

THE DISCOURSES OF MALE TEACHERS:
THE ROLE OF LITERATE IDENTITY IN PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the ways in which the primary Discourse and school experiences inform the literate identity of a male teacher, as well as his professional practice. The research looks at the various influences and relationships that come to bear on male literate identity from childhood to professional practice. As well, it responds to the contention of the popular media that boys' lagging literacies might be remediated through the presence of more male literacy role models in the classroom. This study suggests that although role models may be influential under particular circumstances, the development of literate identity is far more complex and nuanced.

This study focuses on six male teachers and describes their experiences of literacy, particularly reading, from childhood into professional practice. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and informal observations. The interviews revealed that male literate identity is a product not only of parental attitudes toward literacy, but it is also determined by the individual's sense of competence and purpose, as well as sometimes serendipitous encounters with other readers.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOGUE PART ONE: THE BLANK TABLET	p.1
PROLOGUE PART TWO: THE PART OF THE STABLE MOTHER NEVER SAW	p.4
CHAPTER ONE: SELF-PORTRAIT	p.8
The literacy committee	p.11
The questions	p.13
CHAPTER TWO: BACKDROP AND LIGHTING.....	p.15
Gender /Discourse: As in “Dis course sucks”	p.15
Literate Identity	p.21
Media - "Even Tough Guys Like to Read"	p.24
Missing Men	p.27
The Feminization of Education	p.30
Impact of Academic Institutions	p.36
Identity as Socially Constructed	p.38
Gender, Literacy, Identity	p.41
Dissonances	p.44
CHAPTER THREE: APERTURE AND EXPOSURE	p.47
Data Collection	p.49
Participants	p.52
The Group Shot: The Six Participants	p.53
Adam	p.54
Bob	p.54
Charlie	p.54
Devin	p.55
Fred	p.55
Greg	p.56
CHAPTER FOUR: THE ALBUMS	p.58
The Family Album: Literacy in the Primary Discourse	p.58
Reader Identity	p.59
Primary Discourse - The Home and Literate Identity	p.61
Snapshots of the Primary Discourse	p.62
Adam - "Ends to a Means"	p.62
Bob - "It was like Treasure"	p.64
Charlie - "Tons of Books"	p.64
Devin - "I Read Boks Before I Went to School"	p.65
Fred - "My Memories of Books are Where I Don't Want to Read"	p.66
Greg - "I Was Quite Interested in Different Types of Reading"	p.67
Primary Discourse and Literate Identity	p.67
Books and Stories	p.70
The Power of Storybook Reading	p.74
Gender in the Primary Discourse	p.76

Self-Efficacy and Competence - Learning Literate Identity	p.77
The School Yearbook: Entry into Secondary Discourse	p.81
Snapshots - Reading and School.....	p.83
Adam - Competence and Relevance	p.83
Bob - Separation of Home and School.....	p.84
Charlie - Fiction versus Non-Fiction.....	p.85
Devin - "Nothing Was a Struggle"	p.85
Fred - Self-Concept and Reading.....	p.86
Greg - Self-Concept and Peers	p.87
Shift to Later Literacy and Turning Away	p.88
Motivation - Efferent or Aesthetic	p.91
Motivation and Perceptions of Reading Achievement.....	p.99
Intrinsic Versus Extrinsic	p.103
Autonomy and Motivation	p.105
Social Orientation	p.108
School Experiences and Professional Reading	p.110
Literate Identity and Masculinity	p.111
Male Role Models: Reality Check	p.117
Role Models in the Lives of the Participants	p.118
Teacher Models	p.127
Male Role Models	p.132
The Products of Experience	p.134
Notations on the Back	p.136
CHAPTER FIVE: NEW FORMATS	p.137
Reading and School	p.137
Professional Reading	p.140
Reading and Gender	p.140
New Literacies	p.142
Future Directions	p.142
CHAPTER SIX: A BLANK TABLET NO LONGER	p.146
EPILOGUE: DEEDS OR DISCOURSE?	p.148
References	p.151
Appendix A Letter of Consent for Participant.....	p.160
Appendix B Letter of Consent for Release of Transcripts	p.162
Appendix C Interview Protocol	p.164
Appendix D Letter Requesting Consent of Principal.....	p.166
Appendix E University of Saskatchewan Ethics Approval.....	p.167

Prologue Part One: The Blank Tablet

album blank book for the insertion of collected items. XVII. — L. *album* (white tablet on which records, etc., were inscribed, list), *sb.* use of *n.* of *albus* white; first in G. use as *album amicorum* “album of friends,” in which the owner collected the signatures of fellow scholars.

For most, the word “album” recollects a collection of photos. Even its sense as a record album is slowly disappearing from the collective memory in the age of the ipod. Originally the word referred to a blank tablet and was derived from the Latin word “*albus*” meaning white. It was, as such, the place for the collection of records. The meaning of album later expanded and albums became a place to collect colleagues’ signatures and then, with the advent of the camera, photographs. Later still, an “album” would come to signify a collection of songs – texts set to music. In spite of its evolving meaning, the original sense of the word is perhaps most meaningful for my enterprise. At the beginning of this research I was, in several senses, a “blank tablet.” I was ready to be inscribed with new knowledge and at the same time it was essential that I take on the role of scribe in order for this to occur. As scribe and inscribed I began.

This tablet was not merely to become a public record, inscribed with edicts delivered by absent researchers. Rather, it was to contain images and recollections from the lives of the participants in the research. In this, it is also an album – a collection of images, the visual signatures, of the participants. Bruner (2004) writes, “We seem to have no other way of describing ‘lived time’ save in the form of a narrative” (p. 692). We use images to tell the stories of our lives. The photographs we select for an album, the

snapshots we carry in our wallets, the portraits we place on our walls reveal facets of our identities and relationships, the resonant echo of who we are and what we wish to become, if anyone bothers to look. Consequently, this body of work – this album of sorts – is both a public record and a collection of snapshots of my colleagues (the participants). It, too, is a means of telling the participants' stories as they pertain to their identities as readers and teachers.

In the days before Christmas this year, I spent hours trying to sort and place in chronological order the many digital images we have of our family, contained within the ephemeral boundaries of our computer. These photos were a gift for my mother – a woman who is a consummate record keeper. There is always a paper trail – on everything from the new dishwasher to my childhood (in no particular order of significance). Even the seemingly insignificant details are captured in folders, notebooks, and albums. The photographs I had selected, records of our lives over the past four years, were intended to fill an album. But the task was overwhelming. How to choose the images that would best narrate the past four years (since the advent of digital technology in our household)? Which images told the most accurate story of who we are as individuals? Which ones were the best recordings of our children and who they were becoming?

Albums and the images they contain, in an age where little is immune to being captured by a cell phone, video camera, digital camera, or even film, provide portals into the significant moments of peoples lives, but also the spontaneous moments of silliness. They are an inescapable part of the stories of our existence, part of the exchange we make with friends and relatives through email, Facebook, and other forms of communication.

They are also artifacts of our *selves*, recording the objects and environments that define who we are and our ever-changing identities.

Albums work as containers for our lives, capturing eras and relationships in memory, and inscribing a particular vision of who we are through the selection of images and the exclusion of others. And, as with any album, the photographer and the compiler of the album play an integral role in the final presentation. In this case, I have taken on both of these roles. I have examined the participants through a particular lens, selected the images that seemed to be the most telling and most resonant, and I have collected these images, complete with metaphorical notes on the back of these “snapshots,” and placed these images in this, my album. In doing so, I have, nonetheless, tried to present the truest, most revealing, vision of the participants’ stories and reflections that they have generously shared with me.

Prologue Part Two: The Part of the Stable Mother Never Saw

Just as photographs can provide powerful insights into our identities and the narratives of our lives, so, too, can literature. Bruner (2004) observes, “The mimesis between life so-called and narrative is a two-way affair: that is to say, just as art imitates life in Aristotle’s sense, so, in Oscar Wilde’s, life imitates art. Narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative” (p. 692). The female protagonist in Alice Munro’s short story “Boys and Girls” offers a powerful insight into the literacies of men and women:

My father did not talk to me unless it was about the job we were doing. In this he was quite different from my mother, who, if she was feeling cheerful, would tell me all sorts of things – the name of a dog she had had when she was a little girl, the names of boys she had gone out with later on when she was grown up, and what certain dresses of hers had looked like – she could not imagine now what had become of them. Whatever thoughts and stories my father had were private, and I was shy of him and would never ask him questions. (p. 532)

This silence surrounding the father’s stories is particularly intriguing. It seems evident that he has stories, but his daughter simply cannot access these distinctly male literacies – or perhaps, she is simply not attuned to the kinds of stories her father tells. Not only are the mother and father’s forms of discourse radically different from each other, in the protagonist’s view, but so too are the spaces wherein these discourses may be reasonably enacted. She notes that “It was an odd thing to see my mother down at the barn” and that here “She looked out of place” (p. 533). In spite of these differences, it is evident in the story that both the mother and father play a role in apprenticing the protagonist and her brother into the discourses that underpin their identities. A role that is not dissimilar to that of most parents today.

In the world of the story, in that particular time and place, male and female discourses are distinct. They inhabit different spaces and offer limited access to particular spaces depending on the gender of the character. It is in this world of the family that the female protagonist and her brother begin to construct the stories that inform who they are to become. In “Boys and Girls” the female protagonist’s identity is informed not only by the stories that she is told (or not told) by her mother and father, but also by the stories she tells about herself:

The word girl had formerly seemed to me innocent and unburdened like the word child; now it appeared that it was no such thing. A girl was not, as I had supposed, simply what I was; it was what I had to become. It was a definition, always touched with emphasis, with reproach and disappointment. (p. 535)

Munro makes it clear that the stories told by the characters in the story are dependant on gender.

Moreover, what stories can be told and where they can be told is also dependant on rules established around femininity and masculinity:

Laird lifted his arm to show off a streak of blood. “We shot old Flora,” he said, “and cut her up in fifty pieces.”

“Well I don't want to hear about it,” my mother said. “And don't come to my table like that.” (p. 540)

Laird’s reveling in the gore of the butchered horse and the mother’s unwillingness to hear his story resonates with current research about how gender impacts literacy. Laird is perhaps one of the boys in the modern classroom who likes stories with lots of action and gore and is frequently being told that the (female?) teacher doesn’t want to hear about it. Perhaps, Laird’s inability to tell his story at the table provides an apt analogy for what kinds of literacies are allowed in the classroom.

“Never mind,” my father said. He spoke with resignation, even good humor, the words which absolved and dismissed me for good. “She's only a girl,” he said. I didn't protest that, even in my heart. Maybe it was true. (p. 540)

In the final moments of the story when the protagonist is found to be “only a girl” by her father, a man she has looked up to as a role model, this final pronouncement about her identity is met with her own, perhaps unwilling, acceptance. There simply seems to be no other identity for her to take on than that of being “just a girl.” While the story is largely silent about what might make up the father’s literacies, it is evident that his silence is powerful, and his singular pronouncement that she is “just a girl” equally potent. What remains unspoken by the story is that Laird remains “only a boy,” and that, he too, has been effectively silenced. And if we are to extend the teaching analogy, Laird’s father, although he does not quash the tale of the horse’s slaughter, he does not encourage the telling either. Consequently, Laird’s entry into the discourse that will inform his identity appears to be based more in action than in language. And this realization mirrors the kind of complication inherent in the claims that school (like the table) is a place for only particular kinds of discourse and action. And, like the table in Laird’s house, it effectively silences the kinds of discourse that Laird enjoys (and perhaps excels at) and relegates his sister to restrictive and prescribed forms of being in the world (and the words).

Although Munro’s tale was likely intended as a parable of gender inequities for a different time, it, nonetheless, offers an image of the myriad ways in which stories and narratives inform our identity. Moreover, it suggests that narratives are not open to all comers – that certain discourses are more available to certain people – boys or girls. In addition, it signals the silences that surround the literacies of men. This is not to deny the fact that men have enjoyed (and still do) the lion’s share of power in our society, nor is it intended to suggest that women’s literacies are any less important. But as boys continue to do poorly in school-based standardized literacy tests and fewer men enter the teaching

profession, it might be worth examining not only the stories that are being told in the kitchen, but also those that are being shared in the stable:

Henry was there, just idling around looking at his collection of calendars which were tacked up behind the stalls in a part of the stable my mother probably had never seen. (p. 535)

“Boys and Girls” is unequivocal in its suggestion that the literacies of men and women are somehow different; there are, in fact, calendars in the stable that the protagonist’s mother has likely never seen. Munro, on the other hand, clearly defines the narratives that come to identify the female protagonist. Instead, it is the literacies of Laird, his father and Henri, the hired hand, that are defined through silence and “ritualistically important” (p. 533) work that cannot be made known.

My research, then, sets out to uncover or reveal these rituals that inform the literacies of male teachers and unearth the stories they were told as children – to reveal the part of the stable that I’ve never seen.

Chapter One: Self-Portrait

I have been teaching now for almost fifteen years. As a young teacher I had the opportunity to teach in a variety of subject areas including English, French, social studies, drama, career and personal planning, computers, and fencing. But always my true love has been literature and in recent years I have had the opportunity to teach full-time English Language Arts and creative writing. I am passionate about reading and writing. I believe words hold far greater power in society than weapons. I cannot imagine a life without access to the infinite vistas offered in books.

Four years ago I was asked to participate in a new literacy initiative in the district where I teach. One of the by-products of this initiative was the creation of a new ELA course optimistically called “Read to Succeed.” This course was intended to “provide intensive instruction for students who are reading well below grade level” (Saskatoon Public Schools website, “Literacy for Life”). As a newly-hatched “Read” teacher I had the opportunity to participate in literacy training and professional development initiatives. Certainly a focus on literacy should not be unwelcome for an English teacher, but as I found myself embroiled in “literacy training,” I came face to face with the realization that I knew little about the actual process of reading and less about how to teach someone to read. In fact, having watched my own children learn to read in two languages simultaneously and without any undue effort on their part, the process of acquiring reading skills seemed more like magic than instruction.

The literacy initiative of the Saskatoon Public School Division was selected as a district priority in 2004. The initial focus was described as “early learning and literacy.” According to the school district’s web site this strategic direction was decided by

“dialogue with colleagues, . . . a visit to Northern Lights School Division,” as well as “focus group sessions” (Saskatoon Public Schools website, “How Was Literacy for Life Selected as a Priority?”). The goals of the initiative were lofty:

Our Literacy for Life initiative is intended to improve our students’ reading skills. In order to build our learning community, we are engaging all students in early learning and literacy. Our overall **Literacy for Life** goal is all students, K-12, reading at or above grade level. (Saskatoon Public Schools website, “Literacy for Life”)

The rhetoric of the “literacy initiative” is indisputably commendable. Certainly, the goal of having every child reading at or above grade level would be shared by most school divisions and classroom teachers. However, the stated goal of improving reading offers a relatively restricted view of literacy – that of reading. It does not recognize the possibility that new literacies may supersede the traditional forms of reading and writing and that many of our students have already become experts in these areas. This rhetoric also fails to acknowledge the influence of socioeconomic status, culture or gender on success in literacy. Rather, the initiative treats literacy, and reading specifically, as though a simple set of strategies and instructional methods, if demonstrated often enough in professional development seminars and properly performed by the classroom teacher, might remedy all that ails students with poor literacy skills.

Although I attended the professional development seminars that I was required to attend by the school division with the literacy experts flown in from far away, and dutifully armed myself with an array of instructional approaches such as Picture Word Inductive Model, Concept Attainment, Think Alouds and Read Alouds, I became

increasingly cognizant of the fact that I did not know what I was doing – even when I was doing what I had been told to do. Moreover, in my role as Read to Succeed teacher, I began to feel like I was supposed to be a model for literacy and that the same kind of modeling was expected of all teachers.

In 2005 I inherited the Read class that had started in my school the year before. There were six fifteen and sixteen-year-old boys, variously diagnosed and misdiagnosed as “struggling readers.” And what was I going to do with them? An initial sorting revealed that some of these boys were not struggling with reading. Rather, they were struggling with organization, addiction, and other issues that I was less equipped to deal with. With the best of intentions, I tentatively began the process of making them better readers. Their difficulties with reading were far from homogeneous; some had such limited vocabularies that any kind of reading was a struggle to get through, some read so slowly that they had difficulties keeping the plot line of even the shortest novel together, others regularly substituted incorrect words for words in the text. My attempts to engage these Read students by bringing in materials on sumo wrestling, UFO’s, and any other kind of reading that seemed especially boy-friendly met with limited success. I did my best to employ the teaching strategies I had been told to use in the professional development seminars I attended, but continued to feel I was not meeting the needs of my students.

My flagging confidence in my ability to make significant change in the literate lives of my students, coupled with my failure to turn my PWIM (Picture Word Inductive Model) poster into something my students actually cared about, was exacerbated by another realization: my Read to Succeed classroom was filled with adolescent boys who

had little or no desire to read (as I was frequently informed) and less skill. Clearly, the preponderance of boys with so-called literacy deficits is not a phenomenon unique to the city where I live; rather, the apparent decline in boys' literacy is an issue that both researchers and the media have given considerable attention.

That said, it would be a mistake to suggest that the boys I have taught are all the same or that they are all unvaryingly different from the girls I have taught in the Read class (and there have been a few). Some boys struggle with literacy and some girls struggle with literacy. Nevertheless, I cannot deny that there are more boys in my Read class and fewer male teachers in the English department. Consequently, although gender is not a definitive category, it is an angle from which to approach questions surrounding certain students' success or failure in literacy – particularly reading.

The literacy committee

While my role as a Read teacher would act as a catalyst for the many questions I had about the process of reading and how this might intersect with the male literate identity, it was my position on the literacy committee at the school where I work that further complicated the questions I was developing around the relationship between gender and literacy, particularly male literacy. Working with the literacy committee, I found a consensus among teachers that more boys than girls were in trouble in their literacy skills – at least in terms of what they were demonstrating in school. Literacy, in this context, came to mean predominantly the ability to read and understand texts. Sometimes it simply meant the desire to read for enjoyment. It appeared to several of us on the literacy committee, at least anecdotally, that fewer boys embraced the opportunities afforded to them for reading. In addition, this notion that boys were in

trouble seemed to be supported by much of what was being written about boys and literacy. Titles like *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys* (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002) and *Teenage Boys and High School English* (Pirie, 2002) seemed to confirm that we, as a literacy committee, needed to do something about the boys.

Our discussions as a literacy committee, at times, revolved around the idea that there needed to be more male reading role models for boys – that male teachers could influence the reading habits of their male students. This seemed like an overly simplistic solution for a process as ineffable as learning to love reading and reading effectively. I felt that in order to understand the role of the male teacher in supporting literacy, I needed to understand the genesis of the male teacher's attitudes about literacy and how these attitudes informed what he did in the classroom. If boys were lagging in their school literacies and male teachers were to be role models for these boys, it seemed worthwhile to examine the genesis of male literate identity through the connection between childhood literacies, school-based literacies and professional practice. This approach would, hopefully, have the benefit of addressing both what was happening in the lives of my students as well as how my male colleagues were influencing this.

In many ways, this focus on male teachers is also a means of addressing concerns regarding the feminization of education (Froese-Germain, 2006; Weaver-Hightower, 2003) and the declining numbers of men entering the teaching profession (Wiest, 2003). Whether or not these are valid concerns might, in some way, be engaged by examining how the home literacies of male teachers impact their teaching practice and if, in turn, it matters if we have male teachers in the classroom at all. The popular media suggestion that boys are victims of an overly feminized education system (Alphonso, 2004; "How to

Encourage Johnny to Read, 2003; “Let Boys be Boys”, 2003) seems like the kind of essentialist argument that does damage to both boys and girls and fails to recognize the many ways that men and boys are advantaged within society and the ways in which girls and women are not. To what degree do role models, and more precisely, male role models, play a role in influencing the literate identities of male readers?

The questions

We are all influenced by the communities to which we belong. Gee describes these communities or groups as Discourses. Unlike discourse with a small “d”, Discourses are “ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities . . . by specific groups” (Gee, 2008). Ultimately, through this research I hope to come to a better understanding of how the primary Discourse (Gee, 2008) of a male teacher, in other words the “Discourse to which people are apprenticed early in life during their primary socialization as members of particular families within their sociocultural settings” (Gee, 1992, p. 108), influences his attitudes toward literacy and how this may impact his practice of literacy in the classroom. The final application of such theorizing remains to be seen. It may be found that male attitudes toward literacy are fixed in childhood and that if we wish to impact students’ literacy, it must be accomplished in the early years. Alternately, if male teachers’ attitudes towards literacy are capable of shifting in the course of their development or within their professional practice, this may suggest that male teachers can similarly shift the attitudes of their students.

While there is an increasing body of research concerning literacy and identity, particularly boys’ literacy, there seems to be a comparative absence of research

examining the literacy practices of teachers, particularly male teachers. In the end, a better understanding of the literate identities of male teachers may begin to address the apparent gaps in some boys' literacy. As a result, this study intends to tackle the role of male teachers' primary Discourse (Gee, 2008) in the genesis of their attitudes towards literacy, as well as their professional practices. Gee's (2008) conception of primary and secondary Discourses is helpful in that it recognizes that certain Discourses are "intimately related to the distribution of social power" (p. 162). Consequently, while I am interested in the role of gender in the formation of male teachers' literacies, I am also cognizant of the fact that it cannot be disengaged from class, culture and other forces that come to bear on identity. Examining the literacies of male teachers becomes a means of entering the debate about the so-called crisis in boys' flagging school-based literacies. If boys fail to be successful in performing these school-based literacies, can the same be said for male teachers? What Discourses are enacted in the lives and classrooms of male teachers and what influence do these Discourses have on the literacies of our students?

This study is framed by the following questions: In what ways do a male teacher's primary Discourses and early school experiences inform his attitudes towards literacy and reading, as well as his professional practice? And, within the context of these experiences, what role do male literacy models play in the formation of male literate identity? Through the interviews with the participants in this study, I hope to explore the role of gender in the literate identity of male teachers and how their experiences within the home, at school and as professionals influence their literate identities as teachers and, ultimately, how these identities impact our students.

Chapter Two: Backdrop and Lighting

Light is the essence of any successful photo – it reveals the details of the setting, the wrinkles inscribed upon the face. It is the whiteness of the blank tablet before it becomes something other than vacant. It is this illumination that provides context for the image; it, too, allows the photographer to see.

Any album or compilation of images and notations must be understood within a specific context. The conversations and debates that underpin each image, its significance and its place within the album as a whole, are the invisible threads that pull together the eras of our lives caught and inscribed upon the “blank slate.” Research that hopes to examine the complexities of the male literate identity must necessarily engage the debates surrounding the influence of gender on literacy, as well as media and Discourse, among others.

Gender /Discourse: As in “Dis course sucks”

To conclude that boys’ lack of success can be remediated based on a simplistic view of gender seems naive and fails to account for other significant forces such as socioeconomic status and culture. In addition, the standardized tests used to evaluate literacy are simply an evaluation of mainstream literacies, such as reading excerpts from novels and informational texts and producing written responses, and do not account for new literacies tied to technology, nor do they recognize the context of individual children’s literacy practices. In light of this, it seems evident that any discussion of literacy must incorporate a consideration of context. Literacy cannot be divorced from the individual who uses it; it must be seen as part of identity and inherently tied to the individual, group or community wherein it is accessed. Literacy, then, if viewed from this

perspective, is not simply the performance of reading or writing by students within a classroom; rather, it is part of an ongoing conversation between teacher and students and parents and community. In this way, the literate practices of teachers, as well as students, play a significant role in the literacy outcomes of students.

Heath's (1983) study of the white working-class community of "Roadville" and the black working-class community of "Trackton" illustrates the significance of context in the ways children are socialized into various literate practices. Heath (1983) found that "Patterns of language use in any community are in accord with and mutually reinforce other cultural patterns, such as space and time orderings, problem-solving techniques, group loyalties, and preferred patterns of recreation" (p. 344). This underlines the notion that language is not simply a means of communication accessible through the act of decoding a series of signs or symbols; instead, it is part of a reciprocal relationship within family and community. Consequently, the way anyone becomes literate and uses language has everything to do with where they grew up and with whom. Barker and Galasinski (2001) echo this idea, stating, "In carrying out rituals and activities within social relationships people use a language that does not acquire its significance from individual mental states" (p. 44). As a result, language and literacy is not something that resides in the brain; it is, instead, a means of participating in "the world" and cannot be divorced from its context. Both the home and the school, then, become integral pieces in the development of the literacies with which an individual is familiar.

The social context wherein language is learned is fundamental to the ease with which the mainstream discourse of school can be accessed. School-oriented, mainstream success is not simply a matter of reading the best children's stories or reading the

prescribed number of minutes each night. Rather, “The language socialization process in all its complexity is more powerful than such single-factor explanations in accounting for success” (Heath, 1983, p. 344). This suggests that school programs that promote a “quick-fix” approach to literacy deficits are likely to fail, because they fail to consider the innumerable influences that come to bear on children’s literacy skills. That is to that say no strategy can encompass the competing demands of gender, class and community. Heath (1983) also points out, “The school’s approach to reading and learning establishes decontextualized skills as foundational in the hierarchy of academic skills” (p. 353). In the case of the Trackton children, who have a “highly contextualized view” of objects (Heath, 1983, p. 107), and who do not have experience answering the kinds of “why questions” (p. 109) required in school, this results in academic struggle, if not failure, as early as kindergarten.

In spite of Heath’s findings, curriculum typically ignores the connection between literacy and its ties to community and family literacy practices, choosing to present literacy as the ability to decode, visualize or comprehend text correctly. From a social constructivist perspective, however, literacy is an act that cannot be separated from the society. According to Street (1984), “Any version of literacy practice has been constructed out of specific social conditions and in relation to specific political and economic structures” (p. 29). Our way of engaging in any form of literacy activity is necessarily informed by where we come from: “Meaning in language is tied to people’s experiences of situated action in the material and social world” (Gee, 2001, p. 715). For Gee, language and identity are inextricably connected. Identities are not fixed, but, rather, tied to the various Discourse communities to which we belong: “A Discourse

integrates ways of talking, listening, writing, reading, acting, interacting, believing, valuing, and feeling (and using various objects, symbols, images, tools, and technologies) in the service of enacting meaningful socially situated identities and activities” (Gee, 2001, p. 719). This conception of Discourse echoes Lave and Wenger’s (1991) “‘communities of practice’ where individuals are, through a process of enculturation, ‘apprenticed’ to a group and come gradually to learn and take on the values of that group” (as cited in Davies, 2006, p. 165). Thus, like the children of Trackton and Roadville in Heath’s (1983) study, we are all apprenticed to a particular Discourse as children, and in many ways these primary Discourses or “communities of practice” determine the ease with which we can access mainstream literacies and education.

As we mature, according to Gee (2008), we acquire “secondary Discourses”: “They are acquired within institutions that are part and parcel of wider communities, whether these be religious groups, community organizations, schools, businesses, or governments” (p. 157). Although these secondary Discourses are developed in a more public domain than that of the primary Discourse, the primary Discourse continues to influence our access to these other Discourses: “One way that many social groups achieve an alignment with secondary Discourses they value is by incorporating certain aspects of the practices of these secondary Discourses into the early (primary Discourse) socialization of their children” (Gee, 2008, p. 157). This is exemplified in the practices of parents who begin to apprentice their children, at an early age, to the kinds of knowledge and responses that will be expected in school. This alignment, a result of the kinds of school-based language middle-class families frequently practice with their children, makes the transition from the Discourse of home to that of school relatively

uncomplicated (Gee, 2008, p. 169). This suggests that middle-class children should find the literacies of school relatively accessible as a result of the kinds of mentoring they receive in the home.

Mainstream parents spend a lot of time mentoring and apprenticing their children to Discourses that schools and mainstream culture reward: “Long before the child can decode print, she has become a member of one or more school-based literacy Discourses – ways of thinking, acting, valuing with words and object – that undergird school-based and mainstream literacy practices” (Gee, 1992, p. 123). For example, McKool’s (2007) study found that “more middle/high income students were read aloud to when they were young than low income participants.” Apparently this is consistent with Allington and Cunningham’s (1996) finding that “parents who have blue collar jobs work hard during their work day and expect to relax and spend time with their families when they get home. These families expect the schools to educate their children, therefore, they don’t place great value on home literacy practices such as reading aloud to their children” (as cited in McKool, 2007, p. 121). Gee (1992) further points out that these mainstream Discourses of school work against minority students experiencing success in literacy: “These mainstream Discourses often incorporate attitudes and values hostile to, and even in part define themselves in opposition to, these minority students and their home- and community-based Discourses” (Gee, 1992, p. 117). The Discourse of the home is fundamental in providing access to school literacies or rendering these literacies impenetrable.

Our identities, then, are inherently bound to the Discourses in which we participate and the “social languages” embedded within these Discourses: “To know a

particular social language is either to be able to ‘do’ a particular identity, using that social language, or to be able to recognize such an identity, when we do not want to or cannot actively participate” (Gee, 2001, p. 718). From this perspective, classrooms are points of intersection where members of various Discourse communities come together.

Classrooms, too, are imbued with their own particular Discourse – a Discourse some students (and teachers) find more accessible than others. As a result, it seems worthwhile to examine the impact of the primary Discourse on male teachers’ attitudes toward literacy, as it is what “always effects behaviors in secondary Discourses to some extent” (Gee, 1992, p. 108).

Teachers enter their classrooms having diverse primary Discourses and having entered into a variety of secondary Discourse communities. And while it might be expected that teachers share a similar Discourse around literacy, practical experience would suggest that this is not the case. If, in fact, teachers are influential in forming particular Discourse communities around literacy, then it seems valuable to examine the genesis of teachers’ attitudes about literacy, and how these attitudes are perhaps influenced by the Discourse communities to which they belong – communities that must necessarily encompass class, culture and gender to varying degrees. Gee (2001) asserts, “If discussions about reading are not about social languages (and thus, too, about embodied action and interaction in the world, value-laden perspectives, and socially-situated identities), then they are not, in reality, about reading as a semiotic meaning-making process (and it is hard to know what reading is if it is not this)” (p. 719). Further, the value of a consideration of Discourse lies less in the ability to identify “the kind of primary Discourse enacted by each participant, but in identifying the possible range of

secondary Discourses which each participant may have access to, courtesy of their primary Discourse” (Knobel, 1999, p. 213). Thus, any meaningful discussion about reading or literacy in general must consider the identity of the reader and the communities to which he belongs.

Literate identity

According to Gee (1992), it is the primary Discourse that underpins identity. While the primary Discourse may lay the building blocks for attitudes towards literacy, entry into secondary Discourses, particularly that of school, may further cement these attitudes. Discourse, whether that of the home or of the many secondary Discourses that an individual encounters in a lifetime, is the cornerstone of identity. This is not necessarily a novel idea. A search for the exact phrase “literate identity” on Google pulls up 684 possible hits. This certainly suggests that the concept has entered the common parlance to some degree. The work of Shirley Brice Heath (1991) proposes the initial genesis of this term. Heath (1991) describes our “sense of being literate” as something that has evolved through time and is determined by the groups with which we are affiliated. Historically, to be “literate” has meant, in some way, to be separate from the masses: “Since at least the height of Greek civilization, those individuals who have looked upon themselves as literate have differed markedly from those who have used reading and writing merely as tools to achieve somewhat limited ends within narrow occupational roles” (Heath, 1991, p. 4). That said, this conception of literacy seems outmoded and less relevant in a society where to be “literate” is no longer characterized simply by reading and writing. It is also the ability to navigate a web page, play music on an ipod, utilize the various icons and symbols that appear in an online MMOG (Massive

Multi-player Online Game), and set the time on your DVD player. No doubt the technology just mentioned will seem vastly out of date a decade from now. What literacies will be required to navigate the world then?

Just as literacy, or what it means to be literate, has transformed over the centuries, it is also continuously in flux for individuals. The literate identity of a five-year-old is not the same as the literate identity of a college professor. Heath, too, makes the point that what it means to be literate – our literate identity, in other words – is not fixed. Rogers (2002) points out that “literate subjectivities are not monolithic traits that are properties of individuals but rather are constructed across different discursive contexts” (p. 265). Finally, Martens and Adamson (2001) offer a valuable summary of some of the research and thinking that has come to bear on the concept of literate identity:

Literate identities are children’s perceptions of themselves in relation to literacy. These identities are not “fixed”; they are shaped and invented as children draw on their experiences in different literacy events with the texts they read and write (Bloom & Dail, 1997; Harste et al., 1984; Martens, Flurkey, Meyer, & Udell, 1999). As children operate within various cultural and social contexts, literate identities also reflect the influence of particular cultural practices (Gee, 1990) and social practices (Luke & Freebody, 1997; Taylor, 1983). In the act of engaging in literacy events, children interpret themselves in relationship to their world, locating themselves both in view of the experiences they have had and the experiences they imagine (Sumara, 1996). (p. 32)

From this perspective, literate identity is the product of the many communities and cultures that we are part of, as well as a response to the expectations of gender and economic status.

Literate identity is also partially the result of the Discourse we are apprenticed to at a young age. Gee (2008) describes the specific ways we learn to act, speak and understand as a Discourse: “A Discourse with a capital “D” is composed of distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing, with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities” (p. 155). Similarly, Street (1984) suggests that “what the particular practices and concepts of reading and writing are for a given society depends upon the context; that they are already embedded in an ideology and cannot be treated as ‘neutral’ or merely ‘technical’” (p. 1), suggesting that a true understanding of literacy must encompass the values and expectations of the home and community. According to Gee, the primary Discourse, that of the home, is what determines how easily other secondary Discourses might be accessed, those of school, work, special interests and others: “Our primary Discourse gives us our initial and often enduring sense of self and sets the foundations of our culturally specific vernacular (our ‘everyday language’), the language in which we speak and act as ‘everyday’ (non-specialized) people, and our culturally specific vernacular identity” (Gee, 2008, p. 156). This underlines how essential our home environment and our cultural values about literacy are in the construction of our literate identity. In other words, who we become as readers and our ease of access to other secondary Discourses such as school is dependant upon our primary Discourse.

What this suggests, then, is that an examination of male teachers' literate identity involves an examination of not only the individual's attitudes toward literacy, but also the environment in which these attitudes were developed. Moreover, what society defines as literacy continues to evolve and adapt, influenced by new technologies and new forms, and this, in turn, affects our literate selves – selves that are constantly in flux, pulled by gender, culture and community.

Media - “Even Tough Guys Like to Read”

Not only is literate identity constantly in flux and influenced by a variety of external forces, the perception of literate identity is, in turn, influenced by the media. Weaver-Hightower (2003) suggests this “sense of moral panic, or social crisis about boy's issues” has been most evident in the media because it “offers the loudest voices and the most visible headlines” (p. 473). It is not difficult to find news articles and online news reports like the ones cited below that raise concerns about the status of boys' literacy and the failure of educators to act. In fact, practical experience as a teacher suggests that there is something to the claim that boys and girls have different experiences in school and that boys, more often than girls, fail to perform in formal school settings. That said, this media-fueled perception of young men's literate identities may not be a fair representation and may well create a particular conception of the male literate identity that does not really exist.

A recent online CBC news article entitled “Canadian Students put to the Test” (2008) indicates, “Across the country, the girls consistently outperformed the boys on reading” (Fan). What is unfortunate here is that the article sheds little light on what kinds of questions made up the test and who, specifically, was tested. Rather the reader is left

with the impression that boys are clearly being left behind in reading. This article is not unique; it is only one in a seemingly relentless media outcry against a faltering public education system. For example, Heather Sokoloff (2003) in a *National Post* article uses the provocative headline “Almost half of Canada's 16-year-old boys write so poorly that their answers to a national writing test were barely comprehensible” and suggests that “government officials have done little to change curriculum or evaluation methods to counter boys' weaknesses.” Ostensibly, these articles reflect a genuine concern with young people’s education; however, this concern quickly turns into a contentious discussion of boys’ and girls’ success within the current system.

This is apparent in a *Globe and Mail* (2003) article entitled “How to Encourage Johnny to Read.” The author, whose name is not given, writes, “In Canada, gender has been discussed as if it were a zero-sum game: any attention paid to boys would be subtracted from attention paid to girls. Boys, it was said, are not doing worse than before; girls are simply doing better” (*Globe and Mail*, 2003, p. A12). This article paints a rather bleak picture of educators as largely disinterested in the success of male students and concerned only with the inequities experienced by females. According to the article, interest in increasing boys’ literacy test scores is the result of “boys . . . dragging [the school boards] down; and parents . . . insisting that their boys need help” (*Globe and Mail*, 2003, p. A12). In light of such stark media representations of boys’ (il)literacy, it would be unconscionable for academic institutions not to pay attention.

Nonetheless, the widening gap between genders that the media is eager to paint bears closer examination. A recent headline in the *Vancouver Sun* (2007) reads, “To close the gender gap, we must do more for boys; In the huge (and successful) effort to raise

girls' achievement and opportunities, we forgot about the boys." The writer quotes Steve Biddulph, the author of *Raising Boys: Why Boys are Different and How to Help Them Become Happy Well-Balanced Men*, who states, "If we make education more tailored to the special gender needs of boys, of their biology and their brain development, they could be much happier" (Jackson, p. C4). Biddulph further outlines the lack of positive male role models: "This is a result of many things, ranging from the disappearance of men into the workplace in the industrial age to the diffidence and shyness of men around children arising from lack of experience of being fathered well." While the claim that "boys" (presumably all of them) have not been "fathered well" borders on the ridiculous, this article is certainly not an anomaly in the ongoing concern over boys' flagging academic success and particularly their poor literacy skills. What is most concerning, perhaps, is its presentation of a highly essentialist and homogeneous view of men and boys. It fails to acknowledge that some boys are highly successful and that some girls are also falling behind. Moreover, it does not acknowledge the fact that although girls are making better grades in school, this success is not necessarily matched in the workplace (Alloway, 2007). If we are to believe much of what is written in the media, boys are in crisis and the lack of male role models and teachers, coupled with the failure of education to recognize "the special gender needs of boys"(Jackson, 2007, p. C4) is at fault. Media portrayals of boys' literacy such as these cannot help but skew perceptions of the real issues that arise in classrooms. They may also interfere with the work of literacy teachers who must respond to a public demand to address boys' struggles with literacy at the expense of all of the students in the class, male or female.

Media attention typically paints literacy as the prize in a kind of competition between boys and girls. The construction of these kinds of arguments implies that if teachers give any attention to one gender, they are necessarily taking this attention away from the other. Nonetheless, these challenges do raise the question of how significant gender really is in success in reading and other literacies. What these articles fail to address are the gaps in the literacies of some boys and some girls based not solely on gender, but also socioeconomic status and culture. Ultimately, it is far too simplistic to wonder why boys are not as successful in school-based literacies as girls.

Missing men

Polarized perspectives of boys' and girls' literacies impact teachers as well. It is not uncommon to read headlines such as "Male Mentors Help Turn Boys into Bookworms: Hockey Players Enter the Classroom to Show Students Even Tough Guys Like to Read" (Alphoso, 2004, p. A3) again highlighting the belief that male students are less successful academically and that, somehow, this lack is predicated wholly on gender. Similarly, much media coverage seems to imply that boys' failures in school and, in particular, language arts are, at least in part, due to the lack of male role models. An online CBC news report summarizes these concerns: "Ontario must act immediately to boost the already low and rapidly shrinking number of male teachers, especially in elementary schools" (Ontario, CBC, Nov. 13, 2004). The article, which reviews the findings of an Ontario study entitled, "Narrowing the Gender Gap: Attracting Men to Teaching," compiled by the several educational bodies including the Ontario College of Teachers, points out that some of the reasons for the decline in males entering the teaching profession are "low salaries, negative stereotypes and fears that they will be

accused of sexual misconduct” (Ontario, CBC, Nov. 13, 2004). However, what might be problematic here is that, while the article effectively communicates the concern that there are not enough male teachers, it does not indicate what the actual impact of fewer male teachers might be – if there is, in fact, an impact.

Although the media may offer a skewed view of the teaching profession and the differences between boys’ and girls’ literacies, these articles also acknowledge the reality that the teaching profession is in flux. The number of male teachers and males entering the profession is in decline: “In Canada, the percentage of male teachers decreased 6% over the 1990s – from 41% in 1989 to 35% in 1999” (Statistics Canada 2003 as cited in Sokal et al., 2007, p. 651). Similar decreases are evident in other countries like Australia and the USA. Saskatchewan is not immune to these decreases as “fewer than one-third of the [elementary and high school] teachers in 2002 were men” (Bernard et al., 2004, p. 7). Evidently, fewer men are entering the teaching profession. While this decrease may be the result of gender stereotypes that prevent men from seeing teaching as a viable profession in mainstream society, it is not clear what role this decline plays in the lives of students.

The Ontario College of Teachers’ (2004) study, “Narrowing the Gender Gap”, offers the somewhat equivocal conclusion regarding the impact of declining numbers of male teachers that “Although the academic impact upon students who have a male teacher compared to a female teacher needs further study, the importance of a male presence for students in the area of character education can be significant” (Bernard et al., 2004, p. 24). Apparently, “Boys need to witness positive role modeling from someone of the same gender who can provide a demonstration of how a male lives the virtues of

respect, honesty, fairness, empathy, and other values” (p. 24). The study argues for greater “balance” in education, but seems largely unable to explain the impact of this kind of male/female balance. Newkirk (2002) also suggests that boys are impacted by a lack of male role models, “The research suggests that [boys] rarely see adult males reading extended fiction . . . and in schools it is the reading of extended fiction that typically marks them as successful readers, even as successful students. Those teachers promoting reading and writing will typically be female, so there is little to challenge a perception of literacy tasks as feminized” (p. 23). Although Newkirk certainly offers a more substantial basis for the necessity of male role models, this polarized view of what male teachers can accomplish as opposed to female teachers seems fraught with potential dangers. It does not seem like progress to suggest that boys can best be taught by men and girls by women.

Other research challenges these assumptions regarding the importance of male role models. For example, Sokal, Katz, Chaszewski and Wojcik’s (2007) examination of several studies cited below suggests that “male students do not perform significantly better for male teachers than they do for female teachers” (see Allan, 1993; Butler & Christianson, 2003; Carrington & Skelton, 2003; Carrington et al., 2005; Coulter & McNay, 1993; Ehrenberg et al., 1995; Froude, 2002; Martin, 2003; Sokal et al., 1995, p. 652). Moreover, Sokal, Katz, Chaszewski and Wojcik (2007) did not find “any differential effects on achievement when boys are taught by male or female teachers” (p. 655) and within their sample only 9% of the students viewed reading as a feminine activity (p. 656). These findings are supported by Moss (1998), as well, whose findings did not “support the belief that boys who do less well as readers fail because . . . they do

not have enough male role models” (as cited in Barrs, 2000, p. 291). These studies suggest that although the popular media may have latched on to the diminishing numbers of male teachers as the root cause of boys’ lack of success in literacy, this is not the complete picture.

Other studies (Dee, 2006; Shapiro, 1980; as cited in Sokal et al., 2007, p. 653) suggest that to examine success or failure based simply on gender is not the whole story. Gender, as a category, obscures other factors that mitigate teaching; in this case, it may be that male and female teachers employ different teaching strategies and that these approaches are more effective for one gender or the other, or that student performance is a product of both affective relationships as well as cognitive capabilities (Sokal et al., 2007, p. 653). There does, at any rate, appear to be enough evidence to call into question those who claim that gender differences and the lack of male role models are, unequivocally, the root of boys’ struggles with literacy

The feminization of education

Some of the more recent concerns regarding boys’ failings in literacy as a result of the feminization of education are framed by the *National Post* (2003) article quoted below entitled “Let Boys be Boys.” This article, which quotes Dr. Leonard Sax, an American educational psychologist and author of *Boys Adrift*, essentially makes the claim that boys are “hardwired” to behave aggressively and competitively, but that only boys who adopt “geeky” or “emasculated” behaviours can do well in schools in their current form:

Educators are beginning to quantify an "enthusiasm gap" between girls and boys in co-ed public schools. The reason: Schools, especially elementary schools, have

become feminized. Elementary school teachers and administrators who once understood that boys will be boys, now act, at least, as though they expect boys to be more like girls. Their hostility to the male character - intentional or not - is turning boys off learning. The behaviours that earn reward and reinforcement - co-operation, communal achievement and non-assertiveness in class - are feminine behaviours. Meanwhile, such masculine traits as competitiveness, aggressiveness and individuality are seldom prized, and frequently discouraged or even punished.” (*National Post*, March 4, 2003)

Apparently, the problem with education in its current form is that it has become “feminized.” This, of course, assumes that there are some inherent masculine traits that all boys manifest and that are being quashed (hostilely) by education (militant female teachers?) in its current incarnation.

Cohen (1998) illustrates the inherent contradiction in this portrayal of the feminized school:

Despite (or even because of) their poor attainment in tests and examinations, boys are seen as having innate, if untapped potential. While girls’ successes are neatly explained away by their obsessive attitude towards work, boys’ failures are attributed to something “external” to them. Moreover, it seems that in current explanations of boys’ under-achievement in school, these external factors are related back to the “female”: essentially it is women who are to blame. This argument is built around two interrelated elements: “missing men” and “the feminized school.”(as cited in Maynard, 2002, p. 18).

According to Cohen, then, the media misrepresents girls' academic success as being attributable to their appropriately "feminine" behaviors like diligence and discipline, whereas boys are represented as unsuccessful because schools are unsuited to their more boisterous behaviour. In essence, while girls are responsible for their success, boys are not responsible for their lack of success. In addition, Cohen's research suggests, "The current media panic is a mistaken view that until recently there was a 'golden age of boys' when their achievements across the curriculum outstripped those of girls. But, she claims, in the period she has been researching (from the late seventeenth century) boys have always 'under-achieved' in relation to the learning of languages" (as cited in Maynard, 2002, p. 17). The attitudes expressed by the *National Post* article are problematic because, not only do they place the blame for boys' challenges in literacy on female teachers and the feminized school, but also because the article implies that all boys are the same – they are inherently aggressive, individualistic and competitive.

Martino and Kehler (2006) examine the rhetoric used by the media in portraying the apparent boy crisis in literacy. They argue that "calls for more male role models, within the context of boys' education debates, occasionally function as a rhetorical ploy or normalizing strategy intended to reassert and re-traditionalize hegemonic masculinities" (p. 114). Apparently, media accounts that try to paint boys and male teachers as "victims" of the feminization of education are products of the "New Right" agenda: "Media accounts are useful in foregrounding the dominant culture's tendency to constitute boys as particular kind of subjects whose 'natural' masculinity is thwarted by a feminized educational system" (Martino & Kehler, 2006, p. 114). This analysis draws on several examples of media reporting that select data in order to present the homogenous

view that all boys are in crisis and highlight “a commitment to maintaining a gender system founded on essentialist notions of masculinity and femininity” (Martino & Kehler, 2006, p. 126). From this perspective, changes to curriculum and teaching methods that favour what is perceived as boys’ inherent “boyiness” function to maintain hegemonic masculinities, and, consequently, exclude other non-traditional forms of masculinity. Martino and Kehler’s (2006) comments are astute, in that, some research and most media coverage seeks to paint gender-based literacy issues as black and white, failing to acknowledge that the mainstream values of what might be considered masculine or feminine do not hold true for all students.

Alloway (2007) in “Swimming Against the Tide” presents a critical analysis of the data that have been used to support claims that boys are in trouble academically in Australia. Like Martino and Kehler (2006), she too cites the way in which media have manipulated public perception about boys’ literacy: “In an interesting discursive turn, stories about boys doing poorly at school have sometimes been seamlessly reconstituted into stories of reversals of power relations, of women taking over the world of work and, ultimately, of the emasculation of boys and men” (p. 584). She also points to the inadequacies of discussions that only consider gender. In her analysis of the data from a literacy testing program conducted across Australia, she points out that while girls outperform boys at all socioeconomic levels, boys at higher socioeconomic levels outperform girls at lower socioeconomic levels. All boys, clearly, are not struggling with literacy, nor are all girls; socioeconomic status is a key factor in academic performance as well. For Alloway (2007), this suggests that gender is only one aspect of achievement

and arguments that focus on gender are likely to miss other significant indicators for success.

Smith and Wilhelm (2002) also address the concern that boys may suffer in literacy as a result of fewer male role models. This lack of men in the classroom is, however, not a concern based on the number of male bodies physically presiding over classrooms. Instead, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) recognize the kinds of constraints male teachers may experience as a result of societal expectations about masculinity.

Since English teaching, and particularly the teaching of reading, is dedicated in large part to the development of the individual through language, boys may be particularly disadvantaged and undermined by cultural attitudes, structures, and institutions that promote the status quo. This may be especially so when the focus is on narrative, emotional response, expressivity, and creativity, as is often the case in English classes, which are, perhaps importantly, most often taught by females. This deprives boys of male models who embrace the life of the mind, the emotions, and the various forms of literate creativity. (p. 16)

The suggestion in Smith and Wilhelm (2002) seems to be not that boys are incapable of the kind of expression or emotional insight often required in English classes, but, instead, that they lack the appropriate role models and that societal attitudes work against this kind of expression in males. Consequently, the ability of young men to take on the kind of disposition that would serve them well in an ELA class is undermined by the kind of gender stereotypes promoted by the *National Post's* "Let Boys be Boys" article. That said, Smith and Wilhelm's (2002) study found that reading was not perceived as feminine by the male participants:

If there is a macho norm involved in this critique, it would hold that boys need to get away from school and the things of school in order to be with friends, not that reading is “sissy” stuff. Those who criticized Andre [a made up character, who was described as being a reader, whom the boys in the study had to respond to] did so not because they saw reading as he practiced it as feminine behaviour. Rather, their critique suggested that they saw it as schoolish and insufficiently social behaviour. (p. 78)

So, are boys disadvantaged by cultural expectations around maleness that work against them becoming literate? Are schools feminized and hostile to boys? Are media outcries like that of the *National Post* a means of policing “traditional masculinities” (Martino & Kehler, 2006) threatened by new male subjectivities? In spite of great progress over the last decades, there remains a divide between the genders. Popular media does not promote a view of young men that easily intersects with the quiet contemplation of a reader. To appear sensitive, quiet or creative may be a risky behaviour for many of our young male students, and perhaps some male teachers as well.

Certainly, the role of men in education, particularly literacy education, has garnered significant attention. Unfortunately, neither the media, nor the research offers a definitive response to the decline in male teachers and the possible impact of fewer male role models in the schools. This raises several questions. For example, to what degree can male teachers influence the literacy of male students? And how have the male participants in this study been influenced in their own literate identity by the presence or absence of particular kinds of literacy role models? Further, in what ways do male teachers’ understandings of their own literate identities influence their teaching practice

and the literacies of their students? These are the kinds of questions I hope to address in the course of this research.

Impact of academic institutions

Ultimately, while the media may shoulder some of the blame for a skewed public perception of male literacy and boys' academic success, academic institutions resistant to recognizing newer literacies are also to blame. Both Sanford (2006) and Alloway (2007) point out that while boys may be lagging in traditional print-based literacies, they typically have more success with digital communications and multi-media modes of exchange. Sanford (2006) observes that there is a "marked gender difference in the engagement with new technologies" and further suggests that concerns with boys' lack of achievement in traditional literacies simultaneously fail to recognize their high achievement in new, technology-based literacies. As a result, teachers miss opportunities to build on boys' literacy successes or incorporate these new technologies into curricula.

Sanford (2006) also discusses the power of "messages of expectation" passed on by parents and teachers as a means of reinforcing unconscious gendered expectations, as well as a means of allowing some students to escape these expectations associated with gender (p. 306). While she perceives gender as a socially constructed position, she observes that "the plight of the 'poor boys' is increasingly reinforced through media representations and the boys' own responses to school-based literacy activities" (p. 312). She suggests that some boys' resistance to traditional print-based literacy activities (and girls' compliance) is the result of gendered assumptions about what literacies are available for boys, not simply the failure of female teachers or the feminization of education as a whole. As well, teachers need to examine the "deep-rooted gendered

assumptions” that determine, in some ways, what they teach and how they teach (Sanford, 2006, p. 314). Her study of middle years students proposes some interesting gendered literacy differences, but does not acknowledge other factors such as class and culture that may impact these preferences. Moreover, these studies (much like the media reports) do not examine what boys’ lack of achievement in school literacies means once they leave school and enter the workforce.

Martino and Kehler (2006), Alloway (2007) and Sanford’s (2006) critiques of the way gender has been used to portray and polarize boys’ lagging abilities in traditional literacies allude to the reality that gender is not the only element to be considered when examining literacy. They do, nonetheless, indicate that gender plays a role in the construction of literate identity and in the way students perceive themselves and are, in turn, perceived by their teachers. Although the studies, standardized tests, and media reports do not represent directly (or correctly) the impact of gender on teachers’ professional practice (apart from the media proposing the apparent necessity for more male teacher role models), they hint at the necessity to come to a greater understanding of the role of gender, as well as class and culture, within the classroom. If students’ perceptions of themselves can be swayed by gendered expectations (Sanford, 2006) and if the media debate over boys’ literacy is, in some way, a means for maintaining traditional patriarchal hegemonies (Martino & Kehler, 2006), then the genesis and the role of the male teacher’s literate identity bears closer scrutiny. It is for this reason that an examination of the Discourses of male teachers may be worthwhile. Gee (1992) writes,

Discourses are amalgams of ways of talking, valuing, thinking, believing, interacting, acting, and, sometimes, writing and reading, together with various “props” (books, clubs, buildings, birds, and so on) in the world. Discourses are tied to particular social groups and the “identities” their members take on when playing their apportioned “roles” within the social practices of the group. (p. 104)

Male teachers and their identities as teachers and readers are a product of the groups to which they belong. They, in turn, promote the values and beliefs of the Discourse communities with which they are associated.

Identity as socially constructed

On the surface, to be literate may simply appear to be the acquisition of a set of decoding skills. It is not uncommon for school districts to employ standardized literacy instruction and curriculum as a means of monitoring students’ success. The instructional models utilized by these kinds of programs are assumed to be effective in all educational situations with little consideration for the actual students who will be participating in these programs – their lives, class or culture. This type of rigid literacy program represents what is, in many ways, an outmoded version of literacy.

Yagelski (2000) describes this outmoded understanding of literacy as “a set of decoding and encoding skills” but points out that it is, nevertheless, “a means of demonstrating specified – and sanctioned – knowledge” (p. 36). Yagelski’s words suggest the social function of literacy, carefully disguised by skills and strategies. Literacy is not immune to the hegemonies that exist in a particular society. In fact, it is often a way of reproducing these hierarchies in socially “sanctioned” ways. Hicks (2001) echoes this point of view stating, “School reading practices are often conveyed in

educational research literatures as a set of competencies or cognitive skills, as indeed they are measured by the standardized tests so valued among educational institutions.” She further observes, “It becomes all too easy to lose sight of the fact that reading involves a set of cultural practices, as integrally embedded within webs of relationships as any other social act of living and knowing” (p. 221). In fact, the hegemonies of gender, class and culture are perhaps the forces that underpin the concern with boys’ literacy achievement. Ultimately, literacy cannot be divorced from the myriad social forces and entanglements from which it springs.

Several recent studies have examined this intersection of literacy and identity from a social constructivist perspective (McCarthy, 2001; Godley, 2003; Hicks, 2001; Anderson, 2002). In these studies the underlying belief is that a child’s identity is influenced by the stories they are told about themselves and their communities, as well as through their participation in literacy events. Moreover, the studies recognize that identities are rarely fixed, but rather they are fluid and constantly changing. McCarthy (2001), for example, draws on several metaphors for identity; she describes identity as “a collective term referring to the dynamic organization of sub-identities that might conflict or align with each other” (Mishler, 1999), a “cluster of stories” (Anzaldúa, 1999), as well as “a multidimensional space where discourses might blend or clash” (Sarup, 1996, as cited in McCarthy, 2001, p. 127). Although these metaphors might be problematic in their apparent lack of precision, they, nonetheless, represent the interrelationships of narrative, discourse and identity. Literate identity, then, cannot be divorced from community, nor from the stories that narrate our lives.

These studies, focused on children or adolescents, recognize the role of literacy in the negotiation of identity. However, as McCarthy (2001) points out, “Perceptions of parents, peers, teacher, and students [also play] a role in identity construction” (p. 142). Consequently, the construction of literacy or literate identity is not confined to the classroom, but part of a larger process that involves parents, peers and community, as well as the school. Moreover, in Anderson’s (2002) study of third and fourth grade children, she observed that children “use literacy tasks and opportunities for their own purposes, . . . to find their place among others and to position others at both local and global levels” (p. 393). In this case, literacy activities that occurred in school were not simply a matter of learning a set of cognitive skills; rather, the children observed used “literacy practices to do the social identity work of gender” (Anderson, 2002, p. 391). While Anderson (2002) found that the negotiation of gender roles played a significant role in the dialogue of the classroom, gender roles were not as fixed and immutable as might be expected.

The suggestion that identity is fluid and ever-changing does not mean it is without constraints. Godley (2003) illustrates this notion: “Identity work is also constrained by the social categories embedded within and defined by a particular context or community of people” (p. 284). Her study demonstrates the multiple roles a student takes on even within a single classroom depending on the literacy activity. While the categories she describes cannot be used to describe all classrooms, they do underline ways in which student identities must adapt to function within various classroom communities and situations. Moreover, her study illustrates the ways in which students are constrained to particular behaviours based on the expectations of particular groups. For example, she

found that “male students who were positioned as athletes found that this literacy position was associated with being a weak student and thus made it more difficult to gain recognition from the teacher and peers for academic strengths” (p. 284). Similarly, Anderson (2002) writes, “Stories written and told in communities organize experience, materialize social interactions, and maintain social control and community coherence” (p. 397). Consequently, although identity is in constant flux in its interactions with literacy, it remains constrained by the expectations of a particular context.

Gender, literacy, identity

In much the same way that the media have informed public perceptions of boys’ literacy and academic achievement, gender is also informed by the literacies students have access to such as books, media, and internet. These kinds of media images offer few variations on the themes of masculinity and femininity, and, as such, they are restrictive and impact students’ access to certain literacies. According to Sanford (2006), “Gender as a social construct affects learning in and out of school, dictating what can be learned and what is out of bounds” (p. 304). As a result, gender is an indisputable facet of literate identity. The converse is also true; literacy is used to make sense of gender identity. “Even at an early age, children have been shown to use literacy to make sense of the versions of masculinity and femininity they see in their lives and to imagine themselves as actors of them” (Orellana, 1995, as cited in Godley, 2003, p. 273). Media images of masculinity and femininity often offer highly stereotypical and narrow versions of what it is to be male and female, as demonstrated by the news articles cited earlier alluding to concerns about boys’ literacy. Fortunately, some children are able to move beyond mainstream demands of gender (Godley 2003).

Several studies found that gender was not a monolithic, immutable identity marker, although it is worth noting that none of the studies addressed gender outside of the categories of masculine and feminine. According to Anderson (2002), “Children . . . constituted gender identities at the levels of the self, the social group, and at more generalized, distant cultural levels” (p. 393). Anderson’s (2002) study looked at three literacy activities involving several children in an elementary classroom. In this case, “Power and dominance were imbedded in representations and interactions about gender. However, power and position were constantly in flux, dependant on authorship, personal history, proximity to and status among others, and teacher and student initiated literacy events [activities involving literacy]” (p. 421). These findings suggest that gender identities can be reconstituted through literacy, and that certain situations (or perhaps Discourses) lend themselves more readily to particular kinds of gender constructions. It is worth noting that this study took place in a somewhat privileged environment wherein the participants were largely white, upper-middle class and the teachers had an active interest in gender issues. The privileged environment may have allowed the children to feel that they could take more risks with their gender identities.

Newkirk (2002) offers another perspective on the social construction of gender roles: “While it seems to me naïve to rule out any place for biological influence in the way boys and girls behave, it is more useful to view gender roles as social constructions, as tacit social invitations to define oneself in a certain way. As such, they are subject to change” (p. 23). He notes that although gender roles may not be entirely biologically driven, social constructs are, nonetheless, highly resistant to change. This underlines the

necessity to understand gender as a fluid category – one that cannot be understood in isolation from other forces such as class or culture.

Hicks' (2001) research also acknowledges the power of socially constructed notions of masculinity in the difficulties experienced by her subject in adapting to the literacy expectations of the classroom. In this case, the boy observed in the study was heavily influenced by the masculine identity that was embodied by his father and unquestioned by his mother and other female members of his family. This does not imply that gender is an inherently monolithic and immutable construction. Rather, in this particular case, the masculine identity accepted at home existed in conflict with the literate identity demanded by school. Moreover, Hicks acknowledged that the working class status of the subject's father demanded a different set of literacies, such as the ability to decode work orders, than those required by the school.

While these studies ostensibly deal with the social constructedness of children's identities through literacy, they, in turn, suggest the potential power of the teacher's role in the construction of these identities. For example, Hicks (2001) proposes "hybrid discourses of instruction," in order to "make space for the particular identities and textual practices that are valued and practiced by men and boys in culturally specific settings" (p. 226). In the case of McCarthy's (2001) research, the students were all part of a standardized reading program that rated their reading abilities and placed them in a colour category according to their assessed reading level. These students' beliefs in their literacy skills were heavily influenced by the category they had been assigned at school, and, as a result, they placed less value on the literacies practiced in their homes or communities. This study hints at the power teachers and schools can have over students'

perceptions of their reading abilities through systems that scale these abilities. Similarly, it suggests the power teachers might wield in telling students stories about their literary abilities.

Although none of these studies address directly the role of male teachers' perceptions of literacy and reading in particular, they do point to a way of examining literacy, gender and identity. Moreover, they serve as reminders that gender cannot be considered in isolation from other factors such as socioeconomic status and culture. According to Yagelski (2000), "Literacy learning in schools is part of the norming function that schools serve as they convey implicit beliefs about knowledge and behaviour and authority" (p. 162). Literate identities, then, may be caught up in the pressures that maintain traditional, hegemonic views of masculinity and femininity. Alternately, they may also be a means of entering into a variety of Discourse communities. Regardless, participation in literacies, such as reading, is not simply a matter of decoding; rather, it is a means of constituting identity. If we can come to grips with the factors that influence teachers' literate identities, then we may make strides in rendering these literacies accessible to all boys and all girls.

Dissonances

As a result of the many Discourses that we may enter into in a lifetime, literate identity, although fluid and multiple, is not without its tensions. Hicks' (2001) study of the home and school experiences of a young boy describes "the dissonances between family identities and school practices" (p. 217). These "dissonances" are often the site of irresolvable conflicts between home and school literacies. Nonetheless, these tensions can be productive sites for examining the role of literacy in the construction of identity:

Tensions are critically important, even though they may not be resolvable. To negotiate literate participation in complex classroom cultures, children must differentiate not only phonological niceties and textual features but also social worlds – the very social worlds that provide them with agency and important symbols. (Dyson, 1999, p. 396 as quoted in Anderson, 2002, p. 422)

Literacy, then, is not unlike a maze. Individuals must navigate not only the “phonological niceties” of the text, but they must find their way within secondary Discourse communities that may be more or less familiar depending on their primary Discourse. Typically the closer the home culture is to that of the school, the more similar the literacy practices and the more coherent the literate identities.

Hicks (2001) observes, “The stories voiced about us, by those whom we most love and value, shape our identities and values in ways that are sometimes more powerful than even the most authoritative institutional systems of cultural power and social regulation can muster” (p. 225). For some students, these dissonances between home and school are less evident than for others. Williams (2006) similarly points out that some students (typically white, middle-class) learn many of the Discourses valued in school at home; consequently, “Such students don’t have to make choices between the identity they live with in their homes and communities and the identity that will be rewarded in the classroom” (p. 344). The closer home literacies are to the dominant discourse of school, the more likely these children are to reap the social and economic rewards.

The literate identity of a reader is a complex construction. Its foundation is set within the primary Discourse, and its walls are built, torn down, and rebuilt within the many secondary Discourses that follow. It is not immune to the allure of media images

of gender and pressures to conform to mainstream conceptions of masculinity and femininity. And it is constantly in flux.

Chapter Three: Aperture and Exposure

Photographers have the unique and somewhat mystifying position of being both the “see-er” and the unseen – and yet their presence is inherently a part of any image they produce. The objects that frame an image, whether it is photographed close up or from a distance, determine how it is seen. The act of interviewing participants for research is not much different: it frames the participants within a particular context where they are “seen” by the researcher.

I approached this study fully cognizant of the fact that my positionality as a thirty-nine year old, white, middle-class, female Language Arts teacher who loves reading would impact my understanding of the data gleaned from my observations and interviews. First of all, having grown up as white and middle-class in a predominantly white and middle-class area, the daughter of a pharmacist and a principal (in the same system where I now teach), many of the literacies practiced in school were made accessible to me at home. Moreover, I come from a home where both parents are highly educated and my father is an avid reader. I was read to and encouraged to read from a young age. In a similar fashion, I have read to and encouraged my children to read. My husband, a chef, whose first language is French, is a reader (usually in English). Two languages are spoken in our house, though English is more frequent, and our children have shelves full of books in both French and English. I value literacy, particularly that of reading, and it would be disingenuous to suggest that this did not colour my understanding of the participants’ views of literacy and their professional literacy practices.

Moreover, I recognize that my relationship as a female and a colleague of the participants also influenced their responses. They may have felt the need to adapt their responses to what they perceived as my expectations based on my gender or my role within the school where we work. Alternately, the participants may have felt more willing to share their thoughts because I am female, feeling that there was less pressure to maintain a particular masculine façade. Merriam (1998) observes, “The interviewer-respondent interaction is a complex phenomenon. Both parties bring biases, predispositions, attitudes and physical characteristics that color the interaction and the data elicited” (p. 87). In the end, no interpretation can be wholly objective and the best that can be hoped for is that the researcher fully acknowledges and is cognizant of her biases and blind spots.

I believe that knowledge and understanding cannot be fixed and stable but must be understood from within the context from which it emerges. Creswell (1998) illustrates how this influences educational research stating that “knowledge claims must be set within the conditions of the world today and in the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and other group affiliations” (p. 79). This study was not intended to propose an overarching, singular theory about male teachers’ literacies; rather I hoped to come to a better understanding of how each individual perceived the genesis of his attitudes towards literacy (in other words, his literate identity) and the influence of these attitudes on his professional practice. Merriam (1998) echoes this approach: “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in this world” (p. 6). In other words, I

attempted to set aside my own preconceptions about literacy and come to a better understanding of the childhood and professional literacy experiences of the participants.

Data collection

My inquiry into the literacies of male teachers was designed as an open-ended qualitative study that made use of several methods of data collection including informal observation, interviews and a reflective journal. The research employed collective case study methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). A collective case study is described as “an instrumental study extended to several cases” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 437). Multiple cases are chosen “because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 437). Polkinghorne (2005), too, offers a justification for looking closely at several cases:

Multiple participants serve as a kind of triangulation on the experience, locating its core meaning by approaching it through different accounts. Triangulation does not serve to verify a particular account but to allow the researcher to move beyond a single view of the experience. (p. 141)

In this study, I interviewed six participants looking for themes and patterns of experience that emerged across all of the cases.

The primary method of data collection was in-depth semistructured interviews with teachers. According to Gall, Borg and Gall (1996), “The semistructured interview involves asking a series of structured questions and then probing more deeply using open-form questions to obtain additional information” (p. 310). This method allowed me to probe for deeper understandings of the participants’ experiences of literacy by creating

a forum where the participants could narrate their literacy experiences. This was underpinned by the notion that narrative is fundamental to both identity and memory. Clandinin and Huber (2002) write, “For us, identity is a storied life composition, a story to live by. Stories to live by are shaped in place and lived in places. They live in actions, in relationships with others, in language, including silences, in gaps and vacancies, in continuities and discontinuities” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, 1999; as cited in Clandinin & Huber, 2002, p. 162). In essence, we create our “selves” through narrative, as well as interpret events. As well, Merriam (1998) underlines the usefulness of interviews as a means of collecting data about events that can no longer be observed: “Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate” (p. 72). As a result, interviewing seemed to be an appropriate method of data collection, as I was asking participants to recall their childhood experiences of literacy.

The interviews took place outside of school hours at the convenience of the participant. Each initial interview took approximately one hour. The interviews were semistructured asking teachers to reflect on their experiences with literacy: to examine their perceptions around literacy and reading, as well as the genesis of their literate identity. Merriam (1998) points out that “Less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways” (p. 74). The semi-structured format allowed me to explore each participant’s particular view of literacy without being confined to a restrictive set of questions. As a result, a set of prepared questions guided the interviews, but did not restrict me to asking only these questions. These interviews

were audiotaped. As each interview was completed it was transcribed in its entirety. After the initial interviews two sets of follow up questions were emailed to the participants, although two of the participants chose to meet with me instead and notes on their responses were taken.

All data collected during this study were dealt with inductively: themes and categories emerged during the analysis phase of the study (Creswell, 1998). The interviews were transcribed and coded using the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998) looking for dominant themes and patterns that illustrated the participants' understandings of literacy and commonalities between the understandings of the participants. As the interviews progressed I began to see emerging themes related to the impact of gender, competence, role models and Discourse (Gee, 2008). As each interview was completed, I continuously read and re-read the transcriptions looking for recurrent patterns and themes. As well, I reflected on the relationship between what my participants were saying and current research findings. After the initial thematic coding was completed I had dozens of recurring ideas. These were condensed into several overarching themes and these themes were placed within the broader categories of the participants' primary Discourse, secondary Discourses (primarily school) and professional Discourse.

Initially, although I knew I wanted to explore each participant's experience of literacy as a child, in the home as well as school, and their attitudes toward literacy as an adult and professional, I was primarily looking for a greater understanding of the genesis of their attitudes toward literacy. I was also cognizant of the fact that their recollections would not necessarily be a factual representation of their experiences with literacy, rather

these stories would be interpretations of what these experiences meant for the individual within a particular cultural context. “Teachers’ stories, their narratives of experience are both personal – reflecting teachers’ life histories – and social – reflecting the milieu, the contexts in which teachers live” (Clandinin & Huber, 2002, p. 161). These recollections, in effect, would narrate each participant’s literate identity. Bruner (2004) writes, “When someone tells you his life . . . it is always a cognitive achievement rather than a through-the-clear-crystal recital of something unequivocally given. In the end, it is a narrative achievement” (p. 693). Thus, by listening to the participants narrate their literate lives, I hoped to achieve some insight into the forces that impact male teachers’ literate identities.

The data collected in the interviews and the subsequent emails were supplemented with observations recorded in less formal settings such as the staffroom or department meetings. I also kept a reflective journal during the period of the study for the purpose of recording and making sense of what occurred during the interviews, as well as for reflecting on my experiences of reading and its role in my teaching practice.

The findings for this study have been reported using narrative and description, in an attempt to allow the voices of the participants to speak, in order to evoke the understandings gained through the research process.

Participants

The participants for my study were male teachers selected from a single high school in an urban setting. The teachers were selected from the same school where I currently work (though two of the teachers have since left) which allowed both researcher and participant a greater degree of familiarity and comfort in the interviews. I

interviewed six male high school teachers with varying degrees of professional experience and who self-identified along the continuum from avid to non-reader. Participants in this study were chosen by purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998), and are identified throughout the research by pseudonyms. After receiving behavioral ethics approval, I approached the school division for permission to conduct research within one high school. Because the participants are colleagues, I approached them about their participation in the study informally, through a verbal request.

These teachers were purposefully chosen to provide a wide spectrum of literate identities and perspectives on both personal and professional literacy. When making the initial requests for their participation in the study, I briefly asked them to define themselves as readers or non-readers. I also had a sense of their reading habits through working with them – some more closely than others. After the selection of participants, I spent time interviewing them individually as well as observing them informally in less structured situations. During the interviews I informed the participants that they were free to answer only the questions with which they were comfortable and that the recording device could be turned off at any time. As well, I informed the participants that although they would not be identified in the study, nor would any identifying information be used, the smaller participant pool could make them recognizable through their comments in the interviews.

The group shot: The six participants

The participants, frozen in time like photographs, represent a diverse spectrum of literacies and reading interests. Each participant plays a significant role in the culture of the school where he teaches.

Adam

Adam has worked as a teacher for four years in the same high school, teaching physical education, ethical living, native studies and science. If you were to pass by Adam in the hall, his thick neck and broad shoulders would mark him instantly as a former football player. Adam does not characterize himself as a reader, but suggests that he is becoming one, as he has begun to read more in recent years. His reading interests are quite narrow, focusing mainly on books about football, sports magazines and the newspaper. He is, in many ways, the stereotypical “jock.”

Bob

Bob has worked as a math teacher for approximately twenty-five years in Saskatchewan and Alberta, though much of his career has been spent in the urban school division where he currently teaches. Bob contradicts many of the commonly held assumptions about math teachers in that he is an avid reader and reads a variety of genres – with a preference for realistic fiction. It is clear that Bob has always viewed reading as an important and enjoyable aspect of his leisure life and that this enjoyment of literature has been passed on to his daughters.

Charlie

Charlie is in his first five years of teaching and has taught in one school. He prefers teaching history, but he has also taught ELA and native studies. That said, he clearly states that he has no interest in teaching Language Arts and got little pleasure from teaching the Read class, in spite of having a minor in English. Though Charlie would be considered an avid reader by many, his reading interests are somewhat unique, as he has a strong preference for non-fiction and a real enjoyment of what he describes as

“textbook material” (material related to his teaching specialty of history). He does read some novels, but more often in the summer. This appreciation for fiction did not really develop until university.

Devin

Devin is tall, well-dressed and lean for a man in his fifties. He has not lost the air of athleticism that suggests he once played basketball. At the time of the interviews for this study, Devin was in his last year of teaching and was struggling with the decision of whether to retire or not, unsure of what he would do once he retired. The first fifteen years of his career were spent as an elementary teacher, teaching ELA and physical education, as well as other subjects as required, such as social studies, health and music. In the second half of his career he has worked as an ELA/media teacher, and for the past four years, he has worked as a teacher librarian. Of the many subjects he has taught, his preferred subject area is media studies. It is clear that Devin simply fell into the role of teacher-librarian, and it seems that although he places an importance on doing the job well, he is not especially passionate about the role. Devin sees himself as a reader, but qualifies that by stating that he is not a “voracious” reader. However, he does read every day with a preference for Canadian fiction. He describes reading as being “good for the soul” and says that books are a “miracle.” It is always evident, in conversation with Devin, that he has a love of language and that he values being articulate.

Fred

Fred has been teaching for twelve years in Australia, England, the Arctic and most recently Egypt. He has taught physical education, chemistry, math, biology, science, computers and English, but his preferred subjects are chemistry and physical

education. He explains that he enjoys sports but that full time in the gym is tiring and chemistry is his major. As well, teaching in different areas allows him to “bond” with the “jocks” as well as the “academics.” Fred gives the impression that he finds his profession satisfying, but that he is unhappy with having to teach Language Arts – an area that is not his strength and that he does not appear to want to learn more about. Fred “reads a little bit everyday.” Reading, for Fred, is a relatively new found habit, as he did not develop a love of reading until adulthood – early in his teaching career. He likes action-adventure stories and non-fiction, as well as magazines like *Sports Illustrated* and *Outside*.

Greg

Greg, like Charlie, is in his first five years of full-time teaching primarily as an ELA and drama teacher. Greg is a tall, lanky figure with gestures that are easily mimicked by students. In many ways, he is what the students might consider a geek – in the same way that Adam with his thick neck and muscles fits the profile of a jock. Nevertheless, Greg’s eccentricities seem to serve him in the classroom and he develops close relationships with some of his students. Some of Greg’s reading is directed by his work as a drama teacher – reading scripts. But he also reads a variety of novels, the *New York Times*, and film commentaries. He also feeds an interest in politics through his choice of reading materials. During the school year Greg’s reading is limited by time and other obligations, but during the summer he is “always reading.”

These participants were selected because they represent a variety of reader identities, as well as a variety of reading interests. They are also somewhat homogenous, in that, although they come from both rural and urban settings, they all can reasonably be said to be members of the middle-class – both as children and as adults. They represent a

range of ages from late twenties to fifties, but they are all Caucasian males, who self-identity as heterosexual. In seeking some similarities of class and cultural background among the participants, I hoped to focus on the less evident forces that impact male literate identity.

These, then, are the participants whose lives will fill the pages of this album – my thesis. Like any photograph, the participants are seen through the eyes of the photographer, not an objective lens. They are revealed both as a group – male teachers working in the same school, and as men who have developed their own particular literate identities.

Chapter Four: The Albums

The Family Album: Literacy in the Primary Discourse

The family album is, invariably, a revealing document. Not only is it a record of what has happened; its absences record what is not said – the events we choose to forget. Nonetheless, it is a powerful marker of identity, inscribing relationships in the positioning of the group shot, the sideways glance caught on film, the empty chair . . .

Becker (1995) states, “Photographs get meanings, like all cultural objects, from their context” (as cited in Capello & Hollingsworth, p. 444). In many ways, we too are cultural objects, drawing our identities from within a particular context. That said, perhaps we are best captured in photographs as children – before we have learned to be camera shy, before we have decided that our nose is too big, our smile crooked – before, in essence, we have become ourselves. The family album captures, at least from the perspective of the photographer, our constantly shifting, ephemeral selves – like sylphs, slipping in and out of who we are to become. These photographs, too, are a record of the primary Discourse, capturing momentarily, the objects, gestures, dress and relationships that inform the specific ways we learn to act, speak and understand.

The interviews created textual photographs of the participants, revealing versions of their childhood identities as they related to literacy. Each participant’s album is unique and reveals a variety of concerns (or lack thereof) with regards to reading and literacy in general. The images conjured by each individual reveal the impact of the primary Discourse on identity and literacy.

As it is my intention to narrate the stories of my participants, I have chosen in this section to present both the findings and the analysis as a means of preserving the narrative continuity of the text.

Reader Identity

Some stories require knowing the ending in order to appreciate the beginning. In order to fully appreciate the stories of the participants' emerging literate identities, it seems worthwhile to know where they are now as readers as well as examine their fundamental beliefs about literacy.

All of the participants were asked what it meant to be a reader. For Adam, being a reader meant making time for reading. He observed, "When I get into these books [football books], I'm trying to make time in my day to read them . . . like you're going grocery shopping, so maybe I'll just stick around here to read." Of course, based on his comments about avoiding grocery shopping, this may simply be a clever ploy to avoid household responsibilities. Fred, too, comments that he has "reading on his mind." Charlie says that he's not a "Johnny book bag reader," although he does read every day. He points out that his "understanding [of being a reader] is one that understands what they're reading." Similarly, Devin states that he's not a "vociferous" reader, yet he reads all of the time and so that makes him a reader. Greg defines a reader as, "Somebody who's intelligent, can discuss intelligently what he or she has read, and is intrinsically motivated to read." To be a reader, for all of the participants, meant to read regularly and to think about or look forward to reading.

Although it would be interesting to know exactly how many minutes each of these participants reads each day and to evaluate what the quality of this reading might be or

how the content of the reading varies from participant to participant, for this study it is more significant that now, as adults, they perceive themselves as readers (or in the case of Adam, that he is becoming a reader). This is now their literate identity. What is also significant is that this was not always the case. Through the course of their childhood, school years and professional life, their literate identities have constantly been in flux, shifting from reader to non-reader to reader.

As readers, none of the participants fit a stock definition of what it might mean to be a male reader. They all read the newspaper – some from cover to cover, others, like Devin and Adam, prefer the sports section. Charlie reads non-fiction almost exclusively. Bob enjoys realistic fiction. Fred prefers action-adventure stories, while Devin has a penchant for Canadian fiction and occasionally picks up *Vanity Fair* (his wife's subscription). It is interesting to note, however, that despite the vast differences in their interests and reading preferences, they all share a similar definition of literacy. When asked to define literacy and what it means to be literate, all of the participants' responses encompassed the ideas of reading, writing and communication:

A Western-based education adheres to the concept of a written language - this is our epistemological paradigm. If one is not able to cognitively integrate themselves into this paradigm, they are, in essence, standing behind a brick wall.
(Charlie)

In general, the value of literacy, according to the participants, is the ability to function in society, but also the ability to think critically:

Literacy is important because it helps people define their own values If one can read about an issue and discuss it, then maybe read another perspective on the issue that person can form an educated, informed, and individualized opinion on

the issue. (Greg)

Literacy is also the key to intellectual freedom:

In my mind, if you don't read, your brain goes down this narrow channel or tube of thought that ends somewhere looking at a scene that would be like a TV. If you do read it would be like stepping out into a meadow of flowers. (Bob)

In spite of sharing similar definitions of literacy and its connection to reading and writing, some of the participants hold more elaborate notions of the value of literacy. Bob's "meadow" is certainly more evocative than Adam's "means to an end." This underlines the reality that the participants have come to their own particular literate identity by very different paths. The goal of this study is to trace these paths through the stories of the participants as they recall their experiences of reading in childhood, school and their professional lives.

Primary Discourse – The home and literate identity

I do not remember learning to read. It has been part of the fabric of my being for as long as I can remember. I am a reader. This is an inevitable fact of who I am. It is a criterion by which I select my friends, and even my husband (though he has other qualities as well!). I cannot conceive of a world without words. I am mystified by the students who tell me they hate reading, that reading is boring, and that there is nothing to read as they stand in the midst of thousands of possibilities in the library where I work. Although I am certain that my literate identity and how I see myself as a reader has undergone changes since the first moment I picked up a book and found pleasure in the experience, it is inconceivable not to imagine drawing great pleasure from reading.

No so, for all of the participants. Although all of the participants describe themselves as readers now, their paths to this particular literate identity are highly

individualized, beginning in early childhood in the home. Through the interviews with the participants I attempted to assemble a textual snapshot of some of the elements of each interviewee's primary Discourse. In many ways, it would have been better to have observed each participant as a child within their specific home environment. However, Gee (1992) points out that even memory must be filtered through a social context (p. 66), and further suggests that "The norms within the social practice – what count as proper plots – constitute memory, not what is 'stored' in your head" (p. 78). Polkinghorne (2005), too, points out, "People do not have complete access to their experiences. The capacity to be aware of or to recollect one's experiences is intrinsically limited" (p. 141). From this perspective, it would seem that what the participants remember is more telling perhaps than what may have actually occurred. Ultimately, it is how we remember experience that helps to frame our literate identity. Several themes and patterns emerged as I interviewed the participants. The role of parents in conjunction with the availability of books appeared to be significant in the development of a positive reader identity. As well, it became clear which participants had developed a strong sense of their own self-efficacy in reading at an early age.

Snapshots of the primary Discourse

Adam – "Ends to a means"

Adam's response to the question of whether he considers himself a reader is immediately "No," followed by, "But it's gradually getting more and more that I'm starting to notice that I like to do it." Raised by his mother and grandmother in a lower-middle class neighborhood, Adam says that he remembers his mother and grandmother reading to him "all the time" and even remembers Dr. Seuss and *Peter and the Wolf*

among his favorite childhood books. His mother and grandmother actively encouraged his reading. However, their approach seems to have had a contrary effect in many ways: “They’d always say, ‘You got to read. Let’s read.’ And as I was getting older there were times I had to read out loud. I hated that. That’s probably where my hate of reading occurred.” Clearly, Adam’s mom was interested in her son’s success in reading. However, according to Adam, she was “kind of a hard ass. If I screwed up, she’d really grill me.” This was, apparently, “the wrong way” to encourage Adam’s literacy. Adam’s grandmother was involved in his early literacy as well. He recalls, “Grandma would spend time with me: spelling, reading, counting.” These efforts were rewarded with “sticky stars.”

Although, their home had few books, “a couple of Bibles and maybe a *Chicken Soup for the Soul* kind of book,” they did go to the public library frequently, which he recalls as positive. This dearth of reading material in the home was perhaps a reflection of what Adam surmises was his mother’s lack of interest in reading. His grandmother’s interest in reading seemed to be largely restricted to her Bible: “My grandma read her Bible and her devotion book all the time.” Later, he would receive a *National Geographic* subscription from an aunt. Adam describes his older sister as a reader and explains that when he was seven or eight and she was twelve they would exchange fantasy books. Ultimately, although both Adam’s mother and grandmother were actively involved in his developing literacy, their collective approach seems to have worked against Adam developing a sense of himself as a reader or a personal enjoyment of reading. Instead, reading was highly purposeful: “It always seemed like reading was for

a purpose, like it was to get ends to a means. It wasn't to sit down, relax and enjoy a book."

Bob – "It was like treasure"

Bob comments that "I never really, until I sat on [the school's] literacy committee, gave it a thought as being qualified as a reader," but further states that he does see himself as a reader. According to Bob, his mother was a reader, but not his father: "He dropped out of school early, so I don't think he had really good reading skills." However, he qualifies this assessment of his father by stating that "he would have liked to read." Apparently, Bob's mother read "*Reader's Digest* type stuff" and had books by her bed, although he does state that he "can't really remember seeing her read." Nonetheless, he has been left with the impression that both parents either enjoyed reading or would have liked to read more. Similarly, Bob's grandmother (on his mother's side) provided them with reading material. As well, he has fond memories of a neighbor who provided him with a whole box of Westerns to read: "Instead of reading a book in a night and then having nothing to read for a long time . . . it was like treasure." Bob's youth was spent in a small prairie town, so access to library books was fairly restricted. The town library, a small collection of books, was, for a time, housed in his parents' basement. This suggests that Bob's parents saw value in providing this service and that for at least part of his youth, books were readily available and even abundant, and that any time there was an abundance of reading materials was positive and memorable.

Charlie – "Tons of books"

When asked if he considers himself a reader, Charlie responds, "I'm not like hardcore, read a novel a month, reader. I do read everyday, so I do consider myself to be

a reader.” For Charlie the most prominent memory of his home literacy is that they had “tons of books.” This wealth of reading material was the result of subscriptions to book of the month clubs and parents who actively sought out reading material related to Charlie’s interests. As well, because Charlie’s father owned a store, books that did not sell at the store were brought home to be read. However, in spite of having many books available, Charlie observes that he doesn’t remember seeing his parents read, although they did have books beside their bed. He does remember his cousins reading a lot: “Our side of the family, they were well read.” As well, he has memories of reading to his younger siblings, particularly his brother. In his recollection, his parents didn’t take him to the library, although he did go to the public library a couple of times. “I do remember looking at dinosaur books and history books and going in there and taking books out because it was kind of cool that you could take books out.”

Devin – “I read books before I went to school”

“I don’t really see myself as a reader because I know what vociferous readers are like and I’m not like that,” states Devin. However, as we discuss his definition he recants his position: “I don’t read nearly as much as a lot of people, and yet I do read all of the time, so I’m a reader, I guess, in that way.” Devin’s earliest memories of his home literacy make clear that reading was considered important: “I remember having books in the house and that people read. My dad was a big reader and my mom read a lot too.” From a young age, Devin’s father’s love of literature was evident, not simply because he was a high school English teacher: “My dad was a professional and that was his job, so I think I noticed him reading more.” Devin’s parents read a variety of materials from the Bible to professional papers to books that dealt with politics. Devin and his sisters all

read before arriving in grade one: “I read books before I went to school and I pointed that out to my grade one teacher.” Although he has few memories of being read to or reading with his parents, he does suggest that he “would read a bit of the newspaper for my dad before I was going to school.” Some books were available in the home, but Devin remembers getting most of his reading material from the library.

Fred – “Mostly my memories of books are where I don’t want to read”

Fred seems content to describe himself as a reader because he has reading “on [his] mind” and will bring a book if he is “going to the beach,” but is unable to say if this is for more than to just “alleviate boredom.” However, his perception of himself as a reader is relatively new-found, as his early memories do not suggest a profound love of reading: regarding his childhood reading he states, “Certainly my mom and I would read together a lot, but I think mostly my memories of books are where I don’t want to read.” According to Fred, his parents encouraged him to read, books of all kinds were available, and they visited the library. Moreover, while he questions how much free time his parents had to read, he believes that they enjoyed reading and read the newspaper every day. As well, a family friend, the high school librarian, encouraged reading and discussions about books.

Fred’s home environment seems to have been ideal for fostering at least an interest in reading. However, his comments about his brother, whom he describes as a reader, are revealing: “His nickname for me was ‘Mr. Muggs’ – that’s about all I could read, so he thought.” Although it is not clear to Fred whether his brother’s love of reading and success in reading was a discouragement, his remarks seem to suggest this: “I wouldn’t say he influenced me either way, other than his ability to read well was like

‘He’s reading five books and I haven’t even read one book.’ So I was a slow reader compared to him. Maybe it was discouraging. I don’t know.”

Greg – “I was quite interested in different types of reading”

Greg describes a reader as someone who’s “intrinsically motivated to read,” but qualifies this by saying, “I find, as I get older, the extrinsic almost takes over, that I procrastinate over something I have to read until I have a deadline.” It’s clear from his comments that Greg enjoys reading and that his parents fostered a love of reading. “I remember being read to quite a bit by both of my parents,” he observes. Interestingly, he states that he believes his mom would have read to him more, but “I’m sure they both did.” As well as reading to Greg, his parents read a variety of materials from “best-sellers” to “books on raising children.” Likewise, books were available in the home and were purchased for Greg, as well as obtained from the library, though library visits were less frequent or significant than book buying. “I remember at some point I was digging through the basement – at the time I was quite interested in different types of reading – I found some packed away university books of my mom’s and my dad’s – and I grabbed those and took them.”

Primary Discourse and literate identity

These snapshots of the participants offer a glimpse into the attitudes and dispositions that framed their primary Discourse and suggest experiences that may have influenced the development of their adult literate identity. According to Gee (2008) the primary Discourse plays a fundamental role in the formation of attitudes toward literacy. The importance of the primary Discourse, as it is espoused by Gee, was echoed by several of the participants in this study who felt that it was the parents’ responsibility to

ensure that their children learned to read; in other words, that positive attitudes toward literacy must necessarily be developed in the primary Discourse. That said, few teachers have escaped parent-teacher meetings where parents indicate that they are at a loss and can no longer help their child. Experience would tell any teacher that there are students who achieve great success in spite of impossible circumstances and that there are students who fail in spite of having all the provisions for success. Whether or not an individual is able to access mainstream literacies, experiences success in school-based literacies such as reading, or ultimately becomes a reader - someone who reads regularly for pleasure – should be one of these straightforward equations. It seems likely that if parents are readers, books are available, and child is encouraged to read, child will become a “reader” and, as a result, experience success in the many literacy-based aspects of schooling, as well as develop a taste for reading outside of school.

But is this really the case? In conversations with my participants, I wanted to develop a sense of the connection between their literate identity and their childhood reading environment. According to Barton and Hamilton (1998), “Literacy is primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people’s heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as texts to be analyzed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people” (as cited in Davies, 2006, p. 163). From this perspective, the home becomes a child’s first introduction to the literacy practices of his or her community. This introduction is much more than a rudimentary understanding of the alphabet and the language of a community – instead it is an immersion into the values and cultural practices of that place (Lave &

Wegner, 1991). Literacy, then, is not simply the mechanical process of decoding a system of signs, rather, it is an expression of how we value the world and where we locate ourselves in it. The home, then, is fundamental in how we construct our literate identity.

Heath's (1983) study underlines the significance of home literacy (or what Gee calls the primary Discourse) in determining individual approaches to literacy. In the Roadville community she observed that there was "a concerted effort on the part of the adults to initiate their children both into pre-scripted discourse around printed material and into passive listening behavior" (Heath, 1983, p. 227). In comparison, Trackton residents did not accumulate reading materials, no space or time was assigned to reading, and the meanings of what was read were decided jointly and socially (p. 232). As well, in this community, meaning was typically connected to their immediate community and knowledge base. Her study revealed that Trackton children struggled when they entered school because they had not been introduced to the kinds of literacies practiced in the classroom through their home literacy practices. In the end, it was the middle-class (mainstream) community that Heath (1983) observed whose children benefited the most from their early literate exchanges with their parents (particularly their mothers). Here she observed children practicing reading behaviours not dissimilar from the kinds of responses expected in school. What Heath's study confirms is that the literacies practiced by an individual are inextricably tied to their social context – that the home or primary Discourse determines how language is used and valued. The home, then, is the foundation of the adult literate identity. The experiences and expectations that the participants encountered within their primary Discourse set the stage for their attitudes toward literacy.

Books and stories

I do not recall being read to by my parents, though I am certain that they did. The certainty of this memory comes from the conviction that my parents were good parents; they more than fulfilled all of the requirements for effective mainstream parenting. This means they must have read to me as a child – even if I cannot remember it. I do remember books. There were books purchased, books given as gifts and books from the library. Memories of particular series of novels signify significant periods of my childhood and adolescence. These memories recall my history with books in the way that the occasional errant scent evokes another place and time in memory.

That said, simply having books available in the home is not an effective predictor of reading success, as anyone with brussels sprouts in their fridge well knows – just because the vegetables are there doesn't mean anyone will eat them. Much the same can be said for books. Even in the rarified realm of university professors, surely there are those who have not read all of the books that line their shelves. Similarly, providing books does not guarantee that children will read: parental attitudes and dispositions have a significant impact on children's literate identity.

It is worth noting that, without exception, all of the participants in this study stated that their parents must have read to them. In many cases, this assertion was purely a supposition, not a memory. For example, Charlie stated, "I don't remember anyone reading stories to me though I'm sure they probably did." Similarly, Devin commented, "I don't remember sitting in people's laps and having books read," but further said that his parents did read to him. In fact, only Adam and Fred were able to unequivocally assert that their parents did read to them. This perhaps reflects how strongly we are

influenced by culture and class in our construction of identity. It seems likely that these participants were read to by their middle-class parents, as that would certainly be an expectation associated with good parenting. Perhaps this “memory” of sorts speaks more about the assumed importance of reading in mainstream Canadian culture. That said, based on the memories of the participants, it is difficult to ascertain just how effective this story-reading was in their apprenticeships as readers.

For some of the participants, this assumption that their parents must have read to them as children was reinforced by memories of their parents as readers. This is especially evident in the comments of the participants who are the most avid and varied readers, and who express a clear appreciation for novels. Particularly Devin, who states that his father had a “love for literature” and who observed both his mother and father regularly reading a variety of materials including novels; as an adult, he is a daily reader who reads “a fair bit of Canadian literature,” as well as non-fiction, magazines and newspapers. Greg, too, recalls both parents reading “best seller types of books.” He comments that his mother was in a “habit of reading” and made it a “priority.” His interests reflect those of his parents, although they seem somewhat constrained by the demands of being a drama teacher building a youth theatre program: “I read a lot of scripts – a lot of children’s scripts.” Similarly, Bob, although he says that he can’t remember seeing his mother read, believes that she read “*Reader’s Digest*” type stuff and had books by her bed. As well, his grandmother supplied them with books that she had read. This interest in fiction seems to have translated to Bob who reads “mostly fiction” and “a lot of magazines and/or newspapers.” Parental modeling of reading was significant in the formation of the literate identities of the participants.

In comparison, the participants who did not observe their parents reading novels and similar texts seemed less likely to develop this habit later on or took much longer to become what they describe as a reader. Adam does not remember his mother reading many novels and isn't certain his mother liked to read. As well, he remembers his grandmother (who lived with him) reading the Bible, but little else. As an adult reader, Adam's interests are limited to books that are focused on football, primarily non-fiction biographies, as well as magazines and the newspaper. Charlie, who indicates a preference for non-fiction, "text book material," that fits within his teaching specialty of history, does not remember his parents "modeling reading" or reading much beyond the newspaper. However, to categorize Charlie as a non-reader is a misnomer, as he has read consistently from a young age. That said, he is unique within the group in that he developed a passion for non-fiction texts at a young age, and did not come to really enjoy fiction until later. This is not intended to suggest that non-fiction reading is any less significant than fiction, but it may suggest that his parents' choice of text (the newspaper) was influential. Perhaps, as Millard (1997) puts forward, it is necessary for parents to model pleasurable reading (the reading of fiction in this case) as part of the primary Discourse for children to come to understand this possibility of the text.

Gender, on the other hand, did not clearly play a role in the construction of a positive reader identity, though there did appear to be a consistent belief that mothers were likely more involved in early reading. Only Bob saw his mother as clearly more of a reader than his father, and this was the result of his father's limited education. Similarly, because Adam's mother was a single parent, he was only exposed to female readers within the primary Discourse. When asked if parents read to them as children, both Fred

and Greg indicated that their mother played a larger role in this kind of reading. Others, like Charlie, had no memory of parents reading. The significance of gender, for the participants, seemed to be based on assumptions about the particular role of parents in the home, for example, the belief that the mother would have more time to read stories because she may have stopped working to remain in the home with her children. While gender functioned as the ghost in the room in the participants' apprenticeships to reading, access to books also played a critical role.

Books as objects carry a lot of cultural currency (at least in some circles) as evidence of being well read, even wise. But what does it mean to be raised surrounded by books? Or to be brought up in an absence of reading material? Do books carry more weight as signifiers if they have been purchased? Or chosen by the child? All of my participants stated that they had books available in their homes – either from the library, a neighbor, or purchased. However, in the case of Adam, who is perhaps the least enthusiastic reader of the group, even as an adult, although books were taken out of the library on a regular basis, few books were actually owned by his mother and grandmother. It is possible that the lack of books in the home signified that reading was less important. In this instance, however, the limited number of books in the home may have been, in part, related to the economic circumstances of his single-parent family. McKool (2007) points out that middle and high-income children have greater access to reading materials (p. 123), and this seems to hold true with the participants of my study. That said, this access did not conclusively mean that the participant would immediately become a reader. Charlie observed that his family had “tons of books” and that this, for him, signified that his parents liked reading and saw it as important. In comparison, Fred

had many books and parents who actively supported reading through the purchase of books, but he remained a disinterested, reluctant reader until adulthood. Neither access to books, nor parents who were concerned with reading to their children guaranteed a positive reader identity for the participants.

Power of storybook reading

In mainstream North American culture, children are often introduced to literacy through stories read by parents and grandparents, much like the participants in this study. This act of storybook reading is not the seamlessly homogenous performance it appears to be. Gee's (2008) theory of Discourse illustrates the idea that it is not simply what is said, read or written that embodies an individual's literate identity. Rather, the equation is far more complex, encompassing objects, gestures and the subtle actions that reveal unspoken, or even unrealized, values about literacy and what it means to raise literate children. For example, the act of reading to a child seems relatively straightforward, and certainly an act that embodies a positive disposition toward literacy. It is not, however, simply a positive disposition that is required to mirror the kinds of literacies enacted in school, but very specific ways of story reading. Reading programs within schools are built on assumptions about home literacies: "We need also to remind ourselves that part of the correlation between stories at home and success at school is . . . attributable to the school's implicit assumption that story will play the key role in literacy development and that the development of language skills follows from a love of, and familiarity with, books" (Millard, 1997, p. 150). Similarly, as Schleppergrell (2004) points out that the ways stories are read to children are tied to culture and community: "What we value in language performance is deeply rooted in our own experiences with language, and these

experiences vary with social class and ethnicity” (p. 40). Consequently, the kinds of questioning or parental expectations that accompany book reading are dependant on the primary Discourse of the home. According to van Kleeck, Gillam, Hamilton and McGrath (1997), “There are meaningful relationships between parent input during book-reading interactions and gains in children’s abstract language” (p. 1269). However, unlike Heath’s (1983) relatively homogenous portrayal of the middle-class community, van Kleeck, Gillam, Hamilton and McGrath (1997) found significant variation in the middle class parents they studied. What these studies point to is the value of “talking beyond the print” (van Kleeck et al., 1997, p. 1269) during reading. What this means is that, even within the middle-class, parents apprentice their children to be literate in very different ways, and that even the reading of a children’s story can be approached in vastly different ways.

Although reading aloud does reinforce a positive reader identity, much depends on how this reading is accomplished. McKool (2007) states, “When children come from homes where they are read aloud to and where voluntary reading is modeled on a regular basis, the likelihood that children will read voluntarily increases” (p. 121). Nonetheless, it is not any kind of voluntary reading that will have the greatest impact. According to McKool, novels and texts that are associated with pleasure reading, as opposed to the newspaper which might be associated with informational reading, have a greater impact on literacy outcomes for children (p. 122). According to Strommen and Mates (2004), “Readers learned from family, or other members of their social circle, that reading can be an entertaining, diverting, enjoyable, sociable, and, therefore, worthwhile activity” (p. 193). However, they further point out that “readers have access to plentiful, varied

reading materials” (p. 195). Consequently, it would appear that both access to books and a context that supports reading are significant in developing a reading habit. Those participants whose parents modeled reading for pleasure were more likely to become avid readers themselves.

Gender in the primary Discourse

Although it seems evident that the participants’ parents and the literacy environment created within the home were instrumental in forming the participants’ reader identities early on, the specific role of gender is unclear. Research, on the other hand, suggests that gender does play an influential role in literate identity. Millard’s (1997) study confirms what Gee and others suggest – that the home, and in Millard’s case, mothers, play a role that is at least as influential as the school in establishing early reading practices (p. 81): “Parents act as powerful models of literacy users for their children and not only provide them with their first books and materials for writing, but also represent for them what it is to use literacy effectively and how to be literate within particular social contexts” (p. 78). Interestingly, in Millard’s (1997) study, the children associated reading more closely with women than men (p. 83). Newkirk (2000), too, cites a similar finding: “Studies of family literacy show conclusively that reading, particularly book reading, is predominantly a female activity” (p. 42). This belief that women are often responsible for reading stories to young children is mirrored in the images of women in storybooks (Wilinsky & Hunniford, 1993, as cited in Millard, 1997, p. 19). There is a societal assumption that women will take on this role of nurturing children’s early literacy. This kind of gendered influence doesn’t seem especially borne out by the comments of the participants, though it does appear the

majority of them believe their mothers read to them more as young children. Perhaps this is tied to assumptions about the role of women as mothers rather than actual experience.

The stories of my participants suggest that parents do play a critical role in the development of literate identity, but that the power of this role is not simply that of reading stories or providing books. The influence of the primary Discourse is far more complex. Heath (1983) observes, “The language socialization process in all its complexity is more powerful than such single-factor explanations in accounting for success” (p. 344). Much of what is learned in the primary Discourse is so ingrained as to be invisible, yet it becomes the underlying skeleton of the later fleshed out literate identity of the reader.

Self-efficacy and competence – Learning literate identity

In many ways, the home environment and parental attitudes towards literacy in each of the participants’ lives should have lead to positive attitudes toward reading and literacy. Yet, this was not the case for at least two of the participants, Adam and Fred, who, in spite of having books made available and parents who were concerned with their literacy, developed a strong distaste for reading. For example, Adam suggests that his mother’s approach to reading was the catalyst for his hatred of reading: “The worst part I remember was my mom sitting over my shoulder, grilling me, and I know that turned me off doing a lot of things: reading and homework.” Similarly, Fred indicates that he “didn’t read a lot growing up,” in spite of his perception that his parents enjoyed reading and a “bookshelf filled with books.” While Adam’s case may be self-evident, Fred seems to have enjoyed every advantage in developing his literate identity. In the case of Adam

and Fred the attitudes embedded within their primary Discourses worked to erode their sense of being literate, in spite of their parents' best intentions.

As Gee's (2008) construction of Discourse reveals, the forces that come to bear on one's "sense of self"(p. 156) are numerous and not easily articulated as separate entities. Nonetheless, there are indications in the interviews with Adam and Fred of the forces that impacted their literate identities negatively. In many ways, their rejection of reading as a pleasurable activity seems to hinge on their overall sense of efficacy or competence in reading. According to Smith and Wilhelm (2004), "Boys who do not experience competence with literacy tasks will avoid them and thus become even less competent" (p. 456). Their study revealed that young men embraced activities where they could demonstrate competence or sensed that they could develop competence and rejected activities where they believed they would appear incompetent. Of course, this study examined a group of older boys in a school setting; nonetheless, the importance of competence seems applicable to other settings and age groups. This also resonates with Pintrich and De Groot's (1990) findings regarding the role of self-efficacy in motivation: "Student involvement in self-regulated learning is closely tied to students' efficacy beliefs about their capability to perform classroom tasks and to their beliefs that these classroom tasks are interesting and worth learning" (p. 8). Again, these results are tied to the classroom; however, they certainly have relevance when considering motivation to read in any domain. In the case of both Adam and Fred, their sense of self-efficacy seems to have been diminished within the home and into their early years in school.

Competence or a sense of self-efficacy, in the case of Adam, was eroded by his mother's well-intentioned, but ultimately harmful, attempts to get him to read. He

recalls, “We’d take my sister to piano lessons, and my mom would take change, a clock, and books If I screwed up, she’d really grill me.” Adam’s sense that he had little control over these reading events may have been detrimental. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) observes, “Knowledge that is seen to be controlled from the outside is acquired with reluctance and it brings no joy” (as quoted in Smith and Wilhelm, 2002, p. 33). It’s also possible that his mother’s reading strategies left Adam with the impression that he was not a competent reader; he states, “I think she was worried that I wouldn’t read.” Pintrich and De Groot’s (1990) framework for conceptualizing student motivation suggests that there is an “affective component, which includes students’ emotional reactions to the task” (p. 1). For Adam, reading came to be associated with a lack of choice, a sense that he might not be competent (or at least his mother’s sense that he might not be competent), and negative emotions associated with reading. His grandmother may have also played a role in this. Adam remembers receiving “little sticky stars” for reading successfully. Although it’s unlikely that the sticky stars were particularly detrimental to Adam’s developing literacy, they probably weren’t highly motivational either. In Marinak and Gambrell’s (2008) study of the impact of rewards on reading motivation, they found that “the students who were given a book (proximal reward) and students who received no reward were more motivated to engage in subsequent reading than the students who received a token (less proximal reward)” (p. 22). In this case, the stars (a token) probably did little to create a sustained appreciation for reading.

Fred experienced a similar sense of his lack of reading competence – this time at the hands of his brother. Although Fred says that his brother did not influence him much, his words suggest another possible interpretation: “His nickname for me was ‘Mr.

Muggs’ – that’s about all I could read, so he thought.” Apparently, Fred’s brother was “really into reading,” and his brother’s high level of competence created Fred’s reluctance to read. He states, “His ability to read well was like . . .he’s reading five books and I haven’t even read one book. So I was a slow reader compared to him. Maybe it was discouraging . . . I don’t know.” Evidently, Fred’s literate identity, to some degree, was constructed in opposition to his brother, creating a sense of his lack of competence as a reader. For Fred and Adam their home environments seemed to work against the development of a healthy sense of their own self-efficacy in reading, in spite of having parents who were concerned with the development of these skills.

Devin, on the other hand, who seems to have consistently seen himself as a reader from a very young age, had a clear sense of his competence, even before entering school. In our interview Devin discussed his understanding of the value of being a “good” reader: “I think it was positive then . . . I think reading is, for someone who is able to read without effort, you’re intuitively doing the things that are part of the reading process . . . It makes you feel good about yourself. . . . I think reading does that for kids, makes them capable. It’s a cycle – makes them capable and, as a result, they can read the next stuff.” Devin’s comments simply echo Guthrie and Wigfield’s (2000) findings that increasing competence in reading is, in fact, motivating (p. 405). Similarly, Coles and Hall (2001) state, “Sustained literacy habits are based on the confidence and independence which come from seeing yourself as a reader and writer, someone who has the power to use literacy as a tool, as a means of self-expression and as a means of enjoyment” (as cited in Taylor, 2004, p. 293). This sense of competence or self-efficacy in reading seems to have sustained Devin’s literate identity into adulthood.

Similarly, Bob, at a young age, established himself as a competent reader. According to Smith and Wilhelm (2002), “People who consider themselves to be competent enact very particular social practices to mark their identity as a competent member of a particular community of practice” (p. 96). For Bob and Devin reading was established as an enjoyable practice, one that was engaged in without resistance and regularly. And while a significant part of this may have been observing and incorporating the attitudes of parents, as well as being read to as a young child, these participants, in particular, developed a firm and unwavering sense of their competencies as readers.

The School Yearbook: Entry into Secondary Discourse

Just as family photos reveal our relationships and the many identities that we try on as we develop, so too do school yearbooks suggest our particular allegiances. School, for most, is the opportunity to experiment with multiple identities (typically manifested by strange hairstyles and unfortunate tattoos). Likewise, school represents the first entry into a secondary Discourse for many individuals and another layer of literate identity. It may be too that within the walls of educational institutions the demand to act according to what mainstream society deems acceptably “male” becomes more significant as young men try to define their identities and their relationship to literacy.

I don’t remember actually reading in high school, a recollection that is echoed by Bob. I know that I did read and that my teachers would have considered me a reader, but I have little memory of what was read in the classroom or if I enjoyed this kind of reading. School was not a challenge. It was a familiar place, a reality made more

concrete by the fact that my father was an elementary school principal and I would frequently accompany him to the school where he worked, as well as attending my own. My fondest memory of school reading comes from grade five. My class at that time was in an open area (four classes in one large space) and in the centre there was a reading nook for students who were done their work quickly. I was often there and it was a refuge. This, however, was not really school reading. Rather, it was a space within the school where I could pursue my own reading interests. Several of the participants echo my experience. School reading registers as kind of a blank spot on the memory. For some, the recollection is even more unpleasant.

In many ways, the participants in this study and their families embody what might be considered typical middle-class literacy practices. They all were read to by one or both parents, they all had books and they all were given the sense, unequivocally, that reading was important. Moreover, they all learned to read and experienced varying degrees of success, in the earliest stages of learning to read and discovering texts. None of the participants can be described as struggling readers, in the sense that they had sufficient reading ability to “get by” in all of their courses. Consequently, their transitions into school-based literacy practices should have been relatively smooth. This was not the case, in spite of their “mainstream” (Gee, 1992; Heath, 1983) advantages. As they entered into the secondary Discourse of school and the new expectations of the classroom, several of the participants failed to develop an intrinsic interest in reading for pleasure. Although conscious of what was required to be successful in school based literacies, several participants chose to “get by.” This raises questions about what factors

impact the entrance of male students into the secondary Discourses of school and what might be revealed by their recollections of school-based literacies, particularly reading.

Snapshots - Reading and school

Again this series of snapshots attempts to reveal some of the influences that came to bear on each of the participants within the secondary Discourse of school. Although it might be assumed the school would support the participants who were already engaged readers and motivate those who were not fully committed, in fact, the opposite seems to have been true. Almost unequivocally, school, to some degree, undermined the participants' experience of reading. Throughout the interviews the participants' comments raised questions about the influence of context, motivation and the experience of reading on the formation of literate identity.

Adam – Competence and relevance

Adam's experiences of reading in school seem to have been largely negative right up until his last years of university. He describes himself as a "middle of the road" student in elementary and comments that he remembers the "stickers and the stars" from his grandmother, but not any marks he received in elementary school. Although he has positive memories of being read to in grade 5, he also recalls reading competitions that made it clear he was not reading the quantities of books that others were. In high school, he says that he "cruised by" with 65's. He describes his way of dealing with reading assignments, "The odd textbook I would skim very fast to get the answers Even for essays, I couldn't write the essay because I couldn't read the book. I hated reading the book to find the information, so I'd kind of skim it, maybe flip to the back so I could get a couple of definitions, maybe come up with a paragraph." Surprisingly, Chaucer and

Shakespeare offered some respite from the frustrations of reading. He says, “I liked the challenge of trying to figure out what it meant, and that I could figure it out before someone else could figure it out.” Apart from some articles in magazines, Adam says he did not read outside of school.

Once in university, after an initial “lost” year and a realization that his destiny was not in the trades, his approach changed. He says, “Once I found out that I wanted to be a . . . teacher . . . my last two years of education were pretty good.” With this success came a more positive approach to reading. Adam comments that he did begin to read more during this period. For Adam, this increase in reading as well as academic success seems to be closely tied to relevance. He points out that he found the reading relevant because it was “towards his profession” and “no one was telling me I had to do it.”

Bob – Separation of home and school

Recreational reading was clearly a significant part of Bob’s life. Reading in school, however, seemed to hold a very different place in his psyche. For the most part Bob has few memories of reading in school, commenting, “It was like school was too important a time to be reading.” Although he recalls being read to early on in elementary school, his later experiences seem to be encompassed by teachers assigning reading for homework and taking it up through discussion or questions. In comparison to Adam, he states that his “reading probably got put on hold because of university, because [university] was so much work.” For Bob, reading for pleasure and school reading were quite separate. He has no memory of what he read in school. On the other hand, he has many fond memories of days spent reading on his own. It was only in university English courses that the two purposes really came together: “English was fun because all the

homework was to read a novel.” On the other hand, he says he “hated” the reading in his Educational Psychology classes because it did not hold any interest for him.

Charlie – Fiction versus non-fiction

Charlie says, “I have a recollection of being at school and really enjoying the initial part of learning how to read – the Dick and Jane.” He further states that he enjoyed the phonics books and activities that were part of this process. However, past this initial stage, reading, particularly fiction, lost its appeal: “I was a non-reader when it came to fiction. . . . I remember that in elementary school, not reading novels or enjoying it.” He does recall being read to by a teacher in grade four and enjoying this kind of reading. Reading was no more enjoyable in high school, with the exception of history, where he excelled. Although he would do what was required to pass each course, reading the assigned novel the night before the test or assignment, he says, “I don’t remember reading a whole lot of novels in high school. I’m sure I did . . . but I don’t remember actually reading them.” Similar to Adam, Chaucer provided a break in the frustration of reading fiction, as Charlie found this interesting. The appeal of Chaucer foreshadowed a renewed interest in reading in university. This interest seems to have been a function of both the content of the reading as well as the purpose: “When I decided to go into education and I knew I needed to have five English classes . . . I enjoyed them because I did see [more of a purpose].”

Devin - “Nothing was a struggle”

Devin entered elementary school already a capable reader. He states, “I read books before I entered school.” This enjoyment of reading at a young age seems to have influenced his elementary school reading. In hindsight Devin is able to interpret the

complexities of his relationship and success with reading: “I felt positive about reading. I enjoyed reading because I could. I think it started me enjoying what I understand now to be a good way to spend some time.” However, this sense of competence did not carry over into high school. At this point, Devin observes that he was not reading what he wanted to and that he was reading very little outside of school. As well, he was not seeing the same kind of academic success he had grown accustomed to. “I found in the last couple years of high school that just showing up wasn’t doing it any more.” This changed once he entered university and felt that he was reading material that was relevant to what he was doing in terms of his career: “I even enjoyed reading psychology texts and stuff.”

Fred – Self-concept and reading

Like Devin, Fred had a healthy self-concept regarding his abilities as a reader in elementary school: “I was certainly a good reader . . . I was a good student and nothing was a struggle and that comes from being able to read and comprehend.” In spite of this he says that he has little memory of actually reading. This sense of competence seems to have diminished into high school and university. Fred describes his high school experiences of reading as “neutral.” Although he says he has little memory of this reading, he does recall frustrations with decoding Shakespeare and Chaucer. “For me, English, as a course, has been very easy to pass and very hard to get a 90.” University reading seemed to lack purpose as well for Fred. He recalls, “I kind of had the attitude that either you’re a teacher or you’re not a teacher.” Assigned reading, because he believed that the ability to teach was innate, seemed pointless and this, coupled with *Jane*

Eyre in his first year English course, sealed the deal: “I think it’s the worst book ever . . . My friends, male friends, we’d just get together and hate this book.”

Greg – Self-concept and peers

“It’s always been interesting to me that the things I’ve responded to are not what the majority respond to.” In many ways, Greg’s observation offers insight into, what appears to be within this group of men, a unique relationship with reading and literacy. Unlike the others, Greg’s reading, in spite of family support, got off to an uncertain start in grade one. This was not due to a lack of ability, rather, it was the relationship with the teacher that impacted his feelings about reading. He comments, “I was a very sensitive boy and if it was somebody . . . who looked a little bit angry or off, then I wouldn’t respond very well.” Greg seems to have resisted the regimented approach to literacy he encountered in elementary school, referencing the “awful Dick and Jane” and the “drilling” associated with Language Arts activities. This, in spite of Greg’s contention that he “took to [reading] naturally,” seems to have negatively impacted his approach to reading until he reached high school.

In high school, the point where several of the others had lost interest in reading, Greg encountered several teachers who valued reading and encouraged him to believe in his own abilities as a reader and a writer. He states that one of his teachers “made a big deal of my abilities in English and made me feel like I’m not just average or maybe slightly above average – that this is a really strong area for me.” This sense of competence did not carry over into all of his high school courses. Math, for example, was typically not a strong area, though one teacher did have a positive influence: “She was the only math teacher I ever had where I didn’t feel like I was an idiot.”

What is evinced in these snapshots is that school literacy was far from easy or comfortable for several of these participants and, middle-class or not, the transition from primary to secondary Discourse was not without its obstacles. However, these challenges were not tied to struggling to read or finding the secondary Discourse of school unfamiliar or inaccessible, particularly for the three participants whose parents were teachers. Rather, what is demonstrated is the increasing role motivation and a sense of self-efficacy played in the literate identities of these men. And, ultimately, though subtle, gender was an influence that cannot be dismissed.

Shift to later literacy and turning away

What is striking in the interviews is the shift in attitude toward reading in later elementary school or high school experienced by all of the participants. For all of the men interviewed, with the exception of Greg, reading at school and at home was an initially pleasurable experience – all have fond memories of preferred books or reading with parents or siblings. However, as the demands of reading became more rigorous, even as early as fourth or fifth grade, reading became more of a chore than a pleasure. Although high school is often seen as the point where boys begin to read less, several researchers now suggest that this shift occurs earlier. For example, Moje, Overby, Tysvaer and Morris (2008) point out that “A number of educators consider adolescent literacy to begin at the fourth-grade level, when text demands shift from a predominance of narrative, or story-based, texts to increasing encounters with expository, or informational, texts” (p. 110). Similarly, according to Jacobs (2008), “The accepted stages of reading development suggest that the challenges adolescents face begin much earlier, in grades three or four, when the requirements of learning begin to differentiate

by content” (p. 15). Certainly, there is the suggestion in the interviews that when the demands associated with reading in school became more rigorous, the enjoyment of reading began to wane, if it hadn’t already been negatively affected in the primary Discourse. Of course, another possibility for this loss of interest is proposed by Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) who cite studies that suggest the largest declines in motivation to read occur during early to middle elementary school years and middle and junior high and that these declines may be tied to different instructional practices in reading (p. 409). Certainly, this is true in the case of Greg, whose attitudes toward reading were strongly influenced by his teachers. Regardless of the cause, there seems to be evidence of a shift in attitudes toward reading in the middle elementary years.

Although not all of the participants abandoned reading altogether in late elementary school or high school, they all differentiated between the kind of reading they were being asked to do at school, as opposed to the reading some of them continued to do at home. Adam’s experience of reading, of all the participants, seems to have been the most negative. This rejection of reading for pleasure seems to have stemmed from the pressures placed on him at home while learning to read. Nonetheless, this “hatred” did not dissipate in high school: “I hated reading the book to find the information, so I’d kind of skim it. . . . I was like, ‘Get me in and out of here as fast as possible.’” As a result, Adam read as little as possible, both in school and at home. Similarly, Fred was frustrated by many in-school literacy experiences, particularly those in his English courses. He reflects that he put little effort into understanding the reading and, overall, remembers little of what he might have read in school. He, too, read little outside of the required reading for his courses. For Devin, free time in high school was spent pursuing

sports and music; reading was secondary to these other pursuits and, like Fred, little reading occurred outside of what was assigned by teachers: “I was reading stuff I didn’t want to read and that was all I was reading sometimes. How do you feel great about that?” These participants read only what was required, as Adam describes it, “to cruise by” – some cruising slightly faster than others. In many ways, the literacies expected of them by teachers were an unpleasant imposition, something that took time away from the pursuits they truly enjoyed – typically sports.

The other three participants saw the kinds of reading required in school as separate from their home literacies, as well as their identities as students. In the case of Bob, Charlie and Greg, their home reading was not significantly diminished during this period, though it did look different than their school reading. Bob recalls, “I can’t remember people being readers in high school. I can hardly remember it coming up It was like school was too important a time to be reading.” It is evident in the interview, however, that Bob did do the reading required by school and that this did not interfere, or overlap, with the reading he pursued recreationally. In comparison, Charlie states, “I do remember not enjoying a lot of English classes, but, on the other hand, I do remember enjoying some of them. And I always enjoyed reading in our history classes.” In spite of his enjoyment of some of his in-school reading experiences, the kind of reading Charlie pursued at home was consistently non-fiction, archeology and history, whereas his recollection is that much of his school reading was fiction. Greg is a bit of an anomaly in this group of male teachers, as his enjoyment of reading both in an out of school increased as he entered high school: “I wanted to read and I just had more of a desire for it. It became important to me.” Unlike the others, Greg’s literate identity became

increasingly bound to the literacies and groups he was associated with at school. Greg's social groups were formed through the enriched ELA high school classes and drama, whereas the others were connected with their peers through sports and, for Devin, music. In this case, reading was a considerably more covert aspect of their identity, and school did not provide the impetus to change this.

Motivation - Efferent or aesthetic

Reading programs often work on the supposition that there is a singular solution to students' reading difficulties. The underlying assumption is that if teachers would teach more effectively, then students would read better. However, this kind of approach fails to acknowledge the diversity of reasons for which people read and what the experience of reading entails for different readers. Literate identity, then, is not a singular creation, but the result of many, often conflicting, social forces in one person. Nor is the experience of reading consistently the same for an individual – rather, it is influenced by the text and the multitude of forces coming to bear on the individual's reading of it. In many ways, this consideration of motivation as it relates to literate identity is also a consideration of the external forces that come to bear on one's experience of reading and other literacies. For these participants, particularly those who continued to read recreationally but found less enjoyment in school, motivation and context played a significant role in their desire to read, as well as their overall experience of reading.

Rosenblatt's (1994) formulation of "aesthetic" and "efferent" reading offers another way of conceptualizing the reading experience. Her conception of reading is a means of characterizing the internal experience of the reader – one that, of course, is

ultimately impacted by these external pressures. Nonetheless, what a reader experiences while reading seems likely to have an impact on whether he chooses to sustain the activity. According to Rosenblatt (1994), “In aesthetic reading . . . the reader’s primary concern is with what happens *during* the actual reading event” (p. 24). In other words, “The reader’s attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text” (p. 25). However, she further points out that aesthetic reading does not necessarily exclude the potential usefulness of the reading. On the other hand, in efferent reading the “primary concern of the reader is what he will carry away from the reading” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 24). For example, “As the reader responds to the printed words or symbols, his attention is directed outward, so to speak, towards concepts to be retained, ideas to be tested, actions to be performed after the reading” (p. 24). Apparently, the same text may produce either an efferent or aesthetic reading; however, some texts seem more likely to produce a satisfying aesthetic read than others.

In many ways, Rosenblatt’s conceptualizing of the aesthetic and efferent stance resonates with the way in which several of the participants describe their experience of reading. For example, Bob describes his adolescent recreational reading as a means of “going into a dream world” and “tuning his parents out.” For him, reading clearly represents a form of escape where, as Rosenblatt (1994) states, “The reader’s primary purpose is fulfilled during the reading” (p. 27). Similarly, Devin states, “I think books are a miracle . . . I really admire writing and the craft of saying things in a way that somebody hasn’t.” Again, his appreciation for the craft of writing suggests a more aesthetic stance. In comparison, Adam describes the appeal of reading as “the fact that

I'm going to learn something new." This efferent perspective is confirmed by the fact that although Adam didn't enjoy reading in high school he did find Chaucer and Shakespeare appealing: "I liked the challenge of trying to figure out what it meant." Likewise, later in university, where reading had developed some appeal, Adam comments, "I enjoyed the information . . . It was a means to an end." Adam's description of his own reading process hints at what Rosenblatt (1994) describes: "At the extreme efferent end of the spectrum, the reader disengages his attention as much as possible from the personal and qualitative elements in his response to the verbal symbols; he concentrates on what the symbols designate, what they may be contributing to the end result he seeks – the information, the concepts, the guides to action, that will be left with him when the reading is over" (p. 27). Reading, for most of Adam's life, though perhaps less so now, has been a "means to an end." It was simply a tool for accessing the information required to pass his courses in high school and meet the requirements of his degree in university. This kind of efferent approach to assigned reading may in fact be the way most students approach school-based reading.

Smith and Wilhelm (2002) offer another, more generous interpretation of the aesthetic and efferent stance:

The boys we cite here could be described as taking an efferent stance (Rosenblatt, 1978) in their reading. Or maybe it's more accurate to say that they choose texts that reward an efferent reading. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) provides a lens through which to understand that choice. Efferent reading by its nature provides an opportunity for clear and immediate feedback that aesthetic reading does not. . . . Aesthetic reading, the kind that most teachers . . . want to cultivate, is a much

more nebulous thing. The focus in aesthetic reading is not what can be learned but what can be experienced. (p. 40)

This, at the very least, offers insight into why some boys may choose books that are more likely to offer an efferent read, and, as a result, immediate feedback. Even as an adult reader, the books that Adam chooses to read almost exclusively are about football, and, while they are a source of entertainment, they also continue to serve as a means to an end for his coaching of high school and university football.

Nonetheless, Rosenblatt (1994) makes a valuable observation in her discussion of aesthetic and efferent reading: “It is more accurate to think of a continuum, a series of gradations between the nonaesthetic [attention is focused outward on information and ideas to be carried away] and the aesthetic [attention is centered directly on what the reader is living through during his relationship with that particular text] extremes” (p. 35). People, including my participants, read in varying ways – depending on circumstance, state of mind, and past experience. Charlie states that he reads for information and says that the only book that ever really offered a complete immersion into the world of the story was a graphic novel about Louis Riel. Interestingly, he does offer that movies provide the kind of immersion Rosenblatt describes as part of the aesthetic stance. He, like Adam, enjoyed learning Chaucer and Shakespeare in high school because of the challenge of breaking the code. According to Charlie, as he was learning to read in elementary school, Dick and Jane, offered the same kind of satisfaction: “You were figuring out this code and putting things into place.” In comparison, although Greg describes a reader as someone who’s “intrinsically motivated to read,” he confesses, “As I get older, the extrinsic almost takes over, that I procrastinate

over something I have to read until I have a deadline.” His reading seems to be largely determined by his interests and his role as a teacher; although this reading may have an aesthetic component, it is governed by an efferent necessity. Nonetheless, he does suggest that his summer reading of Stephen King novels presents some kind of an aesthetic experience. Finally, as an adolescent, Fred “would never go the extra mile to really get into a book or read enough to improve your vocabulary or anything.” Currently Fred says he reads for enjoyment, “to alleviate boredom,” but prefers non-fiction. These readers seem to fit along the continuum that Rosenblatt describes – some experiences of text are more aesthetic, others are more efferent.

It would appear that an aesthetic read offers the reader more pleasure, at least in the moment: “In aesthetic reading, the reader’s attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 25). Further, at least for my participants, the development of an aesthetic relationship with text occurs, like any relationship, over time and with experience. For Devin and Bob, confirmed readers, it appears that books offer a consistent and satisfying escape – they are more than a source of information. For others, like Fred and Charlie, although they have developed an appreciation for all kinds of reading as adults (with individual preferences, of course), the aesthetic stance is not always part of their textual experience. Rosenblatt’s conception of the aesthetic stance is not unlike what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) refers to the experience of “flow,” which is “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter” (as quoted in Smith and Wilhelm, 2002, p. 28). However, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) directly link the experience of flow to competence, so when this occurs in reading it provides the reader with a sense

of competence and control over the reading experience. Again, this seems consistent with my perception of Devin and Bob as more consistently competent and aesthetic readers than the other participants – because they have often experienced this sense of “flow” in their reading, it has led to a greater sense of self-efficacy as readers.

What is problematic, perhaps, about the efferent/aesthetic distinction, is the suggestion that one is better than the other or, alternately, that boys are more prone to one kind of reading than the other. This kind of distinction lends itself to the kinds of hierarchies, not uncommon in the ELA departments where I have taught, that place the reading of Shakespeare at the top of the literary hierarchy and, in turn, diminish the accomplishments of students who choose to read other kinds of texts. That said, it is not unreasonable to suggest that children who have an aesthetic experience of reading may gain more pleasure from the encounter and, as a result, choose to read more and have a greater appreciation for the lives and experiences that they access through the reading. According to Barrs (2000), “Successful reading is likely to involve the ability to decentre, to empathise, to enter the world of the text, and to identify with characters” (p. 288). But why is this, in particular, “successful reading,” while other kinds of reading are not? Moreover, according to Barrs (2000), “Some boys actively resist the kind of affective and involving experiences that fictional texts offer the reader” (p. 288). Barrs essentially argues that boys may not be able to access the aesthetic reading in the same way as girls and that this may stem from, at least in part, their socialization away from being demonstrative of emotion. She writes, “Reading that involves feeling, that invites the reader to ‘live through’ an emotional experience, may be difficult for boys to relate to in the context of the classroom and the peer group” (p. 288). Again, it does not seem

unlikely that some male readers may shy away from an affective response to a text. In fact, several of the participants in this research suggested they were less interested in texts that were overly emotional (or perhaps it was texts that brought to the fore particular kinds of emotions). Fred makes this observation about his university experience of *Jane Eyre*: “It was kind of more into the emotional side. I wasn’t into it. I hated it.” Millard (1997) echoes this kind of assessment of boys’ aesthetic response: “A concentration in school reading on realism [realistic fiction] . . . works in the interests of the girls, for who this is a favorite mode, and whose responses to feelings and relationships are better developed” (p. 122). It is exactly this kind of assessment that both over-essentializes the characteristics of “boys” and, at the same time, diminishes the accomplishments of boys who do not read the kinds of texts that are considered the most worthwhile.

In Barrs’ (2000) estimation, aesthetic reading is not without grandiose purpose: “But aesthetic reading – by which we learn to explore the world of texts, enter the inner lives of others, and identify with characters who may be quite unlike ourselves – offers us, potentially, a great extension of our humanity” (p. 292). Of course, her comments raise the question of where others, perhaps more efferent readers, will extend their humanity. This kind of thinking, again, results from beliefs about a particular literary hierarchy that places narrative at the top and still heavily influences the way literacy is taught. It is also this same hierarchy that teaches some children and maybe more boys that certain kinds of reading are less acceptable, less impressive, than others. Newkirk (2002) challenges “the implicit (or explicit) moral hierarchy that sets this type of reading above more popular forms of literary activity” (p.79):

One thing that an elite education in fact teaches is how to construct a hierarchical map of reading; it helps develop a “taste” for the serious and a “distaste” for the vulgar (“popular” in its original meaning). It is also a map that places most of the genres boys love near the bottom. (p. 79)

Although Newkirk’s formulation of the literary hierarchy over-generalizes boys’ reading interests, his ideas are reflected in the comments of the participants in this study. The kind of thinking that made Fred, at a young age, recognize that his reading of comics and shorter novels was less desirable than his brother’s reading of longer, more involved tomes. This is not intended to suggest that there is no place for great literary works, the kind that do create an aesthetic experience for the reader. But perhaps this literary hierarchy should be separate from learning to read in the classroom? We may need to rethink what we define as literacy and thus move away from the long-standing hierarchy that places narrative at the top of the literacy pyramid.

That said, it would seem among the participants in this study, those who experience reading aesthetically, Bob and Devin in particular, are the more passionate and voracious readers. However, Charlie, who reads almost exclusively non-fiction, “textbook material,” also reads every day and values reading beyond it being something to “alleviate boredom” as Fred suggests. Ultimately, the aesthetic experience of the text does appear to be more sustaining. Or, at the very least, there appears to be a connection between those who describe aesthetic experiences of the text and those who are consistent, daily readers, who see reading as an important part of their lives. That said, these participants do not confirm the suggestion that boys read more efferently than girls.

These participants, at least, seem to fit along the continuum between aesthetic and efferent.

Motivation and perceptions of reading achievement

Several of the participants in this study, at least as adults, have come to experience the aesthetic pleasures of the text. Bob and Devin understood this from a young age. But how does this kind of experience of reading translate in the classroom? My experiences in the literacy classroom have often lead me to ask, “How do I get these boys to read?” And not just read, but read in the way I do, picking up a book for the pure, aesthetic pleasure of the text. How can this be achieved? Should this be achieved? To be frank, nothing to date in my teaching experience has offered an answer to this question. Certainly, it helps to have attractive and interesting books in the classroom. It helps to create times for reading, but how does one motivate readers so this kind of reading behaviour carries on outside the classroom? So that reading becomes an inherent part of their identity? I would suggest that motivation to read is not singular – that we are motivated to read for different reasons at different times, and that this motivation is both internal and external. Reading programs work under the assumption that the teacher should be able to motivate all of her students to read, if she is a capable teacher. However, my conversations with the participants in this study suggested that the locus of one’s motivation to read is highly individualized and shifts from one setting to another. Context and the division between home and school reading purposes play significant roles in the desire to read.

Rosenblatt (1994) also uses the aesthetic and efferent to make a distinction between private and public. This public/private division suggests the division between

self-motivated readers and those who pursue reading as a “means to an end,” in Adam’s words. She writes, “In readings that fall somewhere in the efferent half of the continuum, the reader selects out predominantly more public than private elements. The aesthetic stance, in contrast, accords predominantly more attention to the preumbra of private feelings, attitudes, sensations, and ideas than to public aspects” (p. 184). The division between public and private also suggests the kind of separation that can occur between home and school reading. School reading seems to encourage a kind of fact-oriented, find the information now so you can do the assignment or write the test later, approach. School is often not a setting that promotes a private or aesthetic appreciation of a text; rather, it offers extrinsic rewards in the way of marks or teacher accolades for students who produce the right kind of product. In this way, school reading becomes divorced from the kind of intrinsically motivated, aesthetic experience readers like Devin and Bob experience in their home reading, and it relies on the expectation that the extrinsic rewards hold enough of a pull to motivate the efferent read.

For several of the participants, the increasing separation between the kinds of reading they enjoyed at home and the reading they enjoyed less and less at school may also be connected to the purpose of these kinds of reading. School reading appeared arbitrary or without a clear purpose in that they saw little connection between the novels or texts they were being assigned and their daily needs or future goals. Heath’s (1983) study, for example, found that “The school’s approach to reading and learning establishes decontextualized skills as foundational in the hierarchy of academic skills” (p. 353). Although Heath’s study recognized that the home literacies of some communities approach those of the school more closely, research suggests that there is a discernible

difference between the literacies children practice at home versus what is expected at school. Moss' (2006) research reflects a similar disconnect between home and school, arguing that the knowledge structures of literacies outside and inside school are different: in school, knowledge is structured vertically (hierarchically, sequentially) whereas knowledge outside of school is structured horizontally (new knowledge is not necessarily directly connected to what has already been learned) and is more concerned with the moment. This observation resonates with Adam's memories of creating forts and other imaginative games with his sister based on books that they shared – an activity very much concerned with a momentary enjoyment of literature and reading. Similarly, according to Belzer (2002), "Literacy theorists in the sociological tradition suggest that there is often a kind of alienation from reading and writing based on a disconnect between school literacy and learners' everyday experiences with reading and writing" (p. 104). Williams (2005) also points out that early literacies often take the forms of "games and play," but by "high school and university, pleasure and school are often seen as mutually exclusive" (p. 339). These observations reflect the kind of increasing separation the participants encountered in their experience of reading at home and in school.

This separation of home and school literacies may be the result of a developing sense of competence or lack thereof in reading. What shifts when students enter school and becomes progressively more apparent to the child is that reading in school is a means of judging performance and ranking students according to their ability (Moss, 2007, p. 82). Moss (2007) states, "In school a reading book has a precise definition, not in terms of the type of book it is, but in terms of the contexts it is associated with" (p. 67). Books, then, in the context of school are linked to judgments about reading competence (p. 68).

Moreover, these judgments about reading competence may have a greater impact on boys than girls. In Moss' (2007) study, low reading proficiency seemed to conflict more with boys' sense of self-esteem than with girls': "In effect, low-attaining girls gain more practice dealing with texts that are within their competence whilst low-attaining boys strive to avoid texts that reveal an unfavorable place on the social hierarchy" (Moss, 2007, p. 87). This echoes Smith and Wilhelm's (2002) observations about the importance of competence for boys: "Exercising a measure of control over literate activities – and appearing and being competent in them – were overwhelmingly important to the boys in the study" (p. 96). In this case, boys avoided tasks where they did not feel competent. However, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) challenge the notion that boys perceive success in reading as particularly suspect masculine behaviour; rather, in their study the boys' attitudes toward reading were impacted by whether they thought they could experience a feeling of competence.

Ultimately, the shifting context of reading in school, as well as judgments about competence, impacted the motivation to read of all of the participants in this study. According to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), changes in children's motivation have been explained two ways: "One explanation focuses on children's increasing capacity to understand their own performance For some children this leads to a growing realization that they are not as capable as other children, thereby reducing their motivation" (p. 408). The other explanation cites instructional practices that focus on social comparison between children. What does this consideration of motivation mean for my participants? Those who felt competent in their reading continued for the most part to be successful and sufficiently motivated to do what was required to be considered

successful. Those who felt less competent read less and less and, at least while in high school, only did enough to pass. Clearly, they received little pleasure from their in school literacies. However, their out of school literacies suffered as well. And while it's tempting to treat these kinds of literacy as entirely separate and distinct, it seems more likely that they do impact each other. A lack of success in school probably means a lack of desire to read outside of school. Martens and Adamson's (2001) study lends credence to this conclusion. In this study they found that the literate identity the children in the study developed in the classroom setting impacted how they saw their literacy abilities in other contexts, finding that "transactions with texts teach across texts and contexts" (p. 46). Consequently, the participants who came to see themselves as less successful in-school readers, like Adam and Fred, also saw themselves as disinterested in reading outside of school.

Intrinsic versus extrinsic

In much the same way that the participants in this study read both aesthetically and efferently, their motivations are both intrinsic and extrinsic depending on the time, place, and text. According to Sweet, Guthrie, and Ng (1998), "Intrinsic motivation refers to a person's desire to engage in an activity, whether or not the activity has an external value to someone else" (p. 211). On the other hand, "Extrinsic motivation refers to other factors that prompt a person to engage in an activity" (p. 211). For all of the participants, there is a distinction made between reading in the context of school as opposed to reading for pleasure. For example, Bob's experience of pleasure reading suggests that he is an "aesthetic" reader; for him, reading is an "active immersion into a text and the opportunity to live vicariously through the situations and the lives of its characters"

(Applegate, 2004, p. 554). This ability to “live vicariously” through reading resonates with Strommen and Mates’ (2004) study of the factors that contribute to a child’s learning to love to read. They found that *readers* had “vivid and fond memories of their early encounters with books” (p. 195). The interview with Bob underlines the importance of both childhood and adult encounters with books, as he recalls many episodes where receiving an abundance of books plays a central role. His motivation to read in these kinds of encounters seems wholly internal and has nothing to do with external expectations of parents, teachers or peers. In fact, his comment that “Nobody really read in school,” reveals how separate this activity was from his other relationships and interests.

Bob’s inability to remember actually reading in school is reminiscent of all the participants’ experience of school reading, with the exception of Greg (I’ll discuss Greg later). For Adam, Fred, Charlie and Devin (though perhaps to a lesser degree), reading in high school was characterized by doing what was required to pass, “reading for the course,” and “hating reading the book to find the information.” In many ways, reading went from the pleasurable activity of childhood to a chore required of them at school. School reading was not memorable, perhaps because it was both extrinsically motivated through the requirements of assignments and essays, and also because the encounter with the text was efferent rather than aesthetic. That said, those participants who maintained a strong aesthetic stance in their reading outside of school, like Bob, or those who had developed a strong aesthetic appreciation earlier, in spite of its decline during high school, seemed to achieve greater success academically – or at least perceived that they had greater success.

Research suggests that individuals who are intrinsically motivated achieve more academic success. Apparently, “Students with high intrinsic motivation, a learning goal orientation, and high self-efficacy are relatively active readers and high achievers” (Guthrie, Wigfield et al., 1999, as cited in Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000, p. 408). Likewise, Sweet, Guthrie, and Ng (1998) reference several studies that confirm the perception that “intrinsic motivation for reading is associated with reading achievement as indicated by test scores, grades, and effective use of learning strategies”(p. 210). Similarly, “In elementary school, more autonomy-oriented students have higher self-esteem, higher perceived cognitive competence, and are less projective in coping with perceived failure” (Ryan, Connell, & Grolnick, 1992, as cited in Sweet, Guthrie, & Ng, 1998, p. 211). Harter’s (1992) study found that intrinsic motivation and perceived competence are positively correlated in the classroom – teachers believe intrinsically motivated students are more competent than extrinsically motivated students. In comparison, “Students with low levels of perceived competence felt less positive about their performance, were more anxious, and adopted an extrinsic motivational orientation” (Harter, 1992, as cited in Sweet, Guthrie, & Ng, 1998, p. 212). Ultimately, what these studies suggest is that the locus of motivation has a significant impact on success in reading, as well as teachers’ perception of students’ reading competence.

Autonomy and motivation

As well, the interviews suggest an important connection between autonomy and motivation. According to Deci and Ryan (1985), intrinsic motivation develops where there is environmental support for the “individual’s needs for relatedness, competency, and autonomy” (as cited in Sweet, Guthrie, & Ng, 1998, p. 211). This concern with

autonomy seems particularly resonant when examining the participants' attitudes about reading in high school where their sense of autonomy diminished. In comparison, autonomy and the opportunity to make choices increases intrinsic motivation to read (Gambrell, Codling & Palmer, 1996; Gambrell & Morrow, 1996; as cited in Sweet, Guthrie, & Ng, 1998, p. 212). All of the participants in this study describe the frustrations associated with having little control over the texts they were asked to read, as well as seeing little purpose in the work associated with the readings. Fred and Adam saw reading primarily as an unpleasant requirement for success in courses, in many cases doing just enough reading to get by and finding little pleasure in the process. According to Sweet, Guthrie, and Ng (1998), it is, in fact, this lack of choice that works against reading success: "Lower achievers needed more choices in reading and writing situations to initiate and sustain their effort and attention. Lower achievers also needed more relevant activities connected to reading and writing, which enabled students to see the usefulness of literacy, to gain confidence in their abilities, and enhance their self-perceived competence" (p. 221). For several of the participants their diminishing control over the texts read in school, as well as their more efferent stance when reading, resulted in a decrease in motivation to read assigned texts in school and a decline in reading outside of school.

Charlie certainly experienced the same frustrations around choice and control of texts in high school. However, it is also with Charlie that the alignment of aesthetic reading with narrative texts and intrinsic motivation breaks down. Although he was undoubtedly intrinsically motivated to read through his childhood and continues to be so, his reading is predominantly non-fiction and he denies the kind of all encompassing

experience of reading that would characterize the aesthetic stance. When asked whether he reads for pleasure or information, he states, “Definitely information . . . to see what’s going on in the world and whether or not our earth is going to blow up today.” Many researchers and teachers of English would perceive this more efferent approach as less desirable than a purely aesthetic appreciation of great literature. However, as a colleague of Charlie, it is evident that he is someone who thinks deeply and critically about what he reads. His pursuit of reading does not seem less valuable or intellectually significant than others who choose to read fiction. Nonetheless, although he is a passionate reader, his interests do not support the kinds of literature typically taught in the English classrooms where I work, nor do they reflect the kinds of reading I was expected to do as a student of English.

All of the participants convey how it became easier to read assigned texts later in university when they could see the relatedness of the materials to their careers or, alternately, that the choices held a greater aesthetic appeal. Smith and Wilhelm’s (2000) research underlines the importance of choice and control in the literate lives of young men (p.108): “Reading cannot be enjoyable unless the student can imagine, at least in principle, that the symbol system is worth mastering for its own sake” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, as cited in Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, p. 142). For the participants in this study, once they encountered a symbol system that held value because it was the key to a career or the key to the pleasures of a particular genre or subject, reading became a significant piece of their literate identity.

Social orientations

Of course, to describe motivation as intrinsic or extrinsic is overly simplistic and does not capture the types of motivation that impact reading behaviour. For Greg in particular, the social motivational orientation (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000) seems to have played a significant role in his reading behaviour in high school and into adulthood. While the other participants enjoyed the initial stages of learning to read in school and then became increasingly disengaged later, Greg's experience was the opposite. His experience of beginning to read in school was largely negative. He comments, "I was a very sensitive boy and if it was somebody, whether it was intentional or not, who looked a little bit angry or off, then I wouldn't respond very well. I remember getting a lot of negative feedback about my language arts abilities, which affected me until around grade six." Although he states that he took to reading "naturally," his experiences of reading in school seem to have been impacted not so much by ability as by the social relationships that were associated with reading. Consequently, while negative feedback from teachers in elementary school worked against his reading development, it was a teacher in high school who created a social environment more conducive to reading, by inviting Greg to participate in an enriched English class.

The impact of this enriched setting is obvious in Greg's recollections. "I was actually in a classroom with people that valued reading and writing. From there I could talk to people my own age. I didn't have to go to teachers or other adults to talk about books." This led to greater success in language arts for Greg. Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) research supports this belief that when reading behaviour has a social orientation, it leads to increased reading and high achievement (p. 405). Similarly, in Smith and

Wilhelm's (2002) study, "When the literate activity provided the occasion for social connections, the boys had intrinsic motivation for their engagement" (p. 147). Moje, Overby, Tysvaer and Morris (2008) point out, "Youth read and write when they have a well-articulated purpose, a purpose that is usually centered in a network of social activity" (p. 146). The importance of the social aspect of reading is evident still in Greg's construction of literacy; he states, "Somebody who's literate can discuss intelligently what he or she has read." As an adult, Greg continues to seek out social groups that can incorporate discussions of what he is currently reading.

That said, even in the case of Greg, who clearly enjoyed much of the reading assigned in high school, the motivation to read was not entirely social, nor was it intrinsic: "The school reading was normally connected to some sort of assignment or assessment and I really wanted to do well . . . There was a little bit of extrinsic pressure in there, even if it was something I was intrinsically interested in reading." Greg observes that he did not enjoy all of the assigned reading in high school, in spite of his admiration for many of his teachers; however, because he was strongly mark oriented as well, the reading remained meaningful.

Greg is a bit of an anomaly in relation to the other participants who state that, outside of their family, they had no significant relationships based on reading or the discussion of texts during their high school years. Rather, their social groups were connected to other kinds of activities: sports and music. As well, Greg is the only participant who placed a real importance on high academic achievement in language arts in high school. However, in this case the desire to achieve seems to have been related to

a need for approval from teachers and a desire to fit into a peer group. For Greg, literate identity was inextricably bound to his need to connect to his peers.

School experiences and professional reading

In the end, all of the participants have become readers who value the pleasure or information to be found in a text. They all find time to read – some more than others. However, their desire to read materials related to their profession seems to sit in the same grey area reserved for school-based reading, and their desire to pursue this kind of reading is not as consistent as their desire to read for pleasure. Adam, for example, says, “If I’m planning a lesson and I want some background information on something in science, I’ll read a little bit. Not a lot, just a little bit.” Similarly, Devin reads “little bits of things,” and Fred, “Not as much as I probably should.” Bob states, “I’ve got so many fun things I want to read, that I really don’t want to do professional reading in the evening.” Moreover, his comments on the professional reading he was asked to do as part of his school’s literacy committee make this clear: “It still reminded me of university and made me cringe a little bit . . . it’s like homework.” These participants do little direct reading in support of their teaching.

In comparison, Charlie’s home reading, for the most part, is connected quite directly to his job and his passion for history. However, he does state that he reads theoretical articles as well: “Most of my readings would be online stuff, looking at different articles – Proquest or Infotrac [academic databases].” Greg reads novels and scripts and content related to the practicalities of teaching and says he is less interested in theoretical content. It is likely that the teaching areas of Charlie and Greg influence their professional reading behaviour, in that it is difficult to remain effective or credible as a

history or English teacher without reading. Moreover, their reading supports their literate identities and their teacher identities in general – it is difficult to be a drama teacher, like Greg, without reading scripts. Similarly, history comes to us often in the form of text and always in the form of sign systems and artifacts that must be interpreted. For Devin, although professional reading has less priority, the fact that he reads, nonetheless supports his identity as a teacher librarian. In comparison, for Bob, Fred, and Adam, working in the areas of science and math and physical education, being considered a reader is less clearly a part of their literate identity or their teacher identity, and consequently, they may feel less need to read professionally.

Literate identity and masculinity

In choosing to interview only male teachers about their literacy practices I intended to address some of the arguments that have turned male students' troubles with classroom literacies and reading into problems of gender. Certainly, there are many valid arguments to support the idea that boys are facing greater challenges in language arts, simply because they are boys. There are societal expectations. For example, "Girls are more likely to be portrayed as readers in the illustrations in children's books, given books as presents for birthdays and Christmas and to describes themselves as devoted to their books" (Wilinsky & Hunniford, 1993, as cited in Millard, 1997, p. 19). Beyond these external representations of gender roles, Millard cites the work of Harris, Nixon and Ruddack (1993) in describing "gender regimes" (Kessler et al., 1985):

They explain that their "data led us to see young people as caught in overlapping gender regimes – the regime of the community, the regime of the peer culture and the regime of the school" (Harris, Nixon, & Ruddack, 1993, p. 5). They further

suggest that although challenges were offered to each external regime by the school, to some extent the residual effects of the other influences were still strong. Perhaps the most powerful influence of all was that of peer culture, particularly that of the gender appropriate peer group. (as cited in Millard, 1997, p. 21)

What this suggests, then, is that these “regimes” or societal influences create patterns of behaviour that are so innate as to be unconscious. It further suggests the importance of the peer group in influencing behaviour. Consequently, though my participants’ literate identities are composed of various and competing influences, their commentaries indicate that gender is an integral part of these compositions.

Several of the participants suggested that there are expectations related to being a guy that must be taken into consideration when choosing to read, as well as what might be read. Several of the participants indicated that they perceived reading as a gendered activity in elementary or high school. For Adam his experiences in elementary school were particularly instructive. When asked if Adam perceived reading as a “girl thing,” he responded, “Probably in elementary more so. We had reading competitions – how many books can you read over the summer – and four girls would come back with ninety-seven books read and I . . . I didn’t even see a book this summer. It was always girls dominating the reading competitions, so I was like, ‘It’s probably because girls like to read.’” Other participants commented on an understanding of reading as a more feminine pursuit. It’s not clear, however, whether or not this significantly impacted their reading behaviour. Fred states that he definitely saw reading as a female activity “because it was sometimes dealing more with feelings . . . I was thinking that I was really into sports and girls weren’t really so much into sports.” Similarly, Charlie suggests that the stereotype of girls reading more fiction and guys reading car magazines probably applied. Greg

comments, “I suppose when I think about it I was aware that society would say that that was more of a female thing to do than a male thing. But I was very focused on a certain genre of books, which were very male. I liked horror stories.” Certainly, the participants’ comments imply an awareness of reading as gendered. In the case of Fred and Greg this consciousness of gender may have circumscribed their choices of reading material and genre.

Devin, in considering whether it was cool to read in high school, responded, “It wasn’t particularly cool to be a good student even.” Although this sense of what was expected may not have been solely related to being male, his work in the library as a teacher-librarian suggests that gender plays a role in what boys read: “There’s a lot of picking for the cover. A lot of times guys would like to take a book but the cover’s kind of ‘gay’ or something.” Likewise, Greg indicates the kinds of penalties that are experienced by male students who do not take on the socially accepted masculine role:

I mean I had some trouble throughout school with bullying and stuff, so I just kind of accepted it. I think that the fact that I liked to read was the least of my issues at that particular time. Again, I got really connected to drama – where I went to high school that was not cool. If you were a male and you were in drama, then you were gay. And so I felt there was a real stigma there, a bit more so than that I liked to read. I didn’t feel that that was an issue. I suppose when I think about it I was aware that society would say that that was more of a female thing to do than a male thing.

While Greg did not see reading as the most obvious challenge to his “maleness,” he does state that he read almost exclusively from a more masculine genre (horror) and that this

may have afforded him some protection. Devin and Greg's comments suggest that there is a social risk for young men who read, particularly if they choose to read texts outside the established norms.

Bob's comments echo this kind of thinking: "Nobody read in school and if they knew I was a reader, it wasn't a problem because I was also a binge drinker." Though Bob does not currently manifest any issues with alcoholism, his comments suggest that in order to escape social penalties for being an avid reader, he also had to pursue appropriately "male" behaviours. This consciousness of reading as a feminine activity also came through in a different manner in the interview with Bob. Throughout the interview whenever he referred to a teacher, it was in a high-pitched parody of a female voice. Invariably the voice was telling him (the student) what to do. This suggests that Bob views female teachers in a particular way and that, perhaps, many of his early reading experiences in school were directed by female teachers. Similarly, he characterized the "jockdom" that exists in the school where he teaches as being populated by male, non-literate teachers: "I'm picking on the jocks, but there's so many of them that you assume, and rightly so, that they don't read, or very little, other than maybe a magazine. And it comes across as almost dumb. . . . When they explain themselves they have trouble doing it unless it's an analogy to do with football." Clearly, Bob has, perhaps unconsciously, assigned specific gender roles to teachers. It is worth pointing out that the Language Arts department in the school where he works has no full-time male English teachers.

Rather than risk seeming feminine, the other participants seem to have dealt with the challenges associated with reading by simply avoiding it or pursuing it as a strictly

private activity. This separation between reading and other activities is revealed in Adam's comments about a friend whom he saw as reader: "I had a really smart friend in the Advanced program. [He] must have been a reader because he was really smart. He had books and stuff. I didn't really see him read all that much. I know he'd be like, 'I can't come over for two hours,' because he had to do stuff. I never inquired." Evidently, his friend's reading either held no interest or perhaps was subconsciously viewed as "risky" behaviour, in terms of his masculinity, and, as a result, was ignored as a means of protection. Similarly, Fred states that he sensed it was probably not cool to read, but that his friendships were built around dialogue about sports and other interests – reading was not discussed. In comparison, Charlie is unique in this group of male teachers in that, though he was conscious of the stereotypes of what genres might be preferred by males as opposed to females, he did not sense a stigma associated with reading in and of itself. He recalls, "In high school, everybody always had a book." Books, in this instance, did not signify a gendered activity, or one that threatened his "maleness."

The singular literate identity that had been constructed within the participants' primary Discourse became multiple literate identities as they made their way through the secondary Discourses of school. Their comments in the interviews and their recollections raise questions about the intersection of masculine identity and literate identity. Maybe the separation that occurs between home and school reading is a symptom of a boy's struggle to define not only his literate identity, but his identity as a male within the context of a society that remains relatively unflinching in its expectations for both men and women? Newkirk (2000) writes, "Boys often feel that an open show of enthusiasm for schoolwork, particularly in the language arts, can undermine their identity as a 'real

boy” (p. 39). Similarly, Pottoroff, Phelps-Zientarski, and Skovera (1996) point out that “While reading in all forms is not perceived as feminized, the type of reading typically favoured in schools clearly is” (as cited in Newkirk, 2000, p. 42). Millard (1997) alludes to this effect of gender most strongly:

From a fairly early age, most boys can be shown to fear the “contamination” of femininity and all the evidence related to language learning that I have cited so far, points to the fact that the school subject English, and the activities associated with being good at it, work to position the successful learner on the feminine side of the cavernous divide they are creating through their peers’ policing of gender difference. (p. 26)

Such research indicates that gender influences boys’ perceptions of literacy activities. It also implies that peers reinforce the notion that being literate or a reader may be a risky position for a male student.

Some research suggests that there may also be gender differences between boys and girls in terms of reading behaviour. Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) and Baker and Wigfield (1999) cite several studies that suggest girls express more positive views toward reading. “The results are also consistent with other studies showing that girls have higher competence beliefs in reading compared to boys, and value it more” (e.g., Marsh, 1989; Wigfield et al., 1997; as cited in Baker & Wigfield, 1999, p. 38). Further, Baker and Wigfield (1999) propose, “These gender differences may reflect the internalization of cultural expectations that girls will be more positive about reading than boys” (Eisenberg, Martin, & Fabes, 1996; McKenna et al., 1995; as cited in Baker & Wigfield, 1999, p. 37-8). Perhaps because of what is deemed appropriate feminine behaviour girls are more willing to comply with the demands of reading in school. In Millard’s (1997) study, she

found, “Girls who describe themselves as disliking reading often settle down in school to the task of reading a book more willingly than boys with similar views” (p. 81). It seems reasonable, then, that the motivation of the participants to read may have been impacted by certain hegemonic conceptions of gender and what it means to act like a boy.

In the end, though gender may play a role in the construction of literate identity, the process is much more complex and layered than simple biology. Like the pages of a school yearbook, literate identity draws on the Discourses of multiple and often competing groups for its construction. Just as an individual may fulfill various roles at home, in school, on a sports team or in a band, their literate identity may shift to realize these roles as well. Often, at least for the participants in this study, the competing Discourses of school served to stifle their desire and motivation to read and may have also diminished their belief in their own self-efficacy or competence.

Male Role Models: Reality Check

The male literate identity, then, is clearly complex and nuanced and does not lend itself readily to prescriptive reading programs and quick-fix literacy strategies. Literate identity is the product of many influences both in the home and outside. According to Gee (2008), the Discourses we acquire later in life are acquired within “a more ‘public sphere’ than our initial socializing group” such as “institutions that are part and parcel of wider communities, whether these be religious groups, community organizations, schools, businesses, or governments” (p. 157). This means that the school plays a significant role in the acquisition of these secondary Discourses and, through this, literate identity. However, is literate identity the product of the many influences within a

Discourse, or do individual role models play an integral role in the development of literate identity?

Whether or not an individual has the capacity to alter the reader identity of another is the question literacy teachers must constantly ask themselves. As a teacher, I would like to believe that, at times, I have made an impact on my students – not all, but some, or maybe just one. I know, too, that as a student, my reading habits were not transformed by the teachers I encountered in school. The fact that I loved reading required no other influence than that of a good book. Some of the participants in this study share a similar background. They became confirmed readers at a young age, influenced by parents and significant relationships in the primary Discourse. Others encountered significant individuals, role models of reading, to offer a way in to the text.

Role models in the lives of the participants

It might be a shoebox under the bed, a discarded wooden box or a cigar case, but most people have some kind of container for the unofficial album of their lives. These apocryphal containers hold the loose ends of our lives – pieces that perhaps do not fit well into the expected scheme, but remain too important to discard.

For the reader, or the reading convert, these unofficial snapshots are the people who offered quiet epiphanies – the unexpected pleasure of the text. All of the participants have had relationships that shifted their literate identity. For some, these were relationships that were an integral part of their childhood; for others, these were individuals who appeared serendipitously offering the right book in the right moment. In any case, the experiences of the participants offer insight into the possibilities of affecting students' lives through modeling or mentoring reading. Greg's comments illustrate that

simply placing more male teachers in classrooms is not necessarily effective, but that sometimes male role models do have an impact.

I think there needs to be more male teachers in the younger elementary grades. My first official male teacher was grade six, which was a bad year, but that's a separate issue. But I had a male intern in grade four and, at nine years old, this guy was the coolest guy in the world, and I was so upset when he left. (Greg)

In many ways, all of the participants in this study were impacted by people who acted as models of literacy in their lives. Smith and Wilhelm's (2002) study found that "Friendships, family, and significant others exerted a powerful influence on literate behavior" (p. 142). This influence for the participants, however, was not always positive. For example, Adam's mother's demanding approach to his early reading successfully made him "hate" reading well into adulthood. Fred's brother's success in reading seems to have undermined Fred's own desire to read. That said, all of the participants encountered positive reading role models as well, and they were drawn, at least in part, into the aesthetic experience of reading through these individuals.

Devin, Bob and Greg, of all the participants, have been the most clearly and consistently interested in the reading of fiction from a young age. The other participants have become readers as adults, influenced, perhaps, by a different kind of model than the first three. However, in the case of the confirmed readers, Devin, Bob and Greg, there has been at least one individual whom they regarded as an influential reader. For these three, their parents were instrumental in the development of their literate identities. For Devin, though both his mother and father were readers, he understood his father's reading as more important because his father was a professional, a high school English teacher:

“[My mom] always read, but my dad was a professional and that was his job, so I think I noticed him reading more, even though they would both be reading in the living room. He would do that more because she was the domestic servant in the household and that was her role.” Although, Devin’s description of his mother as a “domestic servant” is used wryly as a deliberate acknowledgement of the view of women at that time (and perhaps now as well), it, nonetheless, underlines the notion that gender may play a role in the formation of literate identity. In comparison, Greg saw his mother’s reading as more influential in the development of his literate identity. This influence was partially the result of similar interests and tastes: “My dad would like to read in the summer, so I saw what he was reading, but I think my mother was a little bit more of an influence. She had more of a language arts type of background. She was a bit more comfortable in English than in the maths and the sciences. Because I have a similar experience, I related more to her.” For Devin, his father’s reading was perceived as more valuable because it connected to his work as a teacher. For Greg, whose literate identity seems strongly tied to relationships, his mother’s reading was more influential as it related more closely than his father’s to his interests. In both these cases, the participant perceived both his mother and father as readers, and their relative influence seems to have been determined more by perceived status and related interests than gender.

Unlike the others, though Bob lived with both parents, only his mother read. His father had little education and, consequently, was a poor reader. Nonetheless, Bob had the sense that his father would have liked to read, and this likely reinforced his belief that reading was important. Bob was surrounded in his childhood by individuals, alongside his mother, who played a crucial role in the formation of his literate identity. For

example, his grandmother would provide sets of *Reader's Digests*: "My grandma . . . I can distinctly remember sending over these red, leather books. They were *Reader's Digest*. And I thought, 'Whoa, aren't these cool.'" Bob's is the only participant in this group where books were not always readily available or abundant. As a result, any person or event that offered books in any number came to be memorable. Likewise, a male neighbor, who Bob says "must have been a reader himself, which was unusual for men in those days," provided him with books:

He came back one time with a whole box [of books]. . . . It was cool because the two of us, his boy too [Bob's childhood friend], read these things, got to go through them and it took a long time. So instead of reading a book a night and then not having anything for a long time . . . it was like a treasure . . . it was cool.

It's clear from the interview that this time was a cherished memory. Similarly, the period during which Bob's family housed the town library is a fond remembrance and formative in his literate identity: "You'd find something down there that you couldn't sign out if you went to the regular library because you'd be embarrassed by the librarian. So that was neat because I could read whatever." These moments where Bob had access to an abundance of books did not involve an individual directly modeling an enjoyment of reading. Nevertheless, the individuals who facilitated this access had a significant impact on the formation of Bob's literate identity and passion for reading.

For Devin, Bob and Greg, at least one parent played a crucial role in the development of their literate identity. Research supports the suggestion that parental role models can have a powerful impact. For example, Barrs (2000) found that boys who are readers often have at least one parent who is a committed reader at home (p. 291).

Similarly, Moss (2007) found that boys who read well and pursued reading voluntarily, typically had a parent or parents who played a crucial role in sustaining these boys' interests (p. 167). Studies, nevertheless, suggest that gender cannot be wholly dismissed. For example, Millard (1997) remarks, "It is essential to consider first of all why reading becomes so heavily marked as appropriate to one particular gender at this stage of education. One explanation that emerges from the accounts of reading and readers contained in the pupils' own stories is located in the continuing powerful influence of the home, where the consumption of fiction is largely seen to be a concern of mothers, grandmas and sisters. Fathers who read, appear to do so more for instrumental purposes" (p. 96). Millard's observations resonate with what my participants' report. In most cases, even when the father's reading is seen as more important, mothers are almost always associated with the reading of novels. Fathers may read novels, but this is often seen as an escape from the other, more demanding, reading they do for work. Although Charlie's father reads the newspaper, it is for information, rather than the aesthetic experience (Rosenblatt 1994) of the novel. Bob's father cannot read well. And in the case of Adam, the father is not present at all.

Millard (1997) further points out that "girls are provided with more positive roles from family and friends for their self-image as readers. Boys reported far less interaction with fiction amongst themselves, their family and their friends" (p. 164-5). Again, although this study does not compare the experiences of males and females, with the exception of Greg who sought social connections through his interest in literature, none of the remaining participants comment on relationships or interactions that centered around reading, though certainly parents and others facilitated the development of each

participants' literate identity. This is similar to Moss' (2006) finding that boys who were "committed to reading at this length . . . often pursued it as a solitary activity without reference to their friends" (p. 167). Here Moss is referring to boys who pursue the reading of novels, as opposed to their peers who read shorter, typically non-fiction texts.

For these participants the impact of gender is unclear. The influence of the individuals they encountered on their literate identity has less to do with gender and seemingly more with the participants' readiness to read. Nevertheless, both Devin and Bob make note of gender. Bob remarks on the uniqueness of his male neighbor's love of reading and Devin notes that his father's reading was more significant because of his professional status. That said, these men were not necessarily more powerful models because they were male, but because they were readers. However, the fact that they are remarkable in any way lends credence to Millard (1997) and Pirie's (2002) suggestion that the reading of fiction is associated with women. In comparison, Katz and Sokal (2003) found that only "24% of the Canadian boys they studied viewed reading as feminine" (as cited in Sokal et al., 2007, p. 652). In the end, the point is perhaps that not all boys or men see reading as feminine, though some do. Of these participants, Bob and Greg seem to have been more influenced in their reading by their mothers and grandmothers.

For the participants who became readers later, there seems to be a clearer indication that male role models or mentors played a role. In the case of Fred, who would not have described himself as a reader even after university, this shift in his literate identity came as a young teacher in the Arctic:

The biggest shift in reading for me came when I lived in the Arctic and I met the guy that's probably my best friend. He's very well read and he was like, read this book, read this book. He just kind of opened my eyes to more authors and the books that he was reading I usually found to be quite good. . . . From there, I . . . really became more of a reader.

Fred's male colleague suggested that he read the novel *Desert Solitaire* by Edward Abbey: "I'd read plenty of books before that but that was one of the first times I got into it. And then we went to Australia together and we read lots of books there." This shift, for Fred, may have been merely the serendipitous circumstance of meeting an individual he bonded with and perhaps the isolation of the Arctic. Nonetheless, this relationship proved to be pivotal in the development of his literate identity. It certainly is possible that gender played a role in this shift. Certainly the fact that Fred's male colleague shared similar interests was influential, and perhaps these similarities were predicated on the fact that both were male.

Similarly, Adam's literate identity began to change at the end of his university career. For Adam, it was his football coach, a man with whom he had developed a close relationship over five years, who introduced him to the possibility of enjoying reading:

I think it was when I started coaching and I was in [the coach's] office at the university. I was kind of sitting there and just looked at his bookshelf. I hadn't noticed this in the five years I'd played for him. I noticed that he had about fifty books on his shelves. I saw one and I said, "Jeez, that would be kind of a neat book." And he said, "No, no, if you want a book, I'll give you a good book." And then I said, "Oh, all right, he's reading, and there's some books here that I

didn't know existed." . . . And then I grabbed one of his books on vacation, read it and [thought] that's neat. And he's got thirty more. That's when I thought I wouldn't mind [reading more] . . . and then another friend of mine was already into it, and he had about fifty of them. And he said, you've got to read this one, this one, this one – they're all good. That's when I started to read.

Currently, Adam's reading diet is composed of football books, typically autobiographies. Nonetheless, he has found a subject that engages him and, as a result of reading more frequently, he believes his reading speed and comprehension has improved. Fred, too, comments on how his increased reading had improved his speed and retention.

Ultimately, both Fred and Adam seem to have been influenced by male mentors who introduced them to books on subjects that held an intrinsic interest. This, in turn, had the benefit of improving their reading skills and, consequently, the satisfaction experienced while reading - perhaps, moving them closer to Rosenblatt's aesthetic stance or, alternately, Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) "flow" (as cited in Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, p. 40).

For Fred and Adam, reading did not take when they were children for a multitude of reasons. Shakespeare's Hamlet says, "The readiness is all" (Vii) in contemplating his end. But the phrase may be equally applicable to reading as well. Perhaps the conditions for Fred and Adam to become readers were not met in their childhoods – their "readiness" for reading would come later. Is it significant that their mentors were male? Perhaps. But not definitively so. Maybe it was simply a matter of two people connecting with one another over similar interests and developing a relationship that included reading. In other words, Fred and Adam became ready to enter a secondary Discourse that encompassed reading as one of its valued activities - as part of the language of that

particular Discourse. For Adam, this Discourse, surprisingly so perhaps, was that of university level football, part of which involved reading about football or encountering others who read about football as part of their appreciation for the sport. For Fred, life in the Arctic invited him into a Discourse that encompassed reading about wilderness pursuits and adventure.

Charlie, too, encountered both male mentors and circumstances favorable to reading. He developed a preference for non-fiction as a child and maintains this preference as an adult – though he does read some fiction during the summer. Although he states that he did not enjoy fiction as a young person, this changed in university. Again, this seems to be linked somewhat to a male mentor, but also to the discovery of classical and historical fiction, which held greater interest for Charlie. In the case of a university Shakespeare course, the approach seems to have made a difference:

He wasn't arrogant like other English profs. He was kind of down to earth, wore shorts every day and said, "If there's lines that you don't get, just go over them, and go to the next part. And get what you get out of it and we'll figure it out later." So it was fun to read.

Charlie also mentions developing an affection for Western Canadian literature. It is worth noting that all of the professors he mentions as influential are male.

Ultimately, male mentors may play a greater role for men who have not become readers within their primary Discourse. As they enter into other Discourses and take on the values and attitudes of these Discourses, they have more opportunities to adopt the characteristics of a reader. In fact, Moss (1998) suggests that "Boys' peer group relationships tend to work against their choosing to read" (as cited in Barrs, 2000, p.

291). It may be that the hegemonic demands of maleness (assuming that these demands work against boys becoming readers) are so powerful for some boys, that it is not until they leave school that they are able to change their literate identity. For these participants, the combination of greater freedom to choose reading material, coupled with the influence of a relationship with another male reader allowed them to move beyond their non-reader identities (or, in the case of Charlie, his dislike of fiction) created in elementary and high school.

Teacher models

I've never seen a life-changing thing because of anything I've talked to kids about in terms of reading. (Bob)

In Smith and Wilhelm's (2002) study they found that "many of the boys said they would make a special effort to read books that were given to them by a significant other" (p. 143). This, in retrospect, may also explain why I read Tolkien's tedious volume, *The Simirillion*, in high school in an attempt to impress a boy. It is worth noting that in Smith and Wilhelm's (2002) study English teachers were rarely considered "significant others." Rather, the boys believed that "English teachers cared about particular kinds of texts, not about the students themselves as people or readers" (p. 143). While this is likely not true of all English teachers' intentions, it seems that in this study, at least, what the boys believed, about themselves as well as their teachers, was more powerful than the realities of the classroom. There are some interesting contradictions in what the participants in this study say about their experiences with individuals they consider mentors, as opposed to their views on their own abilities to influence their students' literate identities.

Only one of the participants suggests his literate identity was profoundly affected by a teacher – or, in this case, teachers:

I always had great relationships with my English teachers . . . This is how a fourteen year old boy thinks . . . the reason I liked my English teacher from day one was because she had movie posters. And a few weeks in we were just talking and she just talked to me to see how I was doing and I was like, this woman is the greatest person of all time. And that just continued. I had George Smith . . . for creative writing, and I had Christine Black. When I had Declan O’Rielly . . . he was the one who really made a big deal of my abilities in English and made me feel like I’m not just average or maybe slightly above average – that this is a really strong area for me. He was teaching a methods class at the university, and it was the [grade 11] course when we did children’s stories, and he invited me and another student, . . . the brightest student in that grade all around, and invited us to share our children’s stories with the methods class. It was just such an incredible experience for a sixteen year old. I just thought, this is the right thing for me.

For Greg, teachers seem to have offered the social and intellectual connection that his peers did not – at least not consistently.

Even though I didn’t have her for English, but Ms. Thompson . . . I remember one time, I was in grade 12, the book I decided to do for my independent Canadian novel was *The English Patient*, and she saw that I had that and was really excited. She had just been in a book club, when the concept of a book club was fairly new to me, and she said, “Beautiful writing,” but we couldn’t figure out what on earth

it was about. And I thought that this is kind of cool that I can talk to my teacher about a book. Without having had her [as a teacher] I'm still able to learn from her about English.

The teachers who recognized his talents in English had a considerable impact on his interest in literature and his desire to read. Overall, this seems to have increased his belief in his capabilities, particularly in the humanities.

In comparison, the others feel that teachers had little impact. While Fred does have some negative recollections about his English courses and their impact on his reading, in general he remains fairly dispassionate about their influence: "I liked my teachers, but I just never got an influence of go out and read this because it's good and interesting. It always, in English, was just do it." Similarly, Charlie recalls, "I was in that neutral [phase]; they didn't make me hate it and they didn't make me like it. So, they didn't have much influence on me that way." Devin, too, states that he doesn't have a memory of a teacher "who brought it to life for me." However, he says, "There were teachers who were absorbed in this stuff to the extent that it was their life, I think unconsciously they were giving that to me." Consequently, although he does not recall a teacher influencing him outright, he allows for the possibility that this kind of influence may be unconscious. Other participants also comment on their sense that teachers, particularly English and history teachers, were well read and that this knowledge was acquired through reading.

In spite of their own experiences as students, the participants believe, to some extent, that as teachers they might hold some sway over their students' appreciation of

reading. In general, though, they are not overly optimistic about this possibility. Greg comments,

I can try. I'm not convinced . . . unless the kid wants to read, I'm not sure it's going to happen. It may happen after I've said good-bye to some of these kids because I . . . I mean I have friends that did not pick up a book their entire school lives. Hated reading, hated school, and are [now] reading high-level philosophy textbooks and stuff.

The recognition that his friend developed a reader identity as an adult echoes the experiences of the participants in this study who came to reading as adults. As an English teacher, Greg actively tries to find texts that connect with his students, particularly boys:

I had all these boys . . . and most of those boys were into basketball, so they found books on basketball and they were reading them. [Most of them] at least tried to borrow a book from a friend, and made the effort, if they could . . . but it really has to be – there has to be some connection with what they're interested in. And the trick is trying to find out what every one of your kids is interested in and connecting them to a book that works. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

Greg's failure to connect with his students' interests may reflect his overall lack of interest in basketball. Perhaps it takes a special knowledge of the subject, as Adam experienced with his football coach, to successfully influence students' reading interests in certain areas. Similarly, Greg may not have enough credibility or rapport with some students to be influential. Charlie describes a similar attempt to connect a reading to a student's interests:

I gave a grade ten student two articles on white privilege because she has a lot of social justice background . . . I said, I think you might enjoy these. I'd like to hear your thoughts on them. She read them and she was fascinated by them. In this case, Charlie may, in fact, play the role of what Smith and Wilhelm (2002) describe as the "significant other" by singling out the interests of particular student for special attention. This, unfortunately, is not necessarily a teaching strategy that can impact a large number of students.

In comparison, Bob is less optimistic about the possibility of influencing his students. He states, "It's too short of a time period that you have with the kid to make much of an influence" and suggests that a positive reader identity needs to be established before they get to high school. Ironically, it is the participant who reads the least and has little to do with promoting literacy in the school who has the most positive beliefs around mentoring students:

I think I probably could. I'm sure, whether it's one student over four years who sees you read and thinks, "Maybe I should read a little bit more than I do." Yeah, I think so. I think all teachers are in that position to be role models and to influence certain students, for sure.

He goes on to state that he hasn't influenced his students because he rarely reads in front of them. He may see the possibility of being mentored because of his experience with his football coach. However, because his own literate identity as a reader is still developing, it is not easily incorporated into his teaching role.

Male role models

I remember how important that was to me, to have some sort of a male role model, besides my father, as a teacher. I don't know if he was a reader, but he made lessons exciting and so I think, in all grades, there should be male role models for boys, just like there needs to be female role models for females. (Greg)

Although the role of gender in the development of literate identity is hard to pin down, the belief that schools benefit from male role models is evident in the comments of the participants. These comments, however, do not reflect the blanket assumption that any male model is a benefit to all boys (though I personally would not be opposed to a male model); rather, the participants suggest that particular kinds of male teacher models may have an impact on some male literate identities. For example, Devin states,

It has to be the right teacher for the right boy. If [the football coach] is reading a novel and talks about it and enjoys it in way that is kind of intellectual [laughs] – that I think would appeal to one of his football players more than if [the teacher-librarian] told them about the book. Kids are like anybody, they want to hear someone say, “That’s a good book.” Another person has read this book and says it’s a good book and that’s almost enough sometimes, particularly if they’re readers. I think it makes sense for someone whom they admire to be more effectively a model of reading.

Devin’s statement resonates with what I know is true about my own reading behaviour – I am willing to take book recommendations from those I trust will have similar reading tastes, and Oprah, for all of her wisdom, is not one.

Charlie echoes this conviction that physical education teachers are sometimes more powerful models of reading than English teachers:

I think especially . . . in the phys.ed. areas. Because it's a given if you have an English teacher that that person reads a lot. . . . I see a lot of kids that are kind of phys.ed. junkies, that do very well in phys.ed. but struggle with reading. And I think having a gym teacher that reads [can make a difference].

Adam, too, suggests that the physical education teacher (and he is one) can have a positive impact:

If you see someone doing something that you think is outside their box, you might think, "Well, maybe I can do it." [The physical education teacher] is doing it – there must be something to it. He's not just going to do something boring and stupid. They might say, "Maybe I should read more *Sports Illustrated* or sports sections, or whatever." I think we're in a position to influence a lot of different students doing a lot of different things.

It is worth noting that all of these participants chose the physical education teacher/football coach as an example of positive male mentoring. This suggests that the "dumb jock" stereotype persists in our schools and that this version of masculinity is antithetical to being literate. This may give some credence to the suggestion that traditional forms of masculinity work against literacy and that it requires the most traditionally masculine teacher, the football coach, to break down this entrenched stereotype.

The products of experience

In the end, the literate identities of the participants are a composite of their primary and secondary Discourses. As teachers, their literacy practices reflect the attitudes and beliefs they have absorbed over time, as well as the demands of gender. Greg, in one of the follow up interviews, commented, “The old saying is that teachers teach how they learned.” While this may hold true for some, others use the way they were taught as an impetus to not teach in this way.

One of the significant impacts of the participants’ experiences of school-based reading is the emphasis they place, as teachers, on offering their students choice in their reading material, or at least carefully considering the interest level of the reading they assign. Greg comments, “I have taken the approach of doing my best to make English fun, but to also choose literature . . . that I think students will enjoy.” He says this approach is the direct result of the excellent English teachers he had in high school. Charlie echoes this emphasis placed on offering student choice, not only in reading material, but also in areas of study within a course. His attitudes, echoed by other participants, spring from his sense that he was offered little choice in school and that this was detrimental to developing a positive reader identity.

The teaching strategies of the participants have also been affected by their school experiences. Charlie recalls teachers who backed up readings with visuals, as well as books that used visuals to accompany the text (Dick and Jane, for example). This, too, has become a fundamental part of his teaching practice – lessons are often accompanied by a power point with visuals or an overhead. Fred observes, “One way to turn kids off reading is to force them to read boring stuff.” This is a reflection of his hatred of reading

textbooks as a student. Currently, he makes use of power point and presents information verbally, as a means of reducing textbook reading for his students. Bob, on the other hand, sees little direct application of his own school experiences and this is perhaps dictated by the subject (math) that he teaches.

Participants who saw themselves as non-readers at home or in school (though they consider themselves readers now) are the most idealistic in their views. Adam reveals this in a follow up email to our interview:

My experience as a reader when I was a child had a large impact on how I taught my students. My mother used to make reading a horrible experience. She did this by being very hard on me when I made mistakes to the point of making me very nervous at “reading time.” I knew then that I never wanted to make anyone feel that way. I tried to be very cautious of how I corrected mistakes and was cautious of how I corrected the student.

Although Adam’s mother’s approach was clearly detrimental to his reader identity, early on, it has made him a more sensitive teacher. Fred, who also considered himself a non-reader in school, says that “one thing [he] didn’t have was teachers recommending good books.” He notes that his reader identity was transformed when he met his friend in the Arctic who recommended several pivotal books to Fred and changed his attitude toward reading. Fred comments that he would like to be that person for one of his students. These participants have used negative reading experiences as an impetus to work more positively in their own classrooms.

Evidently, the teaching practices of the participants have been affected by their own experiences within the primary Discourse and the secondary Discourses of school.

Devin writes, “The fundamental belief that reading and literacy are the cornerstone of achievement has stayed with me through my career.” Teachers are, after all, the products of the Discourses to which they belong. The values and beliefs that these Discourse communities embody must necessarily be reflected back in their teaching.

Notations on the back

My conversations with the participants suggest, first of all, that to claim simply that the feminization of education is hurting boys is far too simplistic, as well as difficult to justify through research. There is a suggestion, nonetheless, that male literacy models can make a difference in the lives of male readers, particularly those who have not become “readers” as children. The literate identities of Adam and Fred seem to have been altered by male mentors once they reached adulthood. That said, there is little in the lives of these participants to suggest that male teachers made any particular impact on their literate identities, except, perhaps, to create frustration and boredom, in equal measure to their female teachers. Greg is the exception in this. His literate life was impacted by his teachers: at times negatively in elementary school, and later positively in high school. Here though, the influential teachers were a mix of male and female, and they did not convince Greg he could be a powerful reader because of their gender; rather, they allowed him to believe in himself and found books that interested and challenged him. In the end, gender is not absent from the equation, but it is simply one part of the many factors that impact the final outcome for any individual’s literate identity.

Chapter Five: New Formats

Like any album, this one leaves gaps and blank spaces. Photos have gone missing, notations have not been made. It is, nonetheless, a starting point for thinking about the intersections of literate identity, gender, reading and teaching for male teachers and male students.

Reading and school

I came to this research looking for answers that could address why there were so many boys in my high school Read classes and how these boys had come to be non-readers. I hoped that by looking at the childhood and school experiences of some of my male colleagues I might begin to understand what had been influential in forming their reader identities and how this might become meaningful in the classroom. In many ways, the conversations I had with the participants were disheartening. Their experiences as students seemed to suggest that school offered little that was positive in the development of an appreciation for reading. More often, school seemed to be a source of frustration, if not utter confusion. It was something to “get through” as quickly and cleanly as possible – and going beyond the explicit requirements of an assignment was invariably messy and undesirable. School was not perceived as a space for learning and inspiration. Perhaps this is a reflection of the middle-class upbringing of the participants. They were already prepared in their primary Discourse for the kinds of literacies they needed at school – school, as a result, offered seemingly purposeless practice of the kinds of literacies they were already familiar with.

This, of course, was not the case for Greg. Of the six, he seemed to find inspiration and confidence in his late high school experiences. Teachers seemed to have

made a difference in his life. They opened the door to a more accepting peer group by inviting him to join the enriched ELA courses, but also developed a greater rapport with Greg than the others experienced with their teachers, particularly their ELA teachers. This resonates with my own experiences as a teacher. Teachers do not impact the lives of all of their students. They can, however, influence the direction of a particular student. For Greg, this seems to have occurred because certain teachers convinced him of his own capabilities as an English student and reader, compensating unwittingly for the earlier teachers who had undermined his sense of competence.

None of the participants suggest that their literate identities were strongly influenced positively or negatively by particular teaching strategies or methods. The ability to influence another's identity as a reader was based in relationship and rapport, not methodology. This confirms what I experienced in the Read classroom. While teaching strategies might be helpful, they did not provide a definitive and consistently effective means of working with struggling male readers. My conversations with the participants suggested that their literate identities as readers or non-readers, although not fixed, were relatively stable once they arrived in high school and until they graduated. At this point they had decided if they wanted to actively pursue reading for pleasure or not. While the love of reading recreationally did not necessarily carry over into enjoying reading in the classroom – in fact, it rarely did – those participants who regularly found pleasure in reading had developed this as part of their literate identity as younger children.

Greg's experience in school and the others' experiences outside of school, nonetheless, underline the importance of relationships in developing a literate identity as

a reader. Relationships with parents, friends, and occasionally teachers were invariably the fulcrum upon which non-readers began to move toward becoming readers. It was important for all of these participants to encounter people who loved reading and who could invite them into the experience of the reader by providing books or the notion that books on subjects of interest existed.

While the conversations suggested that school is typically not a powerful influence in creating the literate identity of a reader, parents undoubtedly are. For these participants, if parents modeled a genuine interest in reading, particularly novels, the individual appeared more likely to develop the same literate identity for himself. Having books available in the home appeared to be significant in supporting an interest in reading as well. This supports Gee (1992) and Heath's (1983) contention that the home environment or the primary Discourse plays a fundamental role in defining literate identity.

That said, there were individuals in the study who had access to books, as well as parents who were clearly interested in reading, yet these participants did not adopt reader identities until later, outside of their primary Discourse. This signaled another significant factor in the development of positive attitudes toward reading and literacy – a sense of competence or self-efficacy. The sense of competence of some of the participants was undermined in various ways: parents, siblings and teachers all potentially played a role, depending on the individual. This suggests that it is not sufficient to provide the materials and instruction required for reading, but that an individual's sense of self-efficacy must be developed as well. However, whether the diminished sense of competence was the result of less ability in the area of reading, or the diminished sense of

competence resulted in a lack of willingness to read was not fully examined by this study and might be pursued at greater length in future research.

Professional reading

In general, these participants did little or no professional theoretical reading. Although they all read, reading professional materials that dealt with best practices in their areas held little appeal. Some of the participants did pursue reading related to their teaching, but this was more content than theory. For example, for Charlie, Greg and Devin, teachers who worked in the areas of ELA, history or the library, reading was a natural and necessary part of their daily teaching preparation. As a result, their professional reading took the form of content reading: novels, historical texts and articles. Only Charlie indicated that he read articles about teaching and theory voluntarily. For the others, although they read recreationally, reading played only a small role in their teacher literate identities; they read only what was necessary to teach the science, math or physical education curriculum. Professional reading seemed to fill the same role as the kind of school-based reading they disliked in later elementary and high school. They could not, at least at this point in their careers, see a compelling purpose for this kind of reading when there was so much other, more enjoyable, reading to be done.

Reading and gender

This study began with many questions about the impact of gender on reading and literate identity. Throughout the study it became increasingly clear that gender did play a role in the literate identities of the participants. That said, the impact of gender was difficult to pinpoint – it sat like an unobtrusive, yet omnipresent deity presiding over the participants. It seemed evident, at times, that the men were conscious of the unspoken

expectations of being male in mainstream society and that these expectations determined the ways in which they interacted with books; their choices of genres and subjects were circumscribed by what might be deemed *masculine*. Several of the participants commented on their dislike of books that were more emotional and lacked action – these were the books their wives liked. That said, the reading tastes of the participants were based on their own unique interests and pursuits. The reading interests of the participants did not suggest that there was a particular genre or subject that was typically male. There were subjects that were absent from the reading repertoires of these men; for example, no one read romance novels (though they did read novels that had romance as part of the plot line). Similarly, none of the men read fashion magazines. Although, there was not one specifically male subject matter or genre, there were certainly areas that seemed to be taboo.

Reading, as a recreational pursuit, was not a social activity for some of the participants during their years in elementary and particularly high school. Outside of interactions around reading that they might have had with family members, reading does not seem to have been discussed with peers, with the exception of Greg, who found the social acceptance he craved in his high school enriched ELA courses. That said, as adults, all of the participants use reading as a means of social exchange. For example, both Fred and Adam's reader identities were influenced through adult relationships that resulted in the exchange of books. All of the participants suggested they discussed books to some degree with friends or wives, though all of the married participants pointed out that they do not consistently read the same kinds of books as their wives.

New literacies

There have been boys in the Read classroom who have appeared to be struggling readers, but at the same time demonstrated expertise on the computer - particularly at navigating the world of computer games. Both Gee (2003) and Sanford (2006) make the suggestion that schools ignore boys' prowess in these new literacies, such as gaming, blogging and accessing information online, focusing instead on the traditional forms of reading and writing. While I don't disagree with this assessment, it was interesting in the study to discover that only one of the participants commented on making use of his computer for more than an hour a day. Charlie used his computer as a source of reading material, as well as owning several gaming systems that he used regularly (though in a most unfortunate turn of events he has lent these gaming systems to my children – but that is a story for another degree). This regular use of the computer may make him savvier at reading web pages and blogs. That said, he was not especially passionate about technology, simply the information or entertainment that could be had. The others used their computers for less than an hour a day (outside of what might be required for school). New media did not appear to play a significant role in their literate lives. In spite of the limited role of technology in the lives of the participants, the constant technological changes and the increasing access to technology likely means that even a decade difference, for example, between the youngest participants in this study and their students, means an important difference in attitudes and access to new media.

Future Directions

In some ways it is difficult to determine what the experiences of my male colleagues really mean without looking closely at the literate identities of female teachers

as well. Without this kind of comparison it is difficult to really establish the full impact of gender. Perhaps gender, because it is so identifiable when we look at the students in our classrooms, is a distraction from the larger problems of economics or access to mainstream literacies. Just focusing on a student's gender oversimplifies the complexity in our classrooms – all boys are not the same, nor are all girls. Perhaps we need to look at gender not from the angle of biology, but from the angle of sexual orientation. Few studies address the impact of being a sexual minority student.

Future studies might also examine the impact of cultural background on the literate identity of teachers of both genders. For example, what does it mean to be a First Nations teacher within an educational system that still relies on white, anglo authors to provide the majority of the content for ELA courses? How significant are images of reading in the development of a literate identity as a reader? If a particular culture is rarely represented as reading in media, does this lack of representation impact an individual's ability to image him or herself as a reader and thus become one? The challenge for future research then, is to be able to fully encompass all of the factors that impact literate identity, gender, class and culture.

There are other circumstances that could be quite revealing about what is really required to encourage children and students to adopt positive reader identities. Unique home environments may provide clues as to what is really necessary for literacy instruction in the classroom. For example, how are the literate identities of hearing children impacted when they have parents who do not speak or hear? My study suggests that having parents who demonstrably enjoy reading and provide access to books is significant in the development of a reader identity. However, this may simply be

contingent on how a child understands the value system of a parent. That said, the actual reading of books might be less important than the basic apprenticeship to a set of values that incorporates a value placed on reading and being literate.

Although new literacies seemed to play a relatively insignificant role in the lives of my participants, this may not always be the case. As North American society progressively becomes more technology driven, the idea of literate identity may take on an entirely new form. An examination of the attitudes of new teachers toward literacy versus those of more experienced teachers may provide insight not only into the changing perspectives of teachers but also into points of tension and conflict in schools and school districts where beliefs about literacy do not mesh.

This study suggested that simply placing more male teachers or mentors in schools is not the answer for some boys' flagging literacy skills. The development of literate identity is a complex and nuanced endeavor, fraught with potential pitfalls – confidence can be eroded, purpose lost. The participants did suggest that there were moments, nonetheless, when role models (often male) made a difference. These shifts from non-reader to reader as the result of a relationship with another reader typically occurred in adulthood. Perhaps future research needs to examine developmental stages of reading beyond high school. There may be a point in early adulthood where male readers are more open to the possibility of becoming readers. In the end, this shift may have more to do with maturity than male role models.

As well as recognizing that there may be an element of readiness involved in the transition from non-reader to reader, reading must also appear relevant to young men. As teachers, we need to find a means of making our teaching relevant to our students. This

is not a new requirement; it is, nevertheless, a goal that seems difficult to achieve. The men in this study were most engaged in assigned reading when they saw a clear purpose. Perhaps even more significant than relevance is the ability to make students believe they are capable of meeting the requirements of classroom literacies. Even the most attractive choices of classroom reading are meaningless for a student who does not believe he can read or experience success. In the end, just as Munro's characters in "Boys and Girls" effectively narrate themselves into particular roles highly circumscribed by gender, as teachers we can give students the possibility of writing their own stories – stories in which they are readers. "Life as led is inseparable from a life as told – or more bluntly, a life is not 'how it was' but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold" (Bruner, 2004, p.708). If Bruner is correct, it is how we come to "tell" our *selves* that determines who we become – as readers and as individuals within the world. In the future, there may be stories of masculinity and reader identity that do not act as antagonist and protagonist, but rather as hero and amicable sidekick.

Chapter Six: A Blank Tablet No Longer

What needs to be done to address the reality that more boys seem to be struggling with reading? What role do male teachers and mentors play in addressing these gaps? I am left with the sense, based both on this study as well as my interactions with the young men I teach, that the demand to act acceptably “male” often supersedes the desire to appear literate, or at least interested in books, for those male students. It is a much safer position to be interested in sports or music, particularly in high school. Reading, if it is not established in early childhood, becomes a much more covert aspect of identity later on in high school, except, perhaps, for a small percentage of men who form their peer groups around reading or similar interests in books. In order to significantly change what young men perceive as “acceptable” male behaviour we may need to change the images of masculinity that the media continuously bombard us with.

There is a sense of optimism in the recollections of my participants, who have graciously shared their stories. While not all of the participants were early readers, they all have become readers. Though some are less avid than others, all of the participants see the value of reading and being literate and taking pleasure in the text. This later realization of the pleasure of reading suggests that, for some, the literate identity is highly malleable and is a product of the individual’s readiness to read within the seemingly unassailable demands of gender. These readers, the participants, made choices about reading or not; it was not inaccessible for them in the practical sense, in that they could decode text; they could read enough to get by, if they chose to. Perhaps, then, if we can address the practical difficulties of reading for struggling readers, they may not immediately become readers, but that door may open in adulthood.

Finally, although this tablet is not longer blank, there remains much to be discovered about male literacies.

“Where’s here?” cried the Head of the Army.

The young pilot was still grinning broadly. He said to them, “That’s why they always put two blank pages at the back of the atlas. They’re for new countries.

You’re meant to fill them in yourself.” (Dahl, *The BFG*, as cited in Harmon, p. 192)

As a result, metaphorically speaking at least, there are two blank pages at the end of this album of sorts to plot out future directions for investigating the literacies of the boys we teach and the men we work with.

Epilogue: Munro's Men of Action

Jerome Bruner writes, "In the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives" (Bruner, p. 694). The female protagonist of Munro's "Boys and Girls" understands this as she lies in bed at night – telling herself into being. The stories that she tells allow her access to realms otherwise inaccessible within the rigidly defined worlds of masculinity and femininity of her time.

Now for the time that remained to me, the most perfectly private and perhaps the best time of the whole day, I arranged myself tightly under the covers and went on with one of the stories I was telling myself from night to night. These stories were about myself, when I had grown a little older; they took place in a world that was recognizably mine, yet one that presented opportunities for courage, boldness and self-sacrifice, as mine never did. (Munro, p. 155)

Munro tells the reader that by the end of the story, when the main character has been found to be "just a girl" (p. 164) that these stories have changed. "Mysterious alternations" (p. 164) have transformed the content of her stories from a focus on acts of "courage, boldness and self-sacrifice" to details of appearance and dress that serve to smother the excitement of the original story.

Munro remains silent on the stories Laird tells himself. Instead, she writes, "Laird went straight from singing to sleep" (Munro, p. 154). He is, nonetheless, instrumental in shaping the stories the female protagonist begins to weave about herself. He is the one to state, "She's crying" (p. 164) in the final scene that defines with certainty her existence outside that of her father and Laird. Yet, in much the same way that Laird's actions bring

his sister into being, the unspoken assumptions of the story serve to bring Laird into being as well.

While the calendars that hang in the stable (the ones the mother has never seen) are likely unknown to the protagonist's mother, the calendars that hang on either side of the entrance to the kitchen are quite clear in their portrayal of masculine identity.

These companies supplied us with heroic calendars to hang, one on each side of the kitchen door. Against a background of cold blue sky and black pine forests and treacherous northern rivers, plumed adventurers planted flags of England and France; magnificent savages bent their backs to the portage. (Munro, p. 153)

It seems rather pointed to flank the kitchen, a traditionally feminine space, with such brazenly masculine guardians. Once again, although the masculine text may be unspoken, it is not altogether absent. Not unlike the silent guardians of the kitchen, it is the silence of the father that invites the female protagonist into the world of men – the fox pens, the barn, the fields – a world where language is used sparingly and much is communicated through action or inattention.

In the end, Laird finds his voice through action. It is he who leaps into the truck with his father and the hired hand to capture the female horse that his sister has set free in a futile attempt to prevent the horse's slaughter. When he returns, streaked with blood, his mother does not want to hear the details of the horse's demise and Laird is silenced. He has, nonetheless, entered the Discourse of men and his sister has been shut out.

Munro's tale is a parable for an earlier time, perhaps. Yet, there may be many *Lairds* in our classrooms. Men of action, silenced by expectations that demand deeds and not discourse. Such barriers are not impenetrable. Even Flora, the horse, is allowed to

escape for a time – freed from her fate. Male teachers and students should not be bound by the discourses of heroic calendars or courageous deeds. Literate identity should not be a barrier but a doorway into new literacies.

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Appendix A

Letter of Consent for Participant

Thank you for agreeing to be a participant in the mini-research study, *The Discourses of Male Teachers: The Role of Literate Identity in Professional Practice*. The study will examine male teachers' literate identity and its genesis in an attempt to assess the role of literate identity in professional practice. In order to protect the interests of the participants I will adhere to the following guidelines

1. The researcher will interview you to discuss your experiences and understandings of literacy, both as a child and as a teacher, as well as examining how your early experiences might inform or work against your current literacy practices.
2. You will be interviewed at least once (approximately 1 hour) and the interview will be audio-recorded. If further clarification of the researcher's understanding of the data is needed, another follow-up interview will be arranged. The researcher acknowledges that you can withdraw at any time during the study. If you withdraw, the data collected from interviews and tape recordings will be destroyed.
3. The tape will be transcribed and analyzed to discover the patterns and themes discussed. You will be given a smoothed narrative version of the transcripts with false starts, repetitions, and paralinguistic utterances (um, eh etc) removed to make it more readable. Later the researcher will check with you about your responses in the transcriptions. You can add, delete or change information to reflect what you want to say. You will be asked to sign a Letter of Consent for Release of Transcripts. You will be able to receive copy of the study after the discussion.
4. The data collected from you will be kept in a secure place and will be held at the University of Saskatchewan with my advisor, Dr. Jeff Park, for five years according to the University of Saskatchewan guidelines.
5. The results of the study will be used for my master's thesis as well as scholarly journal articles or conference presentations. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participant will be protected through the use of pseudonyms.

If you have any questions about your participation or your rights as a participant this study, you may contact the Research Ethics Office at the University of Saskatchewan

(966-2084) or you can contact me, Shannon Welch, at 653-3371 or my supervisor, Dr. Jeff Park, Department of Curriculum Studies, 966-7569, or email jeff.park@usask.ca.

I, understand that this research project has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board and I agree to participate. I am aware of the nature of the study and understand what is expected of me and I also understand that I am free to withdraw at any time throughout the study without penalty. A copy of this form has been given to me for my records.

As a research participant in this study, you may contact the Research Ethics Office at the University of Saskatchewan (966-2084) if you have any questions about the study or you can reach me Shannon Welch at 653-3371 or my supervisor, Dr. Jeff Park, Department of Curriculum Studies at 966-7569 or email jeff.park@usask.ca.

Participant's signature

Researcher's signature

Date

Date

Appendix B

Letter of Consent for Release of Transcripts

I appreciate your participation in the research study: *The Discourses of Male Teachers: The Role of Literate Identity in Professional Practice*. I am returning the transcripts of your audio-taped interviews for your perusal and the release of confidential information. I will adhere to the following guidelines which are designed to protect your anonymity, confidentiality and interests in the study.

1. Would you please read and recheck the transcripts for accuracy of information. You may add or clarify the transcripts to say what you intended to mean or include additional comments that will be your words. You may also delete any information that you may not want to be quoted in the study.
2. The interpretations from this study will be used for my master's thesis as well as scholarly journal articles or conference presentations. Except for the researcher in the study, your participation will remain confidential. Your name or any identifying descriptors will not be used in the master's thesis or in any scholarly articles or presentations if you do not wish to have it used.
3. In accordance with the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board, the tape recordings and transcriptions made during the study will be kept with my supervisor in a locked file until the study is finished. After completion of the study, the tapes and other data will be kept for five years at the University of Saskatchewan and then destroyed.
4. Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. If this happens, the tape recordings and interview data will be destroyed.

I, _____, understand the guidelines above and agree to release the revised transcripts to the researcher. A copy of the transcript release form is provided for your records.

Participant: _____

Date: _____

Researcher: Shannon Welch _____

Date: _____

Department of Curriculum Studies, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan

As a research participant in this study, you may contact the Research Ethics Office at the University of Saskatchewan (966-2084) if you have any questions about the study or you can reach me Shannon Welch at 653-3371 or my supervisor, Dr. Jeff Park, Department of Curriculum Studies at 966-7569 or email jeff.park@usask.ca.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

The Discourses of Male Teachers: The Role of Literate Identity in Professional Practice

Background Questions

1. How long have you been teaching? In what subject areas?
2. In what subject areas do you currently teach?
3. Do you have a preferred subject area? Why do you prefer this area?
4. Where did you grow up? (Size of community, location, etc.)
5. What did your parents do? (Occupation, hobbies, etc)
6. Did your parents discuss their jobs with you? Did you participate in these jobs?
7. Was there an expectation that you might take on the same job when you were older? (ie. the farm, family business, etc)
8. How would you describe your economic circumstances growing up?

Current Reading Habits and Other Literacies

1. What do you read? Do you read on the computer?
2. How often do you read? For how long?
3. Do you ever discuss the things that you read with others? With whom?
4. Do you see yourself as a reader? What does that mean for you, to be a reader?
5. Was there a point when you would have described yourself as a non-reader or a reluctant reader? (Why did this perception shift?)
6. Why do you read?
7. How much enjoyment do you associate with reading?
8. Do you read primarily to find information or for enjoyment? Fiction? Non-fiction?
9. How often do you spend time on the computer? watching TV? listening to music?

Childhood Reading and Other Literacies

10. What are your earliest memories of books and reading?
11. Did either of your parents read to you? Encourage you to read? Ask you about the books that you were reading?
12. What do you remember of your childhood experiences with reading?
13. Who taught you to read?
14. Did your parents read to you? One parent in particular?
15. Did your parents read? What did your mother read? Your father?
16. Do you think your parents like (liked) reading?
17. Did you have book available in your home? Did you go to the library and take out books?

18. Do you recall relationships or friendships that centred around reading – or friends that you shared books with?
19. As a teenager, how much time did you spend reading?
20. Was it “cool” to read? Did your friends read?

School-Based Reading and Other Literacies

21. Would you describe yourself as a successful student? What’s required to be a successful student?
22. What was reading for at school? (entertainment, information, etc)
23. Was your school reading different from your home reading?
24. When you consider your early childhood experiences of reading, do you recall them as primarily positive, negative, or neutral? Why?
25. When you consider your high school experiences of reading, do you recall them as primarily positive, negative, or neutral? Why?
26. When you consider your university experiences of reading, do you recall them as primarily positive, negative, or neutral? Why?
27. Do you have any particular memories of teachers as readers
28. Did any teachers influence your feelings about reading, positively or negatively? How did they do this?

Professional Reading and Literacies

29. Do you read as part of your job? What do you read? When?
30. Do you read to or with your students? Why?
31. Is it important for teachers to read?
32. Do you think you can influence the reading habits of your students?
33. Whose job is it to ensure that students can read?
34. Do you have to be a good reader in order to encourage students to become good readers?
35. Are there particular groups of students that struggle more with reading and literacy than others?
36. Do boys read differently than girls? Are you a different kind of reader from your wife?
37. Is it important for boys to see male teachers reading? Did you have any significant male reading role models?

Appendix D

Letter Requesting Consent for Principal

Shannon Welch
2026 Ewart Avenue
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
S7J 1X7

June 25th, 2008

Basil Hughton – Principal
Aden Bowman Collegiate
1904 Clarence Avenue
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Dear Mr. Hughton:

I am currently a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum Studies at the University of Saskatchewan. For my thesis, I wish to examine the literate lives of male teachers and how their early literate practices impact their later professional practices. My interest in literacy is in keeping with the Saskatoon Public School Division's current focus on literacy and will hopefully contribute to what is understood about the literacies of our male students.

In order to carry out my research I would like to interview several male teachers on staff at Aden Bowman Collegiate. These interviews would examine their early literacy practices, their current attitudes toward literary and how these attitudes influence their practices as teachers. Each interview would take approximately one hour and would occur outside of school hours. This study would adhere to the ethical guidelines set out by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Saskatchewan and those of the Saskatoon Public School Division.

Thank-you for your consideration of this request,

Sincerely,

Shannon Welch

Appendix E

University of Saskatchewan Ethics Approval



UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Jeff Park

DEPARTMENT
Curriculum Studies

BEH#
08-80

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CONDUCTED
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon SK

STUDENT RESEARCHERS
Shannon Welch

SPONSOR
UNFUNDED

TITLE
The Discourses of Male Teachers: The Role of Literate Identity in Professional Practice

ORIGINAL REVIEW DATE
26-Mar-2008

APPROVAL ON
15-May-2008

APPROVAL OF:
Ethics Application
Consent Protocol

EXPIRY DATE
14-May-2009

Full Board Meeting

Date of Full Board Meeting:

Delegated Review

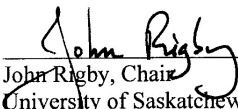
CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics_review/


John Rigby, Chair
University of Saskatchewan
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Please send all correspondence to:

Ethics Office
University of Saskatchewan
Room 302 Kirk Hall, 117 Science Place
Saskatoon SK S7N 5C8
Telephone: (306) 966-2975 Fax: (306) 966-2069

