others she read) as “those kinda books” (line 09), “those books” (line 10), and “such kinda books” (line 12). Jackie consistently evidenced her familiarity with and expertise in intertextuality through her constant comparisons of or references to books, authors, or media and books.

Jackie reiterated her interest in racial understanding, the absence of books addressing issues about racial interactions and understanding, and the serious need for access to books, especially within her community, in lines 09-12. Her inclusion of the phrase “for real” (line 11) indicates the seriousness and sincerity of her opinion. However, Jackie identifies a lack of audience or participants for a discussion on race
relations when she revealed that her friends “don’t really seem to care. Don’t really care much. I ain’t never tole’ my friends about this ‘cause this isn’t something they, you know, talk about.” While Jackie might want to discuss interracial experiences and help reduce cultural misunderstandings, the opportunities for discussion appear limited. Even when she gained access to books which address this topic, her “discussion” seems to end with her closing the books.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, and reflected through the presence of bullying in Candy’s earlier statements, racial tensions permeated Jackie’s school environment. Jackie and Candy expressed a desire to minimize the racial tensions at their school through the printed word; however, they both stated to me, they couldn’t talk to one another because of mutual dislike or perhaps cultural misunderstanding. For both girls, the Word as power (Sims, 1982) and in the form of a book, served as a “safe” and indirect representative of their experiences and their desires. What they seemed to want was a facilitator to bridge them to others through a discussion of a book’s content.

Jackie’s experiences and expressed desires remind us that children do identify and wish to read and speak about racial tensions. Books provide an initial venue for such discussions; however just as book access may not be enough for improving children’s reading proficiencies (Allington, 2002) it is also not enough for societal contemplation and negotiation. Opportunities for authentic dialogue in the classroom and beyond must accompany book access if engagement in the printed word and the imprinted world is to occur. By partnering book access with discussion, children will be able to discuss the intersection of race and culture. Reading and discussing culturally relevant literature
encourages personal narratives, self-determination and representation, and enables progress towards a more just society (Ching, 2005).

**Uniting the Self with the Natural World: Alondra’s Book and Reading Experiences**

Unlike Alice, Candy, Chris, and Jaime, who used books to establish interpersonal relationships with other people, Alondra considered books as vehicles to help her establish a relationship between herself and the natural world. She wished to better understand weather phenomena such as tornadoses and sought to understand the connections between humans and nature. Alondra did borrow a variety of books; however the books she wanted to discuss or share with me within the timeframe of the study were Molly Grooms’ *We are—* series picture books, Schim Schimmel’s (1997) *Children of the Earth, Remember* picture book, and the *Magic Tree House* non-fiction series books.

Alondra’s enthusiasm for the biological and physiological sciences was infectious. As she spoke of picture books such as *Children of the Earth, Remember* (Schimmel, 1997) or *We are Puppies* (Grooms, 2005) she stroked the illustrations or pointed out particular concepts that were thought-provoking for her. She also read aloud one of the picture books each time we talked, and talked about how engaged she was in both the written and visual stories. For example, when speaking about Molly Grooms’ *We Are—* series, Alondra conveyed the following:

182 When I get these books I’m thinking about animal behavior
183 Oh really?
184 Yeah. They are the most greatest books ever.
185 Neat! How so?
186a They make me think about real animals and what the real horse and the real puppy do.
186b They have senses and they help them hunt, eat, grow and stuff.
We’re kinda like them.
We talk without talking.
I wanna know more about them.
They are like us an’ we are like them.
But we don’t know them.

(Alondra, on-going interview, April 11, 2006)

In this example, as well as six other references in her other two on-going interviews, Alondra consistently referred to connecting human behavior with animal behavior (line 190, 193). For her, she was intrigued about non-verbal communication (lines 187-189, 191) and sought to change the fact that “we don’t know them” (line 194). Reading was about learning (line 187) and knowledge became the way to “know them” (line 194). She believed our role in species extinction was a direct result of “not knowing about a part of us like the animal part.” Reading fostered environmental awareness in Alondra, which she said she shared with others such as her friends Linda and Drew but not the other girls in the study.

Alondra extended her interest in communication via non-verbal language to weather systems and how “nature speaks to us through the weather.” During her two additional on-going interviews, she compared the variety of tornadoes (e.g. dust, water, and “big fat” tornadoes) to human diversity (“it’s just like how we’re all different”). Weather books sustained Alondra’s desire to read because

198 it prepares me.
199 You never know what’s gonna happen.
200 It happens every day or every week.
201 It’s a cool thing ‘cause it’s a part of life.
202 Um:: It kinda is life.
203 You can be aware of it
204 but you never know what might happen.
205 It’s cool.

(Alondra, on-going interview, April 25, 2006)
Reading not only “prepared” Alondra for inclement weather but also reflected the unpredictability of life (lines 199-204). Life, like weather, occurs daily and while we have some control over the present, the future is always uncertain (lines 203-204). All she can do is be cognizant of her relation to all aspects of the world. While Alondra appeared comforted by her philosophical approach to life (e.g. “it’s cool”, lines 201, 205), she did express fear about how volatile and destructive life can be. For her, looking at beautiful illustrations of animals in Schimmel’s (1997) *Children of the Earth, Remember*, soothed her nerves. “When I feel like um like I’m having a heart attack inside, like when I read about tornadoes and all that, I look at these illustrations. They look so pretty and real. I reach out and pet the animals and I think things are OK.” Environmentally themed books paradoxically agitated and consoled her.

Alondra’s engagement with and emphasis on the natural world in the books she chose to speak with me about is striking considering her request to drop out of the study. Alondra approached me at the end of March with her concerns.

200 Um:: I don’t want to do this anymore.
201 Oh no. Really? Why not?
202 I don’t like it because people are always asking “Let me see the book”
203 I don’t know if they like me or they jus’ want the books.
204 It’s bothering too much
205 I can’t tell.
206 So I don’t wanna do this too much
207a Hmm. I’m sorry to hear this. Do you not want to do it at all, or do you
207b want to do it but not really tell people you are doing it?
208 I want to see the books. I just don’t want people to know.
209a Well, how about we do that? You can still be a part of the study, but you
209b don’ have to show or tell anyone? How’s that?
210 I’ll keep the books a secret.

(Alondra, spontaneous conversation, March 22, 2006)
The potentiality of superficial friendships (lines 202-204) due to book access and her inability to determine the sincerity of her peers (lines 203, 205) compelled Alondra to initially want to leave the study (line 206) before ultimately reconsidering (line 210). She conceded she did want access to books (line 208); however, the social ramifications, the book’s social capital among her peers, seemed overwhelming (line 204).

Alondra’s conception of reading as a way of understanding the world did not include understanding the variety of relationships between individuals. She connected with the scientific world through animals and weather, but not necessarily the psychosocial world of personal friendships. For Alondra, books and reading were more personal than social and did not include befriending people in order to enter the “literacy club” (Smith, 1997). In this study, Alondra did not share her peers’ views of book as social capital (Baron, Field, & Schuller, 2000).

Instances of Perplexity: Morgan’s Book and Reading Experiences

Morgan’s experience with her books during this study differed considerably from her peers. As indicated earlier in this chapter, Morgan expressed difficulty and confusion related to the types of questions I asked, which resulted in minimal discussions about her book and reading experiences. Also, based on her admissions and her read-alouds with me, she experienced difficulty reading and comprehending some of her selected books, such as *never mind! A Twin Novel* (Avi & Vail, 2005) and *Nutty Knock Knocks* (Rosenbloom, 1986). Prior to my knowledge of her difficulty, Morgan claimed the books were boring no less than 15 times during her three on-going interviews. However, when probed, vocabulary and comprehension difficulty surfaced as the primary reason why she didn’t enjoy the majority of the books she selected. To Morgan, “the words inside ((the book)) were so confusing. They made me not want to open it.”
Multiple perspectives of what Morgan could and should read also contributed to Morgan’s aversion to books in this particular study. The required reading by the school, Morgan’s book preferences, and her mother’s criteria for acceptable books, were often disharmonious. Morgan demonstrated difficulty reading her required books for class, such as *The Whipping Boy* (Fleishman, 1986) and *Which Way Freedom*, (Hansen, 1982), due to the linguistic vernacular in both novels. During one on-going interview, she shared her frustration with not understanding the English variants and wondered why in school “I’m learning how you’re supposed to not talk, not how you are supposed to talk!” Her mother also voluntarily expressed concern to me that Morgan was reading a book that was “so boring and full of poor English.” Knowing the books were difficult, Morgan became even more disenchanted with finding books she could read after hearing her teacher remind her class that the books were “fifth-grade level books so this should be easy for you.” The lack of literary choices on Morgan’s independent reading level proved frustrating for Morgan as she began to ask me to read aloud the books for her and help her answer her comprehension questions during EDEP. She said she would rather fail than “go through the torture of reading this alone.”

Morgan also spoke of her mother’s desire for her to read “good books like award-winning books,” although Morgan loved books which were scary or were based on movies. Her mother inadvertently reinforced Morgan’s statement by asking me one day if I could add the “good books” from the Sunshine State Reading List to the books Morgan selected. This way she could “ensure Morgan improves her reading and won’t struggle next year.” Despite my explanation that those books would probably be too difficult for Morgan to read independently, her mother was adamant about adhering to
award-winning books. I informed her of my inability to do that; however, I was certain local bookstores or the public library would have those books readily available for her if she wanted to purchase or borrow them. Morgan’s mother’s determination for what was an “acceptable” book added yet another layer of expectations which didn’t align with Morgan’s desires.

Morgan painted a provocative portrait of what reading books that were too difficult felt like. She expressed frustration through gestures of such as long sighs, eye-rolling, and laying her head on the table when reading during EDEP. Looking at the pattern and timing of the following description of reading, I believe she addresses the disparity between home and school expectations and her wants or needs.

527 It’s like, if it’s your bedtime or something
528 and you have this really really hard math problem
529 and you, and your mom or your sister—
530 like you ask them how you do it but they don’t know.
531 They’re like “just try it by yourself, you’ll probably get it.”
532 But you know you can’t do it.
533 You just can’t get anyone else to know you can’t do it.
534 So I just go to sleep.

(Morgan, on-going interview, April 11, 2006)

Morgan immediately attempted to ensure that her audience, me, entered her scenario through her use of “you” as the subject (lines 527-533). However, she concluded her story with “I,” (line 534) providing a definitive conclusion to her narrative (“I just go to sleep”), and ensuring that I, as the listener, understood that she was speaking of her actual predicament, not a hypothetical situation. Just as she had yet to find a variety of books she could read, she didn’t solve the math problem. Instead, she opted to sleep.

The setting of Morgan’s narrative bore some resemblance to reading a bedtime story. It occurred at home just before bed and involved her mother and sister, two people
whom she loves. Morgan could have set her comparison in school, at EDEP, or any other location. However, she chose an intimate location which evoked an aura of familiarity—reading before bedtime. The primary differences between a cultural story of bedtime reading and Morgan’s version were that “reading” became a “really really hard math problem” (line 528), which Morgan must solve independently. In this story she must also “read” instead of being “read to.”

Morgan accentuated her frustration by first speaking of her mother and sister’s confidence and expectation of her reading competency and then following with her certainty “you know you can’t do it” (lines 530-532). Two individuals who seemingly know her well—her mother and sister—apparently don’t know her that well in regard to reading. Morgan can’t convince them or “anyone else” (line 533) that she needs to read easier books. Therefore she “escapes” through sleep (line 534). Morgan’s sentiments echo other struggling readers’ depictions of reading and their struggle to gain reading proficiency (Wilhelm, Baker, & Dube, 2001).

The selection of books offered in this study didn’t necessarily improve Morgan’s conception of books and reading either. Even though Morgan participated in this study from the onset and helped decide what books to include, she expressed frustration with the book offerings. During her final interview in May, Morgan offered her opinion about the selection of books.

250 Well, if you were going to do this again,
251 I’d think about what books you give us.
252 What do you mean?
253 Well, I mean, like maybe you could get less books for certain people.
254 Certain people?
255 Well, you know ((nods her head towards some of the other girls))
256 Oh, you mean you think I have too many books for some of the other girls?
257 Well::: yeah.
OK. I see. So what books would you want me to include next time?

Well, if it’s people like me, then books more for my people.

I don’t get it. What do you mean?

Like, I’m not against Black people or anything ((looking down at the table))

I just think there shouldn’t be so many books for them.

OK. So why are those books not for you?

Well, they’re not not for me, they’re just like not my kinda book.

These excerpts reveal one locus of frustration for Morgan: the abundance of literature she considered appropriate for/geared toward Black people which was inappropriate or disengaging for her as a White person. Morgan definitively created an oppositional framework between her and the other girls who were Black in her advice to me. She began her commentary with the word “us,” which I initially assumed to include all of the girls in the study. However, her response of “certain people” (line 253) when I asked for clarification indicated a separation between her and others. When she gestured towards Jackie, Chris, and Alice (line 255), she identifies the separation as racially-oriented. Morgan, as a White person, excluded herself from Black people. She defined Black people as “certain people” (line 253-255)—or people who were not “like me”—and then extended that separation to racially or culturally-specific books (lines 259; 262). The term “Black people” is also lexically related to the pronoun referent “them” in lines 261-262 through the use of “just” and is contrasted by Morgan’s use of “my people” in line 259.

Morgan initially included me in her distinction between White and Black people and assumed I, as a White female, would understand her opinions. She used the pronoun “us” (line 251) and “you know” (line 255) to indicate an assumed understanding between us. However, after I asked for clarification, Morgan began to assert that she was not racist (line 261); rather her concern resided in the type of book, not the people she thought were
interested in the book (line 264). She was talking about personal preference not racial prejudice. However, during the summer Morgan shared with me that she was very happy to be in a school where “more people of, like, my culture” attended and was glad to have left Meadowlawn Elementary. Her statements reflect the difficulty White people have when negotiating and discussing their thoughts about race and White privilege (Copenhaver, 2000; Glazier, 2003; McIntyre, 1997; Willis, 1995). This difficulty, or silence, seems to begin early in elementary school (Copenhaver, 2000; 2001).

Morgan, statements aside, might have had a point. Morgan seemed to be telling me that I provided more books for her Black peers than I did for her. I decided to see if indeed I had unconsciously, from a racial standpoint, offered more books which were assumed to be desired by the Black girls. Upon reviewing the percentages of books by race/ethnicity, the percentage of books with Black characters was 49%, books with White characters was 25%, books with other ethnicities constituting 11%, and books with no explicit association to any race or ethnicity was 15%. In this study, four out of the seven girls (57%) considered themselves Black. Three out of seven girls considered themselves White (42%). Numerically speaking, the book percentages are more or less aligned with the girls’ stated race/ethnicity. However, this assumes that the girls only wished to read books that reflected their racial selves, which was not true for every girl. For Morgan, there seemed to be a clear bias of books for her Black peers. Her considerations might have been influenced the minimal amount of culturally relevant literature published yearly (Cooperative Children’s Book Center, 2007) or the paucity of such literature available to her in her school. Her pronounced aversion to these books, revealed only at
the conclusion of the study, is a wake-up call for the need to not only have a variety of
diverse literature in the classroom but also engage in discussions about such literature.

Despite her frustrations, Morgan expressed enthusiasm for gaining ownership of
books she could read and had read, mainly the *Scary Stories*, *Lemony Snicket*, and
*Chronicles of Narnia* series. Two of those series also have cinematic versions which
could help scaffold Morgan’s comprehension. Those books became Morgan’s literary life
preservers as she indicated during our last discussion that she may not be a good reader,
but when she finds books she likes and can choose what she wants to read, she enjoys
reading.

**Reading Conceptions Synthesized: The Girls’ Entrances and Exits**

During this study I became privy to some of the girls’ “literacy narratives” (Gallas
& Smagorinsky, 2001): their previously unexamined opinions, desires, recollections, and
stories which were representative of their home, public, and previous classroom
experiences. I had assumed that by focusing on the girls’ personal use of books, I would
better understand the out-of-school book and/or reading experiences of girls considered
to be marginalized readers. I anticipated gaining insight into the parallel and intersecting
hemispheres of books and reading when situated in personalized environments.

However, as I listened to the girls, my “horizons” quickly altered. The preponderance of
talk hovering around the girls’ “official worlds” of reading indicated the considerable
influence reading practices had upon the girls’ relationships with books and reading in
and out of school. It was not until approximately midway through the study that their
stories crossed the academic borders of their reading classes. This is not to say that they
didn’t have prior stories about their reading or book experiences out of school to share.
Trust, rapport, and the understanding that I was not a part of their “official world” of
school could have been contributing factors to when their stories were shared; however, increased opportunities to interact with books without academic demands could have also generated new narratives.

The girls’ narratives initially created disconcerting images of reading as decontextualized performances of rate and accuracy and as acts of frustration in order to become academically successful. They reflected how reading, as a “singular program” and books as “uniform devices” could hinder their academic and social journeys. Their considerations of reading were verisimilitudes of academic incarceration with limited rights (Alice, Candy, Chris, Jaime, Jackie, Morgan) and social exile (Alondra, Candy, Jackie, Morgan). However, as they began interacting with the books, Chris and Alice challenged their school-based reading practices and limited book access, and Jackie declared the need to have culturally relevant books in the classroom and within classroom discourse.

These girls’ assertions reminded me of the 1960’s Women’s Movement adage, “the personal is political.” Reading, as a personal and social endeavor, is also a political construct. To adhere to the notion of reading as a solely skill-based process is to support “intellectual compliance . . . and denies the relevance of difference and diversity” (Novinger & Compton-Lily, 2005, p.202). The girls’ reading attitudes and abilities, as “outcomes,” are a part of systemic relations, such as commercialized reading programs, high-stakes assessments, and at the very least, access to a variety of readable and desirable books; all of which are beyond the girls’ control. However, as the girls suggested in their narratives, access to books and opportunities to talk are initial steps towards acknowledging and attempting to subvert those political forces.
The girls’ narratives outside the realm of classroom-based reading and reading response homework contested “official” discourses of reading. They also invited new, or perhaps forgotten, conceptual positions of books and reading as social intermediaries. Our interviews and conversations reminded me that studies with literature or texts are often studies of culture because literary texts are cultural texts and are “read” from various cultural positions (Rogers, 1997). From the girls’ vantage points, books possess social worth even before one opens them.

Books, as physical artifacts, served as conduits for the girls’ interpersonal relationships and social dominance. They became some of the girls’ negotiation tools, garnering them prestige and power among their peers (Alice), assumed respect from influential adults such as teachers (Chris), and opportunities to bond with family members and friends (Candy, Jaime) or share the benefits of book access (Jackie). For these girls, a book became part of a social story, not a written story. A book’s life was how it was enacted, not what it “said” between the pages. The girls communicated with books not necessarily about books. There were intrinsic purposes to the books but not necessarily to reading.

Books were once sacred (e.g. reading scriptures) (Spufford, 2002), and they still retain social status often associated with educated, middle-to-upper class citizens (Griswold, 2001; Hunt, 1991). Books serve as cultural indicators of “intellectual wealth.” The girls’ use of and interactions with books, literally read or unread, reflects a more socially-oriented emphasis on book-as-object. Mass media books, as cultural products (Hade & Edmunson, 2003; Taxel, 2002) constituted the majority of books used by the girls to initiate social dialogue between the girls and their peers or loved ones. These
books operated in similar manners in which music, videos, and movies operate. They created discourse communities of solidarity, despite their “official format” as a “book.” Mass media books became intertextual links between popular culture and academic culture (Dyson, 2000, p.263). Failure to acknowledge the importance of mass media, or popular culture, in children’s lives severs the possibility of better understanding children’s relationship to themselves, others, and school.

The girls did consider books and reading to be interdependent at times. Reading written stories which reflected and validated their personal experiences and desires improved family relations (Alice, Candy, Jaime). Books and reading also offered opportunities to challenge and change social norms and behaviors. They helped create private domains of literary excitement and discouragement (Alondra, Morgan). The books selected by the girls, regardless of genre, became extensions of their selves and symbolized their personal and social identities. Judging from the girls’ narratives, books and reading reflect “. . . the inner life of people with absolute candor . . .” (Montenegro, 1942, p. 347).

With all that has been said, did book access and interactions reshape or influence the girls’ conceptions of reading? Did they look at themselves differently as readers? It depends. My intention was not to create a causal study and assume that access to books would result in a positive change in reading attitudes or conceptions; however, experiences and social interactions can alter language and thought, as evidenced through the girls’ oral discourses. I have therefore included Table 6-3 to indicate how the girls described themselves as “readers” at the beginning and end of the study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Initial reading self-evaluation</th>
<th>Criteria used</th>
<th>Final reading self-evaluation</th>
<th>Criteria used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>I'm a better reader</td>
<td>My fluency is way up there this year.</td>
<td>I'm a good reader</td>
<td>I can read fast and I can build my thoughts with the stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alondra</td>
<td>I'm a good reader</td>
<td>I read a lot of captions on TV and I learn a lot of big words.</td>
<td>I'm a good reader</td>
<td>I know a lot of facts and big words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candy</td>
<td>I'm a good reader</td>
<td>I can read the words fast enough and I have a lot of reading experiences.</td>
<td>I'm a good reader</td>
<td>I know that books can help you and hurt you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>I'm a reader</td>
<td>I'm reading faster.</td>
<td>I'm sorta a reader</td>
<td>I said I was a reader before but I wasn't. Now I do read and I kinda like to read, but I can't read too fast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>I'm a good reader</td>
<td>I read and I read real fast.</td>
<td>I'm a great reader</td>
<td>I can read fast and I pick books that are like my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
<td>I'm a good reader</td>
<td>I read perfect. No mistakes.</td>
<td>I'm a good reader</td>
<td>I can get the concept if I read more slow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>I'm not that good of a reader</td>
<td>I don't read fast. But I do read with expression. In reading class we read the words but not the stories.</td>
<td>I'm a so-so reader</td>
<td>I can read fast but I'm not a good reader. But I do like to read but only a couple of books.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most of the girls did retain their conception of good reading as fast reading. Some also expressed interest and engagement in reading, while others included elements of reading such as comprehension, autonomous choice, and reading response. In their latter evaluations, the girls referenced individuality rather than conformity.

As the study progressed, the girls used similes of lyrical or culinary consumption to discuss their reading experiences. Some of the girls’ “enriched” reading experiences with books from the study are listed below. These experiences are distinctly different from their initial statements of reading meaning “nuthin’” or that “I’ve got a book in my face.”

Reading is kinda like eating my favorite food, like a slice of pizza. It’s the pizza with the stringy cheese. You’re eating it but you can see the stuff coming up. (Jaime)

It’s kinda like sharing food at the dinner table. I got to mix them ((books)) all up and enjoy it. Or I can pass it along to my left. (Candy)

... Think of a tall glass, an’ those martini glasses with like six scoops of vanilla ice cream, choc—I mean strawberry syrup and chocolate covered bananas and it makes a sundae. It’s the best feeling digging in getting all the flavors and just never stopping. That’s kinda like reading at times. (Jackie)

It’s now kinda like a song but the beat don’t go with the song. I like the song but sometimes I’m off the beat. But it works for me. (Chris)

Readin’ now—well, ‘dese books—is like listening to my favorite music. I can memorize it and play it in my head when I want. But it has to be a book I can read more than once. (Alice)

The commentaries and stories articulated by the girls attest to the validity of children’s social experiences (Dyson, 2000). Books as social artifacts and reading as a social process can be critical components of children’s experiences and can help validate those experiences in the classroom. However, in doing so, we must look within our own personal and social horizons and look out at others’ personal and social horizons; we
must see others and ourselves from different vantage points. In doing so, we not only rearrange our relationships, we “rearrange the coordinates of our experienced worlds” (Geertz, 1973, p. 28). Perhaps this rearrangement will then highlight the strengths and determination of girls who are designated marginalized readers at school despite adhering to their school policies and practices.
CHAPTER 7
PERMUTATIONS OF BOOKS AND READING

“The question is not what you look at, but what you see.”
--Henry David Thoreau

The initial purpose of this study was to better understand the book selection rationales and experiences of preadolescent girls who were identified as marginalized readers. These new understandings will presumably help educators in their quest to increase reading motivation and engagement among individuals who struggle with reading or express alliterate tendencies despite their reading competencies. It may also potentially help educators and librarians reconceptualize books, reading, and “struggling” readers.

My two guiding questions in this investigation were 1) What rationales undergird preadolescent girls’ self-selections of books for personal use? and 2) How does access to culturally relevant literature reflect and reshape their conceptions of reading and books? These two questions involve three integral components to reading engagement: book access, book genres, and reading conceptions. All three of these components influence people’s book choices and their engagement or disengagement with those choices. Likewise, people’s selection of and interactions with books influence their conceptualizations. Because I wanted to understand the interdependent nature of readers and texts from the perspectives of the girls as reified through language, I focused on the girls’ narratives during interviews and spontaneous conversations while also taking extensive field notes for additional support and context. I analyzed the interviews and conversations using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis and Gee’s (2005) Discourse Analysis models. Additionally, I thematically analyzed my field notes to bolster the validity and reliability of my analysis of the interviews and conversations.
In Chapters 5 and 6 I shared the girls’ commentaries about their book choices and subsequent experiences with those books. In this chapter I extend my considerations of the girls’ narratives, contemplate the implications of my findings, and offer ideas for future research studies that were generated from this study.

**Book Selections: Reflections of Competency**

The girls demonstrated their belief that book access and reading would help ensure their academic and social success. Successful reading was the only sub-theme in which every girl had a dominant presence. The girls initially selected books of various genres and topics based on the book’s physical characteristics (e.g. the cover, title, illustrations, chapter length, and book thickness), which corroborates previous research about book selections (Fleener, Morrison, Linek & Rasinski, 1997; Swartz & Hendricks, 2000). Thin books, books with short chapters, alluring illustrations, and “just right” font sizes enabled the girls to feel academically successful in reading and fostered reading motivation and engagement. With these books, the girls demonstrated academic savvy that belied their label as struggling readers.

By choosing books with specific features, the girls could complete homework which they had previously “faked,” improve their fluency, better comprehend the textual stories through visual clues, and feel motivated to re-read books. Clearly their rationales were situated within a scholastic or “efferent” domain and represented all three categories of Wigfield and Guthrie’s (1997) taxonomy of reading motivation: competence and efficacy beliefs (self-efficacy), intrinsic purposes (desire to improve or master something) and extrinsic purposes (reading to gain acceptance (e.g. grades, praise, etc.). Instead of expressing alliterate behaviors that one might expect from individuals who consistently assert their distaste for reading (Poppe, 2005) the girls exuded confidence and assuredness of their future success with those books.
Books which validated the girls’ identities as females, citizens, athletes, and individuals capable of social success were also selected. Female celebrity, civil rights activist, and inventor biographies were cited as books which exemplified the tenacity and capabilities of women. Additionally, the girls desired realistic fiction books that encouraged them to fulfill their dreams, validated their sense of equality among males, and provided verisimilitudes of life devoid of the teasing and bullying they experienced. Through these books, the girls conceived of themselves as successful readers, felt a sense of validation of self, and were inspired to be courageous and successful individuals who could and would contribute to society. Psychosocial determinants such as these appear to be absent from the findings of previous book selection studies.

While the girls professed disinterest in reading, their book selection rationales provided an alternative point of view. The girls were interested in books and appeared to be interested in reading books; they just hadn’t found a variety of books that reflected their interests, desires, selves, and were indicative of their reading abilities. The girls’ rationales reveal their willingness and ability to read when provided access and choice (Ivey, 1999). The rationales also suggest that their positions as “struggling readers” conceivably shifted through the simple (or not so simple) provision of books deemed worthy of consideration. The girls’ selection criteria support research by literacy education researchers who are guided by a transactional perspective of reading difficulties. From this perspective, reading ability is complex, variable, and does not solely reside within the individual (Mceneaney, Lose, & Schwartz, 2006).

**Book Selections: Limited Sources of Familiarity**

References to peer, relatives, and teacher recommendations as critical determinants in their book selection process rarely occurred. The absence of these individuals’ influence upon the girls’ selections counters existing book selection research which indicates that all three groups of individuals are quite influential in children’s decision-making processes about books (Casteneda,
1995; Greenlee, Monson, & Taylor, 1996; Kragler, 2000; Mohr, 2006; Simpson, 1996; Williams, 2005). Their absence from the girls’ rationales also suggests a literary schism between the girls’ desired texts and the literary offerings in the classroom, as well as the potential absence of books and book discussions within the girls’ immediate communities. Even though the school library served as a source of familiarity for a couple of their selected books, the girls didn’t appear to reap the benefits of efficiency, certainty, and social negotiation, which are associated with peers’ recommendations of books (Hepler & Hickman, 1982). Instead they gravitated towards another form of recommendation: popular culture.

Popular culture, as peer culture, became catalysts for choosing particular books. Familiarity with mass media storylines which were often tie-ins to TV shows or movies was the most popular rationale offered by the girls. This finding mirrors Williams’ (2005) theory that sources of familiarity, which include mass media texts, influence children’s book choices. Mass media books were chosen because the girls were familiar with the storylines and felt entertained by those storylines. Just as readers experience comfort and engagement with series books such as *The Babysitter’s Club* and *Goosebumps* series that are not associated with mass media (Allington, 2001; Greenlee, Monson, & Taylor, 1996), so too did most of the girls experience comfort and engagement with TV series books such as *That’s So Raven* and *Unfabulous*, book-based movies such as Lemony Snicket’s *Series of Unfortunate Events* and *Aquamarine*, and biographies of famous musicians and singers.

Mass media books were “cinematic peer recommendations” and served as virtual “communities of readers” for most of the girls. The girls wanted to read the books because they saw the TV show or movie or listened to their music. Mass media books allowed some of the
girls to enter social worlds of entertainment that were economically inaccessible and provided encouragement for others to improve their reading. Mass media simply made books “fun.”

While some educators might not consider mass media texts as worthy reading material (Booth, 2006), the girls’ elaborations of their media-based book choices were critical in nature and signified the girls’ beliefs of a hierarchy between print and visual/media literacy with print reigning supreme. The girls wanted to “check the books to make sure what we’re hearing about ((on TV)) is for real.” Their desire to authenticate information disseminated by media outlets suggests that for them, media-based popular culture entertains and print culture informs. By mixing the entertainment/aesthetic and informational/ efferent elements of mass media texts, the girls exemplify Rosenblatt’s (1938/1995) transactional theory of reader response, which Schraw and Bruning (1999) have found to be a more engaging model of reader response than transmission and translation models of reading.

The girls’ comparisons of print and media-based narratives also indicated their positions as constructors of meaning instead of passive consumers. According to Marsh and Millard (2000), while the mediums of print and media can be different, the processes overlap. Both have similar narrative structures and conventions shared by a collective audience and situated with socio-cultural contexts. The girls, relying on shared experiences and understandings of narrative structures, used semantic and syntactic clues of print-based and televisual texts to determine meaning and formulate opinions about those texts. Neuman (1995) suggests that accessibility and interest in content facilitates “spirited interplay” between video and print-based texts among children (p.180). Additionally, the intertextuality of TV or movie tie-ins is almost inherent in children’s lives because of the centrality of televisual texts in the narratives of children’s lives. Televisual texts promote reading among younger children as indicated by increased book sales.
when print narratives become cinematic narratives (Marsh and Millard, 2002; Robinson, 1997). The girls’ desire for mass media texts reflects the central position of televsual texts and their desire to integrate the academic world of “book” with their personal world of “entertainment.”

Some might consider the girls’ statements about comparing and contrasting books and TV shows or movies to be contrived and indicative of what they believe they should say to adults, especially teachers, not what they truly think. However, when discussing their experiences with mass media books, the girls expressed genuine disappointment over some of the mass media books. Plot digressions, an overwhelming amount of dialogue, and sparse action scenes made the books “unreadable.” Ultimately, with the exception of Candy whose possession of mass media books was imperative for her, the girls selected fewer TV series or movie tie-in books during the final book fair when compared to the initial book fair. The reasons for these differences are unknown at this time; however, the disjuncture between anticipation and reality could have contributed to the shift.

The Value of Books

The girls’ interests in and experiences with books compels consideration of value. How is a book valued? What part does culture and context play in that evaluation? From the perspective of many adults in the U.S and other print-rich countries, books, as emblematic of print culture, are clearly valuable. An entire field of research is dedicated to the history and influence of books (Finkelstein & McCleery, 2002) and Lyndon B. Johnson believed that “A book is the most effective weapon against intolerance and ignorance.” Books, as social and cultural messengers, contain power and are influential. They are central in the cultural and social transformations of many societies, which is why adult censorship is frequent among children’s books.

Yet how are books valued in children’s worlds, especially those children with limited access to books? Do children believe a book’s existence and worth is entirely dependent on the
meaning found in or created from the visual or printed messages within bound pages? Is a book’s worth dependent on its current “author” or “owner,” on societal opinion, or a combination of factors? While not explicitly asked, the girls’ offered a variety of ways in which they value books through their sentiments and behaviors. For these girls, books and reading can operate on perpendicular horizons, intersecting on occasion.

Books as “Exports”

The “exportability” of books (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, p.152) was of importance to the girls. Like the adolescent males in Smith and Wilhelm’s study, the girls desired books that could be “easily exported into conversation” (p.152). Books that could be quickly referenced in conversations or used to initiate conversations were considered valuable to most of the girls because they generated interfamilial activities and fostered a sense of community among friends. Joke books, cookbooks, family science books and mass media books were the more common book genres that proved to be exportable. The girls cracked jokes with friends and family, shared recipes with grandmothers, conducted science experiments together, and expressed shared delight of R&B singers and famous athletes. The girls exuded confidence and competency when interacting with others via these books.

Some of the culturally relevant book options present in the study were not as exportable for the girls. This literature was a private practice which did not stimulate the same range and degree of social discourse that the mass media books or functional books (e.g. cookbooks) did. One potential reason for culturally relevant literature’s limited capacity for exportability is the unfamiliarity of the books among the girls and their communities. The girls, their families, and even some teachers indicated they were initially unaware of award-winning culturally relevant literature. Even when the girls did become familiar with such literature, they felt they lacked an
audience of peers to discuss what they felt was important, namely cross-cultural communication and understanding.

The social complexity of culturally relevant literature could serve as another reason for its lack of exportability. Books including serious topics such as imprisoned parents, race relations, and divorce could prove difficult to quickly synthesize in conversations with others. Generally speaking, it is far easier to generate dialogue in public over jokes or sound bytes about celebrities’ lives than it is to talk about why Black and White individuals don’t get along in school or how to grapple with your parents’ divorce. Environment is critical for dialogue about difficult topics (Copenhaver, 2000) and the girls did not view their environment as conducive for serious conversations without the inclusion of popular culture. From a societal perspective, the potential exportability of books elevates their social worth. Books are social capital, and for these girls, culturally relevant literature was valuable, but not as socially valuable as mass media texts during the study. Instead, culturally relevant literature was personally enriching as it validated the girls’ senses of self and reflected their personal inquiries.

Books as Social Intermediaries

The value of culturally relevant literature for some of the girls resided in the opportunity to learn about other cultures in an attempt to solve the racial tensions existing in the girls’ communities, and establish friendships between Blacks and Whites. Based on the girls’ narratives, literature which focused on interracial relations provided the girls with “mirrors and windows” (Bishop, 1990) that reflected their selves and society (Copenhaver, 2001; Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001; Katz, 1983; Rudman, 1984; Yokota, 1993). Yet these books were not shared with others. The girls used the books as a springboard to share with me their desire for improved cultural relations and understanding but claimed their peers weren’t interested or the books were ineffective because conversations didn’t occur. They wanted an adult to initiate and
facilitate the discussion about race relations through reading and discussing books that included interracial relations. In this instance, read-alouds would be a great avenue for such discussions, as suggested by Copenhaver’s (2000, 2001) research. However, such discussions rarely occur due in part to educators’ frequent adoption of a colorblind perspective and their beliefs that talk about race and race relations in schools is taboo (Schoenfield, 2003).

Despite the girls’ inability to build “communities” through multicultural literature focusing on race relations, the girls in this study were able to develop “communities of readers” in a similar capacity as other readers who gained access to books (Cherland, 1994; Guice, 1992; Hepler & Hickman, 1988; Mohr, 2003; 2006; Möller, 1999; Simpson, 1996; Williams, 2005). They read and discussed mass media books and other culturally relevant literature with their peers and relatives on occasion. Reading those books enabled them to create opportunities to reacquaint themselves with their ancestral heritage and their immediate family members who had grown distant from them, something the girls indicated they had rarely, if ever, done.

They also “read” their books in alternative ways which indicated their beliefs that books were not just reading material; they were also bartering tools to gain various positions of status and power. For these girls, the medium was the message; books held social capital. They quickly ascertained the value of books for a variety of people and offered those individuals access to those desired books in exchange for literal and symbolic goods the girls desired. They loaned teachers multicultural picture books in exchange for improved status as a reader in the classroom, and exchanged or shared (but didn’t necessarily read) books about athletes, celebrities, and TV shows with peers in exchange for completed homework, candy, and soda. Additionally, the girls offered books as a) symbolic peace offerings to loved ones; b) requests for reconnection or personal time with relatives or friends; and as c) self-referents to boys who the
girls were attracted to. In these scenarios, girls became cultural brokers with books as currency. Their “uses” of books illustrate distinctions between individuals based on different social backgrounds and interests (Kraaykamp & Dijkstra, 1999) and potentially convey a form of resistance to the dominant definition of “reading” books as literally reading the printed text (Bergin & Cooks, 2002).

**Reconsiderations of “Worthy Books”**

So what is a “worthy book” and in what context makes it valuable? The girls shared many educators and librarians’ valuation of books based on the potential messages within the bound pages of texts—the literal reading of text. They also comprehended and valued books as mechanisms for social positioning outside the realm of print. Books are symbols of status, of academic and social wealth in terms of peer and familial acceptance. David Booth (2006) recalled a story where a customs officer informed him that “only rich people read” (p.153). While this customs officer might have been referring to the economic value of books and other reading materials, the girls have exemplified how books can garner social wealth. The girls can potentially gain entrance into various social circles necessary for social success. They have validated the reality of “literacy as practice” (Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron, 2005, as cited in Pennington, 2007, p.466). The girls read for various reasons and within different cultural spheres.

Books considered “light reading” are also commonly desired for personal or recreational reading by children (Krashen, 2004; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1991) and adults (Nell, 1988); yet these books are rarely acknowledged and honored in the classroom and school libraries (Booth, 2006; Worthy, 1996; Worthy, Moorman, and Turner, 1999). Their restriction from the classroom seems grounded in the social differentiation between different genres of
books. The complexity and prestige of reading materials elevate their literary worth among literary scholars and educators (Hunt, 1991; Kraaykamp & Dijkstra, 1999). Being educated also conveys an aura of developed thought and complexity and typically elevates one’s socioeconomic and social status. Therefore educators—especially literacy educators—believe books “worthy” for personal and academic development should include a level of complexity that “light reading” does not contain. Literary preference is situated within class (Kraaykamp & Dijkstra, 1999) which complicates the presence of and access to a variety of reading materials in the classroom.

Morgan unfortunately suffered the repercussions of desiring “light reading material” when her desired texts were not honored by her mother or school. Morgan’s experiences affirm the need for not only permeable classrooms (Dyson, 1993) but also permeable classroom libraries. We need to understand and respect the knowledge students carry with them and invite their out-of-school worlds to reside within the classroom walls. As Dyson suggests (2003b), we do not need to share our students’ literary preferences in order to respond to them respectfully and incorporate them into the classroom.

**Mandated Reading Programs’ Influence upon Reading Conceptions**

The girls’ discourses about their classroom-based reading practices signified the residuals of current reading legislation upon students’ conceptions of reading and perhaps approach to books. This is especially true for children in low-income areas with limited opportunities to access and interact with books. When discussing their conceptions of reading at the onset of the study the girls described aversive conditions. They were not allowed to read picture books, were fearful of selecting books that were not endorsed by school, and were “forced” to do reading activities that they felt were meaningless. The girls recollected episodes of teasing and bullying by classmates due to the girls’ oral reading capabilities and they compared themselves to
incarcerated individuals who were held to unattainable standards because of a lack of materials and engagement. Their experiences reify Frank Smith (2003)’s portrait of children who are pressured to read. “Children coerced into reading—with punitive consequences for ‘failure,’ will only learn that reading is a mystery, school is aversive, and teachers are agents of tyranny” (p.52).

While I did not observe the girls’ classroom reading instruction first-hand, I did learn from one of the girls’ teachers that Meadowlawn Elementary School used the Success for All basal reading program for their reading instruction. Considering the type of reading instruction provided to the girls, I believe the girls’ narratives reflect how current legislation for reading instruction, based on “scientific reading research” as defined by the National Reading Panel (NRP) report (National Reading Panel, 2000), has not only constricted children’s concepts of reading but has also reduced, if not eliminated the pleasure of reading for both children and teachers. When I compared the girls’ Discourses of detachment and imprisonment with intermediate grade teachers’ beliefs about literacy instruction using Reading Mastery, another mandated scripted reading program (Shelton, 2005), I noticed striking similarities. These similarities illuminate the debilitating effects of current scripted reading instruction programs upon not only students but also teachers.

The discourses used by the girls and the teachers in Shelton’s study speak to a larger discourse community of disenfranchised and defeated individuals who possess little personal agency in education practices. It reflects Patrick Finn’s (1999) definition of domesticating education. Domesticating education stresses functional literacy and ensures the productivity, dependability, and docility of a person (p.ix-x). Table 7-1 shows the similarities between the girls’ and Shelton’s teachers’ discourses and illuminates how both groups of individuals are
disengaged and disempowered with the type of reading instruction currently mandated in many elementary schools.

Table 7-1. Comparison between the girls’ talk and teachers’ talk about reading instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girls' talk about their school-based reading practices</th>
<th>Teachers' talk about their experiences with a scripted reading program (Shelton, 2005, p.195-196)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It’s just sum’em ya gotta do to get outta here.</td>
<td>You are caught.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel kinda like my dad waiting to be released.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These questions are hard! No one asks us these kinda questions. Can I just tell you about the book?</td>
<td>It's difficult and it's stressful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They’re like “just try it by yourself, you’ll probably get it.” But you know you can’t do it. You just can’t get anyone else to know you can’t do it.</td>
<td>A kid will be stuck on something and you'll want to go to it knowing that you really can't.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It don’t really matter. I don't feel nuthin'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So reading to me can be special But it's kinda just tests and doin’ worksheets and stuff</td>
<td>It's not useful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading been controlling me for all ‘dese years</td>
<td>Autonomy. I don't have any.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s like no one trusts us.</td>
<td>There are people telling us we have to do this and we have to do it this way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You sure we ain—are you gonna get in trouble with these?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya gotta have good fluency! In school that’s what we always talkin’ about.</td>
<td>You're so constrained to this little box . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm learning to dislike reading more and more at this school.</td>
<td>My motivation got less and less.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Table 7-1 the girls portray themselves as resigned individuals who have to “play the game” in order to be “released” and show the detrimental effects of current reading legislation, as interpreted by local education agencies and state governments, upon the psyches of students and educators. This is a striking blow to the goals of reading legislation which include “leaving no child behind.” If the statements above are any indication of the effects of current reading legislation, then we are not only leaving children behind, but we are extracting the passion and denouncing the expertise of our teachers. Interestingly the provision of books and the freedom to interact with the books as each girl wished became powerful influences on the girls’ approaches to and conceptions of books and reading.

The Power of Book Access

Researchers are conflicted about whether merely providing access to books can improve children’s achievement. Worthy, Patterson, Salas, Prater, and Turner (2002) determined that access to books considered interesting by resistant readers is not enough to improve their reading achievement; interpersonal interaction is integral. Teachers and reading tutors need to take a personal interest and responsibility in the instruction of struggling readers. On the other hand, Allington and colleagues (2007) concluded that consistently providing economically disadvantaged children access to books of personal interest did significantly increase their reading achievement. While determining the positive effect of book access upon children’s reading achievement was not the purpose of the study, the findings from this study attest to the power of book access for these girls and the girls’ expressed need for interpersonal interactions with books.

The Emancipatory Nature of Book Access

Access to books became an act of social justice for some of the girls. The opportunity to “be” with the books instead of “doing” reading fostered awareness among some of the girls
about their reading policies and practices at school. The girls began questioning the locality of their reading struggles and determined that their lack of reading materials for reading response homework, their restricted access to readable books because they were picture books, and the decontextualized nature of their reading instruction, contributed to their attitude towards and competency in reading.

While only Jackie acted upon her realization during the duration of the study by asking her teacher to read a couple of picture books in order to understand they were quality books for Jackie, the fact that access to books elicits critical thought is quite encouraging. I can imagine the potential benefits of both access and authentic discussion. In a sense, book access is one element of empowering education (Finn, 1999). It can lead to “positions of power and authority” (Alvermann, 2003, p.4).

**Increased Reader Engagement through Personal Responsibility, Autonomy, and Choice**

The girls clearly enjoyed their decision-making responsibilities, despite their initial hesitations and confusion about the authenticity of their active roles in the study. They were responsible for helping decide which books to include, had sole ownership of how they interacted with the books, and helped steer our interviews and conversations. This was in stark contrast to their reading and book interactions in school where they were instructed on what to read, when to read, and how to respond, with little deviation from the “script.” The girls displayed their enthusiasm through smiles and laughter, as well as through their discourse. They used evaluative terms and exclamations in their slang, such as “cool,” “fye,” (slang for good, cool, or something likeable) and “snap” (slang used here to express enthusiasm and positive surprise) when they saw books of interest and shared those particular books with me.

The positive effects of the “novel situation” of uncensored book access didn’t necessarily subside as the study continued. At the conclusion of the study, four of the seven girls voluntarily
stated that one of their favorite aspects of the study was “being able to pick out books that I wanted.” Additionally, some of the girls shared that they loved “tryin’ out the books” without feeling rushed or as if they had to “prove” their reading by answering comprehension questions. They suggested I talk to their librarian about how she could select books for the library and let “people hang out with books.” Interestingly, they balked at my suggestion that they either accompany me or they tell her themselves. The girls’ enjoyment did not include sharing it with individuals associated with the “official world” of school which housed a plethora negative reading experiences for them.

Therrien (2004) speaks of the motivational benefits of repeated and consistent experiences of effective instruction in fluency and comprehension to struggling students. Similarly, repeated and consistent opportunities for free and autonomous interactions with interesting books can be motivational for students who struggle with developing their reading practices and finding aesthetically pleasing books. With the exception of Morgan, the girls considered ownership of books and their reading experiences to be motivational. Morgan’s experiences of frustration due to conflicting perspectives about reading and books from her teacher, parents, me (via my questions and expectations), and herself, seemed debilitating.

Curious about how they would respond to the ERAS study after participating in this study, I asked the girls to voluntarily complete the survey for the second time. With the exception of Morgan who did not want to take the survey again, all of the girls agreed. Alondra completed the survey in May since I was unable to visit her during the summer. The other girls completed the survey during my last interviews with them in the summer. Interestingly, while completing the survey each girl commented that her responses would be the same as before. The results in Table 7-2 indicate otherwise.
Table 7-2. Comparison of the girls’ initial and final Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) percentiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girl</th>
<th>Initial Overall ERAS Percentile</th>
<th>Final Overall ERAS Percentile</th>
<th>Change in ERAS Percentile Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>+56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>+71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>+26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>+33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alondra</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>+6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-2 includes the overall ERAS percentiles which aggregates the girls’ academic and recreational reading attitude scores and indicates the degree of positive change as indicated by the girls’ responses. When looking at just the recreational reading scores, the differences are even greater; however, for all of the girls who completed the survey the second time, their academic scores also increased from their initial survey results. Therefore, I chose to provide the aggregate percentiles to indicate a positive shift towards both classifications of reading.

The results of this survey appear encouraging and substantiate researchers’ assertions that access to interesting and desired books elevates individuals’ reading engagement. It also confirms the girls’ statements and behaviors during the study. Jackie, Jaime, and Alice were three girls who shared their enthusiasm for books they were either unaware of or had been denied access to. They also expressed the value of books and book ownership to them and the larger community by acting as “literary gatekeepers” to their peers and family members. They provided access to only those who “proved” themselves to the girls, just as the girls gained access to books in school. They had to “prove” themselves to be trustworthy (library loans) and competent (reading competency scores). The girls were engaged with books because of the
literary pleasures and the social power contained within the bound pages of books and this engagement was reflected in their ERAS scores.

Chris stated that she still felt as though she didn’t love reading; however, she enjoyed reading with her cousins because she possessed books she could read independently. Even Candy, whose plan to use books as entrance passes into a different cultural community seemed ineffective by the end of the study, indicated having a more positive attitude towards reading. Although, she still harbored a negative attitude towards reading (13th percentile). While I cannot say for certain that Morgan’s attitude scores would have declined due to her somewhat tumultuous experience in the study, I infer her refusal to complete the survey as that possibility.

The girls’ comparisons of their reading experiences to dietary consumptions of literary desserts and favorite foods bolstered their “numerical statements.” Pizza and ice cream sundaes, while not faring well in the nutrition department certainly satisfies one’s cravings. Isn’t that what educators, especially literacy educators, wish more children would do—indulge in reading? At the end of this study the girls’ conceptions of reading encompassed more than reading rates and accuracy counts. They included their selves and society.

**Abated Enthusiasm about the Girls’ Engagement with Reading**

While the girls’ comments about the positive benefits of their participation in the study were encouraging, the girls also mentioned that the access they had with the types of books in the study was temporary. During the following school year, I occasionally received phone calls from Candy, Jackie, and Alice informing me of their inability to find books in their school library and requesting my help to gain access to books they would like. After I asked them why they were asking me, they replied that I was the “book lady” or “book person who knows where to get good books for us.” They admitted that accessing and owning the types of books in the study was
“a one time thingy” and they wanted to “keep on doin’ it.” Additionally, they said that they didn’t “trust” their librarians or teachers to know about good books.

The girls’ beliefs that access to desired books was a unique experience and their distrust of school officials to help them find interesting books are worrisome and speak to the need for school and classroom libraries to contain a wealth of reading materials that extend beyond award-winning, mono-cultural books. School and classroom libraries should include the literature of people’s everyday lives, or as Alice said, “books about real stuff to me, about what happens to my kinda people, not any ole’ thing ‘ole people read. It has to be real.”

**Classroom Implications**

People lead storied lives. In education, teachers and students tell and retell their personal and social stories. They are both “storytellers and characters in their and others’ stories” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.2). The stories told by these seven girls are similar stories told by others in different locales and with slight plot variations. As we continue to hear these stories, perhaps we will renew our commitment to reflect upon our students’ and our own conceptions of books, reading instruction, and literacy practices as they are situated in our lives. The following implications for teachers are reverberations of previous suggestions by educators and education researchers; however, they are included because the girls have indicated through their stories that those suggestions have gone unheeded.

If we are to ensure that our students become life-long competent readers and can appreciate the myriad of ways to read and purposes for reading, we need to distance ourselves from the current consolidation of reading as a set of skills to be mastered and return to the expansive view of reading as practices and processes which involve genuine inquiries into the self, society, and include critical thought. While “gaining meaning from print has always been a goal of reading instruction” (Venezky, 1987, p. 257), meaning is not limited to skill-based
competencies. It also involves cultural, social, and personal reflections and contemplations about the situated nature of life and our actions within it.

Reading instruction in the 1950’s included a lack of teachers’ input in curricular development (Langer and Allington, 1992, p. 703). Like today, reading instruction was construed as “work, not fun.” However, unlike today, reading children’s literature for pleasure was also recommended (Dolch, 1955 as cited in Martinez & McGee, 2000, p. 159). While literature was considered a “reward” once the “real work” had been completed, according to the girls, such a reward doesn’t necessarily exist for them today. Educators can alter those experiences by providing a wide variety of books (including culturally relevant and mass media books) in their classroom libraries and including those books in their instructional practices. This is especially true for those children who rely on schools for their reading materials. Books matter. They matter in different ways at different times and in different contexts. Educators should acknowledge the breadth and depth of books’ purposes and discuss it with their students. By addressing the various purposes of reading and contemplating the various ways in which books and reading are both purposeful and purposeless, educators can help broaden their students’ conceptions of reading, enrich their own instructional practice, engage in critical thought, better ensure their students’ academic and social success.

Despite their label as a “struggling reader” the girls demonstrated their reading competencies and generated wonderings about whether their “struggle” was with the reading process or the socialized nature of reading in the classroom. By inquiring about why students select books, modeling why they themselves select particular books beyond the textual features, and engaging in genuine discussions, teachers can gain a better grasp of their struggling readers beyond comprehension and fluency scores. They can also learn more about their own
instructional practices and “pedagogical horizons” and convey to students that every aspect of books and reading is important.

The need and desire for discussion about books beyond the plot was strongly conveyed in this study. The emphasis on IRE protocols and the absence of authentic discussion contributed to the disengagement in classrooms and the girls’ comparisons to themselves as criminals. Alvermann (1996, 2003) and Wells’ (1996) case-study research about adolescents’ engagement with reading revealed that adolescent readers believe the best learning conditions for them were discussion-oriented classes amongst students, not teachers and students, with the teachers stimulating the discussion by making the topic interesting for them. By creating opportunities for dialogue, with punitive consequences, reader engagement is potentially elevated.

Race and race relations are on children’s minds and they need a platform upon which they can discuss these important issues. Classrooms communities can be that platform and culturally relevant literature can serve as safe and indirect routes to discuss those critical issues. Like the students in Copenhaver’s (2000, 2001) studies, the girls in this study openly brought up the topic of race and cross-cultural understanding. They were also adamant about the presence of culturally relevant literature in their classrooms. Read-alouds could initiate positive discussion which could then become independent inquiry projects or book club topics. Students’ willingness to dialogue about such serious and pertinent topics should not go unnoticed.

**Opportunities for Further Inquiries**

“*Sentences end with full stops. Stories do not.*”

--Harold Rosen

While I began this study with two overarching questions, I ended the study with additional questions. The girls’ reactions, commentaries, and behaviors generated new inquiries
about the interplay of readers, texts, and contexts which would prove worthy as follow-up studies.

A similar study with a broader selection of intermediate and middle grade readers of both genders, who come from linguistically and culturally diverse communities, and are considered marginalized readers would be a worthy investigation. My study was limited to seven preadolescent girls who identified themselves as members of only two different cultural communities, making it difficult to generalize my findings. Additional studies including children of various ethnic heritages and both genders would provide additional context to my conclusions.

While I attempted to focus on the girls’ personal use of books, school was clearly included in their definition of personal use of books and reading. Based on the girls’ statements and previous research (Arya, 2003; Guice, 1992; Landis, 1999; Möller, 1999; Rasinski & DeFord, 1988; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996), schools have a great impact on children’s conceptions of books and reading. A similar study with intermediate students about the ways in which children perceive and interact with books that includes classroom observations and teacher interviews would be a valuable contribution to the field, especially with the overwhelming presence of NCLB and Reading First’s reading mandates.

Teachers play a critical role in arranging children’s reading histories. Their talk “mediates children’s activity and experience, and helps them make sense of learning, literacy, life, and themselves” (Johnston, 2004, p.2). Therefore, a study focusing on intermediate teachers’ discourse about books and reading during formal reading instruction and informally throughout the day would complement existing research on teachers of primary aged children. Another study could focus on teachers’ conceptions of reading, especially after the passage of NCLB, Reading First, and the mandatory reading endorsement courses for teachers at any grade level.
The study could also include documentation of the ways those conceptions influence their instructional practices and subsequently their students’ reading conceptions.

Researchers of early childhood, primary, and secondary level students such as Linda Labor, Anne Haas Dyson, Margaret Hagood, Shelley Nu, Donna Alvermann, James Gee, and other New Literacies researchers have documented the educational potential of media literacies or technologically-based texts. These studies do not include traditional forms of print—books—yet books still remain a prevalent resource in school and don’t appear to be leaving. Investigating how children approach and reconceptualize mass media texts, as intertextual documents of print and media, once the texts become a part of the school or “official” curriculum would complement existing research focusing solely on media literacy, popular culture resources, and books as separate entities.

Both Williams (2005) and this study determined mass media or popular culture texts generated great excitement among economically disadvantaged children who had limited access to books. Conducting a study with more affluent children or children who have a broader access to a variety of books would provide valuable information about the intersection of socioeconomic status and literary preferences. Additionally, the girls in this study selected both culturally relevant literature and mass media literature, just as the 11- and 12-year-old students in Greenlee, Monson, and Taylor’s (1996) study. However, over time, the girls selected fewer mass media books. A study investigating students’ selection of mass media and culturally relevant texts over an extended period of time to determine in what contexts both are considered “worthwhile” and the stimulus for their worth could provide additional information for teachers who are hesitant to allow mass media books into their classrooms, even as classroom library materials.
The girls often referred to the pace of a book as a textual element that contributed to reader engagement. Action, rather than characterization, motivated them to read, which supports contemporary research that many girls no longer prefer books which emphasize character development (Blackford, 2004). This elicits the question, “How is our fast-paced, technological society, with an emphasis on sound bytes and media literacy, influencing the ways in which we read and what we desire to read?” Additionally, what implications does this have for future reading instruction and the type of literature offered in classrooms and schools? Studies concerning these questions would update educators on the unanticipated influences of this technological era upon reading practices.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Advisory statements such as “Let the data guide you” and to “Question your perspective” typically echo in my consciousness when I conduct qualitative research. That psychological release of control can be scary, exciting, and humbling. The data from this particular study enabled me to view things from horizons that I was not personally accustomed to. As a former teacher and an avid reader who typically excelled in reading and literacy as a whole, I reside in a world of books and reading that differs starkly from the world of books and reading depicted by the girls. Their perspectives of reading through academic and social lenses were energizing and perplexing. I attempted to merge their conceptions with mine in the hope of helping determine how educators can better support students who demonstrate reading difficulties or express alliterate behaviors; however, some of our horizons have yet to merge and are hovering alongside, above, or underneath each other, on the cusp of uniting. In a way, this is understandable and comforting for it ensures the need for continued conversations. Listening and responding to narratives as “vicissitudes of human intention” (Bruner, 1986, p.16) never ends if one wishes to be a life-long educator and learner.
APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT AND ASSENT FORMS

Parent Informed Consent Letter and Permission Form

Dear Parent/Guardian(s):

I am a graduate student at the University of Florida and I am conducting research on why girls want to read particular books and their opinions of the books after selecting them. To do this, I will pick some girls to receive free books to read outside of school and meet to talk to their peers and/or me during their extended-day program. The girls will individually select the books to read. Some of these books might be related to popular musicians, such as Beyoncé, and T.V. shows, such as That’s So Raven. Other books offered to the girls will include award-winning books, historical and multicultural books, as well as both fiction and non-fiction books. You are welcome to look at the books at any time.

I need your permission for your child to participate. Giving your permission means that:

- Your child’s current reading test scores will be obtained.
- Your child will be asked to complete a short survey on her reading habits.
- Your child will select and bring home up to 15 books to read and audiotape her responses if desired.
- Your child may opt to take pictures with a camera of what they think is important about the book (for example, where they keep their books, their favorite page or the illustration in the book, etc.) These pictures are to include only things related to their books or reading practices and will only be used during your child’s interviews. I will develop the photos and destroy the negatives after development.
- At the end of the study, your child will select up to 15 books to keep and own.
- Your child will have the opportunity to voluntarily discuss her books with the other participating girls.
- Your child will be asked to participate in voluntary interviews about the books she read and her opinions on reading.
- Your child will be asked to voluntarily artistically respond to the books she read.
- Your child might be asked to read aloud a few pages from the books she is reading.

You child will benefit from the added reading that she does. There are no known risks to the participants. Participation in this study will not affect your child’s grades or placement in school programs. I will keep the results confidential by assigning your child a unique number and pseudonym created by your child. Additionally, any data, including the audio recordings will be placed in a locked cabinet. The audio recordings will be destroyed within one year after the study’s conclusion. Any photographs will be given to your child at the end of the study and the negatives will be destroyed after the development of the photos. You and your child can withdraw consent for your child’s participation at any time.
Results of this study will be available in August 2007 upon request. If you have any questions about this project, please contact me or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Fu, at (352) 392-9191. Questions or concerns about your child’s rights as a research participant may be directed to the UFIRB office, University of Florida, Box 1122550, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0433.

To allow your child to participate in this reading study, complete and sign the following permission form and return it to [director’s name], your child’s after-school care director. Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Jennifer M. Graff
Reading Study Permission Form

I have read the description of the Jennifer Graff's Reading study. I voluntarily give my consent for my child. *(print child's first and last name below)*, to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this description.

____________________________             ______________________
(Child's First Name)              (Child's Last Name)

_______________________________      ___________
Parent / Guardian Signature                        Date

_______________________________       ___________
2nd Parent / Witness                               Date
Child Assent Form

My name is Jennifer Graff and I am from the University of Florida. I am interested in knowing about what girls think about reading and what books girls might like. I also want to learn about what made the books you pick so good or not so good. I would really like it if you participated in my study on girls’ reading selections and experiences.

If you agree to participate, you will be able to

1. Pick books you want to read outside of school, which you will be able to keep and own at the end.
2. Record your thoughts about the book on tape or take pictures of things that were important to you and the book you selected.
3. Talk about these books with your friends.
4. Respond by yourself to the books using art, drama, etc.
5. Talk about these books and your opinions about reading to me.
6. Read aloud a few pages of your book.
7. Complete a survey about reading.

You do not have to do anything you don’t want to do. You also don’t have to answer any questions you don’t want to answer. This is not a part of school and your grades will not be affected by your participation. You can choose to stop participating at any time.

Do you want to participate?

_________ YES ______________NO

______________________________
(Child Signature)

______________________________
Child’s Name (Printed) Date
Table B-1. Extended day enrichment program (EDEP) sample agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDEP Schedule (Mon., Tues., Thurs., Fri.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timeframe</strong></td>
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<td>1:45-2:30pm</td>
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<td>2:30-3:15pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:15-4:00pm</td>
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<td>4:00-5:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00-5:30pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDEP Schedule (Wed.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>Timeframe</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2:15-3:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00-4:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clubs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00-5:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00-5:30pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Greeting with Participant’s Name. It’s great to see you today! How’s it goin’?

Well, we’re here today because I’d like to understand what you think about reading, what books you like to read, and know about your reading experiences at home and at school. Do you feel comfortable talking with me about your reading interests and experiences? {If no, what would help you feel more comfortable with me?}

Because I can’t remember everything that you say, I’ll be tape recording our conversation. This will help me know exactly what you said. I may also write down some notes too. Is this OK with you?

[If yes, then proceed with the following questions making sure this is a conversation that the participant controls.]

1. First, I want to make sure that when we talk about reading, we are on the same page, so I’d like to know what you think the word reading means to you. So if I say the word “reading,” what comes to your mind?

If participant says “I don’t know”
Elaborate with “Well, what do you think reading is when somebody asks you to read?

2. How do you feel about reading?

If needed: What does {term of emotion} mean? Describe it to me.

3. If someone were to ask you what kind of reader you are, what would you say? What does that mean?

If they ask for clarification about “what kind of reader”
“If an adult was to say to others, “This is (name) and she is a ______ reader” or “This is (name) and she reads _________,” what would they say?”

Clarifying Question:
“So if I’ve heard you correctly, you are said you are a ______ reader”

4. I’d like you to think about school and your classroom and the reading activities that occur there. What reading activities happen during the week? What reading experiences do you have?
5. What do you like to read outside of school?

6. I’d now like you to think about your home and reading. What kinds of reading activities happen at home during the week? Who does the reading? What is read? What reading experiences do you have at home?

7. Where do you usually get your reading materials? How often do you get them?

8. Tell me about some of your favorite reading materials. What makes them so good?

9. When you are reading, what do you think about? What thoughts come into your mind?

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and experiences with me! I’ve had a really cool time talking with you. Is there anything you’d like to ask me?
On-going Open-Ended Interview Protocol

(~30 minutes)

Establish rapport
Hey (name). What’s happenin’? How’re ya doing/What’s been going on?

Briefing /Begin Discussion
I’m really curious about what has been happening with you and the books you have been selecting. Just like before, I’ll be recording our conversation because I can’t remember everything that you say. I will also be taking some notes as well.

(If digital photos): Now what do we have here? What’s going on with these photos?

(If books): Now which book(s) do you have right now? Can you bring the books out so we can see them? OK. Now, what’s been happening with you and these books so far?

Sample Extensions:

1. If they have read the book…
   *What were you thinking about when you were reading it?
   *What kept you reading it?
   *What made you want to say “ick” (or whatever word the participant often used) and stop reading it?

2. If they haven’t read the book….
   *Why do you think you’ve been unable to read the book? What’s been going on?
   *Did you or anyone else do anything with the book?

Other Probing Questions/Statement:
Why do you think so?
Tell me more about that…

Other techniques to use include if the girls are having difficulty articulating their experiences:

1. Asking girls to help me imagine how they would imagine the story:
   (e.g. “I’ve never read ~. I know nothing about ~. Tell me about that story.”)

2. Asking them to compare experiences so I can better understand what they were experiencing.
   (e.g. “Tell me about an experience that felt the same as when you were reading~” or “If you were to compare your experience with this book to something you enjoy, what would it be? Describe it.”)
Final Semi-Structured Interview Protocol at EDEP

(~30 minutes)

Introduction
We’ve been able to talk and meet for the past few months and I’d like for you to let me know how this experience was for you. Like always, I’ll be recording our conversations in case I forget something. I may also take a few notes.

Questions

1. What sorts of experiences would you say you’ve had with the books you’ve selected over the past three months? (Who were involved and what happened?)
   
   **If needed:** What were those experiences like for you?

2. If I were to do this study again, what do you suggest I do?

3. If you were to describe yourself as a reader, what would you say?

4. How do you currently feel about reading?
   
   **If needed:** What does {term of emotion} mean? Describe it to me.

5. At the beginning of this study, you said you felt ______ about reading. Now you say you feel ___________ about reading. Why do you think your feelings are different/same?

   **If participants say “I don’t know”**
   What do you think helped those feelings to change/stay the same?

   6. Is there anything else you’d like to add?

Probing Questions/Statements:
Why do you think so?
Tell me more about that…
Initial and Final Book Selection Open-Ended Interview Protocol

(~30-60 minutes)

Introduction
Hey there (name). You all done? OK. Let’s make sure we have all the books you want. Let’s take a look at them here. Be sure to put them in the order you want to talk about them.

So what did you think about the books here today? Were there any that you were happy to see here? Were there any missing books?

Refresher and Question:
As you might remember, I am interested in knowing what books you like enough to borrow. I could guess why you might like these books, but I’d probably be wrong quite a bit. So I’d like for you to tell me why you chose these books to help me know what kinds of books you and possibly other girls might would like. Your opinions might help teachers and librarians get these types of books in the class or the library too! Now you know what my memory is like, so I’m going to record our conversation to make sure I don’t forget anything or write anything down wrong.

Let’s take a look at these books you chose today. How did you decide these were the books to get?

If needed…. Tell me what happened as you chose your books today. Think back as you began to pick these books and talk about what you were thinking until you had finished picking.

If needed… Did anything else happen today that helped you pick the books you did? Tell me about it.

Verification:
Tell me/let me see if I heard you right. I heard you say that you picked this book because ~

Probing
Tell me more about why ~
Tell me why you think ~
Did anything or anyone else help you pick these books? Tell me about it

If the participant says she read the book before
How did you read these books before?

If the participant says she “knows” the book
How did you get to know this book before?

Thanks for sharing why you got these books. It was fun to listen to you and I learned a lot! Is there anything else you’d like to say about this or ask me?
Summer Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

(~30 minutes)

**Introduction**
How’s your summer goin’? What’s been happenin’? How’s ~ (e.g. family members)

**Questions**

1. Which of the books that you got at the end of the school year caught your interest (eye) this summer? Which did not?

2. Which of the books did you hang out with?

3. What happened when you hung out with the books?

4. Who did you share these books or talk about these books with

5. What other kinds of reading material caught your interest/eye this summer? How did you get them?

**Probing Questions/Statements:**
Why do you think so?
Tell me more about that…

Thanks again for spending some time with me and sharing your opinions. I really appreciate what you are doing and saying.

(Continue talk with participant about the participant’s life outside the literary realm).
APPENDIX D
TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

These conventions were adapted from Silverman (1997).

( ) Empty parentheses indicate the talk was unintelligible to transcribe. Any letter combinations or words inside these parentheses indicate my best estimate of what was said.

(( )) Double parentheses indicate my comments which usually describe an event such as a participant laughing or looking at a book. These are not transcriptions of the participants’ words.

(2) Numbers in parentheses indicates periods of silence or pause in total seconds greater than 1 full second.

(…) An ellipsis is used when a period or silence or pause lasts less than 1 full second.

[ ] A left-side bracket indicates where overlapping talk began

] A right-side bracket indicates when overlapping talk ends or marks alignment within a continuing stream of overlapping talk

Inter- A hyphen indicates an abrupt cut-off or self-interruption of the sound in progress. In this case, the word “interview” was self-interrupted

= Equal signs, which are often at the end of one line and the beginning of another line, indicate continuous talk or an interruption of talk. It indicates a unification of both lines

Mmm Multiples of the same letter indicate the lengthening of a particular sound as an affirmative to another’s utterance

::: Colons indicate a lengthening of the sound just preceding them. The length of the sound is proportional the number of colons

That is Underlining indicates stress or emphasis by the participant

° A degree symbol indicates talk lowered in pitch or volume

^ A circumflex accent symbol indicates elevated pitch or volume

APPENDIX E
BOOK ORDER FORM

Date: ___________________’s

15 Initial Book Selections

☺
# APPENDIX F

## BOOK LOG

______________’s Book Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Borrowed</th>
<th>Book #</th>
<th>Book Title (1st few words)</th>
<th>How far did you get with the book? (Circle one)</th>
<th>How Good Was It? (Choose One)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finished it  Read 1/2 Read ___ Chap/pgs.</td>
<td>1= Not good 2=A little good 3=OK 4=Very Good 5=Great! (You can use your own scale too)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Looked at Pictures Only Didn’t Read it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finished it  Read 1/2 Read ___ Chap/pgs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Looked at Pictures Only Didn’t Read it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finished it  Read 1/2 Read ___ Chap/pgs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Looked at Pictures Only Didn’t Read it</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Finished it  Read 1/2 Read ___ Chap/pgs.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Looked at Pictures Only Didn’t Read it</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Finished it  Read 1/2 Read ___ Chap/pgs.</td>
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<td>Looked at Pictures Only Didn’t Read it</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Finished it  Read 1/2 Read ___ Chap/pgs.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Looked at Pictures Only Didn’t Read it</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date Returned</th>
<th></th>
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282
## APPENDIX G
### LIST OF BOOKS OFFERED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book No</th>
<th>Year Published*</th>
<th>Book title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Series/NonSeries</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Lexile**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1993R/1998R</td>
<td>The BFG</td>
<td>Roald Dahl</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Non-Series</td>
<td>Chapter Book</td>
<td>720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2001/2002R</td>
<td>Aquamarine</td>
<td>Alice Hoffman</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Non-Series</td>
<td>Chapter Book</td>
<td>940</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2000R</td>
<td>James and the Giant Peach</td>
<td>Roald Dahl</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Non-Series</td>
<td>Chapter Book</td>
<td>870</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2002R</td>
<td>Charlie and the Chocolate Factory</td>
<td>Roald Dahl</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Series</td>
<td>Chapter Book</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>Series of Unfortunate Events #1: The Bad Beginning</td>
<td>Lemony Snicket</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Series</td>
<td>Chapter Book</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1999</td>
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<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Series</td>
<td>Chapter Book</td>
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<td>2000</td>
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<td>Lemony Snicket</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Series</td>
<td>Chapter Book</td>
<td>1150</td>
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* R means reprint  
**Lexiles were determined using the lexile analyzer tool at [www.lexile.com](http://www.lexile.com)
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<tr>
<th>Book No</th>
<th>Year Published*</th>
<th>Book title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Series/NonSeries</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Lexile**</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
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## APPENDIX H
### GIRLS’ BOOK SELECTIONS

Table H-1. Alice’s book selections

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<th>Initial Book Selections</th>
<th>Borrowed Books</th>
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<td>Mr. Chickee’s Funny Money</td>
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<td>Vince Carter: Choose Your Course</td>
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<td>Double Dutch</td>
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<td>Lebron James (NBA Reader)</td>
<td>Pop People: Lil’ Romeo</td>
<td>Pop People: Lil’ Romeo</td>
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<td>Great Stars of the NBA: Allen Iverson</td>
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Bow Wow
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<td>The Land of Elyon Book I: The Dark Hills Divide</td>
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<td>A Smart Girl's Guide to Friendship Troubles</td>
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<td>One True Friend</td>
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<td>Series of Unfortunate Events #2: The Reptile Room</td>
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<td>The Real Slam Dunk</td>
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<td>What Did I Do to Deserve a Sister Like You?</td>
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<td>Charlie and the Chocolate Factory</td>
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<td>Series of Unfortunate Events #3: The Wide Window</td>
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<tr>
<td>Becoming Naomi Leon</td>
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<td>Pop People: Lil' Romeo</td>
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<td>never mind! A Twin Novel</td>
<td>never mind! A Twin Novel</td>
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<td>Skeleton Man</td>
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<td>Because of Winn-Dixie</td>
<td>Super Visions</td>
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<td>The Land of Elyon Book I: The Dark Hills Divide</td>
<td>Love that Dog</td>
<td>Buttermilk Hill</td>
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<td>SpongeBob SquarePants-Friends Forever</td>
<td>Bird</td>
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<td>Ida B and her plans to maximize fun….</td>
<td>The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe</td>
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<td>Zoey101 #1-Girls Got Game</td>
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<td>Zoey101 #2</td>
<td>-Dramarama</td>
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### Children’s Book References


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jennifer Graff completed her bachelor’s degree in English Literature with a minor in Women’s Studies at the University of Florida (UF) and entered the teaching profession as a school drop-out prevention specialist for “at-risk” fourth and fifth graders where she focused on developing the students’ literacy capabilities. Her desire to better understand world cultures and develop cross-cultural understanding led her to Wakayama prefecture in Japan where she taught English as a Foreign Language at two rural, public secondary schools for over three years. Jennifer returned to the UF and obtained a Master’s degree in Reading Education under the advisement of Dr. Richard Allington and Dr. Anne McGill-Franzen. She continued her academic journey as a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction at UF, focusing on language, literacy, and culture.

During her doctoral studies Jennifer taught Secondary Reading and Children’s Literature courses for pre-service and in-service teachers and served as a research assistant on a variety of education and reading grants including Dr. Richard Allington and Dr. Anne McGill-Franzen’s U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) grant, “Minimizing Summer Reading Loss among Poor Children.” Jennifer continued her commitment to cultural understanding and professional development through her assistance with the UF Transnational and Global Studies Center’s Teachers’ (K-12) Global Education Workshop series, and worked with Save the Children U.S. in Nakasongola, Uganda, on literacy initiatives for girls and women.

After obtaining her doctoral degree, Jennifer accepted a position as Assistant Professor of Reading Education in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia.