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A Case Study of Adolescent Females' Perceptions of Identity in an After-School Book Club

Holly Atkins

University of South Florida, hatkins@mail.usf.edu

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A Case Study of Adolescent Females' Perceptions of Identity in an
After-School Book Club

by

Holly S. Atkins

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Secondary Education
College of Education
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Jane Applegate, Ph.D.
Valerie Janesick, Ph.D.
Patricia Jones, Ph.D.
Joan Kaywell, Ph.D.
James King, Ed.D.

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Dedication

Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.

-- Goethe

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. Thank you for your love, patience, and unwavering support. To my mom: You will always be my first and forever reading buddy. To my husband, Steve: Thirty years of marriage and a dissertation – you are wonderful beyond measure. To my children, Stephen, Laura, and Amy: I am proud of the wonderful dreamers and doers you have become.

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I must begin with the five eighth grade girls who comprised the “Super Girl Nerd Squad:” Lacey, Bianca, Sarah, Katie, and Rachel. Thank you for sharing your reading lives and your selves with me. I will always honor my membership in the book club as “H-Dawg.”

I am grateful throughout the often solitary work of completing this dissertation that I have been surrounded by an array of supportive friends and colleagues who never wavered in their support. To Dr. Jane Applegate, who continued to believe I would complete this process even when (or especially when) I couldn’t see it myself. I thank you for your patience in reading my many muddled drafts and helping me clarify my muddled thinking. To Dr. Valerie Janesick, whose commitment to excellence pushed me to do more and be more both professionally and personally. To Dr. Jim King whose excitement over my study never failed to lift my spirits. I thank you for your support in helping me work through the many wonderings that filled my days and nights. To Dr. Joan Kaywell: Long before I entered the doctoral program you have been one of my most active supporters. Thank you for the doors you helped open for me. To Dr. Pat Jones, my dear friend and colleague: Our lives have become interwoven through our labor of love with the Tampa Bay Area Writing Project. I have learned so much from you. You have a wonderful talent for making people want to do better and be better.

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Abstract

Reading is a perennial educational hot topic – but now extends far beyond early literacy to the secondary level. Reading researchers are growing in our knowledge of how to reach and teach struggling adolescent readers yet too often success in literacy is measured solely by performance on standardized tests. Literacy is seen on one hand as a one-dimensional set of skills students need to possess to be successful in school and their future workplaces. A more expansive view of the importance of literacy and what it means to adolescent females' growth as individuals and members of communities is needed.

This study focused on selected adolescent girls' perceptions of identity through reading, responding, and discussing literature featuring strong female protagonists. Semi-structured interviews conducted with each of the female participants at the beginning and end of the study, reader response journals in which participants composed weekly responses to their reading, transcripts of the weekly book discussions, field notes, and entries in a researcher reflective journal form the data for this study, emphasizing the focus on the meaning these individuals brought to the phenomena studied: identity exploration within literacy events.

This study addressed questions of the how and why of a literary event, and involved a variety of data, thereby making a case study methodology an appropriate choice. Selected participants were the focus of individual case studies and the book club itself was the focus of an additional case study. Self-identity statements and background

information gathered on each of the three case study participants helped shape portraits of these adolescent girls, whose perspectives on their own identities were both convergent and divergent. The same proved true when addressing the two exploratory questions: The participants appeared to hold identical perspectives on identity, yet stated unique, varied perspectives on environmental elements influencing their self-identity expression. All three case study participants viewed identity as a developing, evolving process highly influenced by societal standards and expectations – especially for females. The girls also saw the social environment as affecting identity in the frequent mismatch occurring between what the individual perceives as his or her self-identity being expressed and how others in the environment perceive the identity.

Psychosocial theories of human development acknowledge that an individual's identity is both located within and without. The participants in the book club all shared this perception of identity as a sociocultural construct. However, the girls' diverse self-identity statements and range of perspectives indicate the need for a new model of female adolescent identity development. This new model needs to reflect girls and their sociocultural worlds of today. Finally, the experiences of the five girls in the book club study indicate the common misperceptions existing concerning the nature of adolescent identity. Again, unlike Erickson's concept of identity as undeveloped in adolescence and shifting with each storm and crisis, the girls in the study indicate the need for a different perspective.

Classrooms are unfortunately often bereft of the type of space provided for the girls in the book club. Within this space the girls engaged in deep, thoughtful, critical responses to literature while expressing their self-identities and exploring other's

identities. As adolescents, these five girls were provided space by and with a trusted adult to engage in what is acknowledged to be a critical element in human development: identity exploration. To meet the needs of all students, teachers should arrange discussions in both small group and whole class structures. However, successful discussions – those which offer students rich opportunities to engage with text, make connections, derive personal meaning, explore and express self-identity – these discussions will only occur when the teacher has considered not only the physical environment but also the attitudinal environment.

Chapter One

Introduction to the Study

The Personal and Professional Meet at the Crossroads of Research.

A young girl and her mother walk hand in hand down the quiet street in a small Florida beach community. As the youngest child with four older siblings, “just the two of us” Friday nights visiting Long Key Library with her mother are treasured moments for Holly. The year is 1964. Forty-five years later, Holly will be a middle school language arts teacher pursuing a doctoral degree in English Education. Her research will reflect the lifelong passion for reading whose seeds were planted along the pathway mother and daughter traveled on their weekly visits to the local library: girls and literacy.

This story – my story, is the narrative woven throughout my life. With the many changes I’ve experienced in over 50 years of living, the one constancy has always been the presence of books. Friends, confidants, sources of knowledge, laughter, and inspiration – books are my touchstones. As a doctoral candidate, I have naturally turned to books once again for my research.

As a teenager in the 1970s, the women’s movement formed an important foundation for my adolescence and exploration of what it meant to be female. The words of Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, and others provided me with a window into a concept of womanhood I lacked from my own mother. While I will always value her for instilling in me that lifelong love of reading, my mother saw a woman’s life as defined

only as it related to others: wife first, then mother. The voices of the women's movement spoke to me in ways I'd never heard before. Choices. You have choices.

I look at my own daughters now and know that the society in which they grew into their own young womanhoods has changed significantly since my own days. In many ways, the walls that boxed in far too many females in my day have fallen away. Or have they? Are they gone, or have they simply changed forms? These are questions I wonder as I watch my third-year law school daughter enveloped in the latest episode of "Project Runway."

My research must reflect my passion. And so the marriage of books and women produced a study of five female adolescents reading, writing, talking ... and exploring what it means to be female.

Background of the Study

In 1994, Mary Pipher published her groundbreaking work *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. Pipher joined other voices in asking what was happening to female teenagers. Standardized tests revealed these young girls equaled or out-performed their male counterparts up until the junior high/middle school years. At that point, a dramatic decrease in scores among young women occurred – especially in the areas of math and science. Pipher pointed to a variety of reasons why the "selfhood" of adolescent girls needed saving and how this could be accomplished. A number of national movements were born in response, in part to her recommendations. "Take Your Daughter to Work Day" (now known as "Take Your Child to Work Day") is one such event that stays with us today. "Project Ophelia" groups can also be found in cities

throughout the country. Female adolescent self-esteem has even become part of a national marketing campaign for Dove Soap.

Sixteen years have passed since *Reviving Ophelia*. One wonders: How are our young girls doing now? Harvard psychology professor Dan Kindlon asked that same question. The answers he arrived at can be found in his text, *Alpha Girls:*

Understanding the New American Girl and How She Is Changing the World (2006).

According to Kindlon, Pipher's Ophelia girls have all but disappeared. They have been replaced, instead, by what he terms "Alpha Girls" – young women between the ages of 13 and 22 who are intellectually strong, self-confident, and ready to take on the world. Of course, a careful reading of Kindlon's text reveals significant details that lead naturally to further questions. By his own admission, Kindlon's Alpha Girls represent only about 20% of all adolescent females. How are the other 80% faring? As someone who had spent the past 15 years working with adolescents (many of whom fit Kindlon's model of high-achieving, outwardly self-confident females), I knew that there was much more to painting a full and accurate portrait of these girls than the broad brush strokes Kindlon had employed.

What had I seen in my years as a language arts teacher reading and writing with my students? Adolescents who participated enthusiastically in class discussions – the first hands raised to respond to a question are just as likely to be from girls as from boys. Working in small groups, these girls seemed to lack any hesitation in expressing their opinions -- eye-rolling and open disagreement with ideas presented by their male group members was not uncommon. If I had been a casual observer in my classroom I may have agreed with Kindlon's assertions; I might have been tempted to join him in bidding

adieu to the dismal situation presented in the American Association of University Women's 1992 study entitled "How Schools Shortchange Girls." In *Reviving Ophelia*, Pipher shares the following findings from the AAUW work:

In classes, boys are twice as likely to be seen as role models, five times as likely to receive teachers' attention and twelve times as likely to speak up in class ... as children go through school, boys do better and feel better about themselves and girls' self-esteem, opinions of their sex and scores on standardized achievement tests all decline. Girls are more likely than boys to say that they are not smart enough for their dream careers. They emerge from adolescence with a diminished sense of their worth as individuals. (1994, p. 62)

But I am not a casual observer. In over 15 years as a middle school language arts teacher, I have never been merely the dispassionate dispenser of information to students. The classroom community I strove to create with my students each year meant I formed relationships with my students. I knew them. And knowing them, listening to them, I heard a narrative incongruous with Kindlon's claims. Listening to my girls, I was far from ready to dismiss the AAUW study in favor of Kindlon's.

Kaycee's story is one such narrative. In two years as Kaycee's language arts teacher, I came to know her well. A passionate reader and writer, Kaycee often greeted me at the door to my classroom before school began – breathlessly urging me to read a poem or short story written the night before. About a month into her eighth grade school year, Kaycee arrived one morning with her shoulder-length hair cut so it barely brushed the nape of her neck. She smiled broadly, tousled her hair, and asked/stated, "Don't you just love it, Miss A?" Later that night, I checked my email to find a message from

Kaycee with these brief instructions: “Please read my attached story. It’s sort of about me, but not really. Maybe just a little.” Titled “My Hair,” Kaycee’s personal narrative was divided into five sections: “The Beginning,” “Gone,” “Why?” “The Stares,” and “Me.” Kaycee’s words reflect developmental psychologists’ view of adolescence as a time of identity exploration (Erickson, 1963, 1964, 1968; Marcia, 1966, 1980; Grotevant, 1987; Gilligan & Brown, 1992; Gilligan, Lyons & Hanmer, 1990) – and how even a haircut can be part of the ongoing process of discovering who we are and what it means to be female. Kaycee wrote,

As I cautiously peered into the mirror before me, I did not recognize the person trapped inside its glassy confinements...I couldn’t believe that I had actually gone through with it, getting all of my long hair hacked off. Suddenly, a vicious thought occurred to me. My hair was shorter than most boys...My neck was now bare, my ears peeking through my “guy cut.” I started playing with it, and saw that its full potential was grand and explosive. Huge...I grasped the thought that my opinion was the only one that mattered...This was the me that I’d wanted, still wanted.

Kaycee, winner of an all-state music competition, top student in her academic classes, bubbly, outgoing... and reflecting Pipher’s assertion about girls such as her:

Ironically, bright and sensitive girls are most at risk for problems. They are likely to understand the implications of the media around them and be alarmed. They have the mental equipment to pick up our cultural ambivalence about women, and yet they don’t have the cognitive, emotional and social skills to handle this

information... It's this attempt to make sense of the whole of adolescent experience that overwhelms bright girls (p. 43).

For Kaycee, her new hairstyle was empowering. Yet that empowerment was gained through adopting what she viewed as a physical male characteristic: short hair. Through her "guy cut," Kaycee appropriated the male-centered view of adolescent identity development (Erickson, 1963, 1964, 1968) with an emphasis on separation from others. Yet the section titled "The Stares," reflected her discomfort with this appropriation, and the importance she continued to place on relationships – a feature of female adolescent identity development (Gilligan, Ward & Taylor, 1988; Gilligan & Brown, 1992). Kaycee wrote,

People were watching me, horrific expressions on their typically dismal faces...Others, they thought I was courageous, a girl with guts. It still didn't stop the stares from penetrating me from all angles...I peered into the mirrored windows as I strolled by them, but it was hard for me to recognize the young woman who stared back.

Clearly, Kindlon's observations needed deeper, alternative perspectives. Instead of relying solely on one-on-one interviews with adolescent girls, what would be the result if a researcher gathered a group of girls together once a week to explore gender and the issue of what it meant to be a young female today? What if the discussion centered on books? What if that discussion took various forms and included writing as well as speaking? What rich understandings would emerge? Would we find Ophelias or Alpha Girls? Perhaps both.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain selected adolescent girls' perspectives on identity through participation in an after-school book club. Participation in a book club for the present study was defined as reading agreed-upon texts, writing personal responses to the text, attending meetings with other club members, engaging in discussions about the text with members, and writing responses following the discussions – elements often found in classroom-based small group literature discussions.

While often touted as a pedagogical best practice, small group, student-centered literature discussions such as these have found favor among many elementary and middle school teachers and numerous studies have focused on the benefits for students who participate in such groups (Daniels, 2002; Raphael & McMahon, 1994). At the same time, research indicating the benefits of single-gender education, too, has led many administrators to restructure classroom populations to provide spaces for girls-only and boys-only learning (Cairns, 1990; Colley, Comber, & Hargreaves, 1994; Granleese & Joseph, 1993; Harker & Nash, 1997; Lee & Marks, 1990).

Although scholars have shown the effectiveness of both literature discussion groups and single-gender learning environments, scant attention has been paid to a marriage of the two. Further, what research does exist in this area fails to adopt a sociocultural frame as Galda and Beach (2001) have advocated: “Texts, readers, and contexts, each inseparable from the other, are also inseparable from the larger contexts in which they are enacted” (p.66).

Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia* remains a relevant, seminal study for educators and others concerned with adolescent female development. Gilligan's assertions about

adolescent females, too, are as relevant today as they were in 1992: “Girls at this time have been observed to lose their vitality, their resilience, their immunity to depression, their sense of themselves and their character.” (p. 2) Yet much of the focus of academic literature reflects a shift to males as the sole object of educators’ concerns (Pollack, 1990; Fletcher, 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002), pointing to further need for studies focusing on females.

I do not present these five girls participating in this study as representative of all girls, or even all adolescent girls. As a veteran teacher and a researcher, though, I know the greatest learning always comes from listening to the students themselves. Every time I do so, I come away with new insights and understandings. Even brief, hallway chats elicit ideas I’ll think about the entire drive home. In this study, therefore, I walked in the research footsteps of those who value the often-silenced voices of adolescent females (Gilligan 1982, 1993; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Barbieri, 1995). Gilligan (1982) spoke for herself and other members of her research group who spent five years interviewing young female students at the Laurel School – listening to the voices of young girls to develop a theory of women’s psychological development – when she stated,

Our claim, therefore, in presenting this work is not that the girls we spoke with are representative of all girls or some ideal sample of girls, but rather that we learned from this group of girls and young women, and what we discovered seemed worthy of others’ attention. (p. 23)

And so it was my intention with this particular study to listen to and learn from a group of adolescent females as they read and discussed books and explored their identities as

females. Valuing the voices, I am confident that my own discoveries are “worthy of others’ attention.”

Overview of the Theoretical Framework

Engaging in research is a process of constantly making choices. A study describing and explaining the perspectives on identity of five eighth grade adolescent females reading literature featuring strong female protagonists in an after-school book club, and the variables that influence their perspectives experiences exploring their identities represents the overlap and intersection of multiple theories. In this study, reader response theory was the theoretical framework that informed the design, process, and analysis stages of this work. Selecting a single theory strengthened these components of the study and enabled me to address the exploratory questions clearly and directly. A more in-depth discussion of the framework is provided in Chapter Two, but a brief discussion at the onset is critical in beginning to understand the research.

While reader response theory is a broad term that includes numerous contributors to its development, Louise Rosenblatt’s (1978, 1995) work is considered seminal to this area of literary criticism. According to Rosenblatt, reading is a relational, transactional event between the reader and the text.

The concept of the transaction with the environment provides the model for the process in which reader and text are involved. Each becomes in a sense environment for the other. A two-way, or better, a circular, process can be postulated, in which the reader responds to verbal stimuli offered by the text, but at the same time he must draw selectively on the resources of his own fund of experience and sensibility to provide and

organize the substance of his response. Out of this new experience, the literary work is formed. (1978, p. 43)

From this circular process, knowledge is not merely interpreted, but produced (Sumara, 2002). This knowledge includes knowledge of self. Sumara referenced Iser's assertion that the reader-text relation involves an interpretive practice he termed a "literary anthology," when he stated,

With this phrase he (Iser) suggests that while the reader will always have an interpretation of the text she or he is reading, the interpretation itself participates in the ongoing development of the reader's self identity. (p. 95)

The tenets of reader response theory form the foundation of this study in data collection (journals, small group discussions), formulation of exploratory questions, and data analysis.

Exploratory Questions

In this study, I described and explained selected adolescent girls' perspectives on identity through an after-school book club. Employing a view of female identity that is both socially situated and relationship-based (Gee, 1996, 2000; Harre' & van Lagenhove, 1999; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982, 1993), I considered both individual and group contexts. The questions that guided the study were the following:

1. What elements constitute selected adolescent girls' perceptions of identity through an after-school book club?
2. What elements influence their self-identity expression?

Significance of the Study

Reading is currently an educational hot topic – extending for the first time beyond early literacy to the secondary level. We are growing in our knowledge of how to reach and teach struggling adolescent readers (Alvermann, et al. 2000; Finn, 1999; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Moje & O’Brien, 2001), yet too often success in literacy is measured solely by performance on standardized tests. Literacy is seen as a one-dimensional set of skills students need to possess to be successful in school and their future workplaces. A more expansive view of the importance of literacy and what it means to adolescent females’ growth as individuals and members of communities is needed.

While this narrow definition and purpose of literacy retains a tenacious foothold, reader response theory, based on a perspective in which meaning resides not in the text, but as the result of a transaction between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1995; Iser, 1978), has gained popularity as a pedagogical best practice in classrooms. Students are increasingly asked to make connections between the text and personal experiences and to write their personal interpretations of the text in journals, reflecting the influence of reader response theory. However, research has indicated that New Criticism remains firmly entrenched as a prevailing practice in secondary and undergraduate classrooms (Beach, 1993). In *Why Reading Literature in School Still Matters*, Dennis Sumara (2002) stated, too, that while many of the tenets of reader response theory, emphasizing the importance of literary engagement and readers forming relationships with texts, are now embraced by classroom teachers, there is much work still to do:

In schooling contexts, readers have been encouraged to represent their identifications with characters and, as well, to demonstrate how these

identifications sponsor personal associations. While these have been significant developments, particularly since they point to a more expansive view of what constitutes critical interpretation, in my view there has not been sufficient attention paid to understanding how the very act of reading becomes immersed in a complex set of cultural activities that participates in the ongoing conditioning of personal and cultural knowledge and understanding. (p. 27-28)

In *Private Reading in Public: Schooling the Literary Imagination* (1996), Sumara presented a theory of reading that builds upon and expands the work of Rosenblatt and Iser by viewing the engagement of reader and text as relational “site(s) for the ongoing interpretation of the personal, the communal, and the cultural” (p.12). Sumara (2002) stated, “Interpretation practices function to create experiences of self-identity” (p. 8). This view of reader response theory, in which readers form relationships with the text (characters, setting, etc.) and while exploring these relationships are, in turn, provided with the opportunity to explore their own identities, is the theoretical framework for the present study, and offers classroom teachers a more expansive perspective on literacy and literacy practices.

This study is significant as well for the contribution it makes to the body of research focusing on adolescent females’ participation in book clubs. As I present in the next chapter in the review of literature, females in book clubs have been the subject of numerous studies – some with a specific focus on book clubs and identity exploration (Frye, 2006; Broughton, 2002; Twomey, 2007; Carico, 2001). But while many of these studies acknowledge the rich historical background of book clubs as communities of adult female readers where seeds of empowerment and agency were planted and

flourished, there are few studies where the researcher adopted an *intentionally* feminist researcher perspective. Following the guidance of Shulamit Reinharz in *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (1992), I embrace the view that there is no single method, but instead multiple methods, of conducting feminist research. Rather than a single chapter on what constitutes a feminist method of research, Reinharz's text includes chapters such as "Feminist Interview Research," "Feminist Oral History," "Feminist Case Studies," and "Feminist Experimental Research" – indicating that feminist research can be quantitative as well as qualitative. Reinharz quotes Australian scholar Dale Spender whose perspective on the value of feminist knowledge is pertinent to the focus in this particular study on creating a space where the voices of a group of adolescent females can be heard:

At the core of feminist ideas is the crucial insight that there is no one truth, no one authority, no one objective method which leads to the production of pure knowledge. This insight is applicable to feminist knowledge as it is to patriarchal knowledge, but there is a significant difference between the two: feminist knowledge is based on the premise that the experience of all human beings is valid and must not be excluded from our understandings, whereas patriarchal knowledge is based on the premise that the experience of only half the human population needs to be taken into account and the resulting version can be imposed on the other hand. That is why patriarchal knowledge and the methods of producing it are a fundamental part of women's oppression, and why patriarchal knowledge must be challenged – and overruled. (p. 7-9)

Further, while many of the above-mentioned studies discuss the work of psychologist Carol Gilligan who pioneered a relational, voice-centered, feminist approach to studying women and adolescent females, none of the studies employed and extended this approach in their own studies of adolescent females and literacy. In more than one study, Erikson's male-centered theory of identity development (which Gilligan rejected) was adopted to view the female participants' identity exploration in the book clubs. In keeping with the feminist methods woven throughout this study, I will rely on Gilligan's theory and research methods to inform my work, hoping that others, too, will address the need for studies in which feminist research methods are employed in all aspects of the work.

Definition of Terms

Adolescent/adolescence – The topic of debate in terms of age range and defining characteristics (Lesko, 2001). While the period of adolescence is generally accepted to include individuals between the ages of ten and twenty), in this study, where the secondary school setting is a critical component, when either term is used, the reference will be to individuals between grades six and twelve (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008). In contrast to the earlier views of adolescence as a turbulent period of “storm and stress,” a more contemporary view of adolescence will be employed in this study.

Therefore, adolescence will be viewed as “a period of development characterized by biological, cognitive, emotional and social *reorganization* with the aim of adapting to cultural expectations of becoming an adult.” (*Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, p. 15).

While adolescent theorists view this time in the life cycle as concluding with separation and individuation (Erickson, 1968), researchers focusing on female adolescent

development (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990) emphasize attachment and relationships as key – especially in terms of identity development, a central feature of adolescence.

Book Clubs – In contrast to the more structured, formalized classroom-based conceptions (Daniels, 2002; Raphael, Kehus, & Damphousse, 2001), the term “book club” used in this study refers to a social community of readers who voluntarily read group-selected literature and meet to share and discuss their responses.

Response to Literature – Based on Rosenblatt’s (1978, 1995) reader response theory where readers transact with the text using their “intellectual, emotional, and experiential equipment” to “shape the new experience symbolized on the page” (p. 25).

Identity – Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) emphasized the sociocultural nature of identity and stated, “Identities – if they are alive, if they are being lived – are unfinished and in process ... Identities never arrive in persons or in their immediate social milieu already formed. They do not come into being, take hold on lives, or remain vibrant without considerable work in and for the person. They happen in social practice” (p. vii).

Voice – This statement by psychologist Carol Gilligan provides a multi-dimensional definition of the term. Her words express both the depth and breadth of the research: “To have a voice is to be human. To have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act. (p. 177, 1993)

Literacy Event -- Within the sociocultural framework, literacy (reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing) cannot be separated from the social, cultural, and historical settings within which the act occurs (Finders, 1997; Gee, 1996, 2000). Throughout this study, Heath's (1983) definition of literacy as an event was a central focal point:

(A literacy event is) a conceptual tool useful in examining within particular communities of modern society the actual forms and functions of oral and literate traditions and co-existing relationships between spoken and written language. A literacy event is any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes. (p. 93)

Gender – An anthropological, not biological view of gender (Ortner & Whitehead, 1981; Cherland, 1984) is foundational to this study. Gender identity is therefore an action dependent upon both actor and audience. Butler states, “There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; (that) identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.” (p. 25) Finally, Marshall and Rossman (2010) further inform the position of gender in the present study stating, “Gender is not the sole, essential, and fixed category identifying a person.” (p. 27)

Young Adult Literature – This study employed Nilsen and Donelson's (2009) definition: “Anything that readers between the approximate ages of twelve and eighteen choose to read either for leisure or to fill school assignments.” (p. 3)

Strong Female Protagonists – Central characters who are female and exhibit characteristics of empowerment and a sense of agency (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998; Messer-Davidow, 1995).

Overview of the Methodology

Creswell (2007) maintained the definition of qualitative research is a continuously evolving one reflecting “the ever-changing nature of qualitative inquiry from social construction, to interpretivist, and on to social justice” (p. 36). And while some features of qualitative research remain constant including the interpretive, naturalistic approach and focus on the meaning individuals bring to phenomena studied (Denzin & Lincoln in Creswell, p. 36); contemporary definitions emphasize the power of qualitative research to transform the world.

This study focused on selected adolescent girls’ perceptions of identity through reading, responding, and discussing literature featuring strong female protagonists. Data collection was conducted through extensive time spent in the field, in keeping with the naturalistic approach. Semi-structured interviews conducted with each of the five female participants at the beginning and end of the study, reader response journals in which participants composed weekly responses to their reading, transcripts of the weekly book discussions, field notes, and entries in a researcher reflective journal form the data for this study, emphasizing the focus on the meaning these individuals brought to the phenomena studied: identity exploration within literacy events.

This study addressed questions of the how and why of an event, and involved a variety of data, thereby making a case study methodology an appropriate choice (Yin, 2009). While case study research is sometimes viewed not as a methodology but as a choice of what is to be studied (Stake, 2005), this study followed Creswell’s assertions:

Case study is a qualitative research approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a *case*) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through

detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case *description* and case-based themes (italics and bold in original text). (p. 73)

In the present study, selected participants are the focus of individual case studies and the book club itself is the focus of an additional case study. The “detailed, in-depth data collection” consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted twice with each of the five girls, field notes recording observations of the girls as they participated in the weekly book discussions, audio recordings of the weekly book discussions that were transcribed and analyzed, and the participants’ weekly response journals. A description of the book club through the voices and interpretations of the individual participants will be presented as well as themes emerging from the data.

Assumptions

This study rested on several assumptions. First among these is that literacy is a sociocultural construct (Bloome & Bailey, 1992; DeBlase, 2003; Beach, 1993; Galda & Beach, 2001; Gee, 2000). Building on Louise Rosenblatt’s (1978, 1995) reader response theory in which textual meaning is derived from a transaction between text and reader, a sociocultural perspective situates reader and text in broader cultural and historical contexts (Sumara, 1996, 2002). As Galda and Beach (2001) stated:

Students learn to respond to literature as they acquire various social practices, identities, and tools not only through participation in interpretive communities of practice, but also through experience in acquiring social practices and tools and in

constructing identities within specific cultural worlds (Hynds, 1997; Sumara, 1996; Wilhelm, 1997). (p. 66-67)

A second assumption is that gender is not biological, but anthropological. Individuals learn to behave in culture-specific, gender-appropriate ways that enable them to “do” male or female (Cherland, 1994; Ortner & Whitehead, 1981). As the adolescent females in this study engaged in various discourses surrounding a shared text, their responses were viewed as shaped by their social worlds and the gendered practices of those worlds. Herein is the third assumption, that literacy and gender are inextricably connected. As Bettis and Roe (2008) stated, “Gender is a cultural construction and reading as a social practice, unavoidably involves gender (p.3).” Readers enter the world of the text – a world with its own culture and social structures. Within this world, readers position themselves just as they do in the world outside the text. In fiction, this positioning occurs through close engagement with the characters.

A final, central assumption critical to the study is an expansive view of Gee’s definition of Discourse to include relationships – the building blocks for female identity exploration (Belenky et al, 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan et al, 1990; Brown & Gilligan, 1992). This assumption brings Gilligan’s seminal work on women’s psychological development into a postmodern perspective.

Limitations of the Study

There are limitations of this study that warrant discussion. The results of this study are not generalizable to a broader population. I make no attempt to assert that these five adolescent females from a particular school and geographical location are representative of all adolescent females. Believing, however, that “in the particular

resides the general” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p.14), my intention was to provide a space for adolescent females to engage in literature-based discourse, to document this discourse, and to contribute to “expand and generalize theories and not to enumerate frequencies” (Yin, 2009, p. 15).

Semi-structured interviews with the five adolescent female participants began and ended the study. While the interviews were conducted individually without the other participants present, there remains the possibility that the data was affected by factors pertaining to the interviewer. Beginning with the initial development of the study and continuing at every point throughout the research, I therefore engaged in reflexive objectivity (Kvale, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011) and endeavored to maintain sensitivity to my prejudices. I brought to this study in general and to the interviews specifically my personal bias (Patton, 2002). My belief in the transformative power of literature, and the role of reader response in the literature classroom are significant aspects of who I am personally and professionally. In this study where gender and identity were central to the work, my background as an adolescent female growing up at the height of the women’s movement may also have affected the interview data I collected.

I was aware that studying my own students would have presented a host of potential research bias issues, and so I did not include them in the population of possible participants. As a teacher employed at the research site, however, I understood I may have been viewed as part of the authority establishment at the student participants’ school rather than the outside researcher. I was aware that the students interviewed may have

seen me as connected to their own language arts teacher and respond in ways that may have portrayed them in a positive light – pleasing the researcher to please their teacher. While the integrity of my study rests in part on my awareness of these issues of bias, I chose to conduct my study at this school because of my employment there. The dispassionate, disconnected, outside researcher is not the role I elected to play in the study. I was part of the school culture, just as the student participants were. In this way, I adopted what cultural anthropologists such as Fry and Keith (1980) refer to as an emic or insider perspective of a particular culture. The book club meetings took place after school in an off-site location, but the student participants brought to the meetings and therefore to the study, their attitudes and behaviors as members of the school community/culture. This perspective is the optimum, necessary position according to Ely et al (1991) who state: “Events can be understood adequately only if they are seen in context. Therefore, a qualitative researcher immerses her/himself in the setting” (p. 4).

Transcriptions of the weekly book discussions and field notes compiled during observations of these discussions comprised the bulk of the data collected and analyzed. The observations and interviews acted together to protect the quality of this qualitative study. Patton (2002) argues, “Observations provide a check on what is reported in interviews; interviews, on the other hand, permit the observer to go beyond external behavior to explore feelings and thoughts” (p. 306).

As I discuss in greater detail in the chapter outlining the methodology of this study, while the girls and the discourse they engaged in among themselves were the primary focus of this study, as a participant observer my role at the discussion meetings was not a silent, passive one. Following the girls’ lead, I contributed to the discussions

whenever I felt it was appropriate. This, too, was part of the discourse and therefore part of the data analyzed. I have been cognizant however that my presence as a participant observer could have led to the participants altering their behavior, therefore affecting the data collected. Again, I addressed the issue of my role as a researcher, the effect my personal and professional characteristics may have on the study, and methods I employed to minimize those effects in the methodology chapter. However, as these are critical aspects of the study, it is important that I present my awareness of these issues in this introduction. In doing so, I openly address what Denzin (2001) refers to as “the interpretive crisis” – the debate concerning the issue of bias in qualitative research. My approach to this problem was to adopt a postmodern stance and rather than attempt to control bias, I made it visible (Scheurich, 1997). An important tool I used to achieve this visibility was my researcher reflective journal (Janesick, 2004).

Chapter Summary

In this introductory chapter I have laid the foundation for the study. I provided a personal, researcher context as well as a clear statement of the background, problem, and significance of the study. I presented a brief overview of Rosenblatt’s (1978, 1998) experience-based view of reader response as the theoretical framework informing the design, process, and analysis stages of this work – providing the lens through which the following exploratory questions were viewed:

1. What elements constitute selected adolescent girls’ perceptions of identity through an after-school book club?
2. What elements influence their self-identity expression?

I emphasized one of the unique features of the present study over other similar studies involving adolescent females' identity development through participation in a book club as the feminist methodology woven throughout all aspects of the study. Again, while other studies mention the seminal work of Gilligan (1982, 1993, 1993) in developing a theory of women's psychological development through listening to the voices and perspectives of adolescent females, they lack the deliberate emphasis on feminist methodology Gilligan herself emphasized, espoused, and employed in her own research.

Terminology used throughout the study must be clarified at the onset in order for the reader to understand the unique perspectives employed. I have attempted to accomplish this in defining key terms such as adolescent, identity, gender, and book club. Providing initial definitions of the terms as used in the present study offers a foundation for the in-depth exploration of these concepts in the chapter two review of literature in which I further situated the terms in theoretical and research contexts.

While case study as the methodology used in the study will be discussed thoroughly in the third chapter, I provided a brief overview of both how and why I will adopt this methodology in researching adolescent females' identity exploration in a book club. I have also outlined the various forms of data I will collect during the study: semi-structured interviews, field notes, response journals, discussion transcripts, and a researcher reflective journal. The multiple forms of data collected and a need to provide in-depth descriptions of participants and themes make case study an appropriate choice (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Following qualitative research practices, I began the important practice of making my bias transparent to the reader and discussed assumptions upon which the study rests.

My views of literacy as a sociocultural construct (Bloome & Bailey, 1992; DeBlase, 2003; Beach, 1993; Galda & Beach, 2001; Gee, 2000), reading as a transactional event between reader and text (Rosenblatt 1978, 1995), and the anthropological nature of gender (Cherland, 1994; Ortner & Whitehead, 1981) are critical concepts in understanding how I approached the present study. Also contributing to making my bias transparent to the reader is the discussion concerning the limitations of the study. In addressing the issues of generalizability and researcher bias in my role as a teacher at the site and how I addressed those issues with continued transparency, I embraced a practice key to strong qualitative research. Rather than attempting to control bias, I made it visible. My deliberate use of a researcher reflective journal, aspects of which are included in subsequent chapters of the dissertation, was essential to achieving this goal of bias visibility.

As the review of literature following in the next chapter will show, the dual topics of female adolescent literacy and young adult literature are seldom examined alone and rarely in combination. Yet teacher education programs require coursework focusing on adolescent development and adolescent literature – emphasizing that knowledge in these areas is important to effective teaching. Kindlon’s assertions, too, point to the need to revisit earlier findings concerning adolescent females (Gilligan, 1982, 1990, 1993). Who are these adolescent females? Alpha girls or Ophelias? Perhaps both? And in this process of becoming, exploring, developing, what role does reading play? I embark on the present study, therefore, prepared to do as I have always done in my fifteen years as a classroom teacher: listen to the voices of adolescents to provide insight into the world of adolescence.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

Researchers engage in their work with the goal of contributing to the current knowledge base in a particular field. Understanding the nature of that current knowledge base is essential, then, in order to situate this study within a broader research framework. The purpose of the present study was to describe and explain selected adolescent girls' perceptions of identity through an after school book club. The following exploratory questions guided the analysis:

1. What elements constitute selected adolescent girls' perceptions of identity through an after-school book club?
2. What elements influence their self-identity expression?

While a study involving adolescent females' identity expression during participation in an after-school book club contains numerous facets, I limited my review of literature to four key areas, which in turn became the focus of data analysis and addressed the exploratory questions.

In the first section, I discuss sociocultural theory, beginning with a definition used in this study, continuing with descriptions of major theorists in the field, and conclude with exploration of sociocultural theory in the world of education and literacy. In presenting the review of literature concerning sociocultural theory at the onset of the chapter, I indicate the intricate connections theory has with other aspects of the study.

Book clubs, reader response theory, identity exploration as well as the two exploratory questions all reflect an emphasis on the social and cultural environment. While sociocultural theory occupied a critical role in the study, I chose reader response as the theoretical framework. Reader response was selected as the more appropriate lens for the study as it offered a broad theoretical foundation to support the study, while allowing a more focused exploration of the act of reading within social and cultural contexts therefore facilitating addressing the exploratory questions.

I chose to place a significant emphasis on the theoretical aspects of sociocultural theory and reader response theory. While too often simplistically reduced to single theories, both sociocultural theory and reader response theory are much more complex and are in actuality overarching terms which a more careful, detailed examination reveals contains a myriad of individual perspectives and forms. In order to situate the present study that drew heavily from both of these theories, I have presented in-depth discussions of those myriad perspectives and forms. As a result, the reader has a clearer, more focused understanding of the specific perspective adopted in this study.

In the third section of the chapter, I shift to discussing adolescent girls' identity expression, focusing specifically on developmental psychologists key to this study. This discussion will help situate both the first exploratory question: "What elements constitute selected adolescent girls' perceptions of identity?" And the second question: "What influences their self-identity expression?" Again, presenting a detailed description of theories and theorists in this area provides necessary clarification and focus concerning the unique perspectives employed. Other studies with a similar focus on adolescent female identity development and literacy relied on one of the male-centered theories of

identity development discussed in this section. As this study is unique in its relationship-view of female adolescent identity development (Gilligan, 1982, 1993; Gilligan, et al. 1990) that stands in contrast to the male-centered theories emphasizing separation, a thorough discussion of these various theories is critical.

In the fourth and final section of this literature review, I explore the area of book clubs – emphasizing their historical background and role in both inside and outside of the classroom environment. A thorough discussion of book clubs as well as the related topic of literature in the lives of adolescent females is essential in understanding the context in which both of the exploratory questions occupy.

Sociocultural Theory

The present study described and explained selected adolescent females' perceptions of identity in an after-school book club. The social nature of book club activities, therefore, required a review of literature on sociocultural theory.

In this section of the literature review, I provide an overview and historical background of sociocultural theory, including the central theorists in the field. I then expand the discussion by describing the research that has been conducted linking sociocultural theory and the areas of education and literacy.

Overview and Historical Background

Sociocultural theory views human development as an active process of interacting with the environment and therefore must be viewed within social, cultural, and historical contexts (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1993; Luria, 1976). With roots in the work of psychologist Lev Vygotsky in the 1920s and 30s, sociocultural theory stands in contrast with the perspectives of other human development theorists such as Piaget, for

example, who viewed individuals constructing knowledge with increasing complexity and along a developmental, age-dependent continuum. According to Vygotsky (1978), individuals' actions must be viewed as intricately connected to their social and cultural environment:

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (p. 57)

One aspect of Vygotsky's work that has become well known by classroom teachers is his concept of a *zone of proximal development*. According to Vygotsky (1978), for each individual there exists a level of learning just beyond one's current level – out of reach for the individual acting alone, but attainable with the aid or *scaffolding* of another, more knowledgeable individual. Emphasizing the critical interdependence of learners, Vygotsky stated, “With assistance every child can do more than he can by himself” (p. 87).

The power of novice-expert interaction in learning is a concept with historical roots in American educational theory as well. Pragmatist John Dewey (1956[1902]), acknowledged the power of social interaction in learning stating:

The social environment ... is truly educative in its effects in the degree in which an individual shares or participates in some conjoint activity. By doing his share in the associated activity, the individual appropriates the purpose which actuates

it, becomes familiar with its methods and subject matters, acquires needed skill, and is saturated with its emotional spirit. (p. 26)

Dewey's perspective on the "educative" power of the social environment as individuals participate in a "conjoint activity" helps situate the present study in which adolescent females read and discussed shared texts in a book club, while indicating a need for such a study. Dewey's theoretical statement describes in broad strokes how individuals are shaped by interacting with others, giving rise to questions concerning the specific nature of that shaping. For example, how does the act of appropriation occur? If the conjoint activity is a book club, is the social environment restricted to the actual gathering of the reading members, or is the text world also a social environment in which the individual readers interact with and through characters in associated activities? What happens when an individual is "saturated with its (the conjoint activity) emotional spirit"? Does this saturation involve the individual's development or expression of his or her self-identity? Clearly, Dewey's statement indicates the need for research in which broad statements are refined and focused. The exploratory questions in the present study provided a method for accomplishing this refinement and focus.

Sociocultural Theory and Literacy

Within a sociocultural framework, learning is regarded as much more than either a static discovery of knowledge or a passive receiving of knowledge by an individual. Learning is an active, transformative process. Rogoff (1995) asserted, "People change through transforming their participation in sociocultural activities – in which both the individual and the rest of the world are active" (p. 266). Building on the foundation laid by Vygotsky, Rogoff and other sociocultural theorists (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1997;

Luria, 1976) Rogoff maintained that through interacting with skilled experts, novice learners acquire cultural tools of thought, ultimately transforming these tools for individual cognitive activities. Language is therefore a cultural tool. Rogoff (1995, 2003) specified three planes of focus: apprenticeship (a metaphor of craft apprenticeship in which a less experienced individual learns under the tutelage of someone more knowledgeable), guided participation (communication processes between participants in a culturally valued activity), and participatory appropriation defined as:

Participatory appropriation is the personal process by which, through engagement in an activity, individuals change and handle a later situation in ways prepared by their own participation in the previous situation. This is a process of becoming, rather than acquisition... (1995, p. 25)

Groundbreaking work in the field of sociocultural theory and literacy is Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) nine-year (1969-1978) ethnographic study of minority and working-class students in three communities in the Piedmont Carolinas, Roadville, Trackton, and Maintown. In this study, Heath explored the cultural nature of language and literacy by recording and interpreting the language of young school children. Finding significant differences in terms of language expectations in the home and school environments, Heath maintained, "(The) place of language in the cultural life of each social group is interdependent with the habits and values of behaving shared among members of that group" (p. 11). Sharing her findings with teachers involved in the study, Heath helped them discover ways they could bridge the home-school language dichotomy, not by lowering standards or expectations, but by acknowledging and respecting the students' home literacies as a foundation for further learning.

Heath stated,

The ethnographies of communication in Roadville and Trackton became instrumental for teachers and students bringing language and culture differences and discovering how to recognize and use language as power. (p. 266)

Adopting the sociocultural framework, researchers continue to explore culture as shaping literacy practices, with particular emphasis on the home-school conflict students often face and the need for teaching practice that begin with respect for home literacies as students are taught how to successfully engage in classroom discourse (Delpit, 1988; Hewlett, 1996). Au (1998) further asserts that consideration of students' diverse backgrounds holds the potential for closing the literacy achievement gap and offers five explanations for this gap: linguistic differences, cultural differences, discrimination, inferior education, and rationales for schooling.

Reviewing research with similar features of this present study: adolescent females, book clubs, and identity exploration elicited a study by DeBlase (2003) who asserted the critical role sociocultural theory must play in studies involving literacy and female identity exploration. Finding that the 8th grade girls participating in her study “took up competing social messages about gendered identity in the different kinds of texts they read” (p. 624), DeBlase wrote:

Because literacy is a sociocultural construct, it needs to be seen through the layering and intertextuality of lived experience that shapes and constrains girls' knowledge and the gendered ways they learn to participate in society. (p. 629)

New Trends in Sociocultural Theory

A review of the literature on sociocultural theory reveals the constantly evolving nature of this perspective on human development and learning. Lewis, Enciso and Moje (2007) acknowledge the value of sociocultural theory stating,

Sociocultural theory has allowed us to explore the intersection of social, cultural, historical, mental, physical, and more recently, political aspects of people's sense-making, interaction, and learning around texts. (p.2)

They also, however, found a deficit in the theory. Explaining that traditional definitions of sociocultural theory fail to include issues of power, identity, and agency, they offered a new term for this expanded form of sociocultural theory that encompasses these often ignored issues: "critical sociocultural theory."

Beach's (2000) sociocultural activity theory of learning further indicates the new dimensions this theory continues to adopt. According to Beach, activity theory is a form of sociocultural theory in which "participants learn within an activity driven by the need to achieve a certain object or outcome" (p.1). Examples of an activity/activity system include a family, a church group, a school, a profession; systems comprised of objects/outcomes, tools, rules, roles, and community change. Asserting that activity theory holds particular relevance and usefulness for reader response-based research, Beach maintains that while Rosenblatt's transactional model of reader response emphasizes the act of reading as a social event, the model lacks specificity in identifying the components that shape the event. Through adopting an activity theory lens, the reader and the text are viewed as participating in specific activity systems. Researchers are then

able to explore how the specific components of the system (object/outcomes, tools, etc.) shape response.

In the present study, the book club was viewed as a single literacy event comprised of multiple literacy events. The book club also embodied features of an activity system. Following Beach's model, the objects/outcomes were the books the group read. Tools include the books, journals, and the weekly discussions. Rules created and maintained include the schedule for reading the two books and the requirement to write in the reader response journals. Beach's work not only underscores the sociocultural view of reader response theory (discussed in the next section) that provides the framework for the study, but also informed the methodology.

Reader Response Theory

The present study's two exploratory questions were viewed in the context of a book club. Participants engaged in reading the text as an individual activity at home. While at various times sections of the text were read aloud during discussion meetings, the participants' experiences engaging in the narrowly defined act of reading as the performance of a skill involving decoding text on a page, occurred as individual, solitary events. The individual transaction between solitary reader and text is often regarded as a sort of standard model of reader response theory. The present study, embracing a marriage of reader response and sociocultural theory attempted to expand this standard model. Therefore, to more fully understand the position this current study occupied, I will present an overview of reader response theory. Again, my approach in reviewing the literature on this topic was first to read broadly and widely, and then narrow my focus to

research with features similar to my own study: specifically, adolescent readers, small group discussions, and educational settings.

Overview

I begin this section of my review of literature cognizant of the problems inherent in approaching the topic of research in reader response theory. In “Research on Response to Literature” Marshall (2000) shared a number of caveats when attempting to define the word *response*. Marshall maintained:

The word [response] implies a passivity on the part of the responder, locating initial agency in the text responded to. The text acts on the reader, and the reader ‘responds in some describable way. But such a view of reading has little in common with the largely constructionist theory that has framed reading research since the mid 1970s ... The reader, in these arguments, is conceived as an active maker of meaning rather than a passive receiver, and the word response fails to carry the message of agency. (pp. 381-382)

The medium in which the act of reading becomes visible to the research, according to Marshall, presents a further complication. Whereas a writer’s work is directly represented in the writing, a reader’s work must be transmitted in some way – and each method must be acknowledged as being part of the reader’s response. Marshall’s insistence is that responses are mediated by the method of representation and therefore must be examined as a whole:

One reader’s response to literature, then, can never be studied apart from medium in which it appears, and the response itself must be understood as shaped by the

conventions of that medium, and by the reader's familiarity and skill with those conventions. (Marshall, 2000, p. 382)

As participants in the present study read silently and then transmitted their responses first individually through written entries in journals, and later via verbal discourse with other book club members, Marshall's assertion of the necessity to examine response within the context of the medium in which it appears held particular importance in terms of data analysis. Transcripts of the journal responses and the group discussions were coded using the same process, but results were analyzed and reported contextually, reflecting the tenets of sociocultural theory foundational to the study.

Cognizant of Marshall's caveats in discussing this topic, I present the following general definition offered by Langer (2000) as a way to begin a more in-depth exploration of specific forms of reader response theory:

[Reader response theorists] all see meaning as residing in the reader (although they differ in the degree of reader/text interaction), and regard readers as active constructors of meaning with personal knowledge, beliefs, and histories that affect their responses and interpretations, thus creating the potential for more than one 'correct' interpretation. From such perspectives, instruction focuses on arriving at defensible meanings and refining them as well as considering the validity of other responses. (pp. 1-2)

The "degree of reader/text interaction" that Langer referenced was a key point in arriving at a working definition of reader response theory used in the present study. Broadly, reader response theory differs from other approaches such as New Criticism theory for its focus on the reader. While some reader response theorists view meaning residing in the

reader (Bleich, 1975; Fish, 1980), others view reading as a process or transaction between reader and text (Iser, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1978, 1995). This latter view has been particularly embraced as a pedagogical practice (Britton, 1970; Hynds, 1990; Langer, 2000) and is the theoretical lens used in this study.

Experience-based Views of Reader Response

While the view of literature as possessing a transformative power to enact some type of change on the reader is often acknowledged as a recent perspective, the historical roots can be traced to the 1920s and 30s – most notably with the 1938 publication of Louise Rosenblatt’s seminal text, *Literature as Exploration*. Rejecting New Criticism theory in which text is examined for one specific, universal meaning; Rosenblatt instead emphasized the transactional experience of the reader engaging with the text. Responses to literature are, therefore, unique to each reader. In the preface to *The Reader, the Text, and the Poem*, Rosenblatt stated:

The current climate favors another of my emphases...that there is no such thing as a generic reader, that each reading involves a particular person at a particular time and place, underlies the importance of such factors in the transaction as gender, ethnic and socioeconomic background, and cultural environment. (p. viii)

As a transaction, reading is therefore a two-way process, resulting in not only a unique meaning for the reader, but a potentially transformative one. Highlighting the adolescent reader specifically, Rosenblatt stated:

The adolescent particularly may be helped to interpret his own acutely self-conscious emotions and motivations...Books may help the adolescent perceive

the validity of his own temperamental bent, even when that bent may not be valued by his own environment. (p.192)

Rosenblatt (1995) further acknowledged the unique challenges of female adolescents and the ability of literature to help girls explore gender roles:

The adolescent worry over the need to conform to the culturally dominant pictures of the temperamental traits, types of work, and modes of behavior appropriate to each of the sexes can be lessened through a wide circle of literary acquaintances. The young girl may need to be liberated from the narrow view of the feminine role imposed by her milieu. (p.193)

Within the transactional view of reader response, the act of reading is seen as multidimensional. According to Rosenblatt (1978), readers engage in both aesthetic and efferent reading experiences. Comprehension of basic factual information is considered an efferent approach; aesthetic experiences, on the other hand, involve unique, meaning-making interactions between reader and text.

Process-based Views of Reader Response

Other reader response theorists have built upon Rosenblatt's work by viewing a reader's engagement with the text as a process. Beach and Marshall (1990) describe five steps in the response process: engaging, constructing, imaging, connecting, and evaluating/reflecting. Langer, too, embraces a process-oriented approach to reader response and sees readers as adopting certain *stances* in the process of building understanding – a process she terms *envisionment building* (Table 1).

In a two-year case study involving 14 middle and high school English teachers, Langer (2000) studied how literature instruction that acknowledged and supported

students’ stances in the envisionment building process could also support their intellectual growth. Examining instances where students actively engaged in constructing understanding of the text, Langer found “the classrooms became cultural contexts that both called for and expected the active thought and participation of each student” (p. 18). Langer described the specific characteristics of effective instruction stating:

Envisionment-building was supported through discussing and writing about literature, the primary instructional focus was on the exploration of possibilities rather than maintaining a point of reference, the social contexts taught students ways to discuss and ways to think about literature, and they provided small group activities in which students could use their new knowledge and strategies on their own. (p. 18)

Stance	Strategies
Being Out and Stepping into an Envisionment	Forms tentative questions and associations in attempt to build text world
Being In and Moving Through an Envisionment	Uses local envisionments and personal knowledge to build and elaborate understandings
Stepping Back and Rethinking What One Knows	Uses growing understandings to rethink previously held ideas, beliefs, or feelings
Stepping Out and Objectifying the Experience	Distances self from text to examine, evaluate, or analyze the reading experience or aspects of the text

Table 1: Langer’s Envisionment Building Stances

While the present study explored reader response outside the classroom environment, it was also built on a foundation of “discussing and writing about literature” in a small group social context. Langer’s work therefore informed my work as I described and explained the adolescent girls’ literary discussions.

Text-based Views of Reader Response

Reader response theory is often simplistically reduced to definitions reflecting the belief that there is a single, unified perspective associated with this theory – a perspective which holds that a text’s meaning is created by the reader. Contrasting the New Criticism Theory’s focus on issues outside of the text (historical, authorial, etc.), reader response theory is, nonetheless, much more complex than a reader-as-meaning-maker view held by many. Iser’s (1978) textual theory of response reflects this complexity. For Iser, the process of meaning-making consists of the reader following clues and signals in the text enabling him or her to fill in gaps. The indeterminacy of the text invites what Iser termed an “implied reader” to enter and actively participate in the text-world, a world in which the reader encounters the real and the possible simultaneously.

While Iser viewed indeterminacy as an invitation for multiple text readings, there are “degrees of indeterminacy.” So while texts are open to many interpretations, they are not open to all. These constraints are especially problematic for reader response theorists such as Stanley Fish who disagreed with a perspective in which text is seen as an objective given.

Social Theories of Response

As a dialogic theorist, Bakhtin (1981) emphasized the inextricable link between an individual’s utterance of their response to a text and their achieving an understanding of the text:

Understanding comes to fruition only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other. (p. 282)

In classrooms, these utterances occur in a social setting, and are shaped through interactions with others. Many feminist theorists have built upon this aspect of Bakhtin's theory and criticized classroom response to literature practices as reflecting a masculine gender orientation. Lamb (1991), for example, asserted that teachers construct both classroom discussions and writing assignments in which students are instructed to adopt an adversarial position of convincing a reader to accept a particular response as valid. According to Lamb, this adversarial approach embraces the exertion of power of one reader over another. Lamb and other feminist theorists maintained that when teachers employ and encourage a power-based, adversarial stance in response to literature, they marginalize and silence females for whom connectedness and relationships are of primary importance (Belenky et al, 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan et al, 1990; Brown & Gilligan, 1992). As a result, the literacy events occurring in a classroom are often based on a masculine gender orientation.

Entering the study, I wondered: As the girls shared their individual responses to literature outside of the classroom environment and with only other females present, what kinds of literacy events would take place? Would the girls reflect the masculine-based classroom practices in their book club interactions, or would the female-based social environment of the book club encourage connectedness and relationships, offering space for them to make their voices heard?

Adolescent Girls and Identity

The two exploratory questions focus on adolescent females' perceptions of identity and the elements that influence their self-identity expression. Identity is therefore a critical concept central to the study. As stated in the definitions of terms

section of Chapter One, this study employed a sociocultural view of identity. The review of literature focusing on adolescent girls and identity begins with a discussion of the theoretical background on identity, reflecting an evolving perspective on the topic. Early theorists viewed identity as an internal, self-fashioning process reflecting a life stages perspective on human development. This was followed by a view of identity as a sociocultural process in which individuals developed both a personal and social identity. Finally, postmodern perspectives arose in which identity is seen as fluid and constituted in discourse.

Theoretical Background

Adolescence is generally viewed as a period of human development marked by a particular focus on the formation of a sense of selfhood, a sense of identity (Erickson, 1963, 1964, 1968).

While Erickson remains the theorist most frequently associated with the concept of adolescent identity, there exist other perspectives often in sharp contrast to Erickson. In subsequent chapters I share findings addressing the present study's first exploratory question: What elements constitute selected adolescent girls' perspectives on identity? In sharing those findings, I present the participants' perspectives on identity as valued viewpoints standing alone, and also in light of theorists in this field. Working within this framework, I discuss the theory and research of four key individuals: Erickson, Marcia, Grotevant, and Gilligan.

Identity viewed as part of life cycle stages. Rejecting Freud's singular focus on sexuality as the basis for personality description, Erickson (1963, 1964, 1968) developed a theory of development based upon his clinical observations as a psychoanalyst,

asserting that throughout the human life cycle, healthy individuals move through eight psychosocial stages of development. Movement from one stage to the next involved a crisis (or turning point), stated Erickson, and with the aid of others, an individual would be able to resolve the crisis and successfully continue to the next stage. Further emphasizing the social nature of identity development, Erickson (1968) stated, “Identity is ‘all-pervasive’ ... for ... we deal with a process ‘located’ in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture” (p. 22).

Erickson’s stages are often divided into two sections: in the first four stages, individuals are attempting to make sense of the world, and in the second group of four stages, individuals are attempting to make sense of who they are. Adolescence then, in Erickson’s view, is a stage of human development involving identity formation, including sexual identity and gender roles. As a *psychosocial* theory, Erickson’s premise of identity formation emphasizes that during this stage, young adults “try on” various identities. Therefore identity *formation* necessarily involves identity *exploration*. While the term “identity crisis” has been appropriated from Erickson with an added connotation of crisis as catastrophe, for Erickson, crisis simply indicates a turning point in development. Resolving this identity crisis, adolescents then develop fidelity, which Erickson defines as “the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of the inevitable contradictions of value systems” (1964, p. 125). In other words, young adults move into the next stage able to form relationships with a variety of people, having formed a sense of their own identity. If the crisis is unresolved, however, the result is identity confusion – both in terms of a personal and social identity. In his “Identity

Status Model”, Marcia (1966, 1980) later proposed specific methods adolescents could employ to achieve identity crisis resolution.

Before ending the present discussion on Erickson and moving to a focus on Marcia, one final point about Erickson pertinent to this study should be made. Erickson states identity development differs for male and female adolescents. For the female, Erickson (1968) says, the sequence is a bit different. According to Erickson, a female holds her identity in abeyance as she prepares to attract the man by whose name she will be known, by whose status she will be defined – the man who will rescue her from emptiness and loneliness by filling the “inner space.” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 12) This aspect of Erickson’s work will be a key point during a later discussion of psychologist and former Erickson student, Carol Gilligan.

Identity development as a dynamic “self-structure.” While Marcia concurred with Erickson that identity was not a single fixed entity individuals discovered or achieved at a particular point in their lives, never to be further shaped or altered, he further refined Erickson’s psychosocial model of identity development by placing particular emphasis on identity formation as a non-linear process. Marcia stated, “I would like to propose another way of construing identity: as a self-structure – an internal, self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs, and individual history” (p. 159).

According to Marcia (1980), the self-structure constituting identity involves the adoption of a sexual orientation, a set of values and ideals, and a vocational direction. Adolescence, therefore, is a period of human development in which individuals engage in both exploration and commitment to a sense of identity in various life domains including vocation, religion, relational choices, and gender roles. While Erickson asserted that an

unresolved identity crisis resulted in identity confusion, Marcia (1980) viewed identity formation as a matter of the degree to which an individual adopted each aspect of the self-structure, stating,

The better developed this structure is, the more individuals appear to be of their own ...strengths and weaknesses... The less developed the structure is, the more confused individuals seem to be about their own distinctiveness from others and the more they have to rely on external sources to evaluate themselves. (p. 159)

Developing a protocol for semi-structured interviews, Marcia researched the ways adolescents engaged in identity formation. From this research, Marcia posited an Identity Status Model.

Identity as exploration. Like Marcia, Grotevant (1987) adopted an Ericksonian psychosocial view of identity development, and valued the work of Marcia's Identity Status Model for emphasizing two key elements in this process: exploration of alternatives and commitment to choices. The framework is *developmental* in its focus on the process of forming a sense of identity. It is *contextual* in that it considers the interdependent roles of society, family, peers, and school or work environments in identity formation. Finally, it is *life-span* in scope. Identity formation is viewed as a life-long task that has its roots in the development of the self in infancy. (p. 2) Still, Grotevant maintained the need existed for research focusing on the processes associated with the identity statuses, rather than the statuses themselves. For Grotevant, then, *exploration* is key: "*Identity exploration* (emphasis in original) may be defined as problem-solving behavior aimed at eliciting information about oneself or one's environment in order to make a decision about an important life choice." (p. 3)

As the present study focused on adolescents, it should be emphasized again that Grotevant viewed identity formation as a life-long task beginning in infancy, with adolescence a period in which an individual's identity is reformulated as "a function of mature cognitive abilities, a facilitative environment, and being potentially open to modification throughout adulthood" (p. 2). Clinging to a stage-based theory of identity development Grotevant, like Erickson and Marcia, continued the hierarchical view of identity – a view which perpetuates the myth of adolescence as a period of time marked almost exclusively by hormone-induced turmoil. According to Moje (2002), the consequences of this commonly-held notion have been a devaluing of individuals in this age bracket, leading to research with a skewed view of adolescents and their literacy practices:

If we took seriously the idea that adolescents are sophisticated meaning-makers who use various texts to represent or construct identities and subject positions in the world, then we might not neglect to examine youth's meaning making. We might find that we could learn something about meaning through literacy as well.
(p. 215)

Personal identity and discursive practices. According to Gee, identity is a complex concept. In contrast to the life-cycle, stage views espoused by Erickson and others, Gee reflects a postmodern perspective in which the focus cannot be on the individual in isolation (an impossible phenomenon in a postmodern view), but on the individuals, as well as social and political institutions and structures, within which the individual exists. Gee posited individuals possess multiple identities shaped by those individuals and institutions and used by the individual in various discourse practices. While asserting the

presence and importance of these multiple identities, Gee also acknowledged the existence of a “core identity” which remains fairly constant. Gee (2000) explained the process stating:

Each person has had a unique trajectory through ‘Discourse space.’ That is, he or she has, through time, in a certain order, had specific experiences within specific Discourses (i.e., be recognized, at a time and place, one way and not another), some recurring and others not. This trajectory and the person’s own narrativization (Mishler, 2000) of it are what constitute his or her (never fully formed or always potentially changing) ‘core identity.’ (p. 111)

Gee concluded this explanation by emphasizing again the sociocultural nature of identity:

The Discourses are social and historical, but the person’s trajectory and narrativization are individual (though an individuality that is fully socially formed and informed). (p. 111)

Gee’s research is especially noteworthy for an expansive perspective on what constitutes discourse and how individuals operating within those environments are afforded the opportunity to explore multiple identities and become what Gee referred to as “shape-shifting portfolio people.” With an emphasis on multiple, changing identities shaped by and within discourse communities and practices, Gee’s theoretical perspectives informed this study with adolescent females exploring identities in discursive practices within the texts they read, the journals in which they will write, and among the various members of the book club. However, Gee’s work follows in the male-centered footsteps of Erickson – concepts developed from research with primarily male participants are then applied to both males and females.

While Gee separates an individual's stable, core identity (what is often referred to as personal identity, selfhood or simple self), from multiple, contextually-dependent, social identities Harre' and others (Harre' & Moghaddam, 2003; Harre' and van Lagenhove, 1999) employ positioning theory as "a metaphor to enable an investigator to grasp how persons are 'located' within conversations as observable and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines." (Harre' and van Lagenhove, 1999, p. 61) Rather than being distinct and separate from one another, an individual's personal identity and social identity (or identities) engage in "critical dialogue" in which the social shapes and formulates the personal. Reflecting the postmodern perspective of identity as constituted in discourse, positioning theory includes a view of individuals as active participants within these social practices. Harre' and van Lagenhove (1999) maintained:

The discursive practices of positioning make possible three ways of expressing and experiencing one's personal identity or unique selfhood: by stressing one's agency in claiming responsibility for some action; by indexing one's statements with the point of view one has on its relevant world; or by presenting a description/evaluation of some past event or episode to one's biography. (p. 61)

This empowered, agentic view of individuals engaging in discourse is pertinent to this study as female book club participants met to share their individual views of a shared text.

Female identity development: relationship-based. Psychologist Carol Gilligan criticized classic psychological models such as Erickson's view of identity formation for their nearly-exclusive research on boys—research Gilligan claimed ignore the unique features of female development. Gilligan stated, "Implicitly adopting the male life as the

norm, (psychological theorists) have tried to fashion women out of a masculine cloth.” (1982, p. 6). Gilligan’s work, therefore, focused specifically on female adolescent development. First a student of Erickson and later a researcher working with Kohlberg, Gilligan rejected the male-centered theories of human development in which females are often viewed as inferior or abnormal when their processes of identity or moral development do not mirror what has been presented as the standard for all human beings. The journey to discover the nature of women’s psychology led Gilligan to what she termed the “crossroad in women’s development” – adolescence.

In a five-year study of nearly 100 girls between the ages of seven and eighteen at the Laurel School for girls in Cleveland, Ohio, Brown and Gilligan (1992) began their research following a quantitative design in which participants were randomly assigned to either a research or control group. Girls in the experimental group would be asked open-ended questions with the assumption that these types of questions would encourage the girls to open-up to the researchers and provide information about their emotions, relationships, and conflicts. The control group would be interviewed in a standard psychological method in which hypothetical situations and probing questions would be presented for the girls to offer responses regarding.

What Brown and Gilligan discovered, however, was that instead of offering a vehicle for allowing the girls to openly share their perspectives with the researchers, both interview methods distanced the girls who ultimately shut down. Finally listening to the girls who clearly expressed their frustrations with the way the researchers distanced and separated themselves from them, Gilligan and Brown redesigned their study in such a way that allowed them to establish authentic relationships with the girls, and emphasized

the need to deeply listen to the voices of the girls. What Brown and Gilligan discovered illuminated the previously ignored differences between male and female identity:

The contrast between a self defined through separation and a self delineated through connection, between a self measured against an abstract ideal of perfection and a self assessed through particular activities of care, becomes clearer and the implications of this contrast extend by considering the different ways these children resolve a conflict between responsibility to others and responsibility to self. (p. 35)

These differences in how males and females define themselves, according to Gilligan (1982), also affect gender identity development: “Since masculinity is defined through separation while femininity is defined through attachment, male gender identity is threatened by intimacy while female gender identity is threatened by separation.” (p. 8) A relationship-based view of female identity development is particularly relevant in light of research indicating that adolescence is a time when a child’s self esteem decreases – especially with females (Atwater, 1992). Gilligan and others (Gilligan, Ward, & Taylor, 1988; Brown and Gilligan, 1992) have found that for females this loss of selfhood is often due to “silence, conformity, or submission” in reaction to the “message to be humble, to show stoicism, selflessness or sacrifice” (Stringer, 1994, p.1).

The present study built upon the foundation Gilligan laid in which female adolescent identity is defined, explored, developed, and expressed through relationships. The study explored forms of relationships, however, corresponding with a postmodern perspective. A central assumption was that relationships are a form of Discourse. Therefore, as female participants read, journaled, and discussed a shared text, I explored the discursive relationships present. Discursive relationships with the characters

(especially the female protagonists), intrapersonal discursive relationships evident in the response journals, and intrapersonal discursive relationships evident in the book club discussions all were considered. In this way, Gilligan's relationship-based view of female identity development was viewed from a postmodern perspective and explored within the context of literacy events.

Book Clubs

The purpose of the present study was to describe and explain selected adolescent females' perceptions of identity through participation in a book club. To situate the present study, therefore, I explore the topic of book clubs in general, then focus more specifically on women's participation in book clubs historically, and end with a discussion of the research conducted on adolescent females' participation in book clubs.

Background

The view of literacy activities as social endeavors are modern constructs. The writer, scribbling away in a garret is one perhaps still held by many. And while historians have significant evidence that prolific poet and playwright William Shakespeare's works were highly collaborative, the search for the "master text" penned solely in Shakespeare's hand continues. Reading, too, is seen as a solitary act. According to sociologist Elizabeth Long (1993), the image of the solitary reader is one that dates back to early Christian art in the medieval era with images of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene reading the books of hours and psalters. These representations perpetuated, too, the elitist view of reading. And while reading as an aristocratic pursuit began to change in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, according to Long, the vision of the

reader withdrawn from the world remained firmly in place. In the mid-to late-19th century, though, a new image began to appear: women's literary societies.

Women and Book Clubs

Free from their domestic roles and a male-dominated world (at least temporarily), women began to gather together to engage in what Heath would later term literacy events. But while discussing a shared text was the overt agenda, the literary societies had a covert purpose as well. Much more than book discussions took place. In fact, Long pointed to a significant amount of evidence from studies of 19th and 20th century suffragists that within these women's literary societies women gathered for the first time to discuss "the woman question" (1993). According to Radway (1997), all-female book discussion groups as sites of empowerment and agency for its members can be attributed to "the particular cultural power associated with...acquiring, owning, reading, and talking about books" (p.8).

Literature in the Lives of Adolescent Females

Before exploring the literature surrounding adolescent females and book club participation, a brief discussion concerning the broader topic of the role of literature in adolescent females' lives is important in contextualizing the present study.

Research indicates that the nature of the texts themselves contributes to the atmosphere of empowerment and agency Radway (1997) described. In "Girls and Reading: The Desire for Agency and the Horror of Helplessness in Fictional Encounters," Cherland and Edelsky (1994) presented a view of fiction as a vehicle used by adolescent girls to explore female agency outside the realm of patriarchal societal norms. In an ethnographic study of seven girls, ages 11 and 12, living in a small, middle

class Canadian community, Cherland and Edelsky asked the following research question: “What does reading fiction mean to these sixth grade girls?” From participant observation, interview transcripts (girls, parents, and teachers), literature response group transcripts, and researcher-participant dialogue journals focusing on the books being read, Cherland and Edelsky found that reading fiction did promote notions of female agency, but not in a simplistic, transmission style. Far from being passive recipients, the girls in the study “used their reading of fiction to explore other types of agency and to imagine themselves using other forms of power” (p.42). Cherland and Edelsky stated,

Reading fiction is one site in which children can confront their culture and construct its meanings for their individual lives. Reading fiction is a social practice through which children seek to understand their own places in the world.

(p. 42)

Female readers and textual relationships. Interviewing 33 adolescent girls from diverse backgrounds in California and New Jersey, Blackford’s findings are detailed in *Out of this World: Why Literature Matters to Girls* (2004). These findings are particularly significant for their failure to confirm conventional beliefs about the act of reading. As Blackford asserted,

The reading practices and materials of the girls in this project go against the grain of thirty years, or more, of teacher wisdom: the belief that readers are engaged by stories with characters and social worlds that they can relate to themselves and their own experiences. (p.6)

Referencing Carol Gilligan’s assertion that female adolescents value relationships over separation in developing their sense of selfhood, Blackford found that the relationships

were not with the characters, but rather the form and theme of the text. Blackford explained,

Girls construct a literary text as both an aesthetic object and an alternative world, separate from life and their social worlds. By forging a relationship with the presumed spectator of the text, they experience a welcome diffusion of identity, bifurcating themselves into a “seeing and imagining” agent “in” the text and differentiating this omniscient, reading self from the self that exists in life. (p. 9)

Blackford openly shared how early into the interview process she discovered the significant flaw in her research – found in the research questions themselves. According to Blackford, she constructed questions that reflected her presumptions about what kinds of literature the girls found meaningful and the way that literature shaped the girls’ exploration of selfhood (2004). Rather than forming relationships with the characters as they would friends in their real world, the girls Blackford studied gravitated to books that allowed them to leave their own world and live lives and realities far different from their own.

Blackford’s work resonated in the pilot study I conducted prior to this present research. Like Blackford, I began with a priori assumptions that simplistically reduced the complex experience of girls and reading to one of mirrors and transmission. In this view, the reader selected a text that mirrored elements of her own life, witnessed how the empowered female protagonist in the text triumphed over adversity, and as a result became filled with a similar sense of agency. Ashley, one of the participants in the pilot study, told a different story. In a semi-structured interview, I asked Ashley, “What kinds of books do you like to read and why?” Making a novice researcher’s error, I assumed

Ashley's response would mirror my own reading preference: realistic fiction. However, her response was fantasy – because “It's fun to get away from what's going on with school and my mom ... I get away from all that when I read fantasy.” When probed further about realistic fiction featuring central characters who were girls like her, dealing with many of those same issues of school, parents, etc., Ashley's blunt and honest response was, “That's boring. Why do I want to read about somebody just like me?” Her demeanor indicated this was a rhetorical question and helped me realize how much I needed to learn about the mindset of an effective qualitative researcher. Later, reading the work of Brown and Gilligan (1992) interviewing adolescent females in which they, too, made similar errors in assumptions, I felt somewhat reassured. As Brown and Gilligan stated,

Our wish to do good psychological research led us into assumptions about control and objectivity and concerns about validity and replicability which left us with a sense of discomfort and unease...although our way of working was centered on voice and listening and thus was akin to clinical and literary methods, our attempt to bring this work into line with standard practices of psychological research broke connection in a myriad subtle and not so subtle ways. (pp. 9-11)

While Brown and Gilligan's errors in assumptions pertain to research design, their words resonate as I think back on my experience interviewing Ashley. I entered the present study cognizant of the need to deeply and consistently listen to the girls participating in the book club – allowing their voices to inform and guide me.

Reading as “doing.” Margaret Finders' (1997) work with five adolescent females in a one-year ethnographic study as the girls moved from sixth to seventh grade, focused both

on reading and writing, but informed the present study with its focus on the sociocultural nature of literacy and gender construction. Like Blackford, Finders referenced Gilligan's theory of adolescent identity development as being relationship oriented and used that lens to explore acts of literacy in the girls' lives, both in and out of school. And like Blackford, Finders specifically examined the interpretive experiences of the girls and the books they read. Studying the girls both within an educational setting and at home allowed Finders to further explore the ways school literacy practices supported, or failed to support, those in which the girls engaged outside of school. Finders' findings support other studies (Blackford, 2004; Radway, 1997; Cherland, 1994) underscoring that for adolescent females, reading is far from a passive pursuit. Finders asserted,

Girls use literacy to control, moderate, and measure their growth into adulthood. I would argue that a new independence is afforded to adolescent females through literacy...In other words, literacies served as a visible rite of passage, as a cultural practice to mark oneself as in control, as powerful. (p. 19)

While the importance of relationships was a finding in Finders' work, the present study employed an intentional, focused view of those relationships in a relationship-based literacy activity: a book club. Finders work, too, examined sixth and seventh grade females. The present study focused on eighth grade females. Significant differences exist between females entering adolescence (sixth and seventh grade) and those in the middle of this dynamic period of human development.

Adolescent Females and Book Clubs

Cherland and Edelsky (1994), Blackford (2004), and Finders' (1997) encompassing views of adolescent female's literacy practices provided a broad

foundation upon which to examine the more specific, structured activity of girls' book club participation. Before returning again to a wide view by reviewing the research concerning mixed gender small group discussions, I will first present key studies exploring all-girl book clubs.

Over five months, Carico (2001) met with four adolescent females to discuss two texts featuring strong female protagonists. Six months following the book discussion segment of the study, Carico continued to meet with the girls – this time in the form of four months of reflective sessions. Study findings indicated discussion preferences differed according to the individual girl, and those participants who were adept at employing what Carico termed “the language of eloquence” – the discursive practices most commonly found in English classroom discussions, were in a more privileged position during the book discussion sessions. The after-school setting of the study highlighted this privileged positioning, leading Carico to recommend classroom teachers become cognizant of the power structures present in discursive activities.

Also selecting texts with strong female characters, Smith (1997) studied six sixth grade girls participating in 17 book club sessions. Smith's study is especially noteworthy as it focused on the ways the girls used the texts to reflect on their own identities as adolescent females. Smith (2001) stated,

Their talk laid bare the enticing sense of discovering new possibilities and qualities about themselves. These combined purposes of agency and desire illustrated the fluid and often-contradictory identities these early adolescent girls were constructing and informed their response to their reading. (p. 13)

In an after-school group called The Girls' Book Club, Galda and Beach (2001) studied 15 seventh-grade females who met to discuss Karen Cushman's (1994) novel, *Catherine, Called Birdy*, as part of a classroom inquiry project. Galda and Beach's study offers a critical perspective concerning the evolution of reader response theory since the 1970s. Advocating that classroom teachers must encourage their students to stretch beyond making simple inferences about characters to viewing these characters within sociocultural context, Galda and Beach found providing the students with a structure that necessitated their framing responses in terms of issues such as gender roles and religious practices enabled the students to "explore larger social and political forces shaping characters' lives" (p. 71). Galda and Beach maintained,

Through experiences such as this with literature in schools, students have the opportunity to access their full potential as readers who can create and transform worlds...Researchers today who study response from a sociocultural frame take for granted the complexities of the reader-text transaction that is embedded in multiple worlds. (p. 71)

Book Clubs as a Pedagogical Practice

With roots in adult social gatherings, literature discussion groups now occupy a prominent position within the classroom setting. While teachers may refer to these groups by various terms, two in particular stand out: Literature Circles and Book Clubs. A point of clarification should be made concerning terminology. Literature Circles in capital letters, refers to a small group literature discussion structure as conceived by Daniels (2002). Book Club is another small group discussion structure and conceived of by Raphael and McMahon (1994). The term book club (lower case) was used throughout

this study as a generic term for a small group of individuals gathering together to read and discuss a shared text.

Harvey Daniels, author of *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs & Reading Groups* (2002) describes literature circles as “small, peer-led discussion groups whose members have chosen to read the same story, poem, article, or book” (p.2).

Daniels’ work is popular among teachers because it features “role sheets” to define specific tasks each student member of the discussion group will perform and share with the group. Roles such as “Discussion Director,” “Word Wizard,” and “Artful Artist” are designed for both clarification and accountability as teachers collect the roles to document work accomplished. Daniels emphasizes that these role sheets should be used by teachers to scaffold student learning, and that teachers should nudge student discussions to extend beyond what students have written on the role sheets.

In emphasizing the value of literature circles as a pedagogical practice, Daniels points to research indicating their effectiveness in raising student scores on standardized reading tests, as well as increasing student engagement and enjoyment of literature. Specifically, Daniels found that sixth and eighth grade students from inner city Chicago schools where teachers had been trained in conducting Literature Circles achieved 27% higher on standardized literacy tests than the citywide average (2002).

While McMahon and Raphael’s conception of in-school literature response groups shares many of the same features as Daniels’ Literature Circles, there are also significant differences between the two. Book Club, the term McMahon and Raphael use, includes four major components, all of which students engage in during each instructional class period: Community Share, Reading, Writing/Representing, and Book

Club Discussion (1994). During Community Share, the teacher engages in direct instruction to the whole group. Reading usually involves students reading silently, but large and small group oral reading often takes place at this time as well. Reflection on the text read occurs during the Writing/Representing stage, and students either engage in written response or an artistic representation of what they read. These steps prepare students to engage in the heart of the program: Book Club. At this time, students form small groups and discuss the text, using their work during Writing/Representing and teacher/student-generated questions.

Emphasizing the sociocultural perspective of knowledge as socially constructed, McMahon and Raphael stated their Book Club is built on the foundation that “language use is fundamental to thinking, that what is learned by any individual begins in the social interactions in which he or she engages” (p. 160).

Research on the effectiveness of book discussion groups has produced mixed results. In a quantitative study measuring students’ reading achievement gains on a standardized test, Raphael and McMahon (1994) found no difference between students in a Book Club-centered classroom and those in a traditional classroom. However, Book Club students did exhibit greater long-term recall of the reading material than their non-Book Club counterparts.

While research supporting the effectiveness of book discussion groups as measured by standardized test scores is scarce, numerous studies have viewed academic success as affected by factors such as engagement and motivation. Research indicates that by offering adolescent readers opportunities for peer interactions (Raphael et al, 1992; Raphael, Kehus & Damphousse, 2001), relationship-building activities with

teachers (Chandler, 1997), increased autonomy through choice (Burns, 198), and physical movement (Raphael, Kehus & Damphousse, 2001), book discussion groups meet the unique developmental needs of adolescents.

While the foundational notion of a small group of readers gathering together to read and discuss a shared text is present in both the Daniels and Raphael/McMahon models, they bear little else in common with the out-of-school, adult book clubs described by Long. Nowhere in Long's (1993) work does she describe book clubs where readers prepare and read from role sheets or engage in individual writing/representing activities prior to a leader-directed group discussion. And while scaffolding is a key feature in effective instruction, its use is predicated on the assumption that there is a novice-expert learning situation. This begs these questions: Are our young readers bereft of the ability to engage in meaningful discourse? When does scaffolding become a disabling crutch smothering individual self-expression?

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I reviewed the literature in four areas pertinent to the present study: sociocultural theory, reader response theory, adolescent girls' identity exploration, and book clubs. Examining the literature in these areas contextualizes the present study, and underscores the significance of the study in contributing to the existing body of theory and research.

Understanding the nature of sociocultural theory and the theorists whose work has made seminal contributions to the field (Vygotsky, 1978; Dewey, 1956[1902]; Rogoff, 1988, 1995, 2003; John-Steiner & Mann, 1997; Heath, 1983; Au, 1998), lays a foundation for assumptions central to the present study. Beginning with Vygotsky's

assertion that knowledge is socially constructed (Vygotsky, 1978), sociocultural theory is a continuously-evolving perspective. Au's (1998) work, for example, emphasizing the role of students' backgrounds as sources for creating (and closing) the literacy achievement gap holds significant potential for addressing a growing problem in contemporary classrooms. Lewis, Encisco and Moje (2007) are harbingers of a postmodern view of sociocultural theory in calling for a more expansive definition – one inclusive of issues of power, identity, and agency – renamed “critical sociocultural theory.” The review of literature, therefore, provided ample evidence that sociocultural theory is as relevant today as when first articulated.

In terms of the present study, sociocultural theory was pertinent in addressing the first exploratory question: “What elements constitute selected adolescent girls’ perspectives on identity?” as the study focused on their perspectives while participating in an after school book club. Sociocultural theory informed this question by further asking: If learning occurs contextually – within the social and cultural realms – then what kinds of learning about oneself occur during reading and discussing literature? Further, sociocultural theory informed the definition of identity used in the present study in which identities (plural) were seen as both socially-situated and socially-constructed. In this chapter, I also explored the area of reader response theory, which provided the theoretical framework foundation for the present study. Rosenblatt's (1978) view emphasizing the sociocultural perspective of reading was employed:

The current climate favors another of my emphases...that there is no such thing as a generic reader, that each reading involves a particular person at a particular time and

place, underlies the importance of such factors in the transaction as gender, ethnic and socioeconomic background, and cultural environment. (p. viii)

One aspect highlighted in this section of the literature review was the mistaken notion of the existence of a single reader response theory. Various perspectives and theorists in this field were presented, showing that while reader response is regarded to be a view in which the emphasis on the reading process is on the reader rather than the text, there are degrees to which this is embraced. Understanding the range of reader response theories, and clarifying the perspective pertinent to the present study further situated the research into the reader experiences of adolescent females.

The term “adolescent female identity” contains three words deceptively simple, but complex in close examination. I first included these words in the introductory chapter under definition of terms, and then needed to investigate the terms both singularly and in various combinations with one another. The result of this search is a review organized with a theoretical foundational view of central theorists in the field of identity development/exploration/formation – each word reflecting a distinct approach to the topic. Reflecting the feminist methodology and perspective foundational to the study, I adopted Gilligan’s relationship-based view of female identity – eschewing the male-centered orientations of Erickson and others whose theories were presented in the review of literature. Including these theories and theorists in the review of literature was important as their work is cited as the perspective on identity in studies involving adolescent females, identity, and book clubs. While Gilligan’s relationship-based view of female identity is referenced in these studies, in each case the researcher turns to Erickson or another male-oriented view in the data analysis phase.

I explored first the historical background of and continued with research pertaining to women and book clubs. I highlighted seminal work in the field of female adolescents and literacy activities in order to situate the present study. Blackford's (2004) findings particularly informed my work as I explored female readers' engagement with text and what occurred as a result of that engagement. Blackford's methodology differed from my own, though, in that her study was interview-based. In my work, a community of female adolescent readers formed the foundation of exploring the topic of girls and reading, and therefore discussion transcripts, journals, field notes, as well as interviews comprised data collected and analyzed. Relationships were therefore central to the study and the girls' literacy practices studied.

Chapter Three

Method

In this chapter I outline and discuss the research design of my study. I begin by restating the purpose of the study and the research questions guiding the design of the study. Next, I discuss the theoretical framework informing the methodology employed in the study. I conclude the chapter with a description of the design of the study and the data analysis methods that will be used. *Adolescent Females' Perceptions of Identity in an after School Book Club* is a qualitative study that employed case study methods to provide an in-depth description and analysis of a community of readers.

Purpose of the Study and Exploratory Questions

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain selected adolescent girls' perceptions of identity through an after school book club.

The following exploratory questions guided my study:

1. What elements constitute selected adolescent girls' perceptions of identity through an after school book club?
2. What elements influence their self-identity expression?

I employed qualitative data collection and analysis techniques to explore these questions, following the tenets of naturalistic inquiry which Patton (2002) defines as "A discovery-oriented approach that minimizes investigator manipulation of the study setting and places no prior constraints on what the outcomes of the research will be" (p. 39).

Theoretical Research Framework

According to Creswell (2007), engaging in qualitative research involves making certain philosophical assumptions in terms of ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetoric, and methodology. The two exploratory questions guided the selection of qualitative research methods in this present study. One of the underlying assumptions in asking these questions concerns the nature of reality – that it is both subjective and multiple, seen by study participants. Another assumption is that personal values and bias are inherent in all research. Embracing these assumptions and understanding that in order to explore answers to the research questions I needed to engage closely with the participants, I turned to qualitative research for this study.

Reader response theory provided the framework upon which this study is built, guidance in data collection, and a lens to view and analyze data.

Design of the Study

Case Study Design

Guided by the nature of my exploratory questions and the need for extensive, in-depth descriptions of the social phenomenon studied (Yin, 2009; Stake, 2005), I selected case study design as appropriate methodology to explore adolescent females in a book club. Merriam (2009) lists three special attributes of case studies: particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. The present study focused on describing and explaining the experiences of five adolescent females participating in a book club, and therefore satisfies the first requirement. Thick description is a key feature of the following two chapters in which I first present the data collected and follow with an analysis of the data. Within both sections I have further reflected Merriam's (2009) perspective on case studies as

qualitative research that “include as many variables as possible and portray their interaction, often over a period of time” (p. 43). Finally, the present study satisfies Merriam’s third criteria for case studies in its focus on capturing “complex action, perception, and interpretation” (p. 44).

Additionally, in keeping with the feminist research methodology that foundational to the present study, I am informed by Reinharz’s (1992) assertion of a need for case studies focusing on women’s experiences. In a chapter focusing on feminist case study research, Reinharz further emphasizes this need by referring to these words by Bernice Carroll in her work *Liberating Women’s History: Theoretical and Critical Essays*:

Theory must remain hypothetical, at worst unreal and barren [unless we have detailed] case studies and surveys dealing with the experience of selected groups of women in diverse cultures and time periods. (p. xii)

One goal of the present study was to highlight the experiences of five adolescent females in an after-school book club and breathe reality and rich description into reader response theory. Feminist methodology was therefore foundational to all aspects of the study.

Lather (1991) defines feminist research stating,

Very simply, to do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the center of one’s inquiry.... The overt ideological goal of feminist research in the human sciences is to correct both the *invisibility* and *distortion* of female experience in ways relevant to ending women’s unequally social position.

(Lather, 1991, p.71; quoted in Kvale, 1996, p. 73).

In addition to the nature of the research questions and need for in-depth description of a real-life phenomenon, a feature of the present study that makes case study the preferred

methodology was the extensive variety of evidence collected: interviews, field notes, researcher and participant journals, and discussion transcripts (Yin, 2009).

Participants and Site

As an after-school book discussion group, the meetings forming the core of this study did not take place within a classroom during school hours. Instead, weekly book discussion meetings occurred at a public park adjacent to a local middle school. The participants in the study were drawn from the student body at this particular middle school, however. I myself was previously employed as a teacher at this site. Therefore, with the researcher and participants intricately tied to the site, a detailed description of the school is necessary to provide a foundational background for the study.

At the time of the present study, the school year was the inaugural year for Gulfside Fundamental Middle School. While the school building itself has been in existence for 50 years, during the previous year the district school board responded to a budgetary shortfall by deciding to merge Eastside Fundamental Middle School with Gulf Middle School. The adjoining elementary school, Gulf Elementary School also became part of the merger by reorganizing as a fundamental school. As proclaimed on the middle school web site, three schools (Eastside Fundamental Middle School, Gulf Middle School, and Gulf Elementary School) became one “great K-8 school.”

Gulfside Fundamental Middle School’s total population as of the time of the present study was 954 students. According to district records, the demographic composition of the school was as follows: 898 non-Hispanic or African American students, 33 Hispanic students, and 23 African American students. Of the total middle

school population, 22% qualified for the free or reduced lunch program, 6% were students with disabilities, and 16% were gifted.

Gulfside Fundamental Middle School is part of a large, urban school district in a state whose population has historically experienced tremendous growth – until recently. While Florida was once seen as a land of almost limitless opportunity, the national economic downturn caused that shining image to tarnish. Not only are Americans not pouring into Florida as they once were, they are, in fact, leaving many areas of the state. Residents of Gulf County, located on the west coast of the state along the Gulf of Mexico, have seen property taxes and insurance rates soar, while wages and the availability of jobs have plummeted. Families have been hit particularly hard, and have chosen either to move to other, less costly parts of the state, or to leave the state entirely. The result has been a decrease in student enrollment in the Gulf County School District.

The decrease in student enrollment coupled with the loss of revenue contributed to the closing of eight middle and elementary schools in the year prior to the present study. Eastside Fundamental Middle School, a small (650 students on average) school built in 1927, was one of those schools.

A brief description of fundamental schools, their philosophical and curricular foundations, will provide important contextual information in framing the study researcher (a former teacher at the school) and the participants (students attending the school). Public schools that emphasize active parental involvement and strict adherence to high behavioral standards for students, fundamental schools have been part of the Gulf County School District since 1976.

The student population is drawn via a districtwide lottery system available to all families who agree to terms of active involvement including attending a required number of Parent-Teacher Association (P.T.A.) meetings, signing homework, attending all parent-teacher conferences, and providing transportation to and from school. This last requirement is obviously a particular challenge for many families in the district to meet. It is also a significant reason that closing one fundamental program in a small school and merging it with a much larger K-8 school presented an ideal situation for the local school district. The absence of buses eliminated a significant expense for the district, while offering a new fundamental school for elementary and middle school parents allowed the district to answer parent requests.

The closure-merger scenario was not without significant challenges. Faculty at all three schools were required to interview for positions at the new school. Students already attending the effected schools were given first preference in attending the new school, provided they and their parents agreed to abide by the fundamental school requirements. The result was the creation of a school in which existing faculty saw colleagues required to find placement elsewhere, faculty at the closed school hired to teach at the new school, but experiencing the loss of their own school and the relocation of some long-standing colleagues to other schools, and finally, there were the students. The school population resulting from the merger was a mixture of students new to the fundamental school program, but having attended the school for many years; students from the closed school familiar with the fundamental program, but now attending a new school facility, and students from other middle schools.

Establishing a common school culture and community proved to be a slow, difficult process for students used to strong ties to their school. Three identities: Schoolwide, faculty, and student continued to be in the midst of a rebuilding process during the time of the study.

My intention in beginning the participant recruitment process was to accept any eighth grade female at the school who expressed a desire to be part of the book club and was willing to fulfill the requirements of participation: reading books according to the agreed upon schedule, writing at home in reader response journals, attending weekly one-hour meetings, fully participating in the weekly discussions. I had no other criteria. Therefore, many questions as to each participant's school background would remain unanswered until I began the initial interviews. Would they be former Eastside students (many of whom share a personal and educational history extending back to early elementary school years)? Would they be former Gulfside Middle School students (possibly with a similar shared history)? Would they be students without any previous connection to the school culture – either fundamental or physical location? These questions remained to be answered.

During the design phase of the study, I anticipated approximately ten girls would volunteer to be part of the book club. From these ten or so girls, I would then form two, five-member discussion groups. I would adjust the number of groups according to how many girls asked to participate. I anticipated needing to create more groups. I would gather data on all of the groups, finally selecting three girls from one group as the focus of case studies representative of the participants in the book club as a whole. In the end, I had exactly five girls who volunteered to be part of the book club. As a researcher, I had

planned on some level of attrition, and so I was initially concerned with this limited number of girls. The attrition did not occur. Five eighth grade adolescent females attending Gulfside Middle School began the book club and with the exception two girls who missed one meeting a piece, during the eight one-hour book club meetings, all five girls were in attendance each week.

The recruitment process occurred in this manner. One month prior to the start of the study, I arranged to talk to students in eighth grade language arts classes at the selected middle school site. I discussed the study, answered any initial questions about the study and the book club, and left flyers (Appendix A) describing the study and the book club with the teachers. The flyer included instructions for students interested in participating to accompany their parents to an informational meeting at the school in two weeks. At this meeting, I once again described the study, answered questions from parents and students, and distributed informed consent forms (Appendix B) for parents and students to complete and return to their language arts teacher within the week.

As stated previously, I intended that all girls who applied to be part of the study would be accepted, formed into groups of five, with one group the focus of single case study of the book club, and three of the participants in the group as the focus of individual case studies. This number would construct a small enough discussion group conducive to providing all girls with the opportunity to speak and share, while at the same time large enough to retain the important feature of multiple voices in the event a participant dropped out of the group.

To ensure the participants remained in the study for the full eight weeks and attended each of the weekly meetings, the flyer distributed in the language arts class and

at the parent/student meeting detailed the benefits and requirements of the book club/study participation:

Benefits: Books, snacks, the opportunity to talk about participant-selected books with peers.

Requirements: Attendance at each of eight weekly, one-hour meeting; read two participant-selected books according to a group-determined schedule; write weekly in personal response journals prior to and following book club meetings; participate actively in whole group book discussions; agree to an individual interview at the beginning and end of the study.

Book Selection

Autonomy and empowerment of the female participants is critical to a study embracing feminist methodology. The ultimate selection of the titles therefore needed to be up to the girls themselves. The need for autonomy and empowerment via book choice, however, had to be balanced with the need to address the two exploratory questions driving the study and remain faithful to the purpose of the study. I determined the best way to achieve this complex balance would be to present the girls with a list from which they could engage in collaborative, democratic negotiations to arrive at two group agreed upon titles. I initially intended to assemble the list myself and began searching for young adult literature (specifically novels) featuring strong female protagonists.

Precisely what constitutes young adult literature (also referred to as adolescent literature) is as problematic to define as the term young adult itself. Broadest age ranges for young adult include readers as young as ten and as old as twenty-five (Cart, 2008). The participants involved in this study were all 8th grade females, ages 13-14. I therefore

began to assemble a book list by searching for young adult novels whose protagonists were female, roughly the same age or slightly older, and whose subject matter and plot elements emphasized adolescent female identity expression.

With this criterion in mind, I consulted various booklists for award-winning titles to select books the girls would find engaging. The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), a subgroup of the American Library Association, awards a number of honors for young adult titles including the Printz Award, the Alex Award, the Margaret A. Edwards Award, and the William C. Morris Award. I also explored YALSA booklists including those compiled by teen readers themselves. The Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English (ALAN) was another organization whose resources I spent copious amounts of time exploring in my search. Finally, I drew upon my professional knowledge as a language arts teacher – knowledge gained through reading the journals of the above organizations, being a voracious reader of young adult literature myself, and listening to the discerning opinions of my students.

Compiling the booklist was a time-consuming part of the study design, but a critical one – key to my being able to successfully address my exploratory questions and fulfilling the study’s purpose. I knew, too, from my experience as a classroom teacher, that lack of engagement with text would result in lackluster discussions and written responses. As a researcher, I understood the potential impact that could have on the strength of my study.

In the course of my search, I discovered a list of award-winning books ideally suited to my study. The Amelia Bloomer Project of the Feminist Task Force of the

Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American Library Association became the central focus of my book search. Ultimately, all of the titles on the list I presented to the five adolescent females participating in the study were drawn from recent (past five years) annual lists published by the Amelia Bloomer Project (Appendix C).

Members of the task force use four criteria in selecting books to include on these annual lists:

1. Significant feminist content
2. Excellence in writing
3. Appealing format
4. Age appropriateness for young readers

I felt confident in relying upon individuals who were part of an American Library Association task force in determining books meeting the last three criteria, and I knew I would cross-check the list with the above resources I used to initiate the search. I became interested, therefore, in the first criterion listed: significant feminist content. I wondered, what would be their definition of “feminist”? Acknowledging that while there may be a current popular trend of young adult literature with strong female protagonists, not all of the works would necessarily be considered feminist. The Amelia Bloomer Project clarifies this issue and provided a definition of feminist books that coincides with the specific view of strong female protagonist employed in this study:

Feminist books for young readers must move beyond merely “spunky” and “feisty” young women, beyond characters and people who fight to protect themselves without furthering rights for other women. Feminist books show women overcoming the obstacles of intersecting forces of race, gender, and class,

actively shaping their destinies. They break bonds forced by society as they defy stereotypical expectations and show resilience in the face of societal strictures. (p.

1)

Emphasizing that even if a text features a female protagonist who is “plucky, perseverant, courageous, feisty, intelligent, spirited, resourceful, capable, and independent,” it still may not be considered feminist. The Amelia Bloomer Project Task Force therefore employs specific questions to determine if the work is indeed feminist (Appendix D). A few of these questions include:

1. Does the book show an awareness of gender-based inequalities with action to change these inequalities?
2. Do girls and women take on nontraditional roles? If so, does the book point out that these roles are in opposition to society’s expectations, that the person is breaking new ground?
3. Do females blaze new trails for themselves and those who follow them?
(Again, does the book point that out?)
4. Do females use power for purposeful action, empowering others?
5. Does the book reflect female opportunities (or the lack of them), inequalities, and non-traditional roles in the era in which the book is set? (p. 2)

In the following chapter, I share data collected during the final book discussion meeting when I ask the girls to discuss, reflect, answer a few of these questions in relation to the two books they had selected and read. Their responses and the data collected throughout the study confirmed the value of the time invested in creating the book list I presented to the participants (Appendix E).

Prior to the first meeting, the girls and I gathered so they could look at the lists and determine both which books they would read and a weekly schedule for reading them. At the beginning of the meeting, I distributed copies of the list drawn from the past five years of the Amelia Bloomer Project award winners, cross-checked with my own knowledge of the books, and reviews from various organizations mentioned previously. I also selected texts deemed appropriate by the Amelia Bloomer Project and others for the particular age group of the participants. After a great deal of discussion, the participants decided on two texts: *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks* by E. Lockhart and *Uprising*, by Margaret Peterson Haddix. The girls indicated the intriguing title was significant in selecting the first novel. While *Uprising* is a historical fiction and the girls were initially united in their stance against selecting a novel in this genre, the popularity of the author and positive attitudes toward her other works persuaded them to select this as their second novel.

A brief description of the two novels selected will provide an important context in understanding data that resulted from discussions of the texts. The Amelia Bloomer Project includes this one-sentence summary of *The Disreputable History of Frankie-Landau Banks*: “When Frankie learns that she cannot join the all-male secret society at her exclusive prep school, she takes matters into her own hands” (Amelia Bloomer Project, 2009)

Frankie Landau-Banks is 16 years old, the younger sister of Zada – a confident, popular college freshman. Frankie begins the story as the self and family described “bunny rabbit,” and is determined to break free and create a new persona. Her plan to

achieve this? Capture for herself the empowerment owned by members of the all-male secret society and transform from bunny rabbit to criminal mastermind.

In *Uprising*, the girls selected a far different text. The Amelia Bloomer Project provided this summary of *Uprising*: “Stories of three girls of different ethnic, social, and educational backgrounds demonstrate the solidarity during the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory strike and fire” (Amelia Bloomer Project, 2009).

In alternating chapters, the book focuses on the experiences of three fictional characters representing various perspectives and experiences in New York City circa 1911. Jane, born into a life of privilege seems to be naturally prepared for a life of marriage, children, and an endless series of social events. Yet Jane feels somewhat unsettled about this predetermined future life she faces and wonders if there could be more. Bella – beautiful, naïve, and trusting – has recently arrived to American from her small village in Italy. Bella is grateful when she finds work at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. At the factory, Bella meets Yetta – empowered, activist-minded Yetta who tries to balance working at the factory with her passionate involvement with the union and suffragette movements.

These two participant-selected young adult novels formed the foundation for the weekly book discussions.

The Role of the Researcher

In qualitative inquiry the researcher is the instrument, and therefore self-disclosure about the role and background of the researcher is essential (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2007). I selected Gulfside Fundamental Middle School as the research site due to my intimate knowledge of and time spent in the field – a critical aspect of qualitative

research (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Guided by Jorgensen's (1989) criteria (described below) I also determined that participant observation was appropriate as both my role as the researcher and a data collection technique. A researcher who lacks the understandings I brought to the study – understanding gained from my seven years as a teacher at the site – would be disadvantaged in the contextual knowledge. With this knowledge, however, I risked filtering data through preconceived ideas and not allowing the data to speak for itself. Ely et al. (1991) express these cautionary words concerning the danger of such a “presumption of understanding”:

Familiarity with the subject at hand – the subculture, the jargon, and the unwritten codes of behavior – may enable a researcher to delve deeply into the research without having to do all of the preliminary work ... However, there are certain issues that arise from familiarity with the subject of which the researcher must be aware. An important, subtle issue concerns a researcher's presumption of understanding. (p. 124)

According to Jorgensen (1989), participant observation is appropriate when the following conditions are present:

- the research problem is concerned with human meanings and interactions viewed from the insiders' perspective;
- the phenomenon of investigation is observable within an everyday life situation or setting;
- the researcher is able to gain access to an appropriate setting;
- the phenomenon is sufficiently limited in size and location to be studied as a case;

- study questions are appropriate for case study; and
- the research problem can be addressed by qualitative data gathered by direct observation and other means pertinent to the field setting. (p. 13)

While I outlined the requirements of participation in the weekly book club meetings in broad strokes, the girls had to be central to the decision-making process whenever possible. The book club study's design was to provide a space within which the girls' voices could be heard. My intentions as a researcher were to listen to, learn from, and be guided by these voices. Therefore, if and when called on by the girls, I moved from observer to participant. As a classroom teacher, I view critical literacy as a central component of literature instruction. Even as my students discuss and explore literary texts in small groups or literature circles (Daniels, 2002), I am not a passive observer, but move from group to group listening and asking probing questions that afford them the opportunity to explore the text for critical issues (Cherland, 1994).

In considering methods for fostering rich discussions among the participants, I drew on my own experiences not only as a classroom teacher, but also my work as a freelance writer for the "Newspaper in Education" section of a local newspaper. For four years I facilitated monthly book club discussions with two groups: one in which the participants ranged in age from eight to ten, the other which involved middle school-age participants (ages 12 to 14). Employing a process similar to the design of this study, I selected groups of five participants who agreed to read one book per month and then met at a local park to engage in one-hour discussions of the book. Although not a research study, my role in that context mirrored that of participant-observer, and using a voice-activated digital recorder, I recorded the group discussions, later transcribing and editing

them to fit my allotted space in the newspaper. These experiences provided significant guidance for me in designing this present study. During the first few meetings with the newspaper book groups, I diligently formulated questions for the group to discuss, only to have the meeting begin with the first question and then the discussion happily leaving my hands and landing squarely where it should – with the young readers. Later, my opening question was always just this: What did you think (about the book)?

In designing the study, therefore, I drew from these experiences and rather than preparing a list of discussing questions for the group members. My intention was therefore to begin with “What did you think about the book?” and mark some specific passages to help initiate collaborative discussions if the question was not effective in doing so. Focusing on empowering the female participants in the study, I hoped a reading community would quickly develop so that organic, participant-initiated discussions would occur each week. The texts carefully selected for the list of possible novels to read should have provided foundations for these rich discussions.

My faith in the adolescent readers proved to be well-founded. Each week, one of the participants initiated the discussion almost before we all assembled at the picnic tables. I still prepared selections I felt would offer the girls opportunities to engage in rich discussions concerning identity, but only shared the selections at a few meetings. While I allowed myself to occupy the role of participant-observer, in actual practice, my role was primarily one of observer. It should be noted, however, that as a group the girls, too, provided me with the invitation to play a participant role – selecting for me a pseudonym to further help make this role possible. This selection of a pseudonym occurred during the first few moments of the initial book club meeting.

Bianca: Wait, Mrs. Atkins, you don't want us to think of you as a teacher so can we just call you by your first name?

Atkins: You want to call me Holly?

All: Yeah!

Atkins: Okay, that's fine – you can call me Holly.

Lacey: We should call her H-Dawg!

Bianca: Well, it would be appropriate because in the book, she's in the Beagle Club – so H-Dawg! (discussion transcripts, August 2010).

Throughout the remaining eight weeks of book discussion meetings and final interviews, the girls continued to refer to me as “H-Dawg.” In presenting data from book discussions and final interviews, therefore, I have identified myself using the name the girls selected for me.

A final note should be made concerning my presence and position in the book club meetings and creation of the field notes. My intention was to place the voice-activated recorder in the center of the meeting table, and complete double-entry field notes while the girls engaged in the discussion. This would allow me to provide a context for the discussion transcripts. I would be able to record observations concerning aspects of the discussion not found on the audio recordings – observations concerning the physical positioning of the girls, their facial expressions and body language, etc. However, I discovered at the first meeting how intrusive the girls would regard this activity. The moment I reached for my pen and notepad, all eyes became focused on me and when/what I wrote. I therefore quickly put them away and the girls once again focused on one another and discussing the books.

Procedure and Data Collection

Data collection began in August 2010 with initial individual semi-structured interviews of each girl in the book club. Interview protocols (Appendix F) served as foundational questions, but did not limit their scope. Weekly data collection came in the form of the discussion transcripts when the book club meetings began in August and ended at the close of the book club eight weeks later in early October, as well as the individual girls' response journals. The journals were collected at the conclusion of each meeting, entries photocopied, and returned to the participants the next day. Data also was collected via post-study semi-structured interviews (Appendix G). Tables 2 and 3 outline the study design in terms of data collection and analysis:

Exploratory Question	Data Source	Time (Week of...)	Data Analysis
1. What elements constitute selected adolescent girls' perspectives on identity?	Initial semi-structured interviews with case study participants	Mid-August 2010	Interview analysis (Kvale, 1996, 2009)
	Discussion transcripts; field notes	8 weeks; Mid-August – Mid-October 2010	Constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009)
	Participant Journals	8 weeks; Mid-August – Mid-October 2010	Constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009)
	Final semi-structured interviews with case study participants	Mid-August 2010	Constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009)

Table 2: Exploratory Question 1 and Study Design

Exploratory Question	Data Source	Time (Week of...)	Data Analysis
2. What influences their self-identity expression?	Book club discussion transcripts; field notes	8 weeks: Mid-August – Mid-October 2010	Constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009)
	Participant Journals	8 weeks: Mid-August – Mid-October 2010	Constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009)

Table 3: Exploratory Question 2 and Study Design

The tables reflect my intentional decisions in designing a study that would address each of the research questions by eliciting consistent data (Patton, 2002).

Participant Reader Response Journals

Multiple sources of data enrich any study, and so were an important foundation. One source of data was the participant reader response journals the girls wrote in at home while completing the week’s reading prior to the book club meeting. While the girls were asked to bring these journals to each meeting, sharing their responses with the group was on a voluntary basis. As I do in my own language arts classes, I strove to establish within this study a safe community in which all members felt positive about sharing through reading their writing and verbalizing their thoughts. I also know that even in the safest environments, individuals will often, for various reasons, not want to share with the group. These are not diaries but reader response journals. My experience as a classroom teacher, however, informed me that adolescents especially have a need and desire to share deep emotions. With this understanding, I let the girls know that while they would

be sharing their journals with me, they were free to choose whether to verbally share with the whole group.

Participant Interviews

A second form of data in this study was the transcripts of the individual semistructured interviews I conducted with each of the girls at the beginning and end of the study. During these interviews, I continued to emphasize the importance of relationships foundational to this particular study and feminist research in general. Rubin and Rubin's (2005) perspective of qualitative interviews as "conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion" (p. 56) shaped this aspect of data collection.

My purpose in conducting the initial interviews with each participant was to begin to form a comfortable relationship with each girl prior to the book club discussion meetings, to come to know the girls as individuals, and to provide the girls the opportunity to share what they perceived as their self-identity in an environment without the presence of their peers. Beginning the interviews, I understood my presence as a researcher created a social environment within which each girl would situate statements about their identity. As a participant-observer at the book club meetings, my presence also had the potential to influence the data. This is important in bracketing presentation of the data in Chapter Four. However, it should also be emphasized that the girls' actions during the book club meeting were consistent with the self-identity statements made during the individual interviews.

In preparing to conduct the interviews with each participant, Brown and Gilligan's (1992) experiences as researchers learning to listen to young girls served as

guidelines. As I sat down to engage in interview-conversations with each girl, I tried to keep their experiences firmly in mind:

Constrained by our own design, we found ourselves losing voice and losing relationships in our own research project...Holding firmly to the same questions for each girl, for example, prevented us from following the girls to the places they wished to go. (pp. 10-11)

Therefore, while I had prepared initial and final interview protocols as general frameworks, I tried to be faithful to Kvale's (1996) definition of a semistructured interview.

It (semistructured interview) has a sequence of themes to be covered, as well as suggested questions. Yet at the same time there is an openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up the answers given and the stories told... (p. 124)

I acknowledge and embrace, therefore, the unique nature of each conversation/interview, just as the girls participating in the study are in their own way unique individuals.

Credibility

Believing in the strength of qualitative research to stand as a distinct method of conducting research, I concur with those writers who view appropriating positivist terminology in qualitative research as perpetuating a stance in which qualitative research must be defended in a quantitative world (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2007). Therefore terms such as "trustworthiness" or "authenticity" will not be used in evaluating the quality of this study. In keeping with the interpretive framework for analysis central to this study, I employ the criteria Rubin and Rubin (2005) assert define the trustworthiness

of data: interviewee selection, thoroughness and accuracy, believability, and transparency.

I conducted initial and final interviews with all five participants, but selected three interviewees as the focus of the case studies on the basis of their varied perceptions. Kvale (1996, 2009) emphasizes quality over quantity and asserts that the study purpose informs the number of participants necessary. The present study's purpose is to describe and explain selected adolescent females' perceptions of identity through an after school book club. Selection of five participants with a focus on three presenting varied perceptions is therefore in keeping with Rubin and Rubin as well as Kvale.

Thoroughness and accuracy was ensured by the use of interview protocols followed by clarifying and probing questions. Member checks and an outside peer reviewer further ensured accuracy of transcriptions and analysis. Participant selection methods and interview protocols established believability.

Reflecting postmodern research that views data triangulation as inadequate to represent the complexity of our world, I have sought to crystallize rather than triangulate. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) offer this description of crystallization:

Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays casting off in different directions.

What we see depends on our angle of repose—not triangulation but rather crystallization. (p. 963)

The various prisms in this study were reflected through field notes, interviews, a researcher reflective journal (Appendix H), participant response journals, and transcripts of group discussions. Peer debriefing (Appendix I) and member checking (Ely et al.,

1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were two additional strategies used in the present study and discussed in greater detail below. The researcher reflective journal (Janesick, 2004) I began during a previous pilot study and continued to actively use through all phases of the study enabled me to clarify and make transparent my researcher bias. Finally, subsequent chapters in the dissertation in which I report the findings include “rich, thick description (that) allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability because the writer describes in detail the participants or setting under study” (p. 209). In case study methodology, thick description is particularly important and is therefore a critical element in the present study. The found data poems (Furman, 2006; Furman & Langer, 2004, 2006; Poindexter, 1997) I have constructed during the data analysis phase provide additional and highly accessible forms of thick description for the reader.

Peer debriefer. To establish credibility and thereby help ensure the quality of analysis I enlisted the aid of a peer debriefer (Janesick, 2004; Creswell, 2007; Given, 2008). Also referred to as a peer reviewer, this individual acted as a “critical detective or auditor” (Janesick, 2004). The presence of a peer debriefer is consistent with the feminist methodology employed in the study as this particular individual was also a female with whom I established both a personal and professional relationship with while working together at a university National Writing Project site. This trusting relationship provided an avenue through which I was able to have my own voice heard as I endeavored to accurately represent the voices and perspectives of the adolescent females participating in my study. Given (2008), describes the value of a peer debriefer in this way:

Peer debriefing...is a method for establishing credibility. This is undertaken by the researcher discussing the study with a trusted and knowledgeable peer who

can give informed feedback to assist the research in exploring aspects of the study that have, until that point, remained hidden...peer debriefing can motivate the researcher to delve deeper into the data so as to understand more fully the participants' perspectives...peer debriefing can be conducted to enable the researcher to discuss political or ethical issues, to have a sounding board for confusing or uncomfortable issues, and to clear her or his mind. (pp. 199-200)

Researcher reflective journal. Writing is an important part of my personal and professional life. I agree with the author Joan Didion who said, "I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I'm seeing, and what it means." Therefore, a researcher reflective journal (Janesick, 2004) was a critical component of the study and a third method for establishing credibility. In this journal, I engaged in what Denzin (2001) refers to as "Interpretive Interactionism" in which I "interacted" with myself in writing about my work as a researcher in this study. This reflective journal provided space for me to explore aspects of the study including questions, concerns, issues, etc. In addition, the journal elicited thoughts and ideas about social justice and agency (Janesick, 2004).

I began this journal during the pilot study a year prior to the present study, and continued to write in it regularly throughout all aspects of the study, including data collection and analysis. Rather than a side note to the study, however, the journal was a part of the work and therefore also part of the dissertation. Embracing a postmodern stance toward the issue of bias, I made every attempt to make it visible to the reader (Scheurich, 1997). By maintaining this journal, I drew on the conception of reflexivity, which Steier (1991) defines as a "turning-back of one's experience upon oneself" and

“being conscious of ourselves as we see ourselves” (p.5). Based on the social constructivist approach to inquiry in which “worlds are constructed, or even autonomously invented, by ‘scientific’ inquirers who are simultaneously participants in their worlds” (Steier, 1991, p.1), reflexivity acknowledges that a researcher can never adopt a neutral position; gender, race, ethnicity, age, and other characteristics influence the relationship between the researcher and the participants. As Fine and Sandstrom (1988) asserted, researcher neutrality is especially problematic when working with children:

While status is always an issue the sensitive researcher examines, the muting of status lines is more common than deepening or reinforcing them. Yet, in participating with children, such a policy is not fully tenable, because the social roles of the participants have been influenced by age, cognitive development, physical maturity, and acquisition of social roles. (p.14)

I therefore both acknowledge and embrace reflexivity as part of conducting qualitative research, understanding what Corbin and Straus (2008) describe as the “reciprocal influence” between researcher and participants as they “co-construct the research (at least data collection) together” (p. 31).

The researcher reflective journal’s presence in the dissertation is most noticeable in the following chapter in introductory sections for each of the three participant case studies in which I share sections from the journal following the initial interview with the participant. Through the use of the researcher reflective journal excerpt, I have attempted to bracket my bias toward the participants by openly sharing my initial reactions with the reader.

Member checking. Feminist research methodology stresses the importance of making often-silenced voices of females heard. Essential to this study, then, was ensuring that as a researcher I accurately transcribed and analyzed my participants' voices. Therefore, part of data crystallization for this study and a final avenue I used to ensure credibility was to engage in member checking, a process in which participants verify data and analysis thereof (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, member checking was an ongoing process. Both formally and informally, I shared with the participants my initial thoughts following data transcription of the previous week's book discussions. I was constantly aware that by engaging in this process, I ran the risk of compromising the trusted relationship I had built with the girls. Therefore, in keeping with the openness characterizing all aspects of this study, I shared this concern with them both at the onset of the study and prior to the actual member checking activities. I embraced my responsibility as a feminist researcher to highlight these young females' voices as accurately as possible. One of the participants, Sarah, shared a comment during one of the book discussion meetings indicating that the knowledge of my intention to do so led to a feeling of empowerment.

Sarah: I think it's kind of funny that professors are going to be reading this and they don't know who we are, or what we're like, but they might get a whole...like they might actually end up knowing who we are by listening to this. And I think that's really cool. Like they could just know who we are just by listening to our conversations. (discussion transcripts, September 2010)

Qualitative Analysis Strategies

Constant comparative method. The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009) formed the foundation for data analysis in this study. The procedure was identical for all forms of data. I began the process with open coding, by examining the document (discussion transcripts, interview transcripts, reader response journal writings), looking for possible categories, followed by naming and coding the categories. In the next step I compared the categories for similarities and differences. Similarities then combined into new categories. I considered the category saturated when no new codes could be added. Eventually, some categories emerged in significance (Appendix J).

Reading published research with a similar focus as this study provided me with a great deal of insight into own data collection and analysis. Hoping to learn from other beginning researches, I included dissertations in my reading. Knowing I would no doubt face my own challenges, I hoped that by reading and heeding the words of other novice researchers I could minimize some. I knew, for example, that the amount of data I would collect in this qualitative case study would be tremendous. Eight weekly, one-hour book discussions alone would create volumes of transcriptions. Add to that the weekly written response journals and the pre and post study interviews with each participant and the amount of data collected had the potential for being unwieldy during the coding/data analysis steps of the study. I asked myself during the study planning stages: What could I do in designing the study to address this issue?

Attempting to answer this question, I felt certain I needed to find some type of pre-existing method of coding that would enable me to have a tool to use as I analyzed

the data. Then I read the summary section of Elizabeth Frye's (2006) dissertation "The Features of After School Adolescent Girls' Book Clubs Contribute to the Identity Explorations of Young Women Leaders" and read how she, too, searched for a coding system "out there." Finally, she came to the following conclusion which I heeded as valuable advice:

I now realize that as a qualitative researcher I must balance careful, deliberate planning with the openness to allow themes to emerge from this unique, particular set of data. As a qualitative researcher I understand that all aspects of a study are unique (hence the issue/non-issue of generalizability). Data analysis – coding the data included – is no exception" (p. 89).

Found data poems. Following data transcription and coding, I created final representations of the data in the form of found data poems (Furman, 2006; Furman & Langer, 2004, 2006). Also referred to as research poems, found data poems reflect the postmodern perspective that values the subjective, lived experiences of individuals and groups. Research data, therefore, must not only fully reflect those experiences, but also engage the audience encountering the research. Furman, Lietz, and Langer (2006) express the purpose of found data poems by stating: "The goal of such generating and presenting of this type of data is to inspire an empathic, emotional reaction, so the consumer of research can develop a deep, personal understanding of the 'subject' of the data" (p. 2).

Found data poems offered a number of benefits in strengthening the study. As I was required to engage in an additional step focusing on the data, there was less room for interpretation and an increased emphasis on the actual content and meaning (Furman,

2006), providing what Geertz (1993) refers to as “thick description” – essential to quality qualitative studies. Finally, as a writer, I am always mindful of my audience. In crafting this dissertation, I hope English language arts educators will be among my readers. As I describe in Chapter Five, the study offers numerous implications for these educators’ teaching practices. In this way, the adolescent girls participating in the study have the potential for initiating important changes in established teaching practices. By reducing selected segments of the data to their essential, core components – a quality found in the best poems – I was able to further emphasize the voices and perspectives of the participants. As Furman (2006) has stated, the process of data reduction in creating found poems is “especially useful for advocacy purposes, as its compactness lends itself to various media” (p. 42).

To maintain the integrity and power of the young females’ voices, I did not alter their words in any of the gathered data (interviews, discussions, journal entries). Poindexter’s (1997) process of creating research poems to present traditional qualitative data guided my own work:

As I coded each transcribed interview, I copied phrases, sentences or paragraphs which seemed to highlight the unique personality or perspective of the respondent and transferred them to another computer document. At the end of that process, I arranged the respondents’ phrases into stanzas which seemed to me to best represent the narrative flow and meaning, no changes were made to what the respondent had actually said. (p. 23)

Remaining true to case study methodology, I engaged in the above process with my own interview data, as well as the discussion transcripts and participants’ weekly journal

entries (Appendix K). The found data poems embody Guba and Lincoln's (1985) definition of a qualitative researcher: "They do what anthropologists, social scientists, essayists, and poets throughout the years have done. They emphasize, describe, judge, compare, portray, evoke images, and create, for the reader or listener, the sense of having been there" (page 149).

After creating the found poems from the various forms of data, I chose to include those constructed using words and phrases from self-identity statements the participants made during the individual initial interviews to help introduce the reader to the individual participant. The found poems and selected passages from my researcher reflective journal entries, therefore, begin each participant case study in the following chapter. Together they provide the reader with two perspectives for beginning to come to know each girl: my own thoughts, impressions and statements reflecting how each girl sees herself.

Analysis/Description/Interpretation

I began the data collection process guided by Kvale and Brinkman's (2009) strong directive that "the ideal interview is already analyzed by the time the sound recorder is turned off" (page 190). I knew 30-45 minute pre and post individual interviews with the five participants as well as eight one-hour group book discussion meetings, weekly participant journal entries, as well as my own research reflective journal would result in a significant amount of data. Therefore a perspective of data analysis as an ongoing process, occurring simultaneous with collection, would prove vital. My researcher reflective journal proved invaluable as a tool to help me find focus and be attuned to deeply listening during the interviews and book discussions. As I turned my sound

recorder off, and the interview or book club meeting ended, I followed a predictable pattern of heading off to a nearby Starbucks and writing the field notes I was unable to construct during the interviews or meetings as my participants' reactions to my doing so had quickly let me know that this would intrude on the natural feel that was essential.

While Kvale and Brinkman (2009) present a system for “meaning condensation” from interview data, I applied the system to all forms of data collected. While qualitative methodology is acknowledged to be a messy process, Kvale and Brinkman provided an open, flexible, yet do-able step-by-step guide.

First, the complete interview is read through to get a sense of the whole. Then, the natural “meaning units” of the text, as they are expressed by the subjects, are determined by the researcher. Third, the theme that dominates a natural meaning unit is restated by the researcher as simply as possible, thematizing the statements from the subject's viewpoint as understood by the researcher... The fourth step consists of interrogating the meaning units in terms of the specific purpose of the study. In the fifth step, the essential, nonredundant themes of the entire interview are tied together into a descriptive statement (pp. 206-207).

Feeling overwhelmed by the initial codes, I followed a process Saldaña employed with students in his qualitative research methods course. Presented as a tool to help alleviate the sense of “what do I do next?” beginning researchers may feel when faced with a list of codes, categories, or themes, Saldaña described the “Tabletop Categories” exercises in this way:

We first code the data in the margins of hard copy, cut each coded “chunk” of data into separate pieces of paper, pile them together into appropriate categories,

staple each category's pile of coded data together, label each pile with its category name, then explore how they can be arranged on a tabletop to map the categories' processes and structures. (Saldaña, 2009, page 188)

Turning to the "Tabletop Categories" exercise was in stark contrast to my initial intention of employing one of the various qualitative coding software packages available. I consider myself someone who readily embraces technology tools when they present improved methods for accomplishing tasks. However, I ultimately chose to begin with Saldaña's method for initiating the process involved in constant comparison as it afforded me a hands-on experience working with data in these various forms.

Getting from Here to There

Yin (2009) describes effective research design as laying a foundation for "getting from here to there" – with "here" being the research questions and "there" the answers to those questions. He continues by explaining how the process of good research design is much more than this simplistic phrase implies. Effective research design, however, must provide evidence of an attention to both broad theoretical issues and logistical ones. In creating a dissertation timeline, I attempted to address the latter.

Dissertation timeline. One of our first assignments in Qualitative Research Methods II involved the importance of setting both long-term and short-term goals – specifically in our role as doctoral students.

Researcher Reflective Journal	October 2008 – January 2011
Presentation to 8 th Grade Language Arts Classes about Book Club Study	August 2010
Initial Interviews of Participants	Mid August 2010
Book Club Meetings Weekly discussion transcription/analysis, participant journal collection/analysis, field notes, researcher reflective journal	Mid-August to Mid-October 2010
Chapter 4 – Presentation of Data	December 2010
Chapter 5 – Analysis and Summary	January 2011
First Draft of Dissertation	Early February 2011
Manuscript Draft Format Check Deadline	Early March 2011
Public Posting of Dissertation Defense	March 2011
Dissertation Defense	April 2011
Final Copy Completed	April 2011
UMI Registration	April 2011
Graduation	May 2011

Table 4: Dissertation Timeline

“Where will you be in five years?” Dr. Janesick asked. Not uncharacteristically, my answer had elements reflecting my pragmatic and fantasist natures. Not surprisingly, therefore, my timeline taking me from the beginning of the study to completing the dissertation underwent a number of revisions (Table 4). An unexpected four month process to receive Institutional Review Board approval from the university and approval from the local public school district both contributed to the major revisions of the timeline.

Estimated dissertation expenses. The success of any project depends in great part to careful planning and attention to detail. While I firmly believe in pursuing dreams, my

pragmatic side also knows funding those dreams can be costly. A doctoral degree is one such dream. I consulted recently-graduated, former doctoral students and notes I took as a student in Qualitative Research Methods II with Dr. Valerie Janesick, and constructed a table (Table 5) outlining what I anticipate I would need in order to complete the dissertation. I understood, of course, predicting all expenses was both impossible and naïve. No doubt there would be a host of other incidental expenses I had not listed. I therefore attempted to over-estimate the approximate costs of each item to compensate for the unforeseen. I purchased both a digital voice recorder and the corresponding digital recorder transcription kit which I used during the pilot study. As warned, the amount of time I spent transcribing the two interviews for each of five participants and the eight one-hour book club meetings was considerable. I found, though, that the act of transcribing the data allowed me an additional opportunity to listen carefully and begin the data analysis process. In addition, since I had been present for the interviews and group discussion I was able to differentiate individual girls' voices and combine a visual image of the speaker with what I heard on the voice recorder. My initial goal in designing the study was to complete as much of the transcription of interviews and book discussions as I could. I understood, however, that I might discover the time spent in the transcription process could be better spent on analyzing the data. My initial budget therefore included an estimated cost of having all eight book club meetings professionally transcribed.

I initially estimated the number of girls willing to participate in the book club as ten. Based on that estimate, I listed the cost to purchase each reader two novels. Food is a significant factor in helping to build community and, while the cost of providing the

girls pizza and soda each week was considerable (\$160.00), I believe the money was well spent. During the pilot study, I bought the participants pizza and soda and the walls of the school library in which the meeting was held seemed to disappear. The girls chatted amiably and for the most part ignored my presence (a fact that at first surprised, then greatly pleased me). The same proved true with the present study. I timed the pizza delivery to occur midway through the book discussions to provide the girls with a brief break – although the discussions continued uninterrupted even with the presence of pizza and soda. The relaxed atmosphere I’d hoped for seemed to occur immediately as the time-honored tradition of “breaking bread” helped the five adolescent females and I form a community of readers.

As a result of anticipating the costs to complete the dissertation, I was able to set aside money to fund most expenses. I had also planned to apply for an ALAN (Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English) Foundation Grant to supplement my own funds. These grants “will fund dissertation research if there is clear evidence that the dissertation is closely related to young adult literature and will make a contribution to the field” (ALAN Foundation Grant, p. 1). Adolescent literature featuring strong female protagonists is a central feature of my study, and I was hopeful I would receive the grant to help fund my work. Up to \$1,500.00 per application may be awarded, an amount which would have covered over half the costs anticipated.

Item Needed	Approximate Cost	Funds Required?
Voice Recorder (Sony ICD-SX57 Digital Voice Recorder)	\$150.00	No
Transcription Kit (Sony FS85USB Digital Recorder Transcription Kit)	\$130.00	No
Novels	10 x \$8.00 = \$80.00	Yes
Pizza and Soda	8 x \$20.00 = \$160.00	Yes
Manuscript Processing Submission Fee	\$100.00	Yes
Microfilming Fee	\$65.00	Yes
Copy Editing of Dissertation	\$300.00	Yes
ProQuest UMI Fee	\$165.00	Yes
Transcription Service of 8 – 1 hour Book Club Discussions	8 x \$150.00 = \$1,200.00	Yes
Final Dissertation Copies	\$500.00	Yes
TOTAL FUNDS NEEDED	\$2,650.00	

Table 5: Estimated Dissertation Expenses

Chapter Summary

The present study describes and explains selected adolescent girls' perspectives on identity through an after school book club. The exploratory questions that guided the analysis were the following:

1. What elements constitute selected adolescent girls' perceptions of identity?
2. What influences their self-identity performance?

I explored these questions by collecting and analyzing data including: transcripts of initial and final individual semi-structured interviews, participant reader response journals, transcripts of weekly book discussions, field notes, and a researcher reflective journal.

Data was analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This tiered process began by examining the document (whether interview or discussion transcripts or response journal entries) and comparing student responses and identifying tentative categories. These tentative categories were then examined for

similarities and reduced to a small number of conceptual categories. Each category was considered saturated when no new codes can be added. Finally, data was recoded with each set of categories. The analysis from that data coding process has been reported in subsequent chapters of the dissertation.

Employing credibility strategies, I have attempted to ensure the accuracy of the study's findings through extensive time in the field, crystallization, peer debriefing, member checking, clarification of researcher bias, and thick descriptions of the participants and settings.

In this chapter, I have also included practical considerations pertaining to this study. I outlined what was an admittedly ambitious, but in my view attainable timeline for completing the dissertation. I attempted to construct a budget with items and their costs needed to conduct the study and fulfill the university requirements associated with the dissertation. With an awareness of these costs, I outlined my plans for funding these requirements including my application of a \$1500 ALAN Foundation Grant.

My goal in conducting this study was to listen to the voice of girls and understand the role of reading in the exploration of what it means to be a female. With this understanding, I hope to advocate for a more expansive view of reading and to help other teachers remember, to borrow from the title of Dennis Sundara's book, why reading still matters in schools.

Chapter Four

Presentation of the Data

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain selected adolescent girls' perspectives on identity through an after-school book club. The following exploratory questions guided the analysis:

1. What elements constitute selected adolescent girls' perceptions of identity?
2. What influences their self-identity expression?

Following the research design of the study presented in Chapter Three, this chapter begins with a case study of the book club and individual case studies of three adolescent females who participated in the book club. Data collected and analyzed to create the case studies included semi-structured interviews, group discussions, participant journals, researcher field notes, and researcher's reflective journal. These multiple sources of data not only fulfill a requirement of case study data collection, but also reflect a strength of case study as a research method (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). However, multiple sources of data alone do not ensure a high quality case study. In the present study, these multiple sources of data were collected, analyzed, and ultimately supported in unison significant findings addressing the two exploratory questions. I have modified and adapted a figure used by Yin (2009) to visually represent this process using one of the study findings as an example.

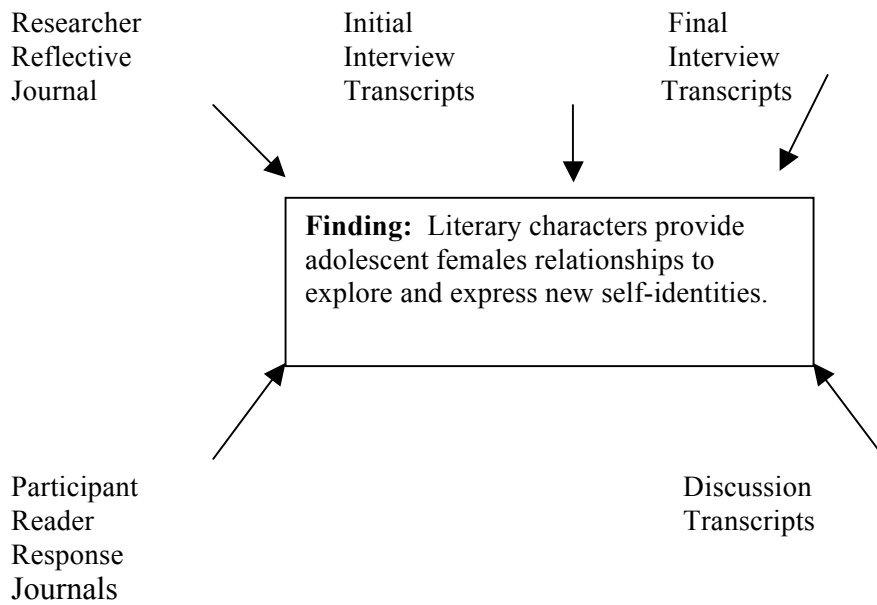


Figure 1: Example Convergence of Multiple Sources of Data

Key to rigorous case studies is defining the case: the unit of analysis. This process should be guided by the exploratory questions. The first question in the present study asked: What elements constitute selected adolescent females' perceptions of identity through an after-school book club? I therefore determined the necessity of a multi-case study involving the members of the book club in order to gather and analyze data indicating various perceptions of identity. The individual participant perceptions would be shared and expressed in a collaborative social environment, and I further determined that the book club would be defined as another case or unit of analysis. With the cases clearly defined, I proceeded to initial data collection with initial participant interviews. Yin (2006) emphasizes defining the unit of analysis as a critical first step in case study research, yet also asserts, "A virtue of the case study method is the ability to redefine the 'case' after collecting some early data" (p.121). Following the initial participant interviews, I therefore redefined the cases as the book club, and three of the five participants. These three participants were selected as cases that show different

perspectives (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2006, 2009). Tables 6, 7, and 8 provide an overview of data gathered addressing the two exploratory questions that guided me in the case study selection. While Katie and Rachel were not discussed individually in case studies, their voices and perspectives were intertwined with all of the participants in the book club discussions. They were therefore included within the book club case study.

In organizing the sections of the case study, I allowed the data to be my guide. As a way of highlighting the voice of each participant, I begin with a found data poem constructed using exact words and phrases used by the participant. Following the found data poem, I present a narrative of my first encounter with the participant. My purpose is two-fold: First, I hope to enable the reader to follow along with me as I present the journey in which I came to know five unique adolescent females both as individuals and as part of a single entity – the book club. Also, as a qualitative researcher I am keenly aware of the need to be aware of and bracket data with my own bias. In Chapter Three I discussed how my researcher reflective journal was a tool I used to achieve this awareness and to make this visible to the reader as well. Impressions of each participant entered into the journal following the individual interviews were therefore interwoven in the narrative.

Following the description of my first impressions of the participant, I present background information about each girl. This is again important in a study adopting a sociocultural perspective of identity in which identities are socially-situated. The background information provides a view of social realms other than the book club – especially home and family.

Next, I share participants' self-identity statements drawn primarily from the individual interviews. A point of clarification should be made here concerning the use of the terms identity and self-identity. This study employed a perspective of identities as multiple – constructed, developed, and expressed in various social arenas (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Gee, 2000). Within those mutable, multiple identities there exists a core identity often referred to as a self-identity or true identity (Gee, 2000). In these next two chapters, I endeavored to clarify identity and self-identity. When the participants made statements about their own identity (often begun with “I am”) I employed the term self-identity. At all other times, I used the term identity.

From the self-identity statements I continue by addressing the two exploratory questions guiding the study:

1. What elements constitute selected adolescent girls' perceptions of identity through an after school book club?
2. What elements influence their perspectives?

I begin the presentation of the cases with the book club as a case. I present a portrait of the book club as an entity, background information on its origins, participant perspectives on the book club, and conclude by addressing the two exploratory questions guiding the study. Next, I present each of the three participant case studies. Finally, I present a cross case analysis in order to further emphasize similarities and differences between the three participant cases and the collective case study of the book club. This act of continuously exploring and considering the data from multiple angles is part of crystallization (Richardson & Pierre, 2005) which strengthened the study findings. Exploring the individual cases, I assumed one angle of repose. Exploring the cases in

relation to one another, I assumed additional angles. Shifting from angle to angle I allowed the reader to experience an important aspect of my data analysis procedures, further strengthening the study through transparency of research methods.

Notes for the Reader: Transcription Conventions

A few important notes should be made to help the reader understand the chapter more fully. Transcription of all data was completed by the researcher. While a time-intensive task, transcribing the data was a significant contribution toward achieving my goals of accurately representing the voices and perspectives of the adolescent girls in the study and fully immersing me in the data to ensure accuracy in its analysis. Verbal comments alone, however, do not constitute the full measure of research data that can be mined from interviews or discussions. Silence as well as verbal expressions are valued in this study. While this approach runs contrary to the dominant culture in America, it is completely in line with many American Indian communities, as Kiowa writer N. Scott Momaday (1997) expressed.

Silence ... is powerful. It is the dimension in which ordinary and extraordinary events take their proper places. In the Indian world, a word is spoken or a song is sung not against, but within the silence. In the telling of a story, there are silences in which words are anticipated or held on to, heard to echo in the still depths of the imagination. In the oral tradition, silence is the sanctuary of sound. Words are wholly alive in the hold of silence; they are sacred. (p. 16).

I made every attempt, therefore, to represent the presence of silence in its various form. Ellipses such as “these ...” are used to indicate moments when a speaker enters silence after verbal utterances either by her own choice (as in a statement or question begun, but

left unfinished as a choice of the speaker) or by the interruption of another participant. The ellipses proved critical to express the frequent occurrence of the participants engaging in collaborative conversations which resulted in co-constructed meaning statements. Examples of these episodes were represented with ellipses beginning and/or ending participant statements, such as the episode below in which the girls co-constructed a unified response to my question asking them to define the term “strong female protagonist.”

Bianca: A character who’s a protagonist or antagonist who shows traits that are very...

Lacey: ...superior...

Rachel...not always dependent on the guy...

Bianca: ...who’s not a follower or a watcher, but a doer and a thinker and a goer!

Sarah: ...like an independent woman...

Lacey: ...independent, strong, maybe superior and mainly intelligent.

[discussion transcripts, September 2010]

Moments of silence either individually (most often in the individual interviews) or collectively were labeled to reflect the duration of the occurrence. A brief, but intentional silence following a question posed during one of the initial or final interviews, for example was indicated by a notation such as this: (pause) or this (long pause).

While transcribing and presenting data, I remained constantly aware of my responsibility as a researcher to protect the identities of the study participants, knowing that when working with minors, this responsibility is especially critical. I made every attempt, therefore, to fulfill that responsibility in a number of ways. In completing the

transcriptions, I used participant-selected pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Names of friends, family members, and schools attended were changed to researcher-selected pseudonyms. Additionally, any other details that might identify specific girls were omitted.

Context

Discussion of the study setting and details describing procedural aspects of the book club can be found in Chapter Three; however, it is important to revisit this contextual information in order to lay preparatory groundwork for the participant and book club case studies that follow. All five participants in the study were, at the time of the study, eighth grade students attending Gulfside Fundamental Middle School, a k-eight public school in a large urban school district in the Southeastern United States. I presented the opportunity to participate in the study to eighth grade females in both average and advanced language arts classes; however all five participants who volunteered to be part of the study came from advanced classes. While I presented information about participating in the book club study to students in their language arts classes held at the middle school, the individual interviews and book club meetings took place at a public park adjacent to the middle school. As I told the girls, I hoped that by leaving the school site to sit and talk at picnic tables in a waterfront park they would feel more comfortable sharing freely their thoughts and ideas about the books. To further build a sense of community, I purchased pizza and soda for the girls to eat and drink during the book discussions.

Case Study: Book Club

Super Girl Nerd Squad

I

Expressed a lot of my opinions
Debated with the other girls (and won)
Looked at other perspectives

I'm

More feminist
More aware
Able to talk to people

It was

Enlightening
Humbling
Empowering

Opening doors in your mind

[found data poem from final interview transcripts, October 2010]

Meeting the Book Club: From My Researcher Reflective Journal

The bell signaling the end of seventh period and therefore the school day rang promptly at 1:30 pm. Wednesday, having been determined by the school district as an “early release day” allowing staff to engage in professional development, will be our meeting day for the next eight weeks. The one-hour meetings will bring us to the time parents would usually pick up their daughters from the school (part of the status as a fundamental school meant parents would be required to provide transportation) – my reason for selecting Wednesday as I hoped parents would support participation in the book club if for no other reason than convenience. I sat at the picnic table in the park adjacent to the school. The same place where I had conducted the initial interviews with each of the girls the week before, and the same place where (weather permitting) we will gather for 1 hour once a week for the next eight weeks talking about the books we’d read. As I waited for the five girls who have agreed to participate in the study to emerge from the

chaos of backpacks, screams, laughter and general adolescent exuberance, I realized that the careful planning I have outlined in my dissertation proposal and Institutional Review Board application is just that: an outline. I wondered with a mixture of both excitement and apprehension: What will happen when I turn on the digital voice recorder?

[researcher reflective journal, August 2010]

Background on the Book Club

Gulfside Fundamental Middle School is located on waterfront property overlooking a busy waterway. Mangroves, a boardwalk, and a small beach run from the southwest side of the school to a public park adjacent to the school property. Holding the weekly book club meetings at one of the picnic tables at the park provided a study site that was not only convenient for the participants and their parents, but also conducive to a relaxed atmosphere in which the girls would feel comfortable enough to engage in rich discussions. Each Wednesday afternoon for eight weeks, I met the girls at our designated location at the back of the school, and the six of us made our way to the park to eat pizza, drink soda, and talk about books.

As the girls and I trekked across the park to the picnic table where we would hold our first book discussion meeting, the topic of names arose. In each of the individual interviews I told the girls they would need to select a pseudonym and the reason why they would need to do this. The discussion on the way to the picnic table began with each girl sharing her selected pseudonym and then sifted to the book club. The consensus among the girls was that the group, too, required a name. Lacey and Bianca indicated they had already discussed this between themselves and decided on a name.

Lacey and Bianca: The Super Nerds

Bianca: No, no – Super Girl Nerd Squad. Squad is a cool word. We’ve gotta use it somehow. It’s a very cool group, ‘cause I’m in it. You know, if I weren’t in it, it would be totally natural for all you guys to just talk about books. But I make everything difficult. Semi-intentionally. [discussion transcripts, August 2010]

With this statement, Bianca not only established the name all the girls would adopt when referring to the group, but also foreshadowed future elements of the book club discussions. The girls did indeed talk about much more than “just” the books. Bianca did at various times challenge the books, the characters in the book, the other participants in the club, and the participant observer.

Participant Self-Identity Statements about the Book Club

With the girls’ proclamation that the group should be named The Super Girl Nerd Squad, they established a new collective identity. During a discussion of the book *Uprising*, the girls revealed their involvement in the book club had bound them together into a unified and protective whole.

In *Uprising*, the girls learned about the connection between the advent of unions and the women’s suffrage movement in America. As we talked about the suffrage movement, I shared with them that all-female book clubs were the collective birthplaces of the suffrage movement.

H-Dawg: Men didn’t prevent their wives from attending the meetings because they thought they were just sitting around talking about books – something they saw as “harmless.” Little did they know...

Lacey: That’s what people say to us when we talk about the book club.

Katie: So women got together and began to realize what was going on.

Sarah: They started thinking *we* could do something together.

H-Dawg: Exactly.

Rachel: Some people make fun of us because we're in a book club. They don't make fun of it around me because they know that if they do they're going to get hurt (giggles).

Bianca: I don't even let people talk about it.

Lacey: The nerd group.

Bianca: No, it's the Super Girl Nerd Squad.

Sarah: Nerdy things are good sometimes.

Lacey: It expands your mind.

Bianca: Girl power. [discussion transcripts, August 2010]

While the book club developed into a new part of their self-identities, within the book club, characters in the novels discussed served as conduits through which the girls shared self-identity statements with the group. Often, these self-identity statements occurred within the context of expressing a personal connection with the character as Bianca made in the following statement about the character Yetta in *Uprising*: "I like Yetta because she's Jewish like I am. And she's revolutionary. And she wants to stick up for herself. And she's willing to do anything that it takes." [discussion transcripts, September 2010] At other times, an individual girl's connection with a character via self-identity was not expressed as openly. This was frequently due to negative statements the other girls had made regarding the character, as was the case with the polarizing character Jane in *Uprising*. Bianca came out strongly in her expression of dislike for Jane, and after the

other girls shared their own negative feelings for the character, Katie at first ventured only as far as quietly defending Jane.

Bianca: You know who really ticks me off? Jane. I was telling Katie about this earlier. She's a little rich girl but still, she can't even be happy. She can't even be happy with her tea parties and everything.

Katie: That's why she feels trapped.

Bianca: I know, I know, but she can't even be happy with what she has. I don't like her because even though she has so much she can't even be happy. She's envious of the girls walking outside the freakin' factory. Can you say BLINDED?!

Katie: Because they're free and she's not.

Bianca: Well, I know, but still she could for once think outside her little box of oh, poor miserable me. And actually think about other people. I mean, even though she wants to learn, she still has no regard for anyone else but herself. Have you noticed that?

Katie: No.

Bianca: She just wants to have these experiences herself; she doesn't want to help other people.

Katie: Jane is learning about women's rights to go to college. [discussion transcripts, September 2010]

Weeks later as we progressed further into the story, Bianca returned to the topic of Jane. Her comments reveal how deeply the girls entered the text world and related to the characters not as characters, but as individuals. Rarely did the girls ever use the word

“character” – referring directly to them by name. Other language tools separating the girls’ world from the text world were also noticeably absent. Rarely do the girls begin statements with phrases such as “The author writes...” or “The character of ...” Entering into a text is a nearly complete submersion into a world.

The week following the above discussion of the character Jane, Bianca and Katie continued their debate.

Bianca: Okay, about Jane. I have begrudgingly forgiven her.

Katie: I knew you would.

Bianca: But I don’t like it. I don’t like it, and I’m not gonna pretend that I’m welcoming her back with open arms because I don’t like her and I still don’t think I’d ever really like her, but I begrudgingly forgive her for being such a snob. But I guess it’s sort of holding a grudge against someone because of their circumstances. [discussion transcripts, October 2010]

Both exchanges between the two girls reflect self-identity statements made during the initial interviews. Bianca challenged Katie’s perspective and situated herself as a debater. Katie identified herself during the interview as intelligent, and through her ability to perceive what Bianca does not – that even a life of privilege and wealth can feel like being imprisoned – Katie reflected and expressed this identity.

Perceptions of Identity

As the book club the girls assumed an additional identity. This collective identity as “The Super Girl Nerd Squad” mirrored elements of individual identities regarding self-identity statements and collaboratively created perceptions of identity. The collective identity is often seen in the transcripts through a string of ellipses indicating a thought or

idea partially shared by one participant, then quickly built upon by another, and then another, etc. Like pieces of a puzzle each girl contributed individually to a collective whole. The text world of the two novels provided both the setting and the avenue through which The Super Girl Nerd Squad acted as a single entity with individual facets.

One way this multi-faceted entity can be seen is in the collaborative perception of the relationship between identity and physical characteristics. Individually, the girls each expressed a perspective that identity is expressed and perceived through physical characteristics. Knowing from past experiences working with adolescent book discussion clubs that in books featuring multiple central characters, there is a fascination with looking at the cover to determine who's who, I asked the girls if they'd done this. After an enthusiastic yes, the girls then shared their ideas about who's who and why. Their observations as a group support statements made individually that physical characteristics are an expression of identity.

Katie: That one's Jane, definitely, 'cause she's all prettified or something.

Lacey: She looks Italian.

Sarah: I think that's Bella, 'cause of her hair.

Lacey: Yetta's in the middle 'cause she looks very Yiddish.

Bianca: I think it kind of ruins it, because then you're oh, I pictured the character this way, not that way. [discussion transcripts, September 2010]

Identity as a sociocultural construct. In wrapping up the final discussion on the book, *Frankie Landau-Banks*, I presented the following passage from the text and asked the girls to react to it:

“I will not tire you with details except to say that Frankie’s position at family gatherings was slightly different. She’d surprised everyone. They were not quite sure where she fit anymore. If she was not bunny rabbit as it was finally clear that she was not, who was she?” [discussion transcripts citing *Frankie Landau-Banks* p. 135]

The girls’ responses indicate a shared perspective that identity is not only socially constructed and expressed, but rather than a single fixed identity (singular), there exists multiple identities situated in multiple sociocultural environments.

Rachel: She’s rabid bunny rabbit.

Lacey: She’s a lioness.

Sarah: Well, I wouldn’t exactly say lioness, because the personality of a lioness doesn’t really fit her.

Bianca: A panther. Kind of a shady character now.

Rachel: She’s someone who can transform at the scene. She can be a bunny rabbit at times, then she can be a panther, and a lion. She can transform at the scene.

Katie: She can be different animals and act different at different times.

Sarah: Like a shape-shifter.

Rachel: Well, she can transform to whatever she needs to depending on the situation she’s put into. [discussion transcripts, August 2010]

Identity as developmental. During the final interviews, I asked the girls whether or not they felt they’d changed as a result of participating in the book club. Each girl indicated some form of shift in their perspective on feminist issues. Bianca made a direct

connection between reading and feminist identity when she responded, “Maybe I’m more feminist because I read more feminist books.” To clarify her perspective and how she defined feminism, I then asked Bianca what it meant to be feminist. Her perspective reflected her earlier self-identity statements about being an environmentalist as both focus on activism. Bianca stated, “Being feminist is like not...it’s basically a progress that females are still making to battle against to fight against previous stigmas that are attached to womanhood.” I then asked her if she felt she wasn’t that way before. Bianca replied, “Maybe not. I’ve always been kind of a feminist. I think it helped, though.” [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

Lacey’s response to the question “Have you changed as a result of participating in the book club?” continued to reflect her self-identity statements made during the initial interview.

I don’t know, after reading the first book, about the girl Frankie, I don’t know, it just made me think about how things like that – she’s like what I aspire to be. Maybe not the criminal mastermind part, but being a leader of all – she was basically the leader of the whole school. Everyone followed what she did. [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

I then asked Lacey why she felt Frankie became the leader of the whole school when no one at the school knew that she was the one committing all the pranks.

Yeah, so like I guess they thought they were following boys or men, but she still did it and eventually everyone found out. So I think they felt differently about it, too. Like they didn’t think it was as interesting that a girl did it. I don’t know why. [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

To encourage Lacey to elaborate, I asked her how that changed her. Lacey responded, “I don’t know, I guess it just makes me think – makes me think about it. How females perceive other females, how men view females...” [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

Sarah, too, expressed she’d developed a more feminist identity as a result of participating in the book club.

Well, the journal is just a personal thing – a diary sort of – and it was whatever came to me in the book and the thoughts I had. And then the actual book club was really, really fun and I got to meet new people and to talk to them. And it was interesting because everyone had different views and it wasn’t just me being, like, saying stuff. And I got a look at different – it kind of made me look at things differently.

I then asked Sarah what kinds of things she looked at differently now.

Like the women’s rights. I never really thought about that, but it kind of came up and I was --- my brain started looking at things differently. Like now when someone says something, like, the girls’ bathroom doors. When you look at them, the woman’s one – it kind of looks like a man with a dress. And it made me think about that and I’m like, why would they put a man in a dress? And why couldn’t they make hair for the girl? Just random stuff like that. [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

Finally, I asked Sarah: “So it helped you notice what you hadn’t noticed before?” She responded, “Yeah. We’re not just men with dresses.”

Influences on Participants' Self-Identity Expression

Physical attributes of the social environment. Katie also responded to the question “How have you changed as a result of the book club?” with a statement about being able to speak up more. Katie stated, “I talk more and I think about books more. Like I talk more in classes because I *can* talk.” [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

Katie contrasted the environment in classrooms with the environment in the book meetings.

Well, classrooms are a lot bigger and more people want to talk at once so I don't really get a chance to say anything if we were having a classroom discussion, but here it's small and I can have my own turn to talk. So I can say everything. [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

When I asked if there were any classes in school where small group activities took place, Katie's response indicated her perception that physical size alone does not constitute an environment conducive to her self-identity expression. Katie stated, “Miss D sometimes, but sometimes I don't talk in there 'cause the kids in there I don't really know all that well.” [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

For Rachel, too, the book club's small size helped her express her self-identity. I asked her if her participation in the book club discussions was different from her participation in classroom discussions. Her response contrasted the physical size of the two environments.

Yeah, because usually I don't really participate in class discussions for some reason. I just like listening to other people and if I have something to input I'll put in just small bits, but not much. In the book club I think I was more open

because there were less of us, so you could talk a little bit more and express your feelings. Plus, classrooms are a larger crowd and I don't like large crowds. [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

Attitudinal attributes of the book club social environment. During the individual final interviews, I asked each of the girls to describe their experiences participating in the book club. Their responses describe their individual perspectives on the attitudinal attributes of the book club social environment. Bianca stated:

I thought it was really fun. I kind of got to express a lot of my opinions (and I have a lot of opinions) and so I also, I'm a big debater, so I really liked debating with the other girls on our viewpoints and winning. I like to win. It's one of my favorite things – winning. [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

I asked Rachel what she liked about the book club and why, and in her response, Rachel focused on the collaborative community created in the book club.

The fact that you got to talk to everybody about the same book and you're basically at the same part and you're understanding it together. 'Cause it helps you understand the book better, it gives you different perspective. And then when you get further in the book you'll be like oh, that makes sense that connects with what we were talking about before on page whatever. It just gives you a different perspective than what the book gives you, yourself. And then when you get later on in the book you keep that perspective with you and you think about different things that you might not have thought about before. [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

Sarah, too, cited the collaboration of multiple perspectives as being a positive aspect of the book club when she stated, “Well, I liked the girls a lot. They’re all really sweet, and they all had their own personalities and they were interesting and very independent.”

[final interview transcripts, October 2010]

Attitudinal attributes of the book club are also evident in the book discussions. In the following interaction among the girls, Lacey shared a self-identity statement as being a “people pleaser.” When Bianca’s attitude toward her expression is perceived by Lacey as belittling, Lacey confronts her and is supported by the other girls.

Lacey: I guess I’m kind of opposite because even when people I don’t like call me mean names it affects me. It always has. Because I guess I’m like a people pleaser, and I worry about what other people think about me. I don’t know why. It’s just something I’ve always done.

Bianca: Well, it’s a natural teen insecurity, but eventually you develop a ...

Lacey: Do NOT belittle me! Stop belittling me!

Bianca: I’m not belittling you.

Lacey (joined by the other girls’ voices): You *are* belittling me/her.

Sarah then offered a self-identity statement further supporting Lacey, and the situation began to be diffused as Bianca joined Sarah.

Sarah: There are people who have said bad things about me and my friends before, but they don’t matter to me. Sure I know them and I was acquainted with them, but if they’re going to say that and they have to be behind my back to say

that, are they really worth it? Like, are they worth talking to or anything? That's the way I look at it.

Lacey: Like me – I flip out when people do say mean stuff about me behind my back.

Bianca: Yeah. And there are girls who don't even care, like Sarah I mean.

Sarah: I don't see the point of caring. Like, it's such a waste of time.

Bianca: Yeah.

Evidence that the environment of the book club had been restored to one conducive to self-identity expression came from Lacey. Finally, Bianca used humor to bring the sense of community back once again.

Lacey: This girl called me a lesbian behind my back. In a derogatory way. And I went up to her and said, "Look, did you call me a lesbian?" And she said no. And I know she did.

Katie: Emily.

Lacey: She's a liar.

Bianca: Something like that happened to me, but it involved rubber band animals and I'm not going to go into that.

All: Oh God ... (giggles). [discussion transcripts, September 2010]

This was not the first instance in which tension arose between Bianca and Lacey. Here, Sarah played a mediating/facilitating role – a role alternatively played by each of the book club participants. In the first meeting, soft-spoken Sarah was constantly interrupted by Bianca, who took center-stage and engaged the girls in the club she knew best in quasi-discussions that seemed to further separate Sarah from the group. Unprompted,

Lacey took up the position of supporting Sarah as a full participant in the book club discussions. Without drawing attention to Sarah, Lacey spoke directly to Bianca about her dominating position, and then turned her body toward Sarah and made eye contact with her – silently communicating that Sarah now has the space in which to talk to the group. Lacey showed a mastery of how to address such domination while supporting and maintaining the positive atmosphere within the group.

Lacey: Bianca, I think you should let other people speak. I can speak as loud as you can, but I choose not to so I can let other people speak.

Bianca: That's exactly it – a choice.

Lacey: Yeah, you should make a good choice.

Bianca: And I should do this because...?

Lacey: Because you're a nice person sometimes. [discussion transcripts, August 2010]

During the final interview, I read this section of the discussion transcript back to Lacey and asked her to comment. Lacey stated, "I had to get her (Bianca) to stop talking so Sarah could say something. I'm that kind of person who does that with my friends." [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

Bianca continued to threaten to dominate the book club discussions, and while this threat had been kept in check primarily through the collective efforts of the group, by the third meeting I wondered if a mechanism for ensuring one voice, one participant spoke at a time might be an effective tool. In this way, Lacey, the one strongest enough to keep Bianca from dominating, would not end up frustrated over having to constantly play this role. I therefore suggested a talking stick, some object that carried with it the

agreement that only the individual with the talking stick would have permission to speak – protecting each girl’s right to have her voice heard. To ensure that the decision whether or not to adopt this tool as a group practice was the sole responsibility of the girls, I left the group briefly to get the pizza and drinks. Since I left the digital recorder still running, I later discovered when transcribing the week’s discussion that the group was decidedly divided in their opinion of whether or not this tool should be introduced. In the discussion, the girls revealed their keen awareness of how sociocultural environments are created and are often, as Bianca stated, “restrictive.”

Bianca: I don’t think it’s a good idea because it kind of says that this is a restrictive atmosphere where you can’t talk unless you have permission.

Lacey: Well, you’re the one who’s always interrupting people.

Bianca: Let’s not point fingers.

Katie: I think we should be able to say something when we want to without other people interrupting us.

Sarah: Well, if someone really wants to say something really badly they could just clap. [discussion transcripts, September 2010]

While some clapping occurred during the following book club meeting, eventually this practice ended and the girls returned to effectively self-monitoring the discussions. Not only did the environmental factors of the book club contribute to the girls’ self-identity expression in the book club, but also in other environments – environments described as not conducive to their self-identity expression. Sarah stated this was her experience when I asked her during the final interview if she felt she’d changed as a result of participating in the book club.

Definitely it made me think differently. And I guess with people too. I'm very shy at first. And I'm a little scared of like, people in general. It's not that I don't like them, but like I get confused a lot. And it made me think like that if I get to know people better and I listen more...not really listen more, but take things in more. It's a lot easier to talk to people. Yeah. [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

As our last book discussion meeting drew to a close, I took the opportunity to pose questions to the girls about reading and identity exploration.

H-Dawg: How many of you have read other books that have female protagonists who are very strong, empowered, and challenging? (hands go up) Does reading these books make any changes in you as a female?

Lacey: Well, I think it does when I'm watching a movie where the woman is empowered because then I have a visual, because I just now started liking reading. So maybe eventually, as I advance as a reader, I'll get better. But when I watch movies that are about female empowerment, I don't know, but I know it sounds really cheesy, but after I watch "Bring it On" I want to go and do something. It's all about female empowerment. Especially with those girls who are cheerleaders; it's really empowering.

Katie: The books and movies make me think what can I do to be kind of like that but still keep my own personality.

Bianca: In *Frankie Landau-Banks*, half that stuff I would seriously do.

H-Dawg: So you get ideas of things to do, but you don't think they affect you?

Bianca: Well, they make me think. And you know: I think; therefore I am.
[discussion transcripts, October 2010]

Introduction to Participant Case Studies

The five adolescent females who comprised the study participants appear to be a homogenous group. All 13-14 years of age, white, middle class and enrolled in advanced academic classes – these girls could easily fall into Kindlon’s (2006) Alpha Girl profile. A cursory glance at the table (Table 7) presenting an overview of the self-identity statements the girls made during the initial interview seems to provide further evidence that Pipher’s (1994) Ophelia has been replaced by Kindlon’s model of today’s adolescent female. Coming to know these girls in the eight weeks we spent together, though, I discovered how powerfully complex they are. In the introduction to this text I wondered what I would find when I listened to the voices of these adolescent females. I asked: “Will I find Ophelias or Alpha Girls? Or perhaps both?” My goal in presenting selected case studies of the girls who participated in the after-school book club was to paint multi-layered portraits of adolescent females who defy dichotomous, simplistic labeling.

Following the tenets of high-quality qualitative research methods, I drew on multiple and varied forms of data (individual interviews, group discussions, participant journals, and a researcher reflective journal), and offer these case studies as in-depth portraits of these adolescent females.

	SARAH	KATIE	LACEY	RACHEL	BIANCA
Shy	X				
Independent	X	X	X	X	X
Relationship-Oriented	X	X	X		
Goal-Oriented	X		X		X
Artistic	X				
Reader	X	X			X
Leader					X
Intelligent		X	X		
Outgoing			X		
Impulsive					X
Creative				X	

Table 6: Participants' Self-Identity Statements

The First Case: Sarah

Sarah

Super-shy

Learning by just listening

Feeling comfortable – the vibes

Music, books reflecting who I am

Thinking like a book

Artistic

Painting with watercolors

Taking on a life of its own

Never a solid truth to things

Living to see the world in all stages

[Found data poem from initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Meeting Sarah – From My Researcher Reflective Journal

The end-of-the-day, seventh period students bustle around the classroom, grabbing backpacks, shoving chairs haphazardly under tables – all the while contributing to the cacophony of adolescents leaving school. I barely notice her at first, but in a momentary parting of the sea of students I glimpse a lone figure whose silence and still posture capture my attention. She waits until I approach her; ask her why she's here,

before quietly presenting a copy of the book club flyer. “Oh, are you interested in joining the book club?” I ask. Sarah nods and says simply, “Yes.” Following this first meeting with Sarah, I find my reaction to her is complicated. She is quiet, shy – yet during the interview Sarah responds to my questions easily and fully and I am pleasantly surprised. Yet as a researcher, I am concerned that her shyness will translate into silence in the book club discussions. I worry that the comfort she feels speaking one on one with me may not be the case during the book club meetings where Sarah will be interacting with four other girls. No talking means no data. I’m glad Sarah’s joining the club, though. It’s interesting that Sarah has joined the book club on her own. She brings me the book club flyer by herself – not accompanied by a friend, as is the case with the other girls. I can’t help but wonder if Sarah has joined the book club as an intentional act of defiance against her shyness. [researcher reflective journal, August 2010]

Background on Sarah

Like the other participants, Sarah is in the eighth grade at Gulfside Fundamental Middle School, a public school in a large, urban school district. Like many other students at the school, Sarah did not attend Gulfside last year. Both Sarah and Bianca, another participant in the book club study, attended elite, college preparatory schools (though not the same schools). Sarah stated her academic experiences at the school were positive and that her reasons for leaving were social.

It wasn’t a good fit for me, though. It was not a good fit. The people there...I don’t know if it’s changed since then, but I didn’t really like a lot of the people. They were really immature...They didn’t have a lot of ... Like they were really nice people...They were all genuinely nice. And then I had a few really close friends again,

but a lot of my friends left to go to other schools and a lot of my friends were in the high school and so I feel a lot more comfortable here. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010] For her final year of middle school, therefore, Sarah and her parents decided to have her attend Gulfside where her close friends, Katelyn and Matthew attend.

Sarah lives with her mother, father, and 12 year-old brother in an upper-middle class beach community not far from Gulfside. She offered varied information about her relationship with her parents, reflecting the shifting parent-child dynamics often occurring during the early adolescent years. When asked in the initial interview what was important to her, Sarah first stated, “Art.” Perhaps feeling the statement needed modifying, she then included a hierarchical relationship statement by adding, “And my friends. I’m not that close to my family, but I guess they’re important to me.” [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Sarah indicated her parents allow her a great deal of freedom – based on both trust and her excellent academic performance. Sarah’s ambivalence toward this was clear both in her initial statement and following my probe.

As long as I get good grades, I’m allowed to do pretty much anything. I mean, my parents like they don’t really care that I hang out with people who smoke pot, like they don’t want me to, but they let me, they trust me that I won’t do it because I get good grades. As soon as I let my grades drop I’m not allowed to do anything, but as long as my grades are good I’m allowed to do pretty much anything. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

I then ask Sarah how she felt about this.

I don't know. My friends' parents would never let them do some of the stuff that I've been doing and I kind of like it because I've been given more opportunities, but then I think about it and wonder do they just want me to have good grades? And I know they love me, like, I know they do, but I don't know if they're just concerned more about grades than anything else. Because, what if I went to a party and stuff and I decided to get high once, right, and I like died, and they let me go just because I got good grades? [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

The topic of school and grades came up again during the initial interview with Sarah when I asked her what life was like for her now. In her response, Sarah presented herself as highly goal-oriented.

I focus a lot on school. I really want to get good grades. Maybe it's a little early, but I know the three top colleges I want to go to and I pretty much have to get all As to go to them: Dartmouth, Brown, and Georgetown. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

In Sarah's school world are her two best friends, Katelyn and Matthew, but she emphasized that her circle of friends lies mostly outside of the school environment. Each summer, Sarah spends time with her extended family in New Jersey where she has developed close friendships. In her neighborhood, too, Sarah has a small group of friends. In both New Jersey and her home neighborhood, Sarah stated that a unique feature of her small group of close friends is their wide range in age saying, "I have friends there who are 18 and 20, and I have friends here who go to FSU that I knew before. I also have friends who are 11 and 12." [initial interview transcripts, August

2010] Throughout the initial interview, Sarah repeatedly emphasized relationships with others as an important part of her self-identity.

Self-Identity Statements

While factual information about Sarah's home, family, friends, and school background lays a foundation to getting to know Sarah, her statements reflecting her perception of her self-identity more fully paint the portrait of who she is and how she sees herself.

My first question in the initial interview with Sarah was one I asked all of the girls: "How would you describe yourself?" Sarah's response indicated she sees herself as shy and a listener, providing a sociocultural context for both of those self-identity statements: "Like me as a person? I'm really shy at first. Like really, really shy." [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

While her self-identity statements include "shy" and "a listener," Sarah stressed that she was not, as she put it "anti-social." It seemed important to Sarah that while she has emphasized her shy nature, she should not be misinterpreted as someone who did not have any friends. As Sarah stated simply, "But I have a lot of friends. I can get along with everyone, as long as they're not obnoxious." [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

The metaphoric language Sarah used to describe these close relationships illustrates how integral they are to her self-identity. Sarah first referred to her best friend Katelyn as someone with whom she is "pretty much joined at the hip." She also discusses her close friendship with two adolescent males, Matthew and Steven. In

describing her relationship with Steven, Sarah emphasized the familial trust she has for him.

I've grown up with my friend Steven, and he's like my brother. I couldn't imagine anything without him. I trust him. He's slept over before. My parents trust him enough to, and it's in New Jersey...I know he wouldn't do anything because we're so close together. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Sarah also stated that in order to know who she is one would need to understand the role of art in her life. Not only is it a tool she uses to express her creativity, but also a lens through which Sarah views life and the world around her.

I like watercolors the most. Watercolors – there's something ... If you have a piece of paper you can do so much with them. You can use Saran Wrap stuff and you can put salt and then mix different liquids with the watercolors. Then the paint sort of takes on a life of its own. You can have the basic outline of a person there, and then it comes alive because of the things you can do, the way you can do stuff. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

I probed Sarah to elaborate on her response by asking if she paints things that are realistic, and she responded, "No. Some of them are, but most of them aren't." [initial interview transcripts, August 2010] When I probed further and asked her why she thought that was so, Sarah shared how her approach to art reflects her world-view.

Because, I have this weird outlook on life. The world – it isn't a realistic place. Since you grow up you hear all these things. I don't know, I don't think there's ever really a solid truth to things. There's always one side of the story and then

the other person's side. I guess no one really knows the truth, so the world's not really realistic. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Music and literature, too, are not only important in knowing Sarah, but in understanding her self-identity. Like her art, the music she listens to and the books she reads help her look both inward and outward.

The books I read, I kind of think like a book now...if that makes any kind of sense. Not third person, but the first person point of view. I think in a book way. You know how people write in a book and they use certain things? I really like thinking like that because it makes the world look different in my mind. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

After stating that she "think(s) like a book," Sarah described herself as a reader. But in elaborating on the self-identity statement, Sarah portrayed her sense of being a reader as an identity extending beyond the vision of the lone individual, curled up in a chair, nose buried in a book. For Sarah, storytelling and narrative structures in books flow from the text world to the real world.

Sometimes in class my mind kind of drifts off and I kind of describe people in my mind...it's sort of a weird habit, but I just start describing people in my mind, like every detail and stuff, like with other words and that. Then I describe scenes and the sounds and like this table may be old and worn, and I think back about maybe who made the marks on the table and drew on it, and where it came from and where it was built and what the tree was like before it was chopped down and what the tree ... how old the tree was and stuff. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

I asked Sarah if this meant she created stories from things she's seeing, and she responded that it did.

Yeah. I think that's the basic thing of everything. 'Cause the tree had to grow and it had to see a lot of things on its way to grow up. It's kind of creating a person within the tree, if that makes sense. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

After sharing this deep love for books and storytelling and her view of the world as not realistic, Sarah revealed her favorite genre of literature was teenage romance fiction. She stated her reason in this way:

'Cause the books are so sweet and you do learn stuff from them, depending on the author, you can learn a lot from them, even though they're meant for just teenagers. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Sarah's preference for teen romance fiction extends even within other genre, such as the historical fiction novel, *Uprising*, the book group read during the last half of the book club meetings. During our final interview, Sarah revealed her favorite character in the novel was Bella because as she stated, "She falls in love, like walking through a doorway." [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

In presenting my first impressions of Sarah, information about her background, and the self-identity statements she herself has made, I have attempted to lay a foundation. From this foundation, I now refine the focus on the two exploratory questions guiding this study: What elements constitute selected adolescent girls' perspectives on identity? What influences their self-identity expression?

Perceptions of Identity

Identity as a sociocultural construct. Sarah's statements about identity are consistent with a sociocultural perspective in which identities are both constructed and expressed in various social environments. In the initial interview, Sarah's first self-identity statement was that she is shy. She elaborated on her response, though, and provided a sociocultural context expression of this identity.

I guess it depends on who I'm around, but like most of the time, I'm super-shy. To the point where I can't really talk and then I get better once I get to know the people and then I'm just...I don't know... [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Sarah's perception of environmental factors contributing to self-identity expression extends beyond her own ability or inability to be herself. Sarah sees, for example, that others are affected by group size and therefore group dynamics. What at first seemed to be Sarah vacillating between identifying the individuals at her former school as both the reason for her leaving ("I didn't really like the people there" and "They were really immature") and people who treated her well ("They were really nice people...They were all genuinely nice"), is evidence of Sarah's ability to discern the sociocultural nature of identity as expression both dependent upon and contributing to the social environment. When Sarah stated why she left the college preparatory school, she indicated it was the non-conducive environment and not the individuals themselves leading to her departure.

They (her peers at the private school) tried really hard to ... I just got ... they're very different one-on-one from when they're in a group. Most of the people here are really nice. I mean, I hear things that are horrible, that I couldn't imagine

these girls doing, but most of the people here in this environment, they've been really sweet to me. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

In this way, Sarah separated identities expressed in intimate, "one-on-one" environments with those performed in concert with others.

According to Sarah, even in these intimate environments there often exists a mismatch between what individuals perceive as their expressed self-identity and how it is perceived by others. This mismatch has occurred so often for Sarah, she has appropriated the label attached by others who misinterpret her desire to be a listener as being shy. And while Sarah acknowledges she often feels uncomfortable in social settings – behavior which can be perceived as being shy – Sarah by her own self-identity statements and actions in the book club indicated that in conducive environments she is indeed a listener.

Sarah sees this mismatch extending to a misperception of identity based on physical appearance.

Like, a lot of people think that if a girl's pretty she can't do a lot of stuff. I mean, I have friends who think that, too. Just because they are really pretty means they aren't intelligent or something like that. If they wear make-up they're like a slut or something – if they wear a lot of it, but it's not necessarily true. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Sarah's statements reflect that she, too, engages in this type of inaccurate perception of others' identities – specifically, other females.

I just see everyone, and I know this sounds really bad, but they all kind of look the same. They're not all the same people of course, if I got to know them, I'd know the distinct differences, but I see girls and they've all got super-long hair,

and it's either straight or curly and they all have like a ton of makeup on. And so they all kind of look the same to me. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Identity in the text world. Sarah's perception of this identity mismatch based on physical appearance is reflected in the discussion of the romantic relationship central to *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks*, and is the catalyst for Sarah's dislike of the female protagonist Frankie and her boyfriend Matthew. Sarah stated, "What really bugs me is that he didn't notice her for her, he noticed her for how she looked at the beginning of the year." [discussion transcripts, September 2010]

Throughout the book, Matthew's perception of Frankie is constructed solely on the basis of Frankie's physical attributes – until her actions become so outrageous that even the clueless Matthew cannot ignore them. This intentional challenge of Frankie's to the world's perception of her identity as meek and mild (or "bunny rabbit" as she is called by her family) to be replaced by a fierce challenger and rule-breaker, further aggravated Sarah who was insistent that in the real world and the text world, individuals should perform only their true identity.

And I don't know who they were talking about, but I heard this one girl and supposedly she goes up to this guy and starts saying that she has drugs so he'll like her and stuff. And I just want to talk to her and be like, why would you ever want someone to think you have drugs? Because last year at school people thought I was on drugs because I was all quiet and listened to music and it kind of sucks because you don't want people to think you're on drugs 'cause then...A lot of people think I'm on drugs because some of my friends are. [discussion transcripts, August 2010]

Through Frankie, Sarah further emphasized her perception of self-identity expression as being the quality of an independent person. So while Sarah viewed identity as a sociocultural construct, she eschewed those whose identity expression is intentionally created based on others. Sarah reflected this perspective when speaking about Frankie's expression of a new sense of self.

I don't know, she doesn't seem independent to me. She seems dependent on attention. She may be her own person, but if she didn't have all this attention, she wouldn't be who she is now. Like, if she wasn't going out with Matthew, she wouldn't be who she is now...and that's not being independent. [discussion transcript, September 2010]

Frankie therefore enabled Sarah to state her definition of an independent female and to reflect her own self-identity. In Chapter One, I stated the definition of gender used in this study was an anthropological, not biological view in which gender is something you do, not something you are. This definition is in keeping with the sociocultural view of identity that is foundational to the study. Sarah's perception of gender identity lies somewhere between the anthropological and biological perspectives. During a discussion of *Frankie Landau-Banks*, I read from the text to help stimulate a discussion on gender identity.

“Because once you say women are one way, and men are another, and say that's how it is in other species so that's gotta be how it is in people, then even if it's somewhat true – even if it's quite a bit true – you're setting yourself up to make all kinds of assumptions that actually really suck. Like, women tend to cooperate with each other and therefore don't have enough competitive drive to run major

companies or lead army squadrons. Or men inherently are unfaithful because they want to propagate their seed. Assumptions like these do nothing but cause problems in the world [discussion transcripts citing Lockhart, 2008, p. 162 September 2010]

I then asked the girls to share their reactions to this selection. Sarah was the first to respond.

Well, males have similar characteristics and female have similar characteristics because they're different species, but of the same...so yeah, they're going to have some different things, but they're going to have a lot more similar things with their own gender, but it doesn't mean they can't have similar things with the other gender or different things. [discussion transcripts, September 2010]

Sarah's response is in keeping with similar statements expressing her perception of gender identity as not tied to rigid biologically-determined expression. On numerous occasions, Sarah presented a relaxed, fluid anthropological view of gender identity expression. She frequently stated how boys can make great friends as well as boyfriends, speaking specifically of her close friendship with Steven and Matthew.

In her statements regarding romantic relationships, Sarah continued to emphasize expression and perception of self-identity often being at odds with one another.

Referring to Matthew, in *Frankie Landau-Banks*, Sarah stated, "He likes the thought of a girlfriend, but he doesn't actually know her enough to love her" [discussion transcripts, September 2010]. True love, according to Sarah, can only exist when one partner accurately perceives the self-identity of the other.

Echoing her views on the character Frankie's relationship with Mathew in *Frankie Landau-Banks*, ("She's whipped; she's completely whipped" [discussion transcripts, September 2010]) Sarah expressed disdain for what she sees as real-life adolescent females' male-centered identity expression.

I mean, there are people I know who are just hormone-driven. I tried to be friends with them and all they talk about is boys and all the guys talk about is girls and then it's all about what are you doing tonight and why don't we do this and blah, blah, blah...and it's like, can't we just talk? It's annoying because there are people like that and they kind of give people my age a bad name. The majority of girls my age are like that. They're all, well I want a boyfriend; it'll make me feel a lot better. [discussion transcripts, September 2010]

In contrast, Sarah emphasized mutual respect both among the partners in the relationship as well as one another's friends. Again, Sarah uses the character Frankie to share her perspective with members of the book club.

If that was me, if those were my boyfriend's friends, I wouldn't want to spend time with them if they didn't respect me. What's the point? I wouldn't really care to be accepted by his friends if they didn't respect me. Like, that wouldn't matter to me. I mean, they're not *my* friends and if they don't respect me then I wouldn't really care. [discussion transcripts, September 2010]

Identity as developmental. In viewing identity as socially situated, the environment of the particular social world plays a significant role as individuals explore, develop, and express their self-identity. For Sarah, individuals are the focus of environmental factors in which she is either able or unable to express her self-identity.

Both in attitude (accepting and open) and in number (small), individuals themselves are the sociocultural context according to Sarah.

Influences on Sarah's Self-Identity Expression

Physical attributes of the social environment. Sarah consistently emphasized how much more comfortable she feels in small groups rather than large ones. In outside of school activities, Sarah is more likely to spend time alone or with one or two of her close friends. Although she has many friends, she spends time with them in small groups. In trying to identify the reasons she felt so comfortable participating in the book club discussions, Sarah stated simply, "Maybe it was the small number in the group." [final interview transcripts, October 2010] Her further statements comparing the book club discussions with those held in the classroom confirmed that for Sarah, size is critical in determining an environment conducive to her self-identity expression, an environment in which she can truly be herself. Following her statement about the small number in the book group, Sarah added, "I could talk to the people in the book club more." [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

Yet Sarah emphasized that small size alone does not ensure a group environment conducive to self-identity expression.

I think the size was really nice 'cause everyone was able to get their chance to speak and there wasn't too little and there wasn't too many. But I don't think it's going to affect how the people talk because I've been one on one with certain girls, and I can't talk to them at all. I'm just uncomfortable with them. [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

Sarah's comment indicates her perspective is one in which environmental factors are interconnected and operate together to create an atmosphere – Sarah used the word “comfortable” – in which self-identities can be expressed by the individual and also interpreted accurately by those within the environment.

Attitudinal attributes of the social environment. During the initial interview, I asked each of the girls the same question to understand their perspectives on the environmental factors that determine expression of their self-identities. I asked, “Could you describe a situation where you can be yourself?” In response, Sarah described the small town in New Jersey where she spends part of her summer. Immediately, she focused on the people in the small town stating, “I think I can be myself around them because they're so open and accepting and they'll listen to you and they'll talk to you...” [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

This environment contrasts with the statements Sarah made about her former school experience in which she was part of what she referred to as the “outcasty” group. According to Sarah, her choice in music and dress as well as her quiet demeanor were outside the group norms at the school and therefore unacceptable. Sarah's statement also indicates that within an environment in which the individuals are open and accepting, her voice, both metaphorically and literally is heard.

Sarah's use of the words “open” and “accepting” prompted me to probe further by asking if the opposite is true for other environments – those which are non-conducive to her self-identity expression. I asked Sarah if rather than being “open” and “accepting,” the people at her present school want her to be a certain way.

It's not that they want you to be a certain way, like, I just see everyone, and I know this sounds really bad, but they all kind of look the same. They're not all the same people of course, if I got to know them, I'd know the distinct difference, but I see girls and they've all got super-long hair, and it's either straight or curly and they all have like a ton of make-up on. And so they all kind of look the same to me. And the people I know in New Jersey...they're so different from each other. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

For Sarah, physical sameness contributes to a sense of a restrictive environment in which she feels she cannot express her own self-identity. While acknowledging that if she got to know them as individuals she would likely perceive the variety of their individual identities, but still maintained the physical expression was of sameness – a group-determined sameness that for Sarah restricts expression of those unique self-identities.

The Second Case: Bianca

Bianca

I'm a tree-hugger
I think outside the box
Impulsive

Do things
Say things

Unafraid

Don't care what people think

Honestly

I'm a good debater
Often reading the same books
Over and
Over
Fantasy books
Room for opportunity
Different ways to perceive it

The female population
Desires to be perceived in a certain way
The American Dream
I want to save the rainforest

[Found data poem from initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Meeting Bianca—from my researcher reflective journal. Bianca could pass as a much younger girl, physically. Small, tiny physique, Bianca arrives at the initial interview dressed in jeans and a top-combination that will prove to be her trademark ensemble for the duration of the book club meetings: long-sleeved shirt underneath (beige today), bright blue t-shirt layered on top (with some kind of advertising in the left-hand corner). Bianca has light brown hair pulled back into a loose, no-nonsense pony tail. Blue eyes, no makeup. Loquacious and animated, Bianca leaves no doubt in my mind she will be a valuable contributor to the book club discussions. My confidence in her in this regard is established prior to this first meeting, though. I have been told repeatedly by teachers at the school: “You have to get Bianca to join your book club.” They describe her as bright and articulate. As one teacher told me, “If you want talkers, she’s your girl.” Bianca is my first interviewee and any doubts I may have had about the girls feeling comfortable enough to share their perspectives with me are quickly dispelled. Bianca responds to each of my questions quickly and with elaborate detail. At the end of the hour interview time, I switch off the digital recorder and breathe a sigh of relief. If all else fails, I know I could write a single case study just on the data I could get from Bianca. I am confident she will contribute to the discussions. Where Sarah is shy, Bianca is outgoing to the extreme. So much so that I worry I will somehow need to curtail her outlandish behavior, and be required to play an authoritative role, something I

am loath to do. I think about the texts I've read by other researchers who've worked with minors. I wonder: How do I balance my desire as a researcher to allow the data to emerge from each girl free from the influence of the presence of an adult? Can I really allow a study participant to dangle from a tree branch? I want this to be a space where every girl's voice can be heard. Can I sit back and let Bianca dominate the discussions? Ever at the forefront of my mind is that the girls will see me as a teacher at the school and not feel comfortable to share their perspectives. [researcher reflective journal, August 2010]

Background on Bianca. Bianca lives with her mother, father and two younger siblings in the same upper-middle class beach community as Sarah. As the oldest, Bianca often plays a mentor/authority figure role with her younger brother and sister.

I usually have to babysit my brother and sister. I get to...like if my mom's not home, I make all the decisions. And sometimes if they can't find my mom they come to me and ask if they can do something. And I say, "I don't know, tell mom." And they're like, "I can't find mom." And I'm like, well, do something about it. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

I asked Bianca how she felt about being the oldest.

It's good sometimes because I can help them with their homework and stuff. My mom's like, I haven't been in fifth grade in so long, I can't do this. So I get to help them with that kind of stuff. Sometimes they whine at me when I'm enforcing my mother's rules. They go, "But...but..." And I'm like, "That's what mom said, now go to bed." [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

With her own activities and those her younger brother and sister engage in, Bianca's life is active. I asked Bianca what life was like for her now.

Very busy. I teach kids martial arts for about five hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays. My brother has baseball practices, and his games go on for hours. I have two siblings: a brother and a sister. My brother's off-the-wall crazy and my sister is an eight-year-old – so that's enough said right there. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Like Sarah, this is Bianca's first year at Gulfside Fundamental Middle School. Like Sarah, Bianca previously attended an elite private school on the other side of town (although not the same school as Sarah). Bianca described the school social environment as filled with cliques, and I asked her if this was the case in her present school.

Well, not at this school so much 'cause there's like, 300 kids in each grade, but I went to a small school and I saw a lot of that, you know, specific groups – “Oh, they're losers; they're cool” – whatever. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

I encouraged Bianca to further elaborate on her response about the environment in her current school by asking, “You don't see specific groups at Gulfside, but you did at your smaller, private school?”

Not as much (here). Maybe a little, but I'm not part of it. I think it makes sense because everyone knows each other better (at the small school). 'Cause I don't know half the kids at this school. I don't know half the kids in my grade. At my old school I knew every single person in the grade. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Self-identity statements. Bianca immediately responded to my opening question in the initial interview, “How would you describe yourself?” by stating, “I’m a tree-hugger.” For Bianca, this identity includes being a challenger to the status quo and thinking outside the box. Bianca described her love of current events discussions in her marine science class and revealed another aspect of her self-identity: a debater. These aspects of her self-identity come together in her favorite class at school – the place she identified as where she could completely be herself: marine science class.

Like I said before, I’m kind of a tree-hugger, environmental person, so whenever I’m in marine science talking about a current issue or something like that ... basically I’ll say, well, why can’t they do this and why can’t they do that? Like for instance, we were talking about off-shore drilling off the coast of Florida and people were saying oh that’s so good, we’ll get oil, but it’ll kill our tourism industry ‘cause our beaches will get all messed up. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Bianca’s self-identity as an environmentalist extends back to her early childhood years. She stated to me during the individual interview and on two other occasions to the book club members that she has known she wanted to live in a rainforest and work for their preservation since she was in second grade. In this way, being an environmentalist is both a career she hopes to pursue, and part of her self-identity.

When asked what someone would need to understand to truly know her, Bianca’s response indicated her sense of an independent selfhood as well as a keen awareness of how others often react to her independence of thought and action: “I’m impulsive and I

do things...I'm not afraid to say things and I don't care about what people think – honestly. I really don't care.” [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Bianca identified herself as a reader, but her tone of voice in making this self-identity statement indicated a nonchalant attitude – until she began to talk passionately about certain books: fantasy series books including *The Hunger Games*, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, and *Gregor the Overlander*. These favorite books are ones Bianca reads “over and over again” because, as she stated simply: “I like them.” [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Perceptions of Identity

Identity as a sociocultural construct. During the initial interview I asked Bianca if she thought it would matter if we had boys participating in the book club. Bianca's response to this and subsequent follow-up questions indicated her perspective on identity – especially female gender identity – is socially constructed and expressed. It depends on the book. If it was a romance novel obviously the boys are going to be yawn, get over it. And if it's a book about guns or something probably girls wouldn't be as interested. That's my theory. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

I encouraged Bianca to elaborate by asking her to tell me more.

I think it would be different. The maturity level of boys and girls differ. We did this quiz thing in language arts where it was like, what kind of learner are you...and many girls got intrapersonal and many boys got something about using their hands. Most of the girls got interpersonal 'cause social life is very, very important to girls. You can watch a classroom or like, say, a pre-kindergarten. I remember when my sister was in pre-kindergarten and there was already a pecking order with the girls...The boys were

just standing there going “what?” and the girls are already figuring out what’s going on.
[initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

When I probed and asked Bianca where she thought this comes from, she replied, “I don’t know. I think they did themselves.” While Bianca first emphasized the role of individuals who make up the sociocultural context, she later pointed to the influence of the greater society on establishing gender roles – especially for females.

There are more definitive standards for girls. And for boys it’s like...hmm...(pauses)...maybe...well, my sister used to do Brownies and so their thing was some of the boys would chase after them because they were brownies and they wanted to eat them (we both giggle). I’m serious...my sister was 5 years old at the time and so she’s like, oh, Jake is so silly, but Will is cool, and Conner’s cool, but I bet the boys were all friends. But the girls were all – I don’t know...I don’t know why, but girls just seem to be more...maybe it has to do with appearance. ‘Cause you know, boys will just roll in the mud, but Georgia, I remember when she was little she had to dress herself and she would be wearing ski pants and a bikini top and she would be all, “I am fashionable today.” So maybe it has to do with the fact that she wants to make herself known and make herself presentable and I think it’s how modern society perceives females.

There’s more pressure to be the prettiest, I guess. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Bianca used the popular teen movie, *Mean Girls*, to illustrate her point and I asked her if she thought movies like this accurately reflect what goes on in the real world.

On some level they do. It's a typical way females are viewed. Which is the stigma that attaches to females as having more...you know...you never see boys having a ton of pressure to have just the right hair or wear the right clothes. It mostly applies to females. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

I then asked Bianca if she thought boys have any similar kind of pressure.

Well, it's absolutely there on some level. But not nearly the same as for girls. Boys define themselves through sports. At least in youth.

Whoever's the best baseball player... [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

When I asked about boys who are not athletic or don't like sports, Bianca stated, "Then you pretend that you are. Or you be really funny. That's my theory." Bianca later returned to the topic of *Mean Girls*, and I asked her once again if she thought this 2004 movie portrays reality for today's teen girls.

Yeah. Because like I said, the female population desires to be perceived in a specific way. Like say for example, the American Dream. The red-blooded American family with the breadwinner man and the mom in the apron and the two little kids hugging dad's legs saying, "Daddy, you're home!" And the three-bedroom family house in a quiet little neighborhood. The American Dream. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Identity in the text world. Like Sarah, the romantic relationship between the female protagonist Frankie and her boyfriend Matthew provided Bianca the opportunity to share her perspective that there often exists a mismatch between what an individual defines as his or her self-identity and others' perception of the self-identity. When Sarah stated,

“He (Matthew) likes the thought of a girlfriend, but he doesn’t actually know her enough to love her.” Bianca responded, “He doesn’t know the true her. He knows part of her, but he doesn’t know the true her.” [discussion transcripts, September 2010] Self-identity is therefore not only an expression by the individual, but a perception by those who encounter the individual. According to Bianca, the process of expression and reception/perception is not always identical.

During one of the book club discussions, Bianca expressed a sociocultural perspective alluding to possible reasons for this mismatch. The girls were discussing a section of the book *Uprising* in which the shirtwaist factory workers on strike shove prostitutes standing near the picket line into a group of billy club wielding police officers. A discussion of prostitution was then followed by comments about the class system presented in the text. After the group veered far away from this topic to the subject of an upcoming dance, Bianca brought everyone back to the text by sharing her own perspective on social stratification.

I don’t think the world is split into two or three groups. I think it’s an entire palette of color and someone just took and mashed it all together and there are some people who want to say this is what’s right and this is what’s wrong, but I don’t think so. [discussion transcripts, September 2010]

While Bianca’s self-identity statements portray an image of a feminist – empowered, independent, expressing her viewpoints openly, she used the text *Frankie Landau-Banks* to express her perception that this is not the case with all females. During one of the book discussions, Bianca shared with the group a passage she described as a “revelation.”

When she is met with silence from the group following her impassioned reading, Bianca persevered in attempting to get the other girls to react with equal passion.

Well, remember at the end of the chapter it says there are some girls that go and do homey things, like Trish, and there are some girls who just sit there and go “Ack,” and then there are the other girls that just totally throw themselves into it, but Frankie was saying how she could do it better. That’s the female thinking that is bringing us into the 22nd century. I say 22nd because women are still generally seen as homemakers... [discussion transcripts, August 2010]

Bianca’s self-identity statements of being independent, impulsive, and thinking-outside-of-the-box are reflected in her view of how the character Frankie (*Frankie Landau-Banks*) challenges the old-guard, male establishment at her private school. Bianca selected a passage from the text in which this is particularly evident, surprised when the other girls did not react or respond.

Bianca: Am I the only one who realized that total revelation?

All: Yes.

Bianca: Okay, what that’s saying is that if she really had a lot of respect for these men she would have been going (makes swooning sound). But what she’s saying is that you are uppity and self-righteous and rich and I’m going to stick my tongue at you because you’re just glowering at me from a picture on the wall and you’re not real. She doesn’t want to be viewed as a bunny rabbit, she wants to be viewed as a threat, as a genuine person and if she’d been (said in a sugary sweet voice) nice and sweet that would have been counterproductive. By doing it this way

she's saying, "World, I am Bad! And you can't stop me!" [discussion transcripts, August 2010]

When Sarah continued to maintain that Frankie was misguided in both her perception of independence and feminist empowerment and the best way to gain these and have others see you expressing these qualities, Bianca agreed only slightly with Sarah that craving attention is not being independent. For Bianca, Frankie's means amply justified her individual and societal ends.

Well, I mean no doubt, but if in the process she brings attention to some major feminism issues in the world, is it really such a bad thing? If in the process she can show the world that females can be a force to be reckoned with, is it really such a bad thing? [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Identity as developmental. The outrageous actions of the central character Frankie in *Frankie Landau-Banks* became the catalyst for sparking heated debates between the girls and provided a medium through which they further expressed both their own self-identities and their perspectives on identity in general. As Frankie sets out on a path of transforming herself from a self and family-described "bunny rabbit" to what she sees as an empowered and powerful individual, Bianca noted this transformational process and connected it to a deeper sense of self-identity as a developing process.

...okay, the fact that she gave up Latin and started studying the panopticon and all that shows that she is developing her own sense of self, plus the fact that she's already gone through a year at that place and she's a sophomore now and she's starting to get some independent thinking going and she's starting to discover her

own person and with that comes her mental explosion. [discussion transcripts, September 2010]

Bianca observed a similar process occurring in the popular YA novel, *Twilight*. While she was decidedly critical of the main character, Bella, for her inability to “know what she wants,” Bianca’s perspective on identity as a developmental process is evident once again in her remarks about Bella’s growth.

At the end of the book, when Bella gains immortality, she starts to become her own person. I remember in the book when she says I can finally become a full participant in the Cullen Family. At the end of the book she does in fact gain her own independence. [discussion transcripts, September 2010]

Influences on Bianca’s Self-Identity Expression

Physical attributes of the social environment. My first question to Bianca in the final interview was: “How would you describe your experiences participating in an all-girls after-school book club?” Bianca responded positively and indicated the atmosphere of the book club was conducive to her self-identity expression.

I thought it was really fun. I kind of got to express a lot of my opinions (and I have a lot of opinions), and I’m also a big debater, so I really liked debating with the other girls on our viewpoints and winning. I like to win. It’s one of my favorite things – winning. [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

I probed Bianca to elaborate on this idea of the multiple perspectives in the book club and what kind of an environment this created for her. Her semi-kidding tone aside, Bianca remained consistent in expressing her perspective that the multiple perspectives in the book club provided her with an adversarial opportunity, similar to the environment

during current events debates in marine science class she described during the initial interviews.

Yeah, I just enjoyed hearing their viewpoints, too, because you know, it's good to know about the world around you and what other people are thinking. Because not necessarily everything you have to say is right. I'm talking about this hypothetically since I know I'm always right. No, I'm just kidding. [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

When asked what could have made the book club even better, Bianca continued to focus on the benefit of multiple perspectives.

Maybe if there were more girls there, people would have the opportunity to have more opinions. I believe in the more the merrier and whatever. And so if you want to get the right answer, you have to have a bunch of people collaborate on what they think is right. And then you figure out from there. The more people you have, the more different, interesting, unique viewpoints you're going to have on how they perceived the book. So you can get more information. [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

Bianca then extended her discussion of the value of multiple perspectives from the book club participants to the book *Uprising* stating, "That's what made that book interesting – the one we just read. They have three different girls with three completely different goals and stuff." [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

Attitudinal attributes of the social environment. Bianca shared in the initial interview her preference for reading fantasy novels, and her disdain for realistic fiction. In doing so, Bianca reflected her need to be part of an environment that provides her with

space to express her self-identity. Bianca repeatedly employed the term “room for opportunity” to describe the environment most conducive to her self-identity expression and found within the open spaces and pages of fantasy novels. As a proficient reader, Bianca enters the text world as herself, not merely as a passive reader. In talking about this world of fantasy novels, she described the text environment both as a place where plot events happen (“bats underground”), and in which the reader is an active participant (“you can do anything”). [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

The Third Case: Lacey

Lacey

Outgoing, intelligent
My dad: He’s the one who raised me
I have guy tendencies
I’m not like other girls
I’m tough

What’s important?
My totem pole:

School
Girlfriend
Friend
Family

I’m not really close to my family
My friends are like my family

[Found data poem from initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Meeting Lacey—from my researcher reflective journal. Long, blonde hair, blue eyes – Lacey arrived at the first book discussion meeting dressed similarly to when we met for the initial interviews, wearing jeans and a low-cut, emerald green top. During the discussion, Lacey commented on her physical strength, and I can see her toned arms. Lacey is outgoing and speaks easily with the other girls just as she did when with me. I was concerned that Sarah was constantly interrupted by Bianca, who took center-stage

and engaged her friends in quasi-discussions (small talk mostly to fuel Bianca's fire). Although I sat next to Sarah so that I could turn to her and ask her to repeat/elaborate on what she'd try to say to the group, I worried doing so would make Sarah feel awkward – like she needed an adult to stick up for her. Ownership of the book club needed to be in the girls' hands, not mine. Soon, though, Lacey took up the position of supporting Sarah as a full participant in the book club discussions. Without drawing attention to Sarah, Lacey spoke directly to Bianca about her dominating position, and then turned her body toward Sarah and made eye contact – silently communicating that Sarah now has the space in which to talk to the group. Lacey showed a mastery of how to address such domination while supporting and maintaining the positive atmosphere within the group. Later, as Lacey and I walked back toward her father's waiting car, I remark about what great comments Sarah made during the discussion, and Lacey brought up the topic of Bianca – confirming my observation of her process in aiding Sarah. Lacey told me: “I had to get her (Bianca) to stop talking so Sarah could say something. I'm that kind of person who does that with my friends.” [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Background on Lacey. Lacey has attended Gulfside Fundamental Middle School since the sixth grade – unlike the other four girls in the book club who are new to the school. Lacey is an only child and lives with her father, who has raised her since she was five. Her mother lives in Seattle. Lacey mentions her mother only once, stating that she talks to her on the phone “occasionally.” I asked Lacey what it's like to be raised by a single dad and she responded, “It's not as weird as most people think, but there's always females in my life who are kind of like mother figures, but not really.” [initial interview transcripts, August 2010] During the initial interview when I asked Lacey what someone

would need to know in order to understand her, Lacey responded they would need to know her father.

First, we kind of look like each other because he's my dad. And then, like, I have a lot of guy tendencies because I was raised by only a man. So there's certain things, like I'm really tough. Like, I'm not like most girls. I mean, I like to go get my nails done, don't get me wrong, but I'm not going to cry if I break a nail. Even though it does hurt. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

I asked Lacey to tell me more about her father.

He's not very outgoing, which is one thing that we don't have in common, but he's very smart in math and science like I am. He has a little bit of a temper, and I noticed lately that when he gets mad and stuff, well like when I get mad I do the same things that he does. And I think that's a learned behavior. Like he likes to throw things or kick things or slam things and that's what I do. I don't get mad that often, though. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

While Lacey stated knowing her father is essential to knowing her, when I asked what's important to her in her life she responded by sharing her idea of a totem pole that represents her hierarchical ranking of the significant aspects to her life.

My friends. My girlfriend. School. School's like number one. I have this thing called a totem pole, and school is number one, and then comes my girlfriend, and then comes my friends, and then comes my family. Because I'm not really that close with my family. My friends are like my family. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

In the final interview, Lacey mentioned how getting to know Sarah was one of the best parts of being involved in the book club and indicated Sarah was similar to her circle of school friends.

Like a real person. There's nothing covering it up, she's just going to let it out. That's the type of people I hang out with. And I call my lunch table the real table because there's the preppy people – I know it sounds really cliché, but that's really how it is. And there's the preppy guy and the preppy girl. And there's the nerdy kids. And then there's the smart, cool kids. And then there's my table, and we're the real people, like we'll tell you straight out. And usually we're not mean about it, but we're going to tell you the truth. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

During the last book club meeting, too, the girls began talking about friendships and Lacey shared with the group how the merging of the two schools and subsequent change in student body has had a significant effect on her.

I don't have as many friends as I used to. I've been really closed off this year compared to last year, because last year I knew like *everybody*. Like I knew every single person in the whole grade and most everyone in the other grades. So I was like really, really popular. And then this year it kind of changed because I didn't know many people because most of them left. [discussion transcripts, October 2010]

Self-identity statements. When I began the initial interview by asking Lacey how she would describe herself, she responded, “Outgoing. Intelligent. That's the two main

things.” Later, during one of the book discussions, Lacey added, “I’m a very loud, outspoken, opinionated person.” [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Later on during the first interview, Lacey and I talked about adolescence and how some people view it as a time of “storm and turmoil.” Lacey disagreed with this view. I don’t know. I don’t think there’s really turmoil. They kind of over-exaggerate it, but everyone goes through those times. Just because you’re trying to figure out yourself and stuff. And it’s a lot about self-discovery and becoming intrapersonal, trying to get to know yourself instead of knowing other people. Because I’m very interpersonal, not so much intrapersonal. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Often using the term “girl power,” Lacey also self-identified as an empowered female.

I’m really into female empowerment, like I’m all for it. Because I think women are looked upon as not as strong as men or not as good as men and I think that we are just better. Because we can do everything guys can do with all the other added female stuff we have to deal with. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

When I asked her what she meant by “added female stuff” Lacey responded, “PMS, heels, dresses, looking good all the time or trying to... We have all the normal stuff added with more.” [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Lacey’s physical strength is also part of her self-identity. During one of the book discussions the talk centered on physical and emotional strength and gender stereotypes. After one of the girls stated she once had a male friend who cried easily “right in front of

you,” Lacey responded by sharing a perspective of herself and her relationships with males.

None of my guy friends cry in front of me. I don’t know why, I guess it’s ‘cause I’m a really, really strong person, physically, so all the guys treat me kind of like the guys. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

While seeing herself as a physically strong, empowered female, Lacey also stated her self-identity as a “people pleaser.” During a discussion of *Frankie Landau Banks*, Bianca and Sarah applaud the character Frankie for being seemingly unaffected when peers hurl insults at her. Lacey revealed this is not the case with her.

I guess I’m kind of opposite because even when people I don’t like call me mean names it affects me. It always has. Because I guess I’m like a people pleaser and I worry about what other people think about me. I don’t know why. It’s just something I’ve always done. [discussion transcripts, September 2010]

Perceptions of identity. Data detailing Lacey’s home, school, and family background and her self-identity statements provide a context. The next step is to refine the focus of the data by answering the two exploratory questions. In presenting data indicating what elements constitute Lacey’s perspective on identity, I have organized the section based on coding categories that emerged during data analysis.

Identity as a sociocultural construct. My first question during the individual final interviews was for the participants to describe their experiences participating in the book club. Lacey’s response reflected her belief in the power and importance of others’ perspectives.

It was definitely interesting with all the different people because I got to look at all the different other people's perspectives of things. Because sometimes it's humbling, sort of, to listen to what other people have to say and how they view things. It's enlightening, also, to not just know what's in my head, but to know what's in other people's. [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

I asked Lacey to tell me what she meant by "humbling."

Because sometimes people, myself included, get a little, I guess, conceited about certain things or have a strong opinion about some things and stuff like that. And hearing what other people have to say teaches you. [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

Again, I encouraged Lacey to elaborate on her response by asking her what she meant by "teaches."

Teaches you how other people think and how others view you, how others view others, how they view the world. And maybe that's not something you thought of. It puts you in your place, maybe. Maybe if you had a wrong opinion. Not a wrong opinion, opinions can't be wrong, but like an unfirm opinion. Which, the way you viewed it was wrong, morally. [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

In the final interview, Lacey stated that a favorite aspect of the book club experience for her was sharing a feminist identity with other girls.

I like knowing that I'm not the only one who believes in empowering females because, still, now women aren't viewed – some women aren't viewed the way men are. As important or smart maybe even. So I liked knowing that I'm not the only one. In my opinion, like, everyone else in the book club, there's only two

other people who didn't really, I don't know, they're not as adamant about female empowerment, but most everyone else was all about it. [final interview transcripts, October 2010]

When I asked Lacey how she determined the two girls weren't, as she put it, "adamant about female empowerment," she shared her perspective on feminist identity as socially constructed within the social world of a family – a perspective consistent with statements made concerning other aspects of identity. Once again, Lacey sees individuals' identities shaped by all types of social environments – even "bad" ones.

I mean, I guess, not just that they weren't vocal, 'cause that was another one, but they just didn't seem as focused on the fact that women are mistreated. I don't think they're aware of how women are treated still, because they must have a good family. It's not necessarily that other people have bad families, but they have families that accept women in a certain way [final interview transcripts, October 2010].

Identity in the text world. Lacey indicated an awareness of the mismatch often existing between self-identity and identity as perceived by others when she and Bianca discussed the character Frankie in *Frankie Landau-Banks*. Lacey and Bianca attempt to share with the group the underlying reason behind Frankie's outrageous actions.

Lacey: I think she wants everyone to know how bad she is and that's why she does it.

Bianca: On some level, that's her personality.

Lacey: She wants to alter how everyone perceives her.

[discussion transcripts, September 2010]

Lacey's final comment indicates her perspective that self-identity and identity is mutable and dependent upon both the individual expressing identity and those perceiving the individual's identity.

During a subsequent discussion of the same book, the girls discussed gender roles as portrayed by the central female protagonist Frankie and her boyfriend, Matthew. To encourage further discussion, I read a selection from the text.

“Because once you say women are one way, and men are another, and say that's how it is in other species so that's gotta be how it is in people, then even if it's somewhat true – even if it's quite a bit true – you're setting yourself up to make all kinds of assumptions that actually really suck. Like, women tend to cooperate with each other and therefore don't have enough competitive drive to run major companies or lead army squadrons. Or men inherently are unfaithful because they want to propagate their seed. Assumptions like these do nothing but cause problems in the world.” [discussion transcripts citing *Frankie Landau-Banks* p. 172, September 2010]

Lacey is the first to respond by offering a statement about gender stereotypes in general, and then one reflecting a more specific, personal perspective. “It's bad to assume that everyone's the same because no one's the same, everyone's different. And like, why is someone who has short hair sometimes called a dyke – just because they have short hair?” [discussion transcripts, September 2010]

Lacey expressed a strong connection with Frankie, the central female protagonist in *Frankie Landau-Banks*, applauding her bold actions. Lacey's statement shifted from approval of Frankie as a person to her actions and finally connecting these actions to

Lacey's own feminist perspective. Lacey stated, "I like her. I like it a lot. I don't know; I just have this superiority complex of females over males, so that's just me, but..."

[discussion transcripts, September 2010] Bianca then offered her own opinion of Frankie and strongly agreed with Lacey, but Sarah disagreed with both of their appraisals of Frankie and her actions. Lacey maintained her stance and further connected with Frankie's actions and self-identity when she stated, "Oh, I think it sounds great, sitting around all scheming and planning and plotting things. I'm so that kind of person." [discussion transcripts, September 2010]

The text *Uprising* offered Lacey further opportunities to connect with characters through a sense of shared self-identity. As she stated in the initial interview, school is important to Lacey. While Bianca later briefly persuaded her to feel otherwise, Lacey initially perceived the character Jane in a positive light – through a shared self-identity of being education-focused. Lacey stated, "I wrote (in my journal) that I have a strong connection with Jane, out of all the characters because she has a thirst for knowledge. And it seems like she wants to improve herself." [discussion transcripts, September 2010]

Identity as developmental. Lacey's perception of Jane as someone who "wants to improve herself" seemed to tether Lacey to Jane, despite Bianca's persistent persuasion to convince Lacey to dismiss Jane as self-centered and ungrateful for her privileged life. Bianca even alluded to conversations the two had outside of the book club meetings in which Bianca continued to work to get Lacey to agree with her about Jane. Despite occasions in which Lacey seemed to begin to go along with Bianca, the connection Lacey made with Jane was tenacious. Although very different from the audacious, prank-pulling Frankie in *Frankie Landau-Banks*, Jane offered Lacey further opportunities to

express her perspective on identity, specifically feminist identity, as a developmental process.

She's (Jane) getting there. She's going toward a goal. She's trying to help herself. I think all of them have a strong goal. But it's different goals, and I think that's why. They're improving for women's rights, in a different way. [discussion transcripts, October 2010]

Following Lacey's statement, the girls continued to discuss Jane and her development when Sarah commented, "She needs to open her mind." Lacey continued to defend Jane, insisting the girls acknowledge the value of Jane having a goal and working toward it. Both of these qualities reflect self-identity statements Lacey herself made during the initial interview. Lacey responded to Sarah, "And that's her goal. You see what her goal is? If you guys haven't noticed, she's trying to expand on what she knows." [discussion transcripts, October 2010]

The girls evaluated Jane and concluded with positive comments. Following Rachel's statement: "She's not a bad person at all," Lacey shared a personal connection with Jane. Lacey stated, "I can relate to her a lot because I just like the fact that she's trying to help herself because at this point in time there's no one else who's going to help her." [discussion transcripts, October 2010]

The discussion then shifted to the character Yetta, who was consistently discussed in a positive way. Lacey observed that all of the female characters had someone to support them in their various struggles – all except Jane. Lacey stated, "She has to support herself." [discussion transcripts, October 2010]

Influences on Lacey’s self-identity expression. During the initial interview, I asked Lacey the following question: “Help me see a situation where you can really be yourself. Be completely who you are and express what you think and feel. What would that situation be like?” Lacey responded by sharing physical attributes of the environment and attitudinal attributes of individuals in the environment – both combining to create a conducive atmosphere where Lacey can express her self-identity.

I guess I’d be at the beach because that’s my favorite place in the world. At the beach or on the boat. Anywhere on the ocean where it’s sunny. With my friends or girlfriend. Most definitely not with my father because I do not express my full self around my father. And it would be just talking with them (initial interview transcripts, August 2010).

Physical attributes of the social environment. As presented in the section describing her background, Lacey spoke about the difficult change the school merger had on her by significantly decreasing her knowledge of the student body. She stated, “Like I knew every single person in the whole grade and most everyone in the other grades. So I was like really, really popular. And then this year it kind of changed because I didn’t know many people because most of them left.” [initial interview transcripts, August 2010] Combined with her self-identity statement of being “outgoing,” Lacey clearly expressed that a social environment made up of a large number of individuals can be conducive to her self-identity expression.

Attitudinal attributes of the social environment. After her statement in which Lacey described her ideal environment for self-identity expression, I probed her for details about why she felt she could not express her full self around her father. Lacey’s response

indicated the primary importance she places in attitudinal attributes of the social environment in expressing her self-identity.

Because on certain things, if I tell him about certain things he'll take it the wrong way and he won't let me explain it. And then, it's just that thing where you don't want to be yourself around your parent. You just don't tell them everything because you just don't want to tell them. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

In the initial interview, I also asked Lacey if there was anything that kept her from being able to say what she thinks and feels. In her response, Lacey again referred to attitudinal attributes of the social environment as critical to her self-identity expression.

Other people's perceptions. Like when I talk about that I'm gay. Other people's perceptions...everyone has their own opinions, so that kind of stops me from telling a lot of people because I don't know how they feel so when I first meet people I don't really tell them until I feel them out for how they are. But a lot of times it's people's perceptions of certain things. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

I ask Lacey what she meant, and she further elaborated.

Like, some people are really religious so they believe that being a homosexual is against God's will or something like that and that's their belief and I respect everyone else's beliefs, but that's not mine. And I won't tell them because they might view me differently just because of that. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Lacey stated the next school year she will be attending the high school where her girlfriend currently attends and she's confident the atmosphere will be conducive to her

being able to express her identity as a lesbian. I then asked Lacey if this is because of her girlfriend and who she knows.

Yeah. She talks to a lot of people. She's friends with a lot of people. And like, at Oswego, it's a lot different there. There's a lot of lesbians and gays and bis and stuff like that, there's a lot of them there. So I think that's another reason why I chose to go there is because those are the type of people who can most relate to me. I'm most comfortable around. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

To clarify Lacey's statement I asked her: "Is this because they get it, and you don't have to figure out whether you'll be accepted or not?"

Yeah. Sometimes I feel more accepted from my girlfriend's family than I do my own. Because I haven't told them. And her family knows, and they love us being together. Because I'm such a good influence. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

I then asked her if she thought she'd be able to tell her family in the future that she's gay.

Eventually. I think I'm going to wait until I'm 18 because that's just the way I should do it because a lot of my family's like, part of my family's religious – just one part of it. My Dad and my Mom know and that's pretty much it. [initial interview transcripts, August 2010]

Like Sarah and Bianca, Lacey was open and articulate in sharing her perspectives during the individual interviews and the weekly book discussions. Highlighting the individual voices of the girls is essential, but not complete in coming to know them as participants in the book club. Each week during the one-hour book club meetings, the girls'

individual voices were expressed both separately and in acts of collaborative reader response.

Cross Case Analysis

I selected Sarah, Bianca, and Lacey as case study participants because they represented different combinations of backgrounds and self-identity statements. The resulting data revealed that the selection criteria allowed the identification of three very distinct cases producing differing perceptions of identity and the factors that affect self-identity expression.

While all three of the case study participants attended the same middle school and were enrolled in advanced language arts classes, they differed in their backgrounds and self-identity statements. Sarah was new to Gulfside Fundamental Middle School and knew only her two best friends. While living with her mother, father, and younger brother, Sarah expressed a feeling of distance from her family. Feeling left out by dominant social groups at her former school, Sarah joined the book club because she liked reading and hoped to get to know a small group of girls at her new school. The oldest of tight-knit family of five, Bianca, too, was new to the school and like Sarah, came from a small private school the year before. However, outgoing, gregarious Bianca had a wide circle of friends – three of whom were part of the book club. Bianca stated her reasons for joining were a combination of the pragmatic (mom could work an extra hour and pick up all three children at the same time) and the adversarial (“It sounded kinda fun. I like to debate”). Bianca is the only case study participant who stated a preference for a larger group of girls in the book club. As a case study participant, Lacey possesses a number of unique characteristics. Lacey is the only participant raised by a

single parent – her father. She is also the only one of the girls who attended Gulfside prior to the current year. Lacey is also the only participant who self-identified as being gay.

<i>Case Study Participant</i>	<i>Shared Self-Identity Statements</i>	<i>Unique Self-Identity Statements</i>
Bianca	Independent Goal-Oriented	Leader Impulsive
Lacey	Independent Goal-Oriented	Outgoing Intelligent
Sarah	Independent Goal-Oriented	Shy Artistic/Creative

Table 7: Case Study Participants’ Collective/Unique Self-Identity Statements

Data collected during the initial interviews indicated that all three case study participants self-identified as independent and goal-oriented (see Table 8). While the girls were unified in the shared perception of themselves as independent and goal-oriented, they also expressed self-identity statements that set them apart from one another. I selected Bianca, therefore, as she represented adolescent girls who self-identify as being leaders and impulsive. I selected Lacey as an adolescent girl who self-identified as outgoing and intelligent. Finally, I selected Sarah to represent adolescent girls who self-identify as shy and artistic/creative.

Participants’ Perceptions of Identity

The first exploratory question I asked addressed the elements constituting selected adolescent girls’ perspectives on identity. All three of the case study participants expressed a sociocultural perspective on identity. Specifically, all three girls shared the view that there often existed a mismatch between how individuals perceive their own self-identity as expressed, and how others perceive the expressed identity. In addition, all

three participants shared a perspective that identity is a developing process. The character Jane in *Uprising* provided the basis for divisive debate among the girls – many of whom vacillated between positive and negative reactions toward her. In the end, the group came together as each participant acknowledged Jane was in the process of developing an empowered identity, just as the character Frankie had experienced in the text *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks*.

Finally, all three case study participants believed societal influences played a critical role in shaping both the self-identities as seen by individuals and perspectives on identity held by society in general – especially gender identity and most notably with females. In individual interviews and during book discussions the case study participants discussed how society holds specific perspectives on roles, attitudes, and behaviors deemed appropriate for females. The girls further stated how individuals (primarily females) then shaped their own self-identities to align with those societal standards and expectations.

Influences on Participants' Self-Identity Expression

The second exploratory question I asked addressed the influences on the selected adolescent girls' self-identity expression (see Table 8).

Influences on Self-Identity

Perceptions of Identity

Expression

<i>Case Study Participant</i>					<i>Physical Attributes of Group</i>	<i>Attitudinal Attributes of Group</i>
<i>Bianca</i>	Expression-perception Mismatch	Identity as developing process	Shaped by society	Explored & expressed in text world	Large	Not important
<i>Lacey</i>	Expression-perception mismatch	Identity as developing process	Shaped by society	Explored & expressed in text world	Large-not critical	“Perception” critical
<i>Sarah</i>	Expression-perception mismatch	Identity as developing process	Shaped by society	Explored & expressed in text world	Small	“Open and Accepting”
<i>Katie</i>	Expression-perception mismatch	Identity as developing process	Shaped by society	Explored & expressed in text world	Small	Accepting
<i>Rachel</i>	Expression-perception mismatch	Identity as developing process	Shaped by society	Explored & expressed in text world	Small	Open

Table 8: Perceptions of Identity and Influences on Self-Identity Expression

In this second question, the shift moves from the concept of identity as an entity, to self-identity – or how one perceives ones’ own identity – and specifically the elements found in environments conducive to expression of that self-identity. As unified as the participants were in their perspectives on identity, they were widely divergent in their descriptions of influences on their self-identity expression.

In the final interview, Bianca expressed only one aspect of the book club that could have made the experience better for her: more members. Bianca stated an increased number of participants would have meant more perspectives and an increased opportunity for her to debate those varied perspectives. This vision of a larger group with

multiple perspectives and an atmosphere in which group members debated one another mirrors Bianca's response to my question to her in the initial interview: "Describe an environment where you can be yourself." Bianca's response was to describe her marine science classroom – a large group of students engaged (at least during current events) in debates. Bianca's statements reflecting a preference for large groups can be connected to her self-identity statements as well. While all of the participants self-identified as independent and goal-oriented, Bianca also stated she was both impulsive and a leader. In the small book club in which all five girls shared the leadership role by offering passages to discuss, questions to address, and issues to debate, Bianca could not always express her self-identity. At no time during either of the individual interviews or the eight book club discussions did Bianca state any attitudinal attributes of environments conducive to her self-identity expression.

For Lacey and Sarah, however, the attitudes of the individuals in various environments are critical elements in their self-identity expression. Lacey indicated she felt comfortable in large groups and spoke about how differently she felt this year at the school with a new student body she did not know well compared with last year when she knew nearly everyone in her grade and many in the younger grades as well. Lacey in this way alludes to the importance of knowing the individuals in the group. Physical size of the group was much less important to Lacey than the attitudinal attributes of the group – in particular, what Lacey frequently referred to as the "perceptions" of the individuals.

Lacey first shared her perspective on the importance of individuals' perceptions during the initial interview when she self-identified as "gay". Later on during a book discussion, Lacey stated how a fellow student once called her lesbian in a derogatory

way, but Lacey did not use the term to refer to herself. Lacey also frequently joined the other girls in discussing romantic relationships, relationships she has had with her girlfriend and with males. However, she does not use the term bisexual to describe herself. After this self-identity statement, Lacey shared that she does not reveal herself as being lesbian unless she knows the individuals in the group have perspectives accepting of homosexuality. Lacey stated this is not the case with many members of her extended family who, according to Lacey, hold religious views in which homosexuality is not accepted.

Like Lacey, Sarah also places primary importance on the attitudinal attributes of the group in influencing her ability to express her self-identity. Sarah employed the phrase “open and accepting” to describe both the attitudes of individuals and the atmosphere they in turn create in environments in which she can “be herself.” Unlike both Lacy and Bianca, though, Sarah emphasized small groups were most conducive to her self-identity expression. While Bianca would like to have seen more participants in the book club, Sarah felt the small size was ideal – allowing all girls to have their voices be heard. Sarah described herself as shy – especially in groups in which she did not know the other members. Sarah also stated once she got to know the individuals, she was more comfortable and finally able to speak. During the final interview, Sarah shared how participating in the book club had helped her be able to speak up more often in her classes. In this way, participating in a group that reflected both the physical (small) and attitudinal (open and accepting) attributes Sarah stated as positively influencing her ability to express her self-identity served as a bridge to her being able to express her self-

identity in an environment that reflected physical and attitudinal attributes that were not conducive to expressing her self-identity.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have presented three participant case studies of adolescent females participating in an after-school book club. I have also presented a case study on the book club itself and ended with a cross case analysis. I offered background information and self-identity statements shared by each of the girls to lay a foundation to address the two exploratory questions: What elements constitute selected adolescent girls' perspectives on identity? What influences their self-identity expression?

Self-identity statements and background information gathered on each of the three case study participants helped shape portraits of adolescent girls whose perspectives on their own identities were both convergent and divergent. The same proved true when addressing the two exploratory questions: The participants appeared to hold identical perspectives on identity, yet stated unique, varied perspectives on environmental elements influencing their self-identity expression.

Bianca self-identified as an independent, goal-oriented individual who was also a leader and impulsive. These self-identity statements were reflected in Bianca's perspective on an environment in which she could express her self-identity. Bianca preferred a large group which held the potential for a wide range of multiple perspectives affording her the opportunity to engage in debate. Bianca made no statements regarding the attitudinal attributes of members of this large group. Like Sarah and Lacey, Bianca's perception of identity reflects a sociocultural perspective. All three case study participants viewed identity as a developing, evolving process highly influenced by

societal standards and expectations – especially for females. The girls also saw the social environment as affecting identity in the frequent mismatch occurring between what the individual perceives as his or her self-identity being expressed and how others in the environment perceive the identity.

The participant case studies focused on the issue of identity from the perspective of three individual girls. By including the book club as a case study, I brought those perspectives together and described how the individual perspectives shaped and were shaped by the collaborative group. Supported by participant statements made during the final interview when I asked the girls to reflect on the book club and their experiences participating in it, the book club case study describes a social environment conducive to self-identity expression. Sarah stated in the initial interview she felt she could be herself in small group environments in which individuals were “open and accepting.” Even when tension among the participants arose, the group regulated itself and restored a sense of community. The wide range of topics discussed provides further evidence of the “open and accepting” atmosphere. Lacey emphasized her need to know individuals in a particular environment held what she termed “perceptions” allowing her to freely express her true self, her self-identity – including the part of her self-identity she often hides, being lesbian. While she knew two of the other participants, she did not know the other two and she did not know me, the participant-observer. And yet during the initial interview, Lacey shared her self-identity as “gay” with me and discussed openly her girlfriend and challenges she faces in expressing her true self. On a number of occasions during the book club discussions, Lacey connected a romantic situation in the book with her own relationship with her girlfriend. In expressing this aspect of her self-identity,

Lacey indicated her sense the book club participants' "perceptions" were accepting ones. Bianca self-identified as a leader and a debater. She also self-identified as impulsive. Throughout the book club discussions and in both of the individual interviews, Bianca expressed those aspects of her self-identity. While Bianca stated she would have liked more participants in the book club to give her a greater opportunity to debate, transcripts of the discussions show she debated frequently with members of the group.

In the final chapter I provide a more thorough discussion of these individual and collective elements of the book club and the individual participants. I also present implications of this study on classroom teachers' practice, implications for teacher education programs, and suggested areas for future research.

Chapter Five

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Gleaning knowledge and understanding from a research study involves a recursive process of looking at the past, the present, and the future. In this chapter I begin with a brief summary of the study's purpose, literature review, exploratory questions, and research procedures. I continue with a discussion of the study's results and their place within the current literature. I conclude the chapter with implications for practice and recommendations for further research.

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain selected adolescent girls' perceptions of identity through an after school book club. Reflecting a growing focus on adolescent literacy as a unique field, the present study's relevance lies not only in supporting and questioning existing research, but also by contributing to filling gaps in the research.

Situated at the intersection of adolescent literacy, adolescent female identity development theory, reader response theory, and sociocultural theory, this study stands upon historical theories that have become the cornerstones of literacy (Rosenblatt, 1978; 1995) education (Vygotsky, 1978; Langer, 2000; Lewis, Enciso & Moje, 2007), and human development (Erickson, 1963, 1964, 1968, 1986; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982, 1993; Gilligan, Lyons & Hanmer, 1990). Many recognize the need for

research located at the confluence of these theories (Galda and Beach, 2001; Moje & Lewis, 2007) and exploring their relevance today, yet few studies exist heeding that call.

Two exploratory questions guided the study:

1. What elements constitute selected adolescent girls' perceptions of identity through an after school book club?
2. What elements influence their self-identity performance?

Marshall and Rossman (2011) stated, "Qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people" (p. 2). These three tenets of qualitative research methodology informed all aspects of the study design from data collection to analysis. Individual interviews, discussion transcripts, researcher reflective journal transcripts, and participant reader response journal transcripts comprised the data collected to address the two exploratory questions. As a feminist researcher, I sought to highlight the often-silenced voices and perspectives of the adolescent female participants in the study and presented data and analysis through case studies focusing on three of the five book club members and the book club itself. Research found data poems served as an additional method to privilege the participants' voices. Sections of my researcher reflective journal were included in introductory sections of each participant case study to make the ongoing activity of reflexivity transparent to the reader.

Finding Meaning in the Individual Case

In the previous chapter, I focused on fulfilling the first part of this purpose. In presenting data gathered from interviews, discussions, reader response journals, field notes, and a researcher reflective journal, I attempted to describe the experiences of five adolescent females participating in an after-school book club. I now turn to the second

part of the purpose, explain the participants' experiences, and offer meaning derived from the explanation.

Learning from Sarah

Sarah's experiences in the book club demonstrate the critical role environmental factors play in creating an atmosphere in which a self-identified shy individual is able to fully express herself. In the initial interview, Sarah reflected a keen awareness of herself and environments conducive to her self-identity expression. She emphasized her self-identity as "shy – super-shy" and stated clearly those environments in which she could be herself were small groups of individuals who were "open and accepting." Sarah was able to make this assessment of the group attitude quickly. During the initial interview, Sarah immediately offered lengthy, rich responses to my questions – requiring few instances of prompting for elaboration. At the first book club meeting, in a group comprised of individuals who Sarah knew only slightly as classmates, she contributed readily to the discussion. Both Lacey and I provided initial support for Sarah in having her perspectives clearly heard (and not be dominated by the more outgoing Bianca), and then throughout the remainder of the first book club meeting and the meetings that followed the support was no longer needed; Sarah not only became one of the most frequent contributors to the discussion, she was also the voice most often attended to by the other book club members. Figure 2 presents a visual representation of Sarah's self-identities, the physical and attitudinal elements of the conducive environment in which she is able to express those self-identities, and her perceptions of identity.

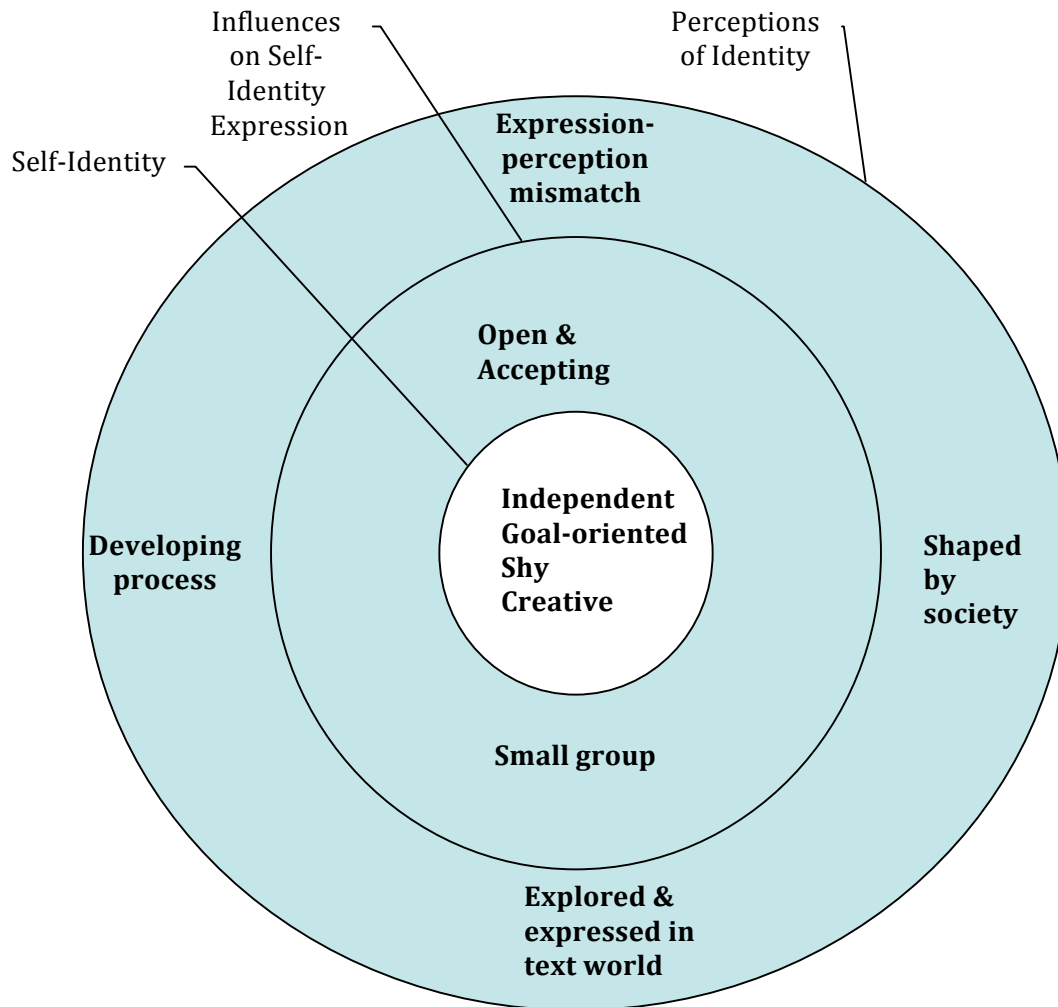


Figure 2: Sarah’s Perceptions of Identity, Influences on Self-Identity Expression, and Self-Identity Statements

Not only did the book club environment provide Sarah an atmosphere conducive to her self-identity as shy, but it also allowed Sarah to express herself as creative. Sarah shared in the initial interview that she thought “like a book” and perceived the world around her not as black and white, but shades of gray. These self-identity statements of Sarah’s are evident throughout the book discussions as she shared often contradictory views of the readings with the other participants.

Sarah also shared in the initial interview that she did not express herself in classroom discussions. Within the classroom environment, Sarah said she preferred to listen rather than contribute to the discussions. In the final interview, however, Sarah indicated this was beginning to change due to her participation in the book club. For Sarah, the book club served as a safe practice ground for her to express her self-identity freely. Receiving positive feedback from the group members who listened intently to her statements, reflecting, building, and valuing these statements, Sarah was able to assume a new identity in group discussions. While she continued to listen carefully to other girls' comments, she was most frequently a contributor to the discussions. This new identity, formed and expressed within a sociocultural framework Sarah considered conducive, then became expressed in an environment Sarah considered non conducive – the environment of a classroom. In this way, Sarah confirmed Rogoff (1995) who asserted, “People change through transforming their participation in sociocultural activities” (p. 266). Sarah’s use of the conducive environment of the book club as practice ground for a new identity in the non-conductive environment of the classroom reflected what Rogoff termed “participatory appropriation” in which individuals are able to successfully engage in later situations due to their active participation in a previous situation.

Sarah’s case therefore not only reveals the ability of adolescents to embrace new self-identities, but also their ability to express these self-identities in new environments (Rogoff, 1995). Through participation in the book club, Sarah experienced a change in her own perception, intricately connected to others’ perceptions (Tatum, 1997) – those of the girls in the book club. Sarah stated in the final interview, “And I got a look at different – it kind of made me look at things differently.”

Sarah was afforded the opportunity to “look at things differently” not only through listening to and interacting with the multiple perspectives of the other girls in the book club, but also the characters in the texts who formed the basis of the discussions – first with Frankie (*Frankie Landau-Banks*) and later Jane, Bella, and Yetta (*Uprising*). Sarah viewed each of the characters from a potential relationship perspective (Mishler, 1999). Even when Sarah stated she could never be friends with Frankie, she contrasted herself with her and in doing so, expressed her self-identity to the group while acknowledging and affirming the identities of Lacey and Bianca who aligned themselves with Frankie and her self-identity expression through covert pranks committed against the private school administrators.

This aspect of the character Frankie led to divisiveness among the girls. Bianca and Lacey firmly agreed with Frankie’s actions as a method for establishing both how she perceived herself and how others perceived her: self-identity and identity. The girls were in agreement that not only did Frankie want to shed her own perception of herself as the “bunny rabbit,” but she also wanted others to see her as an empowered individual. According to Sarah, however, Frankie’s focus on altering others’ perceptions of her was evidence of her lack of independence and empowerment. As firmly as Sarah held to that perspective, Bianca and Lacey cheered with each of Frankie’s new school pranks.

Through the shared text, the girls reflected Rosenblatt’s (1994) assertion that books offer adolescents a mode of exploring and interpreting their unique thoughts, emotions, and ways of interacting with the world. A world often inhospitable to those unique qualities.

Learning from Bianca

Bianca's experiences participating in the book club demonstrated that adolescent girls vary in what they perceive as environments conducive to their self-identity expression. Bianca was the only participant who stated in the final interview that increasing the number of participants would have improved the book club. According to Bianca, more participants more would have meant more perspectives – perspectives affording her more opportunities to “debate and win.” Bianca was both consistent and unique in her preference for large groups with an adversarial atmosphere as conducive to her self-identity expression. In the initial interview, Bianca shared a model for this atmosphere in describing her favorite class: marine science – especially during debate over current event articles.

Figure 3 presents a visual representation of Bianca's self-identities, the physical and attitudinal elements of the conducive environment in which she is able to express those self-identities, and her perceptions of identity.

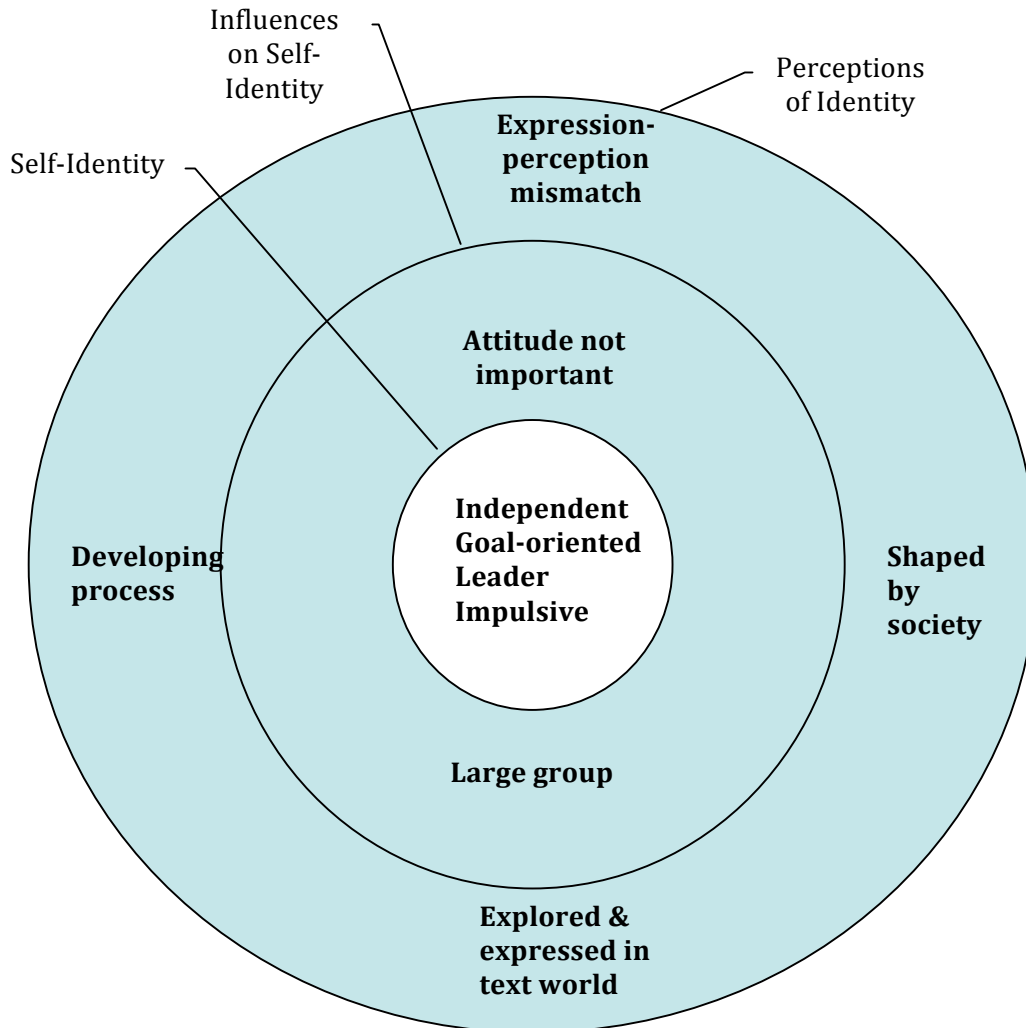


Figure 3: Bianca's Perceptions of Identity, Influences on Self-Identity Expression, and Self-Identity Statements

Bianca's participation in the book club mirrored this same debate-like approach. Bianca therefore did not reflect Lamb's (1991) assertion that teacher-constructed classroom discussion in which students are instructed to adopt an adversarial position of convincing a reader to accept a particular response as valid marginalize and silence females for whom connectedness and relationships are of primary importance (Belenky et al, 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan et al, 1990; Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Bianca's perception was that within an adversarial environment she was able to express her self-identities. When

the book club did not reflect the physical or attitudinal elements she perceived as conducive to her self-identity expression, Bianca's response was far from passive acceptance, silence or marginalization.

Bianca acted as an active agent of change and created an atmosphere in the book club she perceived as conducive to her self-identity expression. Rogoff's (1995) "participatory appropriation" was reflected in Bianca's attempt to transfer the qualities of conducive environments such as her large, debate-oriented marine science class to the non-conducive environment of the small, relationship-oriented, discussion-based book club. Bianca's case clearly demonstrates that adolescent females do not necessarily play a passive role in merely reacting to environmental factors. Like the other participants, Bianca viewed identity as a sociocultural construct, yet unlike the others, Bianca perceived individuals as empowered with the ability to make changes to their environment to create an atmosphere conducive to their self-identity expression. If it were within her powers, Bianca would most likely have recruited more participants to join the book club – thereby enlarging the group and providing her with the physical space she needed to be herself. While enlarging the group was not possible, though, Bianca attempted to shape the attitudinal atmosphere of the group to reflect what she perceived as necessary for her self-identity expression. The first words transcribed in the first book discussion are from Bianca who stated, "I make everything difficult. Semi-intentionally." Later in the final interview, Bianca stated that she enjoyed being part of the book club because it gave her the opportunity to state her opinions and engage in "debating with the other girls on viewpoints and winning." Clearly conveying her goal in discussing/debating with others, Bianca stated: "I like to win. It's one of my favorite

things – winning.” Bianca’s perception of the book club as having a debate-like atmosphere persisted even though on numerous occasions the other members of the group (who stated preferences for environments with open, non-adversarial atmospheres) worked together to thwart her attempts.

Bianca’s case also shows how adolescent females will enlarge their literacy practices if these practices reflect environmental factors conducive to self-identity expression. This reflects Dewey’s (1916) assertion of the “educative” power of the social environment as individuals participate in a “conjoint” activity and are “saturated with its emotional spirit” (p. 26). The multiple perspectives and numerous instances of differences of opinion provided Bianca with an environment in which she could express her self-identity. The educative power of the social environment can be seen in Bianca’s change in perspective concerning reading preferences. When the participants discussed the book list and began considering what texts they would read, Bianca was adamant that she did not enjoy reading historical fiction. She stated her strong preference for science fiction or fantasy as they offered “opportunities” in which anything could happen. This preference mirrored Bianca’s self-identity statement as being someone who “thinks outside the box.” Ultimately, and with Bianca’s strong input, the girls decided on two texts, which were neither science fiction nor fantasy. Bianca was the first to suggest both. *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks* is realistic fiction featuring a teenage girl attending an elite prep school. Bianca had stated in the initial interview she never read realistic fiction, especially texts whose plot and central character were similar to her and her own life. Yet in the *Frankie Landau-Banks* text, the parallels are clear. Frankie challenges the status quo at her private school. Bianca self-identified as an

environmentalist, a tree-hugger, and a debater – and spoke in great lengths about the private prep school she previously attended.

The second text, *Uprising* – historical fiction, Bianca immediately identified on the book list due to the author – one of Bianca’s favorite. Once she began reading the text, Bianca became immediately engaged. Like *Frankie Landau-Banks*, *Uprising* offered Bianca characters with whom she could immediately identify – characters whose actions Bianca perceived as reflecting self-identities mirroring her own. Frankie, the challenger to the status quo and in *Uprising*, Yetta – a young woman who organized strikes against the shirtwaist factory owners. Beyond simple identification with the characters, though, Bianca’s strong preference for the book *Uprising* indicates the important role text world environment plays. *Uprising* is told in alternating chapters focusing on the lives of three very different young women. These three women held multiple perspectives on the social issues central to the text and offered Bianca much more than self-identity connection – they offered her substance to engage in debate. The two texts, one realistic fiction, the other historical fiction, represent literature Bianca rejected as a reader – yet cited as positive aspects of participating in the book club. Bianca’s experience indicates that genre features may be less important to a reader’s enjoyment of a text than the degree to which the environment in the text world reflects those factors the reader perceives as conducive to her self-identity expression.

Learning from Lacey

Lacey’s experiences participating in the book club demonstrate the critical role perception may play in adolescent girls’ self-identity expression as well as their keen ability to discern and evaluate others’ perceptions. Sharing her self-identity as goal-

oriented, school-focused and therefore uniting her with the other girls, Lacey also shared her self-identity as a lesbian early in the initial interview.

Like all of the other girls except Bianca, Lacey emphasized attitudinal attributes of the environments as either conducive or not conducive to her self-identity expression. Like Bianca, the physical size of the environment was inconsequential. Lacey's case occupies space separating her from all of the other girls, and yet uniting her with other adolescent females beyond the book group. Figure 4 presents a visual representation of Lacey's self-identities, the physical and attitudinal elements of the conducive environment in which she is able to express those self-identities, and her perceptions of identity.

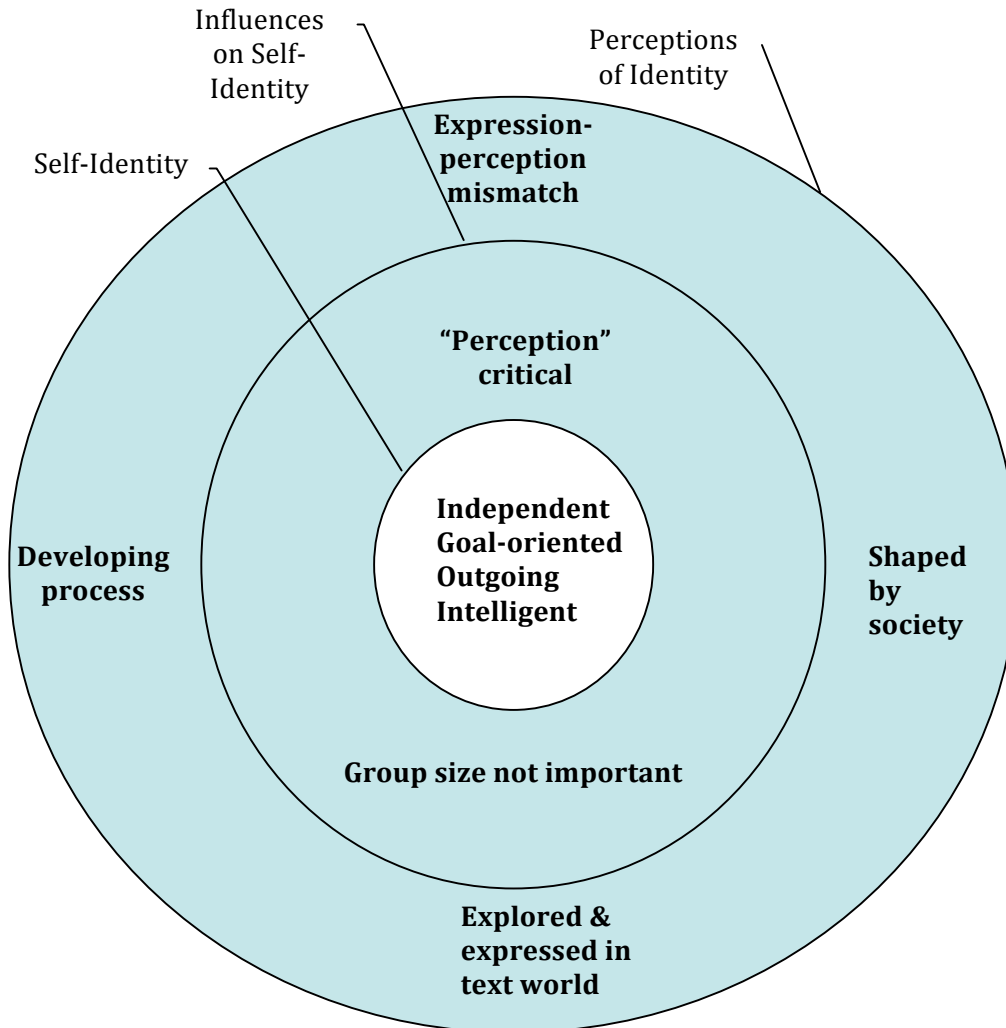


Figure 4: Lacey’s Perceptions of Identity, Influences on Self-Identity Expression, and Self-Identity Statements.

Lacey’s case demonstrates a unique perspective on adolescent female identity expression in her focus on the perceptions held by members of the sociocultural environment. Lacey herself employed the term “perception” and exhibited an acute awareness of the term in practice – an awareness gained through extensive and frequent experience. In both her home and school environments, Lacey learned both the importance of individual’s perceptions – most specifically concerning their perception of homosexuality as acceptable or unacceptable – and how to gauge the presence of those perceptions. In her

home environment, Lacey shared her self-identity as a lesbian with her mother and father, but not with members of her extended family, many of whom Lacey stated embraced religious perspectives in which homosexuality is considered a sin and therefore unacceptable. In this way, Lacey reflected what Brown and Gilligan (1992) stated as embodying the qualities of the female, relationship-oriented self seen particularly as young females “resolve a conflict between responsibility to others and responsibility to self” (p. 35).

At school, the environment resulting from the merging of two schools and the subsequent upheaval in terms of student body caused Lacey to feel what she described as “separating from other people – other groups” because there were many new students she did not know. She contrasted this atmosphere with the previous year in which she knew nearly everyone in her grade and most in the other grades as well and saw herself as “popular.” Lacey’s case further demonstrates that some adolescent females, perceiving the presence of often hostile perceptions, will purposefully separate themselves from environments they are not certain are conducive to their self-identity expression – environments often reflecting broader societal norms (McCarthy & Moje, 2002).

Lacey’s case also shows the importance of self-identity expression to adolescent females, an act that does not necessarily require reinforcement from the environment. Lacey indicated she knew all but one of the participants in the book club prior to her participation. Her self-identity expression while participating in the book club indicates she had prior knowledge concerning group members’ perceptions – especially their acceptance of homosexuality. During discussions, Lacey on a number of occasions contributed to the talk focusing on romantic relationships by sharing statements about her

girlfriend. All of those discussions were verbally one-directional. Lacey's statements were not so much accepted as they were received without comment; a process Lacey seemed to perceive as indicating acceptance because she continued in other instances to share statements reflecting her self-identity as a lesbian. This contrasted with the other girls' experiences. They received positive, reinforcing verbal feedback for their comments about their romantic relationships with males in various forms including statements building on the comments and statements contrasting the comments with dissimilar experiences. But Lacey received nothing verbally except for in one instance. Lacey had made a statement about how her girlfriend thinks she looks beautiful even when she's just wearing workout shorts and a tank top. After giggling slightly, Katie responded by saying, "Oh, it's like that song by Drake" and then began singing the first lines about a boy's love for his girlfriend when she's dressed casually.

Learning from the book club

The experiences of each participant selected to be the focus of a case study provided multiple opportunities for learning. However, as the girls themselves indicated in adopting a unifying pseudonym for the group itself, The Super Girl Nerd Squad, the experiences of the participants must also be viewed in connection with one another. The book club was therefore identified as a separate case study. As stated in the methodology section, I began the study outlining the specifics of the book club in broad strokes – mostly in terms of procedural matters such as where the club would meet, for how long, etc. However, the book club evolved from an idea on paper to the vibrant entity it became in the hands of the participants themselves. Considering the book club, or more accurately The Super Girl Nerd Squad, offers multiple opportunities for learning.

One aspect of what can be learned from the book club is connected to the situation discussed above concerning members of the book club not responding to Lacey's self-identity expressions as a lesbian. This aspect of the book club demonstrates that while perception of an environment may inhibit an adolescent female from self-identity expression, even when the individual perceives a conducive atmosphere, the environment itself – specifically, the members who comprise the environment – may find the expression not conducive to its functioning. Lacey perceived the attitudes of the girls in the group as accepting of homosexuality and therefore felt able to express this aspect of her self-identity. However, the complete silence that followed all but one of Lacey's comments made in sharing her homosexuality demonstrate that adolescent females may reflect accepting or tolerant perceptions of homosexuality, but they may not be able to embrace it in the same way they embrace heterosexuality. When the topic of the group discussion was a male-female romantic relationship in one of the texts, the group members engaged in an easy, seemingly effortless pattern of sharing personal connections and responding/reacting to one another's connections. This was not the case when Lacey shared personal connections about her same-sex relationship. The group became silent and the pattern stopped abruptly. As a group, the book club members appeared unable to situate homosexual self-identity statements within the perspectives of heterosexual self-identity statements shared among the majority of the group members.

The book club case study also demonstrates the ability of adolescent females to engage in effective group maintenance behavior (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998). As a self-identified debater, authoritarian, and leader, Bianca immediately and consistently attempted to create an environment in the book club conducive to her own

self-identity expression. Debate, rather than discussion appeared to be her goal. However, the other group members operated together to maintain their shared goal of a book club environment focused on discussion. The issue of whether or not to embrace a talking stick or some other mechanism to ensure equal voice and participation is one example of how the group members regulated their own behavior. While the majority of members favored using a talking stick or an auditory cue such as clapping, Bianca expressed strong feelings against adopting this practice as it would add an element of restrictiveness to individual expression in the group. The book club ultimately worked together to find a middle ground with all agreeing to be more aware of providing space for equal and full participation by all group members.

The book club also worked as a single entity to regulate potential threats to the “open and accepting” attitudinal environment present. When Lacey expressed her feelings that Bianca had belittled her, Lacey was supported by the other group members who clearly, yet without malice, stated that Bianca did indeed belittle Lacey. A common misperception of adolescent females would lead to predicting a situation such as this would escalate to Lacey and the other members “ganging up” against Bianca. The book club demonstrated this is not necessarily the case. While not directly apologizing to Lacey, Bianca engaged in dialogue reflecting a more humble, uniting attitude – dialogue immediately accepted by the group members. The participants described the book club environment as conducive to their self-identity expression, and it is important to recognize the contribution the girls themselves made individually and collectively to establishing and regulating the environment.

Cross-case issues

By beginning with a focus on learning from the experiences of the individual adolescent females who participated in the book club study, I have continued to emphasize and privilege the voices of these young women. Drawing on those experiences further, I now turn to addressing the two exploratory questions.

Perceptions of identity. Psychosocial theories of human development acknowledge that an individual's identity is located both within and without. Erickson (1963, 1964, 1968, 1986), widely cited in research focusing on adolescent identity development is prominent among those who embrace this sociocultural view of identity development. The participants in the book club all shared this perception of identity as a sociocultural construct. Erickson's views further coincide with those of the participants in the book study by viewing identity as both developmental and exploratory. The significant point of departure between Erickson and the findings of the present study exists in how Erickson viewed gender differences in identity development. According to Erickson, a female's identity development is held in a sort of limbo until she is able to fashion an identity that will attract a male, for he is the one from whom she will be known. The girls in the book club all acknowledged this perspective of female identity development exists, but maintained it existed with other girls and not with themselves. Bianca engaged in a lengthy description of how her younger sister mimicked this process even as a kindergartener. However, Bianca also viewed this process as not inherent within females, although she used the word "desires" when stating, "The female population desires..." Later statements reflect Bianca's perspective that the process is established by society and perpetuated by the participation of females.

Gilligan's work with adolescent females rejected other aspects of Erickson's theory of adolescent identity development. While Erickson viewed adolescents as exploring and eventually achieving identity through separation from others, Gilligan found this male-oriented perspective was not true for females for whom identity development was based on relationships. The data gathered in the present study supported Gilligan's relationship-oriented perspective on adolescent female identity development, but with one noteworthy exception.

Four out of the five girls who participated in the book club repeatedly emphasized the importance of relationships not only in their lives, but to their self-identity. Only Bianca failed to make any direct statement about the value of friends and relationships. However, Bianca's experience when the group supported Lacey in her challenge to Bianca as belittling her, indicates the value she placed on maintaining relationships. While not apologizing to Lacey, Bianca worked quickly and purposefully to repair the injury to their relationship and re-established her position as a member of the group. Bianca, who repeatedly stated her self-identity as a debater and challenger of the status quo, reflected what Brown and Gilligan (1992) found regarding the importance of relationships to adolescent females.

The complexities and layering found in Sarah, Lacey, and Bianca, however, cause even Gilligan's view of adolescent female identity development to be too restrictive. Bianca often appeared more separation-oriented, just as she seemed to embrace the adversarial approach to literature discussion – both deemed as male-oriented by male theorists such as Erickson and feminists such as Lamb (1991). Some might ask: Is Bianca appropriating these behaviors as a sign of independence (where independence is

construed as a male quality; so in order to be independent, a female must act like a male)?

However, this question continues to position females in relationship with male-oriented theory. Listening to the perspectives of the girls and learning from their individual case studies necessitates fashioning a new vision. The girls in the book club study established themselves clearly as independent individuals. Through self-identity statements and expressing perspectives often contradicting those of other members of the book club during discussions, the girls indicate the need for a new model of female adolescent identity development. This new model needs to reflect girls and their sociocultural worlds of today. The new vision must reject the dichotomous approach of identity as either Erickson's male-oriented separation theory or Gilligan's female-oriented relationship theory, and instead reflect a continuum. Along this continuum, all adolescents will be able to find space for self-identity development, exploration, and expression. Figure 5 represents various positions along this continuum each of the three participants occupied at various times during the study. Through self-identity statements made without the presence of other participants during initial/final interviews and in her reader response journal as well as those made during book discussions in which other participants were present, Bianca primarily displayed characteristics of Erickson's model of identity through separation. However, as stated in Chapter Four, Bianca did indicate a degree of value placed on relationships during book discussions when her statements led to isolation from the group. In those situations, Bianca actively sought to regain her status as a group member – often through the use of humor. Similarly, Lacey and Sarah primarily embodied Gilligan's relationship-based view of female identity. But like Bianca, Lacey and Sarah often displayed qualities more reflective of Erickson's model.

books, Katie, too identified their appeal as residing in the nature of the text world, not the characters. According to Katie, within this world “anything can happen.”

However, book discussions consistently focused on the individual characters, and only occasionally on the nature of the text world. Contradicting Blackford’s findings, the girls discussed these characters by evaluating first their actions through comparison with themselves, then how the actions reflected on the character as an individual, and often concluding with an evaluative statement indicating whether or not this character would be embraced as a friend. Blackford relied on interviews with the adolescent females to gather data concerning their reading preferences. The data from the present study included not only interviews, but also reader response journals, and discussions. Findings from these varied forms of data indicate the process of text selection in adolescent females is much more complex than Blackford reported. Overt statements the participants made during individual interviews concerning their reading preferences do confirm Blackford’s findings: The girls stated a preference for books with characters separate from their own experiences. However, in reader response journals and collaborative discussions, the girls indicated an affinity for characters with whom they perceived a sense of shared self-identity. Without this shared self-identity, the girls expressed dislike for the text itself. Sarah expressed such a strong disconnect with the central character Frankie in *Frankie Landau-Banks* she may have stopped reading the book had it not been part of the book club. Bianca, too, continued throughout most of the discussion of *Uprising* to rail against the character Jane. Were it not for the presence of characters such as Yetta, with whom Bianca stated a self-identity connection, she too would have abandoned the book. The girls did not want or need the characters and their

experiences to mirror their own lives; but they did express through the journals and discussions the need for a shared sense of self-identity with the character(s).

Finally, the experiences of the five girls in the book club study indicate the common misperceptions existing concerning the nature of adolescent identity. Again, unlike Erickson's concept of identity as undeveloped in adolescence and shifting with each storm and crisis, the girls in the study indicate the need for a different perspective. Sarah, Bianca, and Lacey each showed a clear sense of self-identity. Statements expressing the nature of their individual self-identities remained consistent throughout the book club and reflected in both individual contexts such as the interviews and reader response journals and group contexts such as the weekly book club discussions. As described in the individual case studies and the book club case study in Chapter Four, the girls each had a clear sense of understanding regarding elements in environments that were both conducive and not conducive to their self-identity expressions. Further, the girls expressed a keen ability to regulate their environments and when necessary, to adapt to non-conducive environments.

Influences on self-identity expression. In Chapter Two I shared two statements by reader response theorist Louise Rosenblatt that have particular importance in light of the findings from the present study. Rosenblatt referred to the role of reader response in the lives of adolescents stating:

The adolescent particularly may be helped to interpret his own acutely self-conscious emotions and motivations ... Books may help the adolescent perceive the validity of his own temperamental bent, even when that bent may not be valued by his own environment. (1994, p.192)

Rosenblatt continued to address the value of employing a reader response approach to literature instruction with adolescents and emphasized the particular value to female adolescents by stating:

The adolescent worry over the need to conform to the culturally dominant pictures of the temperamental traits, types of work, and modes of behavior appropriate to each of the sexes can be lessened through a wide circle of literary acquaintances. The young girl may need to be liberated from the narrow view of the feminine role imposed by her milieu. (p. 193)

Rosenblatt's words are embodied in the experiences of the five girls who participated in the present study. Even with, or perhaps especially with, the characters the individual girls railed against (for instance the character Jane in *Uprising* for Bianca and the character Frankie in *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks* for Sarah), this "wide circle of literary acquaintances" offered the girls the opportunity to "be liberated from the narrow view of the feminine role." Sarah continued to resist Frankie's covert and overt attacks on the male-dominated practices in the male-dominated world of her school and the Basset Hound Club, but then discussed in the final interview how she had changed as a result of participating in the book club in terms of how much more she speaks up in class and in her more feminist perception of the world around her. Did Frankie's transformation from bunny rabbit to empowered, outspoken young woman help "liberate" Sarah from being a shy female – a role she both self-identifies with and attributes to other's perceptions of her?

The book club environment both physically and attitudinally mirrored those Sarah identified as being conducive to her self-identity expression. Practicing in the conducive

environment (the book club) therefore gave rise to self-identity expression in a non-conducive environment (the classroom). Rosenblatt's perspective may also be reflected. Both texts involve characters challenging established, male-dominated social structures. The example Sarah shared in elaborating on her statement that being involved in the book club helped her to see things differently was the use of symbols on bathroom doors. "We're not just men with dresses," Sarah stated.

Bianca offered both a similar and contrasting example of Rosenblatt's perspective reflected in the book club. Bianca entered the book club as an outspoken and outgoing individual, exhibiting characteristics of a highly empowered adolescent female. She and Lacey cheered first with the character Frankie and later with Yetta – characters who mirrored self-identity statements made by Bianca and Lacey themselves. What, then, did the character Jane offer these two adolescent female readers? Bianca stated she "begrudgingly" forgave Jane. In the end, Bianca was finally able to accept and embrace empowerment and identity as a developing process of becoming. This, too, was an act of liberation. Bianca may now be more accepting of girls like book club member Katie who she constantly teased for not speaking up and asserting her thoughts and opinions. Both characters with whom adolescent female readers can identify and those with whom they may at first reject may become part of what Rosenblatt termed a "wide circle of literary acquaintances" and therefore part of the sociocultural world the girls inhabit beyond the book club.

The present study therefore confirms previous research finding all-adolescent female book discussion groups serve as sites of empowerment and agency for participants (Radway, 1997; Cherland & Edlesky, 1994; Finders, 1997; Carico, 2001; Smith, 2001).

Cross-case analysis indicates that through participating in the literacy events associated with the book club, adolescent females gained cultural power (Radway, 1997) enabling the crafting of new self-identities formed in the safe arena of the conducive environment of the book club and enacted in the non-conductive environment of the classroom. The present study also confirms Cherland and Edelsky (1994) who found adolescent females used fiction as a mode of exploring female agency outside the realm of patriarchal societal norms. In the present study the fiction texts reflected feminist perspectives, yet Cherland and Edelsky's study encompassed a broader range of fictional texts with a similar finding. Analysis of the three cases further supports findings indicating that, for adolescent females, reading is both active and agentive. The participants in the present study reflect this agentive quality both in fashioning new self-identities and expressing them in non-conductive environments, as well as in affecting change in these non-conductive environment to fashion a more conducive one.

Implications for Practice

Individually and collectively, the adolescent girls who participated in the book club study offered rich opportunities for learning about the nature of identity and elements influencing identity expression in a literature-based context.

Literacy as a Sociocultural Construct

The increasing pressure of high stakes testing has led to significant shifts in classroom pedagogical practices. This shift is particularly evident in reading and English language arts classrooms. Pedagogy that is attendant to standardized tests in reading often requires students to read passages of both fiction and non-fiction text, and then requires them to determine the "one correct answer." The implications of student

performance on these tests are felt by school districts, schools, students, and increasingly teachers, for whom merit pay is quickly becoming the norm. In varying degrees, all forms of merit pay involve basing part of teachers' salaries to students' performances on standardized tests. While teachers may theoretically embrace reader response and student-centered classrooms, they increasingly feel the pressure to reduce effective pedagogical practices to simply "teaching to the test." In reading and English language arts classrooms this often translates into skill instruction designed to enable students to perform well on the state test. Classrooms such as these are bereft of the type of space that was provided for the girls in the book club. Within this space the girls engaged in deep, thoughtful, critical responses to literature, while expressing their self-identities and exploring others' identities. As adolescents, these five girls were provided space by and with a trusted adult to engage in what is acknowledged to be a critical element in human development: identity exploration (Erickson, 1963, 1964, 1968, 1986; Gilligan, 1982, 1993; Marcia 1966, 1980 Grotevant, 1987; Moje, 2002). Sumara's text, *Why Reading Literature in School Still Matters*, serves as a reminder that literature's value is far more than text material used to teach workplace literacy skills.

Focusing solely on literacy as a set of skills denies students the opportunity to experience the full measure of what literary engagement can offer. Sumara (2002) describes the nature of this experience as "an important site for the ongoing interpretation of the personal, the communal, and the cultural" (p. 12). The Super Girl Nerd Squad is not an aberration occurring in an environment outside of a classroom; it is both evidence of the possible and the necessary.

Classroom Discussions

None of the questions listed on either the initial or final interview protocols made any reference to teacher and classroom practices, and yet unprompted, each participant contributed decided perspectives on them – particularly classroom discussions. This is perhaps not surprising, given that all of the girls reported they had never participated in a book club before. Classroom discussions were their only point of reference to reflect and comment on the activities in the book club. Collectively the girls painted an unfavorable picture of classroom discussions. When they exist, they are almost exclusively whole class and used to assess content knowledge. The literature discussions the girls described occurring in their language arts classes reflected the male-oriented, adversarial approach (Lamb, 1991) in which responses are deemed valid only when supported by evidence from the text. While students who self-identify as debaters, like Bianca, might feel positive initially with this type of discussion, when they discover that rather than a true debate, what is actually occurring is a game of “guess what’s in the teacher’s mind” they will feel the opportunity to engage in true, meaningful debate has been co-opted by the teacher. What is mistakenly referred to as discussion is in fact a search for the single correct answer, according to the teacher. Bianca, who also self-identified as someone who “thinks outside the box,” would not find room for that type of thinking in this environment.

The case studies and participants’ observations comparing the book club with classroom discussions clearly indicate a mismatch between these discussions and what the girls identified as elements creating an atmosphere conducive to their self-identity expression. The majority of the girls in the book club stated small group environments

were those in which they could express their self-identity, and yet the girls expressed predominantly negative views of the few examples of small groups they'd experienced in their classes. Sarah, Bianca, and Lacey differed in their preferences for small or large groups in which they could express their self-identities, but shared a common need for environments in which there was space for individual self-identity expression. Space they did not find in the classroom. Sarah used the term "open and accepting." Bianca found this space in fantasy novels and referred to it as "room for opportunity." Lacey, who had already honed a keen ability to gauge other's perceptions of homosexuality, could only be part of larger groups when she feels acceptance for her self-identity as a lesbian.

To meet the needs of all students, teachers can arrange discussions in both small group and whole class structures. However, successful discussions – those which offer students rich opportunities to engage with text, make connections, derive personal meaning, explore and express self-identity – these discussions will only occur when the teacher has considered not only the physical environment but also the attitudinal environment. While I consistently sought to maintain a researcher role as a participant observer, I am also aware that both my actions and lack of actions contributed to the open and accepting atmosphere the girls perceived as existing in the book club. In each decision in the design and implementation of the book club study, I attempted to balance my needs as a researcher with the needs of the adolescent females participating in the study. I needed rich, descriptive data for the study, the girls needed autonomy, choice, and an adult who deeply valued their voices and trusted their ability to engage in meaningful literary discussions. Lacey's statement during the final interview assured me

this balance had been achieved. In reflecting about the nature of the discussions, she observed: “If you let them, kids will go off topic, but if you trust them enough, they’ll mostly come back, too.” Classroom teachers must practice that same level of trust. Building trusting relationships with the students as individuals and reflecting this trust in the organization of the classroom and the activities in which students engage establishes a culture of trust, leading to an open and accepting environment in which students are able to express their various self-identities.

Literature Selection

As a researcher intent on avoiding playing a possible teacher role, my goal was for the girls to feel a sense of empowerment – to create the book club as their own space. In turn, the girls themselves created a space that was a “cultural context(s) that both called for and expected the active thought and participation of each student.” (Langer, p.18) Classroom management principles, even the design of literature circle role sheets and other protocols for small-group discussions (Daniels, 2002; Raphael & McMahon, 1994) are touted as mechanisms to help teachers ensure students are able to engage in rich discussions. Inherent in the concept of rich discussions is the idea that students stay focused on the topic of discussing the book. This is part of a larger concern among educators about “off task” talk and behavior. From the book club and spending copious amount of time reading and re-reading transcripts of the discussions my perspective is that nothing is really off topic when viewed as part of a collaborative conversation. When I expanded my goal of creating a book club for adolescent readers to providing space for those readers, my own perception and subsequent acceptance of what would transpire within that space also expanded. I engaged in the act of trust Lacey described.

As a result, I began to see a powerful pattern emerge. Discussion began with a reference to a character or event in the text, it expanded through further contributions from the text by other group members, then personal connections began to be shared, the personal connections then led to discussions about personal lives not connected with the text, and finally, one of the participants would bring the discussion back to the text by sharing a new observation.

While the foundational notion of a small group of readers gathering together to read and discuss a shared text is present in both the Daniels and Raphael & McMahon models, they bear little else in common with the out-of-school adult book clubs described by Long (2003). Nowhere in Long's work does she describe book clubs in which readers prepare and read from role sheets or engage in individual writing/representing activities prior to a leader-directed group discussion. And while scaffolding is a key feature in effective instruction, its use is predicated on the assumption that there is a novice-expert learning situation. With data from the book club study, I am now able to address questions asked semi-rhetorically in Chapter Two: Are our young readers bereft of the ability to engage in meaningful discourse? When does scaffolding become a disabling crutch smothering individual self-expression?

Literacy events occurring in a classroom are often based on a masculine gender orientation (Lamb, 1991; Belenky et al, 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan et al, 1990; Gilligan, 1992). Entering the study, I wondered: As the girls shared their individual responses to literature outside of the classroom environment and with only other females present, what kinds of literacy events would take place? Would the girls reflect the masculine-based classroom practices in their book club interactions, or would the female-

based social environment of the book club encourage connectedness and relationships, offering space for them to make their authentic voices heard?

Bianca stated her self-identity as a debater in the initial interview and continued to express that self-identity and approach to discussion throughout the book club. Is this evidence of how deeply entrenched the male-oriented, adversarial approach to classroom literature discussions in which a reader has to defend his/her interpretations by evidence gained from the text is with Bianca?

Teacher Education

The experiences of the five girls who comprised The Super Girl Nerd Squad offer significant implications for preservice teacher education programs. Listening to the voices and perspectives of these adolescent females provides numerous “whys” for what is frequently espoused as exemplary pedagogical practices. One of these practices is cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1974; Slavin, 1977). Structures such as think-pair-share, numbered heads together, and round robin are highly touted as methods to engage students in learning with and through interactions with peers. Methods courses, adolescent learners courses, classroom management courses and others emphasize cooperative learning, yet focus primarily on the academic over the affective domain. As the experiences of these five adolescent girls indicate, engaging in meaningful discussions not only deepens understanding of the material discussed, but also affords adolescents the opportunity to participate in Dewey’s (1916) “educative” social environment. Dewey described what we now term cooperative learning groups in which individuals work in concert with one another in a shared activity, acquiring skills, ways of work, and subject area knowledge while being “saturated with its emotional spirit” (p.

26). The experiences of these girls indicate the need for teacher education curriculum to continue to emphasize the benefits of cooperative learning, but to enlarge the focus to include the critical role these small groups play in providing many adolescent females a conducive environment in which they can express their self-identities.

Teacher preparation programs, too, should consider shifting away from the almost exclusive emphasis on defining adolescents and adolescent identity through the work of Erikson (1950). As discussed previously, the five girls in the book club shared and expressed a range of perceptions of identity that defy Erikson's male-oriented view. Preservice teachers in secondary education programs need to understand the developmental needs of the students they will one day teach. Curriculum in teacher education programs must move beyond a single identity-through-separation model, by including the work of Brown and Gilligan (1992) who viewed identity-through-relationships. Ultimately, however, preservice teachers need to see adolescent identity as fluid and its development as unique as the adolescents themselves.

Recommendations for Future Research

Participants

The five adolescent females who participated in the present study were in many ways a homogenous group: white, middle to upper-middle class, academically successful students. Closer examination, through the case studies, reveals numerous ways these girls distinguish themselves as individuals. Therefore, participant selection procedures offer additional opportunities for future research. In partial reaction to Kindlon's (2006) portrayal of the high-achieving, successful, self-confident Alpha Girl, I conducted participant selection for the present study exclusively through eighth grade advanced

language arts classes. Even in so doing, the girls who ultimately became participants in the study represent a range of academic abilities (most notably Lacey who while self-identifying as academically goal-oriented, also self-identified as someone who is “just now getting into reading,” contrasting sharply with the other participants who self-identified as proficient readers). My intent, however, was not to explore identity perception exclusively among white adolescent females, though this was the result of my selection procedure. Future research, therefore, should include perspectives from adolescent females from diverse racial, ethnic, and achievement backgrounds. A diverse group of participants offers the opportunity to explore self-identity from multiple perspectives and within an environment that may more closely mirror the diversity of our society and schools.

An additional area for future researchers to consider in terms of participants is the number recruited for the study. Research focusing on a group is tenuous, and even more so when the participants are adolescents. While my intent was always to form discussion groups not exceeding five members per group, having exactly five participants caused a great deal of anxiety. I knew to plan for attrition in working with groups, however with five participants my ability to experience attrition and still have a participant discussion group that would engage in rich descriptions and therefore provide rich data was significantly less than if I had been able to recruit my projected number of ten participants. Ultimately, I believe this lack of tolerance for attrition led me to work even harder to establish a sense of community and ownership among the girls. Feeling positive about and invested in the book club would, I hoped, lead the individual girls to continue to participate in the group and therefore the study. I also made additional

contacts with the parents throughout the eight weeks the book club met, further ensuring the girls' participation.

Reader Response Journals

Reader response journals occupied an important place in the initial overall design of the study. The response journals would provide a view of individual readers engaging with the text prior to and separate from the book club discussions. I would then be able to see how reader response theory operated in the sociocultural context of the individual reader within the text world as well as the context of the individual reader, the text world, and the book club world. From the first week onward, though, getting the girls to write in their journals was a struggle. At one point, I tried using journal writing as a way for us to wrap up our meeting. I hoped by using the journal as a way to individually reflect on the weekly discussion meeting, the girls would begin to see the journal as a part of their participation in the book club. Even that quiet reflection time became a challenge, though. I also tried the gentle reminder to write in their journals in a weekly note I sent to each girl via their language arts teacher. Still, journal writing remained inconsistent among most of the girls, and I remained convinced I was missing out on a rich source of data. Turning as always to the girls themselves to help guide me, I asked the girls to reflect on the reader response journals during the final interviews.

Rachel made the following statement hinting at possible reasons the reader response journals were not successful:

If you're reading for half an hour, you have to slow down, think about it, then write. And then you might want to reword what you were thinking and then you want to go deeper into your thoughts because it's like, in a journal that other

people are reading that could help with studying.[final interview transcripts,
October 2010]

When I asked Rachel what she meant about the journal helping with studying, she responded, “Yeah, like studying how people might react to books. You might want to reword it so that it’s deeper in thought.” Clearly, Rachel felt self-conscious in writing in a journal she knew would be collected and used as data in a research study.

Future researchers conducting a similar study have the option of employing certain structures to encourage the participants’ engagement with the reader response journals. Structures or tools others have used include a weekly prompt, a graphic organizer, or a list of reader response prompts from which participants may choose (Galda & Beach, 2001; DeBlase, 2003). However, in qualitative inquiry the researcher is a data collection instrument and as such, the role of the researcher significantly affects the study data. Shifts in the role of the researcher may therefore result in a shift in the data. Ever mindful of remaining as much as possible a participant observer in practice and in the participants’ perceptions, I elected not to employ a structure or tool for the readers to use as these are too often associated with teacher-directed mechanisms for response to literature. Rachel’s comment confirms that composing a written response carried with it formality and permanence. Rachel remained conscious that she was composing not a personal response, but data to be collected and analyzed. During one of the book club meetings, Sarah indicated her awareness of how the discussions would also be shared with an outside audience, but her statement reflected a casual observation of fact. In contrast, Rachel’s statement about the response journals reflected a self-

consciousness resulting in restricting the transactional relationship between reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1995).

Future researchers who engage in a similar study therefore must be aware that by employing a structure or tool to encourage participants to consistently compose individual responses to literature they may gain data, but these structures/tools will impact the data differently. I saw a significant part of my role as the researcher as ensuring the book club – The Super Girl Nerd Squad – was the girls’ space. This perspective is in keeping with my focus on qualitative research as naturalistic inquiry (Merriam, 2009). Any data I may not have had access to as a result of my approach in dealing with the lack of consistency in writing in the response journals was worth what I gained in terms of maintaining the natural environment of the study.

Researchers could also consider offering participants alternatives to composing writing responses in journals. In the present study, those participants who indicated they enjoyed writing not surprisingly most consistently wrote in their reader response journals. If participants were given various options in representing their transactions with the text, however, there may be a greater consistency with completing individual responses. Verbal responses delivered via a digital recorder, visual representations such as drawings, even perhaps musical compositions could be presented as alternatives to a reader response journal. Employing other technologies such as email, blogs, or private messages sent via social networking sites may also appeal to many adolescent females who feel most comfortable composing in digital environments.

Book Selection

As shared in Chapter Three, the process of constructing a book list from which the girls would choose was a lengthy and critical process. In similar studies, researchers have chosen either to have the responsibility of book selection be up to the researcher (Carico, 2001; Smith, 2001; Galda & Beach, 2001) or the participants (Blackford, 2004; Finders, 1997). Constructing a list of books from the Amelia Bloomer Project annual list achieved my goal of balancing the needs of the study with the needs of the adolescent female readers in the study. At the intersection of these needs is the need for rich, descriptive data in the form of book discussions and response journals – data that would only be present if the readers were able to engage deeply with the texts. The exploratory questions, too, informed the process of book selection. I needed to find books that would invite the participants to explore individually and collectively issues of identity. I therefore began to narrow my search to texts featuring strong female protagonists. When I discovered the Amelia Bloomer Project annual book lists with their focus on feminist texts, I was confident I'd found a list that would meet all the various criteria.

Ultimately through group discussion and consensus, the girls selected two texts reflecting the experiences of adolescent females from a range of perspectives. In *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks*, the girls engaged in transactional experiences with a strong female protagonist who mirrored the sociocultural world in which girls themselves lived. As a white, upper-middle class heterosexual female attending an elite private school, Frankie offered Sarah and Bianca the opportunity to see themselves, at least their sociocultural backgrounds, reflected. In *Uprising*, the three female protagonists represented slightly more diverse, immigrant backgrounds. Yet the

voice that opens and closes the story is Jane's: a white, upper-middle class heterosexual female. Future research should include texts whose characters represent an even greater range of diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. Lacey's experiences participating in the book club particularly emphasize this need. Lacey, who self-identified as a lesbian, readily engages with the other participants in discussions involving male-female romantic relationships, and helps to maintain the momentum of the interactions among the girls. However, on the rare instances in which Lacey contributed to the male-female romantic relationship discussion with a comment about her female-female relationship, the interactions abruptly and uncomfortably ended. Reading a book with a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) character would not only have allowed Lacey to see her own self-identity reflected within a text, but also provided the participants with scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) to help them learn how to engage in discussions involving sexual orientations not their own. Bullying in middle school is increasingly a problem leading to often tragic results. Suicide among teen victims of bullying is occurring at an alarming rate; often the bullying is tied to the victim's sexually orientation. With the inclusion of a text including a LGBTQ character, future research could explore how engaging in discussions about same sex relationships could help address the fear and ignorance associated with differences in sexual orientation often at the heart of bullying.

Literacy as a Sociocultural Construct

The view of literacy as a sociocultural construct in which individuals' shape and are shaped by language tools is foundational to the present study and rests upon a rich theoretical and research background (Vygotsky, 1978; Heath, 1983; Rogoff, 1995; Cole,

1990; John-Steiner & Mann, 1997; Lewis, Enciso & Moje, 2007). Further research that continues to explore culture as shaping literacy practices and literature as shaping cultural practices must also focus on the culture that develops in small group communities such as the book club. Even in eight weeks, the girls who attended the weekly one-hour book club meetings formed a community. However, in order to fully explore how a community such as this shapes the literacy practices of the participants, a more longitudinal approach would need to be employed. Future research could involve a book club meeting for a full academic year and with a broader focus on the literacy practices of the participants beyond the book club to home and school.

Role of the Researcher

As a qualitative researcher, I am cognizant of my role as an instrument. I collected the data; I analyzed the data. My presence itself as a participant observer at the book club meetings affected the data I collected. Future researchers who engage in qualitative methodology must also be aware of this researcher as instrument role and actively engage in reflexivity throughout all aspects of the study. Active use of a researcher reflective journal, including entries in presenting the data are critical to “embracing subjectivity, replacing the pretense of objectivity” (Marshall & Rossman 2011, p. 35). Working with minors adds another element future researchers must consider. Participants who are adolescents present many similar challenges as conducting research with younger children, but just as the adolescents themselves are unique, so are the challenges (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Holmes, 1998).

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the present study took nearly four months. The study itself did not take place on school property, but the initial stage of

recruitment did. In order to enter the language arts teachers' classroom and distribute a flyer about the book club study, I was required to complete a 20-plus page approval document for the local school district, signed by the middle school principal. I had been forewarned by a member of my doctoral committee that working with minors would be as she phrased it "a nightmare." The four month process during which I revised and submitted, revised and submitted a number of times in working toward obtaining IRB approval for the study approached embodying her prediction. I share this experience with future researchers so that they too will be forewarned, but not so that they will decide not to pursue research focusing on adolescents.

As a feminist qualitative researcher, one of my goals is to highlight the lived experiences of others – especially those whose voices have been traditionally silenced. There currently exists a tremendous gap in research focusing specifically on middle school-aged adolescents, and if future researchers turn away from that research due to the potential of experiencing similarly lengthy, arduous IRB approval process the gap will remain.

Chapter Summary

In this final chapter I have discussed the findings of the present study. I began with a brief summary of the purpose and significance of the study, and then continued with a section on finding meaning in the individual case in which I returned to the case studies of three participants and the book club. I then explored cross-case issues. Next, I focused on the two exploratory questions. I began by discussing the elements constituting participants' perspectives on identity, and revisiting key theorists and significant research presenting in Chapter Two, the review of literature. I then discussed

the second exploratory question, sharing new understandings about the physical and attitudinal attributes of the social environment that influence adolescent female's self-identity expression. In the final two sections of this chapter I presented implications from the present study on classroom practices and concluded with recommendations for future research.

A careful examination of the data resulted in distinct, yet overlapping perceptions of identity. First differentiating between identity (other's perception of who you are) and self-identity (your perception of who you are), all of the participants shared a sociocultural view of identity as intricately connected to the social environment. Self-identity statements made by the participants showed commonalities such as being school-focused, as well as differences ranging from being shy to outgoing and from artistic to a challenger/debater. The participants were keenly aware, too, of the environmental elements conducive to their abilities to express those self-identities. Three participants strongly preferred small group environments with an atmosphere of open acceptance. One participant focused exclusively on the element of acceptance and further expressed an ability to discern what she termed "perceptions" on the part of individuals in the particular environment. As she stated, this ability has been acquired as a result of experiences when she has shared with others her self-identity as a lesbian. The fifth participant in the study contrasted with the others in her preference for large groups with a debate-like, adversarial environment.

The inability to place these five adolescent females within one perspective of adolescent female identity development rejects either Erickson's (1950) male-oriented, identity through separation model or Brown and Gilligan's (1985) view of female identity

as relationship-centered. The adolescent females in the present study reflect the need for a new model that is both linear and fluid. Within this expansive model, adolescent female identity will be seen as developed both through separation from others and building relationships with them. Operating within this model, adolescent females are afforded the opportunity to express their many self-identities.

The present study supports previous research indicating for adolescent females, engaging in literacy events is both active and agentive. In addition, the findings in the present study reflect this active and agentive nature of literacy holds true across individual self-identities and descriptions of conducive environments for expression of those self-identities. For example, a self-identified shy adolescent female is empowered to form a self-identity of someone who volunteers to speak more in class. Participation in a book club reflecting a self-described conducive environment provides the individual safe space to practice the new self-identity prior to expression in the non-conductive environment. Empowerment may also be expressed in enacting change to the environment itself. For example, an adolescent female who self-identifies as a debater and describes a conducive environment as one that contains a large number of individuals, will seek to engage participants in adversarial debate and move them away from collaborative discussion. Empowerment and agency through participation in literacy events, therefore, allows adolescent females to enact change internally by crafting new self-identities, or externally by changing aspects of the sociocultural environment.

Final Reflections

The purpose of my study was to describe and explain selected adolescent females' perspectives on identity through participating in an after school book club. As I write these final pages of what has been a six year journey, I begin a brief reflection on that journey by considering the extent to which I was able to fulfill that stated purpose.

At the heart of the purpose statement are the words “adolescent females’ perspectives” and “book club.” From the beginning of my doctoral studies, I knew adolescent females and reading would be the central focus of my dissertation. I retained that focus through years of part-time coursework as I continued my employment as a full-time middle school language arts teacher. I believe it is because of remaining connected to these adolescents that the book club was successful and the study findings relevant contributions to the field of adolescent literacy. Theoretical coursework by night, pedagogical practice by day – the interweaving of the two formed a tapestry of the researcher I am today. Grounded in understanding and valuing adolescents, knowing that it is only through listening to their voices that will result in significant research, I am the better researcher because of these adolescents.

The year-long sabbatical I have taken in order to complete this dissertation has afforded me the opportunity to delve deeply into the data I have collected from the book club study. And as I read and re-read the words of the book club girls, and listened to hours of interview and discussion transcripts during commutes to and from the university, I thought about females and identity. I heeded the words of professors on my doctoral committee and listened to what the data – the girls – would tell me. Naturally, as a reflective researcher, I thought often about my own identity as a female. As the girls in

the study reported being changed as a result of participating in the book club, I too, have experienced a change in my own self-identity. With the aid of my doctoral committee, I have persevered not only in knowing how to engage in qualitative research, but also how to be a qualitative researcher. This shift from doing to becoming; from activity to identity was neither linear nor complete. I close this study knowing that with each future study I engage in I will continue to adopt new facets of my self-identity as a researcher. An appropriate and necessary close to this text is with focusing once again on the girls in the study. The five members of The Super Girl Nerd Squad breathed life into the equation I proposed in Chapter Two. Elements of peer interactions, increased autonomy through choice, physical movement, and relationship-building activities with teachers added together equal book clubs in which meet the unique developmental needs of adolescents (Figure 6).

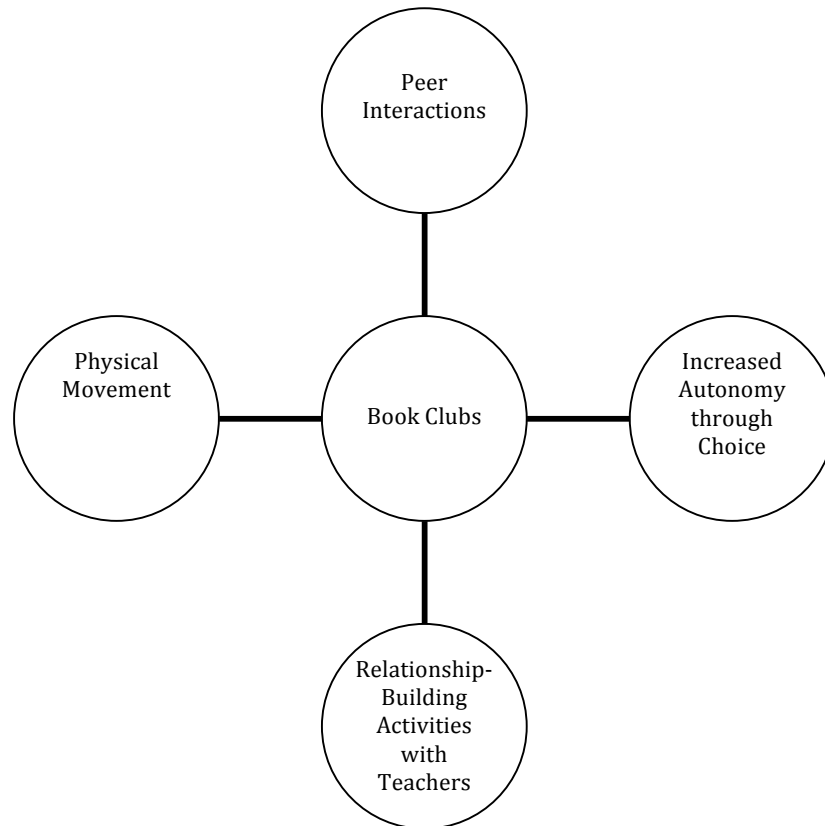


Figure 6: Components of Effective Book Clubs Meet Developmental Needs of Adolescents

One hour each week for eight weeks, Sarah, Bianca, Lacey, Katie, Rachel (and I) gathered at a picnic table to eat pizza and talk about books. What the girls gave was rich data with significant implications for classroom practice. While the setting and the pizza contributed to the relaxed feeling and so added to the sense of community, the elements in the above equation can easily be duplicated in the classroom. What the girls received from participating in the book club is equally significant. The girls left the book club having had the opportunity to engage in an enjoyable book-related experience – something they all reported as new. The girls also left the book club being able to engage in rich explorations about who they were as adolescent females, engaging in those explorations through the safety of book characters, and within an open and accepting

atmosphere. I began the book club study intent on highlighting and valuing the voices of adolescent females, and I hope I have honored these girls by doing so. I have not reduced these girls to simplistic, shallow categories of either Alpha Girls or Ophelias. Sarah, Bianca, Lacey, Katie, and Rachel have taught me that adolescent females today are so much more layered and complex. They may express self-identities reflecting Kindlon's Alpha Girls or Pipher's Ophelias, or both depending on the nature of the environment. Through books and small group discussions, adolescent females have the opportunity to explore and express those varied self-identities.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Book Club Flyer

Girls' Book Club!



About the Book Club

Join your fellow 8th grade girlfriends reading, writing, and chatting about books. We'll meet once a week for 8 weeks. Interested? Contact Mrs. Holly Atkins for more information: hatkins@mail.usf.edu.

What: Girls-Only Book Club

When: Wednesdays

Where: Bicentennial Park
(State Road 699, next to Tom
Stuart Causeway)

Time: 1:30 pm to 2:30 pm

Other: Free books, free pizza
and soda

Appendix B
Informed Consent Form

Parental Permission to Participate in Research

Information for parents to consider before allowing their child to take part in this research study

IRB Study #

The following information is being presented to help you/your child decide whether or not your child wants to be a part of a research study. Please read carefully. Anything you do not understand, ask the investigator.

We are asking you to allow your child to take part in a research study that is called:

Girls' Identities in a Book Club

The person who is in charge of this research study is Holly S. Atkins, M.A. of the University of South Florida. This person is called the Principal Investigator. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Jane Applegate. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge.

The research will be done at Bicentennial Park on State Road 699 (Tom Stuart Causeway) in Madeira Beach.

Should your child take part in this study?

This form tells you about this research study. You can decide if you want your child to take part in it. This form explains:

- Why this study is being done.
- What will happen during this study and what your child will need to do.
- Whether there is any chance your child might experience potential benefits from being in the study.
- The risks of having problems because your child is in this study.

Before you decide:

- Read this form.
- Have a friend or family member read it.
- Talk about this study with the person in charge of the study or the person explaining the study. You can have someone with you when you talk about the study.

- Talk it over with someone you trust.
- Find out what the study is about.
- You may have questions this form does not answer. You do not have to guess at things you don't understand. If you have questions, ask the person in charge of the study or study staff as you go along. Ask them to explain things in a way you can understand.
- Take your time to think about it.

It is up to you. If you choose to let your child be in the study, then you should sign this form. If you do not want your child to take part in this study, you should not sign the form.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to describe and explain selected adolescent girls' perspectives on identity through a book club. The research will be carried out through pre- and post study interviews and eight weekly, one-hour book discussion meetings. Other researchers have used similar procedures to study adolescent females in book clubs. This study builds on that existing research.

Why is your child being asked to take part?

We are asking your child to take part in this research study because she is an adolescent female. We want to find out more about the experiences of adolescent females when they participate in book clubs.

What will happen during this study?

Your child will be asked to spend 8 weeks in this study. During this time period, your child will be asked to engage in a pre-study individual interview, followed by eight weekly one-hour book meetings, and concluding with a post-study individual interview. The pre- and post-study interviews, as well as the eight weekly one-hour book meetings are being performed strictly as part of the research.

A study visit is one your child will have with the person in charge of the study or study staff. Your child will need to come for ten study visits in all. Study visits will take about 30 minutes (individual interviews) and one hour (weekly book discussion meetings).

Below is a timetable for the study:

Your child will be asked:

- To be interviewed individually at the beginning and end of the study. The questions asked during these interviews will be about her views on herself, reading, and the book club. The purpose of these individual interviews is to provide the researcher with an understanding of who she is and the role of reading in her life. These interviews will be recorded using a voice activated digital recorder.
- To read at home a book she and the other participants will select and write her thoughts down about the book in a journal she will bring to the weekly meetings. The

- purpose of the journal writing is to provide the researcher with information about her individual reactions to the book.
- To attend eight weekly, one-hour book discussion meetings and share her thoughts/ideas about the book. The purpose of these meetings is to provide the researcher with information about individual and group experiences of adolescent females in an all-girls book club. These discussions will be recorded using a voice-activated digital recorder.
 - Audio recordings of the individual interviews and book club discussions are essential to data collection. Participants will be asked to select a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. This information will be known only to me and the chair of my dissertation committee. Prior to data transcription, the digital recorder containing the electronic data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked office. Electronic files transferred from the digital voice recorder will be stored on a password protected computer on a secured server which is backed up nightly. Per University of South Florida requirements, data will be kept for five years at which time the informed consent forms and the hard copies of all transcripts will be shredded. Digital files will be deleted and erased from the computer hard drive.

What other choices do you have if you decide not to let your child to take part?

If you decide not to let your child take part in this study, that is okay.

Instead of being in this research study your child can choose not to participate.

Will your child be paid for taking part in this study?

We will not pay your child for the time she volunteers while being in this study.

What will it cost you to let your child take part in this study?

It will not cost you anything to let your child take part in the study.

The study will pay the costs of:

- Books
- Journals
- Refreshments during book club meetings

What are the potential benefits to your child if you let him / her take part in this study?

The potential benefits to your child are:

- Being provided with additional training by a skilled teacher in an informal, small group rather than a formal classroom setting.
- Reading and discussing engaging group-selected novels in a relaxed, off-campus setting with the potential benefit of having fun with their peers.

What are the risks if your child takes part in this study?

There are no known risks to those who take part in this study.

What will we do to keep your child's study records private?

There are federal laws that say we must keep your child's study records private. We will keep the records of this study private by keeping records in a secured place according to University of South Florida policies. Transcripts will be shredded and disposed of five years after the end of the study.

We will keep the records of this study confidential by having participants select pseudonyms that will be used in all aspects of the study.

However, certain people may need to see your child's study records. By law, anyone who looks at your child's records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your child's records. These include the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the staff that work for the IRB. Individuals who work for USF that provide other kinds of oversight to research studies may also need to look at your child's records.
- Other individuals who may look at your child's records include: agencies of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Office for Human Research Protections. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your child's rights and safety.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your child's name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who your child is.

What happens if you decide not to let your child take part in this study?

You should only let your child take part in this study if both of you want to. You or child should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study to please the study investigator or the research staff.

If you decide not to let your child take part:

- Your child will not be in trouble or lose any rights he/she would normally have.

You can decide after signing this informed consent document that you no longer want your child to take part in this study. We will keep you informed of any new developments which might affect your willingness to allow your child to continue to participate in the study. However, you can decide you want your child to stop taking part in the study for any reason at any time. If you decide you want your child to stop taking part in the study, tell the study staff as soon as you can.

Even if you want your child to stay in the study, there may be reasons we will need to take him/her out of it. Your child may be taken out of this study if:

- Your child is not coming for the study visits when scheduled.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Holly S. Atkins at (727) 415-5429.

If you have questions about your child’s rights, general questions, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813) 974-9343.

If your child experiences an adverse event or unanticipated problem call Holly S. Atkins at (727) 415-5429.

Consent for Child to Participate in this Research Study

It is up to you to decide whether you want your child to take part in this study. If you want your child to take part, please read the statements below and sign the form if the statements are true.

I freely give my consent to let my child take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to let my child take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

Signature of Parent of Child Taking Part in Study Date

Printed Name of Parent of Child Taking Part in Study

Signature of Parent of Child Taking Part in Study Date

Printed Name of Parent of Child Taking Part in Study

Signatures of both parents are required unless one parent is not reasonably available, deceased, unknown, legally incompetent, or only one parent has sole legal responsibility for the care and custody of the child. When enrolling a child participant, if only one signature is obtained, the person obtaining the consent must check on of the reasons listed below:

The signature of only one parent was obtained because:

The other parent is not reasonable available. Explain: _____

- _____
The other parent is unknown.
The other parent is legally incompetent.

The parent who signed has sole legal responsibility for the care and custody of the child.

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect.

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Appendix C

Amelia Bloomer Project 2011 List

Introduction

Feminism is alive and thriving, a movement with a rich history that constantly gets reshaped and redefined. – Courtney E. Martin and J. Courtney Sullivan, Click p.17

As we honor strong, powerful girls and the books that inspire them, the Amelia Bloomer Project celebrates 2010, a year that has sounded a call to action for multiple generations of feminists to work together and reflected diversity of culture and format. We rejoice in stellar picture books with feminist content, welcome newly represented formats of zine, stencil and coloring books, and appreciate graphic novels that explore new visions for girls and women with a variety of artistic styles. These books encourage girls and young women to love themselves for who they are, overcoming issues of body image to create new cultural contexts that honor the beauty of all girls and women. Infinitely resilient, women and girls survive heartbreaking conditions to provide messages of hope to us all. We reimage our herstory through books that excite us with previously unknown jewels of information and empower us with historical fiction that challenges the past in which it was set and our own thoughts and actions now. Dystopian futures comment on practices around the world today and encourage us to change our behavior as well as inspiring us with sheroes who overcome unimagined odds. Girls and women embrace non-traditional roles that empower them and us.

...instinctively, we get that the scariest thing is not dying but not trying at all. - Eve Ensler, I Am An Emotional Creature p.110

The Amelia Bloomer Project is part of the Feminist Task Force of the American Library Association's Social Responsibility Round Table. The committee members are Angela Semifero, Marshall District Library (MI); Beth Olshewsky, co-chair, Tulare County Office of Education (CA); Dana Campbell, Corvallis-Benton County Public Library (OR); Jennie Law, John Bulow Campbell Library (GA); Joy Worland, Joslin Memorial Library (VT); Linda Parsons, Ohio State University (OH); Maureen McCoy, co-chair, Brooklyn Public Library (NY).

For more information, please visit the Amelia Bloomer Project blog
<http://ameliabloomer.wordpress.com/>

Recommended Titles 2011

Young Readers

Fiction

Browning, Diane. Signed, Abiah Rose. 2010. Unpaged. Tricycle Press/ Random House, \$15.99 (978-1-58246-311-7). PreS-Gr. 3.

Although she is a talented young artist, Abiah Rose is told that serious painting is “not girl’s work.” Undaunted, she secretly finds a way to sign her name to her art, while dreaming of an independent future.

Bunnell, Jacinta and Julie Novak. girls are not chicks coloring book. 2009. Unpaged. PM Press, \$10.00 (978-1-60486-076-4). PreS-up.

A laugh-out-loud coloring book in which each panel offers a different vision of empowerment for girls and womyn of all ages.

Nonfiction

Annino, Jan Godown. She Sang Promise: The Story of Betty Mae Jumper, Seminole Tribal Leader. Illus. by Lisa Desimini. 2010. Unpaged. National Geographic Children’s Books, \$17.95 (978-1-4263-0592-4). K-Gr6.

Betty Mae Jumper became the first woman to be elected tribal leader for the Seminoles. She is also a storyteller, a nurse, an alligator wrestler, and helped to start a newspaper.

Brown, Tami Lewis. Soar, Elinor!. Illus. by François Roca. 2010. Unpaged. Farrar Straus Giroux, \$16.99 (978-0-374-37115-9). K-Gr.3.

When others say girls can’t fly, Elinor’s courageous spirit leads her to defy her critics, completing a dare that shows the world what a girl can do.

Middle Readers

Fiction

Coombs, Kate. The Runaway Dragon. 2009. 292p. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$16.99 (978-0-3743-6361-1). Gr. 3-5.

Princess Meg’s dragon escapes from the palace grounds. Meg and her scrappy band of friends set out to find the dragon and encounter many adventures along the way.

Yolen, Jane. Foiled. Illus. by Mike Cavallaro. 2010. 160p. First Second, \$15.99 (978-1-5964-3279-6). Gr. 6-12.

Ace fencer Alieria bravely takes up the mantel of the world’s defender.

Nonfiction

Rothery, Louise. Lest We Forget: A Salute to the Women Who Entered Corporate America Without a Road Map. 2009. 56p. Seawordy, \$12.00 (978-0-615-30683-4). Gr. 4-up.

Whimsical line drawings share messages about sexism and discrimination.

Schraff, Anne. Ellen Ochoa: Astronaut and Inventor. 2010. 128p. Enslow, \$31.93 (978-0-7660-3163-0). Gr.4-7.

Breaking racial and gender barriers, Ellen Ochoa becomes the first Latina astronaut and continues to inspire youth across America today.

Young Adult

Fiction

Chevalier, Tracy. Remarkable Creatures. 2010. 320p. Dutton, \$26.95 (978-0-525-95145-2). Gr.9-up.

Mary Anning and Elizabeth Philpot forge an unusual partnership as they struggle for recognition of fossil discoveries in a scientific community disinclined to acknowledge women.

Doctorow, Cory. For the Win. 2010. 475p. Tom Doherty Associates, \$17.99 (978-0-7653-2311-8). Gr.7-up.

The sweatshop workers of the virtual world unite with one another and with traditional workers across continents and languages to fight for better conditions.

Oliveira, Robin. My Name is Mary Sutter. 2010. 364p. Penguin/ Viking, \$26.95 (978-0-670-02167-3). Gr.10-up.

Mary Sutter's indomitable determination to become a surgeon interweaves with a vivid account of the grizzly realities of the Civil War.

Nasrin, Taslima. Revenge. Translated by Honor Moore. 2010. 176p. Feminist Press, \$15.95 (978-155861659-2). Gr. 10-up.

By taking control of her own body, Jhumur regains the confidence and independence she experienced before her marriage to a traditional Muslim man.

Okorafor, Nnedi. Who Fears Death. 2010. 386p. Daw Books, \$24.95 (978-0-7564-0617-2). Gr. 11- up.

In post-apocalyptic Sudan, a young sorceress overcomes the stain of the genocidal rape from which she was conceived to rewrite relations between races and sexes.

Oron, Judie. Cry of the Giraffe. 2010. 190p. Annick Press, 12.95. (978-1-55451-271-3). Gr. 10-up.

Based on a true story, Wuditu, an Ethiopian Jewish girl, endures life in a refugee camp, slavery, and rape- and survives.

Nonfiction

Campbell, Susan. Dating Jesus: A Story of Fundamentalism, Feminism, and the American Girl. 2009. 215p. Beacon Press, \$24.95 (978-0-8070-1066-2). Gr.9-up.

Susan Campbell uses humor and insight to describe her unlikely journey from fundamentalist Christianity to feminism.

Appendix D

Amelia Bloomer Project Book Criteria

During the past five years of selecting appropriate books for the Amelia Bloomer Project of the Feminist Task Force of the Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American Library Association, members have determined that the four criteria are vital to the books selected:

1. Significant feminist content
2. Excellence in writing
3. Appealing format
4. Age appropriateness for young readers

The qualities for each will be taken in order.

Significant Feminist Content:

This may be the most difficult to determine because the definition of feminism is so simple: Feminism is the belief that women should be equal to men. Some feminists add to this by stating that feminism is the doctrine advocating social and political rights for women equal to men, including overthrowing institutions that oppress women, celebrating the creation of a female “counterculture,” or supporting the belief that women have a special relationship to nature and a responsibility to act as caretakers of the environment.

With the current trend of using strong female protagonists in fiction, a more specific explanation of feminism may be in order. Feminist books for young readers must move beyond merely “spunky” and “feisty” young women, beyond characters and people who fight to protect themselves without furthering rights for other women. Feminist books show women overcoming the obstacles of intersecting forces of race, gender, and class, actively shaping their destinies. They break bonds forced by society as they defy stereotypical expectations and show resilience in the face of societal strictures.

In addition, feminist books show women solving problems, gaining personal power, and empowering others. They celebrate girls and women as a vibrant, vital force in the world. These books explain that there is a gender issue; they don’t leave the reader to guess. A book with a strong female character that does not demonstrate that an inequality exists may not be a feminist book. Strong female characters may be plucky, perseverant, courageous, feisty, intelligent, spirited, resourceful, capable, and independent—but the book’s presentation may still not be feminist.

Suggested Criteria:

1. Does the book show an awareness of gender-based inequalities with action to change these inequalities?
2. Do girls and women take on nontraditional roles? If so, does the book point out that these roles are in opposition to society's expectations, that the person is breaking new ground?
3. Do females blaze new trails for themselves and those who follow them? (Again, does the book point that out?)
4. Do females use power for purposeful action, empowering others?
5. Does the book reflect female opportunities (or the lack of them), inequalities, and non-traditional roles in the era in which the book is set?
6. Has the protagonist grown in a positive manner, or does she stay dependent on others?
7. Does the girl or woman in the book depend on men to support her, or does she gain power through personal effort?
8. Is the protagonist the active party, or does she simply react to situations?
9. Is the protagonist's voice silenced? Does she become "squashed" between the beginning and the ending of the book? If so, does she ever regain her voice?
10. Do descriptions show the character of the person, or do they concentrate on attractive personal appearances?
11. Is there an emphasis on male activities, male photographs, etc.?
12. Is the word "feminism" used in the book? Is the approach positive to feminism?

Excellence in Writing:

Literary quality can be very subjective, yet it is vital to the success of the book. The book must appeal to young readers, but beyond that it must follow some criteria of good writing.

Fiction:

1. Is the characterization shown through action and dialog? Are the characterizations developed or flat?
2. Are the transitions strong? Are there holes in the plot? Does the ending satisfy?

3. Do all the scenes advance the plot? Is the plot overly predictable?
4. Is the book authentic and consistent—the setting, characters, the plot?

Informational Books:

1. Is the information in the book accurate?
2. How timely is the book? Will it retain its timeliness?
3. Is there diversity of people in the illustrations?
4. Is the writing objective, or does the author provide subjects with feelings and attitudes that are not substantiated?
5. Is the supportive material (index, glossary, bibliography, resource lists, etc.) appropriate and up-to-date?
6. Is the author successful in limiting the scope of the subject?
7. Is the material presented in logical sequence?

Books in General:

1. Is the book didactic? Does it seem to teach rather than entertain?
2. How well is language used—metaphor, analogy, pacing, etc.?

Appealing Format:

1. Is the format non-confusing, with illustrations close to related text?
2. Are the illustrations posed? Do they support and/or extend the text?
3. Are the captions clear and accurate?
4. Is the design inviting? Does the appearance of the pages invite the reader into the book?
5. Is the book something that young people will want to read instead of a reference work?

Appendix E

Participant Book List

About the Amelia Bloomer Project from the project's Facebook page (2010): "The Amelia Bloomer Project is an annual book list published by the Feminist Task Force of the American Library Association's Social Responsibilities Round Table for the purpose of honoring youth books with strong feminist themes published during the award year."

Bowen, Rhys. *In a gilded cage.* 2009. 276 p. Minotaur Books, \$24.95 (978-0-312-38534-7). Grades 7-up. Private investigator Molly Murphy becomes involved with the women's suffrage movement while balancing her attraction to NYC police captain Daniel Sullivan with the knowledge that marriage may well mean the end of both her freedom and to running her own business.

Bradley, Alan. *The sweetness at the bottom of the pie.* 2009. 384 p. Delacorte Press, \$23.00 (978-0385342308). Grades 7-up. Eleven-year-old Flavia De Luce spends her time studying chemistry, creating poisons, and spying on her family and neighbors. When a dead snipe with a postage stamp clutched in its beak appears just before Flavia discovers a man dying in the kitchen garden, she uses her skills to solve the mystery and save her family.

Perkins, Mitali. *The secret keeper.* 2009. 225 p. Delacorte Press, \$16.99. (0385733402). Grades 7-10. Amid the social and political turmoil of 1970s India, traditional views and familial expectations threaten Asha's dreams of attending university and pursuing a career.

Bunce, Elizabeth C. *A Curse Dark as Gold.* 2008. 395p. Scholastic, \$17.99 (978-0-439-89576-7) Gr. 7-up. When an eerie stranger offers to spin straw into gold, Charlotte must discover the benefactor's name and history before the price of his generosity destroys her village.

Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games.* 2008. 374p. Scholastic, \$17.99 (978-0-439-02348-1). Gr.7-up. When her little sister loses the lottery and becomes the tribute for the annual Hunger Games, a fight to the death shown on government-sponsored reality television, 16-year-old hunter Katniss Everdeen volunteers to take her place, and challenges the system in the process.

Headley, Justina Chen. *Girl Overboard.* 2008. 352 p. Little, Brown, Young Readers, \$16.99 (978-0316011303). Gr. 8-12. After a debilitating accident derails her pro-

snowboarding dreams and costs her the only place she feels she can be herself, 16-year-old Syrah Cheng must re-examine who she is and where she wants to go.

Lockhart, E. *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks*. 2008. 345p. Disney Book Group/ Hyperion, \$16.99 (978-078683818-9). Gr.6-up. When Frankie learns that she cannot join the all-male secret society at her exclusive prep school, she takes matters into her own hands. (National Book Award Finalist, Printz Honor Book, Booklist Starred Review).

Venkatraman, Padma. *Climbing the Stairs*. 2008. 247p. Penguin/ G.P. Putnam's Son, \$16.99 (978-0-399-24746-0). Gr.7-12. Against the backdrop of the movement for India's independence from British rule, Vidya is determined to gain her own independence from her family and continue her education. Booklist starred review.

Winston, Sherri. *The Kayla Chronicles*. 2007. 188p. Hachette Book Group/ Little, Brown, and Company, \$16.99 (978-0-316-11430-1). Gr. 7-11. Kayla and Rosalie's plan to expose the sexist selection process for their high school dance squad backfires when Kayla makes the team. Booklist starred review. Florida journalist.

Haddix, Margaret Peterson. *Uprising*. 2007. 272p. Simon & Schuster, \$16.99 (978-1-4169-1171-5/ 1-4169-1171-5). Gr. 7-12. Stories of three girls of different ethnic, social, and educational backgrounds demonstrate the solidarity during the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory strike and fire.

Sayres, Meghan Nuttall. *Anahita's Woven Riddle*. 2006. Harry N. Abrams, Inc./Amulet Books, \$16.95 (978-0-8109-5481-6/ 0-8109-5481-8). Gr. 7-12. In defiance of tradition, Anahita is determined to choose whom she will marry using a riddle in a rug.

Pratchett, Terry. *Wintersmith*. 2006. 323p. HarperCollins, \$16.99 (0-06-089031-2). Gr. 7-12. When thirteen-year-old witch-in-training Tiffany attracts the "undying love" of the Wintersmith, the spirit of winter, the "wee big hag" must use all her wits and powers to undo the harm her actions have caused and bring back spring, before it's too late. Booklist Starred Review.

Sheth, Kathmira. *Koyal Dark, Mango Sweet*. 2006. 250p. Hyperion, \$15.99 (0-7868-3857-4). Gr. 7-10. Thirteen-year-old Jeeta fights to find a balance between her East Indian traditional life and her "Western" ideals of furthering education and her choices of when and whom to marry.

McNaughton, Janet. *The Secret Under My Skin*. 2005. 272p. Eos/HarperCollins, \$15.99 (0-06-008989-X). Gr. 7-12. In the year 2368, when humans exist under dire environmental conditions, one young woman, rescued from a work camp and chosen for a special duty, uses her love of learning to discover the truth about the planet's future and her own dark past.

Mackler, Carolyn. *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Things*. 2003. 246p. Candlewick Press, \$15.95 (0-7636-1958-2). Gr. 7-10. Feeling like an alien within

her thin, brilliant, and gorgeous family, 15-year-old Virginia deals with her self-image, her first boyfriend, and her disillusionment with some of the people closest to her. Printz Honor Book.

Bradley, Kimberly Brubaker. *For Freedom: The Story of a French Spy.* 2003. 181p. Delacorte Press, \$15.95 (0-385-72961-8). Gr. 5-9. War changes everything, including the life of a young French girl who fights for her country, her honor and her freedom in this World War II tale based on a true story. (Rave reviews on Amazon.com)

Donnelly, Jennifer. *A Northern Light.* 2003. 389p. Harcourt, \$17 (0-15-216705-6). Gr. 7-10 Surviving life in poverty, her mother's death, the burden of raising her sisters on a farm, and the crisis of being the only person who knows the truth about a young pregnant woman's murder, 16-year-old Mattie fights to find her own voice and achieves her desire of going to college in 1906. Printz Honor Book.

Appendix F

Initial Interview Protocol

Purpose: The initial and final individual interviews will provide description of each girl during conversation with the researcher. The initial interview includes questions about identity, voice, and reading.

Questions Relating to Identity

How would describe yourself?

How would you describe what your life is like?

What would you tell someone who wanted to know who you really are?

Questions Relating to Voice as Female

When can you “be yourself” and express what you really think and feel? What keeps you from saying what you think and feel?

Questions Relating to Participant as Reader

What kinds of books do you read and why?

What role do books play in your life right now?

How much time each week do you spend reading?

Ending Question

(Janesick, 2004, p. 253): “Is there anything else you would like to add at this time?”

Final Interview Protocol

The final interview will provide participants the opportunity to reflect on their book club experience and evaluate the book club. Like the initial interview, the final interviews will provide further description of the individual cases apart from the social context of the book club. The final interviews will also contribute data addressing the three research questions.

Questions Inviting Reflection on Book Club Experience Literacy Events

How would you describe your experiences participating in an all-girl after school book club?

Identity and Voice

How have you changed as a result of participating in the book club?

Why did you join the book club? Why did you continue to participate?

How would you describe the book club activities (individual response journals and group discussions) as opportunities for you to share your thoughts and ideas?

Questions Inviting Evaluation of the Book Club

Literacy Events

What did you like about the book club? Why?

What do you think could have made the book club better? Why?

Ending Question

(Janesick, 2004, p. 253): "Is there anything else you would like to add at this time?"

Appendix G

Sample Interview Transcription and Analysis

Participant Name	Interviewer Question/ Participant Response Meaning Units High- lighted	Theme of Meaning Unit	Emergent Central Theme	Emergent Code
Interviewer	How would you describe yourself?			
Bianca	I'm a tree-hugger. I like science and that kind of stuff. But I'm not very linear. I like to think outside the box.	Bianca sees herself as an independent thinker.	Adolescent girls see themselves as independent thinkers.	Self-Identity: Independent Thinker
Interviewer	Can you give me an example of thinking outside the box?			
Bianca	Solving problems in ways people haven't solved them before.	Bianca sees herself as an independent thinker	Adolescent girls see themselves as independent thinkers.	Self-Identity: Independent Thinker
Interviewer	Can you give me an example of when that happened?			
Bianca	(pauses) Let me think about that. That's a hard question. (pauses) Well, every day. Like on a small scale, every day. A general one, civil disobedience, Nelson Mandela and South Africa. How he solved his problems – he tried to solve his problems – by not obeying a law he thought was unjust. Like that.	Bianca sees herself as an independent thinker	Adolescent girls see themselves as independent thinkers.	Self-Identity: Independent Thinker
Interviewer	Oh, interesting. Were you learning about that			

	in social studies?			
Bianca	No.			
Interviewer	How do you know about that?			
Bianca	I just...I think at my school last year, they talked a lot about him.			
Interviewer	Okay. So, how would you describe what life is like for you right now?			
Bianca	Very busy. I teach kids martial arts for about five hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays. My brother has baseball practices, and his games go on for hours. And I have two siblings: a brother and a sister. My brother's off the wall crazy and my sister is an 8 year old – so that's enough said right there.	Bianca sees herself as a leader, mentor, authority figure.	Adolescent girls see themselves as leaders, mentors, authority figures.	Self-Identity: Leader/Mentor
Interviewer	Where are you in the order...are you the oldest, the middle...?			
Bianca	I'm the oldest.			
Interviewer	Do you think that makes a difference where you are in the birth order?			
Bianca	Yes.			
Interviewer	What's it like for the oldest?			
Bianca	I usually have to babysit my brother and sister. I get to ... like if my mom's not home I make all the decisions. And sometimes if they can't find my mom they come to me and ask if they can do something. And I say, I don't know, tell mom. And they're like, I can't find mom. And I'm like, well do something about it.	Bianca sees herself as a leader, mentor, authority figure.	Adolescent girls see themselves as leaders, mentors, authority figures.	Self-Identity: Leader/Mentor

Appendix H

Example of Researcher Reflective Journal Entries

Researcher Reflective Journal Entry – September 20, 2010

One of the goals for this study was to create a space where voices of adolescent girls, often silenced in a classroom, could be heard. Yet I listen to Lacey. I hear her in the initial individual interview declare that to understand her you need to know about her “totem pole” – a kind of self-created hierarchical representation of what’s important to Lacey. First is school (she makes this statement often – her steadfast focus on school as a path for her future success.), next is her girlfriend, and third is her family (“I’m not that close to my family” she states). We talked further about her girlfriend and how she doesn’t reveal her sexuality to everyone – waiting until she gets a feel for how she’ll be received.

And so I wonder each time I listen to one of the book discussion meetings, is Lacey trying to get a feel for how she’ll be received in this group? During each meeting, she makes some comment about either her own sexuality as a gay/bisexual female, or homosexuality in general (“lesbians,” “dykes,” “girls kissing”). And each time as I listen to what follows after Lacey makes a comment, I hear pauses, silences, sometimes with or without a few giggles, even an occasional “oooooaaaaay.....” As though to say, “Hmmm, I’m not sure what to say about that.”

But often I hear a quiet murmur from Sarah affirming/validating Lacey’s comments. Dear Sarah – I would have liked to have known her when I was an 8th grader. I love her calm, self-assured, other-oriented nature. So it is dear Sarah who can be heard when I listen for the second or third time, quietly saying to Lacey, “I don’t think there’s anything wrong with being a lesbian. I have friends who are gay.” And yet no other girls’ voice chimes in with agreement.

So the space where adolescent females’ voices are heard doesn’t include a lesbian/bisexual girl. How do I, as a participant researcher, handle this? Do I sit by passively and continue to collect data as evidence that at least in this group, not all voices are heard (which is of course true for other girls in the group for different reasons – Katie, for example, was horribly silenced last week when someone, probably Bianca made a put-down comment about how she never has anything to say in class and just sits there without an opinion. Again, it was Sarah who defended/supported her saying, “I don’t say a lot in class either, but it’s not like I’m not part of what’s going on.”

If I bring this issue directly out in the open, do I violate Lacey's right to not be the focus of possible negative comments? Or is this an opportunity for these girls to grow in their awareness of how they operate in silencing their fellow females' voices? Maybe I can bring it up without mentioning Lacey or even homosexuality specifically. Maybe there's a way to spark a discussion about what it means to have your "voice" heard – and whether or not in certain environments females' voices are silenced.

And so I come back to what it means to be female. I stated that in the study, an anthropological, not biological, definition of gender would be used – that gender was something you "do" not something you "are." Dr. K asked what that meant, and I'm wondering if I know the answer. I'm not sure I even know what I think it means to be female.

Maybe I should ask the girls...

Which brings me to another nagging, nagging, concern. Am I "allowing" the discussion to veer too much off the events and characters in the text? Is this a book club, or an adolescent female consciousness-raising group? Both certainly have value, but I can't ignore my research questions. Somewhere I read that the researcher with integrity ensures that data collected focuses on addressing/answering the research questions. Maybe that was something I had to fill out in the IRB – how I was going to make sure that happened. Dr. K suggested I have some text-related questions prepared for each discussion. I rejected that idea on the basis of my experiences with the newspaper book clubs. I rarely needed discussion-starter questions. Of course, I've been thinking lately about how very different this book club with the girls is from any of the ones I conducted for the Times. So I have asked the girls to mark passages in the text they'd like to talk about during the meeting. Lacey was the only one who did that. Some didn't even bring their books to the last meeting. No one had a journal.

How do I get what I need as a researcher and not become the teacher? Would I feel like I have to tread that line so carefully if I wasn't a teacher at the school? But even I didn't feel conscious of that need, it would still be there. Discussing books in a formal way only happens in the classroom for children/teens.

Appendix I
Peer Review Form

I, Karen Rigoni have served as a peer reviewer/outside reviewer for Adolescent Girls' Identity Exploration in a Book Club, by Holly S. Atkins. In this role, I have worked with the researcher in capacities such as reviewing transcripts and/or assisting in identifying emerging issues.

Signed: (Signature on File) _____

Date: 11/4/2010 _____

Appendix J
Categories and Codes

Perceptions of Identity

Socially Constructed and Expressed
Explored and Expressed in Social World of Text
Developmental in Nature
Expression-Perception Mismatch

Influences on Self-Identity Expression

Physical Attributes of Group
 Physical Size – Large
 Physical Size – Small
 Physical Size – Not Important
Attitudinal Attributes
 “Perception” Critical
 “Open and Accepting”
 Prior Knowledge of Self-Identity
 Not Important

Appendix K

Sample Participant Reader Response Journal

p. 8-13	this fight sounds just like mine with my mom!
p. 14	I wonder if that's true? "But you might have given it to me even if you did want it. Just because I asked."
P. 26	The whole "Geek Club" sounds just like my friends club she started with her friends at school!
p. 27	I wonder why our school doesn't have a debate club...
p. 27	Sounds like a weird thing to debate over (membership)...
p. 27	Debating isn't always geeky! Everyone does it!
p. 27	"forensics" does sound a little geeky...
p. 28	I like how they describe the numbers of the Geography Bowl!
p. 31	That's really sad...I hope that never happens to me...☹
p. 33	Aw...that's so nice of Matthew to come help her! ☺
p. 35	So they plan to <u>gain</u> pounds/ Don't most want to <u>lose</u> pounds for the next school year?!
p. 40	Sounds like most boys about rules...☺
p. 41	Wow!...Didn't see that coming!
p. 46	That's how everyone should be! ☺
p. 52	Matthew plays soccer! She has good taste! Sports player!
p. 53-54	Smart! Less work of the watchers!
p. 59	They sure say "nimrod" a <u>lot</u> !
p. 62	I don't know if I should think the letter's sweet...or scary...☹
p. 69	It's so funny how guys make things up just to hold your hand!
p. 72	She can make that long of a list in her mind in 2.8 seconds?! Wish I could do that!
p. 85	The 3 rd paragraph – I like how they described boys...very thought out! ☺
p. 101	Elizabeth and Alpha don't sound like a good couple... ☹

p. 105

“Lots of girls don’t notice when they are in this situation. They are so focused on their boyfriends that they don’t remember they had a life at all before their romances, so they don’t become upset that the boyfriend isn’t interested.” VERY TRUE!
☺

p. 107

How dare he blow her off for Alpha!

About the Author

Holly S. Atkins received both her Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees in English Education from the University of South Florida. She worked for 15 years as a middle school reading and language arts teacher, during which time she served as the cooperating teacher for interns and the site-based coach for new teachers. In 2001, she became a National Board Certified Teacher in early adolescence/English language arts. She has served as the Co-Director for the Tampa Bay Area Writing Project, a local site of the National Writing Project since 2005. She served for three years on the board of ALAN (Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English) and has presented at several state and national conferences. She has also served as an adjunct instructor at the University of South Florida-St. Petersburg, St. Petersburg College, and Saint Leo University where she currently serves as an Assistant Professor of Education.