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Gendering Fiction: A Mixed Methods Examination Of The Influence Of The "boy" Book/ "girl" Book Phenomenon On The Willingness To Read Of Young Adolescents

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GENDERING FICTION:
A MIXED METHODS EXAMINATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE “BOY”
BOOK/ “GIRL” BOOK PHENOMENON ON THE WILLINGNESS TO READ OF
YOUNG ADOLESCENTS

A Dissertation Presented

by

Megan Munson-Warnken

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The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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Specializing in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

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ABSTRACT

Well-meaning educators often recommend more “boy” books to increase reading motivation amongst boys. This experimental mixed-methods study investigated the influence of the “boy” book/ “girl” book phenomenon on willingness to read using a researcher-designed instrument called the Textual Features Sort (TFS). The TFS measured two attitudinal constructs—*gendered beliefs about texts* and *willingness to read*—in relation to individual textual features of selected young adult novels. Data came from 50 sixth and seventh grade students at a mid-sized public school in a rural New England state. Mean scores, frequencies, and percentages were analyzed using independent samples t-tests, paired t-tests, and Fisher’s exact test. Qualitative data was used to explain quantitative results. Findings indicate that boys were not more willing to read “boy” books than other books, nor less willing to read books with female protagonists. Boys were significantly less willing to read “girl” books, though individual textual features of a single novel elicited different gendered beliefs along with varying degrees of willingness to read. Girls were significantly less willing to read a novel if it was first sorted as a “boy” book. Research revealed a widespread belief in social consequences for a boy carrying a “girl” book down the hallway, that did not hold for girls. Findings suggest that sociocultural constructions of gender inhibit both boys and girls as readers, though to varying degrees, and challenge the notion that highly gendered and heteronormative assumptions about books and reading practices will increase willingness to read among young adolescent boys.

DEDICATION

For David, who inspired my work the moment he protested, “But Ms. Munson, we can’t read that, that’s a girl’s book!” and then loved the book.

Wherever you are and whatever you are doing, I hope that you are still reading all kinds of books.

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there the way becomes clear. When I say that I could not have done this without you, I am not being cute or modest. I actually, literally, could not have done this without you.

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**CHAPTER 1:
THE PROBLEM OF THE “BOY” BOOK/ “GIRL”
BOOK PHENOMENON**

Introduction

- I. A boy brings *A Little House in the Big Woods* by Laura Ingalls Wilder (2004) to share with his second-grade class. Though he resisted when his mother introduced the novel as a bedtime story, he loves the story and is now excited to share it with his peers during literature circle. After he introduces the book, he looks up. Every girl in the circle makes the hand-sign for “connection” indicating they too had read and enjoyed it. Every boy avoids eye contact, hands tucked under their legs. The boy comes home from school and bursts into tears.
- II. The owner of an independent bookstore rings up an audiobook and tells her customer, “You’ll love this detective novel; it was a page-turner. I couldn’t put it down!” The woman replies, “I’m so glad, my teenage son and I are going on a road trip and we need a good book for the drive.” The owner freezes, “Oh—it’s for your son? We should put this one back because the main character is a woman. We can find one with a male protagonist he’ll like better.” She voids the transaction and leads the customer back to the shelves.
- III. A college student is talking with classmates when their professor overhears one young woman say to another, “Did you know his favorite movie is *Frozen*!” Both young women laugh and tease as the young man protests vehemently, his cheeks burning in obvious shame and embarrassment.
- IV. A fifth-grade boy sees his mother reading the popular young adult novel *Divergent* by Veronica Roth (2011). “Mom,” he says, “the boys in my class say

that is a girls' book.” She asks him what that means, they talk about it, then she tells him why she cannot put it down. When she finishes the novel, the boy picks it up and begins. He cannot put it down. He reads in the car; he reads as he walks; he reads while eating breakfast. When he puts it down, his younger brother begins. Like his brother and his mother, he cannot put it down. They read every book in the series.

Each of these literary events occurred between 2000 and 2014. In each, an invisible and highly gendered line separating boys from texts became visible, a boundary judging boys and “boy” books against girls and “girl” books. “Boy” books are loosely defined as fiction or nonfiction with stereotypically masculine themes such as sports or the military that involve violence or bodily humor, center around male characters, and are most often written by male authors (Newkirk, 2002; Serafini, 2013). “Boy” books are consistently and implicitly defined in opposition to “girl” books, that is both books with stereotypically feminine themes and any book centered around female characters and written by a female author. Thus, novels like *Little House on the Prairie* or *Divergent* qualified as “girl” books in spite of their overt survival themes and high-interest settings. As demonstrated in the literary events above, public enjoyment of a “girl” book or film is perceived as emasculating for boys, a reason for shame and avoidance.

The gendered line in literature endures and is often invoked in both the popular press and professional journals (Scieszka, 2014; Serafini, 2013; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Young & Brozo, 2001) as an answer to the persistent gap in reading motivation and achievement between girls and boys (Brozo et al., 2014; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2015; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development,

2014). Calls for more “boy” books are premised on the assumption that “boy” books will increase reading motivation among boys and thus raise reading achievement (Atkinson, 2009; Korman, 2013), without recognizing that gender and masculinity are the products of particular sociocultural beliefs and values. Feminist theorists and activists have challenged, complicated, and rejected simplistic definitions of womanhood and femininity that continue to define men and masculinity (Beauvoir, 2009; Friedan, 2013; Nye, 2005; Rich, 1995). Given the literary events motivating this study, it is possible that these narrow definitions, although clearly charged with social, political, and economic power, have significant socio-emotional and literary costs (Kimmel, 2008; Newson, 2014; Pollack, 1998).

What is at Stake?

The research is clear that the way to become a stronger and more fluent reader is to read (Stanovich, 1986; Torgesen, 1998; Ivey & Johnston, 2015). Reading increases background knowledge, vocabulary, reading fluency, reading stamina, and academic achievement (Chall, 1996; Stanovich, 1986). In addition, reading is a social practice (Baker, Sher, & Mackler, 1997; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997) and is associated with increased empathy, positive social ability, decreased social isolation, and increased brain connectivity (Berns, Blaine, Prietula, & Pye, 2013; Ivey and Johnston, 2013; Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009). Mol and Bus (2011) found that not only did weaker readers benefit from reading for pleasure, or leisure reading, but that there was a strong correlation between reading for pleasure and reading comprehension, technical reading, and spelling; these correlations strengthened as students moved through school.

In spite of widespread agreement that reading has extensive cognitive and affective benefits, there is also a well-documented and gendered gap in reading achievement by both national and international measures (Brozo, et al., 2014; Chudowsky & Chudowsky, 2010). Since 2002, girls have scored an average of 7 points higher than boys in fourth grade and 9.7 points higher than boys in eighth grade on the National Assessment of Educational Progress reading test (NAEP, 2015). Boys are underrepresented among students taking Advanced Placement (AP) English test. Of the over 527, 274 students who sat for the AP English Language and Composition test in 2015, just under 38% were boys, while 37% of the over 401,000 students who sat for the AP English Literature and Composition test, were boys (The College Board Program Summary, 2015). As a point of comparison, 48% of students who sat for the AP Chemistry test were girls (The College Board Program Summary, 2015). On an international scale, girls continue to outperform boys in reading by the equivalent of one year across countries and economies, a gap that is significant even among the best performing students (OECD, 2014).

A debate over how to meet the needs of boys has been ongoing amongst literacy educators. As will be explored more fully in the literature review below, the response of educators can be summed up by Young and Brozo (2001) in their dialogic article “Conversations: Boys Will Be Boys, or Will They? Literacy and Masculinities.” Throughout the article, Brozo argues that not only is there a crisis, but that the answer lies in increasing the number of “boy” books available in classrooms and schools and that before boys can be critical readers, they must be readers by any means necessary. Young counters that reading and critical reading should happen concurrently, that learning to

unpack sociocultural assumptions about masculinity might, in fact, motivate otherwise reluctant readers. Brozo and Young (2001) present themselves as dialogically opposed. However, it is possible that while broad generalizations about boys as readers may be useful to a point, a critical lens is needed to expand the breadth and range of books male readers can access, and recognize and disrupt the oversimplified and hegemonic version of masculinity that may actually inhibit boys as readers.

As the upcoming review of literature will show, research has explored the literacy practices of boys (Brozo & Schmelzer, 1997; Brozo, 2012; Dutro, 2002; Love & Hamston, 2004; Young, 2000, 2001), gendered differences in achievement and motivation (Becker, McElvany, & Kortenbruck, 2010; McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang, & Meyer, 2012; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), and the development of gender roles in the interactions of young children with each other and with adults (Cahill, 1983, 1986; Martin & Ruble, 2004). However, in spite of the overwhelming evidence that strong reading skills and high reading motivation predict academic achievement and that boys, as a group, consistently underperform in reading achievement and motivation, few studies have examined the possible influence of sociocultural constructions of gender and masculinity on reading.

Overview of Dissertation Research

This dissertation research will begin to fill this gap by extending previous research on the “girl” book/ “boy” book phenomenon (Dutro, 2001, 2002). The study examines the influence of sociocultural constructions of gender and gendered beliefs about texts on the willingness to read of young adolescents and considers the possibility that hegemonic definitions of masculinity may inhibit boys as readers.

Study design. Previous studies suggest that young adolescents' attitudes towards texts reflect gendered beliefs and values and indicate that book covers may act as gatekeepers, preventing boys in particular from accessing novels they might otherwise be willing to read (Barrs & Pidgeon, 1994; Dutro, 2002; Millard, 1997; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). This study extends earlier work by measuring two attitudinal constructs — *willingness to read* and *gendered beliefs about texts* — in relation to young adult (YA) fiction. This mixed methods study used a posttest-only randomized group design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Table 1.1), centered around a researcher-designed affective instrument called the Textual Features Sort (TFS). The TFS elicited quantitative and qualitative data to measure the two dependent variables as they may be associated with gender and group assignment (Table 1.2). The study addressed the following questions:

1. How likely are young adolescent readers to perceive young adult (YA) novels as gendered based on individual textual features?
2. To what extent, and in what ways, is willingness to read associated with gender and the gendered categorization of YA novels for young adolescent readers?
3. To what extent do highly gendered book covers influence willingness to read YA fiction for young adolescent readers? To what extent, and in what ways, do boys and girls perceive there to be social consequences for public association with highly gendered books?

Sample. Participants were 50 sixth and seventh graders at Bethany Middle School (a pseudonym) in a formerly rural New England town, now a bedroom community to the state's largest city. Approximately 42% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch; 96% of students identify as White, 1% as Hispanic, and 3% as Multi-

Racial. The percentage of students qualified for support services is on par with the state demographic: 79% receive no support, 13% have Individualized Education Plans, 3% have Educational Support Teams, and 5% have 504 plans (Vermont Agency of Education, 2016).

A recruitment letter was distributed to all 221 sixth and seventh grade students. Middle grade students were chosen because research on reading motivation (e.g. McKenna, et al., 2012) and national reading achievement data (e.g. NAEP, 2015) consistently show that gendered gaps increase between fourth and eighth grade. Fifty-one students returned signed consent forms, though one seventh grade boy dropped out of the study early on (Table 1.3). Participants represented 22.6% of all sixth and seventh grade students at Bethany. Seventy-two percent of study participants were sixth graders ($n = 36$), 28% were seventh graders ($n = 14$). Forty-six percent of participants were boys ($n = 23$) and 54% were girls ($n = 27$). Ninety percent of participants identified as white ($n = 45$), 6% as bi-racial ($n = 3$), and 4% ($n = 2$) as Asian American. In terms of reading, 44% ($n = 22$) of participants read above grade level, 14% ($n = 7$) read at grade level, and 42% ($n = 21$) read below grade level. All student-level demographic and reading level data was obtained through school records and compiled by the data and testing specialist at Bethany. In the course of data collection, participants were asked to self-select gender identity due to the possibility that biologic sex designation as recorded institutionally, may not match an individual student's gender identity. All participants in the study self-identified as cisgender, that is, when the individual experience of gender matches sex assignment at birth; however, the principal shared that several students in the middle school identify publicly as gender-fluid.

Procedures. As mentioned above, this dissertation study is centered on a researcher-designed Textual Features Sort. Participants were sorted into experimental and control groups based on a random stratified sampling that controlled for gender, reading level, and reading motivation (Table 1.4). Each participant, regardless of group, was asked to sort three sets of textual features commonly used in recreational text selection – text extract, back jacket, and book cover (Isaacs, 1992; Mohr, 2006) – onto a sort mat; the textual features were drawn from ten young adult novels on the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) “Top Ten List of 2013.”

Participants in the control group were asked to sort each set of textual features onto a sort mat with three columns: I Would Read This, I Might Read This, I Would Not Read This. Participants in the experimental group were asked to sort the same sets, in the same order, onto a mat with three columns: Boys’ Book, Both Book, Girls’ Book. The control group sort mat tested degree of willingness to read the YA novels based on individual textual features. The experimental group sort mat introduced gendered book categories to test gendered categorization, then tested willingness to read in a close-ended question during the post-sort interview. Structured interviews for all students gathered narrative accounts of individual beliefs and rationales influencing sort decisions. Data from the individual Textual Features Sort form the basis of the two journal articles included in this dissertation study.

In addition to the individual Textual Features Sort, several other types of data were collected in the course of field research. First, each participant was placed in a small mixed-gender group with other participants in the control or experimental groups. Again, placement was based on a random stratified sample controlling for gender,

reading level, and reading motivation. Each group was asked to repeat the sort, this time with the goal of achieving consensus on the placement of each textual feature. The same structured interview questions followed each sort. Data for group were collected manually and through video-recording. Second, reading achievement data was collected for each student, including teacher-assessed reading level, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) reading scores, and the Gates-MacGinitie grade-level test for reading achievement, which measured reading comprehension and vocabulary. Third, each student filled out the Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1995), a validated measure of intrinsic and extrinsic reading motivation over 11 dimensions that is commonly used in reading motivation research. These three additional data sources are beyond the scope of the current study, but form a broad foundation for future research.

Findings. Findings from the first round of data analysis have been written up into two journal articles. The articles are detailed below.

Scholarly article 1. The first article in this dissertation will be submitted to a top-tier, peer-reviewed scholarly journal focused on literacy research, such as *Reading Research Quarterly*. The article, titled “The Influence of Gendered Beliefs About Texts on the Willingness to Read of Young Adolescents: A Mixed Methods Approach,” shares the findings of the individual Textual Features Sort (TFS). The findings address the first two research questions using data from all participants ($N = 50$). These findings contradict the popular beliefs that boys are more willing to read “boy” books and that boys are less willing to read books with female protagonists. However, boys *were* significantly less willing to read a novel if the representative

textual feature was perceived to represent a “girl” book. Both gendered beliefs about texts and willingness to read varied based on different textual features of a single novel, in some cases significantly so. An unexpected, though not entirely surprising, finding was that girls were significantly less willing to read a novel based on a textual feature if it was first sorted as a “boy” book.

Scholarly article 2. The second article in this dissertation will be submitted to *The Reading Teacher*, a peer-reviewed practitioner journal focused on the reading and literacy practices of young people up to age 12. The article is titled “The High Cost of ‘Girl’ Books for Adolescent Boys.” The article presents data from the experimental group ($N = 25$), which sorted books into gendered categories before indicating willingness to read. The article answers the third research question regarding the influence of book covers and potential social consequences on willingness to read. These findings may help to explain why boys throughout the study were significantly less willing to read a novel when its textual feature was believed to represent a “girl” book. Findings revealed the widespread perception that a boy carrying a “girl” book down the hallway of his school would face negative social consequences that a girl carrying a “boy” book down the hallway would not.

Taken together, these articles challenge the pervasive belief that “boy” books are the solution to the gendered gap in reading motivation and achievement and suggest the cost of gendering fiction, implicitly or explicitly, is too high a price to pay.

Empirical and Conceptual Contributions

This research is poised to make significant empirical and conceptual contributions

to the fields of literacy research and gender studies.

Empirical Contributions. This study is the first to both quantify the “boy” book/ “girl” book phenomenon and consider the ways this phenomenon may be associated with willingness to read. In addition, it is the first known study to measure gendered beliefs about texts and willingness to read using isolated textual features of individual texts. And finally, it is the first known study to record and measure the presence or absence of social consequences for public affiliation with books perceived to be highly gendered.

Conceptual Contributions. Conceptually, this research contributes to a more robust understanding of the ways sociocultural constructions of gender work within a binary system to inhibit the reading practices of young adolescents. It also reveals those gendered constructions for what they are—unstable categories cultivated and reproduced, in part, through text selection or rejection, that contribute to a hegemonic social order premised on compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 1988). Finally, it provides an opportunity to “queer” the gendered book binary as it is embedded in a system of compulsory heterosexuality by revealing the need for a pedagogical approach to reading and readers that “refuses normal practices and practices of normalcy...begins with an ethical concern for one’s *own* reading practices... is interested in exploring what one cannot bear to know” and imagines literary experiences “unhinged from the dominant conceptual order” (Britzman, 1998, p. 227, emphasis in original). In doing so, this study begins to make room for reading practices and communities that encourage all readers to read critically and authentically. The research will show that not only do young people need educators to help them engage in this work of queering gendered beliefs about texts and readers, but that many of them have begun it already.

Researcher Position Statement

As a feminist and critical race theorist with post-modernist tendencies to complicate claims of a single, stable, or universal Truth, I have long recognized that individuals and communities exist and interact within systems of overlapping and often discordant sociocultural, historical, political, and economic discourses. This is to say that I entered the doctoral program wary of and even resistant to quantitative research with its claims to Truth via large-scale, empirical data sets. However, over my course of study, I have come to learn that qualitative research benefits in profound ways from quantitative research.

In spite of an initial aversion to statistical analysis, this dissertation research study was designed using a mixed methods approach because, as a very wise professor taught me, the questions must drive the methodology; my questions required both quantitative and qualitative answers. The limited work that has been done on the “boy” book/ “girl” book phenomenon has been either small-scale qualitative (Dutro 2001, 2002) or theoretical (Young & Brozo, 2001). The work on the gendered gap in reading motivation has been largely quantitative and focused on overarching significance and correlations (Kelley & Decker, 2009; McKenna, et al. 2012) rather than the willingness to read of individual readers towards individual texts. The questions that emerge from the gap in these bodies of literature require both quantitative and qualitative answers.

Creswell (2008) delineates between four epistemologies that fundamentally shape research design: post-positivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism. While researchers often locate themselves within a single epistemological framework, I find myself increasingly locating myself in what Onwuegbuzie (2012) has

termed the *radical middle*. I now believe in the potential of empirical measurement as fully as I do in observations, interviews, and action research; it is in this radical middle that researchers can develop a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the influence of sociocultural and historical conditions on individual and collective experiences.

My background as a literary scholar, literature teacher at the middle and college levels, and mother of three boys who read voraciously across gendered boundaries, cannot help but to inform my work because I have witnessed, the tremendous power of literature to transform ways of thinking about, seeing, and interacting with the world. I fundamentally believe in the potential of fiction to shape who we are as individuals and our communities, as well as build empathy and deepen an understanding of others and ourselves.

My research interests have always been in the place where the humanities and social sciences meet. As an English major and then again during my graduate work in English Literature at the University of Washington in Seattle, I felt compelled to move beyond an experience and analysis of the text itself and towards an examination of the ways fiction works in the world, particularly its transformative potential for young adult readers—or potential readers. This dissertation research provided the opportunity to engage across disciplinary fields, to develop the methodological and epistemological tools that are essential in the work I hope to do in the space where literature and education overlap.

Potential Biases and Ethical Issues. As a former middle level teacher in both private and public schools, I have witnessed the excitement of reluctant male readers

when given access to engaging texts they had considered beyond the gender line. As the mother of three boys, I have spent over a decade reading to my own boys, discussing, critiquing, and reveling in the literature we read together. One of my deepest fears as a new parent was that my boys would not be readers. While this fear was unfounded, it does point to a significant potential for bias in my research. Throughout this study, I have remained cognizant of my own bias towards reading, particularly my fundamental belief in the value and power in fiction, and I have remained curious about the many forms of reading participants spoke of engaging in.

In order to check myself, to maintain a critical distance and minimize bias, I instituted several checks and balances throughout the process of research, analysis, and interpretation. First, I “bracketed” my personal beliefs about the “girl” book/ “boy” book phenomenon, along with philosophical and emotional reactions, by writing reflective memos (Giorgi, 2009). Second, to minimize unfounded assumptions based on my own positionality and biases, I asked the young adolescents themselves to clarify and confirm responses during participant interviews. Third, I met with my advisor regularly to discuss the data collection and my interactions with participants. Fourth, I worked with a small group of fellow doctoral students on a regular basis throughout this process. This “critical friends” group included colleagues who do not share my passion for literature and have proven willing to engage in honest critique. I relied on these individuals for perspectives that challenged and balanced my own.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This review of the literature will consider: (a) the debate about the gendered gap in reading achievement; (b) sociocultural constructions of gender as they are historically, empirically, and theoretically understood; (c) the importance of reading motivation, attitude, and choice in the development of engaged readers; and (d) the history of children's and young adult literature as a vehicle for reproducing particular and highly gendered values.

The Gendered Gap in Reading Achievement

The contemporary conversation, both popular and academic, about how to approach the underperformance of boys as readers has been lively in the United States and the United Kingdom since at least the 1990s. Not only do young women now outnumber young men on the honor roll and outperform them on standardized assessments of reading and writing, but unlike at the turn of the nineteenth century, young women also outnumber young men in undergraduate and graduate school admissions and graduation rates (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009).

In the popular press. Concern periodically erupts into panic through newspaper headlines designed to generate worry (Bidwell, 2015; Major, 2009; Sommers, 2013). Locally, articles about the failure of boys in school and particularly in reading are common. Headlines from the major daily newspaper for the state of Vermont over the last decade have included many variations of "Boy Trouble: Girls Outperform Boys in Many Academic Areas" (Walsh, 2013). These articles often follow the release of state-

wide standardized test scores and highlight the persistent reading and writing achievement gap between boys and girls. National media outlets offer similar headlines such as “The Gender Gap: Boys Lagging” (Stahl, 2002), “The Boys at the Back” (Sommers, 2013), “Boy Falling Behind Girls in Many Areas” (Tyre, 2006), and “Dads Weigh in on Why Boys Fall Behind” (Martin, 2013). Such articles blame the gendered achievement gap on everything from the sedentary nature of school, to the lack of male elementary school teachers, to the developmental appropriateness of the increased academic pressure on children as a result of public policy like No Child Left Behind (2002), to the changing national economy as a result of the transition of U.S. manufacturing jobs overseas.

Books published for the general public include titles such as *The War Against Boys* (Sommers, 2000), *Boys Adrift: The Five Factors Driving the Growing Epidemic of Unmotivated boys and Underachieving Young Men* (Sax, 2009), *The Trouble with Boys* (Tyre, 2008), and *Why Boys Fail: Saving Them from an Educational System That’s Leaving Them Behind* (Whitmire, 2012). As is clear from even the most superficial rhetorical analysis, these titles foreground gender and position boys as both a monolithic group and the victims of a larger institutional conspiracy. These articles and books are often ahistorical and build their argument around the notion in the last quarter of the twentieth century, and as the result of feminism or educational policy, an educational system that had been meeting the needs of boys as learners developing into men has changed for the worse. This ahistorical perspective implies, first that boys operate as a monolithic group devoid of other identity or contextual features, and second, that at some point all boys performed as all girls on measurements of reading achievement, regardless

of race or class. Threading this narrative is an allusion to a precipitating event or series of events began a decline in boys' academic and reading achievement. However, there is convincing evidence that, since the beginnings of coeducation in the U.S., girls have consistently outperformed boys, especially in reading and writing (Gates, 1961; Stroud & Lindquist, 1942; Tyack & Hansot, 1992).

In the academic community. Among literacy educators and researchers (e.g. Martino & Kehler, 2007; Serafini, 2013; Watson & Kehler 2012; Wilhelm & Smith, 2014), the shape of the debate can best be summed up by Young and Brozo (2001). Both base their positions on national data sources and trends, their own academic research, and personal and professional experiences and both maintain an ahistorical perspective when agree that boys are 'falling behind' in literacy. That said, their intellectual and pedagogical positions are presented as diametrically opposed (Young & Brozo, 2001).

Brozo argues that gendered differences in academic and socio-emotional success (e.g. depression, suicide, and incarceration rates) are stark enough to warrant crisis-level thinking. His primary solution is to fill classrooms with "boy" books, the kinds of books he believes will appeal to a general young male audience and will increase their engagement, and by extension achievement, in literacy-related tasks (Young & Brozo, 2001). Brozo defines "boy" books as books about stereotypically manly characters (such as lumberjacks) having adventures on both land and sea (Young & Brozo, 2001, p. 317). This definition echoes an early definition proposed by W.G. Sumner, a literary critic in the late nineteenth century (1876). While ultimately Sumner was critical of such "boy" books, fearing that the hyper-masculine characters and their mischievous adventures set a

dangerous precedent for male readers, he provided a definition of “boy” book that continues to resonate,

The stories are about a hunting, Indian warfare, California desperado life, pirates, wild sea adventure, highway men, crimes and horrible accidents, horrors (tortures and snake stories) gamblers, practical jokes, the life of vagabond boys and the wild behavior of dissipated boys in great cities. (Sumner, 1876, p. 681)

Brozo suggested that “through the careful use of archetypal literature it could be expected that boys would expand their literacy as well as their conceptions of masculinity” (Brozo & Schmeltzer, 1997). Like Brozo, Serafini (2013) endorses books “[f]ocused on plot—not focused on drama and emotions” (Serafini, 2013, p. 40) and “underwear, farting, and slapstick misbehavior” as a way to motivate boy readers.

Young (Young & Brozo, 2001) argued that a critical literacy approach is needed, one that “opens up possibilities for the readers to explore how gender is defined by language and social contexts, and, in turn, how their constructions of gender influence their understanding of text” (Young & Brozo, 2001, p. 321). This ongoing critique should be done with students and address the ways that masculinity itself is socially constructed (Young & Brozo, 2001). Young challenged educators to question school literacy practices, to engage in an examination of the ways gender is reconstituted by these practices and “in turn, how the Discourses of masculinity and femininity are affected by these practices” (Young & Brozo, 2001, p. 321). Martino and Kehler (2007) take up a similar stance, arguing against literacy policies and practice that position boys as a hegemonic group incapable of or uninterested in critical literacy, and for teaching

boys sustained and complex thinking about the forces that shape the world around them, both visible and invisible.

Historical context. Tyack and Hansot (1992) provide accounts of conversations among educators as early as 1858 about the “boy problem” in public schools. This problem was defined as inconsistent attendance, high retention rates, and disproportionately high drop-out rates among boys. In 1907, “Out of 100 boys entering Boston high schools, for example, only 10 reach the senior year” (Tyack & Hansot, 1992, p. 171). The gendered gap was even greater among African American students, though seldom given the attention it deserved (Tyack & Hansot, 1992). A turn-of-the-century report called *Laggards in Our Schools* (Ayres, 1909) detailed the results of a comprehensive study of thousands of school records from schools across the country. In the report, Ayres argued that

We have always known fewer boys than girls go to the high school, but we have not known before that there is 13 per cent more retardation among boys than among girls and 13 per cent more repeaters among boys than among girls, or that the percentage of girls who complete the common school course is 17 per cent greater than the percentage of boys. These facts mean our schools as at present constituted are far better fitted to the needs of girls than they are to those of boys. (Ayres, 1909, pp. 6-7)

‘Retardation,’ as it is used here, is not associated with cognitive or developmental differences, but is defined as students who are older than the average age of their grade in school and is attributed to late entrance in school and slow progress due to poor attendance. In 1942, Stroud and Lindquist published an analysis of the Iowa Every-Pupil

Testing Program from 1932-1939 and the Iowa Every-Pupil Basic Skills Testing Program for 1940, which found that “girls have maintained a consistent, and on the whole, significant superiority over boys in the subjects tested, save in arithmetic, where small, insignificant differences favor boys” (Stroud & Lindquist, 1942, pp. 665-66).

As these examples show, gendered differences in achievement, including reading achievement, have been an issue for well over a century. However, such historical longevity is rarely mentioned in the current debate over boys. The present study evolved, in part, out of a concern that the contemporary crisis-oriented rhetoric surrounding the gendered gaps in reading achievement and reading motivation generate potential solutions that stem from an essentialist and an ahistorical understanding of the issue hinged upon hegemonic and heteronormative definitions of masculinity.

Understanding Gender

Gender can be approached from multiple disciplinary perspectives. Given that gender drives this dissertation research and is the primary independent variable in both quantitative and qualitative data analysis, it is important to understand the ways gender is conceived.

Historically situated. The hyper-masculine definition of masculinity implicit in calls for more “boy” books (e.g. Korman, 2013; Serafini, 2013; Young & Brozo, 2001) and problematized by those challenging such definitions (e.g. Watson, Kehler, & Martino, 2010; Young & Brozo, 2001) dates back to the mid-nineteenth century. With the Industrial Revolution, the growth of a middle class, and the rise of the Victorianism came urban, economic, and familial shifts that used gender and gender roles as a means

of organizing and disciplining a changing social, cultural, and political landscape (Nye, 2005; Segel, 1986).

Within this evolving social order, gender as a construct and gender roles as cultural expectations were conflated with biologic sex and sex roles dependent upon purportedly ‘natural’ sex differences and constructed along a series of dichotomies, such as public/ private, rational/irrational, intelligent/emotional, strong/weak (Butler, 2006). Women were expected to manage all domestic affairs in the private sphere as “angels of the house” (Segel, 1986), while the men were expected to participate in the public sphere as nation-builders.

It is important to note that race and class, in particular, whiteness and affluence, are embedded within the generalizations above (Higginbotham, 1992). Like gender, race, class, and sexuality are socially constructed categories used to define and control individuals and communities within broader historical, political, social, and economic systems of power (Foucault, 1995; Lorde & Clarke, 2007). Often a single category is discussed as if it does not intersect with the others in complicated and dynamic ways. The intent here is not to render race or class invisible in the discussion of gender and sexuality, but to recognize and problematize overarching themes as they have been used to define individuals and categories of people (e.g. boys or men). West and Zimmerman (1987) called gender—and by extension sexuality— “master identities” because they subtly, and not-so-subtly, define individuals from the moment biological sex is known and cut across race and class (Cahill, 1986). While at the present moment, race and class are beyond the scope of the current study, future analysis of the current data will include

a closer examination the data using race and socioeconomic status (as defined by free or reduced lunch) as both critical lenses and independent variables.

Feminist activists and theorists (e.g. de Beauvoir, 2009; Friedan, 2013; hooks, 2014; Rich, 1995) continue to challenge and reimagine the working definition of womanhood and femininity, including *who* counts as a woman and *when* (Goldberg, 2014). As a result, there has been a profound broadening of cultural norms and expectations for girls and women along educational, professional, political, and economic lines. However, the working definition of manhood and masculinity has not been contested to the same degree, perhaps because with active participation in a patriarchal system comes privilege and power whose costs are often hidden or repressed (Kimmel, 2008; Pollack, 1998).

Theoretically bound. Gender and sex have been theorized in powerful and significant ways over the years as individuals in various fields try to make sense of the complex interplay between biology, history, and culture on individuals, groups, and society at large. Several theorists in particular provide the theoretical framework for this study.

Connell (2005) has theorized “hegemonic masculinity” as a culturally dominant form of masculinity pervasive throughout Western culture and reproduced through the media, political and economic structures, and institutions of all sizes. This form of masculinity is associated with authority, power, and social status and is re/produced in direct opposition to femininity and womanhood. As theorized by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), hegemonic masculinity is the measure against which other forms of masculinities are subordinated and judged. Hegemonic masculinity may play out to

varying degrees in the lives of individuals and “works in part through the production of exemplars of masculinity (e.g. professional sports stars), symbols that have authority despite the fact that most men and boys do not fully live up to them” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.846).

Butler (1988, 2006) theorized that gender is produced through interpretations, actions, and interactions that result in a performance of maleness or femaleness, masculinity or femininity. Butler (1988, 2006) argued that gender is not ‘natural’ or fixed, but socially and culturally constructed in ways that are both pre-existing and reproduced through the daily performances of individuals and groups,

Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives. (Butler, 1988, p. 526)

This script creates a "gender order" reliant on a system of compulsory heterosexuality intended to maintain rigid social coherence and facilitate biologic and cultural reproduction. Individual transgressions or failures to perform gender identity within the confines of this system “initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, [while] performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all” (Butler, 1988, p. 526). Thus gender is understood as a collective as well as individual experience that is connected, but not tied to any individual body or genitalia. This study conceptualizes gender as a cultural performance subject to the demands and

permutations of social, political, economic and philosophical forces over time (Butler, 1988, 2006).

Through Gee (1989), the performance of gender can be understood as both subject to and reproducing overarching discourse communities for boys/men and girls/women. As a master identity, gender-identity is performed in relation to national, regional, and familial values, expectations, and belief systems. Gee (1989) defines a discourse community as requiring a particular way “of being in the world...[the] integrat[ion of] words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes” (p. 6-7). At any given moment every individual is a member of multiple, overlapping, and at times contradictory Discourse communities that she or he navigates and negotiates consciously or subconsciously. Discourse communities are governed by explicit or implicit rules for participation, rules that define who is *in* as well as who is *out*. In any given Discourse community, a participant must abide by governing norms or be subject to discipline or exclusion for transgression (Gee, 1989; Foucault, 1979). Individuals may be born into a Discourse community (e.g. family unit, ethnic or religious group), opt into a Discourse community (e.g. soccer team, political party), or be forced into a Discourse community (e.g. school, prison). Discourse communities may be dominant or subordinate, visible or invisible.

Socially and culturally constructed. The theories of gender offered by Connell (2005), Butler (1988, 2006), and Gee (1989) have been observed and complicated through empirical studies of gender as it is practiced in everyday experiences and used as an organizational tool from childhood through adulthood. For example, in a qualitative study of gender-identity acquisition in young children, Cahill (1986) observed a

‘grammar of social identity’ that reflects cultural practices in a given society and “influences its members’ definitions of self...through everyday interaction” (p. 297). Cahill found that children internalized unspoken and gendered rules of behavior before 3 years-old, as they attempted to make sense of and enact the categorical terms organizing their world and experience of it (1986). In addition, he found that young children often make choices, both conscious and subconscious, that align themselves with these gendered categorical terms (Cahill, 1986). These displays of identity possess varying degrees of social value, and children attempted to enact gendered identities that led to positive social outcomes (Cahill, 1986).

In their review of cognitive perspectives on gender-identity development, Martin and Ruble (2004) observe that children play an active role in developing a gender-schema, drawing cues and clues from their social environments. These gender-schemas are not neutral and by the age of 5, children have collected and apply an extensive array of gender stereotypes to themselves and others. Adherence to and application of gender stereotypes can be rigid, though become more flexible, though still influential over time (Martin & Ruble, 2004).

In her seminal ethnography of gender and play among fourth and fifth graders over the course of an academic year, Thorne (1993) found that boys, girls, and teachers established, guarded, and policed gender boundaries, albeit in different ways. While her findings were extensive, particularly germane to this study, is the finding that boys perceived girls along with qualities associated with being a girl as threatening and a source of contamination, though the reverse was not true to the same extent. Boys who were perceived to possess, either in a moment or over time, feminine traits were isolated

and ostracized, particularly by other boys (Thorne, 1993). In a study of children ages 5-12 in a summer camp environment, McGuffey and Rich (1999) found that boys organized consciously and unconsciously into a clear social hierarchy determined by high status markers of masculinity, such as athletic ability. High status boys controlled coveted resources both physical (e.g. play area) and social (e.g. prestige); ultimately, masculinity was conflated with power for both boys and girls (McGuffey & Rich, 1999). Both studies found that boys actively participated in the maintenance of hegemonic masculine identities through “name-calling, physical aggression, and exclusion” (McGuffey and Rich, 1999, p. 618; Thorne, 1993). In a stark contrast, these studies found that while boys were punished by their peers for displaying traits or preferences perceived to be feminine, girls were most often praised and given social status from other girls for successful participation in “boys’” activities (McGuffey & Rich, 1999; Thorne, 1993).

Stereotypes continue to influence and shape an understanding of gender and gender roles well into adulthood. In a study examining gendered beliefs about social status and perceived sexuality, McCreary (1994) asked participants to rate depictions of men and women engaged in male- or female-valued activities; he found that male participants were more likely to perceive a man acting in a female-valued way to be homosexual, and by extension low-status, than a woman acting in a male-valued way. In a qualitative study of men ages 23 to 50 within an academic community, Bird (1996) found that three unspoken “rules” applied to homosocial friendships between men: maintain emotional detachment, privilege competition, and participate in or condone the objectification of women. Bird (1996) found this framework was predicated on a belief

in the inferiority of femininity and that it was used to maintain and reproduce hegemonic masculinity.

The participation of adults in the construction and reproduction of value-laden gender schema has been found to influence children. Barry (1980) found that parents who do not adhere to gender stereotypes themselves were less likely to encourage or model gender-typed behaviors for their children. In a meta-analysis of 43 articles and 48 different samples from 1975-2001, Tenenbaum and Leaper (2002) found parents' gender schemas were strongly correlated to children's gender self-concept, gender-related attitudes towards others, and work-related attitudes. In a study of early childhood teachers ($N = 103$), Cahill and Adams (1997) found teachers' expressions of feminist attitudes were associated with more flexible beliefs about the gender socialization of children and that, regardless of philosophical leanings, teachers were more willing to accept cross-gender behavior in girls than in boys.

Educational institutions, classrooms, and libraries provide additional sites in which hegemonic masculinity is reproduced and maintained, though it can also be disrupted. In an analysis of widely distributed policy documents intended to support boys' literacy achievement, Kehler (2010) found gendered philosophical and pedagogical recommendations that "essentialize and homogenized gender as a unidimensional concept or dimorphic social identity" (p. 357). He argues that such policies not only condoned, but reified a heteronormative and hegemonic masculinity at the expense of a dynamic and multidimensional understanding of boys, books, and literacy practices.

Dutro (2001, 2002) found similar forms of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity played out for a group of fifth-graders in her qualitative study of boys and

reading. She found gender, and in particular the avoidance of “girl” books, to be a significant preoccupation in the text selection of boys; in addition, boys were more likely to guard and police gender boundaries through reading choices and conversations about books than girls (2001, 2002). However, Dutro also found that when required to read a “girl” book in the scaffolded space of a literature circle, the boys enjoyed the plot and connected to the female protagonist, even as they negotiated the implications of that connection in their performance of masculinity. A survey of 98 third-graders found that boys overwhelmingly rejected any book covers (fiction or nonfiction) that were perceived as stereotypically feminine or, in the words of one participant, “too girly” (Verlaan, Miller, & Ingraham, 2014, p. 41). And a study of reading habits and library use, boys gave more negative feedback than girls and cited “too girly” and “too many girl books” as reasons not to visit the library (Creel, 2007, p. 48).

Reading Motivation, Attitude, and the Importance of Choice

The studies above (Creel, 2007; Dutro, 2001, 2002; McGuffey & Rich, 1999; Verlaan, et al., 2014) suggest that boys are less motivated to read texts associated with girls or femininity. While the influence of sociocultural constructions of gender on reading practices and reading motivation is, as of yet, understudied, multiple studies have found that gender is strongly associated with reading motivation and reading achievement (Pintrich, 2003; Taboada, Tonks, Wigfield & Guthrie, 2009). Reading motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation affects the volume and breadth of students’ reading, which is associated with reading competence (Mol & Bus, 2011; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). These studies have shown that, overall, girls are more motivated to read than

boys, read more often, and do better on national and international measures of reading achievement (Brozo, et al., 2014).

In a study of fourth and fifth graders ($N = 105$), Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) measured reading motivation along with amount and breadth of reading using questionnaires and reading diaries. They found that girls were more positively motivated to read than boys and that the intrinsic reading motivation composite (i.e. Efficacy, Curiosity, and Involvement) predicted amount and breadth of reading in ways that extrinsic reading motivation (e.g. Recognition, Grades, and Competition) did not. A large-scale study of fifth graders in Belgium ($N = 1260$) found that girls reported significantly higher motivation to read; that intrinsic motivation correlated positively to several motivation sub-scales, including Involvement, Challenge, and Curiosity; and that a more positive reading self-concept was associated with increased time spent engaged in recreational reading, higher reading engagement, and stronger reading comprehension (De Naeghel, Van Keer, Vansteenkiste, & Rosseel, 2012). In their quantitative study of middle school students' motivation to read ($N = 1080$), Kelley and Decker (2009) found that girls reported significantly higher motivation to read than boys and reported a significantly higher value placed on reading than their male peers. They also found girls were more likely to recommend books to friends and to read at home (Kelley and Decker, 2009).

A review of research on gender and achievement motivation (Meece, Glienke, Burg, 2006) found that girls reported higher confidence in and higher perception of their reading and writing ability. In a quantitative study of reading motivation among fifth and sixth graders ($N = 371$), Baker and Wigfield (1999) found that girls had more positive

views than boys across nine of the 11 dimensions of reading motivation; the two remaining dimensions were Work Avoidance and Competition. In a later study of reading motivation among sixth to eighth graders ($N = 472$), Unrau and Schlackman (2006) found that while girls reported higher intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for reading, both declined significantly over time as students moved up through the grades.

In a nationwide survey of the reading attitudes of middle school students ($N = 4,491$), McKenna, et al. (2012) confirmed the finding that as students moved through the middle grades, attitudes towards reading gradually worsened on three subscales: recreational print reading, recreational digital reading, and academic digital reading. Only attitudes towards academic print reading did not change significantly over time and remained low throughout. In addition, girls reported significantly more positive attitudes than boys on three of the four sub-scales of reading addressed; boys reported significantly more positive attitudes towards digital recreational reading.

In a longitudinal quantitative study of the relationship between expectancy-values and achievement ($N = 668$) for students grades 5 to 12, Eccles (1983) used school records, questionnaires (student, parent, and teacher), and classroom observations to map the complex pathways of sociocultural context, identity, experience, and interpretations of experience that result in achievement-related performances and outcomes. Eccles (1983) found that not only do past performances and outcomes shape expectancies, both current and future, but that gender plays a significant role in the model because it influences the ways students understand themselves in relation to various activities and expected outcomes. Individual understanding of gender is influenced by the cultural milieu, including gender role stereotypes, cultural stereotypes associated with subject

matter and the behaviors and beliefs of socializers, such as parents, teachers, peers, media (Eccles, 1983). Socializers influence the student's perception of two elements that are central to this study: gender stereotypes and activity demands stereotypes. These elements influence willingness to engage in a task, along with task values, but seem to have received little attention in the research.

As noted above, while many studies have found significant gendered differences in the reading motivation and achievement, very few studies have looked at the influence that gender roles and stereotypes may have on those differences. In a qualitative study of adolescent boys and reading in a single sex comprehensive school, Atkinson (2009) had two findings of particular relevance to this study. First, she found that boys wanted more choice in reading materials, and a broader and more contemporary range of fiction and non-fiction to choose from. Second, she found a negative social climate existed within the school community, wherein boys who publicly displayed pleasure in and motivation to read were targeted by peers with terms of derision and abuse, for example, being called "geeks" and labelled "gay" (that is, not "real," masculine boys).

Ivey and Johnston (2013, 2015) found that social climate has a powerful influence on reading motivation and attitudes towards reading and that complete choice in reading materials helped to create a positive social climate for all readers. In an ongoing, longitudinal qualitative study of four eighth grade classrooms whose teachers have moved to an entirely choice-based curriculum (with support from Ivey), Ivey and Johnston (2013, 2015) have found that choice facilitates avid reading, book exchanges among peers and family members, and a classroom climate where reading has a positive task-value among both girls and boys. The 2014 Scholastic Kids and Family Reading

Report found that 91% of children ages 6-17 report their favorite books are the ones they pick themselves (Scholastic, 2014). Boltz (2007) found that 40% of the boys surveyed reported that they enjoy reading for pleasure and 42.9% reported liking to read sometimes. The study also found that the majority of boys want to read books of interest to them (Boltz, 2007). Atkinson (2009) also found that boys wanted more choice in reading materials and felt that they felt like the books in their school library were not engaging. In a qualitative study of fifth graders Farris, et al. (2009) found that the boys often chose books based on book covers that “looked good.”

Merisuo-Storm (2006) and Clark and Foster (2005) found overlap in the kinds of books boys and girls prefer to read. In a mixed methods study of Finnish students aged 10-11 ($N = 145$), Merisuo-Storm (2006) found that boys and girls both preferred adventure books, humorous stories, and comics, that girls were significantly more positive about reading poetry and boys were significantly more negative about fairy tales. In a large-scale survey ($N = 8206$), boys were as likely as girls to report preferring magazines and fiction and within fictional genres both boys and girls ranked adventure, comedy, and horror/ghost (in that order) as their most preferred (Clark & Foster, 2005).

Taken together, these studies emphasize the importance of choice in reading materials and suggest that perhaps the actual differences in the reading preferences of boys and girls are not as wide as some educators suggest (Korman, 2013; Senn, 2012, Serafini, 2013). Ironically, even as they recognize that boys and girls have similar reading preferences and that pressure to conform to hegemonic norms may account for the cultural belief that ‘boys read nonfiction’ and ‘girls read fiction,’ Davila and Patrick (2010) ultimately conclude that “Girls prefer stories about romance, realistic fiction, and

animals, while boys prefer stories about science fiction (fantasy), sports, crime investigation, and war or spy topics” (p. 207). Perhaps this stark contradiction is the by-product of the relatively short, but highly gendered, history of children as readers and children’s literature as a genre.

The Gendered History of Children’s and Young Adult Literature

That boys, as a group, may feel their reading choices are truncated by the limited definition and practices associated with hegemonic masculinity may help to explain why studies continue to find that boys have more negative attitudes towards reading (e.g. Schwabe, McElvany, & Trendtel, 2014); and that shifts in reading climate, including choice in reading materials, dramatically improves reading engagement among all students, most notably, boys (Fisher & Frey; 2012; Ivey & Johnston, 2013, 2015). The “boys will be boys [as readers]” rhetoric (Brozo & Schmelzer, 1997; Korman, 2013; Senn, 2012; Serafini, 2013) may reproduce a hegemonic reading climate (Atkinson, 2009; Kehler, 2010), and ultimately limit choice in reading for boys by inscribing gendered book categories (Dutro, 2002). The call for more “boy” books implies that the gendered books and genres are ‘natural.’ This naturalization of gendered categories is possible, because missing from much of the literature on boys and reading is the recognition that the history of children’s and young adult literature has been subject to the same cultural, political, and economic forces that have shaped our understanding of gendered traits, behaviors, and attributions (Butler, 2006; Nye, 2005; Parille, 2008; Reynolds, 1990; Segel, 1986).

Children’s literature first emerged on a limited scale in England in the 1740s (Reynolds, 1990; Segel, 1986). From the very beginning, literature for children was

understood as a vehicle for the transmission and reproduction of specific values and beliefs about social behavior (Segel, 1986). From the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, these values and beliefs were largely gender-neutral; children's literature promoted obedience, neatness, and self-control among both boys and girls equally (Segel, 1986). These values began to shift and dichotomize in the 1860s (Reynolds, 1990; Segel, 1986).

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, children's books became more widely available and increasingly popular as the technological advancements of the Industrial Revolution made them less expensive to produce, evolving beliefs about the importance of literacy and education in a civilized society, and the emergence of a solid middle class with more disposable income (Segel, 1986). In the context of a growing market, children's books became an increasingly powerful tool for socialization, and the reproduction of highly gendered values, beliefs, and behaviors of the Victorian era (Reynolds, 1990; Segel, 1986). Colonization and westward expansion required that instead of being obedient and submissive, boys be adventurous, courageous, and daring. In contrast, girls were to manage the home-front in increasingly urban communities that did not require the labor of a farm; thus femininity was portrayed in children's literature as passive, sweet, and submissive to male authority (Segel, 1986).

It is in this socio-historical context that the "good bad boy" emerged as a literary archetype, a hero who is not only disobedient, but saves the day as a result of his disobedience. Like Tom Sawyer (Twain, 1876) or Harry Potter (Rowling, 1998), these heroes resist adult authority and resent institutional settings, they do not strive to achieve in school, and often prefer personal experience to classroom or book learning (Parille,

2008; Segel, 1986). As Sumner (1878) observed, "The heroes are continually devising mischief which is mean and cruel, but which is presented here as smart and funny. They all have a dare-devil character, and brave the principal's rod as one of the smallest dangers of life" (p. 682). These characters offered a new model of masculinity, one that stood in stark contrast to the ideal of femininity (Segel, 1986).

Parille (2008) argues that this hegemonic version of masculinity offered to young readers troubled late nineteenth century sociologists, authors, critics, and parents. Alcott (1844) and others (Higginson, 1879; L. M. Alcott, 1875) were concerned about the influence of "boy" books on young male readers, in part because "[t]he boy reader obtains a theoretical and literary acquaintance with methods of fraud and crime" (Sumner, 1878, p. 684). In his study of boys, reading, and literary criticism in the mid to late nineteenth century, Parille (2008) found that

Though most advice writers did not completely oppose fiction, they claimed that novels (as well as short stories and poems) could have a bad effect on boys, and so, along with numerous educators and reviewers, they told boys to focus on history and biography. (p. 8)

The concern was that fiction, stories with grandiose adventures and easy financial gain would be overly seductive, encouraging unrealistic views of the future, and promoting dangerous values among boy readers; instead boys were advised to focus on nonfiction, such as history and biography, to prepare for the lives as productive men in society (Parille, 2008).

The work of Parille (2008) and others (Reynolds, 1990; Segel, 1986), suggests

that, far from being neutral or ‘natural,’ contemporary beliefs and assumptions about texts and genres are the product of gendered values and social anxiety. There has long been and continues to be concern over the influence of literature on children and young adults, specifically its potential to shape beliefs, values, and cultural expectations (Gurdon, 2011; Ferguson, 2014). Perhaps this becomes less surprising when considering that children’s literature was originally *intended* to exert subtle influence over its readers.

In addition, there is evidence that reading for pleasure may be perceived as “feminine” activity (Stein and Smithells, 1969; Tepper, 2000). Studies suggest that such gendered task values and gender stereotyping may prevent men and boys from reading in general (e.g. Atkinson, 2009; Creel, 2007; Tepper, 2000) and from reading books perceived to be a “girl” book specifically (Dutro, 2001; 2002; Verlaan, et al., 2014). Literary historians have noted that, given the uneven power relation, girls frequently (and more openly) read these “boy” books, while if boys read “girl” books, they did so surreptitiously (Parille, 2008; Segel, 1986). Books, like clothing (Crane, 2000), may act as markers of masculinity or femininity and treated, that is to say accepted or rejected, as such. Further research is needed if we are to understand the roots of gendered differences in reading practices, reading motivation, and reading achievement, research that explores the influence of sociocultural constructions of gender and gender-schemas on willingness to read.

Conclusion

This dissertation study provides a first step in filling the gap in the literature by examining the influence of gendered beliefs about texts on the willingness to read of young adolescents. The study was designed to test the hypothesis that girls may have

greater access to texts across gendered categories and thus greater willingness to read given the gendered history of children's literature and gendered reading practices that seem to simultaneously privilege and inhibit boys as readers.

Young adult fiction, as a genre, was chosen for this study for several reasons. First, fiction provides a powerful site for building empathy and is associated with feelings of social support (Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009; Rosenblatt, 1983). Second, conversations about boys and reading often include recommendations to increase boys' access to "boy" books (Korman, 2013; Senn, 2012; Serafini, 2013), in effect limiting access to other books (Watson, Kehler, & Martino, 2010). Third, young adult fiction has become one of the fastest growing sectors of the publishing industry in the United States (Glor, 2013; Corbett, 2013). However while the content has diversified and female characters, such as Annabeth Chase (Riordan, 2006) and Katniss Everdeen (Collins, 2009), complicate traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, the readership of young adult fiction is predominately female (Corbett, 2013). The result is that many books may be considered "girl" books, regardless of the actual content.

This research was designed to test the possibility that (a) boys view books disproportionately as "girl" books, (b) boys are more willing to read "boy" books and less willing to read "girl" books, and (c) the possibility that gendered beliefs about book covers may prevent boys from accessing novels they otherwise might be willing to read. In short, this study was designed extend the important work begun by Dutro (2001, 2002) in hopes of helping educators, researchers, parents, policymakers, and even publishers to better understand the complex relationship between gendered beliefs about texts and willingness to read.

**CHAPTER 3:
MEASURING THE INFLUENCE OF GENDERED BELIEFS ABOUT TEXTS ON
THE WILLINGNESS TO READ OF YOUNG ADOLESCENTS:
A MIXED METHODS APPROACH**

Abstract

Through the researcher-designed Textual Features Sort (TFS), this experimental mixed methods study investigated the influence of the “boy” book / “girl” book phenomenon on willingness to read. The TFS was designed to measure two attitudinal constructs, *gendered beliefs about texts* and *willingness to read* in relation to three isolated textual features of young adult novels. Data came from 50 sixth and seventh graders at a public school in a mid-size town of a rural New England state. Mean scores, frequencies, and percentages were analyzed using independent samples t-tests, paired t-tests, and Fisher’s exact test. Qualitative data was used to explain quantitative findings. Findings indicate that, contrary to popular beliefs, boys were not more willing to read “boy” books, nor less willing to read books with female protagonists. They were significantly less willing to read if the textual feature was perceived to represent “girl” books. Findings also suggest that girls were significantly less willing to read a novel based on a textual feature if it was first sorted as a “boy” book. Findings suggest sociocultural constructions of gender inhibit both boys and girls as readers, though more insidiously for boys; findings also challenge the pervasive belief that “boy” books are the solution to the gendered gap in reading motivation and achievement.

Keywords: gender, motivation, young adult fiction, boys

Introduction

In the last two decades, much has been made about the “boy crisis” in reading (Brozo, Sulkunen, Shiel, Garbe, Pandian, & Valtin, 2014; Weaver-Hightower, 2003; Whitmire, 2010; Young and Brozo, 2001). With the release of national and international reading test results, news stories and editorials concerned about the underperformance of boys flood the media (Bidwell, 2015; Major, 2009; Sommers, 2013). While the degree to which it is actually a crisis is the subject of debate (Hogrebe, Nist, & Newman, 1985; Loveless, 2015), there are measurable differences in reading motivation and achievement between boys and girls. Studies of reading motivation consistently show lower reading motivation among boys (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Kelley & Decker, 2009; Pitcher et al.,

2007) and have found that intrinsic reading motivation is positively associated with reading achievement (Schwabe, McElvany, & Trendtel, 2015). National and international achievement tests including the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicate that the reading achievement gap between boys and girls is significant and persistent (Brozo, et al., 2014; Chudowsky & Chudowsky, 2010).

However, despite rhetoric suggesting otherwise (Bidwell, 2015; Major, 2009; Sommers, 2013), there is evidence the gendered reading gap is not new (Tyack and Hansot, 1992; Stroud and Lindquist, 1942), though the consequences may have changed given dramatic shifts in educational and professional norms for girls and women since the middle of the twentieth century (Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson, 2009). Stakeholders, including educators and researchers, have circulated various biological/neurological (Eliot, 2010; Sax, 2006), pedagogical/institutional (Newkirk, 2002, Sommers, 2000; Tyre, 2008), and sociocultural (Brozo & Young, 2001; Watson, Kehler, & Martino, 2010) explanations for this persistent gendered reading gap.

The gendered gap in reading achievement is troubling for many reasons, especially given the recent proliferation of young adult (YA) literature that offers adolescents more reading choices than they have ever had. In fact, YA literature continues to be the fastest growing sector of the publishing industry (Bucher & Hinton, 2014; Glor, 2013). While the working definition of YA literature is dynamic, has shifted over time with the needs of readers and publishers, and continues to evolve (Bucher & Hinton, 2014), it is defined here as literature intended for youth aged 12-18 that addresses the physical, social, emotional, and psychological experiences, needs, and challenges of

young people moving out of childhood and towards adulthood (Cart, 2008). There is widespread agreement that YA literature provides a rich and complex site for engaging adolescent readers (Bucher & Hinton, 2014; Cart, 2008; Koss & Teale, 2009). Yet analysis of the YA market shows that its audience is largely female (Corbett, 2013).

A popular solution to the perceived problem of boys, reading motivation, and reading achievement is for boys to have greater access to “boy” books in classrooms, libraries, and homes (Brozo, 2006; Newkirk, 2002; PBSParents, 2015; Scieszka, 2015; Serafini, 2013). This gendered distinction between “boy” books (books and genres that are believed to appeal to boys) and “non-boy” books (i.e. “girl” books) is premised on essentialist notions of books boys enjoy reading (Barrs & Pidgeon, 1994; Hale & Crowe, 2001; Watson & Kehler, 2012) and gives rise to a “boy” book versus “girl” book phenomenon. Throughout this study, “girl” and “boy” will appear in quotation marks as they appear in relation to books, as a constant reminder that they are not stable or fixed terms but conceptual amalgamations of particular social, cultural, and political histories, values, and beliefs.

Belief in the “boy” book/ “girl” book phenomenon fuels websites like Guysread.com, a web-based literacy program created by popular children’s book author Jon Scieszka, and Boysread.org, intended to provide book recommendations that will turn boys into lifelong readers. These sites encourage boys—and the adults who want boys to read—to browse categories such “Sports and Fantasy” (www.boysread.org), “Nature/Getting Dirty,” and “Outer Space, but with Aliens” (www.guysread.com). However, recommendations that rely on “boy” books to do the work of motivating boys to read (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Scieszka, 2015; Serafini, 2013) hinge upon essentialist

assumptions about what it means to be a boy. “Boy” books as a solution to the problem of boys’ underachievement in reading presumes that all boys like to read from the same narrow swath of genres and texts; positions boys as readers in direct opposition to girls; and is based largely on an adult perspective. Instead of challenging stereotypes about who boys are or could be as readers, these recommendations take a reductivist stance towards the reading interests of all boys. While theoretical challenges to the notion that boys will only read “boy” books have been made (Martino & Kehler, 2007; Watson, Kehler, & Martino, 2010; Watson & Kehler, 2012; Young & Brozo, 2001), formal research on the “boy” book/ “girl” book dichotomy is scant.

Quantitative and qualitative literacy research clearly demonstrates the importance of intrinsic motivation, choice in reading materials, and pleasure in reading to reading achievement (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; International Reading Association, 2014; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; 2015), consistently finding that boys are less motivated to read (e.g. Marinak & Gambrell, 2010; Kush & Watkins, 1996; Logan & Johnston, 2010). However, we do not yet understand the extent to which sociocultural constructions of gender influence willingness to read, particularly for boys. Though some studies have identified similar or different book preferences among boys and girls (Merisuo-Storm, 2006; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999), research on the influence of the “girl” book / “boy” book phenomenon on boys’ willingness to read is limited (Dutro, 2001; 2002). And while Dutro’s finding (2001; 2002) that in a supportive environment, boys enjoy and are willing to read a “girl” book is promising, there have not been follow-up studies to confirm or complicate this finding. More research is clearly needed if parents, educators, and policymakers are to adequately address the problems of low reading motivation,

engagement, and achievement among boys as a group. This purpose of this experimental mixed methods study is to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the ways sociocultural constructions of gender may influence willingness to read, particularly for young adolescent boys.

Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the theoretical positions that shape the conceptual understanding of gender as it may influence willingness to read for adolescent readers; this conceptual understanding provides the foundation of this study.

Gender as Performance. Gender is constituted through a “stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, 1988, p. 520), contingent on time and place for their symbolic value. Therefore, being understood as a boy or a girl is not the result of biology, but on the continuous performance or interpretation of that sex through movement, dress, language, and behavior. The performance of gender begins at an early age (Best, 1989; Cahill, 1983, 1986; Martin & Ruble, 2004), and while some children actively resist socialization, many begin to behave and respond in ways considered by dominant cultural values and beliefs to be suited to their gender (Archer and Lloyd, 2002; Kimmel, 2008; West and Zimmerman, 1987).

Hegemonic Masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is defined as “the pattern of practice (i.e. things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity)” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832) that reproduces patriarchal systems of power designed to subordinate women, denigrating material artifacts, behaviors, and emotions associated with the feminine. Hegemonic masculinity sanctions specific, heteronormative behaviors and alternative behaviors as transgressive, effeminate, and dangerous (Nye, 2005; Green

& Van Oort, 2013). Social scientists suggest that hegemonic masculinity sanctions a “boy code” with specific rules governing the performance of masculinity (David & Brannon, 1975; Kimmel, 2008; Pollack, 1998) and around which childhood and adolescent experience is organized (McGuffey & Rich, 1999; Newson, 2015).

Discourse Communities. Gee (1989) defines capital-D Discourse as a particular way “of being in the world...[an] integrat[ion of] words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes” (p. 6-7). Thus, Discourse communities are made up of individuals who adhere, consciously or subconsciously, to the particular ways of being that distinguish one Discourse community from another. Rules operate within Discourse communities, defining who is *in* as well as who is *out*; to participate, one must abide by governing norms or be subject to discipline or exclusion for transgression (Gee, 1989; Foucault, 1979). Gender identity (whether one identifies as a boy or a girl) provides automatic membership to such a Discourse community.

Reader-Response Theory. Rosenblatt’s (1978) transactional theory of reading asserts that a reader’s perception of and interaction with a text is influenced by personal, cultural, and historical frameworks. However, Gibson (1950) suggests that a literary transaction is not simply bi-directional between reader and author, but triangulated between reader, author, and the fictitious speaker of the text defined as “a projection, a fictitious modification of themselves” known as a mock reader (Gibson, 1950, p. 5). The mock reader of the text makes assumptions, both subtle and overt, about the actual reader of the text. These assumptions can range from age of reader to gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, political leanings, social and/or religious beliefs, and so on. Based on

Gibson's concept of the mock reader, literary engagement presupposes the question: Do I want to be the reader this book wants me to be? When Gibson (1950) is understood through Gee (1989), the question becomes: Based on my membership in a given Discourse community, can I safely be who this text wants me to be or will there be social consequences?

Review of Literature

Gendered differences in reading preferences and practices have received significant attention over several decades. Research has shown that children observe and articulate gendered differences in reading preferences and habits, (Barrs & Pidgeon, 1994; Dutro, 2002), that women are more likely to read fiction than men (Love & Hamston, 2004; Tepper, 1998), and that parents are more likely to encourage girls to read than boys (Tepper, 2000). Thus it is perhaps no surprise that studies have found a girl is more likely than a boy to be able to name a favorite book, to identify as an avid reader, and to consistently demonstrate more positive attitudes towards reading (Kush & Watkins, 1996; Millard, 1997; McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang, & Meyer, 2012).

However, while these studies show gendered differences, it is possible that there are also important similarities. One study of fourth-graders found that boys and girls preferred the same genres, although the order of preference varied, in some cases significantly (Merisuo-Storm, 2006). Adventure books, humorous stories, and comics were the preferred reading materials across the study, with girls reporting adventure books as their favorite and boys significantly more interested in comics and significantly less interested in fairytales (Merisuo-Storm, 2006). Another study found that scary stories and books were preferred by both boys and girls (Worthy, et al., 1999); still

another found that adventure, comedy, and horror/ghost stories were the top three choices of fictional texts for both boys and girls (Clark & Foster, 2005).

Research is clear that access to these genres and choice in reading materials, matters to children and adolescents (Davila & Patrick, 2010; Ivey & Johnston, 2013, 2015). The 2014 Scholastic Kids and Family Reading Report found that 91% of children ages 6-17 report their favorite books are the ones they pick themselves (Scholastic, 2014). Similarly, Ivey and Johnston (2013, 2015) found that implementing a choice-based language arts curriculum profoundly increased time spent reading, reading motivation, and reading engagement among eighth-graders.

Unfortunately, there is also evidence that gendered beliefs about texts curtail choice for boys. Dutro (2001, 2002) found that, for boys, gender identity played a central and conscious role in book selection; boys guarded and policed gender boundaries more closely than their peers, boys publicly rejected books they privately professed a desire to read, and girls crossed gendered boundaries more easily than boys (Dutro, 2001, 2002). Perhaps most significantly, this study showed that, when provided with a safe and scaffolded learning environment, boys were willing to actively engage with “girl” books (Dutro, 2001, 2002).

Like Dutro, Telford (1999) also found that the gendered beliefs of their peers had a negative influence on the reading attitudes of upper elementary school boys, along with a difference between private and public attitudes towards reading. Similarly, Moeller (2011) found that young adolescents struggled to reconcile interest in a particular genre (in this case, graphic novels) with both negative stereotypes of the genre and their perception that public association with the genre would lead to negative social

consequences. In a study of fifth-grade boys, researchers found that boys often made reading choices based on book covers (Farris, Werderich, Nelson, & Fuhler, 2009). Another found that third-grade boys overwhelmingly rejected books whose book covers were perceived as stereotypically “girly,” that boys were more likely than girls to cite gender as a reason for rejecting a book based on its cover, and that girls were more willing to read overall (Verlaan, Miller, & Ingraham, 2014).

While not looking at literacy or reading practices per se, McGuffey and Rich (1999) and Thorne (1993) found similar guarding and policing of gender boundaries. Both studies found boys actively participated in the maintenance of hegemonic masculine identities through “name-calling, physical aggression, and exclusion” (McGuffey and Rich, 1999, p. 618). These studies also showed boys who were perceived as effeminate in any way by male peers or engaged in “girly” activities (such as jumping rope) were subject to teasing and social stigmatization (McGuffey & Rich, 1999; Thorne, 1993). In a stark contrast, girls received praise and increased social status from other girls for their successful participation in “boys” activities (McGuffey & Rich, 1999; Thorne, 1993).

In their examination of boys and literacy reforms in school-based settings, Rowan, Knobel, & Bigum (2002) argue for a new literacy studies mindset to “problematize taken-for-granted assumptions about what it means to be a girl and a boy [and] link this problemization to widespread beliefs about boys’ and girls’ different literacy abilities and potential” (p. 99). This study used an experimental mixed methods design to do just that.

Hypothesis

Research suggests that gender identity and affiliation with gendered groups

influences perception of access to books and genres, particularly for boys (Barrs & Pidgeon, 1994; Dutro, 2001, 2002; Smith and Wilhelm, 2002). The current study is an attempt to quantify the influence of sociocultural constructions of gender on young adolescents' willingness to read. The study grew out of the hypothesis that boys are less willing or able than girls to read across gendered book categories without fear of social reprisal (Figure 1.1).

This experimental mixed-methods study (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007) is part of a larger study that considers the “boy” book / “girl” book phenomenon as it may be related to reading attitudes, reading motivation, and reading achievement for young adolescent readers. The current study focuses on the gendered book phenomenon as it may be associated with adolescents' willingness to read YA novels. It is guided by the following research questions:

1. How likely are young adolescent readers to perceive YA novels as gendered based on individual textual features?
2. To what extent, and in what ways, is willingness to read associated with gender and the gendered categorization of YA novels for young adolescent readers?

Willingness to Read and Gendered Beliefs about Texts

In the context of this study, willingness to read and gendered beliefs about text are both considered attitudes and are measured as such. While attitude has been defined in many ways, this study uses Aiken's (1980) conceptual definition of attitude as “learned predispositions to respond positively or negatively to certain objects, situations, concepts or persons” (p. 2). Attitude is defined by three attributes (1) *intensity*, or the degree or strength of feeling; (2) *direction*, or the positive, negative, neutral, or ambivalent

direction of that intensity of feeling; and (3) the *target*, artifact, object, concept, or idea at which the intensity and direction of feeling is directed (Gable & Wolf, 1986).

Willingness to read represents a positive, ambivalent, or negative attitude towards a text and reflects cognitive beliefs or ideas about a text, affective responses to literary or visual elements of the text, and specific behavioral outcomes. Gendered beliefs have been shown to influence individual and group attitudes towards artifacts, emotions, and texts in positive or negative ways. As noted above, research indicates that these gendered beliefs about texts may influence willingness to read (Dutro, 2002; Moeller, 2011). This study was designed to measure directionality of gendered beliefs about a text as represented by individual textual features and as they may be related to willingness to read.

Methods

Methodology

This research was conducted using a mixed methods approach, defined as a comprehensive and dynamic blend of quantitative and qualitative techniques within a single study (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). To date, research on boys and reading has been largely divided between large-scale quantitative (e.g. McKenna, et al., 2012) and small-scale quantitative studies (e.g. Young, 2000). Findings across these studies imply that the ways boys are socially constructed as readers may influence their willingness to read, but these studies do not explore the relationship between gender and willingness to read directly. This study is a first step in filling in this gap and was designed to systematically consider the ways perceptions of reading and texts may be

gendered and the ways sociocultural constructions of gender may influence the willingness to read of young adolescents.

Creswell (2008) argued that mixed methods research “can serve a larger, transformative purpose to advocate for marginalized groups” (p. 14). Lewis, Enciso, and Moje (2007), argued literacy and reading practices are not neutral, and that achievement gaps can not be addressed “without attention to histories of power relations or group and individual struggles for identity” (p. 3). This study aims to deepen, as well as complicate, our understanding of the influence of the “girl” book / “boy” book phenomenon on young adolescent readers. It sought empirical and narrative answers to questions and assumptions that have, until now, been largely theoretical.

Sample. Middle grade students were chosen because research on reading motivation (e.g. Kelley & Decker, 2009; McKenna, et al., 2012) and national reading achievement data (e.g. National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2015) consistently show that gendered gaps increase between fourth and eighth grade. Participants were 50 sixth and seventh graders at Bethany Middle School (a pseudonym) in a formerly rural New England town, now a bedroom community to the state’s largest city. Like the state it is in, Bethany is in a predominately white community; 42% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch.

A recruitment letter was distributed to all 221 sixth and seventh grade students. Fifty-one students returned signed consent forms, though one seventh grade boy dropped out of the study early on. Participants represented 22.6% of all sixth and seventh grade students at Bethany. Seventy-two percent of study participants were sixth graders ($n = 36$), 28% were seventh graders ($n = 14$). Forty-six percent of participants were boys ($n =$

23) and 54% were girls ($n = 27$). Ninety percent of participants identified as White ($n = 45$), 6% as bi-racial ($n = 3$), and 4% ($n = 2$) as Asian American. Forty-four percent of participants ($n = 22$) read above grade level, 14% ($n = 7$) read at grade level, and 42% ($n = 21$) read below grade level. All student-level demographic and reading level data was obtained through school records and compiled by the school data and testing specialist. In the course of data collection, participants were asked to self-select gender identity due to the possibility that biologic sex designation as recorded institutionally, may not match an individual student's gender identity. All participants in the study self-identified as cisgender, that is, when the individual experience of gender matches sex assignment at birth; however, the principal shared that several students in the middle school identify publicly as gender-fluid.

Study Design. Previous studies suggest that young adolescents' attitudes towards texts reflect gendered beliefs and values; they also indicate that book covers may act as gatekeepers, preventing boys in particular from accessing novels they might otherwise be willing to read (Dutro, 2002; Millard, 1997; Smith and Wilhelm, 2002). This study extends earlier work by measuring two attitudinal constructs, *willingness to read* and *gendered beliefs about texts*, in relation to YA fiction.

This mixed methods study used a posttest-only randomized group design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963), centered around a researcher-designed affective instrument called the Textual Features Sort (TFS). The TFS elicited both quantitative and qualitative data designed to measure the two dependent variables — willingness to read and gendered belief about text— as they may be associated with two independent variables, gender and group assignment.

The Textual Features Sort

Overview. The individual TFS measured willingness to read and gendered beliefs about texts by asking each participant to sort isolated textual features onto a mat with three categories presented in columns. Each sort was immediately followed by a short, structured interview using both closed and open-ended questions. The interviews gathered qualitative and quantitative data.

The textual features, text extract, back jacket, and book cover, are commonly used in recreational text selection (Farris, et al., 2009; Isaacs, 1992; Mohr, 2006) and were drawn from the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) “Top Ten List of 2013” (Table 3.1). The use of novels from an established list was intended to both mitigate researcher bias towards favorite novels and reflect “best” novels as determined by experts in the field. Each YA novel was represented by each of the three targeted textual features, thus 30 individual textual features were used in the study. Each textual feature was isolated on a 4 ½” x 5 ½” card. The design protocol for each textual feature is described in the paragraphs that follow.

Text extract. Text extract was defined as 20 lines of text from the exact middle of the book; a line of text was defined as more than four words. In the event of a one- to four-word line, that line was combined with the one above. The text extract finished with the end of the sentence of the twentieth line, not the paragraph or scene. To reduce potential biases, text extracts were standardized and any specialized design features found in the original novel (e.g. unusual font types) were removed. All text extracts were reproduced in Adobe Caslon Pro in 14-point font. The text extract was the first textual

feature given to participants, to reduce the risk of reader-fatigue for this text-heavy set of cards.

Back jacket. Back jacket was defined as the text found on the back of the book cover, meant to hook the potential reader. For some of the books in this study, the back jacket consisted of a plot summary; for others it was made up of an excerpt from the novel itself, accolades from other readers positioned as experts, or some combination of the above. To reduce potential biases, back jackets were standardized. Any specialized design features found on the back of the original novel were removed, and direct references to the title or author were replaced with “[this book]” or “[this author].” All back jackets were reproduced in 14-point Adobe Caslon Pro font. The back jacket was the second textual feature given to participants.

Book cover. Book cover was defined as the covers of paperback editions as they appeared on bookstore shelves in the spring of 2014. Each book cover was reproduced in full color, complete with titles and authors. No design elements were removed. The book cover was the third textual feature given to participants to eliminate the possibility that a visual representation might predispose participants to a particular directionality in willingness to read or gendered categorization of the other two textual features.

Textual Features Sort mat. The sort mats for control and experimental groups were identical in form and font; only the column labels differed. Each sort mat was white with black print, measured 3’ x 1.6’, and was divided into three vertical columns. The sort mat was set out on a table and visible to the participant as she or he entered the interview room.

Sort Location and Duration. Each individual TFS occurred in a quiet, school-sanctioned space. Each sort was facilitated by the researcher and conducted during school hours. The individual TFS was completed in one sitting and lasted approximately 50 minutes. Participants were able to stop and resume the TFS as needed.

Conditions. Study participants were divided equally into control or experimental groups using stratified, random sampling that controlled for gender, reading level, and reading motivation (Table 3.2). Students in both groups participated in the TFS, with the nature of the sort mat serving as the treatment condition. Both groups used the sort mats to categorize the isolated textual features for all 10 books.

The control group sort mat tested degree of willingness to read the YA novels based on individual textual features. The experimental group sort mat introduced gendered book categories, then tested the gendered categorization and willingness to read YA novels based on individual textual features. Structured interviews gathered narrative accounts of individual beliefs and rationales influencing sort decisions for each participant, regardless of group.

Instructions for the Textual Features Sort

Participants in each group were given the same basic set of instructions. Each participant was informed that she or he would receive three sets of ten cards each over the course of the sort, one set for each textual feature under consideration. Textual feature card sets were given to participants in the following order: text extract, back jacket, and book cover. The ten textual feature cards in each set were identical for all participants across the control and experimental groups, though the order of the cards within a set varied randomly per individual set. Following each sort, the researcher asked several

standardized interview questions about each textual feature sorted. When one textual feature set and interview was completed, the next was given.

Control group. Control group participants were asked to read each card carefully, then place the card in the column that best represented their own willingness to read the novel based on the given textual feature. Column labels for the control condition were I Would Read This, I Might Read This, I Would Not Read This.

Experimental group. Experimental group participants were asked to read each card carefully, then place the textual feature in the gendered category that best fit their belief about the novel it represented. Column labels for the experimental condition were Boys' Book, Both Book, and Girls' Book. Throughout this study, categorical terms such as Boys' Book or Would Read will appear in capital letters to distinguish them from the conceptual terms explored in this study, e.g. "boy" book and willingness to read.

Accommodations. This study was not designed to assess reading comprehension. Thus, the researcher offered to read the cards aloud if the participant displayed any reluctance, difficulty reading independently, or if asked. In these cases, the structured interview questions were asked after each textual feature was categorized and before the next one was read rather than at the end of the sort for the sake of time, efficiency, and to minimize participant fatigue. The researcher read aloud in nearly half of the individual TFSs successfully recorded.

Data Collection

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently in the field during the course of the TFS.

Willingness to Read

Quantitative data collection. The control group sort and experimental group structured interview were designed to measure willingness to read across the study ($N = 50$). During control group sorts, willingness to read scores for individual textual features were hand-recorded on spreadsheets. During experimental group sorts, willingness to read scores for individual textual features were hand-recorded during the post-sort interview. Video-recordings of each sort were used to confirm quantitative data.

Qualitative data collection. The post-sort structured interview gathered qualitative data about willingness to read by prompting participants to explain reasons for placing textual features in particular willingness to read categories. Data was captured via video-recording. In addition to the structured interview data, the researcher maintained a researcher's journal with student descriptions and general observations throughout the study.

Gendered Beliefs About Texts

Quantitative data collection. The experimental group mat was designed to elicit information participants' ($N = 25$) gendered beliefs about texts for each textual feature. These responses were hand-recorded during each individual experimental group sort and confirmed using video-recordings. The structured interview that followed elicited quantitative data pertaining to willingness to read.

Qualitative data collection. The post-sort structured interview gathered qualitative data regarding gendered beliefs about texts and willingness to read; it focused on the underlying reasons for gendered categorizations and willingness to read responses. Data was captured via video-recording. In addition to the structured interview data, the researcher maintained a researcher's journal with student descriptions, student reactions

to experimental sort mat, and general observations throughout the study.

Data Analysis

Coding of Dependent Variables

Willingness to read. Willingness to read was originally conceived of as operating on a 3-point scale reflecting the control group sort mat categories: I Would Read, I Might Read, and I Would Not Read. The reasons for this original scoring design were two-fold. First, given the experimental nature of the study, it was essential for the control group sort mat to parallel the experimental group mat in all ways except the treatment condition of gendered book categories (e.g. Dutro, 2002; Serafini, 2013). Second, given the tactile and active design of the sort, it was critical to keep the visual field of the mat simple and uncluttered while providing ample room for the cards themselves.

However, early on in the data collection, a participant asked to use the column line separating Would Read This from Might Read This to indicate that he probably would read a book based on its textual feature, but was not entirely sure. In order to protect the integrity of this participant's response, two additional categories were added to the control group sort: Probably Would Read and Probably Would Not Read. Thereafter, participants were offered use of the column lines during their sort as needed. As a result, willingness to read came to exist on a 5-point scale.

Gendered belief about text. Given gendered book constructs as they are discussed in the literature (i.e. "boy" book as opposed to "girl" book), gendered belief about text was originally conceived of as existing on a 3-point scale and reflected in the experimental group sort mat categories: Boys' Book, Both Book, Girls' Book. However,

as in the control group, early on in the study, a participant in the experimental group asked to use the column line separating Both Book from Girls' Book to indicate that the novel represented by the textual feature was not quite a Both Book, but also not quite a Girls' Book. In order to protect the integrity of this participant's response, two additional categories were added to the experimental group sort: Boys' Line and Girls' Line. Thereafter, participants were offered use of the column lines during their sort as needed. As a result, the gendered belief about text variable came to exist on a 5-point scale that came to be known as the "gender line."

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis was performed using Stata, a data analysis and statistical software platform frequently used in the social sciences. Significance was set at $p \leq 0.05$.

Willingness to read. Willingness to read scores were the same 5-point scale across both control and experimental groups where 1 = Would Not Read and 5 = Would Read. Each text in the study ($N = 10$) yielded four willingness to read mean scores: text extract, back jacket, book cover, and composite score. The composite score was calculated for each text by averaging the willingness to read mean scores for each textual feature of a single text, making the text itself the unit of analysis. In addition, a whole study composite willingness to read mean score was created by calculating the combined means of all ten whole text composite mean scores. This whole study willingness to read score was used to analyze overall willingness to read by gender.

Given the relatively small sample-size, dummy variables were created to test significance in frequency of willingness to read. The 5-point scale was collapsed to a 3-point scale indicating high willingness to read, medium willingness to read, and low

willingness to read. Given the low number of participants who categorized a textual feature as Probably Would Read or Probably Would Not Read, the dummy variable for high willingness to read combined Would Read and Probably Would Read; the dummy variable for low willingness to read combined Would Not Read and Probably Would Not Read. The category Might Read was labeled medium willingness to read to reflect the midpoint between high and low willingness to read. Mean scores, frequencies, and percentages were generated to understand participants' overall willingness to read, willingness to read a specific novel based on individual textual features, and willingness to read a specific novel based on whole text composite mean scores.

Quantitative analysis of willingness to read used three statistical tools. First, independent samples t-tests were used to test for differences in willingness to read individual textual features and whole text by gender and group membership. Second, paired samples t-tests were used to test differences in willingness to read individual textual features of the same novel by (a) whole study; (b) between groups; (c) between gender; (d) within gender by group. Third, Fisher's exact test was used to test for differences in the frequency of willingness to read a text based on its individual textual features by gender and group. It is important to note that statistically significant gendered differences in willingness to read mean scores found using the independent t-test were confirmed by Fisher's exact test.

Gender line. Gender line scores were generated for the experimental group only. Each text generated four gender line scores: (a) text extract, (b) back jacket, (c) book cover, and (d) composite score. The composite score was calculated for each text by averaging gender line mean scores for the three textual features of a single text. As for

willingness to read, dummy variables indicating that a textual feature had been categorized as a Boys' Book, Both Book, or Girls' Book were created for each individual textual feature. Again, given the low number of participants who categorized a textual feature as Boy's Line or Girls' Line, the dummy variable for Boys' Book included textual features placed on the Boys' Line and the dummy variable created for Girls' Book included textual features placed on the Girls' Line. Mean scores, frequencies, and percentages were generated to understand participants' beliefs about the gendered category of texts as represented by individual textual features and the whole text composite scores.

As with willingness to read, quantitative analysis of gendered beliefs about text used three statistical tools. First, independent samples t-tests tested for gendered differences in individual textual feature gender line mean scores and whole text composite gender line mean scores. Second, paired samples t-tests were used to test differences in gendered beliefs about individual textual feature of the same novel by (a) whole study; (b) between groups; (c) between gender; and (d) within gender by group. Third, Fisher's exact test was used to test for differences in the frequency of placement of a textual feature on the gender line by gender. It is important to note that no statistically significant gendered differences in gender line placement were found using Fisher's exact test; one statistically significant gendered difference in gender line placement was found using the independent t-test.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Given the scope of qualitative data collection, the transcription of individual control and experimental group interview data is ongoing. For the purposes of this study,

relevant interviews have been transcribed using the online transcription tool *Transcribe*. These interviews have been analyzed for themes and insights that confirm and complicate quantitative findings.

Findings

The findings that follow will be presented in direct response to the research questions. Data from the experimental group ($N = 25$) will be used to answer the first research question concerning gendered beliefs about texts. Data from both experimental and control groups ($N = 50$) will be used to answer the second research question focused on willingness to read as it may be associated with gendered beliefs about texts. However, before the research questions are addressed, it is important to acknowledge an overarching finding integral to study though not directly addressed by the research questions. To this researcher's knowledge, it is the first time the "boy" book / "girl" book dichotomy has been directly measured and quantified.

The Existence of "Boy" Books, "Girl" Books, and "Both" Books

The reactions of experimental group participants to the gendered sort mat confirmed the existence of gendered book categories. Of the 25 participants in the experimental group, 100% expressed familiarity with the gendered construct put forth by the mat, though 36% of the participants had a reaction of some kind. The majority of participants in the experimental group, 64% ($n = 16$; 8 boys, 8 girls), expressed no reaction of any kind to the gendered categories on the sort mat. These participants simply greeted the researcher, then settled in for instructions and the sort activity. Eight percent of participants ($n = 2$; 2 girls) expressed moderately positive reactions to gendered instrument, evidenced through smiling and mild curiosity. Twenty percent of participants

($n = 5$; 2 boys, 3 girls) had a moderately negative reaction to the instrument, evidenced by an initial critique of the gendered mat, though each of these participants then engaged in the sort without further complaint.

The remaining two participants (8%; 2 boys) expressed strong negative reactions to the gendered mat. The first declared that he did not believe in gendered book categories and would sort every textual feature under Both Book, which he proceeded to do throughout the sort. Similarly, the second participant rejected the gendered mat outright and began by categorizing individual textual features under Both Book. However, midway through the sort, he decided that books could be more masculine or more feminine, characteristics that he made clear were not linked to sex or gender. To reflect this realization, this participant changed the categories of the mat and then continued the sort under the new constructs of masculine and feminine. To maintain construct validity and ethical integrity, this participant's gender line responses were dropped from gender line analysis. His willingness to read responses were retained for analysis.

Research Question 1: *How likely are young adolescent readers to perceive YA novels as gendered, based on individual textual features?*

Young adolescent readers were not very likely to perceive YA novels as gendered based on individual textual features. The gendered categorization of individual textual features by experimental group participants ($N = 25$) were analyzed both individually and as they formed a composite gender line score for the novel as a whole. When composite gender line data was analyzed with boys and girls combined, eight out of the 10 YA novels had mean scores within a 0.50 range on either side of the Both Book value (Table

3.3). The composite means for two novels, *Enchanted* by Alethea Kontis (2013) and *Boy21* by Matthew Quick (2013), were the only highly gendered outliers. The composite mean score for *Enchanted* ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.72$) placed it on the Girl Book side of the Girl Line. The composite mean for *Boy21* ($M = 1.89$, $SD = 0.77$) placed it on the Boy Book side of the Boy Line.

At the level of individual textual features, 21 of 30 textual features (70%) were categorized as Both Book by the majority of participants in the experimental group. Only six textual features (20%) were categorized as highly gendered by a clear majority of participants. Four of these textual features (across three novels) were categorized as Boys' Books, while two textual features (across two novels) were categorized as Girls' Books. There was no majority agreement for the remaining three textual features (10%). The overarching finding is that, by and large, young adolescent readers believed the majority of individual textual features represented "both" books.

Textual Features Perceived as Highly Gendered

As mentioned above, six out of 30 textual features were categorized as highly gendered by the majority of participants in the experimental group. In this section, findings for each of the highly gendered textual features will be presented, followed by a section presenting the findings for the three textual features that had no clear majority agreement on gendered categorization.

***Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* (text extract).** The text extract of this novel ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 0.80$) was categorized as representing a Boys' Book by 50% of participants ($n = 11$). One seventh grade girl explained her placement of this text extract under Boys' Book because "boys would be more interested in like reading about what happened in

that...It's about like someone comparing food to barf and to drugs.” In contrast, the back jacket ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.26$) was categorized as Both Book by 54% of participants ($n = 11$) and the book cover ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.93$) was categorized as Both Book by 71% of participants ($n = 17$).

Never Fall Down (book cover). The book cover of *Never Fall Down* ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 1.08$) was categorized as a Boys’ Book by 54% of participants ($n = 13$). Several students cited the horizontal red stripes across the book cover looked like “blood that’s been put on a paintbrush and then rolled over there” as reasons for categorizing this cover as a Boys’ Book. A sixth grade girl observed that “the paint or whatever it is is splattered and red; it reminds me of ...the boys shirts usually have like splattered stuff, so it reminds me of sports and like down and dirty or something like that.” In contrast, the text extract ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.24$) was categorized as a Both Book by 52% of participants ($n = 12$) and a Girls’ Book by 39% of participants ($n = 8$). The back jacket ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 1.08$) was categorized as a Both Book by 67% of participants ($n = 14$).

Boy21 (text extract). The text extract of *Boy21* ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 0.98$) was categorized as a Boys’ Book by 66% of participants ($n = 15$). Participants often identified the sports theme as their reason for categorizing this text extract as a Boys’ Book. As one sixth grade boy explained, “it seems like a sport book, like a basketball kinda sport book....” While the book cover of *Boy21* was also categorized largely as Boys’ Book, the back jacket ($M = 2.09$, $SD = 1.02$) was categorized as a Both Book by 55% of participants ($n = 12$) and a Boys’ Book by 45% of participants.

Boy21 (book cover). The book cover of *Boy21* ($M = 1.89$, $SD = 0.79$) was categorized as a Boys’ Book by 71% of participants ($n = 17$). A seventh grade girl placed

it under Boys' Book, citing the title as the reason a "boy would like it more than a girl." While the title and depiction of a boy's face were often giving as reasons for a Boys' Book categorization, one sixth grade boy explained "it just seems like scribbly, like a mess...[boys] do not have good handwriting." It is worth repeating that while the text extract was also categorized widely as a Boys' Book, the back jacket of *Boy21* was categorized as a Both Book by a majority of participants.

***Enchanted* (book cover).** The book cover of *Enchanted* ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 0.96$) was categorized as representing a Girls' Book by 88% of participants ($n = 21$). Several students shared that the cover seemed "like a princess-like book" and "Alice-in-Wonderland-looking" with its depiction of "a girl in a big dress."

Participants were evenly split in their categorization of its text extract ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.41$), with 43% of participants ($n = 10$) categorizing it as a Both Book and 43% ($n = 10$) categorizing it as a Girls' Book. The back jacket of *Enchanted* ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.02$) was categorized as a Both Book by 52% of participants ($n = 11$) including 70% of boys ($n = 7$) and a Girls' Book by 48% of participants, including 64% of girls ($n = 7$). One sixth grade boy indicated that he might be willing to read *Enchanted* based on its jacket copy because it "leaves you off on a cliffhanger;" another shared that he might be willing to read the novel because the jacket copy "sounds like...escaping, adventuring, doing something."

***Every Day* (text extract).** The text extract of *Every Day* ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.31$) was categorized as representing a Girls' Book by 56% of participants ($n = 13$). A sixth grade girl summed up her placement of this text extract in one word "romance." When pressed, she went on to explain "a girl is trying to go out with a guy and guys wouldn't

like it because the guys don't go out with other guys, usually.” However, over 70% of participants categorized both the back jacket ($M = 3.36, SD = 1.00$) and book cover ($M = 3.25, SD = 1.07$) as Both Books.

Textual Features Perceived as Split Between Gendered Categories

As mentioned above, the following section will present findings on the three textual features, from two different novels, that were not sorted into a single gendered category by a clear majority during the Textual Features Sort.

***Enchanted* (text extract).** The text extract of *Enchanted* ($M = 3.61, SD = 1.41$) was categorized as representing a Both Book by 43% of participants ($n = 10$) and as a Girls’ Book by 43% of participants ($n = 10$). Boys and girls were evenly split between the two categories. A sixth grade boy categorized it as a Both Book because

it seems like an old book, like they ...come from kingdoms...
kinda like in the olden days, that's kinda like, it could be an action
book but... maybe it's just like a time where they're all meeting
and they're desperate to leave or something and it seems like a just
a good book from reading here, so [maybe I'd read it] Because
it kinda seems like a little of a drama book, but I'd probably read it,
yeah.

A seventh grade girl who categorized the text extract as a Girls’ Book explained her response by saying “it just seems like more of a girly book...Like a princess type of book, like there would be some sort of true love that would happen. Most of the time guys don't read like true love stories.”

The back jacket ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.02$) was categorized as a Both Book by 52% of participants ($n = 11$), including 70% of the boys ($n = 7$). Its book cover ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 0.96$) was categorized as a Girls' Book by 88% of participants ($n = 21$), with girls slightly more likely to categorize the book cover as a Girls' Book than boys.

Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe (text extract). The text extract of *Aristotle and Dante* ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.74$) was categorized across gendered categories without a clear majority; 44% of participants ($n = 10$) categorized it as a Girls' Book, 26% ($n = 6$) categorized it as a Both Book, and 30% ($n = 7$) categorized it as a Boys' Book. It is worth noting that 55% of boys ($n = 6$) categorized the text extract as a Boys' Book, while girls were divided evenly between all three categories (33.33%). A sixth grade boy who categorized this text extract as a Boys' Book did so because, “‘cuz he's thinking about trying to kiss a girl.” A sixth grade girl who placed the extract under Girls' Book explained that “it just seems like this person seems to like this other person I guess, and um, I couldn't...it's hard to imagine like some dude classmate reading this book, it's like romance-y, I guess?” The back jacket of *Aristotle and Dante* ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.38$) was also split across gendered categories, with no clear majority. Its book cover ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.04$) was categorized as a Both Book by 71% of participants ($n = 17$).

Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe (back jacket). The back jacket of *Aristotle and Dante* ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.38$) was categorized across gendered categories without a clear majority; 24% of participants ($n = 5$) categorized it as a Girls' Book, 48% ($n = 10$) categorized it as a Both Book, and 29% ($n = 6$) categorized it

as a Boys' Book. A sixth grade boy, after categorizing the back jacket as a Both Book, observed that

it just seems like a Both Book. Boys and girls would read any book basically, like you can't just like judge a book by like, "oh it's a drama book, it's totally a girl's book" because drama, girls love, they read, they wanna read drama, but you can't really like say like boys wanna read drama too....

The text extract ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.74$) was also split across gendered categories, with no clear majority. Its book cover ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.04$) was categorized as a Both Book by 71% of participants ($n = 17$).

Research Question 2: *To what extent, and in what ways, is willingness to read associated with gender and the gendered categorization of YA novels for young adolescent readers?*

Findings indicate that willingness to read is associated with both gender and the gendered categorization of YA novels. Analysis revealed that, overall, girls were more willing to read than boys as measured by the mean of textual features composite willingness to read scores (Table 3.4), though there were no significant gendered differences in willingness to read based on individual textual feature composites (i.e. text extract, back jacket, or book cover). The only gendered difference in willingness to read at the group level was for the text extract composite score, which showed that control group girls ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.56$) were significantly more willing to read novels based on the text extract ($p \leq 0.05$) than control group boys ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 0.72$).

There were similarities and differences, some significant, in the novels boys and girls were most willing to read (Tables 3.5 & 3.6). Two out of the three YA novels boys and girls were most willing to read were the same, as were two out of the three YA novels they were least willing to read. Composite mean scores for each of the ten texts revealed some significant gendered differences in willingness to read individual texts and some that, though not significant, may have practical implications. Based on composite means, boys study-wide were modestly, though not significantly, more willing to read two of the novels, *Boy21* and *Code Name Verity* than girls. As discussed above in the section above, two out of three textual features for *Boy21* were believed to be “boy” books by participants in the experimental group and its composite gender line score fell on the Book Book side of the Boy Line. In contrast, the composite mean gender line score for *Code Name Verity* placed it just below the Both Book value and each of its three textual features averaged in the Both Book range.

Girls study-wide were significantly more willing to read *Enchanted* and *Every Day* than boys, both novels whose whole text mean gender line scores placed them closer to the Girls’ Book value than any other texts in the study. It should be noted, however, that overall girls’ composite willingness to read score for *Enchanted* was not high in that it hovered just under the Might Read value, though was significantly higher than the boys. Girls were modestly, though not significantly, more willing to read the remaining six novels than boys.

Differences in Willingness to Read Highly Gendered Books

Willingness to read at the level of individual textual features followed a similarly gendered pattern. Boys study-wide were significantly less willing to read each of the individual textual features categorized by participants in the experimental group as “girl” books along with the two individual textual features split among gendered categories. There were no significant differences in willingness to read between boys in the experimental and control groups (Table 3.7) though experimental group boys were modestly more willing to read *Enchanted* based on its book cover than their peers in the control group. There was no significant gendered difference study-wide in girls’ willingness to read “boy” books, though as will be detailed below, there were interesting and significant differences in willingness to read between girls in the control and experimental groups for these textual features (Table 3.8).

Me and Earl (text extract). Girls in the control group were significantly more willing to read *Me and Earl* based on its text extract than girls in the experimental group. Girls in the control were more than twice as likely to indicated high willingness to read group ($n = 5, 36\%$) than girls in the experimental group ($n = 2, 15\%$). Girls in the experimental group were more than twice as likely to indicate low willingness to read ($n = 8, 62\%$) than girls in the control group ($n = 4, 29\%$).

For example, a seventh grade girl placed the text extract of *Me and Earl* under Boys’ Book because “Boys would be more interested in like reading about what happened in ...how it, like starts and how it ends;” the extract opens with references to barf and concludes with an admission of accidental drug use. She was unwilling to read the novel based on this textual feature. As if in answer, a sixth grade boy in the control

group explained that he would read the novel based on the text extract because “I thought it had some pretty funny things in it, like comparing food to barf and the alien thing and like how they didn’t know that they were high or anything.” A sixth grade girl in the control group explained that she would read the *Me and Earl* based on its text extract because “I thought it was kind of interesting and something that I’ve never really read before.”

Boy21 (book cover). Girls in the experimental group were as likely to indicate high willingness to read the novel based on book cover of *Boy21* ($n = 4$, 31%) as girls in the control group ($n = 5$, 36%), but over four times *less* likely to indicate that they might read ($n = 2$, 15%) as girls in the control group ($n = 9$, 64%). Over half of the girls in the experimental group indicate low willingness to read the novel based on its cover ($n = 7$, 54%), as compared to no girls in the control group group ($n = 0$, 0%).

A seventh grade girl in the experimental group explained that she put the cover under Boys’ Book “because ... it has a boy and a bunch of imaginative drawings and stuff like that,” and while she said that she might read the book based on the cover, she later associated a “tomboy” with the kind of girl who might carry the novel down the hallway of her school. In contrast, a seventh girl in the control group who strongly rejected the text extract and the back jacket of *Boy21* because of the basketball theme, said that she might read *Boy21* based on its book cover because

I love how other races can stand up to the dominant race in some kind of way, but this one just reminded me of how people are

trying to fight for equality still and how Martin Luther King was all, was supporting the African Americans, trying to get their rights back...I feel like I could read this, and there's also a little basketball in here, so....

***Never Fall Down* (book cover).** Half of the girls in the control group ($n = 7$, 50%) indicated high willingness to read compared to only 15% of the experimental group girls ($n = 2$). Girls in the experimental group were more likely to say they might read the novel based on its book cover ($n = 5$, 38%) as girls in the control group ($n = 3$, 21%), but more likely to indicate low willingness to read ($n = 6$, 46%) than girls in the control group ($n = 4$, 29%). A sixth grade girl in the experimental group who placed the book cover of *Never Fall Down* under Boys' Book because it reminded her of a boy on her brother's baseball team who has "issues." She shared that she would not read the book based on its cover because there would probably be "drama, but boy drama...like when they fight, like sorta fighting or arguing." In contrast, a seventh grade girl in the control group shared that she liked the cover because "it kinda has like an inspirational quote on the front [in the title]... And how there's like, um, a boy in the back and you don't know who he is and what he's doing there...."

***Enchanted* (book cover).** Girls were significantly more willing to read *Enchanted* based on its book cover than boys (Table 3.9) with 41% of girls ($n = 11$) indicating high willingness to read compared to 9% of boys ($n = 2$). In contrast, 78% of boys ($n = 18$) indicated low willingness to read compared to 26% of girls ($n = 7$). Given the extreme gender differences in willingness to read based on the book cover, it is worth repeating

that there were no gendered differences in willingness to read based on either the text extract or back jacket. Girls in the experimental group ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 1.45$) were more willing to read *Enchanted* based on its book cover than girls in the control group ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.75$), but the difference was not significant.

While study-wide, boys' book cover willingness to read score for *Enchanted* was lower than any other textual feature, boys were modestly more willing to read the novel based on its text extract ($M = 2.04$, $SD = 1.19$) and significantly more willing to read the novel based on its back jacket ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 1.64$, $p \leq 0.01$). In discussing his willingness to read *Enchanted* based on its text extract, one sixth grade boy explained, "it seems like a just a good book from reading here.... it kinda seems like a little of a drama book, but I'd probably read it, yeah." Upon encountering its back jacket, he responded, "Yeah, [I'd] probably [read that] it seems a little bit like drama and I don't like drama ...[but] I would say that I would maybe read it." However, when faced with its book cover, his response changed again:

P: It just looks like a girly book I mean, it's like "girly"...it looks girly...I don't know how to explain it, like it's like girl in dress that looks drama-y, she looks like she's knocked out or like sleeping or something.

R: *Ok, and based on that cover would you read that book?*

P: Probably not.

Every Day (text extract). Boys across the study were significantly less willing than girls to read *Every Day* across all three textual features. Boys' lowest willingness to read mean score of all 30 textual features in the study was for the text extract ($M = 1.96$,

$SD = 1.15$) of *Every Day*, which had been categorized as a Girls' Books by 52% of participants in the experimental group ($n = 12$), including 64% of boys ($n = 7$). Though boys' willingness to read *Every Day* based on its back jacket ($M = 3.13$) and book cover ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.51$) was significantly lower than girls ($M = 4.20$, $p \leq 0.01$), boys as a group were significantly more willing to read the novel based on its back jacket ($p \leq 0.001$) and its book cover ($p \leq 0.05$).

Boys study-wide were also significantly less willing to read the novel based on its back jacket ($p \leq 0.01$) and book cover ($p \leq 0.01$) than girls; they were significantly more willing to read the novel based on its book cover than its text extract ($p \leq 0.05$). That said, *Every Day* elicited extremely high willingness to read scores among girls across the study for each of its three textual features; thus it is important to note that boys were not unwilling to read *Every Day* based on its back jacket or book cover, they just were not as willing as girls.

A sixth grade boy explained that he was unwilling to read *Every Day* based on its text extract because "their conversation is all mumbo jumbo and I don't even know what they are trying to talk about, it sounds kinda like love or something and so I'm not interested really." In contrast, another sixth grade boy said that he might read *Every Day* based on its book cover because "that's the one about the guy who switches bodies everyday, or girl, and it's pretty, pretty cool."

Discussion

This experimental mixed methods study was designed to test the influence of gendered beliefs about texts on willingness to read YA fiction among adolescent readers, particularly boys. Two major findings emerged from this study, each with powerful

implications for how we support and encourage adolescents as readers in both practice and policy.

Gendered Attitudes Influence Willingness to Read

The study found that gendered attitudes negatively influenced willingness to read individual YA novels when textual features were believed to represent opposite-gendered books for the majority of boys and the girls in the experimental group.

This finding supports the hypothesis that, among boys, willingness to read is negatively influenced by gendered attitudes in ways that are pervasive. For boys, the negative influence was independent of the treatment condition. Boys across the study were significantly less willing to read a novel based on a textual feature that the majority of participants in the experimental group categorized as a “girl” book.

In the case of *Every Day*, boys were significantly less willing to read the novel based on the text extract than the back jacket or book cover. The text extract as determined by study protocol depicted the narrator attempting to seduce the boyfriend of a friend, a scene that seemed to influence the extract’s categorization as a Girls’ Book. Thus, in this example, the book cover increased willingness to read among boys and may have

In the case of *Enchanted*, boys across the study were as willing to read the novel as the girls based on its other textual features, but rejected it based on its book cover, suggesting that boys were not opposed to the story itself, but to the publisher’s decision to depict a very narrow “gender identity, drawing their imagery primarily from the stereotyped iconography of...femininity” (Schroeder and Zwick, 2004, p. 21). Book covers are clearly not neutral. The book cover of *Enchanted*, categorized as a “girl” book

by nearly 90% of experimental group participants, was the only book cover to elicit such extremely low willingness to read among boys. This suggests a secondary finding that deserves further research: *highly feminized covers may prevent boys from reading books they otherwise would enjoy.*

This research indicates that particular book cover design decisions can prevent boys from accessing stories and characters they would otherwise be willing to read. Additional research is needed into the ways book covers function as advertisements, intended to define and attract a particular audience (i.e. consumer), and the ways that highly gendered design decision may prevent a broad readership.

This finding raises questions about the ways conscious and subconscious notions of hegemonic masculinity may regulate the reading practices of boys, for example: Is there a social cost to a boy's public association with such a "girly" book cover? If so, what would it look like and to what degree? Further research is needed into the ways book covers (1) position a potential reader; (2) reproduce stereotypes and social inequities; (3) have symbolic value that support or threaten performances of gender identity (similar to clothes, shoes, or kinds of sports); (4) may have real or perceived social consequences. However, regardless of the existence of a social cost for boys, current findings suggest that educators and parents need to develop the skills and willingness to help boys deconstruct pervasive notions of masculinity that limit their access to books.

While, study-wide, the "girl" book attitude had a significantly negative influence of the willingness to read of boys, findings showed girls were not immune to the influence of gendered categories. The data showed that opposite-gendered categories

also negatively influenced girls' willingness to read, though in more direct and less pervasive ways. In instances where textual features were believed to represent "boy" books by the majority of experimental group participants, girls in the control group were significantly more willing to read than their peers in the experimental group. For boys, gendered categories seemed to operate on a subconscious level, but for girls, the overt act of labelling a book a "boy" book seemed to significantly decrease willingness to read. However, findings indicate that further research is needed into the possibility that the inverse may also be true. While the difference was not significant, girls in the experimental group were more willing to read *Enchanted* based on its book cover than girls in the control group in ways that may have practical significance. As one seventh grade girl in the control group wryly observed, "I know I'm a girl, but *that* is too girly." Gendered boundaries do seem to influence girls' willingness to read in complex ways.

Further research is needed into the ways gendered stereotypes may influence girls' willingness to read and sense of identity in complex and potentially problematic ways. While it may be tempting to rationalize the negative influence of publicly promoting book as "boy" books on girls as readers if these "boy" books increase willingness to read among boys given the gendered gap in reading engagement and reading achievement, current findings suggest it is time to move beyond an "either/or" (or "boy" v. "girl") mentality. Highly gendered book categories do not increase willingness to read overall, nor do they support the promotion of "boy" books as a panacea to low reading engagement and reading achievement among adolescent boys.

"Boy" Books Do Not Inherently Increase Willingness to Read Among Boys

Recommendations for improving boys' willingness to read often assumes that boys only want to read about male characters doing "masculine things" by male authors (Boysread.org; Brozo and Schmelzer, 1997; PBSParents, 2016; Scieszka, 2015; Serafini, 2013). These recommendations position "boys" and "guy things" in direct opposition to "girls" and "girl things" (Senn, 2012; Serafini, 2013; Wilhelm, 2001) and lead directly to the assumption that the textual features perceived to represent "boy" books would have elicited the highest willingness to read among boys in the study.

However, the textual features believed to represent "boy" books by a majority of participants in the experimental group did not inspire greater willingness to read among boys than other books. In fact, the text extract of *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* ranked fourth in willingness to read study-wide, the back jacket of *Boy21* ranked fifth and its book cover fourth, while the book cover of *Never Fall Down* ranked seventh. Of the textual features believed to represent "boy" books, the text extract of *Boy21* ranked the highest at second, behind the text extract of *The Raven Boys* which had been categorized predominately as a "both" book. Clearly, boys do not conform to the stereotypes that circulate widely about boys as readers.

This study found that the books boys had the highest willingness to read scores for books whose textual features were believed to be "both" books by experimental group participants. The data suggests that assuming boys are only willing to read about male characters, doing "masculine" things, written by male authors is profoundly misguided. This study found that boys were most willing to read novels with female protagonists engaged in everything from fighting Nazis (*Code Name Verity*) to confronting sinister paranormal activities (*The Diviners* and *The Raven Boys*). In fact, in four of the top five

novels boys were most willing to read, the central protagonists are adolescent girls. Several of these characters, both girls and boys, struggle with issues of identity and place in the world (*The Diviners*, *Boy21*, and *Seraphina*), while others others struggle with the consequences “true love” may bring (*The Raven Boys* and *Seraphina*). With the exception of *Boy21* (by *Matthew Quick*), the book covers boys were most willing to read were by women authors with overtly feminine and highly visible first names (e.g. Libba, Rachel, Maggie, and Elizabeth).

This study found that, as a group, boys were *not* more willing to read highly masculinized and stereotyped books than other books and that, like girls, they were most willing to read novels with high-interest plots and complex characters, novels most often perceived as “both” books. This is not to suggest that “both” books are the new panacea to the problem of low reading motivation among boys. Far from introducing a new bandwagon for educators and parents to jump on, these findings require that we problematize our collective understanding of gendered book categories in profound ways. While the majority of boys expressed low willingness to read *Enchanted* based on its book cover, 5 boys (22%) did indicate medium to high willingness to read the novel based on its book cover, while 9 boys (39%) indicated medium to high willingness to read *Every Day* based on its text extract. This significant minority suggests that boys too would appreciate and benefit from a broader understanding of who boys are and can be as readers.

Conclusion

This study found that stereotypically gendered book categories seem to do more harm than good. Findings support the urgings of several scholars (Martino & Kehler

2007; Millard, 1997; Telford, 1999; Watson, Kehler, & Martino, 2010; Young & Brozo, 2001) that we, as educators, examine and resist sociocultural pressure to essentialize and limit, boys as readers. Findings confirmed the conceptual hypothesis framing this study: that boys are less willing and girls more willing to read books across gendered categories. However, the data also suggest that this framework is more nuanced than previously believed, suggesting that it is not only boys who are negatively influenced by sociocultural constructions of gender and pointing to the need for further research.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates the need to unpack and examine essentialist, and ultimately sexist, assumptions and stereotypes about (1) who boys and girls “are” as readers; (2) what constitutes a “boy” or “girl” book; and (3) the cost of reproducing such hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity. It challenges us, as educators and researchers, to support both boys and girls in developing critical literacy skills that will allow them to name, examine, and resist or reconstitute sociocultural constructions of gender.

These findings underline the importance of ongoing comprehensive and innovative research on the ways particular identity Discourse communities and histories of power influence willingness to read among children and adolescents (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007). Given what we know about the importance of choice in reading motivation (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Ivey & Johnston, 2013, 2015; Pintrich, 2003), the dearth of contemporary research on gender and reading is unsettling. It is time to turn a critical eye to ways boys have and continue to be defined as readers, to recognize the costs of hegemonic power even as we problematize its benefits. The gendered gap in reading motivation and achievement cannot be narrowed much less resolved without critical

examination of the issues of identity, agency, and power that influence how willing adolescents are to read.

Threats to Validity

There are several threats to the internal validity of this study. First, given the pull-out nature of the sort environment and the social nature of adolescents and the school environment, study participants may have primed each other across groups. For example, a participant in the control group may have told a friend in the experimental group to expect to sort by willingness to read, while a participant in the experimental group may have told a friend in the control group to expect to sort by gendered categories. This priming may have influenced willingness to read responses, especially for any control group participants who expected a gendered sort mat. A second threat to the experiment is the distinct possibility that gendered stereotypes have been internalized, meaning that regardless of the presence of explicitly gendered categories, participants are thinking about textual features in gendered ways that may influence willingness to read.

A third threat to the experiment lies in the process of random stratification. Given the relatively small sample size there may be meaningful differences in reading levels that moderated willingness to read and perception of access to texts by gender between groups. This may have occurred even though reading level was a primary consideration when assigning students to their stratified random groupings. For example, in the control group, 45% of boys read above grade level compared to 25% of boys in the experimental group. In the experimental group, 33% of boys read at grade level compared to 18% in the control group. These imbalances may have been the result of also considering gender and level of reading motivation in the process of random assignment.

A fourth threat to the study's internal validity is also a limitation. That the Textual Features Sort was given in one sitting meant that astute participants became aware of patterns across the textual features of the same novel (e.g. character names or dominant themes), though the cards themselves were unmarked. In some cases, this awareness may have influenced willingness to read responses. When a participant referenced a previously encountered textual feature in explaining willingness to read a given YA novel, the researcher asked the participant to "pretend" s/he had not seen the related textual feature and base her/his response solely on the textual feature at hand. Ideally, each individual Textual Features Sort would have occurred one textual feature at a time over the course of days, or even weeks, to minimize the likelihood that participants would make associations and develop preconceptions between textual features of the same text.

Finally, the attempt to reduce reading fatigue among participants and mitigate researcher bias by developing a strict protocol for the text extracts that only allowed for 20 lines of the text to be taken from the exact middle of the book, may have inadvertently lowered willingness to read among participants. First, twenty lines of text may not have been enough to develop an accurate willingness to read response; second, the protocol may have dictate that an unrepresentative except from the text to stand in for the whole (e.g. uncharacteristically slow or deceptively action-packed). For example, the text extract of *Every Day*, elicited extremely low willingness to read among boys, significantly so compared to its back jacket and book cover. This suggests that it may not have been the story itself boys were rejecting, but this particular scene taken out of

context. A more representative excerpt from the text may have elicited a higher willingness to read among boys.

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CHAPTER 4: THE HIGH COST OF “GIRL” BOOKS FOR ADOLESCENT BOYS

Abstract

It is commonly believed that boys prefer “boy” books, which are often promoted as a sure-fire way to increase read motivation and engagement. This study challenges those beliefs and provides evidence that book covers perceived as “girly” and the social consequences attached, may keep boys from reading novels they might otherwise enjoy. Young adolescent readers need help from teachers and librarians to recognize and critique the gendered myths and stereotypes that define boys in such limited and one-dimensional ways. Developing critical literacy skills can help create safe hallways, classrooms, and libraries boys as readers in all of their complexity.

Pause and Ponder

- Are gendered assumptions and/or stereotypes about students as readers circulating through the faculty lunch room, hallway conversations, or staff meetings? How are these assumptions based on media-driven rhetoric and/or cultural stereotypes and to what degree are they based on observations and experiences of actual students?
- What are teachers doing, individually and collectively, to challenge and disrupt such assumptions and stereotypes?
- How can teachers visibly model engaged reading of a wide variety of books and genres for their students? For example, are teachers sitting among students in Silent Reading, reading for pleasure? Picking books out from the library? Taking suggestions from students?

Introduction

“We can’t read that! That’s a girl’s book!” several of my seventh grade language arts students declared. I had just introduced *Alanna* by Tamora Pierce (2010) as our read-aloud when several of the boys vehemently objected. The cover showed a drawing of the young protagonist holding the reins of a pony, backlit by a purple aura. Even the girls sitting around the room agreed that this was, indeed, a “girl” book.

We talked through what students meant by “girl” book, discussing the term’s derogatory connotations. Then I began to read, trusting the power of the story to capture their imaginations. When I finished reading for the day, my students protested, but this time it was because they wanted me to continue reading, though the bell was about to ring. Boys as well as girls. My students were captivated by the story, they loved Alanna as a character, and every day they asked me to read-aloud. Several of the boys in the class, including a previously apathetic reader, went on to read the next novels in the quartet, often staying up late into the night and then rushing in to class to talk with me about what they had read. When assigned a culminating, comprehensive, literacy project focused on the book or author of their choice, several of the boys chose either *Alanna* or Tamora Pierce.

The book cover of *Alanna* has been updated, but since experiencing the dramatic shift in my male students from “but that’s a ‘girl’ book” to “yes, that’s my book,” I have wondered: Do book covers act as gatekeepers, keeping out readers based on identity features? What is the cost of a “girl” book for adolescent boys? Do sociocultural constructions of masculinity prevent boys from accessing fiction they might actually enjoy?

The Gendered Achievement Gap in Reading

The nationwide gendered achievement gap in reading has remained persistent and consistent over time (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2015). Education research confirms that, as a group, boys are less motivated and engaged as readers than girls (Kelley & Decker, 2009; McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang & Meyer, 2012) and yet is also clear that reading achievement is associated with high reading motivation and

engagement (Schwabe, McElvany, & Trendtel, 2015). As a result, educators and academics often recommend increasing boys' access to "boy" books as a means of improving boys' reading outcomes (Newkirk, 2002; Senn, 2012; Serafini, 2013; Wilhelm, 2001).

However, while these recommendations are well-meaning, they also (1) are based on stereotypes about who boys are as readers, (2) make assumptions about how masculinity works as an organizing construct, and (3) overlook the ways children's book publishing and reading practices have been gendered since the mid-19th century (Reynolds, 1990; Segel, 1986).

In short, calls to improve reading outcomes for boys rarely take the opportunity to move beyond a narrowly focused bring-more-boy-books-into-the-classroom response. As a result, they miss the opportunity to engage in a critical conversation about the ways children's books have been used as a means of enculturating particular values and beliefs about how girls and boys, women and men, should function in society (Reynolds, 1990; Segel, 1986). If my experience teaching *Alanna* is any indication, "girl" books might actually inspire more pleasure reading and greater reading engagement among boys if they are provided a safe and intentional space to move beyond the "girl" book / "boy" book dichotomy.

Gendered Fiction in Historical Context

Fiction has not always been so gendered, though it has always as a vehicle for the transmission and reproduction of particular cultural values. Children's literature emerged in England in the 1740s, in part as a means of reinforcing childhood virtues such as obedience, industriousness, and good temper, virtues that were expected of all children

regardless of sex (e.g. Segel, 1986). In the mid to late 19th century, industrial revolution, emergence of a middle class, and rise of Victorianism with its emphasis on highly gendered roles in all aspects of society created both a market and separation between “girl” books and “boy” books as a means of socializing future men and women (Parille, 2008; Reynolds, 1990; Segel, 1986).

In his article “What Girls Read” (1886), Edward G. Salmon clearly articulated the role of books and reading in such a highly gendered culture,

Boys’ literature of a sound kind ought to help build up men. Girls’ literature ought to help build up women. If in choosing the books that boys shall read it is necessary to remember that we are choosing mental food for the future chiefs of a great race, it is equally important not to forget in choosing books for girls that we are choosing mental food for the future wives and mothers of that race. (As cited in Segel, 1986, pp 170-171.)

To our ears, this may sound antiquated and ridiculous. Today, are girls raised to be doctors, professional athletes, and politicians. Today it is as easy to imagine a girl reading *Captain Underpants*, a series set out in public space and premised on overt challenges to adult authority, as it is to imagine a girl reading *The Babysitters Club*, a series set in domestic spaces as girls learn to reproduce maternal authority.

However, before rejecting Salmon’s claims entirely, how easy is it to imagine a boy settling into silent reading with *Captain Underpants*? Probably not a stretch. But what if he opens a *Babysitter’s Club* book? What assumptions will classmates and even teachers or other adults make about him? About his masculinity? His sexuality? What

might the social consequences be? Arguably, while feminism has forced a broadening of cultural expectations surrounding girls, including their reading materials, philosophical and pragmatic vestiges adapted from the Victorian age continue to define our boys, and their reading, in limiting ways.

Gendered roles and identities are acquired through daily social interactions beginning at an early age (Butler, 2006; West and Zimmerman, 1987), and adults and children are both more willing to accommodate a girl's challenging of gender roles than a boy's (Cahill and Adams, 1997; McGuffey & Rich, 1999; Thorne, 1993). A masculinity premised on the rejection of anything associated with girls or the feminine continues to dominate the social, cultural and physical (David & Brannon, 1976; Kimmel, 2008; Newson, 2014).

Gendered Reading Practices

This is the same form of dominant masculinity that led my male students to reject *Alanna* outright as a "girl" book. Left to their own interpretations of the world around them, children articulate gendered beliefs in "girl" books and "boy" books early on (Dutro, 2002; Barrs & Pidgeon, 1994) and gendered beliefs have been shown to negatively influence boys' willingness to engage in experiences or texts when they are perceived to be "girly" (Dutro, 2001, 2002; McGuffey & Rich, 1999; Thorne, 1993). Studies have consistently shown that girls have better attitudes towards reading (e.g. McKenna et al., 2012), are more motivated to read (Kelley & Decker, 2009), and that the gendered reading motivation gap in relation to recreational reading increases with age and grade in ways that cannot be explained by ability (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995). Subconscious gendered stereotypes among teachers that girls are better readers

than boys (Retelsdorf, Schwartz, and Asbrock, 2015) or the popular assumption that boys only want to read “boy” books (Brozo & Schmelzer, 1997; Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002) may very well be part of the issue. At least two studies suggest that once stereotypes about “girl” books are challenged, boys may be willing to read them (Dutro, 2001, 2002; Munson-Warnken, 2015).

Dutro’s qualitative study (2001, 2002) found that gender stereotypes had a profound influence on the reading practices of fifth-grade boys, in particular as they voiced disdain for “girl” books as a threat to their public performance of masculinity. She found that girls could read across gendered boundaries without fear of social consequences, while boys, and in particular high status boys, guarded gendered boundaries in reading and book selection very carefully. However, when organized into a book group reading an *American Girl* novel, boys were able to connect with the protagonist and enjoy the plot, even as they struggled with and against the ways reading such a novel in the public space of the classroom conflicted with their interpretations of masculinity (Dutro, 2001, 2002).

My own experimental-design study of sixth and seventh graders found that, contrary to popular belief, boys were most willing to read young adult (YA) novels they perceived to be “both” books, many of which had female protagonists (Munson-Warnken, 2015). I also found a significant difference in boys’ willingness to read the YA novel *Enchanted* by Alethea Kontis (2013) based on its book cover, which was perceived as a “girl” book and its back cover, which was believed to be a “both” book, when the textual features were presented in isolation. This study found that textual features perceived to represent “girl” books were widely associated with a decrease in willingness

to read among boys, though book covers perceived to be “boy” books did not significantly increase their willingness to read (Munson-Warnken, 2015). Both studies suggest, implicitly or explicitly, that there is something in the way particular books or series look, the ways they interface with public perception, that inhibit boys as readers.

The Role of Book Covers

Contemporary book covers facilitate a reader’s first interaction with a book and as a result function, in part, as advertisements. As it has evolved, the primary goal of a book cover is to attract a potential reader, then to inspire that reader to purchase the book and read the story inside (Drew and Sternberger, 2005; Mackey, 2014). Yet a book cover is also a blending “of form and meaning, a reflection of an American literary legacy that continues to find new ways to explore the nature of contemporary experience [and offering] a visual language that defines the literary legacy of an entire culture” (Drew and Sternberger, 2005, p. 16).

Individual book covers are the product of particular socio-historical contexts, pictorial displays intended to represent the story in a way that can be interpreted quickly and easily by an imagined reader (Goffman, 1988). This imagined reader has distinct attributes reflected in the cover design and may, or may not, and is akin to what reader-response theorist Walter Gibson has named “the mock reader” (1950). Gibson suggests that in every literary experience, we the readers “assume, for the sake of the experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume, and, if we cannot assume them, we throw them away” (1950, p. 1).

The cover of a book like *Alanna* (as it appeared in the spring of 2000) constructs a mock reader the boys in my class immediately identified as “Not-Them” through their

frank rejection of the novel as a “girl” book. Yet once past the cover, the boys *were* willing to take on the attitudes and qualities projected by the text itself. Perhaps because the character Alanna, a girl who passes as a boy in her determination to be the first female knight, would herself be offended by the assumptions and stereotypes perpetuated by the cover of her own book. Once the boys gained access, they were enthralled, but first they had to get past the cover’s mock reader. For several boys, *Alanna* was a “gateway text,” a text so engaging it inspired further reading of similar books (e.g. the ultimate gateway text of the 21st century is *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* by J.K. Rowling (1998). For my students, this meant not only reading the subsequent books about Alanna, but other novels written by Pierce and/or in the fantasy genre.

What is clear is that book covers are not neutral; they imagine and judge the reader, even as, despite the familiar adage, the reader judges them (Drew and Sternberger, 2005). Nor is the history of reading or evolution of children’s and young adult literature neutral. Both have been and continue to be gendered in ways that influence actual and potential readers, though such influence has not been widely measured. It is out of this context that the questions shaping this study emerged: To what extent do highly gendered book covers influence willingness to read YA fiction for young adolescent readers? How willing are these readers to read books perceived to be intended for the opposite-gender? And finally, to what extent, and in what ways, do boys and girls perceive there to be social consequences for public association with highly gendered books?

An Experimental Study

The data I use to answer these questions were gathered as part of a larger experimental study on the ways sociocultural constructions of gender may influence willingness to read, reading motivation, and reading achievement conducted during the 2014-2015 school year in a predominately working class suburban district in a rural New England state. As part of this larger study, I asked a group of middle grades students ($N = 25$, 12 boys and 13 girls) to sort individual textual features of a set of novels into the gendered categories they believed best represented by the feature. The sort mat was split into three columns labelled (from left to right) Boy's Book, Both Book, and Girls' Books. For the sake of clarity, the use of capital letters will indicate reference to these categorical gender labels.

The study focused on the textual features most frequently used when selecting recreational texts: text extract, back jacket, and book cover (Mohr, 2006). To both reduce researcher bias and represent YA novels believed to be the "best" by experts in the field, the sort pulled textual features from the ten YA novels on the Young Adult Library Services Association's "Top Ten List of 2013" (Table 4.1).

Students received three sets of 10 cards, one set at a time. Each set contained the cards of a single textual feature. While the textual features were always given in the same progression, the order of individual cards within a set varied randomly. The sort mat had three columns labelled Boys' Book, Both Book, and Girls' Book. Students were asked to place each textual feature, one set at a time, onto the sort mat, into the gendered category they felt the feature represented (Figure 4.3). Each sort began with the text extract and ended with the book cover and each student performed the sort individually with the researcher present. After completing each sort, students were asked to discuss

both reasons for individual choices made about gendered categories and willingness to read the novel based on the given textual feature.

The Hallway Test

In addition to measuring gendered beliefs and willingness to read a novel based on its textual features, the Hallway Test was developed to measure students' perception that social consequences could result for a student publicly associating an opposite-gender book. The Hallway Test was given to students during the book cover portion of the sort any time a book cover was sorted into a gendered category (i.e. Boys' Book or Girls' Book). The Hallway Test was not given if a book cover was categorized as Both Book. The test was comprised of the following three questions: (1) Can you imagine a [boy or girl] walking down the hallway of your school and into silent reading with this book under [his or her] arm? (2) Would there be any social consequences if [he or she] did? (3) What would those social consequences look like? Gendered categorization and willingness to read of textual features, along with Hallway Test responses were recorded, then analyzed using frequencies and percentages. In addition, interviews were used to illuminate and complicate quantitative findings.

Gendered Beliefs about Texts and Willingness to Read

Gendered beliefs about texts. Data analysis showed no significant difference in the ways boys and girls placed individual textual features in gendered categories. It also showed that most textual features (70%, $n = 21$) were categorized as Both Books by the majority of students. As discussed at greater length elsewhere (Munson-Warnken, 2015), analysis found that textual features perceived to represent "girl" books were associated with significantly lower willingness among boys and that individual textual features of

the same novel may elicit significantly different willingness to read responses depending upon their gendered categorization.

Out of the 10 YA novels in the study, only two covers were believed to represent highly gendered books by a majority of students. The first, *Boy21* by Matthew Quick, (2013), was categorized as a Boys' Book by 71% of students ($n = 17$). The second, *Enchanted* by Alethea Kontis (2013), was categorized as a Girls' Book by 88% of students ($n = 21$). Gendered differences in willingness, or lack thereof, to read these two novels suggests that highly gendered book covers may inhibit willingness to read for young adolescent boys.

Willingness to read *Boy21*. Girls in the study were less willing to read the novel based on its book cover than boys, however the difference was not significant. Nearly half of girls expressed medium to high willingness to read the novel based on its book cover. As one seventh grade girl explained, she might read *Boy21* based on its book cover, "Because it has basketball and I like basketball." Girls were more willing to read the novel based on its back jacket than any other feature, but again, the differences in willingness to read between the back jacket and the text extract or the book cover were also not significant.

Willingness to read *Enchanted*. Boys in the study were significantly less willing than girls to read *Enchanted* based on its book cover ($p \leq 0.000$); 92% of boys ($n = 11$) expressed low willingness to read compared to 23% of girls ($n = 3$). There was no significant gendered difference in willingness to read the novel based on either its text extract or back jacket, but boys were significantly less willing to read the novel based on its book cover than its back jacket ($p \leq 0.05$). After sorting the back jacket of *Enchanted*

into the Both Book category, one sixth grade boy shared that he might read it because “it leaves you off on a cliffhanger.” However, when faced with its book cover, the same boy said that he probably would not read *Enchanted* because “just looking at the cover of that book it looks drama... It just looks like a girly book.... I mean, it’s like ‘girly’...I don’t know how to explain it.”

The Cost of Book Covers

The Book Cover of *Boy21*

Hand-written block letters spell the title out across the forehead of an African American boy. His head is disembodied, suspended against a dark background; his intense gaze meets the eyes of the potential reader. Over and around his head sketches of stars, a planet, rocket, and basketball flying up past a net suggest a teenager has doodled all over the cover. For the majority of students (82%), symbolic representations of boy-ness did not undermine girl-ness. Students often spoke about basketball as enjoyed by both boys and girls. A seventh grade girl explained that “It seemed like a book that’s about basketball so it’s a book that guys would like to read and girls would like.” A sixth grade boy observed that “I ever [sic] see like girls reading these kinds of books; like my sister Rose, she reads like, she’s a big reader... and I can just see her with this book.”

The Hallway Test. Overall the Hallway Test for *Boy21* ($N = 24$) revealed that, in spite of being categorized as a Boys Book by 71% ($n = 17$), *Boy21* was perceived as a safe book for girls to carry down the hallway (Figure 4.2). It was irrelevant in 25% ($n = 6$) cases as 25% of students ($n = 6$) categorized the book cover as a Both Book. The test was given in 75% of cases where students sorted the cover as in gendered categories.

The one student who placed the book cover under Girls' Book was a sixth grade boy who explained that it looked like "drama." He also said that he could imagine a boy walking down the hallway with the book.

Of the 17 students who sorted *Boy21* as a Boys' Book, 47% ($n = 8$) said they could imagine the opposite-gender carrying the book down the hallway of their school; 35% ($n = 6$) said maybe and 18% ($n = 3$) said no, they could not imagine the opposite-gender carrying the novel down the hallway of their school. Two of these three students were girls who could not imagine other girls carrying *Boy21*.

Social consequences. A total of 82% ($n = 18$) of students ($N = 22$) did not believe there would be social consequences for a girl carrying *Boy21* down the hall (Figure 4.3). For 27% of students ($n = 6$) the question of social consequences was irrelevant and an additional 55% ($n = 12$) of students predicted there would be none. Of the four students who said there would be social consequences for the opposite-gender carrying the book down the hall, three were sixth grade girls, the fourth a sixth grade boy. One boy out of 11 (9%) believed there would be social consequences for a girl publicly associating with *Boy21*.

Degree of social consequences. Overall, 33% of students ($N = 16$) believed there would be some degree of social consequences for the opposite-gender publicly associating with *Boy21* (Figure 4.4). Put another way, 67% of responding students did not.

Two girls believed there would be slight social consequences for a girl carrying *Boy21*, namely other girls giving curious or wondering looks. Two additional students shared that there would be some social consequences for a girl carrying the book. One, a

sixth grade girl, predicted other girls would ask: "Why are you reading a *boy's* book?"

The second, a sixth grade boy, first said that "nothing" would happen to a girl carrying *Boy21* down the hallway, then changed his mind and predicted that "Some might think bad I guess [sic], but they wouldn't say it. They wouldn't say it, no, but they might think ... 'uh, *this* book' sarcastically."

The only student who predicted major social consequences would for a girl carrying *Boy21* was a sixth grade girl. She initially predicted there would be no consequences, then changed her mind, "Wait, yeah [*pause*] I think other girls would yell...yelling and being mean to that girl because she doesn't like drama and diary kind of books." In her perspective, it would be girls not boys questioning the girl carrying *Boy21*, other girls policing her book choice.

The Book Cover of *Enchanted*

A white teenage girl in a strapless formal dress accented by black lace reclines sleepily against a vaguely sylvan backdrop. Her eyes are closed. Her head tilts away from the potential reader, blond ringlets fall against her arm and neck, and a faint smile plays against her lips. A frog perches on her hand, looking into her face. White swirls and hot pink roses surround the pinkish purple title with its ornate "E."

The Hallway Test. Results of the Hallway Test ($N = 24$) for *Enchanted* were strikingly different than *Boy21* (Figure 4.5). The test was irrelevant in only one case (4%) because one student sorted the book cover as a Both Book. This sixth grade boy began the sort by declaring that he did not believe books could be gendered, then proceeded to explain his Both Book sort decisions each time.

Half of the students ($n = 12$) said they could *not* imagine a boy walking down the

hallway carrying *Enchanted*, while 46% of students ($n = 11$) responded they could or maybe could imagine a boy carrying the book. For example, a seventh-grade girl who openly aligned herself with the boys in her class shared that “It looks like the kind of book most girls would like to read...It kind of seems like an old time dress and everything...It just wouldn’t interest me.” She was quick and decisive that no, she could not imagine a boy walking down the hallway with *Enchanted*. When asked why she could not imagine it, she responded vaguely, “I just can’t.”

Social consequences. For participants in the experimental group ($N = 25$), the question of social consequences for carrying *Enchanted* was only irrelevant for the sixth grade boy who consciously categorized the cover as a Both Book (Figure 4.6). Sixty-four percent of remaining students ($n = 15$) believed there would be social consequences for a boy carrying *Enchanted* down the hallway; an additional 24% ($n = 6$) believed there might be social consequences. Thus 88% ($n = 21$) of students believed a boy could face social consequences of some kind for walking down the hallway with this book. Only 12% of students ($n = 4$) believed there would not be social consequences.

Degree of social consequences. In stark contrast to *Boy21*, 83% ($n = 19$) of students ($N = 24$) believed there would be some degree of social consequences for a boy carrying *Enchanted* down the hallway. These consequences were believed ranged from questioning looks and light teasing to public humiliation (Figure 4.7). On the light end, one seventh grade girl said “they’d make jokes about it but that’s really all.”

At a more moderate level, Jacob, a sixth-grade boy and avid reader anticipated the social consequences for public association would include overt teasing:

I wouldn't bring *Enchanted* with me...Because, like my friends pick on me for like reading... just looking at the cover they'd pick on me...They say like "That's a girl book, that's a book that girls are reading, you shouldn't be reading" and stuff like that. [But] I just ignore 'em and keep reading.

Jacob's response reveals not only his certainty that other boys would interpret a public reading with *Enchanted* as a transgression of gendered boundaries, but that this certainty is based on previous experience. During the post-sort interview he shared,

I remember like going to school with the first book in the Mortal Instruments series by Cassandra Claire and I was so embarrassed by shirtless Jace on the cover and so I did my best to hide the cover and like fold it and roll it and hide it in my legs because I was embarrassed by what people would think of it... [But] It's really good, it's my favorite series ever.

Jacob's desire to read the novel overrode the risks associated for him as a boy reading a book whose cover is dominated by a naked, muscle-bound male torso covered in tattoos, emanating an eerie light. However, he took precautions, hoping to mitigate the shame and embarrassment of public association with such a cover. Jacob does not seem to interpret his friends' attempts to 'put him in his place' or police gendered boundaries as malicious, but, for him, it is also not effective.

Another sixth grade boy predicted major social consequences if a boy carried *Enchanted* down the hallway of their school:

People would make fun of him and I don't think that's right...like if he accidentally dropped his book in front of like the mean kids or something... there's this boy and he plays football and

everything and he thinks that every other sport is for girls and everything and if you dropped that book in front of him he would call you some pretty offensive names, and it wouldn't make you feel nice. You'd feel insecure.

This student was clear that while he does not agree with or support the social consequences that could result from a boy's public association with *Enchanted*, they do exist and are tied directly to perceptions of masculinity and sexuality.

Finally, even the sixth-grade boy who systematically placed every textual feature in the study under Both Book believed there would be teasing for possession of *Enchanted*: "I think kids might think it's girly, but I don't really think books to can be girly or boy-ey, I think people like what they like to read, it doesn't really matter...I'd probably say yeah [there would be teasing]."

Conclusion

This study confirmed what my language arts students made visible: there are some novels boys are willing to read based on the book itself that they are not willing to read based on the book cover. The Hallway Test revealed the reason: there *are* dangerous book covers—at least for our boys. Students were clear that if a girl reads a "boy" book in public, chances are she will go unnoticed or elicit mild curiosity. However, a boy reading a "girl" book in public would garner teasing, ridicule, even public humiliation. His allegiance to heteronormative masculine practices may be called into question. His sexuality may become a matter of debate. He would no longer be safe.

This study indicates that some boys do not believe these social consequences are right or just; some are willing to take the risks associated with reading a "girl" book in

public space, though they may take precautions like rolling back, tearing off, or otherwise obscuring the cover to minimize the risks; some may read the book in the privacy of their own homes. But why are boys forced to take such risks? To resort to hiding? To associate fear and shame with books that they love or may even just be curious about?

Perhaps because well-meaning adults assume boys cannot or will want to read about girls and girls' experiences, even as they take for granted girls' ability to read about boys and boys' experiences. Instead of teaching boys to be *dual-readers*, able to read across gender identities and life experiences, adults allow and even encourage, boys to be *mono-readers*, only able to read books about boys whose mock reader (both on the cover and in the text itself) is a boy or man. That girls are encouraged to read across genders, while boys are often limited to their own suggests a continued, pervasive belief that the male perspective and experience are universal while the female perspective or experience is not.

Thus boys are allowed to not only encouraged to skip over books like *Enchanted* (or *Alanna*), but publicly confront peers who dare read them. In the course of the study, boys indicated they were as willing as girls to read *Enchanted* based on its text extract and jacket copy, yet unwilling to read the novel based on its book cover. Not only are book covers not neutral, in some cases they clearly act as gatekeepers, preventing boys from accessing novels that they would otherwise be willing to read. These findings suggest it is time to begin teaching boys and girls to see and critique the gendered constructs that limit them, instead of implicitly or explicitly encouraging their reproduction. As educators, as reading teachers, it is our job to create safe spaces and initiate conversations that support the development, engagement, and achievement of

boys as readers in all of their complexity.

Take Action!

1) *Notice* ways that reading is gendered in your classroom.

What patterns do you see in text selection and recommendations? How do your students talk about their choices and the choices of others? What words and phrases are used?

2) *Interrupt* stereotypes by asking questions.

What is really being said when a book is labeled “girl” book? Who has access and why? What about when labeled “boy” book? Who has access and why? Who says? To what end? What happens when we disrupt those assumptions and stereotypes?

3) *Engage* students in critical conversations about the ways books are gendered.

What assumptions does the book cover make about the reader? What does the title suggest? What about the image, color choices, and font used? Do you think characters in the book would agree with the ways their story is portrayed by the book cover?

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More to Explore

- Check out YA novelist Maureen Johnson's "Coverflip" project in which readers redesigned book covers to either feminize them (e.g. *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding) or un-feminize them (e.g. *before i fall* by Lauren Oliver); School Library Journal's article "Breaking Bias: Inside Maureen Johnson's 'Coverflip' Challenge" is a great place to start (<http://www.slj.com/2013/07/books-media/breaking-bias-maureen-johnsons-coverflip-challenge/#>)
- Read author Caroline Paul's TED online article "Why boys should read girl books" (March 29, 2016; <http://ideas.ted.com/why-boys-should-read-girl-books/>)

CHAPTER 5: COMPREHENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Appendix A
 Tables for Chapter 1
 The Problem of the “Boy” Book/ “Girl” Book Phenomenon

Table 1.1		
<i>Two-Group Posttest-Only Experimental Design</i>		
R _E	X	O
R _C		O
<u>Key</u>		
R _E = Experimental Group		
R _C = Control Group		
X = Gendered Belief about Text		
O = Willingness to Read		

Table 1.2			
<i>Variable Chart for the Individual Textual Features Sort</i>			
<u>Variable</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Group Tested</u>
Gender	Independent <i>Nominal</i>	Self-identified by subject	N/A
Group	Independent <i>Nominal</i>	Random placement in control or experimental group	N/A
Gendered Belief about Text	Dependent <i>Categorical</i>	Belief that novel represented by isolated textual feature is a Boys’ Book, Both Book, or Girls’ Book	Experimental
Willingness to Read	Dependent <i>Continuous</i>	Degree of willingness to read novel represented by isolated textual feature	Experimental & Control

Table 1.3.

Demographic Data for Study Participants
(*N* = 50)

	<u><i>N</i></u>	<u><i>%</i></u>
<u>Grade</u>		
<i>Sixth</i>	36	72
<i>Seventh</i>	14	28
<u>Gender</u>		
<i>Boy</i>	23	46
<i>Girl</i>	27	54
<u>Race</u>		
<i>White</i>	45	90
<i>Bi-Racial</i>	3	6
<i>Asian-American</i>	2	4
<u>Reading Level*</u>		
<i>Above Grade Level</i>	22	44
<i>At Grade Level</i>	7	14
<i>Below Grade Level</i>	21	42
<u>Reading Motivation**</u>		
<i>High</i>	26	52
<i>Low</i>	24	48

* Reading level based on the school-administered STAR Assessment.

** Reading motivation level based on the researcher-administered Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997); *High* defined as at the median or above (≥ 2.81), *Low* defined as below the median (< 2.81).

Table 1.4

*Stratified Random Sampling of Experimental Groups (N = 50)***Control Group (n = 25)**

		Reading Level*			Reading Motivation**			Grade in School		
		<u>N</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>		
<i>Girls</i>	14	<i>Below</i>	7	50	<i>Low</i>	5	36	<i>Sixth</i>	8	57
		<i>At</i>	2	14	<i>High</i>	9	64	<i>Seventh</i>	6	43
		<i>Above</i>	5	36						
<i>Boys</i>	11	<i>Below</i>	4	36	<i>Low</i>	7	64	<i>Sixth</i>	9	82
		<i>At</i>	2	18	<i>High</i>	4	36	<i>Seventh</i>	2	18
		<i>Above</i>	5	45						
Experimental Group (n = 25)										
<i>Girls</i>	13	<i>Below</i>	6	46	<i>Low</i>	5	38	<i>Sixth</i>	8	62
		<i>At</i>	2	15	<i>High</i>	8	62	<i>Seventh</i>	5	38
		<i>Above</i>	5	46						
<i>Boys</i>	12	<i>Below</i>	5	42	<i>Low</i>	7	58	<i>Sixth</i>	11	92
		<i>At</i>	4	33	<i>High</i>	5	42	<i>Seventh</i>	1	8
		<i>Above</i>	3	25						

* Reading level determined by teacher-assessed Lexile reading level using the STAR Assessment.

** Motivation to read determined by mean score on the researcher-administered Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997); *High* defined as at the median or above (≥ 2.81), *Low* defined as below the median (< 2.81).

Appendix B
Tables for Scholarly Article I

Table 3.1 <i>Young Adult Library Services “Top Ten Fiction 2013” List</i>		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Genre*</u>
<i>Me and Earl and the Dying Girl</i>	Jesse Andrews	Coming of age
<i>The Diviners</i>	Libba Bray	Mystery
<i>Seraphina</i>	Rachel Hartman	Fantasy
<i>Enchanted</i>	Alethea Kontis	Fairy tale
<i>Every Day</i>	David Levithan	Romance
<i>Never Fall Down</i>	Patricia McCormick	Historical fiction
<i>Boy21</i>	Matthew Quick	Coming of age
<i>Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe</i>	Benjamin Alire Sáenz	Coming of age
<i>The Raven Boys</i>	Maggie Stiefvater	Fantasy
<i>Code Name Verity</i>	Elizabeth Wein	Historical fiction

* Genre as labelled by Common Sense Media©

Table 3.2

Stratified Random Sampling of Experimental Groups (N = 50)

Control Group (n = 25)										
		Reading Level*			Reading Motivation**			Grade in School		
		<u>N</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>			<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>		
<i>Girls</i>	14	<i>Below</i>	7	50	<i>Low</i>	5	36	<i>Sixth</i>	8	57
		<i>At</i>	2	14	<i>High</i>	9	64	<i>Seventh</i>	6	43
		<i>Above</i>	5	36						
<i>Boys</i>	11	<i>Below</i>	4	36	<i>Low</i>	7	64	<i>Sixth</i>	9	82
		<i>At</i>	2	18	<i>High</i>	4	36	<i>Seventh</i>	2	18
		<i>Above</i>	5	45						
Experimental Group (n = 25)										
<i>Girls</i>	13	<i>Below</i>	6	46	<i>Low</i>	5	38	<i>Sixth</i>	8	62
		<i>At</i>	2	15	<i>High</i>	8	62	<i>Seventh</i>	5	38
		<i>Above</i>	5	46						
<i>Boys</i>	12	<i>Below</i>	5	42	<i>Low</i>	7	58	<i>Sixth</i>	11	92
		<i>At</i>	4	33	<i>High</i>	5	42	<i>Seventh</i>	1	8
		<i>Above</i>	3	25						

* Reading level determined by teacher-assessed Lexile reading level using the STAR Assessment.

** Motivation to read determined by mean score on the researcher-administered Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997); *High* defined as at the median or above (≥ 2.81), *Low* defined as below the median (< 2.81).

Table 3.3

Gender Line Mean Scores Organized on Gender Line by Text Composite

	<u>Title</u>	<u>Comp</u>	<u>TE</u>	<u>BoJ</u>	<u>BC</u>
Texts Within Both Book Range	<i>Enchanted</i>	4.05	3.61	3.95	4.67
	<i>Every Day</i>	3.53	3.91	3.36	3.25
	<i>Seraphina</i>	3.48	3.54	3.52	3.50
	<i>The Raven Boys</i>	3.06	3.09	3.57	2.33
	<i>The Diviners</i>	3.00	3.30	2.91*	2.89
	<i>Code Name Verity</i>	2.94	2.61	2.91	2.92
	<i>Never Fall Down</i>	2.81	3.57	2.91	1.96
	<i>Me and Earl</i>	2.80	2.30	2.60	3.46
	<i>Aristotle and Dante</i>	2.79	2.74	2.91	2.88
	<i>Boy21</i>	1.89	1.79	2.09	1.67

* Indicates significant difference in gendered categorization ($p \leq 0.05$).
 Gender line range:
 Girl Book = 5.0; Girl Line = 4.0; Both Book = 3.0; Boy Line = 2.0; Boy Book = 1.0

Table 3.4

Willingness to Read Whole Text Composite Scores

<u>Title</u>	Boys			Girls		
	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
<i>Me and Earl</i>	22	3.12	1.16	26	3.40	1.32
<i>The Diviners</i>	21	3.38	0.64	25	3.65	0.86
<i>Seraphina</i>	22	3.18	1.22	24	3.31	1.11
<i>Enchanted</i> ***	22	2.12	0.92	24	2.97	0.88
<i>Every Day</i> ^t	23	2.62	1.02	25	3.96	0.95
<i>Never Fall Down</i>	22	2.76	1.14	25	3.12	1.12
<i>Boy21</i>	22	3.33	1.34	26	3.08	1.23
<i>Aristotle and Dante</i>	22	3.05	1.10	25	3.41	1.11
<i>The Raven Boys</i>	22	3.42	1.20	24	3.74	1.15
<i>Code Name Verity</i>	22	3.61	1.14	24	3.31	1.15

*** Girls significantly more willing to read ($p \leq 0.01$).
^t Girls significantly more willing to read ($p \leq 0.000$).

Table 3.5			
<i>YA Novels Boys Were Most Willing to Read Based on Whole Text Composite Willingness to Read Mean Scores</i>			
<u>Rank</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>M</u>
1	22	<i>Code Name Verity</i>	3.61
2	22	<i>The Raven Boys</i>	3.42
3	21	<i>The Diviners</i>	3.38
4	22	<i>Boy21</i>	3.33
5	22	<i>Seraphina</i>	3.18
6	22	<i>Me and Earl</i>	3.12
7	22	<i>Aristotle and Dante</i>	3.05
8	22	<i>Never Fall Down</i>	2.76
9	23	<i>Every Day</i> ^t	2.62
10	22	<i>Enchanted</i> **	2.12

** Boys significantly less willing to read
($p \leq 0.001$).

^t Boys significantly less willing to read
($p \leq 0.000$).

Table 3.6

YA Novels Girls Were Most Willing to Read Based on Whole Text Composite Willingness to Read Mean Scores

<u>Rank</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>M</u>
1	25	<i>Every Day</i> [†]	3.96
2	24	<i>The Raven Boys</i>	3.74
3	25	<i>The Diviners</i>	3.65
4	25	<i>Aristotle and Dante</i>	3.41
5	26	<i>Me and Earl</i>	3.40
6	24	<i>Code Name Verity</i>	3.31
7	24	<i>Seraphina</i>	3.31
8	26	<i>Never Fall Down</i>	3.12
9	26	<i>Boy21</i>	3.08
10	24	<i>Enchanted</i> ^{***}	2.97

*** Girls significantly more willing to read ($p \leq 0.001$).
[†] Girls significantly more willing to read ($p \leq 0.000$).

Table 3.7

Gendered Differences in Willingness to Read Textual Features Categorized as “Girl” Books (Boys Only)

<u>Title</u>	<u>Text Feature</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>M_{GL}</u>	<u>M_{WR}</u>	<u>t</u>
<i>Enchanted</i>	Book Cover				
Control		11	N/A	1.73	0.229
Experimental		12	4.45	2.33	-
<i>Every Day</i>	Text Extract				
Control		11	N/A	1.91	0.855
Experimental		12	4.18	2.00	-

Table 3.8

Group Differences in Willingness to Read Textual Features Categorized as “Boy” Books (Girls Only)

<u>Title</u>	<u>Text Feature</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>M_{GL}</u>	<u>M_{WR}</u>	<u>t</u>
<i>Me and Earl</i>	Text Extract				
Control		14	N/A	3.36	0.020*
Experimental		13	2.08	1.92	-
<i>Never Fall Down</i>	Book Cover				
Control		14	N/A	3.71	0.0098***
Experimental		13	1.69	2.08	-
<i>Boy21</i>	Book Cover				
Control		14	N/A	3.86	0.0033***
Experimental		13	1.31	2.31	-

* Significant at $p \leq 0.05$.
 *** Significant at $p \leq 0.001$.
 M_{GL} = Mean Gender Line Score
 M_{WR} = Mean Willingness to Read Score

Table 3.9

Willingness to Read of Textual Features Categorized as “Girl” Books

<u>Title</u>	<u>Textual Feature</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>p</u>
<i>Enchanted</i>	Book Cover				
Boys		23	1.70	1.15	0.000 ^t
Girls		27	3.26	1.61	-
<i>Every Day</i>	Text Extract				
Boys		23	1.96	1.15	0.001***
Girls		26	3.42	1.65	-

*** Significant at $p \leq 0.001$.
^t Significant at $p \leq 0.000$.

Appendix C
Figures for Scholarly Article I
Conceptual Framework Undergirding Hypothesis

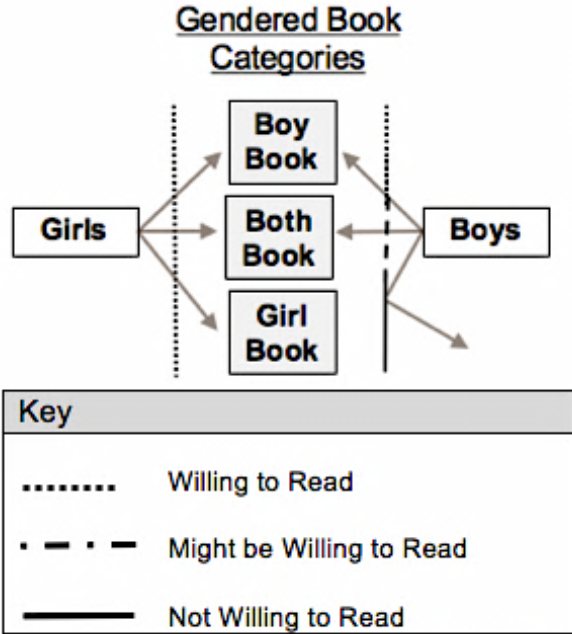


Figure 1.1. Conceptual framework depicting hypothesis regarding the influence of gendered attitudes towards book on the willingness to read of young adolescents.

Appendix D
Tables for Scholarly Article II
The High Cost of “Girl” Books for Adolescent Boys

Table 4.1					
<i>Young Adult Library Services “Top Ten Fiction 2013” List and Gendered Categories Chosen for Individual Textual Features by the Majority of Participants (≥ 50%)</i>					
<u>Title</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Genre^γ</u>	<u>TE</u>	<u>BJ</u>	<u>BC</u>
<i>Me and Earl and the Dying Girl</i>	Jesse Andrews	Coming of age	BB	BoB	BoB
<i>The Diviners</i>	Libba Bray	Mystery	BoB	BoB	BoB
<i>Seraphina</i>	Rachel Hartman	Fantasy	BoB	BoB	BoB
<i>Enchanted</i>	Alethea Kontis	Fairy tale	BoB/GB	BoB	GB ^t
<i>Every Day</i>	David Levithan	Romance	GB	BoB*	BoB**
<i>Never Fall Down</i>	Patricia McCormick	Historical fiction	BoB	BoB	BoB/BB
<i>Boy21</i>	Matthew Quick	Coming of age	BB	BoB	BB
<i>Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe</i>	Benjamin Alire Sáenz	Coming of age	SPL	BoB	BoB
<i>The Raven Boys</i>	Maggie Stiefvater	Fantasy	BoB	BoB	BoB
<i>Code Name Verity</i>	Elizabeth Wein	Historical fiction	BoB	BoB	BoB

Key: BB = Boys’ Book; BoB = Both Book; GB = Girls’ Book; SPL = Majority split across all three categories; / = Majority split across two categories.
*Gendered difference in willingness to read significant at $p \leq 0.05$.
**Gendered difference in willingness to read significant at $p \leq 0.01$.
***Gendered difference in willingness to read significant at $p \leq 0.001$.
^tGendered difference in willingness to read significant at $p \leq 0.000$.
^γ Genre as labelled by Common Sense Media©.

Appendix E
Figures for Scholarly Article II
The High Cost of “Girl” Books for Adolescent Boys



Figure 4.1. An example of the book cover portion of the Textual Features Sort.

Figure 4.2
The Hallway Test for Boy21 (N = 24)
Can you imagine a girl walking down the hallway of your school with this book?

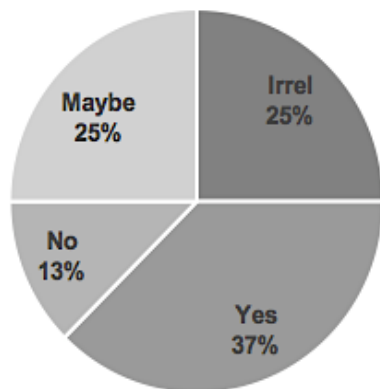


Figure 4.3
Social Consequences for Boy21 (N = 22)

Would there be social consequences
for a girl carrying *Boy21*?

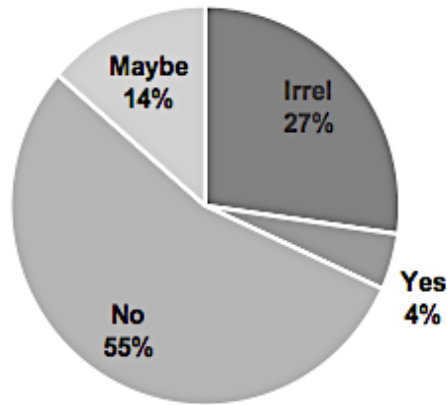


Figure 4.4
Degree of Social Consequences for Boy21 (N = 21)

To what degree would there be social consequences
for a girl carrying *Boy21*?

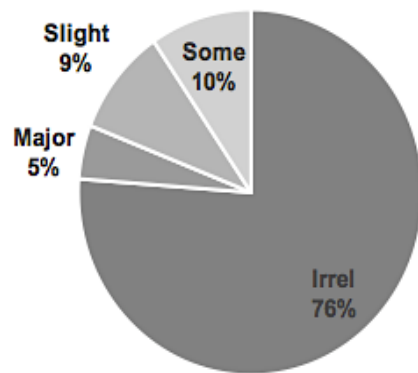


Figure 4.5
The Hallway Test for Enchanted (N = 24)

Can you imagine a boy walking down the hallway with *Enchanted*?

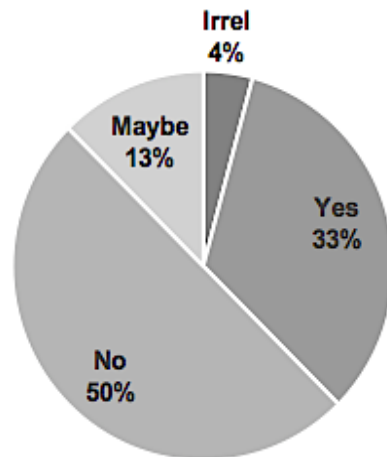


Figure 4.6
Social Consequences for Enchanted (N = 25)

Would there be social consequences for a boy carrying *Enchanted*?

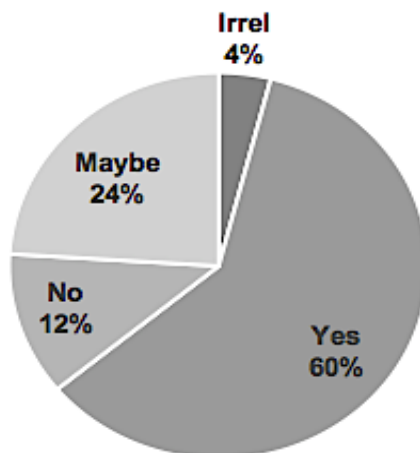


Figure 4.7
Degree of Social Consequences for Enchanted (N = 23)

To what degree would there be social consequences
for a boy carrying *Enchanted*?

