

PERCEPTIONS OF MORAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE READING
EXPERIENCES OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL SETTING:
AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Praxia S. Apostle

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ABSTRACT

Current global trends in education continue to question the value of fiction within school and promote a culture of testing and standardization. Instructional practices that promote testing as the ultimate goal of schooling serve to further marginalize the value of imagination, exploration and discover within schools. The purpose of this study was to generate greater understanding of the individual experiences of adolescent girls as they read fiction in an American international school located in the United Arab Emirates. The research questions of the study sought to capture the individual meaning-making and perceptions of girl readers. Sub questions of this study examined the outcomes of reading experience such as moral identity formation, and personal growth. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis methodology along with the framework of Rosenblatt's (1965) transactional theory of reading, allowed for insights into the reading experiences of international adolescent girls to emerge. Data analysis of interview transcripts revealed three themes including Reading as a Lived Experience, Reading as Deep Learning, and Reading as a Recognition of Moral Complexity. The findings of this study reassert the power of reading fiction to adolescent girl readers as this allowed girls to navigate their identity, clarify moral thinking, and learn about others. Educators are in unique position to recognize the transformative power of fiction and advocate for students' intellectual, moral and emotional development in school. In an era of growing complexity and globalization, this study pushes educators to reconsider the ultimate aims of education for our students and our communities. For girls and international students, this study demonstrates how fiction can support them in navigating the particular demands found in adolescence.

Key words: adolescent girls, moral development, aesthetic reading, interpretative phenomenological analysis, international schools

DEDICATION

For my namesakes -

Praxia Ananias Apostle

&

Salma Mary Habib Habeeb

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“A good book is an education of the heart. It enlarges your sense of human possibility, what human nature is, of what happens in the world. It's a creator of inwardness.”

— Susan Sontag

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

Statement of the Problem

What happens when girls read fiction? Our experience as readers informs us, that if the story is good enough, many things are destined: distant worlds visited, new characters befriended, and worthy enemies fought. In the *Educated Imagination* (1964), Northrop Frye describes how the lives we live, read, and even imagine, possesses the ability to influence our identity and shape our sense of self. According to Frye, many of the stories we encounter in fiction stem from the basic narrative framework of the “loss and regaining of identity” (p.55). This narrative arc parallels the developmental demands found in adolescence as individuals leave the world of childhood and forge new identities through experience and reflection. For girls in adolescence, reading fiction provides an experience of identity exploration and discovery (Smith, 2000; Smith 2001; Abrams, 2002, Blackford, 2004, Stutler, 2010; Polleck, 2010; Polleck, 2011; Park, 2012). Girls read realistic fiction to identify with characters and locate their own experiences in the world (Stutler, 2010; Polleck, 2010; Polleck, 2011; Park, 2012). Other adolescent girl readers, however, prefer texts which depart from the known social world and immerse them into dramatically different identities (Blackford, 2004). Dynamic encounters with fiction of any genre may push readers towards self-reflection, self-questioning, and ultimately greater self-understanding (Rosenblatt, 1965). When adolescent girls read fiction, in short, the quest for personhood begins.

Nowhere else are the demands of self-understanding more pronounced than in adolescence, and thus, nowhere else does fiction play such a pivotal role in our quest of personhood (Kiaei, 2013; Alsup, 2010). Adolescence is traditionally characterized as a crisis or

period of intense psychological and social stress, wherein adolescents struggle to integrate new found expectations, desires and limitations into an emergent identity (Abrams, 2002). Recent re-theorizing now understands adolescence as more than just a stage of crisis, and indeed worthy of increased scholarly attention, research and respect (Christenbury, Bomer & Smagorinsky, 2009). Alvermann (2009) finds it necessary for educators to avoid a deficit view of adolescents as individuals in crisis, and instead see adolescents as people of agency, undergoing profound changes, and in possession knowledge and valuable expertise. Differences resulting from culture, socioeconomic status, gender and sexual orientation, add additional challenges in adolescence, and only further support the claim of complexity as the defining feature of this time (Christenbury et al., 2009). Self-selected fiction, in the hands of adolescents during this transitional, and sometimes turbulent time, can be a tool to navigate complexity, develop moral agency, and explore identity.

Study Topic

Research by Sinai, Kaplan & Flum (2012), determines adolescent identity exploration and development as a “valuable educational goal”, and calls for greater research into educator practices and curricular frameworks that support such aims (p.196). However, educational policy at the secondary level, both domestically and internationally, continues to promote high-stakes testing, curricular standardization, and an emphasis on transferring content knowledge to students. Such policies and the beliefs that inform them stand at odds with the goal of prioritizing identity in schooling (NCTE, 2014). Researchers Christenbury et al., (2009) go on to state that adolescents today are “the most tested group of young people in history” (p.5). The emphasis given to testing and standardization pushes many secondary instructors to devote less time for

students reading self-selected fiction, and more time to direct literacy instruction, or test preparation (Williams, Hedrick & Tuschinski, 2008).

Additionally, over the course of the past several years in the US, studies of adolescents reading independently illustrates a sharp decline and a study of adolescent reading habits demonstrate the gap between readers and nonreaders is expanding, (Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Johnsson-Smargadi & Jonsson, 2006). Independent, self-selected reading is a significant activity for adolescents as research finds this practice, as opposed to whole class reading, to provide ideal conditions to explore identity and moral decision-making through fiction (Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Williams et al., 2008). Despite these potential gains, the beliefs, policies and practices in schools around the world limit the space for independent reading and identity exploration in the secondary classroom (NCTE, 2014; Kiaei, 2013; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Williams et al., 2008).

Justification for the Research Problem

Challenges in adolescent development. Researchers sought to better understand the social and individual experiences of adolescents from the early 20th century. Two key theoretical perspectives emerged to form the foundational frameworks for understanding adolescent development: Erikson's (1951) psychosocial stage theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory. However, Erikson (1951) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) have both drawn criticism for the limiting assumptions regarding race, class and gender found within their view of adolescent development (Abrams, 2002). For example, a psychosocial framework posits a set of universal developmental stages, which largely ignores variations in adolescent experience related to gender, race or class. Much of Erickson's research was conducted with White, middle-class, college-aged men, while only one chapter of his foundational work addressed women. Psychosocial stage theory implies that the crisis experienced by young women in adolescence is

largely resolved through the roles of marriage and motherhood, rather than through the autonomy achieved by men. Similarly, ecological developmental theory does not adequately examine the influence of gender, race or class inherent to adolescent development. Such factors intersect to create a unique environmental context in which the adolescent develops. Gaps in developmental psychology with respect to gender in turn gave rise to feminist psychology in the 1980's. Feminist psychologists theorized differing models of adolescent development, which attended directly to the distinct cognitive, social, and emotional experiences of girlhood.

Girl specific challenges in adolescent. Girls face a variety of unique social-emotional challenges during adolescence (Park, 2012; Smith, 2000; Abrams, 2002). Both Phillips (1998) and Pipher (1994) assert significant differences to be found in the development of adolescent girls on the basis of culture, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. As such women and girls cannot be theorized or understood as a monolithic category. Researchers into adolescent girl development look to differences in socialization, as opposed to biology, to differentiate the maturation of boys and girls at this life stage. Feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan (1982) theorized that girls mature within a cultural context, which enforces a highly prescriptive set of social and emotional roles such as caring for others or being reserved. Western culture encourages conformity to these roles on the part of adolescent girls to grant them social acceptance. When girls do not conform to these roles, by choice or on the basis of race, class, or sexual orientation, they are confronted with social conflict and rejection. Gilligan (1982) goes on to theorize that even when girls do conform to such idealized roles, such characteristics are not granted equal social value to those masculine characteristics such as autonomy or physical strength.

According to Abrams (2002), around the globe, through laws, cultural norms, and popular media, society continues to question value of women and girls. In both the public and private sphere girls may observe a society which, “privileges men over women in the labor market and in cultural life, places extraordinary pressure to strive for feminine ideals, possesses high rates of violence against girls and women, and presents contradictory sexual messages” (Abrams, 2002, p.48). Schoen (1998) further suggests, that in response to social pressure and conflict, adolescent girls demonstrate internalized symptoms such as self-harm, suicidal ideation, eating disorders, and depression at “alarmingly higher rates than young men” (p.48). Such gendered socialization leads to great turmoil in the public and private lives of adolescent girls. Given these realities, research into adolescent development must continue to generate knowledge, which contributes to the social and emotional well being of girls (Park, 2012).

Issues facing international adolescents. Adolescents living in international settings face the additional challenges of negotiating and maintaining a sense of identity within a constantly changing cultural environment (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008, p.259). International children who have lived in many different countries and cultures during developmental years are often collectively referred to as Third Culture Kids (TCKs) (Cockburn, 2002). The first two cultures are defined as the student's country of birth or passport country and the current country of residence (Lijadi & Van Schalkwyk, 2014, p.1). The third culture is the global trans-cultural culture of students and families who relocate regularly; characterized by regular adjustments to new geographic locations, cultural norms, values, languages and education systems. TCK's often possess a multilayered academic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds that makes adjustments within the education system challenging. As a result, many TCKs maintain a questioning and uncertain stance regarding their identities and stand to benefit from curriculum that more directly

addresses these needs (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008; Harrington, 2008; Lijadi & Van Schalkwyk, 2014).

Fiction as a space of negotiation in adolescence. Sustained engagement with fiction is a powerful and transformative experience for adolescent girls, especially those living internationally, as it is a space in which to negotiate dilemmas and explore personal identity (Smith, 2000; Polleck, 2010; Park, 2012; Ivey & Johnston, 2013). Identity exploration and moral development through reading is of particular importance to adolescent girls, specifically those who live in nations and societies, which marginalize women through social, political, or economic means. English classrooms can be spaces for adolescent girls in particular to “develop, articulate and make public their critiques, so they can see themselves as agents of change in their lives and in society” (Pytash, 2009, p.72). Emerging research suggests a correlation between what is termed engaged independent reading and adolescent identity exploration and moral development (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). Studies by Wilhelm and Smith (2002) find that girls read more fiction than boys despite dominant educational practice which privileges male perspectives and male oriented narratives.

Other researchers also argue for fiction as a powerful catalyst for identity and moral development during the turbulent time of adolescence (Collins, 1996; Smith, 2000; Polleck, 2010; Alsup, 2010; Polleck, 2011). Girls at the start of adolescence are often referred to as story less, meaning that there are few traditional narratives they feel connected to and can relate to as girls (Smith, 2000). However, young adult literature (YAL) targeted towards adolescents allows girls to identify with fictional characters who possess similar feelings and problems. From the safe position as a reader, girls may observe how these problems are negotiated by characters and make comparisons. Polleck (2011) uses the metaphor of a dressing room to describe how

adolescent girls may enter the world of the text, and try on various identities and situations to better understand their own lives, relationships and communities (p.139). YAL also prompts girls to confront existing problems, and further explore identity in the space afforded through text (O'Quinn, 2013; Ma'ayan, 2012; Alsup, 2010; Blackford, 2004). These personal connections with texts help girls develop greater moral identity by imagining their actions in similar situations, and considering what they would do in their own life (Smith, 2000).

Deficiencies in the Evidence

Further research is needed to understand the role of independent reading in expanding adolescent girls worldview, and moral identity, and sense of self. Currently, there is little research into the role of reading in the lives and moral identities of international adolescent girls living in Gulf countries. Nationally, the problem of declining independent reading, and identity exploration in school is of note as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is not a democratic society; media is censored, critical social discourse is discouraged, and culturally there is an emphasis on conformity. Furthermore, Islam is the state religion and while there is tolerance shown to other belief systems, the legal and social structure of the country is informed by Islamic laws and cultural norms. As a result, women both Emirati and expatriate, possess lower social status to men, and have fewer financial, legal, and social freedoms. The political, social and religious context of the UAE is in sharp contrast to the highly Westernized student culture found within the American international secondary school system. Given these contrasting realities, research into the role engaged reading in the identity and moral development of adolescent girls is crucial.

The role of international school curriculum, specifically the inclusion of structures that support independent reading, may serve to mediate the dilemmas of identity and social relationships many international adolescent face. However, there is currently little research

investigating the role of international school curriculum, and how this can support the social and emotional development of students. Furthermore, existing studies of adolescent girl identity development within an international school setting is limited. While many qualitative studies do focus on girls and reading, few focus on understanding the experience of independent reading in an international context, or how such experience may shape moral identity development.

Additionally, research into the particular needs of international adolescents girls living and learning in the Middle East is limited. Qualitative inquiry into these topics may offer girls in this part of the world the opportunity to use their voice to shape learning outcomes for the future.

Relating the Discussion to Audiences

This research relates directly to classroom teachers, as they may support international adolescent girls to negotiate tensions and uncertainties of identity, by opening up the imaginative space afforded by independent reading (Knoester, 2009). English classrooms in international schools are ideally situated to support identity formation through learning experiences, as they are places that operate between linear cultural boundaries. Engaged, independent reading fulfills many of the theoretical conditions set forth by researchers regarding the formation of the self given features such as the creation of a mediating or third space. According to Grimshaw & Sears (2008), “third spaces” much like “third cultures” can be understood as “the state of in-betweenness [which] enables individuals to establish new hybrid forms of identity” (p.262). This study seeks to understand how independent reading within the classroom may generate rich third spaces for international adolescent girls readers, and how such reading experiences shape their perspectives on moral identity (Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Knoester, 2010). The development of identity is of significance to all students, but plays a crucial role in the lives of adolescent girls. Many may argue that we currently live in a post-feminist society, that adolescent girls are

thriving, and as such education reforms focused on girls are no longer needed (McRobbie, 2011). However, such arguments ignore the persistent consequences of institutionalized oppression of girls within the education system and society at large. bell hooks (1994) argues for classrooms as humanizing spaces, which do not have to replicate patterns of social and cultural oppression. Instead, hooks (1994) asserts the purpose of education is to create the conditions for greater freedom to be realized an individual and social level. Independent, engaged reading creates such conditions, as it grants girls a space in which to develop a greater sense of personal and moral identity, to voice resistance to norms which do not serve them, and to exercise greater control over their lives. Twomey (2011) further suggests that collaborative literacy practices, such as blogging and discussion, allow girls to navigate the complexities of feminine subjectivity. Even within the current social context of girl empowerment, girls still need spaces to explore and negotiate femininity, power, culture, and identity (Charles, 2007).

Significance of the Research Problem

Institutionally, at the International American School (IAS), this problem is significant, as engaged reading is at odds with curricular objectives such as SAT preparation, Advanced Placement (AP) examinations, and other methods of high stakes testing currently found. IAS is an international, private, co-educational school located within the United Arab Emirates. The student population is culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse with students holding passports from over fifty nations. IAS uses an American model of English education; one which embraces open discourse, critical thinking, and student choice to teach key literacy skills. However, the academic goals of both teachers and students primarily focus on grade point averages, high test scores, and acceptance to elite colleges around the world. This leads to instructional methods in English, which emphasize mastery of content knowledge, grammar,

objective analysis, and performance in test taking scenarios. As a result, the process associated with self-selected reading experiences on the part of adolescents is de-emphasized. Indeed, this is a concerning trend, as students at IAS are in many ways positioned to be ideal independent readers: they are highly academically motivated, come from highly literate families, and have easy access to books. Institutionally, IAS may not be taking full advantage to engage students in independent reading through the current English curriculum, despite students' disposition for success and the potential to further identity exploration and moral development.

Although adolescent girls living in the US, may not face the same legal and social restrictions experienced by girls in the UAE, moral development and identity formation are still essential on a social level. For many adolescent girls there is often growing tension between identities performed in school, and those performed at home or in other social environments (Twomey, 2011). Independent reading, through an emphasis on opening imaginative space, providing rich experiences of language, and meaningful questions, will provide an experience within schools that support girls far beyond.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological study is to explore and describe the perceptions and experiences of adolescent girls reading fiction independently in an international school setting, and to examine their perceptions of personal growth and moral identity development, resulting from their experience.

Research Central Questions

Research Question: How do adolescent girls at an international school in the UAE make sense of the experience of reading a novel?

Sub Question:

1. How do the independent reading experiences of adolescent girls with fiction contribute to perceptions of moral identity?
2. What perceptions do adolescent girls hold regarding identity development as an outcome of reading?

Theoretical Framework

Louise Rosenblatt first described a transactional theory of reading, also known as reader response theory, in her classic text *Literature as Exploration* (1965). Rosenblatt's vision of reading deeply shaped English pedagogy and educator understandings of how to foster a meaningful relationship between the individual and the text. According to Rosenblatt (1965), meaning exists not in the text or in the reader alone, but rather that meaning is generated through a "transaction" between the reader and the text. In this transaction, an individual's experience, socio-cultural context, emotions, and imagination are all brought to bear upon the meaning-making process. According to Polleck (2010), Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading "enlarges readers' emotional capacity and maturation, where both cognitive and affective development is enhanced" (p.52). Due to this attention to prior knowledge and cultural context, both adolescent development and literacy researchers often look to Rosenblatt's framework to use fiction, not only to develop reading skills, but also to engage students in explorations of their own experience, identity and decision-making.

Historical foundations of transactional theory. Rosenblatt (1968) theorizes reading as an experience, and her ideas were influenced significantly by the work of John Dewey (1938). In Dewey's view learning is process, always situated within a particular context, within a continuum of human experiences, which draws upon an individual's prior knowledge and memories. As Rosenblatt (1965) explains, "reading is a constructive, selective process over time

in a particular context” (p.26). A learner, and thus a reader, is someone who constructs meaning out of experiences, and reflects and revises their understandings over time, even after the particular event (or text) is over. Rosenblatt (1965) chose “transaction”, a term also employed by Dewey in his work, to describe the reciprocal relationship between the reader and the text. In Rosenblatt’s view each is acting upon the other in mutual contribution (Pantaleo, 2013). The nature of this reciprocal relationship explains why meaning is not to be found “in the text” or “in the reader” alone. Rather Rosenblatt (1965) states, “both the reader and the text are essential to the transaction process of meaning making” (p.27). The result of this transaction between the reader and the text is the creation of what Rosenblatt then terms as “a poem”. The poem is to Rosenblatt a representation of what happens when a text is “lived through” by the reader, and when the text is taken by the reader not as a literal statement, but as an object which evokes associations, images, feeling and memory at a particular moment in time (Rosenblatt, 1965, p. 33). Rosenblatt’s poem evocation views of reading as an act of interpretation and creativity, akin to the performance of a concert pianist whose is informed by a musical score, but whose rendition is nevertheless singular and unique (Davis, 1992). Figure 1 demonstrates the transaction, which generates meaning between the reader and the text.

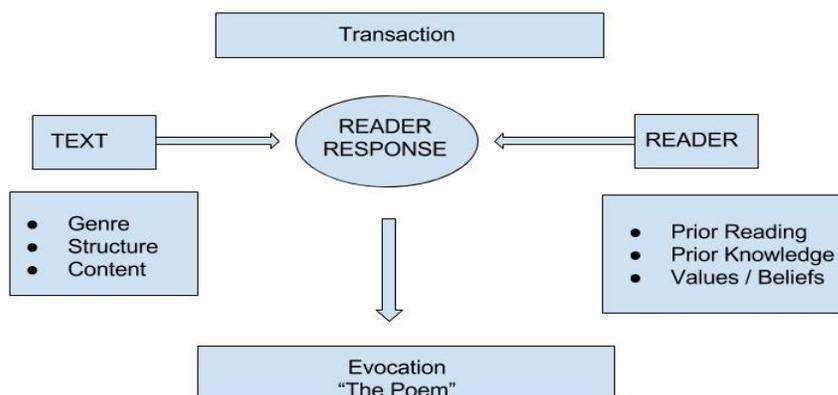


Figure 1. Reader response to literature.

Components of transactional theory. Transactional theory of reading is comprised of several components, which define both the modes and outcomes of reading experience. To begin, Rosenblatt's (1965) theory determines two purposeful modes of reading: efferent and aesthetic (Pantaleo, 2013; Farnan, 1997). A transaction with any text will call upon both stances, and Rosenblatt conceives of reader experience as falling within a continuum, rather than in one mode or the other. A reader's position on this continuum is determined by the amount of emphasis placed upon particular aspects of their experience. In the aesthetic experience of reading, a reader is primarily focused upon what she feels, visualizes, associates and imagines while reading. An efferent reading stance is driven by a desire to comprehend and obtain information from the text (Polleck, 2010). Efferent reading is more concerned with the cognitive versus affective dimensions of reading, and therefore emphasizes comprehension. Reading aesthetically differs as

it is a lived experience, a process, and readers come to not only understand, but to also inhabit the imagined world of stories (Farnan, 1997).

The role of the text, the reader, and the teacher. While not central, the text still plays an important role in transactional reading theory. According to Rosenblatt (1965), the text provides “cues” to guide the reader's response, and some texts may achieve this better than others. In Rosenblatt's view fiction, or any great work of art, “may provide us the opportunity to feel more profoundly and more generously, to perceive more fully the implications of experience, than the constricted and fragmented conditions of life permit” (p.37). However, Rosenblatt's (1965) theory also holds that for a text to have an impact on a reader that it does not necessarily need to be similar to the reader's lived experience (p.41). Rather, the ability of the text to evoke the emotional structures and dilemmas of human life, demonstrates lasting power to readers.

In transactional theory the reader must take an active, not passive, role in constructing meaning. The reader must bring to the work their memories, their mood, and the context surrounding their reading experience. Fiction, in particular, requires readers to use their own experiences of life and of language to imagine, find insights and essentially “write” the text (Farnan, 1997; Park, 2012). Even after the act of reading is finished, Rosenblatt believes the reader continues to revise their understandings, and make new meanings when texts are encountered in altered contexts and situations. As a reader reads more, they become an “experienced reader”, and one Rosenblatt understands as possessing increased understanding of the aesthetic patterns and sensory dimensions of fiction: “The young reader's personal involvement in a work will generate greater sensitivity to its imagery, style, and structure; this in turn will enhance his understanding of its human implications”(p.52). This engagement with the

text, according to Rosenblatt's theory, results not only in greater insight into fiction, but also into the reader's life.

In Rosenblatt's theory the teacher is de-centralized as an authority in the reader's meaning making process (Park, 2012). Yet, the teacher plays a role in supporting the reader in their experience of a given text. As transactional theory holds, reading is a process, and often a recursive one. Thus best way to teach reading is in a manner that mirrors the challenges and joys of reading: by engaging in conversation, the consideration of meaningful questions, and generating connections to lived context (Davis, 1992). The teacher, in Rosenblatt's (1965) theory should work to foster an enjoyment of language, and an engagement of imagination on the part of their students. The teacher must also learn about the personalities of their students and seek to understand the experiences and preferences they may bring to the text. Additionally, it is very difficult to know which texts will evoke strong feelings on the part of readers, and thus, teacher are advised to provide texts which use imaginative language, relatable situations, and compelling conflicts (Farnan, 1997). Teachers are also encouraged to give time for reading and to create physical spaces in the room where readers can build relationships with texts and engage aesthetically.

Critics of transactional theory. Formalism, also known as New Criticism, held sway in literary circles for much of the 20th century. New Critics believe meaning lies within the text, and readers must set aside personal interpretation, in order to understand the form of the work, and the intention of the author. New Critics remained skeptical of transactional theory, and the emphasis it placed on individual reading experience, as well as context, to generate meaning. New Critics argued that transactional theory encouraged readers to conflate personal experience with the aesthetic experience, and termed this the "affective fallacy" (Davis, 1992; Pataleo,

2013). However, transactional theory gained traction in the 1970's when reader response theorists such as Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish and Normand Holland, began writing in response to New Critics belief in the "affective fallacy" (Davis, 1992). Although, reader response theorists borrowed much from Rosenblatt's foundational work, she was often omitted from reader response publications and anthologies (Davis, 1992). Some have attributed this marginalization to Rosenblatt's focus upon pedagogy and application, as opposed to theory alone. Others have criticized Rosenblatt's theory for positioning reading as a highly solitary and individualistic practice, which is isolating and limiting (Park, 2012). While transformation may occur for a reader, it is only possible one at a given time, and does not provide a feasible scale for social change.

Theoretical rationale. Rosenblatt's (1965) theory of transaction provides a robust model for understanding experiences of adolescent girl readers in the classroom. It is a powerful lens to view the potential of fiction to broaden a reader's understanding of the world and the self. This framework also takes into account the cultural and social context in which the act of reading is taking place, and allows for these features to be included in analysis. Additionally, Rosenblatt's (1965) theory allows for varied outcomes of the reading experience to be studied. While it is implied that readers may emerge from an aesthetic experience with greater self-understanding, the particular ways this may manifest is not detailed in a manner seen as limiting.

Theoretical application. Rosenblatt's (1965) theory of transactional reading supports this study in terms of both the overall design and aims. Developing an understanding of how adolescent girls aesthetically experience a fictional text is a seen in the overall research question for this study. Additionally, the potential outcomes of identity exploration and moral development are supported by the concept of aesthetic response found within the framework.

Literacy researchers such as Wilhelm (1997) and Polleck (2010) often apply Rosenblatt's theory of transactional reading to study personal growth in adolescent readers. Rosenblatt's (1965) theory accounts for both the cognitive and affective dimensions of reading experience, which forms the foundation of all personal outcomes for readers. Outcomes such as moral development or greater feelings of personal agency are not achieved unless a reader, according to Rosenblatt's (1965) theory, is reading within the aesthetic dimension. Furthermore, Rosenblatt's (1965) theory is also highly compatible and specialized with the adolescent reader, as they developmentally "not yet arrived at a consistent view of life or possess a fully integrated personality" (p.31). Such reading transactions represent developmentally and personally significant events in the life of an adolescent. This theory also provides substantial attention to the combination of contextual factors, such as cultural and social norms, language and geography, constituting the adolescent girl reader and her experience of a given text. Rosenblatt's (1965) theory provides a nimble framework for understanding how such factors may generate varied outcomes from reading experience.

This study utilized in-depth, qualitative interviews to collect data, and to construct a subjective understanding of the adolescent girl reader's experience. The framework was suited to a discussion of personal meaning making of adolescent girls, as it discusses both their process, choices, and judgments regarding fiction. Considering fictional characters and moral dilemmas allows for adolescent girls to rehearse their struggles, clarify emotions, and work toward more informed thinking and decision-making. This study sought to showcase the voices and experiences of a seldom-studied group, adolescent international girls, and by doing so bring their experiences into the larger conversation of adolescent development and literacy practices.

Summary

While school is a crucial environment for adolescent identity development, the space of the secondary English classroom is of particular importance to adolescent girls living in multicultural settings. English classrooms provide access to fictional texts that support the questioning, reflection, and resistance of limiting structures, which exert power on the identities, actions and imaginations of girls at a crucial time in their development. Specifically, the practice of independent reading of young adult fiction may serve as a trigger to further identity exploration and moral development. This study focuses on understanding the independent reading experiences and meaning making processes of adolescent girls in an international setting through the lens of Rosenblatt's (1965) transactional theory of reading.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Current research demonstrates how independent reading possesses potential to benefit adolescents academically, socially and emotionally (Knoester, 2009; Topping, 2007; Farnan, 1997; Ivey & Johnston, 2013). Yet over the past several years, reports of adolescents' independent, voluntary reading outside of school has sharply declined (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). A study of adolescent reading habits demonstrates the gap between readers and nonreaders is expanding, and overall students are spending less time reading independently (Johnsson-Smargadi & Jonsson, 2006). Additionally, due to an emphasis on testing and mastery of content knowledge, many high schools are devoting less curricular focus to students independently reading (Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Williams, Hedrick & Tuschinski, 2008).

Research by Ivey & Johnston (2013) asserts that engaged, independent reading leads to the development of greater social and personal agency on the part of adolescents. Recent research by Wilhelm & Smith (2016) further supports an increase in adolescents' independently reading for pleasure, as this engages adolescents in "inner work", which is described as a moving towards a more integrated sense of self, and an actualization of potential (p.29) Understood in terms of students, engaged, independent reading has the potential to expand adolescent readers' worldview, conceptions of self, and ultimately decision-making behavior. The realization of such agency through engaged reading is of particular importance to adolescent girls, specifically those who live in nations and societies which marginalize women. Recent research also reveals a growing interest in how international school students negotiate and maintain a sense of identity within a constantly changing cultural environment (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008). Current declining

trends in adolescent independent reading are troubling as they demonstrate the space for engaged reading in school is shrinking despite the benefits adolescents stand to gain.

This literature review will begin with a brief overview of the literature on adolescent moral and identity development. Within this topic, focus will be given to literature which discusses identity and moral development with respect to girls and international adolescents. A review of current theories of adolescent literacy will follow with attention given to the role of constructivist literacy practice, reader response, and the role of young adult literature (YAL) in adolescent literacy practice. This section will discuss current research that proposes varied methods to support for student engagement in identity development. Lastly, literature on the specific literacy practices and outcomes of adolescent girls will be discussed. Theories of gender construction and agency will be reviewed in relation to literacy practices. This review will conclude by providing practitioners criteria to consider when designing independent reading experiences for adolescent girls so that personal growth is kept at the forefront.

Adolescent Development

For all people, adolescence is a significant and turbulent time. Adolescence is understood as a crossroads of both social and cognitive development (Smith, 2000). The individual and social worlds of adolescents are spaces that inform, shape, and conflict with one another. It is specifically the drive to develop a consistent view of personal identity which gives rise to some of the key desires of adolescents: greater independence, personal autonomy, and an increased focus on social relationships over family structures (Polleck, 2010; Terrell & Brandler, 2014). As adolescents increase time outside of the home, identity features such as gender and race are intensified through social experience (Smith, 2000; Polleck, 2010; Terrell & Brandler, 2014). Due to these factors, adolescence is often characterized as a crisis, or period of intense

psychological and social stress (Abrams, 2002). Adolescents struggle through this crisis to integrate new found expectations, desires and limitations into an emergent identity. Such stress may also lead to patterns of maladaptive, antisocial adolescent behavior which social and psychological research has sought to better understand (Abrams, 2002). This section reviews the literature on traditional theories of adolescent development and moral development, the unique challenges of adolescent girl development, and the development of adolescents in international settings.

Traditional theories of adolescent development. Two key theoretical perspectives, Psychosocial Stage Theory and Ecological Theory, form the foundational frameworks of adolescent development (Abrams, 2002). Psychosocial stage theory is typically associated with psychologist Erik Erikson (1951). Erikson was the first to define adolescence as crisis, and a period of when we first experience identity versus role confusion. According to Erikson, this crisis is heightened as adolescents attempt to form an identity separate from that of their family structure and expectations (Abrams, 2000). Adolescents who fail to differentiate from familial roles in adolescence experience identity confusion in adulthood (Abrams, 2002). Importantly, Erikson asserts that the manner in which adolescents confront their struggle for identity sets the stage for struggles encountered in adulthood. From this perspective, the crisis of adolescent development has far reaching psychological implications.

However, Erikson's psychological perspective on development paid minimal attention to the role of dynamic, contextual social environments in the lives of adolescents (Abrams, 2002). The interaction of culture, family relationships, and institutional hierarchies are essential to understand adolescent behavior and forms the basis of ecological development theory as originally defined by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Bronfenbrenner describes human development as a

“tapestry of interlinked and interdependent relationships between the material (or biological) and social environment (Abrams, 2002, p.50). According to ecological development theory, these complex and shifting environmental systems are at the core of interpersonal relationships and identity development. Importantly Bronfenbrenner notes, that the self is simultaneously influencing and being influenced by the social environment; a process termed as “reciprocity” (Abrams, 2002; Faircloth, 2012). The literature illustrates the importance of social dynamics and interaction to construct identity. Ecological development theory also imparts a more comprehensive approach to the study of adolescent development by accounting for interacting environmental factors, but is not without limitations.

In a historically controversial section of his study, Erikson asserts that for women “ideological and vocational concerns are peripherally important compared to social and domestic roles” (Abrams, 2002, p.49). Thus psychosocial stage theory implies that the crisis experienced by young women in adolescence is largely resolved through the roles of marriage and motherhood, rather than through the autonomy achieved by men. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner asserts socially enriched contexts lead to healthy cognitive, emotional, and moral development on the part of adolescents. Thus, ecological perspectives on adolescent development often fail to account for children in “socially impoverished settings”(Abrams, 2002). In this perspective, poverty places students at the highest risk for maladaptive behavior in adolescence, with little theoretical time spent on how humans might transcend such social and economic limitations (Abrams, 2002). Just as with the psychosocial perspective, the literature illustrates ecological theory does not adequately examine the aspects of gender inherent to adolescent development (Smith, 2000; Abrams, 2002; Polleck, 2010). Feminist theories of development drew attention to these theoretical gaps in the 1980’s.

Adolescent moral development. Factors that characterize adolescence, such as the importance of social relationships, make this a rich period to study the emergence of moral identity (Hart & Carlo, 2005). In adolescence individuals move beyond the influence of family and begin to open up to a rich variety of influences including peers, media, and other cultures (Durham, 1999; Smith, 2000; Abrams, 2002, Alsup, 2010). Additionally, adolescents display an ability to change quickly and dramatically as a result of these influences, which manifests in personal decision-making, and new presentations of their identity (Alsup, 2010). However, within Western society there exists a belief that adolescents are morally deficient instead of being primed for moral development (Hart & Carlo, 2008). Adolescents are often represented, and subsequently viewed as disrespectful, irresponsible, and rude. However, adolescents are far more primed than children to engage in moral life, as they possess skills such as the ability to infer the perspectives of others, understand the self, and solve complex social problems through abstract reasoning (Hart & Carlo, 2005; Alsup, 2010). To this end, and because many theorists agree that adult moral character is given shape and influence in adolescence, psychologists such as Lawrence Kohlberg (1984) endeavored to generate a framework to better understand moral reasoning and its' relationship to adolescent development (Rhin, 1980; Collins, 1996; Hart & Carlo, 2005).

Kohlberg's (1984) theory synthesized the liberal moral philosophy of thinkers such as Rawls (1971) along with Piaget's (1965) theories of cognitive and developmental psychology (Hart & Carlo, 2005). Kohlberg's (1984) theory of moral development was defined by six stages, and was founded upon his study of boys between the ages of ten and sixteen. According to Kohlberg children develop their sense of morality independently as opposed to learning it by watching adults (Collins, 1996). Individuals successfully progress and develop as moral

individuals when they find more “effective ways to resolve issues of justice” (Collins, 1996, p.8). Kohlberg's framework was built upon the idea that justice is the most important moral virtue, and that morality was always the same, no matter the individual, time or place. According to Kohlberg, boys and men tended to think through moral dilemmas using abstract principles of right and wrong as typically defined by law and social rules. Kohlberg’s ideas dramatically contrast with John Dewey's ethical conceptions of every moral situation as unique and not resolvable by the application of abstract moral law (Collins, 1996).

Moral development in adolescent girls. Feminist psychologist, and former student of Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan (1982), was among the first to turn a critical eye to the Kohlberg's understanding of moral development. With *In a Different Voice* (1982, 1993) and *Mapping the Moral Domain* (1988), Gilligan takes issue with Kohlberg's perception of women as lacking moral development. In Kohlberg’s model of moral development, women typically fail to progress past the third of five moral stages. Kohlberg defines this third stage by a focus or concern with social relationships to guide moral thinking (Collins, 1996). Essentially, women and girls were viewed as morally less developed compared to male counterparts due to their concern with relationships and expressing care for others (Collins, 1996; Smith, 2000; Abrams, 2002). Gilligan (1982) criticizes Kohlberg, much like Erikson (1959) before him, of basing his studies solely on young men in the United States, and using male experiences as a stand-in for universal human experience. According to Gilligan (1982, 1993; 1988), Kohlberg’s theory equates male development as child development, and male moral development as all moral development. Gilligan’s (1982) studies argued for the importance of accounting for care and relationships in moral thinking, for both men and women, throughout the life cycle.

Gilligan (1982) conducted studies with both male and female participants, who led her to conclude that women engage in moral reasoning extensively, but they are generally more concerned with relationships as opposed to rules. Girls and women base their moral decisions on preserving existing relationships with others, as well as the perspectives and emotions of others. Moral thinking on these terms did not have a place in Kohlberg's existing theory, its' absence communicated that such thinking had little social or personal value. Girls and women are guided by a morality, which Gilligan (1982) terms an ethic of care. Gilligan (1982) resolves that there are essentially two moral principles which guide decision-making: not treating others unfairly, and helping others in need (Collins, 1996). In Gilligan's studies, providing help and care guided girls' actions to others, as opposed to ideas of fairness or justice. Gilligan illustrated a relationship between gender and moral thinking through her study, which was further explored by educational theorist Nel Noddings (1984). While Noddings viewed the feminine moral voice as superior to the masculine due to the attention given to care and connection, Gilligan held that justice and care are both valid moral orientations, and men and women should seek to think through moral decisions which account for both. Thus, the literature draws attention to the socialization of adolescent girls, which is frequently overlooked in traditional theories of moral development, in order to understand both their experience and personal development.

Adolescent girl development. Dubowsky-Ma'ayan (2012) asserts in her study of the reading lives of adolescent girls, any study of what it means to be a girl today must begin with a critical examination of the cultural and societal definitions of girlhood. In Gilligan's (1982) assessment, dominant culture exerts pressure on adolescent girls to conform to social norms of girlhood, while simultaneously degrading feminine characteristics associated with these roles such as care, and a concern for relationships. Additionally, girls are socialized into what Brown

and Gilligan (1992) term as a relational stance to a much greater degree than young men. A relational stance results in young women who are highly sensitive to the dynamics of human relationships, and consider their well being as connected to the well being of others. Girls' feelings of self-esteem originate in connections with others, and by showing care (Abrams, 2002). While this stance may be possible in the simplistic world of childhood, Gilligan argues the relational stance of girls becomes highly problematic in adolescence. To preserve relationships in the face of tensions, adolescent girls will resist speaking out about their needs and emotions, and attempt to minimize feelings of anger, confusion or distress (Abrams, 2002). This silencing often leads to psychological consequences such as dissociation and loss of self-esteem (Abrams, 2002). Brown and Gilligan (1992) further argue that socialization into a relational stance in girlhood is a significant barrier to establishing an authentic sense of self in adolescence.

Adolescent girl identities are “not fixed, but fluid” (Dubowsky-Ma'ayan, 2012, p.20). Girl identity is not rooted in a stable idea of the self, but is instead a hybrid of influences. A girl's identity shifts and manifests differently based on social situations, time and space. Feminist psychologists, such as Gilligan (1982), theorized that while exerting pressure for girls conform to such norms, dominant culture simultaneously degrades feminine characteristics associated with these roles. Additionally, girls are socialized into what Brown and Gilligan (1992) term as a relational stance to a much greater degree than young men. A relational stance results in young women who are highly sensitive to the dynamics of human relationships. Girls' feelings of self-esteem originate in connections with others, and by showing care (Abrams, 2002). While a relational stance may be possible in the simplistic world of childhood, Gilligan (1982) argues the relational stance of girls becomes problematic in adolescence, as there is an increased emphasis

on individuation and autonomy. A relational stance in girlhood is incompatible with norms of adulthood, as success in development is defined as autonomy as opposed to care for others. Brown and Gilligan (1992) further argue that socialization into a relational stance in girlhood is a significant barrier to establishing an authentic sense of self. Psychological stress encountered by girls in adolescence often leads to consequences such as depression, anxiety, and loss of self-esteem (Abrams, 2002). Conflict stemming from relational socialization does not dissipate in adulthood, as personal relationships continue to be the primary measure of worth for women in many cultures and societies.

International adolescent development. Researchers examining the lives of adolescents conclude that attention must be given to the role of race, class, culture, and gender in their development (Christian-Smith, 1996; Durham, 1999; Smith, 2000; Abrams, 2002; Polleck, 2010, Park, 2012; Faircloth, 2012, Dubowsky-Ma'ayan, 2012). Importantly, these factors influence both the identities and literacy practices of adolescents. The literature demonstrates attention to culture is of significant importance when studying adolescent identity development for those who have spent the majority of their lives in an international setting. While coming of age internationally is not a new phenomenon, studies into this experience of adolescence are growing, as does the rate of globalization (Cockburn, 2002; Fail, 2004; Resnick, 2006; Harrington, 2008; Grimshaw & Sears, 2008; Faircloth, 2012; Flum & Kaplan, 2012, Siani, Kaplan and Flum, 2012; Lijadi & Schalkwyk, 2014). Useem (1976) was the first to use the term “Third Culture Kids” (TCKs) to describe the experiences of children of missionaries growing up in India during the 1950s. Useem (1976) described how TCKs had a unique experience of adolescence, as it was often distinct from both their home culture and their host culture (Cockburn, 2002). More recently researchers such as McCaig (1992) have used the term “Global

Nomad” to capture the experiences of international adolescents. As Harrington (2008) highlights, these terms refer to a sense international adolescents feel that they do not belong anywhere, and yet they belong everywhere; or that they have multiple feelings of belonging. Instead of identifying with those who are from their home or host culture, international adolescents identify more closely with those who have a similar experience as they do of being between cultures (Harrington, 2008; Cockburn, 2002). Literature demonstrates that experiences within the English classroom can provide TCKs with the stimulus and social space to explore their experiences and articulate emergent identities (Flum & Kaplan, 2012, Siani et al., 2012).

Social relationships and the role of language are both highly influential in shaping international adolescent development. The process of making sense of identity, relationships, and new cultures inherent to any dramatic shift in location is enhanced in the period of adolescence. Symbolic interactionist theory gives insight into understanding the international adolescent’s identity development (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008). This theory understands social interaction to be foundational to the building of the self. In this way the identity of TCKs is constantly renegotiated as they adjust to changing social environments and cultural settings. Speaking the language of the current setting allowed for TCK adolescents to feel a sense of belonging, while also allowing them to blend in, and communicate to make friends (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008). While multiculturalism and international mobility allows for TCKs to acquire skills such as language and cultural sensitivity, it also places pressure on adolescent TCK’s to conform or to survive in a new social environments (Lijadi & Van Schalkwyk, 2014). The literature discusses how literacy practices, such as book group discussion, or independent reading, may allow TCKs to adjust to new social environments, and utilize their skills and experiences with language and culture (Faircloth, 2012; Flum & Kaplan, 2012, Siani et al., 2012).

Research also found TCK adolescents less willing to fully commit to social interactions which resulted in deeper friendships, and more inclined to view friendships as transient or superficial (Lijadi & Van Schalkwyk, 2014; Grimshaw & Sears, 2008)). TCK adolescents also use protective measures such as avoidance to cope with feelings of fear, exhaustion, anger, and sadness in the face of imminent departures. While the social world provides multiple opportunities to generate identity during adolescence, TCKs are at risk as they resist full engagement that may result in such development. Additionally, research suggests TCK adolescents may experience increased stress and confusion as a result of managing multiple selves each identified with varied social context, cultures and symbolic meanings (Lijadi & Van Schalkwyk, 2014). Faircloth (2012) emphasizes the importance of linking learning with identity in the classroom to support TCKs in the areas of social engagement, peer relationship building, and the exploration of their own hybrid identities.

Currently, there is little literature that examines the specific experiences of adolescent TCK girls, and even less with respect to literacy practices. Durham (1999), in a discussion of her own experiences growing up between India, Canada and the US, highlights key dilemmas and questions facing this population of girls. Growing up, as she describes, “between Black and White” led her to be constantly engaged with the project of self-definition (p.193). A girl who possesses an ethnic or cultural identity that does not conform to existing social definitions faces a heightened degree of scrutiny and uncertainty in adolescence (Durham, 1999). Discussions and explorations into identity, and the varied cultural experiences of girlhood are highly relevant to the adolescent TCK, especially when compared to girls whose identities are less in flux. The literature, however limited, does illustrate significant connections between the lives of adolescent girls of color, and multi-cultural adolescent TCKs who must confront limiting social

constructions of race and culture, in addition to that of gender (Smith, 2000; Abrams, 2002; Durham, 1999; Dubowsky-Ma'ayan, 2012). Adolescent girl TCKs are similarly situated to resist, and deconstruct such constructs of culture, ethnicity and race, and reconstruct their identity according to their own experience and desires (Durham, 1999). Again, literature supports engaged literacy practices such as independent reading and discussion to prompt such thinking and exploration of identity on the part of adolescent girls.

Summary

The literature clearly illustrates the central task of adolescence to be identity formation. It is also apparent this developmental period is often marked by intense turmoil, confusion, and stress. Both psychosocial and ecological theories of identity development provide frameworks for understanding the stages, roles, and environmental factors shaping adolescent experience at this time. Feminist theories of moral development emphasize the important interactions of race, gender and class in experiences of adolescence. Furthermore, the literature illustrates the importance of interaction in identity formation. In review of foundational theories of identity and moral development, however, additional study is needed of how adolescent development varies in terms of gender, class, and race. These intersections of identity provide unique stressors on the development of adolescents. Specifically, the development of girls is shaped primarily through socialization toward femininity which leads to many internalized psychological symptoms such as depression and low-self esteem. Additionally, adolescents living in international settings also encounter unique struggles during this period such as managing multiple selves, shallow social relationships, and coping strategies such as withdrawal. The literature suggests supports of adolescents through engagement in safe, social, educational spaces that allow for open expression, critical thinking, and identity exploration.

Theories of Adolescent Literacy

Reading literature to shape student identity and worldview is the goal of many English educators. However, competing beliefs regarding what knowledge is worth knowing impacts both the literature educators select, as well as the manner in which students read. If inner work, such as identity exploration and moral development identity is the priority, then research suggests educators encourage specific, constructivist, independent literacy practices among students (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016). Constructivist literacy theory reflects the primacy of reader experience and social interaction in the meaning making process. According to research, constructivist reading practices lead to cognitive, as well as social-emotional development (Farnan, 1997; Park, 2012). As the previous section discussed, identity development is the major outcome of adolescence (Smith, 2000; Abrams, 2002; Park, 2012; Faircloth, 2012). To this end, the following section reviews the current theories of literacy, which prioritize adolescents' independent relationships with literature to construct identity and meaning.

The influence of reader response theory. Theories of personal development utilize Louise Rosenblatt's (1965) reader response framework to demonstrate the need for educators to use literature not just to develop reading skills, but also to represent their experience and symbolize their identity (Polleck, 2010). According to Polleck (2010), Rosenblatt's theory of aesthetic transaction "enlarges readers' emotional capacity and maturation, where both cognitive and affective development is enhanced" (p.52). The work of Wilhelm (1997) with reluctant, male adolescent readers is a further illustration of how experiential responses when reading literature helped students construct identity and enhance emotional growth. However, research also highlights that when literature is studied in secondary school, the imaginative and aesthetic experience of reading is often marginalized in favor of analysis and evaluation (Farnan, 1997).

Literacy researchers such as Farnan (1997), Knoester (2011), and Wilhelm and Smith (2016) suggest that voluntary or independent reading may better provide adolescents with a space to aesthetically experience literature, and in turn, may support interactions central to social and emotional development.

In addition to incorporating reader-response theory into classroom practice, research encourages educators to blend theories of critical literacy and culturally responsive teaching to further personal growth in adolescents (Freire, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Park, 2012). According to critical literacy theorists, reading is not a culturally or politically neutral action (Freire, 1987; Christian-Smith, 1993, Dubowsky-Ma'ayan, 2012; Park, 2012; O'Quinn, 2013). Culturally responsive researchers such as Rogers and Soter (1997) view the reader as culturally situated. This cultural position of the reader is central in shaping perceptions of the text. Critical literacy draws upon the work of Paulo Freire (1987) and asks the reader to speak back to the text. Educators may position students to question the interests, purposes or assumptions of the author and/or the dominant culture that produced the text. In practice, critical literacy also asks readers to reflect upon what their own interpretations of the text reveal about the features of their identity in terms of age, race, class, and gender (Park, 2012). Researchers Rabinowitz and Smith (1997) ask critical literacy educators to ask students not just what the text means to them, but to also require students to question where such a response came from (Park, 2012). An educator focus on readers' response, cultures, and critical perspectives further generates space for identity development and the construction of a nuanced worldview.

Role of independent reading. The act of students choosing what to read, on their own, inside, and outside of school is known by many names throughout the literature. Such differences in terminology are meaningful and warrant closer examination for the purposes of clarity. Each

term carries within it researcher assumptions regarding the central features of adolescent literacy. Knoester (2010) provides an overview of foundational perspectives and research on independent reading, with accompanying terminology. Free or voluntary reading is a term used by Krasen (2004) to describe independent reading conducted in school. Krasen (2004) concluded that free and voluntary reading was connected to increases in fluency and comprehension for students measured in school (Williams et al., 2013). However, Anderson et al., (1988) terms independent reading as exclusively reading outside of school with no focus on reading practice inside of school. Anderson et al.,'s (1988) study concludes that students who do not read outside of school do fall behind peers in school who do (Knoester, 2011). Hughes-Hassel & Roge (2007) use the term leisure reading in a similar manner as Manzo & Manzon (1995) who call independent reading recreational reading. Lastly Williams et al., (2013) uses the term authentic independent reading to emphasize the role of student choice in the reading process, and ensure students transact with texts in personally meaningful ways. Knoester (2011) concludes that although independent reading is the most widely used term in the literature, it is also the use of the word *independent* which leads to many misconceptions regarding adolescent literacy habits and the relationship between reading, the self and the social environment (p.2). Indeed, much recent research demonstrates that independent reading which supports academic and personal growth is highly socially interactive, and far from an isolated activity.

Much foundational research on independent reading focused on the benefits to academic achievement, as opposed to benefits to personal growth and development. However, emerging research suggests interesting connections between academic achievement and interpersonal engagement in the reading process (Knoester, 2011; Williams et al., 2013; Ivey & Johnston, 2013). The literature supports strong connections between independent reading practices and

gains in academic performance for adolescents. Foundational studies on independent reading conducted by Anderson, Fielding and Wilson (1998) concluded that children reading books was the single greatest predictors to increase reading comprehension, reading fluency, vocabulary and reading speed (Knoester, 2011). The practice of reading inside or outside of school was determined to be a significant determinant of fluid intelligence in adulthood (Topping, 2009). Furthermore, Krashen (2004) found correlations between in school independent reading time and higher achievement on standardized tests, and overall academic performance. However, despite these gains, research shows that such independent reading sharply decreases at the start of adolescents (Knoester, 2011). In response, Knoester (2010, 2011) hypothesizes that one reason for this decline is the increasing importance of social relationships and identity formation in adolescents that moves them away from literacy practices. The literature continues to reveal that despite academic gains, increasing student reading achievement through independent reading is not as straightforward as it might appear (Topping, 2009; Knoester, 2011, 2010; Williams et al., 2013).

Researchers such as Topping (2009) find that simply allocating greater class time or increasing volume of pages read, may not be enough to meaningfully impact reading achievement of adolescents. Topping (2009) instead focuses on the significance of challenge present in texts to produce literacy gains for adolescents. Additionally there are challenges of measurement for instructors to determine exactly how time spent independent reading is used by students. Williams et al (2013) highlight the problem of fake reading first named by Kelly-Clausen and Grace (2009). Such fake reading is common in environments where students do not exercise significant choice in what they read and there is a focus on obedience to teacher expectations around reading. Some researchers also take issue with the term independent and the

solitary connotations it lends to the activity that may discourage student reading. Knoester (2011) highlighted the importance of teachers identifying reading as a public versus private act to increase literacy gains. Literacy as a social practice is supported by Vygotsky's views of social constructivism, as well as Gee's Discourse theory, which prioritize language communities in shaping identity and meaning-making, over isolated individual practice (Knoester, 2011).

Researchers also confronted many challenges in understanding adolescent reading practice due to the varied purposes students brought to reading. These stances relate directly to Rosenblatt's efferent or aesthetic approach to reading. Williams et al (2013) performed research on independent reading in an effort to quantify exactly what students did during independent reading time in classrooms. Williams et al (2013) found that when assessments of independent reading were comprehension based, students held an efferent stance and rarely engaged in aesthetic experience of reading. Researchers in this study concluded that the point of independent reading time was indeed an aesthetic reading experience, and measurements needed to encourage rather than discourage this stance in adolescents. Knoester (2011) asserts that more research on independent reading practices and reading motivation in adolescents is needed to better understand the complex factors which contribute to adolescent reading habits.

Independent and aesthetic reading experience. To experience texts at an aesthetic level which impacts social and emotional development requires a high degree of personal and social engagement on the part of students. Ivey & Johnston (2013) argue for the act of engaged reading by students to promote social and emotional development. Researchers argue that engaged reading is only possible when texts are interesting, when choice and autonomy is supported, and when opportunities for collaboration are plentiful. These parameters are in keeping with the model of independent reading as students may self select their text, work at their own pace, and

discuss their reading experience with partners. Ivey & Johnston (2013) go on to define an engaged reader as one who displays a strong motivation to read, is metacognitive in their construction of meaning, strategic in their approach to reading, and spontaneously socially interactive about what they read.

Researchers Lysaker & Miller (2012) further investigated the role of social interaction and engaged reading through the development of the “Relationally Oriented Reading Instruction” (RORI) model (Ivey & Johnston, 2013, p. 256). RORI posits that engaged reading is a central location of human development. Within this space students participate in a dialogic, relational and narrative construction of the self through an immersion in meaningful language events such as reading and conversation. These experiences of language are the material through which students come to construct not only the self, but also their “social imagination and construction of the other” (Ivey & Johnston, 2013, p. 256). A key shift attributed to engaged reading observed by Ivey & Johnston (2013) was the development of greater social and personal agency on the part of adolescents. Understood in these terms, engaged, independent reading has the potential to expand adolescent readers’ worldview, conceptions of the self, and ultimately their behavior.

Social constructivism and adolescent literacy. Both reader response theory and theories of engaged reading highlight the importance of transactions and interactions to generate meaning and support social and emotional development. The influential work of social constructivism Vygotsky (1978) further demonstrates how both textual interpretations and understanding of the self is further enhanced through conversation and collaboration (Smith 2000; Polleck 2010; Park, 2012; Faircloth, 2012). Polleck (2010) asserts that social constructivists emphasize the motivations and emotions of the reader by exploring the cognitive, strategic and affective

dimensions of literacy. The research also reveals evidence that a constructivist framework for literacy supports students in merging their personal experiences with others to co-construct meaning. As Smith (2000) argues, readers may not be able to name what they have imagined about a text unless they are in discussion with one another. By reading together, students' assumptions and thinking regarding the text becomes visible. Park (2012) elaborates in stating that by reading together "literary interpretations, interpretive lenses, and world views become public, and therefore, open to examination"(p.194). A constructivist framework for literacy builds upon the strengths of reader response theory and further generates space for identity development in adolescents.

Conversations within reading groups, also understood as communities of practice, may help to shape the understanding of the self and of the world (Polleck, 2010). Faircloth (2012) also finds that such literate, interactive communities of practice, allow for individuals to create an "identity in practice" (p.187). Identity in practice allows students to feel a sense of connection and belonging through learning, which supports their development. Lalik & Oliver (2011), build upon Gee's (1990) Discourse theory to further understand the role of conversation within groups to generate feelings of identity and belonging in adolescent girls. Ways of talking, thinking, writing and being together all become ways of identifying as a part of a group (Lalik & Oliver, 2011, p. 50). Such discourse creates a critical community for adolescent girls to construct beliefs about the self and the world through language.

The role of young adult literature in adolescent literacy. A small but growing body of research has examined the genre of young adult literature (YAL) in adolescent literacy practices and its outcomes for personal growth (Carico, 1996; Blackford, 2004; Alsup et al., 2010; Flanagan, 2011; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Napoli, 2013; Spring, 2016). YAL is defined as fiction

written for readers aged 12 to 20, and some of the earliest examples of this include texts such as *The Outsiders* (1967) by S.E. Hinton (Alsup, 2010). More recent examples include *The Giver* (1993) by Lois Lowry, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999) by Stephen Chbosky, and *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) by John Green. Alsup (2010) asserts that despite the popularity of the genre, and claims to YAL as effective in reaching reluctant readers, there has been little scholarly investigation into the effectiveness of the genre. Alsup (2010) along with eleven other scholars published a series of qualitative studies investigating the experiences of adolescent readers of YAL, and the varied outcomes for identity formation. According to the research, YAL meets several criteria for engaging adolescent readers, as texts provide relatable settings, characters, and plot lines. Additionally, YAL presents adolescent readers with larger themes and questions that pertain to human nature in an accessible and authentic manner (Blackford, 2004; Alsup 2010; Flanagan, 2011; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Napoli, 2013). Napoli (2013) states that YAL with a global focus allows students to consider and dialogue on issues such as courage, justice, and freedom, within a relatable and accessible format. Reading and responding to YAL can support adolescent readers in critically considering the world they live in, while also enabling their intellectual and emotional development (Napoli, 2013). Given the focus on identity formation during adolescence, Alsup (2010) finds YAL narratives that prompt critical reflection the part of adolescent readers to be crucial. According to researchers, adolescents reading within the YAL genre are likely to engage in thinking and discussion which promote personal growth, increased social agency, and a broadened worldview (Alsup, 2010; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Napoli, 2013).

Research into YAL illustrates issues surrounding adolescent identification with characters and situations, and raises questions as to the nature and necessity of identification in

the experience of reading. Specifically when examining the experiences of adolescent girl readers, researchers such as Carico (1996) and Napoli (2013) found the presence of strong female protagonists to support reader engagement, along with articulations of identity, decision-making, and the making of personal connections. While Napoli (2013) also found that even if girls have a different experience than what is represented in the text, many were able to live vicariously through characters, develop empathy, and better understand their own privileged social status. Educators should not select texts on the basis of reader identification alone. Books aimed at capturing girl experience, may in fact, alienate some girl readers, or send messages regarding girl culture that are limiting and damaging (Blackford, 2004, Alsup, 2010). Gaps between reader identity and the identity of characters may in fact allow the girl reader to better examine her own experience through comparison and greater engagement in the imaginative life of the novel. Blackford (2004) in her research into adolescent girl readers who choose to read YA fantasy and sci-fi texts, determines that what motivates girls to read is often not an experience of identification. Instead, Blackford (2004) finds that girls read not to see themselves, but often to go on an imaginative journey, and to see something new and unfamiliar. This immersive experience is accompanied by feelings of detachment, which Blackford (2004) and Alsup (2010) also find as equally important to readers when fostering critical reflection for identity development.

Adolescent literacy as a gendered practice. Cultural expectations of what it means to be male and female within our society also shape how literacy is enacted by adolescents (Charles 2007; Tarulli & Brendler, 2014). As discussed previously, adolescence is a period of identity formation, as well as a time when the socialization of girls and boys begins to differentiate greatly (Park, 2012; Smith, 200; Abrams, 2002). Hence, the literate practices of male and female

readers reflect the politics of gender and identity formation. The first studies of gender and literacy began nearly 40 years ago, and posited findings such as adolescents preferring a protagonist of the same gender, that girls respond to texts emotionally and boys focus on actions and events (Tarulli & Brendler, 2014). Researchers such as Bleich (1986), Cherland (1994), and Christian-Smith (1993) suggest literacy must be studied through the lens of gender to better understand phenomena of understanding, choice, discourse and reader subjectivity (Tarulli & Brendler, 2014). However, the most recent literature reveals shifts in the beliefs of adolescents towards gender, and implications for literacy practices. The popularity of YA fiction titles such as the *Divergent* series (2011) by Veronica Roth, and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999), reveals a decrease in gender differentiation by adolescent readers by attracting high numbers of readers from either gender (Tarulli & Brendler, 2014). Even so, research illustrates an attention to literacy as a gendered practice may assist educators in understanding adolescent reading habits, and ways to support engaged reading for identity formation.

Importantly, however, the research also highlights a key distinction between literacy as gendered practice, and gendered literacy. Researchers assert that gendered literacy is the practice of utilizing limiting definitions of gender in both public discourse on achievement, and in educator practice to understand adolescent reading habits (Charles 2007; Tarulli & Brendler, 2014). Perpetuation of the gendered literacy reinforces the idea of the boy crisis in literacy, that girls will read anything, and that educators must only promote boy books to boys. Recent research also reveals arguments which assert that much of the public concern for the underperformance of boys in reading compared to girls, is due to overly simplistic and disconnected understandings of both gender and literacy (Charles 2007; Topping, Samuels and Paul, 2008; Tarulli & Brendler, 2014). Charles (2007) indicates misconceptions and

generalizations create a gender binary in which “all boys are constructed in relation to all girls”, and where literacy is understood as a “static” category of decontextualized academic skills (p.73). The literature suggests supporting both the literacy practices and the identity development of adolescents, is better positioned when educators seek to validate diversity within gender, not only between genders (Tarulli & Brendler, 2014).

Summary

In summation, the literature illustrates the importance of foundational theories such as reader response as well as social constructivism to understand adolescents’ relationship to texts. In review of competing theories of independent reading habits, engaged reading presents the strongest support of aesthetic reading on the part of students. Engaged reading possesses qualities such as student choice, self-pacing, and high levels of peer interaction, which support aesthetic transactions with text. Engaged reading also prioritizes the role of social interaction and conversation to further advance understandings of the self, and to influence social behavior of adolescents. The literature also demonstrates that viewing literacy, as a gendered practice is central to understanding both what adolescents read, how they read, and what meanings are made. The following section will review the literature further on the specific intersections of adolescent girl development and literacy practices.

Literacy and Adolescent Girl Development

Researchers assert that school is an important context of identity development. Schools are social environments where students encounter new ideas, activities, role models and engage with peers (Sinai, Kaplan & Flum, 2012). The development of personal identity and moral reasoning is of importance to all students, but plays a crucial role in the lives of adolescent girls. Independent, engaged reading creates conditions for personal growth, and developmental gains

such as a greater sense of personal and social agency to resist norms and exercise greater control over their lives (Ivey & Johnston, 2013).

Critical literacy and adolescent girls. While a great deal of research on adolescent literacy focuses upon the importance of reading for the purposes of cognitive development, personal growth and personal response, there remains a significant body of work which focuses on the political implications of literacy for adolescents in terms of gender, race, class, and culture. According to critical literacy researchers, reading is a political act, and far from a neutral and private educational practice (Freire, 1987; Christian-Smith, 1993; hooks, 2003; Dubowsky-Ma'ayan, 2012; Park 2012). Reading is an act fully enmeshed with the politics of identity, gender, race, and social class, and as a result, those who are subject to systematic oppression within contemporary society stand to gain and lose much through the act (Christian-Smith, 1993). Teaching adolescent readers to critically analyze and reflect on the texts they consume is essential for social empowerment, according to thinkers such as Freire (1987). It is through literacy practice that allows the reader to name their experience that adolescent readers construct their voice and their identity (Dubowsky-Ma'ayan, 2012).

To many researchers, the question of cultivating critical literacy practices is of particular import to the lives of adolescent girls, as literacy skills grant access to social power, and personal freedom. The literature illustrates how, both historically and presently, illiteracy among women and girls is used as a tool of social control, and allows for institutionalized gender inequality to persist (Christian-Smith, 1993, Dubowsky-Ma'ayan, 2012). When girls read, critical literacy researchers advocate for educators to emphasize not only the personal experience of reading, but also the ideological values and social relationships contained within the texts. Through this girls

may construct their identities, beliefs, attitudes, values, and interrogate their experiences, to gain greater social agency (Christian-Smith, 1993; Dubowsky-Ma'ayan, 2012; Napoli, 2013).

Identity, moral agency, and literacy. The research illustrates identity and agency as interrelated concepts central to adolescent development. Both identity and agency are referred to in the literature as performance and mutually bound by cultural structures (Carlone, Johnson and Scott, 2014). According to the structural theory of Hill-Collins (2009), individuals are bound by four domains of power: institutional, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal (Carlone et al., 2014). All four of these domains intersect within the classroom space. Institutional domains relates to school policies. The disciplinary refers to normative classroom behaviors, and cultural domains connect to dominant ideas of gender, race and class that codify how girls ought to behave in school. Lastly the interpersonal domains contain social interaction between students and teachers. However, within all of these domains, individuals may exercise decision-making, which either conforms to or resists these structures and subsequent roles (Carlone et al., 2014). According to Carolone et al. (2014), the English classroom is theorized to be a space where adolescent girls can access fissures and cracks within structures of power. By engaging girls in aesthetic and collaborative experiences of literature, girls may safely try out multiple identities, perspectives, and transgress boundaries. All of which may serve as practice for making decisions and judgments in their own lives.

Agency and moral decision making may also be defined as the performance of identity, which takes the form of moral judgments and taking personal action (Carlone et al., 2014). Gender performativity, defined by Butler (1990), argues that gender identity is not an inborn or fixed entity, but rather a negotiation between the subject and the structural environment, and defined by actions, appearances, and speech. Girls may perform their gender by conforming to

cultural expectations such as being reserved, or they may perform their gender by resisting such norms. However, the agency adolescents exercise relates to what specific identity they are exploring or performing. In the case of adolescent girls, theories of structural constraints highly influence performances of gender and possibilities for resistance (Carlone et al., 2014). Engaged transactions with literature allow adolescent girls to perform gender through the action of reading, which is an act typically gendered as female. However, critical and collaborative literacy practice also generates space for subversive and transgressive thinking to take place, while maintaining connections to respectable girl behavior (Smith, 2000; Polleck, 2010; Park 2012).

Girl identity exploration through literacy. Sinai, Kaplan & Flum (2012) propose that identity exploration in school goes beyond connecting content to students' lives. Instead, researchers suggest going beyond connecting content, and engaging students in an identity exploration framework. This framework promotes "confidence and skills in [students] revising their current self-aspects" (p.197). The framework for identity exploration in schools, according to Sinai et al., (2012), includes: exploration triggers, sense of safety and exploratory scaffolds (p.197). Identity exploration is most often triggered by events or content that creates dissonance, or present ambiguity, threat or conflict. A sense of safety is essential for adolescents to work through the stress or confusion generated from an explorative trigger. Identity exploration is a process that invites feelings of vulnerability, and thus adolescents may feel defensive or self-conscious, if they do not feel they are in a safe community to do so. Lastly, educators must present scaffolds or activities to support the exploratory process--these may be reflective writing prompts, modeling, or role playing (Sinai et al., 2012) Researchers further suggest that exploratory scaffolds may include fictional characters and situations encountered in literature to

promote adolescent identity development. A study of a grade 9 English class by Faircloth (2012) specifically examined the fostering of identity through learning through an “identity in practice” model (p.187). All students were encouraged to make connections between personal experiences, identity traits, and learning, and to see each other as sources of knowledge and expertise. The conclusion of the study demonstrates how identity exploration is beneficial to students on personal, but also intellectual and academic terms.

Studies illustrate that reading discussion groups within classes can be important exploratory spaces for adolescent girl identity (Smith, 2000; Polleck, 2010; Park, 2012; Dubowsky-Ma’ayan, 2012). Researchers found girls to use literacy practices to affirm their identities, make connections with others, create community and also explore new perspectives. In person or digital conversation on books often serve as places for girls to discuss “what it means to be adolescent, female and in an environment that undermines their hopes for the future” (Polleck, 2010, p.57). These spaces promote a culture of openness, respect and mutual regard that generate feelings of safety for examining beliefs and connecting with personal experience. Within reading groups girls encounter alternative perspectives and connections, while revealing tacit beliefs and emerging understandings pushing toward greater reflection (Smith, 2000). Open discussion surfaces such responses, which would be impossible with solitary reading, and allows girls to examine their understanding critically. Park (2012) further asserts that reading communally for girls are important as it allows for multiple and differing perspectives to be encountered and compared. Through the sharing of interpretations, girls build trust and relationships which further enhances their emotional and social development (Polleck, 2011).

Girls and the role of fiction in moral development. Research illustrates that fiction plays a powerful role in the moral lives of young adults as it allows readers to consider complex

and contemporary problems replete with moral dilemmas (Collins, 1996). Researchers such as Rita Manning (1992) and Wayne Booth (1988) have held that fiction holds the possibility for the reader to find their moral voice, and to build a richer character through adopted roles. Wolfgang Iser (1978) demonstrated how through reader response theory the reader's own experience is transformed, and this enables the reader to go beyond the text and consider moral decisions. Collins (1996) cites the work of John Gardner (1978) and Mark Tappan (1991), as illustrating the intellectual and emotional support provided by narratives and art to generate moral authority in the young reader.

However, few researchers discuss the question of how gender impacts the construction of identity when engaging with fiction. Alsup (2010) advocates that the reading of complex YAL can encourage adolescents to interrogate what Kohlberg (1984) terms the conventional morality stage, and to practice informed decision making. However, as discussed prior, feminist psychologists criticized the moral development stages of Kohlberg (1984), as he failed to account for the moral value of care, and thus failed to measure girl's' moral capacities. Gilligan (1982) maintains that girls display equally high levels of moral reasoning, but do so based upon a value of care, and relationships, over a universal value of justice. Few studies have attempted to study Gilligan's moral framework within girl's response to literature. Blackford (2004) holds that it is girls' exclusion for certain genres such as fantasy and sci-fi, which allow them to be more sensitive to the characters, plot situations, and subsequent moral dilemmas which surface. Rihn's (1980) study of how young readers understand the moral decision-making of protagonists utilized Kohlberg's scale of moral development, but in doing so yielded troubling results. Rihn (1980) concluded male authors created characters who resolved moral dilemmas at higher levels than did female authors, and further concluded that male protagonists resolve moral dilemmas at

higher levels than female protagonists. Rihn's (1980) study implied that men both create and make more sophisticated moral decisions than women, which is a point of which Gilligan (1984) and her feminist contemporaries would refute. The literature illustrates the potential for YAL to expand the moral capacities of adolescent readers, however, more research needs to respond to the specific experiences of adolescent girls, and how this may reflect the model of moral reasoning proposed by Gilligan (1984).

Summary

According to recent research, English educators would do well to consider implementing engaged, independent reading programs in their classrooms. For programs to authentically build not only academic, but also social and emotional capacities, such programs must emphasize student choice, self-pacing, student interaction, and non-comprehension based assessment strategies. Protecting imaginative space in the classroom is crucial for students to engage in aesthetic experiences of literature which provides opportunities for cognitive, as well as emotional and interpersonal development. Constructivist theories of literacy development emphasize the role of conversation, specifically around what is read, to be building blocks of adolescent identity and moral reasoning. It is also important that English educators remain aware of distinctions of literacy and gendered practice and gendered literacy. Adolescent attitudes regarding gender are shifting to be more inclusive and diverse. Text suggestions on behalf of educators should also reflect an understanding of diversity within gender. Generally keeping discussions, assessments, and assigned texts germane to this central focus of adolescent development is well supported by the literature.

Educators of international students should also bear in mind, according to the literature, the potential of international school curriculum to help student in their negotiation of identity.

International schools have been defined by the literature as third spaces that allow multicultural adolescents to merge and integrate varied academic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Such support on behalf of international educators would be of particular importance to students who have contradictory experiences gender, class, or race with which to contend.

Lastly, the literature encourages educators to remain aware of the structures of power, which operate in the lives of adolescent girls as they move through school. Additionally it is illustrated in the literature that girls and boys are socialized in highly distinct ways, which solidify in adolescence, and can diminish girls' view of their own capacities, and decision-making skills. Educators are supported in considering how socialization contributes to the participation of girls in class, and how such internalized pressure to conform to gender norms may lead to potentially harmful behavior. However, educators of adolescent girls can also provide opportunities to engage with critical literacy.

Conclusions

The literature supports educators working with adolescents in providing rich reading experiences that provide access points to greater identity development. Selection of content is important in this regard, but of even greater importance is the development of a reader's disposition towards exploration, imagination, and taking critical perspective towards cultural norms. Schooling is a crucial context for identity and moral development. Educators thus play an important role in shaping and supporting students academically, socially and emotionally.

CHAPTER III

STUDY DESIGN

Introduction

Adolescence is often characterized as a crisis or period of intense psychological and social stress, wherein adolescents struggle to integrate new found expectations, desires and limitations into an emergent identity (Abrams, 2002). This is particularly true for girls, as identity features such as gender are intensified through social experiences of adolescence (Smith, 2000; Polleck, 2010; Terruli & Brandler, 2014). However, research suggests that sustained engagement with literature is a powerful and transformative experience for adolescent girls in which to negotiate the dilemmas of adolescence (Smith, 2000; Polleck, 2010; Park, 2012; Ivey & Johnston, 2013).

Research questions. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the perceptions and experiences of adolescent girls while reading a novel in an international school setting. Therefore, the overall research question guiding this inquiry was: How do adolescent girls make sense of the experience of reading a novel? The sub questions investigated were: 1) How do the reading experiences of adolescent girls with fiction contribute to perceptions of moral identity? and 2) What perceptions do adolescent girls hold regarding identity development as an outcome of reading?

Research paradigm and methodology. The purpose of this study was to generate an understanding of how adolescent girl readers make sense of their independent reading experiences. To this end, a constructivist-interpretive paradigm and a qualitative inquiry approach was selected as best suited for the study (Ponterotto, 2005). A constructivist-interpretive paradigm validates the existence of multiple realities, as reality is constructed by the

individual and not through the application of universal truths. Individuals make sense of their own lived experience to define reality subjectively instead of objectively. Furthermore, interpretivism is concerned with how reflection, social interaction, and dialogue between individuals co-constructs meaning (Ponteroto, 2005). The research process is then viewed as both the participant and the researcher engaging in meaning making, with the researcher utilizing an inductive approach to understand participant experience.

An additional paradigm that informs this study is a critical-feminist approach first described by Lather (1991). A feminist research paradigm shapes this study as the researcher seeks to establish collaborative and non-exploitive relationships with participants (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, the research questions of this study holds assumptions found in the feminist paradigm regarding the centrality of gender in shaping consciousness and social experience. The study aims to further support a feminist paradigm which looks to research to further “correct the distortion and invisibility of female experience in society” (Creswell, 2013, p. 29).

Qualitative inquiry, according to Creswell (2013), begins with an interpretive framework that holds that “multiple realities are constructed through lived experiences and interactions with others” (p.36). Participants and phenomena are studied in a natural setting with a collection of data that is sensitive and aware of individual values and belief systems. The focus of qualitative study is to examine phenomena and describe the meaning that individuals bring to their experience. In qualitative study, the researcher employs an inductive approach to data analysis, which allows patterns and themes to emerge from interviews and other artifacts (Creswell, 2013). Lastly, qualitative inquiry seeks to bring participant voices to the forefront of the study. The aim of this study was to understand the lived experiences and meaning making processes of adolescent girl readers, which reflects the interpretive and constructivist underpinnings of

qualitative inquiry. Data was collected in this study through in depth interviews conducted at the school site, and with attention to reflexivity, or the role of the researcher in the inquiry process. Each of these goals and methods found strong alignment with a qualitative approach.

Author Positionality

Personal connection to research topic. Reading was a central experience of my childhood and adolescence, and essential to my identity development. My parents always supported my growth as a reader. My mother would regularly take my sisters and I to the public library, and allow me to read for hours in my room. Both my parents were from first generation immigrant families, and the first to attend college. As such education and reading was deeply valued and praised. While my parents espoused liberal social values, aspects of our familial life were also traditional and culturally defined. It was at this time that fiction helped me understand my experience, and consider possibilities for my future.

Secondary to reading was the role of rich conversation in shaping my beliefs, values, and understanding of self. Again, my family played a key role, as from a very young, I was surrounded by gregarious adults, sharing opinions, asking me questions, and encouraging me to talk back. As a result, in school I found experiences of discussion to have the greatest impact on my learning. I was fortunate to attend a university where classes in all disciplines were discussion based. This experience of transformative conversation was integral to my development at such a formative stage of late adolescence. Talk is also a defining feature of my personal life, as it is the primary way I build relationships, make connections, and come to feel known by others. It was specifically talk around books, which allowed me to build particularly strong personal relationships, while furthering my own personal and intellectual development.

Much of my background affirms findings in the research demonstrating the academic and personal gains of engaged reading. As O'Rourke (1979) concluded, the home environment is a key factor in explaining the attitude students adopt toward reading, which is certainly reflected in my background. Furthermore, researchers Ivey & Johnston (2013) assert, students are involved in a dialogic, relational and narrative construction of the self through an immersion in meaningful language events such as reading and conversation. These experiences of language are the material through which students come to construct not only the self, but also their "social imagination and construction of the other" (Ivey & Johnston, 2013, p. 256). Furthermore, engaged reading allowed me to negotiate the culturally defined roles of gender held by my community. Pytash (2009) further argues that English classrooms can be spaces for adolescent girls in particular to "develop, articulate and make public their critiques, so they can see themselves as agents of change in their lives and in society" (p.72). While my family supported my intellectual growth, I needed an alternative imaginative space to develop my sense of self.

Professional interest in research topic. I observed an independent reading program during my student teaching experience, but found it to be disjointed and focused primarily on the quantifiable aspects of reading (e.g. page numbers, certain genres, numbers of titles). Thus, when I first began teaching high school English, I did not have a formalized independent reading program in my classroom. Nevertheless, I consistently noted the differences in the writing, discussion, critical thinking and interpersonal skills found in students who read independently outside of school to those who did not. Through intensive work with a literacy consultant, our English department was pushed to consider the role independent reading had in our classrooms last year. In an attempt to bridge theory and practice, I finally implemented an independent

reading component to my Grade 9 English classes. The unexpected consequences of student independent reading are what spurred my interest in further research.

It was important to me that independent reading in the classroom achieve the following aims (1) emphasize choice (2) feel personal (3) generate community. I focused on designing structural components to support these aims. The independent reading component of class began with each student naming and tracing their relationship with reading through a project called reader profiles. Following this, students designed a personal reading blog using the Google platform Blogger. Here students post weekly reflections, reviews, and connections on what they are reading. Students also follow each other through Blogger, and leave comments on each other's pages. Structurally, students may read independently in any genre, and are given 60 to 90 minutes of time to blog or read in class per week. Students are assessed quarterly through their blog using standards which assess their ability to read in a variety of genres and integrate technology to express learning.

I began noticing two girls engaging quite deeply with one another around a series of young adult novels. These girls would recommend titles to each other, have spirited conversations around the motivations of characters, and often voluntarily share their ideas with me about the book. They often collaborate and comment on each other's blog postings, and always want even more time to read in class. Interestingly, these were not girls who identified as strong readers at the start of the school year. Now their conversations and behavior reflect strong engagement with reading, and their academic performance has improved. On separate occasions, both girls have commented to me about how reading this year has helped them think about their life and their actions differently.

Documenting and addressing biases. In reviewing my personal background, and current classroom practices, it is apparent that I have a strong bias towards the value of engaged reading to support personal, social and academic development. Through my personal experiences as an adolescent learner, I witnessed the power of language to shape my perspective of myself and of the world. Reading was an empowering experience for me, as it gave me insight, allowed me to make connections, redefine my beliefs, and connect meaningfully with others. I believe that protecting the space for independent reading at school is essential, as it ensures all students have access to these academic, personal and social gains, regardless of parental support, financial resources, or personal inclination. I identify, and thus I am also biased towards, the experience of adolescent girls growing up in cultures or social environments that marginalize women. I believe reading can play a highly influential role in the development of girls' personal agency and their ability to transcend rigid social boundaries.

My experience as a classroom teacher generates bias in my view of best practices for implementing independent reading, and the stakes of engaging adolescents in reading. I observed ineffective independent reading programs that emphasized compliance on the part of students, which biased me against such measurement of independent reading by page numbers or hours logged. I also witnessed independent reading programs with little instructional guidance or support for students, and noted how this also limits engagement. Although it is very much a work in progress, the work of my department around independent reading has generated higher levels of engagement than I have seen in prior iterations. I am biased towards independent reading models, which emphasize student choice, student voice, and are structured around social interaction and collaboration. It is my belief that such structures create the necessary conditions for engaged reading to take place, and thus for personal agency to grow.

The author as a researcher. As Briscoe (2005) discusses it's important to remain aware of my own demographic positionality, as a White, middle-class, educated woman, and native English speaker. As a function of my privilege I often experience a sense of comfort in academic environments. However, my ideological positionality, as Briscoe terms it, also colors the way I understand schools and my area of interest. I am predisposed to have a critical stance toward more traditional curricular design and assessment methods because I believe these do not serve all students, especially those who come from marginalized linguistic and cultural groups. I became a teacher because I believe schools are a locus of change in our society. By examining our teaching practice we can become more effective educators, and we can create change in the lives of individuals. This in turn holds the possibility to create change in our communities. By transforming how we instruct and assess with an eye towards cultivating personal agency in student, we can empower students to be intelligent, engaged, critical contributors and problem solvers within communities.

It was important for me to be wary of simple distinctions such as “engaged” and “disengaged” as I moved forward with my research on the relationship between adolescent girls, reading and identity development. As Fennel & Arnot (2008) describe, change which results from research is only possible if we endeavor to understand beyond “binary relationships”, and disrupt traditional assumptions about what effective instruction looks like. I appreciate the complexities of positionality, identity, and how we learn.

Jupp & Slattery (2006) describe a deficit mindset which many well-intentioned educators fall into when attempting to explain why their students struggle, or experience social problems such as poverty or crime. This mindset blames the individual rather than understanding the larger, more complex structures in play that create these outcomes in students' lives. While a bit

different, I tried to remain vigilant not to create a deficit mindset when considering, not individuals, but institutions and their intentions towards students. By this I mean basing my conclusions on simplistic, albeit critical, assumptions. Through discourse, interviews and other qualitative methods, I hoped to create a humanistic, respectful and non-othering relationships with participants involved in my research. Additionally, Briscoe's (2005) discussion of foregrounding and backgrounding identities is also important to keep in mind as I built relationships and conducted research with students.

Research Design

This study was primarily concerned with the personal meaning and sense making process of adolescent girls engaged in independent reading, rather than the essential features of the independent reading experience for girls in adolescence. To this end, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected as the most appropriate research approach. IPA allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, and is largely concerned with the individual perception of an event or experience under study (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Brocki & Wearden, 2006)). Additionally, IPA allows for a close examination of personal meaning making within a particular context, between individuals who share a particular experience. These features of IPA align closely with the purpose of this study, as well as the overall research question guiding the inquiry process. IPA also allows for an inductive analysis of themes, which emerge from interview data, and a small purposeful sample of participants. In this study, providing a rich description of the literacy experiences of girls reading novels independently, as well as their perceptions, and personal meanings ascribed to these experiences was of central importance.

Research Tradition

IPA as a qualitative research methodology is underpinned by the philosophy of phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography, which evolved in the late 19th and 20th century as a reaction to the positivist paradigm found in scientific research (Reiners, 2012). While positivism held that reality was ordered, fixed and could be measured objectively, phenomenology asserted that reality was constructed by subjectivity, and as such, it must be measured inductively and dynamically (Reiners, 2012). Phenomenology concerned itself with detailed examinations of individual experiences in order to reduce such experiences to essences or universal meanings or structures of human experience (Findlay, 2009).

Introduction to phenomenology. Phenomenology is associated with the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, and his student Martin Heidegger. Husserl believed phenomenology should endeavor to be descriptive rather than analytical, and that a researcher seeking to uncover the experience of perception, should suspend preconceived ideas or opinions through a process termed as bracketing (Reiners, 2012; Findlay, 2009). Conversely, Heidegger argued for phenomenology as interpretive rather than descriptive, and for the philosophical focus to shift from a study of experience to a study of being. In doing so, Heidegger expanded the philosophy of interpretation, also known as hermeneutics, which is a central feature of the IPA approach. Heidegger rejected notions of bracketing so important to the descriptive phenomenology of Husserl, as it is understood as not possible to remove researcher beliefs and experiences from the process of interpretation (Dowling, 2007; Reiners, 2012). Instead, Heidegger advocated for reflexivity, or awareness of subjectivity, on the part of the phenomenological researcher. The methodology of IPA retains Heidegger's intellectual emphasis on hermeneutics in phenomenological research to access and make sense of participant's personal worlds and perceptions (Smith et al., 2009). Heidegger's philosophy of interpretation and the study of being

significantly influenced the trajectory of phenomenological inquiry, and the development of IPA methodology in the late 20th century (Dowling, 2007; Shinebourne, 2011).

Rise of IPA methodology. In 1996, theorist Jonathan Smith proposed the qualitative methodology of IPA, and argued for its' inclusion within the philosophical tradition of phenomenology. IPA aims to “explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world” (Smith et al, p. 54). IPA was specifically constructed to create more experiential and qualitative research within the discipline of psychology and health science so as to better understand individual perceptions of experiences such as disease or grief. Smith holds that IPA is phenomenological as it is concerned with personal perception, as opposed to objective statements of experience. Furthermore, IPA maintains that researchers must take a dynamic role in the process of constructing meaning within a study (Smith et al., 2009; Brocki & Wearden, 2006)). In IPA, Smith extends Heidegger’s philosophy of being and interpretation, by employing a double hermeneutic or a two-stage interpretive process, in which the participants and researcher are engaging in a sense-making process (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenological approaches within psychology often focused upon nomothetic inquiry, which prioritized groups or large populations to generate meaning. Conversely, IPA seeks to perform idiographic inquiry, which focuses on what is particular and significant to individuals, and for which research questions will be of relevance (Smith et al., 2009). Ideography, along with a focus on understand individual sense making processes, is distinctive feature of IPA and sharply distinguishes it from the Husserl’s phenomenological focus upon description, and reduction to uncover universal human experience (Shinebourne, 2011).

Critics of IPA. Debate exists within the phenomenological community regarding both the philosophical assumptions and methodological approaches of IPA. Current researchers such

as Giorgi align with Husserl in seeing the purpose of phenomenological inquiry to be a clarification of the nature of a given experience. Giorgi and other descriptive phenomenologists maintain a focus on the scientific norming of experience, and seek to prioritize a phenomenon that resonates on a group, rather than individual level (Findlay, 2009). IPA Researchers such as Smith, along with Osborn and Eatough, again emphasize the ideographic element of inquiry, and incorporate many narrative elements within the data collection and analysis process. Researchers such as Holling advocate for a phenomenological inquiry process to occupy a middle ground between Giorgi and Smith, and for the researcher to dynamically move between abstraction and experience to generate meaning (Findlay, 2009). This stance held by Holling builds upon the phenomenological trajectory of the Dutch School, or Utrecht, which argued for a combination of both interpretation and description within phenomenological data analysis (Dowling, 2007; Reiners, 2012).

Participants

Participants in this study were four to six girls enrolled in Grade 9 and Grade 10 at an international high school in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The girls were generally be between the ages of fourteen and fifteen years old. As Smith et al., (2009) highlight a sample of three to six allows for significant engagement at the individual level, and also provides the novice researcher opportunity to note points of divergence and convergence within the data (p.57). As this was a purposeful sample, girls were recruited on the basis of interest in the study, as well as specific criteria such as the genre of books read, time spent reading, and comfort level discussing books with others. Participants were not be students currently taught by the researcher, but in some cases were former students, or students who have worked with the researcher on extracurricular activities such as clubs. Such a connection encouraged rapport between the

participant and the researcher to allow for a rich collection of interview data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Recruitment and Access

The study drew upon a small and purposeful sample of students to allow for in depth description and analysis of the interview data to occur. Students enrolled in an optional, 40-minute enrichment class block focused on independent reading of young adult fiction. This block met twice a week for two weeks, and was open to any student in the high school with no restrictions as to gender or grade level. This was advertised through the high school weekly bulletin, through colleagues within the high school English department, as well as through the enrichment block online enrollment system, to which students have access. During this class block students had an opportunity to both read and discuss current books they are independently reading with each other. Students completed a reading survey (Appendix A) at the end of each session, which collected data on their reading habits, reading preferences, and experiences of reading fiction and making personal connections. Students who identified as consistent independent, girl readers of young adult fiction, who reported to make personal connections, and identify moral dilemmas in what they read, were given the option to participate in the interview process of the study.

After two weeks passed, the researcher conducted interviews with five girl participants who attended each of the enrichment blocks. The researcher obtained signed consent from the participants (Appendix B) and their parents (Appendix C) parents prior to beginning the interviews, as well as the school superintendent and the board of trustees. Interviews were conducted at a mutually convenient time. Communication with participants took place in-person and through school email. Appointments for interviews were organized and confirmed through

Google calendar. Interviews were conducted in the neutral site of the high school library where there are glass encased meeting rooms. This allowed for the interviews to be visible to other students and faculty, but not audible. The researcher also invited another instructor to be present in the room during the interview sessions to ensure the protection of the study participants. Confidentiality was ensured and pseudonyms were used for each participant. Interviews were approximately 40 minutes in length, and occurred three times with each interview participant. Interviews were audio recorded, and the researcher took notes during the interview process. Recordings were transcribed immediately for the purposes of accuracy, and reviewed prior to the next scheduled interview session (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). At the conclusion of the study, participants were given a \$20 gift card to a local bookstore as a token of thanks for their time.

Protection of Human Subjects

The researcher completed and gained approval for this study through the Internal Review Board (IRB) process at Northeastern University. Additionally, the researcher gained written consent from the board of trustees, superintendent and high school principal at the study location. Furthermore, the researcher wrote a letter detailing the study to the families of each of the participants, held an informational meetings, and obtained written signed consent. This is of particular importance as the participants of this study are a designated vulnerable population under the age of 18. To further the protection of the participants, the researchers had no evaluative role in participants' schooling, and ensure there was no conflict of interest. The purpose of the study was to generate greater knowledge and visibility of the experiences and sense-making process of adolescent girls living internationally. As this was a seldom-studied population, knowledge generated through this study allowed for a greater focus on the specific learning needs of these girls and girls around the globe.

Data collection

IPA focuses inquiry on individual perceptions of a lived experiences (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Thus researchers Smith et al (2009) assert such focused inquiry into participant sense making “requires a flexible data collection instrument” (p. 57). To this end, IPA data collection is typically characterized by semi-structured interviews, and a small, homogenous, and purposeful sample of participants. This intentional choice in participant selection was in keeping with an idiographic underpinnings of IPA methodology. According to Smith et al. (2009), this sampling allows for the detail necessary in particular situations to emerge through the interview process, and for questions to have greater significance to participants. In other words, IPA data collection favors “depth over breadth” in order to generate a rich and realistic interpretative account (Smith et al., 2009, p. 56) Furthermore, the format of semi-structured interviews allow for a dynamic dialogue to take place between the researcher and the participant. In a semi-structured interview, the set of questions, or interview schedule prepared by the researcher is intended to guide the conversation, rather than drive it. Structured interviews do not allow for the same flexibility on the part of the researcher to modify questions, or to ask follow up or probing questions when a point of interest arises. The semi-structured also interview allows for rapport to develop more easily, and the flexibility permitted is often cited as producing richer data for analysis.

The semi-structured one on one interviews were conducted in three phases according to Seidman’s (2005) model of in-depth phenomenological interviewing. This data collection method allowed for the researcher to explore complex experiences of participants and to understand with detail the meaning these held for them. The purpose of conducting a semi-structured interview within three phases allowed for rapport to develop, and for a gradual

immersion into the life and social world of the participants (Smith et al., 2009; Seidman, 2005). Lastly, the phases of interviews also allowed for interview data to be reviewed prior to conducting further conversation, which again, grants more detailed and specific follow up questions, and richer data to emerge. Interviews were audio recorded, and transcribed for analysis.

Seidman (2005) describes interview one as maintaining a focus on the participant reconstructing and narrating past experiences. For this study, interview one focused on the participant's history with reading, as well as gaining an understanding of their own perceptions of themselves as readers. According to Seidman (2005), interview two focuses on a detailed reconstruction of particular experiences, and interview three is wholly concerned with reflection and sense making on the part of the participant in relation to this experience. In keeping with this approach, interview two explored deeper into the meaning the participant has ascribed to their most memorable reading experiences. Interview three asked participants to reflect upon their reading experiences, and draw conclusions as to what meaning this experience has to them personally. Each interview began with an open-ended question with additional prompts as needed to help elicit important perceptions of independent reading experience. Interview questions are summarized in Appendix D.

Prior to conducting interviews, the researcher conducted a pilot interview with a participant of approximately the same age as the participants, but not enrolled at the same institution. The purpose of the pilot interview was to refine the interview questions, look for any confusing questions, and to more accurately gauge the time and pacing of each session. The researcher obtained consent from the pilot participant's family, and conducted the interview at a mutually agreeable time, with another adult present, and in a public space. Throughout the

interview process the researcher also maintained a research journal to assist with data analysis as access to immediate perceptions, observations and sense making of the researcher, which may have been lost over time if not captured immediately. The researcher journal was important to triangulate interview data, and provide greater accuracy and validity to data analysis and findings.

Data Storage

This study utilized a data management system to ensure reliability, and to protect against any damage, loss or theft. All interviews were recorded digitally using the QuickTime audio recording software designed for a Mac Book Air laptop computer operating system. Audio recordings were converted to MP3 files and labeled according to the date, the interview number, and participant's pseudonym. These digital audio files were transcribed using a transcription service promptly after recording to ensure reliability. The text files of each transcript were labeled in the same sequence as the audio files. Handwritten notes by the researcher were maintained in a researcher journal. These notes were typed up for clarity, reflection, and storage purposes at the conclusion of each interview session. Audio and text files will be indexed within appropriately labeled digital folders for quick reference. These were stored on two external storage hard drives. Both were placed in the researcher's office in a locked cabinet. All data will be kept for the requisite five years, and deleted at the appropriate date.

Data Analysis

According to Smith et al (2009), IPA inquiry seeks to learn about the psychological world of the participant (p.66). In addition to participant sense making of experience, the researchers own sense-making process is also in a process of interpretation. Due to this double hermeneutic at work in IPA inquiry, all findings arrived at through analysis are subjective and

tentative (Sultana, 2014). Yet, IPA analysis is also marked by sequential, structured and rigorous process of analysis, which allow for findings to be verified and connected to other studies.

Smith et al (2009) describe a five-phase sequence for data analysis within the IPA methodology. Each of these phases allow for the researcher to engage in a deep and interpretive relationship with the interview transcript. Smith et al (2009) further highlight that these phases are not intended as prescriptive and that each study and researcher used a personalized approach to analysis to generate significant findings. In this study, data analysis followed the structure set forth by Smith et al (2009), while integrating Seidman's (2005) assumptions for the researcher to trust oneself as a reader, and to immerse fully into the text. Smith et al (2009) structure begins with looking for themes in the first interview case, and is characterized by multiple readings of the transcript, extensive annotation and memoing on the part of the researcher using MaxQDA coding software.

The second phase of analysis focused on generating coding themes that emerge from the detailed annotation and memoing of the transcript. These coding themes captured the essential qualities expressed in sections of the transcript, and were a mix of in-vivo, processes, and pattern coding themes. In phase three of analysis, these emergent coding themes were clustered together and verified against the words and phrases present in the transcript through the construction of tables. As Smith et al (2009) state this phase of analysis in IPA is highly "iterative" which requires the researcher to remain as a reader very close to the text (p. 66). Lastly, a narrative write up of the analysis was generated.

Presentation of Findings

According to Creswell (2013), in the final phase of the research spiral a visual representation of what was found must be created. Such visualizations of data have always been

a key component of qualitative fieldwork investigation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014). Additionally, being able to visually represent data generated through collection and analysis demonstrates a thorough understanding of the phenomena under investigation by the researcher. Through the creation of both tables and concept maps the researcher better understands the relationships between in presence of in vivo codes, process codes, and pattern codes in the data to generate greater conceptual understanding of the participants experience.

Trustworthiness

My position as an English teacher at the international school in this study, as well as any pre-existing relationships with participants, generates bias of which was important to remain aware of throughout the process. Being aware of my role, as a teacher researcher is one I needed to continue to interrogate and reflect upon in my inquiry process. To increase the validity of my study, I transcribed interview data promptly to ensure accuracy, and reflected at the conclusion of each interview session in my researcher journal. By reflecting and taking notes throughout the interview process, I hoped to generate a rich and detailed account through the collection of data. Rubin & Rubin (2012), suggest member checking, or sharing transcripts with interview participants, to allow for additions or corrections. This generates greater accuracy and credibility in the inquiry process. Reviewing transcripts prior to conducting follow up interviews also demonstrates thoroughness in the research process, and an openness to what may have been missed. In the data analysis phase, I worked to explore many different thematic variations, and work to see the data from a variety of perspectives to generate rich, thick description and meaning. Throughout this study I actively sought the guidance and feedback of my advisor and colleagues, as I worked to generate knowledge that positively impacted the lives of students.

Summary

The purpose of this IPA study was to generate greater understanding into the reading and moral lives of adolescent girls living internationally. This study concerned itself with the perspectives and meaning participants ascribe to their reading experience. The researcher sought to develop collaborative and non-exploitative relationships with participants in order to achieve the aims of this study. The researcher also maintained a position of reflectivity throughout this study, in which she is aware of how her own culture, professional experiences, and personal history, shape the interpretation of data (Creswell, 2013). Participants engaged with the researcher in three phases of interviews to describe their history as YAL readers, current reading habits, as well as describing personal outcomes related to reading such as moral development, and greater self-understanding. This study worked to ensure the protection of participants and obtain consent by working closely with a faculty advisor, the IRB of Northeastern University, as well as the administrative leadership at the research site.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss how adolescent female readers make sense of their reading experiences. To this end, a constructivist-interpretive paradigm and a qualitative inquiry approach was selected as best suited for the study (Ponterotto, 2005). A constructivist-interpretive paradigm validates the existence of multiple realities, as reality is constructed by the individual and not through the application of universal truths. Individuals make sense of their own lived experience to define reality subjectively instead of objectively.

An additional paradigm that informs this study is a critical-feminist approach first described by Lather (1991). A feminist research paradigm shapes this study as the researcher seeks to establish collaborative and non-exploitive relationships with participants (Creswell, 2013). The aim of this study is to understand the lived experiences and meaning making processes of adolescent girl readers, which reflects the interpretive and constructivist underpinnings of qualitative inquiry. Data for this study was collected through in depth interviews conducted at the school site, and with attention to reflexivity, or the role of the researcher in the inquiry process.

Research questions. The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the perceptions and experiences of adolescent girls while reading a novel in an international school setting. Therefore, the overall research question guiding this inquiry is: How do adolescent girls make sense of the experience of reading a novel independently? The sub questions to be investigated are: 1) How do the independent reading experiences of adolescent girls with young adult fiction

contribute to perceptions of moral identity? and 2) What perceptions do adolescent girls hold regarding identity development as an outcome of independent reading?

Data Collection Procedures

Site. This study was conducted at an independent, co-educational, K-12 American international school located in Dubai, UAE. The researcher is currently employed in the High School division as an English Language Arts teacher. Approximately 50 percent of students are US or Canadian passport holders, while the remaining 50 percent hold passports from over 45 nations. The majority of non-US or Canadian passport holders are from nations such as Egypt, Lebanon, India, Pakistan, Iran, and the UK. The curriculum follows the Common Core Standards adopted by many states in the US, and all instruction is in English.

Recruitment of participants. A purposeful sampling method was used for this study to recruit five girls in Grade 9 and Grade 10 on the basis of interest in the study, as well as specific criteria such as interest in reading independently, time spent reading, and comfort level discussing books with others. The study drew upon a small and purposeful sample of students to allow for in depth description and analysis of the interview data to occur. Participants were not students currently taught by the researcher, but in some cases were former students.

Participants were first identified through their enrollment in an optional, 40-minute enrichment class block focused on independent reading. The enrichment block met once a week for two weeks, and was open to any student in the high school with no restrictions as to gender or grade level. The enrichment block was advertised through the high school weekly bulletin, through colleagues within the high school English department, as well as through the enrichment block online enrollment system, to which all students have access. Participants completed a reading survey at the end of each session, which collected information on their reading habits,

reading preferences, and experiences of reading fiction and making personal connections.

Participants who identified as consistent independent, girl readers of young adult fiction, who reported making personal connections, and identify moral dilemmas in what they read, were then given the option, with their parental consent, to participate in the interview process of the study.

Interview protocol. Prior to beginning interviews, the researcher obtained signed consent from the participants (Appendix B) and their parents (Appendix C). Consent was also obtained from the school site superintendent, the divisional principal, and the board of trustees. Additionally, in the weeks prior to beginning participant interviews the researcher conducted a pilot interview. The pilot interview was with an adolescent child of a colleague enrolled at another local school. Experience and feedback from the pilot interview helped to refine interview questions, and to also better understand the pacing of 30 to 40-minute interview with an adolescent participant. Through this process greater clarity was given to the wording of interview questions, the primary inquiry focus of each of the three interviews, and setting the maximum interview time at 30-minutes. Lastly, prior to data collection, the researcher held an informational meeting for families and participants that outlined the purpose, scope, and logistics of participation in the study. The informational meeting was held after school on the school campus. Any families unable to meet at this time were able to arrange one-on-one meetings with the researcher to further understand the study prior to giving signed consent. Following parental consent, the researcher contacted student participants to discuss the study in greater detail, answer any questions, and gain consent.

Interviews with participants were conducted at a mutually convenient time, and this was established in through both in-person and email communication. Interviews took place on campus in the neutral site of the high school library where there were glass encased study rooms.

These rooms allowed for interviews to be visible to other students and faculty, but not audible. Another adult instructor was present during the interview sessions to ensure the protection of the study participants. Interviews ranged from 25 to 40 minutes in length, and occurred once a week for three weeks. Interviews were audio recorded, and the researcher took notes during the interview process. Recordings were uploaded to Rev.com, an online transcription service, and reviewed prior to the next scheduled interview session (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). At the conclusion of the interview cycle, participants were given a \$20 gift card to a local bookstore as a token of thanks for their participation.

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were completed in three phases according to Seidman's (2005) model of in-depth phenomenological interviewing. The initial interview followed the interview script closely while asking a limited number of follow up questions. However, upon reflection and review of the interview transcript, the researcher relied less on the interview script in the following two interviews. While posing the same overarching question to each participant the majority of the questions comprised of follow up questions to generate a richer and more complex descriptions of experience. Second and third interviews also began with follow up questions building upon earlier interviews. Rapport between the researcher and the participants developed naturally over the course of the interview process. Participants were relaxed, displayed a positive attitude, and would often lose track of time when engaged in the interview process. As the interviews progressed, participants were more comfortable elaborating on their responses, illustrating with more specific examples, or requesting that the researcher clarify or rephrase interview questions. On more than one occasion participants shared thinking about interview questions after the interview session had concluded.

Participant confidentiality. Confidentiality was ensured to all families and participants through study consent forms. To further confidentiality participants chose their own pseudonyms that were used to label and organize all audio and transcript files for the study. The researcher referred to all participants by their pseudonyms when scheduling interviews within their personal calendar, and when writing reflexive and analytical memos in the data analysis phase. The transcription service used by the researcher ensured confidentiality through a signed agreement. The adult observer for the interview sessions also signed a form to ensure confidentiality of participant interviews. All memos, audio and transcript files maintained during the study were stored on two separate digital devices using password protection. All hard copy documentation was kept in a locked cabinet off the school site. Both digital and hardcopy documentation produced by this study will be destroyed in five years.

Demographics. All study participants were girls between the ages of 14 to 16 currently enrolled in an English 9 or English 10 course at an American international school in Dubai. Three of the five participants are bilingual Arabic and English speakers. One of the participants has lived in Dubai her entire life and attended the school since Kindergarten, while two of the participants enrolled only last year. The remaining two participants enrolled during their middle school years, approximately three years ago. All participants have experience with an in-school independent reading program currently in place for Grade 9 English students. Each of the girls live with their parents and siblings, and are involved in a wide range of activities on campus including sports, music, student organizations, and community service.

Description of Participants

Rose. Rose is a student in Grade 10. She is bilingual in Arabic and English, and her family is originally from Syria, although she had never lived in the country. Rose describes

herself as reserved and shy, but also as having a “very outgoing and funny side” when she is with her close friends. She loves sports, and is currently on the high school soccer team, but dislikes it when people become too competitive. Rose enjoys school and most subjects especially when the teacher can make it interesting and fun for students. As a reader, Rose is drawn to books where the characters are well developed and have characteristics that she likes or wishes she had. Rose related strongly to the character of Scout in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as Scout was energetic, playful and curious. This is how Rose saw herself as a young girl. However due to her family's recent move to Dubai and “school stress”, she changed, and now “calmed down a bit.” Female characters are important to Rose in books that she reads. She likes to see “female empowerment” in books and says that it draws her into a book more. Rose especially liked this aspect of the book *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini. She sees the relationship in the story between the characters of Laila and Mariam as “supportive” and that they “helped each other stand up for themselves.” Rose feels like she is reading less in Grade 10 than in Grade 9, as her current English class does not have an independent reading program. She also feels like she has changed as a reader since starting high school. Rose says she used to read books in her mind that were “childish”, and now she cares more about books that discuss “real issues” like those found in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

Claudia. Claudia is also in Grade 10. She is very close with her family especially her older brother. Claudia’s mother is originally from Mexico and her father is from the US. She considers the Midwest of the US her home although she has never lived there because this is where her family visits each summer. She loves to read and also loves art and sketching. Claudia enjoys school and says this is because she “really likes learning new things.” Like Rose, Claudia also really likes sports. She is currently one of two girls on the high school wrestling team, and

she was an active gymnast until last year. Claudia describes herself as an “introvert”, and someone who likes to “keep to herself mostly.” She thinks her friends would describe her as someone “helpful, shy, quiet, probably someone who could help with homework, too.” As a reader, Claudia says that she’s usually “that one student who enjoys the books that are required in class.” She prefers historical fiction, fantasy or sci-fi books, and tends to select her books by author. Claudia tends to avoid young adult fiction because she finds the characters to seem “plastic” and the romantic relationships all seem very “unrealistic”. She’s still reading independently this year, but reports preferring the program last year that “required” her to do something she already really enjoys.

Anna. Anna is in Grade 9 and has lived in Dubai her entire life. She considers Dubai her home, but she also feels a strong connection to the Northeast of the US where she spends summers with her relatives. She is the youngest in her family and at the moment she feels closest to her friends at school. Anna plays soccer for the school team and her favorite subject is English. She “loves to read” and discussed having a “really good year with reading” in English 9. She’s finding lots of books and enjoys having time in her English class to read. Anna describes herself as “a social person” but she also someone who needs to “have her alone time.” Transitioning to high school from middle school was a challenge for Anna as she saw her friends less, and she described feeling “lonely” at times. She likes reading in her room where it is quiet as her house is loud and busy all the time, and makes it hard for her to concentrate. As a reader, Anna likes reading because she feels it is creative, and she can visualize the entire story in her mind. She also likes to “be in the story” with the characters. She also likes to think about what she would do in similar situations that she finds the characters in within the book. Anna finds it important to connect personally with a book and like the characters. She reads realistic fiction

especially books that talk about romantic relationships to help her understand the real world and the different struggles she thinks people her age go through. She prefers books where the main character is a girl and the events are highly relatable.

Alex. Alex is in Grade 10 and she is a bilingual speaker of Arabic and English. Her family is originally from Morocco, but she considers Dubai her home, as it's the place she "remembers best." Alex sees herself as a creative person. She loves to play piano and this year started to write her own pieces of music. She likes school, and sees her older sister in university as her "role model" because of how hard she works and how much she has already achieved academically. Alex describes her mom as her "best friend", and the best cook in the world. She says that her dad often helps her with her homework, that she loves his sense of humor, and that people tell her that she "looks like him." Alex read her first book in English when she was nine years old, and began reading a lot independently when she was in middle school. Her favorite genres of books are mysteries, thrillers, and "fast-paced" action oriented books. Alex's favorite author is Sophie Mackenzie and one of her favorite books of all time is *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. Alex says that if a book is good enough it can "drown out any noise" happening around her. She likes to read for "fun" more than to analyze, but finds that it's easier to analyze when the story or characters are "relatable." Alex feels like she's reading less this year because of her busy academic schedule, and not having time to read independently in her current English class.

Bridget. Bridget is in Grade 10 and describes herself as a passionate person who likes to help others. She's highly involved in activities on and off campus like swimming, service clubs, cheerleading, and Girl Scouts. She prefers writing to reading as it helps her express herself better than in person. Bridget also shared that her dad is Muslim and her mom is Christian, but she feels

she's never really had a religion. She shared that she's "OK with not knowing" because she "likes the mystery." Bridget feels that when you "throw yourself at one opinion" you close yourself off from "something else." Although she enjoys school now, when she was in elementary school she didn't like it and "wasn't a good student". Then school started to challenge her, and she felt like she learned how to challenge herself. What makes classes enjoyable for her now depends on friends that are in a class, and "if the teacher can make the it interesting and fun." Bridget describes herself as an "open minded "reader. Bridget discussed a reading blog that she created for her Grade 9 English class as something that pushed her to read different genres. This challenged her and opened her up to lots of new types of writing. Now she feels like she reads more broadly and doesn't have a strong genre preference. Bridget talked about how she can read for very long stretches of time and "finish a book in a day" when she wants to. She also mentioned that a book might resonate differently with her depending on "the way you read it". For example, when she is reading quickly, sometimes she may not pick up on "symbols and bigger stuff", but that she always feels "a part of the whole scene" when she is reading.

Data Analysis

Interviews were digitally audio recorded by the researcher. Following each interview the researcher would review hand-written notes and write a reflective memo on the interview process and ideas for strategies to use in the next round. After completing the interview, the researcher listened back through the recording without transcribing, but adding detail to handwritten notes on concepts, patterns and key quotes. After this first listening, the audio file was uploaded to the transcription service Rev.com. After the transcript was complete, the researcher listened back through the recording with the accompanying transcript to check for

accuracy. Additional memos were written at this stage which summarized the content of the interview, highlighted key quotes, noted emergent patterns and themes, and made note of follow up questions.

Overall an inductive coding method was used throughout the data analysis process. The researcher employed MaxQDA software to analyze the transcript in three coding cycles. These multiple readings of the transcript and step-by-step approach to coding allowed for multiple interpretations of the text to emerge, and for researcher bias to be mitigated (Creswell, 2013). In the first round, parent codes such as “Reading habits”, “Reading experience” and “Decision making process” were identified. Within the second cycle, sub-codes were generated from these parent codes such as “finding books”, “visualizing”, and “questioning”. In the third round, the researcher employed using In Vivo coding, which allows for the participants exact words to be “prioritized and honored” (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014). Numbering indicated the frequency of repeated phrases or words, and both positive and negative responses were tracked in relation to each question (e.g. being open +3). In Vivo coding in the third round was also employed to provide a credible grounding for the interpretive analysis to follow. Codes were revised throughout the analysis process for greater precision and coherence when recognizing patterns. Inductive and In Vivo codes were then clustered into three overarching themes. After identifying all codes within thematic clusters, the researcher looked for relationships and interactions within the data.

Overarching themes. In review of the interviews demonstrating the individual sense making of adolescent girl reader, three central themes emerged: 1) reading as a lived and remembered experience, 2) reading as deep learning, and 3) reading as recognizing moral complexity. The theme of reading as a lived and remembered experience contained a total of 196

parent and sub-codes. These sub codes included “identifying with characters”, “visualizing”, “being in the story”, “personal connection”, “enjoyment”, and “prompting questions”. The next theme of reading as a practice in moral decision-making contained 146 parent and sub codes. Within this theme sub-codes such as “recognizing complexity”, “influence of others”, “importance of relationships”, “perspective taking”, and “reasoning with evidence” had the highest frequency. Lastly, the theme of reading as deep learning contained the sub codes of “learning about social issues”, “learning about culture”, “learning about the self”, and “learning about others”. There were a total of 74 sub codes clustered within this theme.

Discussion of Themes and Subthemes.

Reading as a lived and remembered experience. Participants all described a highly engaged and immersive reading experience. Immersion in the story world was often conveyed as shared by Claudia, “when you really get into a book, everything else just leaves.” Alex also shared that even when it is loud in her house, “a good book can drown everything out.” Anna described the importance of visualization in an immersive reading experience.

When it comes to reading I can picture everything in my mind. And the characters, I can really visualize them so it gives me sometimes, just some time to be by myself, and be in the story...be in the characters shoes.

Anna went on to describe how she feels when engaged in an immersive, or “distracting” reading experience, “I feel like you get so distracted and you're so comfortable that you just feel safe.”

Bridget also shared that her reading experiences were immersive and often made her lose track of time or even where she was reading.

I read it all in one day and I was focused on the book for the entire day. We were on vacation and my parents were like come out to the beach, but I really got into the world

and felt like I was just part of the whole scene.

This immersion in the story world provided a foundation for other perceptions and experiences of reading to surface for participants. This included feeling strong emotions while reading, remembering events and characters as “real”, and developing relationships with characters that mirror those of friends.

The role of emotion. Reacting emotionally to what was read was seen in each of the participants reading experiences. These emotions ranged from happiness to frustration and even sadness. Relating and engaging emotionally with the story world allowed for participants to visualize situations more clearly, empathize with characters, and supported their analysis of larger themes or dilemmas.

For Anna emotion played the most significant role in her reading experience. In addition to sharing that reading made her feel safe and comfortable, she also described the absence of what she describes as “thinking” when she reads.

I think about the character all the time. It's her life and I feel like I'm in it. When I read, I really don't think much about the author, which probably is my thing. I'm just so into the story and the characters, I don't even think.

When describing the characters of Augustus and Hazel from John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, Anna shared how she “felt bad for Hazel” when she learned that Augustus was far more sick than Hazel first believed. Anna also described being “angry” at Augustus for keeping such a big secret from his girlfriend. Anna explained that the book was one of her favorite reads ever because, “I just feel like I connected with them.” Anna also described feeling upset when characters made choices she disagreed with.

In those situations, I feel like I have no control when I read. It's very ... I don't want to say

annoying, but it's very irritating because you feel like you could have done the right thing and helped yourself more.

In all of Anna's conversations the line between her and the characters is fluid and she shares how connecting with characters is a large part of what makes a book interesting and enjoyable for her. In describing a recent read, Anna shared that her reading experience was like talking with another person.

I feel like someone is telling me their life. In the book I'm reading now, I just feel like about the Paris story, she told me how it happened. I was listening to a friend telling me how her trip in Paris went. That's why I really enjoyed it... Yeah, that's why people read. It's like there's someone there.

Bridget's experience builds upon Anna's emotional experience of friendship while reading. In Bridget's view reading is valuable to her based upon both the kind of reflective thinking and emotional experiences it allows her to engage with. Like a close friend, reading provides Bridget a kind of conversation that clarifies her current reality and shows her possibilities that may lie ahead.

For me reading...I think it's just the thinking that it makes me do. If it's not necessarily about a big overarching question, but it gets me thinking about my life. Like if I'm in a certain situation, what would I do in that situation. I think it helps me deal, almost. It's like having a friend. They can't tell you what to do, but they can help you form the idea by helping you figure out what you're most interested in. They help you find the answer. This emotional kind of relationship with reading is also reflected in other participants' experiences. Claudia shared that although she does not typically cry or become emotional at the end of books, *Salt to the Sea* by Ruta Sepetys was an exception, "I just fell in love with the

characters, and I was so sad.” Claudia shared that the realistic portrayal of friendship is what helped her connect emotionally to the story. Alex also discussed developing feelings of empathy and engaging emotionally while reading.

I empathized with the main character Hetty and her life was so difficult and how I realized how lucky I am compared to her. But she still found happiness in her life which was a good thing for me.

Role of memory. Due to the degree of immersion and emotional engagement in the story world, it is not entirely surprising that the participants share remembering events and characters from fiction as if they took place in real life. Rose was the first to share how the experience of reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* was one that she remembers and thought of often, “I loved *To Kill a Mockingbird* and after I read it I just kept on thinking about it...Just the characters and the issues.” Bridget also shared that when making decisions or encountering situations in life she often thinks back on moments from books.

In a lot of the books I read, the situations that the characters are put in aren't that similar to my life. I don't think it's as clear as my own memories, but it still feels like one, if that makes sense.

Bridget shared the following when asked to elaborate further on how she understands the difference between her memories of life and those she has read about.

I feel like reading a book is very similar to real life because you experience her life with her. I feel like it's almost the same as hearing a real-life example of something that's actually happened to someone. I just remember like, "Oh, I feel like this has happened before" even though it hasn't happened to me.

Claudia also shared her desire to remember her fictional characters and worlds, and how she

becomes upset when she is not able to recall them accurately.

I try to remember the characters, but I will forget them very often which is sad. My memory does not have the capacity to remember each and every book I've read, while I wish it did.

In each of the participant comments, the desire and experience of memory in reading demonstrates high levels of emotional engagement. This is built upon the foundation of an immersive aesthetic, or lived reading experience.

Reading as deep learning. Each of the girls interviewed discussed the element of learning throughout their experience of reading. This theme uses the term “deep” learning, as described by Ritchhart (2015). Deep learning is characterized by the building of evolving explanations and interpretations, identifying complex situations, making connections across different academic disciplines and areas of prior knowledge (Ritchhart, 2015). Each of the girls articulated that reading fiction allowed them to engage in deep learning about themselves, about others, and about social issues. The theme of reading to learn came through very strongly in each of the interviews with Claudia. When asked why she enjoys reading so much Claudia replied, “I love to read so I can learn.” In Alex’s interview she share that reading, “makes you realize things that you might've looked over before and makes you start to actually pay attention to those things.” Both of the participants comment highlight perception of learning is a central component of reading experience.

Learning about the self. Each participant spoke to the experience personal reflection and personal discovery prompted through engaged reading. Learning about the self was often prompted by identifying with the experiences of characters, or noticing problems or questions posed by a story. Alex shared, “I think these dilemmas you see in books make you realize that

you could be a better person.” Claudia also shared the importance of complex and developed characters to help her think about her, “With developed characters you can find characteristics of the character within yourself.” Reading also allowed for participants to engage with complicated topics or a risky personal topic from the secure position of a reader as is shown in Bridget and Claudia’s experience in particular.

Bridget shared that by reading about characters she came to understand different aspects of herself that were more elusive to her in real life.

It also kind of helps you understand yourself because if there's something that, I don't know, you've been dealing with where you haven't really taken it head on. Maybe one of the characters of the supporting characters is going through something similar, and something happens and they have an amazing moment and they realize everything, and then you go through that with them, and that's, I think, really powerful. It gives you some courage.

Bridget went on in another interview to elaborate on how reading often prompts her to reflect more on what she believes about “big topics” or questions.

I'm not really sure how it happens, but I think you just read something and maybe the characters will be having a conversation about a big topic that you haven't necessarily thought about before, and that just makes you question like, whoa, what would I do about this? It kind of encourages you to step back and think about yourself.

Bridget elaborated on how certain books prompted specific questions about her developing identity. When reading Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*, Bridget identified with the character of Santiago who is on a personal quest to find his purpose in life.

I kind of started thinking about what my strengths are, and what my weaknesses are.

Then I started thinking maybe I have a personal legend, but I'm just not really sure what it is yet. But then the other side came in, and I was like, it's just what you put yourself out to do.

When she started reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Bridget stated the questions and reflections on her did not go away, but again, shifted in focus.

During that time, during the *To Kill A Mockingbird* time, I was more about trying to figure out if there was something specific that I was meant to do.

In each of these examples, Bridget demonstrated how the experience of reading prompted her to think about herself and her identity to more thorough and complex ways.

Rose shared that when reading, if she identifies strongly with a character, it will often make her think of personal characteristics she wishes, or does not wish to possess. This was a particularly strong experience when she was reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* and identified with the character of Scout Finch.

When I read a good character I think this is what I want to be and this is what I aspire to be. It can also be like, no, I don't want to be like that.

Rose elaborated on how she comes to understand herself more by relating to a character.

I feel like since I read realistic fiction I can relate a lot with the characters. I think that once I read about a character that I like and that have qualities that I respect, then I'd be like I want to be more like that...I want a lot to be like Scout because she was so brave and she was able to stand up to what she believed in and she wasn't scared of it. I think that she also questioned a lot of societies rules especially about discriminating and not talking to people of color. And I think that that's such a strong characteristic to have to go against what a lot of people say is true. And just go with what you think is right.

Rose also reflected on how her personality has changed over time by comparing herself to the

character of Scout.

I felt like I was a lot like her when I was younger. I used to love talking and I was always so energetic and everything, but now since school and since I moved and since all the workload, it's just calmed down a bit.

Rose also shared how she particularly enjoys reading stories with a strong female protagonist as this can support her and other girls in developing their own identities.

I think that they can gain the confidence and I think a lot of females can, if it's a positive female protagonist, I think that they can aspire to be like her and they can take steps in order to be more like her. I think they may find her as an idol or someone that they can respect. They'd want to be more like her.

Later, Rose went on to describe how the character of Scout filled this role for her as a reader.

I just loved how like a little girl, so small who doesn't really know a lot about the world yet did something so big. She changed a lot of people's opinions. She went against society's rules and I guess she matured. She seemed so mature just by doing that. I guess someone her age, especially at that time, they would do whatever her parents or her neighbors said, but she didn't.

In discussing decisions of characters *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green, Rose shared how reading can also help you understand how to make better choices in life. By reflecting on the choices of the characters, Rose appeared to demonstrate a strong personal value of honesty and truthfulness in relationships.

I think that you can personally learn a lot from the characters mistakes. Just like, for example, not telling someone something can actually hurt someone even more. I think you can learn a lot just from one book on how to treat others and how to be honest with

yourself.

Anna's experience closely resembled that of Rose. When Anna reads about a character's personal choices she found that it, "really gave me a good understanding of what I wouldn't have done anyway, and why I might not."

Claudia's learning about herself surfaced in discussing her experience of reading Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Reading the book, which centers on the lives of two women living under both an abusive husband and the repressive regime of the Taliban in Afghanistan, pushed Claudia to reflect on her personal privilege and her place in society.

Like with that book... their life was drastically different from mine, and it helped me understand, besides travel and all these things which have also helped me understand, that my life is not normal. I am extremely privileged, and I probably do not deserve my privilege more than anybody else.

Reading to learn about others. Reading also allowed participants the experience of learning about others. Claudia shared, "I think it gets me thinking beyond just my life and I like thinking about others and what might be happening to other people." Each participant expressed learning about others differently. However, the commonality of experience, of getting beyond your own life expressed through Claudia's comment, can be seen in each.

Alex shared her thinking on how people can be limited by their own experiences. To Alex, fiction allows for her to understand people who have different experiences from her. She sees reading as a way to build greater connections between her and others.

In fiction and novels we don't always live in our life. In our life...we don't live everything other people live. Everyone has different experiences, so I think that fiction introduces us to us to different ideas or situations where we're not used to. And we get to better

understand people that actually go through that. It makes us connect with those people more.

Bridget also shared that reading grants her a broader perspective and helps her learn about the experiences of others.

I feel like reading gives you an idea from another perspective of like, a character who's not going to be exactly like you, or maybe it's set in a place that isn't exactly like where you are from or you may have never visited that place, so it kind of gives you a new perspective on what somebody else might be going through.

Bridget also shared that reading helps her understand what she calls “the line” between the way she may think or feel, and the way others do. While she acknowledges that there are some universal experiences, she finds herself more drawn in reading to understanding the boundaries that make perceptions unique.

I think everyone's minds are so different, and I'm trying to understand what other people think and how in a way we're all really similar, and where that line is. Everyone kind of thinks similarly and in a way reacts to things in a similar way, but then different experiences shape the way that people react to it and deal with it. Like how some people I feel like get deeper - feel emotions more deeply - and why that is.

Discussions with Rose revealed the importance of complex and realistic female characters to support learning about others.

Having more complex characters is important, because I feel realistically like a person just doesn't have one trait or one character trait. I feel like everyone is so different and everyone has different characteristics within them. So I think it's important in a story to go have a female character that kind of encompasses a couple of character traits rather

than one, because then I think that way she'd be more relatable to girls.

Claudia's interviews also demonstrated a need for realism in a story to help her learn about others. She shared that learning about others behavior and thinking was a large part of her reading experience. She was partially joking when she shared, "...if you watch people in real life they'll think you're creepy. So I read." Claudia later went on to more seriously elaborate how she sees this learning as primary in her reading experience.

Well, it's about understanding people. Sometimes when a book is in third person you learn through action and by the author telling you what they thought. When it's in first person you can actually see their thought process. It's written by another person so you know that it's at least partially a true thought process. You can't see someone's thoughts. Even if you look in a mirror you can't see your own. It's interesting to be able to read a complete thought. Everything out written on paper is very interesting. If you watch people you can see interactions, but you can't stare at them too long.

Here Claudia expresses her belief that the experiences of others shared through fiction can be trusted to reflect an authentic "thought process" that is impossible to see in real life. This comment is of particular interest as Claudia also self-identifies as a very shy person who is made uncomfortable with lots of attention or social situations. Reading fiction is again viewed a safe way to engage with topics that hold greater risk in real life.

Strong identification with the characters is what makes learning about others meaningful to participants. Anna describes her reading experience as, "someone telling me their life." As Rose and Alex also shared, connections with complex characters shaped their understanding of issues within their books. In Claudia and Bridget's experience, learning about others was closely related to perspective taking and broadening their own worldview.

Learning about the real world. Rose and Claudia demonstrated the strongest experience of learning about the real world through reading. Rose summed up her view in sharing, “I think fiction can serve as a model of what you want the world to be or what the world shouldn't be.” Reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* appeared to be a turning point in Rose’s thinking about issues such as racism and discrimination. When she was asked to elaborate on what she continued to think about from the book, Rose shared her connections to characters, but also how the book helped her “relate” more to important social issues.

I think that now whenever I think about racism or read about it, I always think of *To Kill a Mockingbird* because it's pretty much talking about the same issue but just in a different way. I think once books talk about issues, if it's scientific or it's about society, I think that it's easy to relate to and you can go back and think.

Rose went on to share why reading books like *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* held value to her.

Because I like real stuff. I don't like thinking about things like the future, things that might happen. I always think about things that are in the present and that are actually happening. I just care more about real issues after reading *To Kill A Mockingbird* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Real issues that talked about- I don't know how to explain it - but I guess you really see what happens behind closed doors, and stuff that's not really in the news.

Discussions with Claudia revealed her engagement in many social issues and topics contained in the books she read, “...Racism, difficulties of motherhood, friendship, religion, and love in general.” Claudia tended to choose books that were historical or realistic fiction. Claudia described all titles such as *Salt to the Sea* set during the Holocaust of WWII, *Chains* in pre-Civil

War American South, or *The Poisonwood Bible*, which follows a missionary family in the Belgian Congo in the 1950's, in vivid detail. She discussed seeing connections while reading between historical time periods and topics, as well. Claudia reiterated many times that reading to her is about learning and becoming immersed in a fictional world that teaches her.

I like to view reading as learning and I love to learn something while also being engaged in a story. I mean that's why I like fiction instead of non-fiction. I mean I like non-fiction because it shows exact facts, but with fiction you can actually look at a character's specific point of view. Fiction you can put yourself into the situation because, while it's a fake story, it can be a real world. With non-fiction it's definitive and it tells you exactly what happened.

Claudia went on to discuss how reading helps her uncover information and topics that are less accessible to a person in everyday life. In her comments, Claudia shows that she is not only engaging in the story world on an aesthetic level, but also learning specific information that is of interest to her.

It's difficult to find what you want on the Internet and if it's an engaging book you'll learn about a topic anyways. I had never heard of ALS as a disease. I can't remember what it is, but I know it's the disease that, basically you lose control of your muscles and you can no longer live by yourself. You have to be hooked to a machine. I hadn't heard about it before I read a book called *The Last Leaves Falling*. It was probably the only book besides *Salt to the Sea* that I actually cried over. It was so beautiful.

While Alex, Bridget and Anna did learn about the real world through reading, this thinking was less related to specific social issues and eras, and more related to their consideration of moral dilemmas presented in fiction.

Reading as recognizing moral complexity. Throughout the interview process, participants voiced ideas on how reading provided a chance to engage in moral thinking. Through considering the events of the plot or character decision-making, participants engaged in three distinct types of moral thinking. Firstly participants consistently identified situations in fiction as morally complex or as having more than one possible solution. Secondly, participants used morally complex situations to clarify and articulate their own moral beliefs and values. Lastly, participants applied themes or ideas from these fictional scenarios to their own life, in a manner that served as practice in real-life decision-making.

Identifying complexity. Alex shared that reading pushes the reader to question, which is perhaps the first phase of recognizing a morally complex situation in fiction.

When you read, I think, it starts to make you question what you already know and like what's right and wrong as well.

Claudia also shared her belief that fiction often raises more questions than answers. By reading, a reader comes to see that there is always more than one side to a situation. Claudia reflected on the events in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, which resulted in the character of Mariam killing her abusive husband, Rashid, to save her adopted daughter Laila.

Was killing Rashid right? Not in the eyes of some. The decision can never be the same in the eyes of everyone. It's kind of weird that way.

This same event sparked a recognition of moral complexity for both Rose and Alex. Rose shared, I don't think killing someone should be justified but I think she didn't really have the chance of running away. In terms of that situation I think that's the only way she could've been freed. Even though it's not really the right way to do it. I guess I don't know if she's necessarily made the right decision. Obviously it felt good for her and I guess she finally

felt free after being like imprisoned so long.

Alex also shared her belief that the decision to kill Rashid was both a good one, but also one with negative consequences. Alex shares how Islam, the belief system both her of the characters in the book, contributed to her thinking.

But then again, her whole life, this guy, her husband, has been abusing her. And the pain that she went through was a lot, so I feel like especially because it's due to Islam, religion, that's in this culture, she wasn't supposed to kill him, but because he was about to kill her and she knew that, I think she was like it was okay for her to kill him, because you're just defending yourself.

Claudia also shared that in her view the decision was neither right nor wrong, but rather that it was realistic.

It wouldn't be very realistic if it was easy decision because when you make decisions in real life, there are a bunch of other emotions mixed up in those, too. With Mariam, she did not want to actually kill Rasheed, but she wanted to save Laila more. When they make the decision it's based on one singular emotion, and I think it really appeals to the reader when characters can make a decision like that, because it shows strength in a character to be able to make a decision that quickly.

Bridget also reflected on this event of the novel, and considered if it was right or wrong.

Importantly this moment pushed her to generalize her reading experience, and understand how books also push the reader to understand the world in increasingly complex ways.

I think when we're younger, we learn all the black and whites. Like, there is black, there is white. I don't know. There's good, there's bad. There's all this different binary. I don't know. I think through reading, over time, you realize that even if you go back to Junie B.

Jones, you know, should someone really have gotten into the fight on the playground?

You kind of realize over time that things aren't as simple as they seem. I feel like it's hard to judge a situation because there is morality, and then there is what's said to be right and wrong, and there's all these other factors.

Claudia also generalized and made connections on the theme of moral complexity from other reading experiences. She shared how books that illustrate ambiguous situations can push readers to examine their previously held assumptions and treat others with greater consideration.

Recent book that I read was, *Everything I Never Told You*, about a girl who supposedly commits suicide but actually didn't. It shows her side of the story as it goes through present time, and her thought process in the past. It shows how there's this grey area. In realistic fiction, like in *Crank*, it shows the side of the drug addicts. Whereas some people may see it as, they're just helpless, homeless, poverty-stricken people that have basically driven themselves to rely on drugs, but really it's this very complicated matter.

To Bridget, considering morally complex situations while reading helps her to achieve her goal of seeing the bigger picture in life.

I feel like when you kind of throw yourself at one opinion or one side then that kind of closes you off from something else. I just kind of want ... I guess I try to just see the whole picture. It doesn't always work out, obviously there's bias and stuff, but my goal is to be able to see what both people can see in a story and in real life.

Clarifying moral beliefs. After identifying morally complex situations in their books, participants often used these to clarify and articulate their beliefs. Participants compared and contrasted their thinking with that of characters to better understand their beliefs.

Rose shared that having characters with opposing viewpoints within a novel pushed her

thinking considerably, “I think you can formulate opinions when reading, definitely, and especially when there are two different characters with their own views.” Rose went on to discuss how reading *A Thousand Splendid Suns* made her even more committed to her beliefs around women’s equality.

Yeah, obviously, it made me think a lot. I think even since the beginning of time women are seen as inferior and they're always seen as less. In a lot of countries they're just seen as workers or they belong in the house or something like that. Also in the society in the book a lot of women don't have roles in their life other than being a housewife. And I think that that's when women's rights should be in place. That's why they should be talked about. People should stand up for it.

Alex also discussed how her reading experience of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* pushed her to question the justice of laws, and consider her own view on what should guide actions.

Laws, I think, are ... because they're from the government, they're right, to some extent. But they can also be wrong, depending on if they're unjust or unfair to different people or minorities of people. So I think you should always go by the laws, but if you believe something and you know that it's right, then you should believe that over the law.

Alex went on to describe how reading helps her clarify her moral beliefs and why this is important to her.

Those type of morals are more clear when you read a book. Because you see the situations that make it clear that if you were confused about it before, or not sure if you thought it was right or wrong. Those type of situations might make you more sure of your answer.

Bridget went on to share her belief that the situation from *A Thousand Splendid Suns* really was not about a simplistic right or wrong decision. In her experience, this was again a moment that demonstrated her belief in complexity and seeing situations broadly.

I don't feel like it's black and white, happy or sad, but I think that it was the right thing to do because the story was all about moms making the best choice they can for their daughters.

Claudia shared her belief when discussing this same book that she would not “want to ever unintentionally hurt someone, either emotionally or physically.” Claudia also shared that she would always put relationships ahead of any law or moral. When viewing the situation, she still articulated a clear belief.

If someone who still says that killing Rashid was wrong, I can't agree with them. A bad person dying instead of two good people, I would say is way better than two good people dying.

Although Anna did not read *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, she did share how reading *The Fault in Our Stars* pushed her to think about her own beliefs around honesty and respect in relationships. When discussing the romantic relationship of Augustus and Hazel, and the power of secrets, Anna had a clear opinion.

I feel like in relationships everything works both ways. If you're going to put someone else's happiness above yours, they should at least think about you, and be honest with you.

Aiding moral decision-making. Beyond the articulation of beliefs, participants used their reading experiences to help them think about their actions in the real world. Both Anna and Bridget explained self-consciously that reading helps them think about their own decisions. Anna

shared, “reading helps me make decisions in real life as well, even though that sounds weird.”

Bridget echoed this in another interview, “I feel like I can make decisions in real life, even though that maybe sounds weird.” Both of these comments demonstrate the commonality of the experience for readers.

Bridget went on to explain how the decisions of Mariam from *A Thousand Splendid Suns* made her think through her own real-life decision-making process.

Sometimes I feel like I don't always stand up for myself when I should. I just really admire how she was willing to do that. That made me thinking like, okay, who would I take a bullet for? Who would I stand up for? I don't even know who. I'm still thinking about that. I feel like now I have a responsibility to step up to whatever I'm passionate about and I think that's why I'm trying to get involved with stuff on campus.

Rose discusses how she also considered the actions of Mariam and Laila in her own life.

I like how Laila always stands up for herself, but I also feel like at times she doesn't know when to stop. But I feel like it was really empowering to see that Mariam had the courage to stand up to someone who was violent to her.

Anna also shared that reading about complex situations helps her think about what she would do, and the decisions she would make. When Anna discussed a recent read, *Megan and the McGowan Boys* she shared that had she been in the position of the main character, “there were a lot of things I would have done differently.” She also considered the relationship dynamics in *The Fault in Our Stars* from the perspective of her own decision-making.

I guess it can also be really unhealthy. Him putting her needs before him. I mean he died because of it. I guess it was very sweet in the end, but in relationships I feel like it should be balanced.

Alex shared her view on how reading can help a reader think about things in a more open-ended manner, while still considering how something may play out in their own life.

With fiction...I think it connects with you more because it makes you realize, think about things or actions in a more hypothetical way. So that it sticks with you because it hasn't happened yet, like for real. But you know it can but that just makes you realize more the book is trying to say. These things they could happen, and maybe they will actually impact you in real life.

Bridget also shared that in her experience fiction is not necessarily something that tells her what to do or what to believe. Instead, like for Alex, it provides her a place to observe all the factors that go into making a big decision. This is an abstract concept that Bridget sees as helping her think about her own decision-making process.

Because if you're going to charge someone guilty or innocent or something, it's not going to just impact that one person but it's going to impact you, it's going to impact the whole world around you. It might impact the environment. I think you have to think with a view where you analyze the consequences of everything, and I think that's kind of how I make decisions.

Chapter Summary

This study focused on reading experiences and perceptions of five girls attending an American international school in Dubai. Through a three-phase phenomenological interview process participants were able to share detailed information about how they experience reading and what aspects of their reading experience are of the greatest importance to them. This chapter discussed three emergent themes that developed through a three cycle inductive coding process. These themes were reading as a lived and remembered experience, reading as an experience of

deep learning, and reading as identifying moral complexity. These themes were analyzed in depth by looking at sub-themes and how participants were able to speak to each. Placing participant voice at the forefront was a goal of this study. Chapter four demonstrated both the patterns as well as areas of divergence within the data to be further investigated with the theoretical framework and literature review in chapter five of the study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how adolescent female readers make sense of their reading experiences in an international school setting. Interview conversations revealed reading to be an experience of learning and moral decision-making, which may be remembered as vividly as any lived experience. Additionally, this study sought to construct understandings to the following research questions:

- 1) How do adolescent girls make sense of the experience of reading a novel?
- 2) How do the reading experiences of adolescent girls with fiction contribute to perceptions of moral identity?
- 3) What perceptions do adolescent girls hold regarding identity development as an outcome of reading?

In this chapter, the researcher will present the major themes identified from the participants' interviews. These themes will be brought into conversation with ideas found within the literature review to generate greater understanding of participant experience. These themes will then be considered through the lens of the study's theoretical framework and research questions. The researcher will also discuss the implications of the findings in relation to both the research questions and the body of literature reviewed. Lastly, the researcher will present recommendations for future research and educator practice with respect to adolescent literacy.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this qualitative study were related to the relatively small sample size of participants, and the selection of study participants. Five female adolescent readers were

recruited for this study. This was a purposeful sample of motivated, self-identified readers, who selected into reading enrichment activities, and later into the study. A limitation of this sampling choice is that it restricts the findings of the study to pertain to individuals to whom reading presently has inherent value and relevance. Self-identified readers were recruited as participants as the study was concerned with constructing an understanding of the individual experience of reading, the adolescent sense-making processes, and related outcomes for personal growth. This is not to say that studies investigating strategies for engagement, or of other phenomena which may inhibit adolescent engagement in reading is not of value, but rather to clarify that these were not the aims of this particular study. As such, it is possible that the findings of the study may not pertain as directly to disengaged or reluctant adolescent readers. However, examining the subjectivity of reluctant readers, or barriers to aesthetic experiences of fiction is an important site of possible future research. Lastly, while the small sample size did produce rich interview data and vivid descriptions of lived through reading experience, a larger sample size of six may have allowed for greater variation within the data.

Overview and Discussion of Findings

In this section, the research questions will be investigated by analyzing themes that emerged through participant interviews. Interview data will be further analyzed through the problem statement of this study, the theoretical framework of the study, and conceptual understandings presented in the literature review.

Making sense of the reading experience. The overall research question for this study sought to understand and describe the ways adolescent girls made sense of their reading experiences. Interviews revealed three central themes related to participant's individual sense making. These themes included understanding reading as a lived and remembered experience,

understanding reading as an experience of deep learning, and understanding reading as a practice in moral decision-making. Each of these themes finds resonance in the problem of practice, the theoretical framework of the study, as well as within the body of literature that was reviewed.

The role of the text and the teacher. This study sought to draw further attention to the tension between current models of instruction and assessment that promote a culture of testing in the classroom, and aesthetic experiences of fiction for students. The Common Core State Standards, adopted by many states and international schools, place a clear emphasis on what is termed “college and career readiness” for students upon graduation (Kern, 2014). In an effort to achieve these aims, teachers and school districts have pushed for greater emphasis on the reading of nonfiction texts, and less time devoted to the study of fiction, either on an individual or class level. Fiction, according to participant interviews, plays a central role in not only academic development, but in students’ social, emotional, and moral development. The findings and implications of this study are highly significant to educator practice and student learning outcomes, especially given trends, which may push educators away from devoting instructional time to fiction.

Specific comments of participants illustrate the varied and valuable outcomes of their aesthetic reading experiences. Rose and Claudia shared in their discussion of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the fiction allowed them to get beyond their own lives, and empathize with individuals with radically different experiences. Anna also shared that YAL fiction like *The Fault in Our Stars*, gave her the chance to “be in the characters shoes” and feel the intense emotions of love, joy and loss alongside them. Bridget and Alex also shared that reading helps them to see their own experiences with greater clarity. Alex shared that often times reading fiction raised questions for her that she had not previously considered, and it helps her to make

connections with her own life. Bridget similarly experienced that reading fiction raised her awareness of “big concepts” present in everyday life that are “harder to see when you are not reading about them.” These participant comments reflect Rosenblatt’s (1965) theory which proposes that fiction, or any great work of art, “may provide us the opportunity to feel more profoundly and more generously, to perceive more fully the implications of experience, than the constricted and fragmented conditions of life permit” (p.37) These comments also suggest significance to the problem of practice addressed in this study. Such outcomes for personal growth and development are unique and specific to an aesthetic experience of fiction. This rich and rewarding experience of fiction is often found at odds with current trends, which marginalize the role fiction in an English Language Arts curriculum.

Participants demonstrate through their comments an ability to grapple with complex themes presented through a variety of YAL genres such as thriller, dystopia, historical fiction and realistic fiction. According to adolescent literacy researchers, young adult fiction (YAL) presents adolescent readers with larger themes and questions which pertain to human nature in an accessible and authentic manner (Blackford, 2004; Alsup 2010; Flanagan, 2011; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Napoli, 2013). Bridget shared that *The Alchemist* helped her to think about what her purpose might be, and how she could find a rewarding path in her life. Claudia considered the concept of courage when reading the YAL historical-fiction novel *Salt to the Sea* set in WWII Europe. Alex shared that Sophie Mackenzie's thriller series *Girl Missing* also made her consider what it meant to act courageously, and what sacrifices people are willing to make for love and friendship. Rose and Anna both considered the importance of honesty in romantic relationships when reading *The Fault in our Stars*, and shared how this influenced their thinking about their own actions. With an understanding of these rich possible outcomes, instructors may

be able to select relevant YAL novels for class study, or guide students toward making informed independent reading selections. A novel with a more global focus allows students, especially those living internationally, to consider and dialogue on issues such as courage, justice, and freedom, within an accessible format (Napoli, 2013). Such findings are significant in demonstrating the value of YAL in the classroom, and are reflected in the books discussed by participants, as well as subsequent thinking that it spurred. Each of the participants illustrate how reading and responding to YAL can support adolescent readers in critically considering the world they live in, while also enabling their intellectual and emotional development (Napoli, 2013). While YAL titles often come under scrutiny for a lack of perceived rigor by secondary instructors, it is demonstrated through participants' comments, that YAL supported significant critical thinking on the part of participants during and after the reading experience was over. Additionally, the long-term impact of YAL titles on participant identity, worldview, and critical consideration of social issues, may expand current definitions of reading and literacy practice to extend beyond the act of reading. Through extended reflection and engagement in high-interest texts as described by participants, English Language Arts instructors may see the process of reading as continuing for as long as the reader considers the work, and allows it to inform their own thinking.

Teachers and their instructional choices had a significant impact on the reading experiences of participants. It was voiced in each interview that when teachers devoted consistent instructional time to independent reading, promoted collaborative literacy activities such as blogging, or small group discussion, that participants gleaned more meaning from their reading experiences. Participants were all self-identified as motivated readers, but even so, each reported reading more when their teacher held an expectation for independent reading, and

encouraged participants to read more broadly across genres. According to Bridget, an expectation of her teacher that she try to independently read at least two books in a different genre each quarter, at first seemed impossible. However, she reported that having a concrete expectation of reading broadly pushed her to engage with unknown authors and topics, and led her to discover new genre interests which persist today. Instructional choices create the conditions for participant engagement in aesthetic reading, and they also indirectly communicate teacher values to the student. Ivey & Johnston (2013) assert that engaged reading is only possible when texts are interesting, when choice and autonomy is supported, and when opportunities for collaboration are plentiful. While these instructional strategies serve motivated readers, they may also prove to be effective in generating greater buy-in on the part of reluctant readers to access an aesthetic experience of reading (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). Teacher decisions that attend to choice, autonomy and student identity can create the instructional conditions in which an aesthetic experience of reading can take root for all students. It is significant for English Language Arts teachers to understand the power contained within instructional decision-making. Through instructional choices teachers may encourage and promote meaningful reading experiences for both accomplished and struggling readers.

Teacher promotion of autonomy through instructional choices is reflected in Anna's experience of selecting her own books to read this year in English 9, and using the time given to her in class to read by her teacher. Each of her independent selections allowed her to engage emotionally with characters and the dilemmas they faced. This autonomy also provided Anna a space to imagine what she would do in similar situations, and make connections between her world and the world of the book. Both Alex and Claudia's discussion of maintaining a blog of their independent reading experiences also reflect a support of autonomy from the part of the

instructor. Alex and Claudia shared the blogs allowed them to “think more” about what they were reading, and “get feedback.” These experiences illustrate opportunities for collaboration that are key characteristics of engaged and aesthetic reading. Bridget also shared that small group conversations in class, and teacher questions about books she was reading both in class and on her own helped her to develop her ideas, and better understand her self in relation to the characters or events. These comments by the participants demonstrate strategic decisions on the part of instructors to support an aesthetic, and engaged, reading experience. While these are significant findings for promoting the growth of accomplished readers, there is also evidence in both the findings and the research to support such strategies as effective in engaging reluctant readers within the classroom.

According to the problem of practice in this study, fiction and independent reading within school is often assumed to have less instructional value than practices such as direct instruction, exam preparation, or the reading of nonfiction. Additionally, these assumptions may lead institutions to provide less support to programs or instructors who view fiction and independent reading as equally rigorous and valuable to student experience. Participant comments relating to the outcomes of sustained engagement with fiction supports a deeper and more robust institutional commitment to these practices. This is especially true for international schools that locate their institutions at a crossroads of cultures, languages, experiences, beliefs, and content knowledge. This intersection of experiences, especially in light of the findings of this study, further charges international schools to attend to the question of identity present in each student through the curriculum.

These implications are further supported further by current research examining the role schools play in the development of adolescents beyond that of academics. According to

Sinai et al., (2012), identity exploration is most often triggered by events or content encountered in school-settings which create dissonance, or present ambiguity, threat or conflict. The English Language Arts classroom is particularly well positioned to offer students content which provides moments of exploration and discovery. Beyond the content, researchers also identified that a sense of safety is essential for adolescents to work through the stress or confusion generated from an explorative trigger. Participant interviews reflect both the engagement with rich content that spurs greater exploration and questioning, as well as immersion in a safe social space that supports intellectual and emotional risk. In Anna's interview she shared that reading helps her feel safe both in and out of school. Bridget also shared that reading will often present a situation that is hard to face in real life, but through reading you are safe to explore it further. Rose shared that reading pushed her to think about her own identity in considering traits of characters she admired or did not. The controversial climax of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* gave four of the participants the opportunity to consider the moral ambiguity of the main character's' decision, and question previously held beliefs about violence. According to these findings, discussing fictional characters, dilemmas, and contexts, allowed participants to rehearse their own struggles, clarify emotions and beliefs, and work toward more informed thinking and decision-making. This is significant on an institutional level, as the space for such experiences of fiction within the curriculum appear to be shrinking. The findings push institutions to consider their commitment to the development of the international child on a social, emotional, and moral level. Aesthetic experiences of fiction within the classroom have the potential to address these unique needs, and draw upon the rich and unique life experiences of the study body.

Reading as a lived experience. Interviews demonstrated a deep engagement in the world of fiction by all participants. Plots and characters were recalled and described in precise and

vivid detail. Emotion was present when describing a beloved character, a tragic ending, or a moment of humor. The emotions, descriptions, and level of engagement, on the part of each reader reflected the dimensions of aesthetic reading first described by Rosenblatt's (1965). In Rosenblatt's (1965) transactional theory, an aesthetic reading experience is akin to a lived experience. Stories are not just understood by a reader within this mode, but are instead "lived through" in a manner that mirrors experience found real life. In the aesthetic experience of reading, according to Rosenblatt (1965) a reader is primarily focused upon what she feels, visualizes, associates and imagines while reading. The meaning of what is read is deeply shaped by the cultural and social context in which the reader is situated, and a by reader beliefs, experiences, and prior knowledge. Rosenblatt's (1965) understandings of reading experience informed the researcher's reading of the data and identification of themes.

Rosenblatt's (1965) understanding of aesthetic reading experience is demonstrated throughout participant interviews. Aesthetic experiences of reading are highly significant to this study. Due to the qualities associated with reading in the aesthetic dimension individuals are able to engage in personal reflection and consideration of the situations that can lead to revised understandings of the self, others, and the surrounding world. Interviews with participants revealed experiences of immersion within the story world, strong emotional engagement with characters and events. Alex reported a good book having the power to drown everything else out of her mind. While Bridget and Claudia shared that they often remember the events and characters from books they read with the vividness of real life experience. Rose and Anna also described their experiences of reading on emotional terms sharing feelings of sadness, annoyance, or happiness when reaching certain elements of a story. Visualization was consistently high with each participant and could be seen in the degree of detail characters,

settings, and ideas were described within the interview process. Interestingly, participants described this level of aesthetic engagement in the reading experience on reciprocal terms, and much like that of a friendship. Both Anna and Bridget, described books and their relationship to reading like that of a friend. Bridget shared that books are like friends to her because they “help you find the answer without really telling you.” Anna shared an experience of books like that of a confidant, and shared “it’s like someone telling you their life.” Books to Anna helped her feel like “someone was there” and she was less alone with her experiences, which to her was like “a friend.”

The findings shared here further demonstrate the significant and unique role of fiction in the lives of adolescent girl readers. While reading provides a space of inwardness and reflection to girls, reading is also viewed as an interactive negotiation, which shares some of the social rules of friendship. Texts give and suggest ideas to the adolescent girl reader that she may accept, integrate or reject into her evolving sense of self and others. Each of the participant experiences of immersion, visualization, and emotional engagement demonstrate strong alignment with Rosenblatt’s (1965) theory of aesthetic reading. These findings also support later participant comments in which learning about the self, others, and the social world emerged strongly. Without a rich aesthetic reading experience, such personal outcomes would not be possible or articulated by participants.

The strong relationships formed with books and fictional worlds in participant interviews is striking in light of the literature reviewed on the social worlds of international adolescents or TCKs. Research finds TCK adolescents less willing to fully commit to social interactions which resulted in deeper friendships, and more inclined to view friendships as transient or superficial (Lijadi & Van Schalkwyk, 2014; Grimshaw & Sears, 2008)). It has also been found that TCK

adolescents also use protective measures such as avoidance to cope with feelings of fear, exhaustion, anger, and sadness in the face of imminent departures. It is possible that in the case of TCKs the emotional engagement within the fictional story world is intensified as their existing social environment remains in a constant state of flux and change. Comments by Claudia, Anna and Bridget all reflect the guidance and emotional support garnered through their reading experiences. Bridget and Claudia even shared preferring reading over social interactions with family or friends on occasion. These text based supports took the form of posing difficult or challenging questions, helping participants feel less alone with their experiences, and giving models for identity development and decision-making. Findings such as this again demonstrate the significant role that international schools and classrooms play in supporting the social and emotional needs of international adolescent girls. Yet it can also be seen how engaging students in aesthetic experience of fiction within English Language Arts classrooms can provide all TCKs with social space to explore their experiences and begin to articulate emergent identities (Flum & Kaplan, 2012, Siani et al., 2012).

Reading as learning. Aesthetic experiences of reading allowed for participants to learn in ways that were personally relevant and specific to their identity and cultural context. Understanding reading as a learning experience was key feature of individual sense making on the part of participants. Learning about the self through examining personal values, traits, recognizing bias, or reflecting significant personal experiences were all reported as a part of participant reading experience. As Bridget shared, many participants felt that reading helped her to “step back” and “look at myself.” Rose shared how books often provide models for character traits she wished to either emulate or avoid. Rose even reflected that certain characters reminded her of herself at different life stages, and pushed her to acknowledge not only how she has

changed but also why. Alex shared that reading often made her realize that she could improve herself, and act more like those in books she admires in the real world. Reading also became a space for girls to process their experience and name associated feelings. Anna shared how reading about romantic relationships in books made her feel better after fights with friends, or dealing with her feelings of loneliness. Understanding the self through reading is further supported by research as Lysaker & Miller (2012) posit that engaged reading is a central location of human development. Through reading individuals participate in a dialogic, relational and narrative construction of the self. Such rich experiences of language through reading and conversation are the material through which individuals come to construct not only the self, but also their “social imagination and construction of the other” (Ivey & Johnston, 2013, p. 256). Through both participant comments and current research reading is understood as a central location of identity development and learning about the self. Engagement with fiction in adolescence is of particular significance given the demands of this developmental stage to differentiate and redefine the self to achieve greater autonomy. These findings are significant as they reflect the potential of fiction to be a space of negotiation of identity for adolescent girl readers. This is especially significant within the context of school, which is a key context of socialization for girls. It is a space in which girls may experience growing tensions, stress, and dissonance with respect to their identity.

Each participant articulated a more detailed understanding of their personal experiences, identity and values through reading, and this also allowed for a more complex view of others to subsequently emerge. Alex and Rose also shared that reading generated greater empathy for others, and helped them to understand the perspectives of others, even those who would do harm such as characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Anna also shared that her reading experiences

helped broaden her view of why others act as they do, and draw contrasts to her own experience. Comments made by Claudia demonstrated recognition of social inequality and her position in the world while reading *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *The Bean Trees*, and *The Poisonwood Bible*. Claudia stated that these reading experiences helped her see that her life was “not normal” and that she “did not deserve her privilege” more than anyone else. Claudia equated reading about the lives of others in fiction to service-trips and travel she had taken with her family to developing countries. To her, reading was equal to, if not more powerful, than these experiences in real life. Napoli (2013) also finds that even if girls have a different experience than what is represented in the text, many were able to live vicariously through characters, develop empathy, and better understand their own privileged social status. These findings are also significant to consider given the TCK identity and experiences of the participants. TCK adolescents are coming of age in highly global and multicultural environments, and yet, their social privilege often isolates them from the lived experiences of those around them, such as local Emirati families, workers from Southeast Asia, as well those women and girls who enjoy far fewer social freedoms. Aesthetic reading to learn about complex social issues and different cultural values can thus be understood as a form of experiential learning for TCKs. This unique form of experiential learning through reading has the potential to impact how adolescent TCKs not only understand the world, but also how they act within it. This further demonstrates the highly varied and valuable outcomes of reading fiction aesthetically, and calls for teachers and institutional leaders to defend its’ place within a curricular framework.

In the interviews, participants showed a willingness to think critically about the world beyond the text, and analyze their own experience in society more deeply. Such thinking and analysis can take place outside of an English Language Arts context. However, the narrative

structures of fiction, which may symbolize thematic ideas such as power, choice, resistance, or change, through characters, settings, or events, characters provide adolescent readers with highly accessible tools to draw connections, and construct critiques. The ability to make meaningful connections between art and life, and find a critical voice within the space of literacy practices, is especially important for adolescent girls, as they come of age in societies that marginalize women. According to critical literacy researchers, when girls read educators must emphasize only the personal experience of reading, but also the ideological values and social relationships contained within the texts. By doing so, girls may construct their identities, beliefs, attitudes, values, and interrogate their experiences, to gain greater social agency (Christian-Smith, 1993, Dubowsky-Ma'ayan, 2012; Napoli, 2013).

Critical literacy is a key outcome of an aesthetic experience of reading. This literacy expands the readers' experience beyond the text, or even their own experience, and pushes for greater action in the real world. By coming to critique and raise questions through reading, girls may also develop the ability to do the same within their own lives when they are faced with issues of equity or access. Through these reading experiences girls may also develop a greater sense of advocacy for others, and begin to see connections between their lives and the struggles of others. The development of critical literacy is another significant dimension of the experiential learning that results from aesthetic reading of fiction. The potential of fiction to generate critical consciousness on the part of readers through the drawing of complex connections and analysis of social experience is supported by participant comments. Rose's reading experiences pushed her to question why certain injustices around race and gender persist in the world today. Her reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* were described as her favorite books because of what they showed her about "real issues" happening to people in the world. These

books also pushed Rose to consider what can be done to address injustices, and that more girls should be willing to speak up when women are “put down”. Alex and Bridget also described how reading these same books made them more aware of different experiences of girls in the world, and how inequality causes suffering across generations. Bridget shared her desire to get more involved with service organizations on campus after reading, and considering what individuals can do. These critical literacy outcomes are significant, as they impact not only the individual consciousness of the reader, but also push the adolescent reader towards greater social engagement and self-advocacy in issues of inequality and bias.

Perceptions of moral development. The sub questions of this study related to the specific outcome of moral identity development on the part of adolescent girl readers. Sub-question one hoped to understand how the reading experiences of adolescent girls contributed to the development of moral thinking. Sub-question two looked to understand and described the perceptions adolescent girls held regarding their moral development and their reading experiences. These questions led to thought-provoking discussion with participants and revealed connections with both the theoretical framework and body of existing research.

Reading experiences and moral thinking. It is clear from participant interviews that immersion in fiction through aesthetic reading experience allows for moral thinking to emerge. A development of moral thinking as an outcome of reading experience is significant on several levels of this study. Firstly, the development of moral thinking is an important activity for adolescents to engage, as developmentally they are what are often termed a crossroads of personal and social differentiation and change. This is both a rich and turbulent time, and one in which the models of decision-making, and frameworks for social interaction presented in novels can be highly influential. It is also significant to note the form moral reasoning took with

adolescent girl readers. The moral reasoning present in participants when discussing moral dilemmas in fiction was highly relational in nature, and demonstrated careful consideration of existing social relationships, cultural context, religious beliefs, and the emotions of others. Moral decisions according to participants were dependent on these factors as opposed to depending on a universal rule or law. It is significant to recognize this type of thinking present in participants as moral reasoning as moral thinking in girls and women has traditionally been marginalized and poorly understood by researchers into moral development. Relational moral reasoning is rigorous in its' attention to variables and influencing factors, and which is clearly illustrated through participant commentary. Rigorous moral thinking is important for all adolescents to engage with as the approach a life stage of critical decisions, but of particular importance to adolescent girls, to find voice and rehearse for self-advocacy. Additional significance can be found when considering the role of fiction in prompting this moral reasoning in participants. Interview commentary vividly describes how fictional texts provide ideal conditions to practice this kind of thinking. Fiction can present a high degree of realism, multiple possibilities, and a rich emotional context in which consequences may occur. This finding relates to the study problem of practice in highlighting the critical role of fiction and aesthetic reading in secondary schools. There are few other areas of schooling that have the power to engage students on this level of personal and moral development.

Moral thinking emerged in several categories on the part of participants. Participants shared how reflecting on a character's decision-making process showed them that there is seldom agreement on what is right and what is wrong. Claudia and Bridget both discussed that reading made them realize that situations are not "black and white" and that there is always another side to a story. Alex discussed how reading made her question previously held beliefs,

and thinks about which beliefs are most important to her. Rose shared that reading made her more willing to stand up for what she thought was right, and that reading about characters with courage, made her more willing to act. Bridget also shared that reading helped her to “see the whole picture” and not remain content with her own beliefs and values. Reading allowed her to suspend her judgment, and engage in the moral reasoning of others through well-developed characters. Participant interviews illustrated that reading provided practice in identifying morally complex or ambiguous situations. It is significant to note that fiction provides the safe and contained space for such identification to take place for readers. Further comments by participants demonstrate their ability to identify morally ambiguous situations extends beyond reading experience, and also translates into their thinking and actions in their own lives.

Reading also allowed for participants to clarify their moral beliefs. Interestingly, the majority of participants articulated relationships and emotion as playing a central role in their moral thinking. Participants also identified several situations when characters in fiction were making moral decisions based on the well being of others over their own. In discussing *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Bridget shared that the decisions of the main characters were neither good nor bad, but rather the decisions were about “mothers making the best choices for their daughters.” In considering if universal laws should be followed over personal moral codes, Alex shared that laws should be respected as they have the authority of the government. She then provided a counter example of the unjust laws found in books like *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Hunger Games*. Ultimately, Alex concluded that laws can and should be disobeyed if they discriminate, oppress or cause harm to individuals. Claudia also shared that she bases much of her moral thinking on the way a decision may impact other people, and how they might feel when something is said or happens. Rose, Bridget and Anna also voiced a desire to put others

first in their decision-making process. In Claudia's view although she would never want to hurt anyone "physically or emotionally", she would break this rule if someone she cared about was in danger, and she would not consider this wrong. All participants shared decisions of fictional to be "right" when the feelings and consequences for others were considered carefully. These findings are significant as they demonstrate adolescent girl readers engaging in relational moral reasoning. This intellectual activity on the part of girls and women has been historically undervalued. The conditions of the English Language Arts curriculum has the potential to engage girls in moral development that is differentiated on the bases of gender, and allow for greater expressions of moral identity to emerge.

Findings of this study are also significant as they reflect the research of Gilligan (1984) into the moral development of adolescent girls. This study examines the theory of Gilligan (1984) in a new context of aesthetic reading of fiction, and the significance of fiction to prompt moral thinking in girls. As discussed in the review of the literature, Gilligan (1984) concludes that women engage in moral reasoning extensively, but this looks very different that the moral reasoning of their male counterparts. Women and girls are generally more concerned with relationships as opposed to rules. Boys and men instead have a tendency to think through moral dilemmas using abstract principles of right and wrong. She found that girls and women are guided in their moral actions terms of an ethic of care, and the two moral principles which guide decision making are not treating others unfairly, and helping others in need (Collins, 1996). In each of the interviews, adolescent girl participants demonstrated detailed and elaborated moral reasoning based upon these principles. These centered on doing what was "right" within the context of relationships, culture, and the emotions of others. What was viewed as "wrong" was typically an action or thought that did not consider others as equals, or actions that focused only

on one possible outcome for an individual. This study allowed the researcher to better understand how aesthetic reading experiences provided an opportunity for participants to reason through complex moral scenarios that may be applied to their own lives. It was also significant to note the extension of Gilligan's (1984) research into gender and moral thinking in discipline specific context of secondary English Language Arts.

Lastly, the overall findings and claims regarding the significance of fiction to prompt adolescent moral thinking is present and supported by the literature regarding fiction, moral development and adolescence. Fiction plays a powerful role in the moral lives of young adults as it allows readers to consider complex and contemporary problems replete with moral dilemmas (Collins, 1996). Researchers have long held that fiction holds the possibility for the reader to find their moral voice, and to build a richer character through adopted roles. Wolfgang Iser (1978) demonstrated through an extension of Rosenblatt's (1965) theory of aesthetic reading, how the reader's own experience is transformed, and is thus enabled to go beyond the text and consider moral decisions. In this study, stepping into a character's perspective or role, hypothesizing about consequences, or explaining why a decision was justified, allowed participants to meaningfully engage in refining their own beliefs and identifying moral complexity. In doing so, they practiced navigating complex moral situations, which supports personal development and decision-making skills. This highlights the significance of adolescent exposure to fictional texts in school, as well as instructional practices that prioritize aesthetic reading.

Perceptions of personal outcomes. The second sub-question of this study looked to understand the perceptions participants held on the outcomes of their reading experiences. Participants claimed many outcomes from their reading experiences related to enjoyment, learning, emotional connectedness with others, and a deeper understanding of the world they live

in. However, a central outcome that emerged from each participant was a deeper understanding of the self, and what kind of person they would like to be. Reading allowed for girls to explore different versions of their current identity, and to think carefully about what moral values guided their thoughts and actions. Carlone et al. (2014), theorized English classrooms to be spaces where structures of power present in society can be accessed and questioned by adolescent girls. According to this research, engaging girls in aesthetic and collaborative experiences of literature, supports girls in safely trying out multiple identities, perspectives, and allowing them transgress existing boundaries. This is a highly significant outcomes as these reading experiences serve as practice for making decisions and judgments in their own lives.

Participants also held perceptions on reading outcomes clustered around learning about the self and others. Alex shared that an outcome of reading for her was the understanding that she “could be a better person.” Aspects of personal experience were brought into sharper focus by comparing and contrasting, according to Anna. Both Alex and Anna reached this outcome by reflecting on events and characters in what they read, and considering how she may could incorporate new ideas into her life. Rose often returned to how the outcome of reading to her was to learn about others and the struggles that people endure. Bridget often returned to the metaphor of a mirror to describe both her motivation to read and the related outcomes. To her, reading allowed her to see herself more clearly, and to understand what makes her different than others. Bridget described this as “understanding the line” between her experience and others. Thinking shared by Bridget and other participants is significant as it highlights the experiential learning dimensions of reading to participants. Through their experience of reading they experience a transformation relating to self-perception and identity. Learning which shapes and transforms

students is often the goal may instructors seek. According to the findings of the study, aesthetic reading of fiction is a tool well suited to achieve these aims in school.

These transformative and personally significant outcomes are not possible with just any text, as participants shared. To Rose, the presence of a female protagonist is important, and in her perception she finds it empowering to see a girl at the center of a story. However, Rose, along with Claudia and Bridget shared, that realism, a lack of “stereotypical” situations or “plastic” characters is what allows for personally relevant outcomes to emerge. Participants such as Rose and Claudia also shared that in their perception, character traits are not dependent on the gender of a character. Male or female character can be relatable to participants if they are “realistic” and “have more than one side.” Even when the genre is fantasy or dystopian, the level of realism is determined by the participants through the manner characters and relationships are developed. This perception of gender and reader subjectivity reflects research into adolescent reading habits. Research by Tarulli & Brendler (2014), reveals a decrease in gender differentiation by adolescent readers by attracting high numbers of readers from either gender. As was the case with identifying moral complexity, well-developed fictional texts, either YAL titles or others, allow for adolescent readers to engage in a plausible, and therefore immersive world. Complex characters that express traits not restricted to stereotypes are important to adolescent readers as they develop greater understanding of their own gender identity. Realism and complexity in the depiction of female characters is particularly significant as these have the power to communicate the status of women and girls within society.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

The researcher was not the instructor of any of the participants in this study, and had no evaluative role in their academic life. The clarity of the researcher role contributes to the

credibility of participant responses, as there is no consideration of evaluation. However, in order for the detail and quality of participant responses to develop, trust needed to be fostered between the researcher and the participant. Prior relationships through extracurricular, enrichment blocks, and previous classes, allowed for there to be initial familiarity. This familiarity allowed for the trust between the participants and the researcher to develop over the course of the interview process. The researcher used methods such as pilot interviews, member checking, and triangulation of memos to increase the trustworthiness of the study. Reflexive journaling was an important part of the researcher data collection process. Topics the researcher tracked included her own personal value system, any possible role confusion with the participants, reasoning for taking on the subject of the study initially, and assumptions on gender. It was important to remain aware of researcher bias, and personal sense making, throughout the interview process, as well as the data analysis phase. Bracketing allowed the researcher to determine which qualities belonged to her own experience of the phenomena under study, and which belonged to the participants (Tufford & Newman, 2011). Throughout the interview, the researcher ensured the confidentiality of all participants, and followed all procedures for the protection of human subjects. Another adult was present at the time of all participant interviews, as the participants were under 18 years of age.

Implications for Future Study

Participants in this study were highly motivated readers. As such, future research could focus on understanding the reading experiences of reluctant readers, and possible challenges to aesthetic reading experience. This study also focused on the reading experiences, perceptions and outcomes for girl readers. Future research may wish to investigate the reading experiences of adolescent boys, or compare these experiences on the basis of gender. Possible research may also

further investigate the social emotional needs of TCK or international adolescents. It may be important to study with greater focus role of international school curriculum, specifically the inclusion of structures that support independent reading, and how these may serve to mediate the dilemmas of identity and social relationships many international adolescent girls face. The researcher is unaware of other studies that investigate the role of fiction in the moral identities of international adolescent girls. While many qualitative studies do focus on girls and reading, few focus on understanding the experience of self-selected reading or how such experience may shape moral identity development. Additionally, research into the particular needs of international adolescents girls living and learning in the Middle East or Islamic majority countries is limited and would do well to be expanded upon in future research. It is recommended that a qualitative inquiry approach is adopted as into these topics as this may offer girls the opportunity to use their voice to shape learning outcomes for the future.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Schooling is a crucial context for identity and moral development. Educators play an important role in shaping and supporting students academically, socially and emotionally. As a result of the study, classroom teachers are encouraged to implement several instructional practices with respect to student engagement with fictional texts. Overall, it is highly recommended as a result of this study, that educators continue to recognize the place of fiction within the English Language Arts curriculum K-12, and do all they can to support students in gaining access into the world of fictional texts. Nonfiction literacy is a key skill and an important part of a student learning experience. However, educators must bear in mind transformative and experiential power of fiction for students. Fiction, according to the study participants, allowed for them to look deeply into their own lives, and also far beyond. Fiction provided a context for

learning about the self, others, and society with a level of depth and realism that was not found for readers in nonfiction texts. In light of the findings, fiction does not appear to have a counterpoint in other academic disciplines, and this provides significant justification sustained student exposure K-12.

From the perspective of the classroom, English Language Arts instructors should work to implement independent reading programs in the classroom K-12, and consider how this may look differently depending on the needs and context of their students. Participant interviews demonstrated the importance of instructors giving the time, space, and strategies to support independent reading experiences. The study also highlights that when teaching a text to be read independently or as a class, it is important to prioritize an aesthetic experience of reading which leads to socially and personally meaningful outcomes for students. Constructivist literacy practices such as discussion groups, blogging, literature circles, and activities promote connections to the world and the self are all classroom-based practices that support an aesthetic experience of fiction. It is also important for teachers to instruct on literacy and metacognitive strategies such as monitoring comprehension, understanding self-pacing and self-selecting books to allow for students to become more independent readers, and less dependent on the instructor. Modeling on the part of the instructor may be particularly powerful as this may illustrate some of the thinking moves of accomplished readers, which lead to an aesthetic reading experience. Lastly, it is reflected in the findings of this study that educators remain aware of differing socialization of boys and girls, and the pressures of conforming to gender norms that intensify in adolescence, and can manifest in the classroom. Engagements in rich literacy experiences provide space for resistance, exploration, and discovery in the lives of girls.

Leaders K-12 play an important role in setting institutional priorities that define the

culture of learning within a school environment. As a school leader, the researcher looks to positively impact learning experiences as a result of the study findings. It is important to share and present the findings of this study to English Language Arts faculty K-12, and to lead discussions on implications for teacher practice at the classroom level. Elements of the study to highlight with faculty may include findings on reading as a form of experiential learning, the impact of YAL titles on moral thinking, the social and emotional needs of TCK adolescents, the socialization and moral development of adolescent girls, as well as a brief introduction into Rosenblatt's (1965) transactional theory of reading. The modeling and training of specific, constructivist literacy practices may also be important to follow the presentation of study findings. As a school leader, the researcher looks to coach colleagues in lesson design, assessment practice, or unit planning that prioritizes aesthetic reading experience. From the perspective of institutional change, the researcher hopes to use the study findings to contribute to strategic decisions regarding what texts are taught and the models of literacy instruction which are adopted K-12.

Conclusions

Current global trends in education continue to question the value of fiction within school and promote a culture of testing and standardization. Instructional practices that promote testing as the ultimate goal of schooling serve to further marginalize the value of imagination, exploration and discover within schools. However, the findings of this study reassert the power of reading fiction. Aesthetic reading experiences allow students to navigate their identity, clarify moral thinking, and learn about others in a way that efferent reading does not. In an era of growing complexity and globalization, this study pushes educators to reconsider the ultimate aims of education for our students and our communities. As educators our charge is to develop

the intellectual and emotional capacities of our students. The value of teaching fiction, within a constructivist framework, is that it cultivates both. For girls and TCKs, this study demonstrates how fiction can support them in navigating the particular demands found in adolescence.

Educators are in unique position to recognize the transformative power of fiction and advocate for students' intellectual, moral and emotional development in school.

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APPENDIX A

Independent Reading Survey

Name:

Grade:

Gender:

Part 1:

- | | | | | |
|--|----|---|---|----|
| 1. Books are boring. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 2. Reading is one of my hobbies. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 3. I don't have enough time to read books. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 4. Reading is a waste of time. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 5. I like having time in class to read. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 6. Books can help us understand others and ourselves. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 7. I often don't understand what I'm reading. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 8. I almost always get A's and B's in English. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 9. I believe I'm a strong reader. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 10. It's easy for me to make interpretations of what I read. | SA | A | D | SD |

Complete the sentence: "When I'm reading, I usually feel..."

Part 2: Reading Interests

Directions: Place an X next to any of the following genres or topics you like to read:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adventure | <input type="checkbox"/> Relationships/Love |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Science Fiction | <input type="checkbox"/> Friendship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dystopia | <input type="checkbox"/> Family Problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Realistic Fiction | <input type="checkbox"/> Bullying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mystery/Thriller/Suspense | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Comedy | <input type="checkbox"/> Issues of Death |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romance | <input type="checkbox"/> Stress/Anxiety |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Horror | <input type="checkbox"/> Growing Up |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Biography | <input type="checkbox"/> LGBTQ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historical Fiction | <input type="checkbox"/> Peer Pressure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Religious | <input type="checkbox"/> Third Culture Kids |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fantasy | <input type="checkbox"/> Drugs/Alcohol |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Graphic Novels | <input type="checkbox"/> Fitting In |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Others _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Others _____ |

Any other thoughts you want to share on your reading experience or preferences?

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM FOR MINORS 12-17 YEARS OF AGE

Dear Independent Reading Flex Block Students,

I am Praxia Apostle, an English teacher at the American School of Dubai (ASD), as well as a doctoral student at Northeastern University in Boston, MA. In fulfillment of my doctoral program, I will be conducting a research study about the independent reading experiences of girls in Grade 9 and Grade 10. The purpose of the study is to better understand what adolescent reading choices, experiences, and personal take-aways. Upon receiving the permission of your parents and of ASD, I would like to collect data in the form of individual interviews.

This letter is to ask you to participate in my study, which includes three 40 minute-long individual interviews. Your participation in this research process is completely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Additionally please be advised that interviews will take place at your convenience in a confidential location. You will not need to miss any class time and this will not impact your academic standing in anyway. No real names will be used during data collection, and all personal information will be kept strictly confidential. This research may help the researcher better understand what teenagers say about young adult literature. In thanks for your participation, you will receive a 100 AED (\$20 USD) gift card to Kinokuniya book store located in the Dubai Mall.

Consent to participation is entirely optional, and you may opt out at any point. Additionally, all responses will be 100% confidential. Should you have questions about the study, you may contact the researcher, Praxia Apostle, at apostle.p@husky.neu.edu or Dr. Carol Young, principal investigator, at c.young@neu.edu.

Should you have any questions about rights of a research participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, at irb@neu.edu.

I thank you in advance for your time and for contribution to this research.

Sincerely,
Praxia Apostle, Researcher

Please feel free to fill out your information below if you interested in participating in the study.

Student's Name: _____

Student's Signature: _____

Grade level (_____) Date: _____

APPENDIX C

PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM FOR MINORS 12-17 YEARS OF AGE

.....

Northeastern University, Department College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigator(s): [Dr. Carol Young, PI; Student Researcher, Praxia Apostle]

Title of Project: Perceptions of Moral Identity Development Through Self-Selected Reading Among Adolescent Girls in an International School Setting: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you *and your child* to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You and your child are being asked to take place in this research study because of your strong interest in independent reading and young adult fiction.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this project is to better understand what about young adult literature teenagers find interesting, what teenagers say about young adult literature, what ways these books relate to their own lives, and how these books might be useful to them.

What will I be asked to do?

If you and your child decide to be in this study, your child will be asked to complete a short reading survey during their daily Flex Block session. We will review these surveys, and dependent upon responses, your child will then be asked to participate in three interviews. These interviews will take place in January in the High School Library. Another adult will be present for the entire interview process. Each interview will last approximately 40-minutes. During these interviews your child will be asked about their independent reading experiences, the qualities of young adult novels they look for, and any connections they see between reading and their life. Your child will not be required to miss any classes within the regular school day.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

The independent reading survey will be given to your child in their Flex Block class in classroom D207 or D208 in the High School. The survey should take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Interviews will take place in January in the High School Library. Each interview will last approximately 40-minutes. Your child will not be required to miss any classes within the regular school day, and they will be scheduled at a mutually agreeable time.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There are no known risks associated with your participation beyond those of everyday life.

Will I benefit by being in this research?

There is no direct benefit to you or your child for taking part in the study. However, your child's participation may help the researcher better understand what teenagers say about young adult literature.

Who will see the information about me?

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project. Confidentiality of your child's records will be strictly maintained with the following exception: the researcher is required by law to report to the appropriate authorities, suspicion of harm to your child or to others.

All interviews and discussions will be audio taped. You may review the tapes that include your child's participation and request that all or any portion of the tapes be destroyed. The audio tapes and all information obtained during this project will be kept strictly secure and will not become part of your child's school record. The audiotapes and all research data will be kept in a locked file cabinet and will only be accessible to the researcher. The audiotapes will also be coded to remove your child's name and will be erased five years after the project is completed. All surveys, and research journals will also be destroyed after five years. The results of this study may be used for the researcher's dissertation, scholarly articles, and/or conference presentations. A pseudonym—or 'made up name'—will be substituted for your child's real name on all documents and files. The researcher assures the study participants that she will keep all records and information addressed in the interviews confidential.

Can I stop my participation in this study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. For the interviews, your child has the right to skip or not answer any questions they prefer not to answer. Non-participation or withdrawal will not affect your child's grades or academic standing.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact Praxia Apostle (apostle.p@husky.neu.edu) or her faculty sponsor, Professor Carol Young (cyoung@neu.edu). The address for Professor Carol Young is Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, 360 Huntington Ave., Boston, MA 02115.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?

In thanks for you and your child's participation, you will receive a 100 AED (\$20 USD) gift card to Kinokuniya book store located in the Dubai Mall.

Will it cost me anything to participate?

There are no costs associated with you or your child's participation in this study.

I agree to [have my child] take part in this research.

Signature of person [parent] agreeing to take part

Date

Printed name of person above

Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent

Date

Printed name of person above

.....

Depending upon the nature of your research, you may also be required to provide information about one or more of the following if it is applicable:

1. A statement that the particular treatment or procedure may involve risks to the subject (or to the embryo or fetus, if the subject is or may become pregnant) which are currently unforeseeable.
2. Anticipated circumstances under which the subject's participation may be terminated by the investigator without regard to the subject's consent.
3. Any additional costs to the subject that may result from participation in the research.
4. The consequences of a subject's decision to withdraw from the research and procedures for orderly termination of participation by the subject.
5. A statement that significant new finding(s) developed during the course of the research which may be related to the subject's willingness to continue participation will be provided to the subject.
6. The approximate number of subjects involved in the study.

Interview Questions

Interview One: Reading History

Overarching Question:

- In this interview, we're going to be discussing your background and experience with reading. Can you tell me a little about yourself (personality/hobbies/likes/dislikes) and how you feel about reading?

Follow up prompts as needed:

1. Does your family like to read?
2. How would you describe yourself as a reader?
3. What have been your experiences with reading in school?
4. Do you independently read at home?
 - a. Why or why not?
5. Are you reading independently more, less, or the same since starting high school?
6. Have you changed as an independent reader since starting high school?
7. What do you like about reading?
8. What kinds of things make a book interesting to you?
9. Tell me about your first experience reading a book you found interesting or engaging.
 - a. What about the book did you find interesting?
10. Tell me about a book you did not like.
 - a. What did you not like about the book?

Interview Two: Current Reading Experience

Overarching Question:

- In this interview we're going to be discussing an independent reading experience that was important to you. Can you tell me about a book that you'd call a favorite or is special to you? What did you find interesting or what did you enjoy about this book?

Follow up questions as needed:

1. What kinds of things do you think about or imagine when you were reading this book?
2. Did this book make you think about yourself or others?
 - a. If so, explain what kinds of things it made you think.
3. Tell me about a time you identified with a character in a book.
 - a. What are the character's traits and experiences?
 - b. Why do you identify with this character?
4. Do you ever make connections to your life when you read?
 - a. If, so describe a connection with a book that was interesting or important to you.

Interview 3: Reading Outcomes

Overarching Question:

- In this interview we're going to discuss what you think about why people read fiction, and what purpose it might have in our lives. Can you tell me about a time where a book made you think about yourself, other people or the world we live in?

Follow up questions as needed:

1. Tell me about a book you read that had an interesting conflict or difficult problem to resolve.
 - a. What was the problem?
 - b. What were the different "sides"?
 - c. How was it resolved?
2. What about the problem was interesting to you?
3. How did characters think through the conflict?
4. How would you think through this conflict?
 - a. Why?
 - b. What were important considerations you made?
5. Tell me about a time when a character, in your opinion, did the right thing.
 - a. What made this right?
 - b. Would others agree or disagree with you?

6. Tell me about a time when a character, in your opinion, did something wrong.
 - a. What made this wrong?
 - b. Would others agree or disagree?

7. After you finished this book, did you ever think about it later on?
 - a. When did it come to mind?
 - b. What did you think about?
 - c. What connections did you make?

8. What's the point of reading about fictional people, worlds, and problems?
 - a. Why do you think we read about them?

Second, studies on how schools and teachers can intentionally support adolescents' identity development showed that different types of explorative learning experiences can be organized to support adolescents' identity development: experiences aimed at exploring new identity positions (in-breadth exploration), further specifying already existing self-understandings (in-depth exploration), and reflecting on self-understandings (reflective exploration).⁴ When it comes to more circumscribed identity dimensions, we included articles on the development of adolescents' school- and learning-related identity dimensions (e.g., mathematics identity, learner identity).