

An Investigation of Reading Attitudes and Influences Among Working Class,
Multiethnic Eighth Grade Students in One Ohio High School

by

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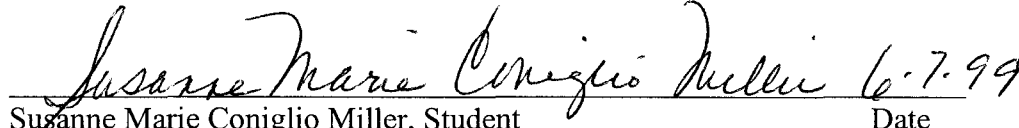
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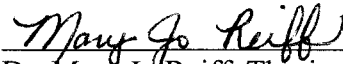
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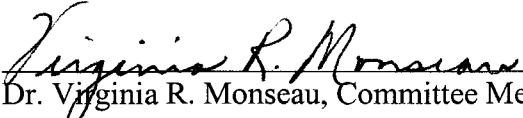


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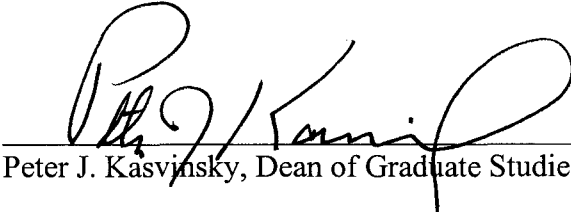
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the reading attitudes and interests of working class, multiethnic eighth grade students at one Ohio high school. My research focused on these questions: Do children from working class homes form reading attitudes based on the attitudes of those who most influence them, namely parents and peers? Do working class families view reading as a more utilitarian, survival skill rather than as an emotionally enriching hobby? Are there differences among reading attitudes of white, African American, and Hispanic students? Is gender a factor when considering reading? These research questions were developed based on interaction with teenage readers and information obtained through a variety of research sources such as *Ways with Words* by Shirley Brice Heath, *Social Stratification and Inequality* by Harold Kerbo, *Survey Reveals Truths about Young Adult Readers* by Nevada Thomason, as well as other relevant texts.

My research methodology consisted of a survey via a four-page questionnaire, interviews with students, and participant observation. Data was collected via these methods in order to achieve triangulation, and yielded demographic, quantitative, and qualitative information.

All of the research was conducted at a high school in a primarily working class community. The name of the high school and those of the students I interviewed are all pseudonyms in order to protect the confidentiality of all involved and in accordance with the Human Subjects and Research Committee at Youngstown State University.

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Chapter One

Introduction

As adults, why do some of us love to read for pleasure, and others rarely, if ever, pick up a book? Is the love of reading something we develop in childhood? Or do most children enjoy reading, but find other hobbies and interests as they grow older? Why are so many of today's young adults aliterate—knowing how to read, but choosing not to? Are gender, race, and socioeconomic status factors in determining whether or not a child will grow up to be an active reader? Attempting to answer these questions formed the basis for this thesis.

In reviewing existing research, I discovered that many studies on students' reading attitudes and literacy exist. One of the largest surveys, in terms of quantitative information, is Don Gallo's 1983 research report. Gallo surveyed 3,400 students from fifty-one schools in thirty-seven Connecticut towns and cities. Although his study was extensive, his focus was mainly on students' favorite types of books, favorite authors, sources of information about books, book purchases, and expenditures on books. His study did not dissect findings into race or class; but he did look at gender. He found that females in grades four through six preferred books dealing with problems of growing up, followed by animal stories, mystery/suspense, and romance novels, while romances dominated the interests of girls in grades seven through twelve. Sports remained at the top of the list at all grade levels for boys. Very few students listed the same titles as their favorites. Variety dominated also in the list of the most recent books students had read for their own information or enjoyment. In the selection of books, the dust jacket seemed

to be the most important quality for students at all grade levels, except for males in grades ten and eleven, where the title of the book was slightly more important.

In a smaller-scale study, Nevada Thomason surveyed 236 students from two high schools with similar socioeconomic backgrounds but different reading programs. His study indicated that young adults do read for pleasure but find other activities more enjoyable. Students found reading more appealing if they were allowed to choose their own material; older students did not enjoy being read to by the teacher; and required reading did not turn students against reading. Again, there was no construct of race or class addressed in Thomason's study.

One study that did look in depth at class and literacy issues is Shirley Brice Heath's seminal work, *Ways with Words*. Heath examined three groups of children from different socioeconomic environments: Maintown (middle-class children); Roadville (working-class children with a predominantly European heritage); and Tracton (rural working-class African American children). Heath found through her research that parental input is invaluable in children's learning, schooling, and reading. With regard to the working-class Roadville students, Heath discovered the Roadville parents did not engage their pre-school age children or ask them to interact with stories. These children were forced to listen and required to be quiet when being read to. When Roadville children entered school, they initially did well in reading; however, because they were unable to answer affective, evaluative, or creative questions about the text, and as instruction changed from learning to read to reading to learn, they fell behind. Heath found that Roadville parents did not think literacy was important in their daily lives.

The review of literature helped define and sculpt the purpose of this investigation. With the exception of Heath's work, I found research on the reading attitudes and influences of working class students lacking. Even Heath's work wasn't an exact model for my study because she separately interviewed white working class students and families of eastern European descent, and rural working class black families, not an entire population of working class, multiethnic students. Because I uncovered no studies of working class, multiethnic students, I chose to investigate their attitudes and influences toward reading and literacy. I wanted to know more about this group of eighth-grade students in a working-class, multiethnic high school environment. How did these students feel about reading? Who or what influenced their reading?

Many research studies of reading attitudes already exist, but none looked at reading attitudes through the lens of class and race. My study surveyed white students of primarily European heritage, Hispanic students, and African American students in order to develop a "snapshot" of current attitudes about reading. In short, what makes this investigation unique compared to existing studies is the construct of race and class. My study focused on the following questions:

1. Do children from working class homes form reading attitudes based on the attitudes of those who most influence the child, most notably, parents, and secondarily, peers?
2. Do working-class families view reading as a more utilitarian, survival skill rather than as an emotionally enriching, lifelong activity?
3. Are there differences among reading attitudes of white, African American, and Hispanic students when analyzing data through a working class focus?

4. While most studies suggest that boys read certain types of fiction (adventure, science fiction, mystery), and girls read other types of fiction (romance), is the gender gap closing, particularly with regard to working class students?

This investigation is very important to me because I believe reading can change a person's life. I am saddened to think of any child growing up without experiencing the pleasure of losing oneself in a good book. Of course, children today have many choices on how to spend their free time: computer and video games, sports, music, dance, school-related activities, and more. Yet, some children *do* find good books and will continue recreational reading into adulthood. These children have discovered the joys of literature, as Perry Nodelman outlines in his book, *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*. Briefly, Nodelman suggests those pleasures are of the words themselves, of making use of strategies of comprehension, of newness, and storytelling; discovering the pleasures of structure, of finding mirrors for ourselves, and stepping outside of ourselves. They are the pleasures of understanding, of gaining insight into history and culture through literature, of discussing with others responses to texts, and developing a deeper understanding of our responses and of relating them to responses to other texts, and to our understanding of literature in general (11–12).

Clearly children and adults who have experienced the joys of reading would agree with Nodelman's assessment of reading for pleasure, or perhaps even have different their own, individual reasons. Although those reasons for reading may be different, a positive attitude toward reading along with an adequate skill of reading are perhaps the most essential prerequisites for picking up a book.

Because reading is the central element in this investigation, it is important to define the term. In clinical terminology, reading is defined as a “process of translating signs and symbols into meanings and incorporating new meanings into existing cognitive and affective systems” (Robeck and Wilson, 41). However, an intangible component, attitudes, is also involved:

Attitudes are considered to consist of a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation. A learner’s attitudes may vary with his personal predispositions and may be affected in unique ways by variables within the learner and his environment. (Wilson and Hall 11)

Based upon the first of my research questions, I believe that reading attitudes and influences are formed in large part by the students’ surrounding environment, most notably their families and friends.

Nancie Atwell, author of *In the Middle*, became an avid reader as a result of a situation which, as Wilson and Hall describe, was most definitely affected by her environment. Atwell grew up in a working-class home: Her father was a postal worker, her mother, a waitress. The turning point in her life, she recalls, was when she contracted rheumatic fever during the fifth grade. She remembers recuperating upstairs in her bed reading:

The day Mom brought home *The Secret Garden* I wrinkled my nose at its old-fashioned cover and language and put it at the bottom of the pile.

When I finally cracked it open, out of desperation, I practically inhaled it.

I remember calling to my mother when I finished it and thanking her over and over again for the best book I had ever read. “Can you get me some more just like this one?” I begged. My poor mother tried, but there’s only one *Secret Garden*. I became a fast, enthusiastic reader over that dark winter because all I had were time and books. (32)

Like Atwell, I grew up an avid reader in a working class home. My father was a carpenter by trade, but also worked in the steel industry. My mother was employed in the personnel department of a large factory, but after my older sister was born, she stayed home to raise her growing family.

I have always loved to read, in fact, I can’t remember a time when reading wasn’t an important part of my life. My love of reading started as a love of being read to as a child. Being read to by my mother is my favorite memory of her. She read to the three of us, my older sister, myself, and my younger sister, and somehow her arms were long enough to gather us all together and hold us next to her while she read. We would sit on a glider outside in our breezeway on warm spring and summer nights, while the lamp with the paper shade behind her threw off a pale, peach-colored light. I remember my mother’s fragrance, a rose-scented lotion she always used, and once in a while, I catch a whiff of it on women who are still loyal to that brand. I don’t remember her reading fairy tales to us; instead, she chose the short stories from her favorite women’s magazine, *Good Housekeeping*. Those stories were all the same: girl meets boy, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back, and they live happily ever after.

Later on, in first and second grade after I had learned to read, I remember reading

the same few books over and over again. They were Tell-A-Tale books published by Whitman Publishing Company. Smaller than the more popular Golden Books of that era, I took those books everywhere. I still have my favorite books, and they have a special place in my library today: *The Bremen Town Musicians*; *Three Billy Goats Gruff*; *That Puppy*; *Sunny, Honey and Funny* (a takeoff on the Three Bears); and my favorite; *The Puppy that Found a Home*. (I may no longer remember all of the state capitals, but I shall never forget the refrain from that book; “Go ‘way little stray, go away I say!”) As I grew up, I continued to combine my love of reading and love of animals, and my favorite books as a nine and ten year old were those written by Marguerite Henry, *Misty of Chincoteague*, and her other wonderful stories about horses. My favorite gifts at that age were ceramic figurines of horses (I had dozens!) and books about horses. As Nodelman illustrated earlier, my passion for horses and the excitement I experienced when reading about something I cared for so deeply left a lasting impression and a desire to experience more of those pleasures.

We had hundreds of books around our house, many of them old, musty illustrated editions of the classics, in beautiful walnut bookcases that my father had crafted by hand. I read *Little Women*, *Nancy Drew*, and *Cherry Ames* books in the summer. On the hottest, most humid days, I would often grab a book and head down to the basement where the air was cool and the surroundings quiet. On more than one occasion, my mother strongly suggested I go outside and play with the other kids. She was afraid I was becoming a “mole,” a scary basement dweller of the dark, afraid of the brightness of day.

As I matured and became a young adult, I grew tired of children’s stories and

wanted stories that were more relevant to my life. I longed to become a grown-up and was eager for my “real life” to start, and took great delight in shocking my mother by reading her copy of the ultimate pulp fiction novel of its time, *Peyton Place*. But more often than not, the books I read during that period were books for school, classics such as *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Romeo & Juliet*, and *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. As a teenager in the early ‘70s, I enjoyed fiction with a contemporary humorous or political bent; I enjoyed books by Jimmy Breslin and often read some of the same books as my father.

I remember devouring *The World According to Garp* and quickly read his previously printed novels, *The Water Method Man* and *The 158 Pound Marriage* during the summer I graduated from college. In fact, I spent hours that summer reading and contemplating my future, wondering if I would find a job after graduation. Yet strangely, after I did find a job, I almost quit reading fiction altogether. I still loved to read, but the books I chose were mostly biographies, and a few other non-fiction books that piqued my interests. Only years later, after enrolling in graduate school, did I discover fiction again. Inspired by several children’s and young adult literature classes, I recaptured the joy of reading for pleasure. The stories had helped reconnect with my past.

As I began the final third of my graduate program, I began to make connections with nearly all of the classes I had taken to date. The children’s and young adult literature classes were the sparks, but it was a methods of composition research class that fueled the flame of curiosity and inspired this study. I was intrigued by ethnography and research, especially when looking at attitudes and behavior patterns of children and young adults in areas of literacy. The kernel of this investigation began with the question

of why children read the books they do; specifically, how much did book cover art and back of the book copy influence children. To my surprise, much research had been conducted in this area, which clearly illustrates that kids do, in fact, judge a book not only by its front cover, but by the information they read on the back cover as well. Further research led to further questions, such as what types of books do young females and males read? Are there differences? Earlier studies, such as Elizabeth Flynn's 1980 study on gender and reading, indicated there *were* definite gender preferences in book genres, (although I discovered in my research a blurring of those preferences).

Finally, through my own experiences in reading and my preliminary research on reading, a definite outline for this study emerged: What are the reading attitudes of young adults, specifically those living in a working class environment? As a working class person, I was especially curious how working class children today perceived reading. What were their attitudes about reading? How important had reading been in their life up to this point, and how important did they think reading would be in their future? What kinds of books did they read? Were there any obvious gender differences? How did these students feel about reading, and to some extent, writing? And, using myself as an example of a child in a working class home who loved to read and who eventually chose a career in writing and communication, I wondered if there was any correlation between students who are passionate about reading and career choices. Ultimately, I wanted to investigate: if parents most influence their children's passion for learning; if the gender gap is finally closing with relation to the types of books boys and girls read; if working-class families view reading more as a survival skill than as an

activity for pleasure; and if socioeconomic status, possibly more so than race, determine a child's attitude toward reading.

Because reading is so important to my life, I remain optimistic that young adults will also discover the joys of reading. Reading has taught me compassion and empathy and has helped me become a better person. It has taken me to places I want to go, to places and eras I will never see: the past, the future, and the present that is not mine. I don't read to become "smarter"; I read to satisfy a hunger. Reading has made me feel more a part of the human family. In her essay, "Children, Literature, Passion," Karen Smith eloquently echoes my feelings on why I feel it is so important for children to discover the joys of reading, and to continue to experience that joy long into adulthood.

Ultimately, I want students to understand that literature has the potential to help them transcend their present situation and to move beyond what they know, believe, and imagine themselves to be. I remember clearly the day Raul, a twelve-year-old student, finished reading *Shadow of a Bull* (1964), the story of a young man who stands up for himself under difficult circumstances. Raul sat and stared at the last page of the book for a long time before he closed it and laid it on his desk. Slowly, he looked up at me and said, "I have to tell my dad that I don't want to play Little League this year." I knew the difficult circumstance Raul had found himself in during a month of playing a game he really hated. He had felt he needed to play; he needed to please his dad. I also knew what had happened between Raul and the story. The power of story had spoken. (195)

Chapter Two

Rationale and Background

To investigate the research questions described in the previous chapter, I chose to work with the eighth grade students at Coalburg High School in Coalburg, Ohio, because of the community's decades-old working class stronghold. (All names are pseudonyms.) The community has always been considered a working class community. However, like most communities, not everyone in Coalburg can be considered of working class socioeconomic status; some residents may be considered middle class, and others might be members of the lower class.

Coalburg was once home to steel mills and other manufacturing concerns but, like similar communities in the rust belt, has been deeply affected by deindustrialization. When the steel mills began closing in this and surrounding communities in September of 1977, Coalburg was one of the communities hardest hit. In the two decades since the mills have closed, thousands of jobs have been lost in the area, and many of the families who reside in Coalburg and surrounding communities have "slipped" in socioeconomic status from working class to lower class, depending on welfare and other state and federally-assisted programs to survive.

Yet despite the economic hardships of the community, Coalburg has maintained an ethnically diverse population. The community is home to the area's largest Greek-American population, and is home to the area's only Puerto Rican Spanish-speaking church. Coalburg has a significant number of African American citizens and is richly populated with persons of ethnic southern and eastern European backgrounds such as

Italian, Polish, and Slovak.

The community's ethnic mix of nonwhite persons is important to consider when factoring in the construct of socioeconomic class. Statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, as cited in Kerbo's *Social Stratification and Inequality*, showed that nearly 57 percent of white males and 33 percent of white females were blue collar workers, and over 72 percent of nonwhite males and 50 percent of nonwhite females were blue collar workers. Clearly, the working class, more than any other class (upper, corporate, middle, and lower), is comprised of multicultural persons. Therefore, my decision to work with the students at Coalburg High School, with its working class background and rich ethnic makeup, couldn't have been more ideal.

Throughout my research, I found no one definitive definition of "working class", but rather certain traits and characteristics that define and separate the working class from other social classes. Based on class difference descriptions, Kerbo finds working class persons have the following in common:

- Persons in this social class occupy mid-level to low-level positions.
- More often than not, working class persons have lower education, and perform tasks at work that require lower skills and lower levels of complexity.
- Jobs are for the most part low paying, less secure, more physically demanding and more dangerous.
- Working class persons occupy positions near the bottom of the authority structure.
- Working class persons tend to have little work-related gratification and suffer more alienation at work.

- Working class persons are more involved with extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and more distantly related persons.)
- Working class persons own less property.
- Working class couples have separate friendships.
- Working class parents are concerned with their children's well-being without reference to occupational level per se.
- Working class socialization tends to stress external conformity to rules, less self-reliance and creativity, and working with things rather than ideas.

One caveat about wages: Many jobs that could be considered "working class" often pay high wages, such as auto worker, plumber, and other trades positions. But

Kerbo cautions:

The more traditional assumptions about class income inequality are much closer to reality. The belief that working-class people have made substantial income gains relative to the middle class is usually incorrect in two respects: (1) The publicized cases of high working-class incomes are atypical. (2) The hourly wages of some blue-collar workers may at times be high, but the work is usually insecure or seasonal. For example, workers making \$15.00 or more an hour on a construction site are often out of work several months between jobs. (272)

Many residents of Coalburg relied on the wages earned at Coalburg Steel Works to provide for their families. Other manufacturing jobs were available in the area, but Coalburg Steel Works was part of the community, and the community part of it, perhaps

because the community had its working class roots in iron and steelmaking. The area, once part of the Connecticut Western Reserve, built blast furnaces in the early 1800s and supplied primitive castings and hardware to local farmers and tradesmen. In 1840, bituminous coal from the area began to be used for ironmaking, a revolution of sorts; because the coal was of such superior quality, it did not have to be coked before use in the blast furnace. In 1863, the area was home to seven blast furnaces, three rolling mills, a steelworks, and two machine shops and foundries. In 1900, civic leaders and entrepreneurs formed Coalburg Steel Works on the banks of the river that ran through the town of Coalburg. Within a short time, other steel related industries followed, bringing opportunities for other businesses as well. The growth of the steel industry brought many changes to the area, the most important being foreign immigration. Newspapers across the country advertised for workers in the new steel mills, and thousands flocked to the area. In *Mahoning Memories*, Frederick J. Blue describes the immigration:

Some came from northern European countries, particularly Great Britain and Germany, but the overwhelming majority came from the countries of southern and eastern Europe. . . . Eventually the call of already settled brothers or sisters, cousins, aunts, and uncles would encourage the migration of Greeks, Hungarians, Italians, Poles, Romanians, Russians, Slovaks, Ukrainians, and many others. (99–102)

This diverse eastern European population, combined with the African American and Puerto Rican migration from the south, created the multiethnic working class community that Coalburg is today.

From the 1920s through the 1960s, the area thrived. Its steel production was invaluable in helping the United States win both World War I and II. Fuechtmann writes of those years:

The war effort and the reconstruction that followed strained the . . . mills to capacity. Steel employment in that period also reached a high point. It is estimated that during the war . . . area mills employed sixty-five thousand workers directly in iron- and steel-making. (18)

After the second World War, area soldiers returned to a booming steel town to create the baby boom generation. Times were very good. Consumer purchasing power was at an all-time high; for the first time in history, nearly every family owned a home, a car, and a television set. The area was witness to suburban sprawl; the country's first strip plaza and one of the first shopping malls was located in the area. Yet in several working-class communities, there was little flight to the suburbs. Fuechtmann notes

This was particularly the case with communities like [Coalburg which] surrounded the [Coalburg Steel Works]. The ethnic heritage remained strong. Figures from the 1970 census show that 22% of individuals in the metropolitan area were foreign-born, of foreign parentage, or of mixed parentage, compared with only 9% for the state of Ohio as a whole. In [Coalburg], 45.6%. . . were of foreign stock. [Coalburg] is strongly Czechoslovakian (12%) with significant groups of Italians (7%) and Poles (5%). . . In [Coalburg], almost 75% of the residents owned the houses . . . in which they lived. (24)

The community of Coalburg was tightly-knit with grandparents, parents, and children often living under one roof. The mills provided a lifestyle where husbands could find well-paying jobs and mothers could stay home and raise their children, and families worshiped at churches that had a strong nationality base, such as the Italian Roman Catholic or Greek Orthodox churches. Everything a family wanted or needed could be found in Coalburg, so it was especially difficult when steelmaking in Coalburg came to an end.

Lack of plant modernization, a recession in the early to mid 1970s, reduced demand for steel products in both national and international markets, and aggressive foreign steel producers were all factors in the demise of steelmaking in the area. In September of 1977, Coalburg Steel Works announced the closing of most of its facilities. Other area steel making and manufacturing companies closed in the years to follow. The total number of lost jobs in the five county area was over 10,000; fully one-half of those jobs were lost at the Coalburg Steel Works alone.

The effect on the city of Coalburg was devastating: "In [Coalburg], more than half of the salary and operating costs of providing basic police and fire protection services were provided for via [Coalburg Steel Works] income taxes" (Fuechtmann 67). A whopping 77.2% of the city's income tax was provided by Coalburg Steel Works. The annual payroll of the permanently laid-off workers was \$72.98 million, and it was estimated that in the twenty-seven months following the closing, as much as \$102.6 was lost in retail sales. (68)

Obviously, the loss of the city's single largest source of tax revenue had a profound

impact on the schools. In the early and mid 1970s, the school district was struggling to pass a school levy that would increase the millage on the property taxes. In November 1975, after the fifth attempt at passing the levy failed, the district closed the schools due to lack of monies. The schools were reopened two months later after an emergency levy was finally approved by the voters. One school official remembers that the monies from the tax levy hadn't even been yet collected when the Coalburg Steel Works announced its closing in September 1977. For the school district, what had been a bad situation suddenly became catastrophic. The district's plight was noted in Columbus, and state legislatures created an emergency state loan fund.

In the years immediately following the closing of the steel mill, the district was in such dire financial straights that four such emergency loans were granted. Once again, state legislatures, who were all too aware of the economic devastation caused by the closings, enacted a special act that forgave the district's four loans. This school official stated that it has only been in the last several years, *nearly twenty years after the closing*, that the district has been able to buy supplies and other such nonessential items. Further, she notes, the only way the district was able to survive in the two decades following the mill's closing was through special state, federal, and private grant funds. Recent statistics obtained from the Ohio Department of Education's *Local Report Card* web site demonstrate that the district is still heavily dependent upon state and federal monies. The 1996–97 district profile showed that only 19.4 percent of funding came from local sources; 69.3 percent of school funding was provided by the state, and 11.3 percent was provided by the federal government. The state averages differ dramatically: almost 52

percent of the average Ohio school district was funded through local sources, while 42% was funded from the state and only 6% from the federal government. Currently, the school district ranks about 540 in wealth among the over 600 school districts state wide.

Although the community has suffered greatly, the eighth grade students attending Coalburg High School have had no first hand experience of the economic turmoil. These students, born in 1985 and 1986, nearly a decade after the Coalburg Steel Works plant closed its doors forever, have no doubt heard from their families the countless stories of the dark days the followed the mill's closing. For these eighth grade students, and all Coalburg students for that matter, their past is inexorably linked with that of the Coalburg Steel Works. The families in Coalburg, both nuclear and extended, are generally very close. I discovered that five of the seven students I interviewed had lived in the community their entire lives. One of the students had moved to Coalburg as a young child from another working class community about sixty miles away. Only one student had not been born in Ohio; she was born in Puerto Rico.

Clearly, much has changed in Coalburg since the closing of the steel mills, yet Coalburg has remained a working class community with a strong multiethnic family base. Because of its strength and resilience, Coalburg was my first choice when selecting the district to work with in my investigation. I wanted to discover just how strong the multiethnic family was and its relationship to reading attitudes, to investigate how and if gender played a part in reading attitudes and influences, how being part of the working class affected literacy, and if race was a determinant factor within socioeconomic status.

Chapter Three

Methodology

In *Composition Research* by Janice M. Lauer and J. William Asher, the authors describe a notion involving ethnographic research methodology called “triangulation.” Triangulation is the combining of multiple sources of data to create a well-balanced study and, thus, insuring more credibility. For my investigation, I elected to collect data three different ways: via a survey questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and participant observation. Specifically, the mini-ethnographic research methodology used in my investigation included a four-page *survey* on reading attitudes administered to all eighth-grade students at the high school, one-on-one *interviews* with seven students (selected from those who agreed to be interviewed and those who had obtained parental permission), and *participant observation* which helped me to determine how students chose the books they did.

The survey (see Appendix II) was composed of twenty-seven questions and was administered to the students on December 4, 1998 by an eighth grade language arts teacher. The total number of students in the eighth grade is 112; of that number, ninety-six students completed the survey. The remaining sixteen were either absent or unavailable to complete the survey on that day. Of the 112 total students, approximately 21 percent are African American, 23 percent Hispanic (primarily Puerto Rican), and 53 percent are white.

I developed the survey in a booklet format, printed on both sides of an 11" x 17" white sheet of paper and folded. Students had the entire class period (forty-two minutes)

to complete the survey. The questions were designed to allow me to collect demographic, quantitative, and qualitative data. Examples of the demographic data collected included age, sex, and ethnic background of the student. Quantitative data included number of books read per month/per year; favorite genres; whether or not the student read a newspaper, knew how to use a computer, or had access to a computer/Internet at home. The qualitative data were couched in survey questions about favorite books as a child, names and opinions of the most recent books read, attitudes toward reading, perception of reading skills, and future plans and how reading fit into those plans. Results and interpretation of the data are described in Chapter 4.

Included in the survey was a request to interview students at length about reading attitudes. Those interested were asked to complete and return a form (see Appendix V) to their teacher. At no time was the confidentiality of the students compromised. When the surveys were returned to me, I collected the forms from those thirty-four students who had expressed an interest in being interviewed and returned to them another form that would grant them permission from their parent or guardian to be interviewed (see Appendix VI). The students I chose to interview were the first seven students who returned their completed forms by the due date indicated.

I interviewed these seven students, two boys and five girls, twice (except for one female who was out of school recovering from back surgery; her second interview being completed via survey questionnaire). (See Appendix III and IV for survey questions.) The first set of interviews took place on Monday, December 14, 1998, during the students' library period, part of their language arts class which is designated as library

time for students to search for books for required book reports, as well as time for silent sustained reading. No actual teaching is scheduled during the library period. It was important to me, the language arts teacher, and the principal, that students not miss any scheduled class time in order to participate in this investigation. I asked each of the students identical questions, but because of the variety of their answers, occasionally some questions were added or deleted. The first set of interviews lasted approximately twenty minutes per student, with two interviews scheduled per class period. Each of the seven interviews was transcribed verbatim.

The second set of interviews took place on Monday, February 1, 1999, again during the students' scheduled library time. This interview was much shorter, lasting no more than ten minutes. While transcribing the interviews, I noticed some information lacking, or lack of depth to several of the questions I asked. I wanted to collect that information in order to present what I believed to be a more thorough study, thus the second set of questions asked of the students were more specific in nature than the first group. These questions asked for background information on the students' parents or guardians, their career goals, how important they felt reading would be in their chosen career, and why and how their reading habits had changed in the previous years.

The final method of data collection I utilized was participant observation. I was curious about how children and young adults selected the books they chose to read. I had analyzed previous research studies, most notably Jeanne Marcum Gerlach's studies on whether kids really do judge books by their covers. At the end of the first interview, I asked each of the students to go through a box of paperback books I had brought with me.

These were books that I had collected either from graduate classes or purchased at used book stores. All of the books, except *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck and a collection of Emily Dickinson's poems, were current young adult fiction. I asked the students to go through the books and make two stacks; one, books they would enjoy reading, and two, a stack of books in which they had no interest. While the students completed this task, I took notes while observing their actions, and because all of the interviews were tape recorded, I was able to transcribe their exact comments and questions while looking through the books. I observed that each student demonstrated a very specific pattern of selection (some thoughtfully read the back cover of each book and painstakingly decided whether or not they were interested in reading the book, others quickly determined interest based on the cover illustration alone), and each student clearly had a strong opinion on their favorite kind of books and genres. For a listing of the books students were able to choose from, please see Appendix I.

Through observation, I determined the students' interests, any gender differences in how the books were selected, and the degree of difficulty in the selections. I have reported the results and interpretations of those questionnaires, interviews, and observations in the following chapters.

Chapter 4

Survey Results

The survey, a four-page instrument designed to acquire both quantitative (demographic) and qualitative data, was administered to all eighth grade students at Coalburg High School by their language arts teacher on Monday, November 30, 1998. Students had the entire class period of forty-two minutes to complete the survey. A total of ninety-six students completed the survey; however two of the surveys were unuseable. (Both were completed in what appeared to be a humorous and flippant manner by the students. Although all of the questions were answered, and some information might have been truthful, I believed the data to be suspect and, therefore, did not include those results.)

Even though these students are in the eighth grade, they are part of Coalburg High School, which is comprised of grades eight through twelve. There are a total of 591 students currently attending CHS. Of those students, an average of 60% are enrolled in the free lunch program. Approximately 20.3 percent of the students are African American, 14.6 percent are Hispanic, 2.2 percent are multiracial, and the remaining 62.9 percent are white. The eighth grade language arts teacher reports that of the 112 students in the eighth grade, approximately 52% are white, 22% are Hispanic (primarily Puerto Rican) and 26% are African American. There are no Asian American or Native American students in the eighth grade. All of the participating students are either thirteen or fourteen years old.

Of the 94 students completing this survey, 46 were males and 48 were females. A

breakdown of race and gender shows that there were 27 white males, 25 white females, 8 African American males, 12 African American females, 11 Hispanic males, and 11 Hispanic females responding to this survey. An overview of survey results follows.

Books Read For Pleasure Per Month/Books Read For Pleasure Per Year

On average, working class eighth grade girls read slightly more than working class boys. On a monthly basis, African American females read the most, followed by white females, Hispanic males, white males, Hispanic females, and African American males. On a yearly basis, Hispanic males are the most active readers, followed by white females, African American females, white males, Hispanic females, and African American males. Specific averages are as follows.

Table 1—Books Read Per Month/Per Year

	Book per month	Books per year
All Males average	1.15	11.2
All Females average	1.4	11.75
White Males average	1.2	11.2
African American Males average	.625	5.4
Hispanic Males average	1.3	15.5
White Females average	1.4	15.3
African American Females average	1.6	13.4
Hispanic Females average	1.1	9.2

I found two instances of students, both girls, who are avid readers, each devouring books in tremendous quantities. The first girl, an African American student, reads approximately twenty books per month, every month, or 240 books per year. The second girl, a white student, reads fifteen books per month, or 150 books per year. In both instances, approximate quantities were verified by their teacher. Because I felt that averaging the tremendous amount of books read by these two girls would perhaps skew the survey upward, I did not factor their number of books read into the averages reported here. An entire breakdown of survey results can be found in Appendix VII.

In the group of students surveyed, I discovered that, overall, girls read more than boys, except in the case of Hispanic students, where boys read more than girls. White students generally read more than African American and Hispanic students, except for African American girls who read more than white and Hispanic girls. The reading habits of white boys and Hispanic boys are nearly identical (Hispanic boys read slightly more); however, African American boys read half the amount of books than Hispanic boys. In this analysis, then, race, gender, and class may play a significant part in the frequency of reading of young adults.

Genres

Survey results of the favorite book genres of eighth grade students are as follows:

Table 2—Eighth Grade Students Favorite Book Genres (number of students saying they read this particular genre)

1. Mystery (61)
2. Horror (51)
3. Adventure (38)
4. Sports (34)
5. Comic books (32)
6. Poetry (26)
7. Short stories (25)
8. Fantasy (21)
9. Science fiction (19)
10. Young Adult Literature (realistic fiction) (16)
11. Romance, biography (tie) (15 each)
12. Animal (10)
13. Space (9)
14. Other (comedy, Bible stories, how-to books, history, mythology and medieval books listed as other with one vote each)

Further examining this data with regard to gender, favorite genres show somewhat predictable differences.

Table 3—Favorite Book Genres by Gender

<i>Genre</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Adventure	21	17	38
Poetry	7	19	26
Short stories	9	16	25
Mystery	23	38	61
Sports	28	6	34
Space	6	3	9
Sci Fi	12	7	19
Horror	20	31	51
Comic Books	20	12	32
Romance	0	15	15
Biography	6	9	15
YA Lit (Realistic fiction)	4	12	16
Animal	7	3	10
Fantasy	8	13	21

In a previous study, for example, “Sex Differences and Initial Reading Performance,” Norman Chansky found that fourth grade boys had preferences for books on sports, biography, mystery, social studies, science, humor, animal stories, adventure, fantasy, and poetry, in that order, while girls showed a preference for mystery, humor,

adventure, biography, animal stories, poetry, fantasy, social studies, science, and sports. There were significant sex differences in all categories except animal stories and mystery in their study. Carole Schulte Johnson and Gloria R. Greenbaum, in “Girls’ and Boys’ Reading Interests: A Review of the Research,” report that boys prefer adventure, sports, science, and information, while girls choose mystery, romance, home and school life, animal stories, and fairy tales. I believe my study’s results indicate that the preferred genre difference gap between males and females is closing. While some of the old stereotypes about gender and reading prevail (i.e. notice that not one male indicates he reads romance novels; and four times as many boys read sports stories than do girls), I believe there is less of a divide today than in years past. For example, note the similar numbers in the less gendered genres: adventure, mystery, horror, and biography. While there are indeed genre preferences along gender lines, the closing of that gap is evident.

In addition, I believe my study shows that girls read a greater variety of genres than boys, which mirrors the claim of Johnson and Greenbaum who found that, while girls and boys have many overlapping reading interests, girls tend to have a wider variety of reading interests. In my study, genre interests for males, in terms of raw numbers, are double digits in only five categories: adventure, mystery, sports, horror, and comic books. Girls’ genre preferences reach double digits in nine categories: adventure, poetry, short stories, mystery, horror, comic books, romance, YA literature (realistic fiction), and fantasy. Johnson and Greenbaum, among others, note that while girls have no problem reading stories that contain either male or female protagonists, boys, on the other hand, are less likely to read stories containing female protagonists. Similar research by Donald

Gallo, Barbara Samuels, and others has further validated that claim. My study, I believe, supports this claim as well.

Data from a gendered/racial perspective show the top three genre preferences are as follows:

Table 4—Favorite Books Genres from a Gender/Racial Perspective

<u>White Males</u>	<u>African American Males</u>	<u>Hispanic Males</u>
1. Sports	1. Adventure (tie)	1. Mystery
2. Mystery (tie)	1. Sports (tie)	2. Sports (tie)
2. Comic books (tie)	1. Comic books (tie)	2. Horror (tie)
		3. Adventure
<u>White Females</u>	<u>African American Females</u>	<u>Hispanic Females</u>
1. Mystery	1. Mystery	1. Horror
2. Horror	2. Horror	2. Mystery
3. Adventure (tie)	3. Romance	3. Poetry
3. Poetry (tie)		4. Romance

In my study, book choices and genre preferences among all students—males, females, blacks, whites, and Hispanics—are as individual as fingerprints, but several results were surprising. Only 16% of white females indicated they read romance novels, whereas 36% of Hispanic females and 58% of African American females read romance novels. Poetry reading among males was predictably infrequent, although 22% of white

males indicated they read poetry, compared with only 9% of Hispanic males and 0% of African American males. A complete breakdown of genre preferences by gender and by race is found in Appendix VII.

Where Students Find Books

Students were asked where they find the books they read for pleasure. Not surprisingly, the majority of students (63%) find books at the library (either school or public), 32% obtain their books from a bookstore, and 22% of students borrow books from friends. Three percent of students indicated they purchase books through Scholastic or other school book order forms. Only 2% of students said they find books to read for pleasure in their homes. I find this result significant, and believe it helps to answer the second of my research questions, which queries whether or not working class parents believe that reading is more of a utilitarian skill than an enriching hobby. During the interviews with these students, I discovered that while many of them had been given books as gifts by grandparents or parents when they were small children, this had stopped once these children become older. Perhaps the parents and grandparents felt books weren't the type of gifts children wanted any more, or perhaps the children themselves had found other, more pleasurable hobbies (see below). Regardless of the reasons, the fact remains that books for young adults, both fiction and nonfiction, are simply not inside the homes of these working class students. Perhaps if books and reading were valued more, they would be more visible.

Hobbies

Do working class students value reading as a hobby, or are these students more

interested in other activities? Today's young adults have a myriad of activities to keep them busy. Gone are the days of teenagers' limited choices of either cradling transistor radios to their ears while reading sports or Hollywood gossip magazines, or gathering en masse at the local fast food restaurant. These 94 eighth grade students responded with great variety to the open-ended question of how they spend their free time after school and on weekends (raw numbers in parentheses):

Table 5—Hobbies/After School and Recreational Activities

1. Sports (78)
2. Watching television (35)
3. Playing video games (31)
4. Watching movies/going to the movies (18)
5. Talking on the phone/hanging out with friends (16)
6. Playing music/listening to the radio (10)
7. Computer/going online/web surfing and reading (6 each)
8. Shopping/going to the mall (5)
9. Writing poetry and singing (4 each)
10. Playing in band or musical instrument, church activities, dancing, and babysitting (3 each)
11. Drama, model cars or railroading, and studying/doing homework (2 each)
12. Walking dogs and doing chores (1 each)

My data reveal that both boys and girls are active sports participants, and, that both enjoy playing video games, but clearly reading is not one of their favorite hobbies.

Newspaper Readership

Of the 94 students responding to the survey, 58 said they read a newspaper; 36 said they did not. Nearly all of the students said that when they read a newspaper, they read the local daily newspaper, and several of the African American students indicated they read the weekly African American community newspaper. In this area, there is no Hispanic community newspaper. Newspaper readership viewed via a gendered/racial perspective is as follows:

Table 6—Newspaper Readership by Gender and Race

	Total Students	Those Who Read Newspaper
All Students	94	58
All Males	46	28
All Females	48	30
White Males	27	19
White Females	25	11
African American Males	8	2
African American Females	12	10
Hispanic Males	11	7
Hispanic Females	11	9

Students said that they read the sports section and the comics most frequently. Less than half of the students said they read the local news and entertainment section

(television/movies), and a few students said they read the national news section, obituaries, and their horoscope. Nearly as many females as males indicated they read the sports section of the newspaper, which I believe addresses the research question of whether or not the gender gap in reading preferences is diminishing.

Magazine Readership

While an average of 62% of students read a newspaper, nearly 90% of all students read magazines.

Table 7—Magazine Readership by Gender and Race

	Total Students	Those Who Read Magazines
All Students	94	84
All Males	46	39
All Females	48	45
White Males	27	26
White Females	25	24
African American Males	8	5
African American Females	12	11
Hispanic Males	11	8
Hispanic Females	11	10

In no other area was gender preference in reading material more obvious than in the magazines these young adults chose to read. One hundred percent of females who

read magazines say they read fashion and glamour magazines; most popularly named titles include *YM*, *Seventeen*, *Teen*, *Teen People*, *Glamour*, and *Cosmopolitan*. Most of the males indicate they read *Sports Illustrated*; however, many named special interest publications such as *Car and Driver*, *Road and Track*, *WWF Magazine*, *BMX Motorcross Bike Racing*, and *Popular Mechanics*. A few of the African American students said they read *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines as well.

One item of particular interest: While only 44% of white females said they read a newspaper, 96% of white females said they read magazines. Perhaps these girls feel that newspapers offer no real information that may be of relevance to their lives, or perhaps it's the allure of bright, bold graphics, snappy photographic images, and glossy paper that attracts these females. No other group of students—segmented by gender or race—illustrated such profoundly opposite results.

Computer Skills, Usage, and Ownership Among Working Class Students

I wanted to ask working class students about computer skills, use, and ownership because I feel that computer literacy translates into overall literacy. For example, a student told me in an interview that his hobbies included listening to his favorite bands and watching WWF wrestling. Later he said he sometimes read non-fiction books, especially if they're about his favorite bands or wrestling. Later still, he told me he likes to surf the Internet, looking for sites on his favorite bands and wrestling. This student uses books and the Internet to satisfy his curiosity. And, although I see no direct link to computers, computer technology, and developing a passion for reading, the overall issue of literacy is most certainly a valid one. In short, if using a computer helps develop

reading skills, then those students who become better readers may also become more active readers. I also that repeated computer use helps develop reading skills, especially in younger children.

At Coalburg High School, I discovered that ninety-four percent of eighth grade students surveyed claim they know how to use a computer, yet only 41% have a computer at home. Overall, students' gender is a factor in perceived computer knowledge; as many males as females (93%) say they know how to use a computer. In addition, gender plays no role in computer ownership, as 41% of both males and females said they had a computer at home. An average of 40% of African American students have computers in their homes (38% of the males, 41% of the females); 36% of Hispanic students (45% males, 27% females), and 44% of white students (40% of males, 48% females). Although there is virtually no difference among computer ownership between male and female African American students, that is not the case with Hispanic and white students. The 18 percentage point difference between Hispanic male and female students is significant, the eight percentage point difference between male and female white students, less so.

With regard to home Internet usage, I discovered that of the 39 students who have a computer at home, 36 were connected to the Internet. Additionally, 66 percent of the total students said they used the Internet at school; Internet school usage declined among those students who were connected to the Internet at home.

Coalburg High School has four computer labs equipped with a total of seventy-two computers. Included among them are a small computer lab in an alcove off the

school library and three larger labs on the second floor of the building. All of the computers are hooked up to the Internet, and students are permitted to use these computers during study halls and for classroom assignments.

Although the majority of students claim to know how to use a computer, many of these working class families do not have or own a computer in their homes. Likewise, with only seventy-two computers in a building of 591 high school students, students' computer time is limited. In "Teaching English Across the Technology/Wealth Gap," Charles Moran and Cynthia Selfe address the troubling issue of the ever increasing technology gap between rich and poor. Moran and Selfe report the findings of Coley, Crandler, and Engle:

Schools primarily serving students of color and poor students continue to have less access to computers or access to less sophisticated computer equipment than do schools primarily serving more affluent and white students. Similarly, these schools have less access to the Internet, to multimedia equipment, to CD-ROM equipment, to local area networks, and to videodisc technology than do schools primarily serving more affluent and white students. (48)

Moran and Selfe further state that less affluent families, especially those in urban and rural environments, and black and Hispanic families, are less likely to own computers than higher income and white families. Finally, they conclude that because of the wealth/technology gap, poorer students and their families are less likely to have access to computers and, therefore, less likely to gain access to high-paying, high-tech jobs.

Because I had no personal knowledge of the “average” number of computers within a high school, or the percentage of computer ownership among wealthier, middle class families, I asked the principal of a more affluent high school if he could help. Lake Valley is an upper middle class suburb located only ten miles north of Coalburg, yet the communities might as well be worlds apart. Lake Valley is an affluent suburb, where many of the students have parents who are doctors, lawyers, business owners, corporate executives, or other professionals. The Lake Valley school district is in the process of building a new high school, which should be complete by the fall of 1999. The high school is comprised of grades nine through twelve, with a total of 610 students; 174 students are in the freshman class. I surveyed those students to find if they owned a computer; if they owned more than one computer, how many, and if their computer was hooked up to the Internet. The results showed that, of the 136 freshman students responding to the survey, 20 had no computer, 69 had one computer at home, 30 had two computers, 11 had three computers, and 6 students had four or more computers at home. One hundred had Internet access at their home computers, and 36 students either had no computer, or no Internet access. I also asked the principal about Lake Valley High School’s computer labs. He informed me that currently there are three labs with a total of seventy-five computers. However, he added, it’s been three years since the school has added any computers to the lab. Because a new high school is currently being built, administrators felt it was not necessary to modify or add to the present labs. When the new building is complete, he said there will be more labs, with a total of approximately 200 computers for students’ use throughout the high school.

Clearly Moran and Selfe have identified a significant problem among less affluent school districts and families. It is obvious that students from working class homes and communities are victims of the wealth/technology gap.

School Library and Public Library Usage

An overwhelming majority of students, 86 percent, regularly use their school library; however, only 67 percent of students say they frequent a public library. School and public library usage viewed from a gendered/racial perspective are as follows:

Table 8—School and Public Library Usage

	Use School Library	Use Public Library
White Males	85%	65%
White Females	88%	69%
African American Males	100%	75%
African American Females	100%	75%
Hispanic Males	64%	64%
Hispanic Females	91%	82%

These results indicate a fairly consistent usage of both school and public libraries with one glaring exception: only 64% of Hispanic males utilize either the school or public library. This result is puzzling because, as a group, Hispanic males said they read more than almost any other group of students. So the question remains: Where do they get their books?

In general, the most common reason cited for not using the public library was that

the students or their families owed money to the library for lost or overdue books.

Students Who Have Observed Their Parents Reading

Students were asked if they observe their parents reading frequently, and two-thirds of the students stated that they had. The two-thirds average was fairly consistent among male and female, white, and Hispanic students. However, 88 percent of African American males and 83 percent of African American females said they saw their parents reading frequently. When asked what types of reading materials students saw their parents read, a majority mentioned the local newspaper and magazines, yet only a handful of students mentioned they ever saw their parents reading books. A small number of students said they saw their parents read the Bible.

The parent/child connection with regard to reading—whether it’s a child observing a parent reading, a parent reading to a child, or parents and children sharing books together—I believe, is fundamental in determining a positive or negative attitude about reading. I believe what children see and hear from their parents will powerfully influence them in the future. A study conducted by the Scottish Education Department and the University of Strathclyde illustrates the power of the parent/child relationship with regard to reading. Researcher Margaret Clark reported that 32 five-year-old children were observed over a period of approximately two years. These children, who came from a variety of home environments and had varying degrees of intelligence, were all fluent readers and showed skills in a variety of language based situations. As avid readers, they all shared common traits: the children were encouraged to read by their mothers, most of whom themselves read widely. These children all had at least one interested adult who

talked to and listened to them. It was also noted that few mothers of these children worked, and those that did work chose jobs with hours that enabled them to be available to the children as much as possible.

In attempting to analyze any differences between the children Clark observed and the working class students I interviewed, it may be that many working class mothers currently are employed outside the home and most likely worked when their children were younger. They possibly were not able to spend the time reading to their children with any great frequency. Although I did not ask about parents' employment in the survey, I did ask that question of the seven students I interviewed in-depth. Of those seven students, only one had a mother who was a full time homemaker. Conversely, this student's father holds a well paying job at the local General Motors plant. The other six students all reported that their mothers worked either full or part time. I discuss and review parental employment in the following chapter.

Reading Skills Self-Perception

Only 6 percent of all students described themselves as excellent readers, compared to 36 percent who described themselves as good readers, 46 percent as average readers, and 12 percent who described themselves as poor readers. One student stated he couldn't read at all, and another student said he was dyslexic and had enormous difficulty reading.

One of the most interesting findings of my study occurred in this category.

Table 9—Reading Skills Self-Perception

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
White Males (26 total)	2	13	10	1
White Females (25)	0	9	14	2
African American Males (8)	0	2	4	2
African Am. Females (12)	3	4	4	1
Hispanic Males (11)	0	3	6	2
Hispanic Females (11)	1	3	5	2

I found it problematic that not one of the white females considered themselves to be an excellent reader. Compared to the fifteen white males who considered themselves to be either excellent or good readers, only nine females felt likewise. This is puzzling because these females say they read more than their male counterparts. Also, it's interesting to note that three of the African American females believed themselves to be excellent readers, and four thought they were good readers, compared to the African American males, of whom none thought they were excellent readers and three considered themselves good readers.

In reality, I am certain that several of these females are excellent readers. Perhaps the reason they did not identify themselves as such is a phenomena described by Mary Pipher in *Reviving Ophelia*: “Th[e] tendency for girls to hide their academic accomplishments is an old one” (64.) Pipher writes about an AAUW study that found:

[A]s children go through school, boys do better and feel better about

themselves and girls' self-esteem, opinions of their sex and scores on standardized achievement tests all decline. Girls . . . emerge from adolescence with a diminished sense of their worth as individuals. (63)

I'd like to speculate that the reason three African American girls felt their reading skills are excellent might be due to their parents' support and increased awareness of the need for their daughters' self-esteem. One of the African American females I interviewed had a great deal of pride in herself. She was proud of her African American heritage, and was exceedingly self-confident. I suspect her parents encourage her a great deal. I also suspect that parents of white females might not instill in their daughters a sense of self-confidence because they don't feel it's necessary, perhaps because the parents themselves come from a more traditional background of privilege.

College Plans and Career Goals

How do working class students feel about higher education? Clearly, many believe that a college education is fundamental to their future success, as an average 83 percent of the eighth grade class plans to attend college, which includes 87 percent of the males and 79 percent of the females. Eleven percent of the class is undecided about college and 5 percent say they have no plans to attend college. One hundred percent of the African American males, 67 percent of Hispanic males, and 93 percent of white males plan on attending college, while 92 percent of African American females, 82 percent of Hispanic females and 72 percent of white females say that college is in their future. I asked school officials for the post-secondary plan results of the latest survey taken by high school seniors. At the end of their high school careers, only 50 percent planned on

attending a four year college, 10.58 planned on attending a 2 year college, and 3.84 percent planned on enrolling in a technical school. Twelve percent planned to join the military, 18.2 percent were headed into the workforce, and 4.81 percent had miscellaneous plans. Obviously, many students will change their minds on future plans between the eighth and twelfth grades.

Finally, I asked students if they had settled on a career choice. While several students have plans to become singers, dancers, actors, and NFL football stars, many of the students have perhaps more realistic hopes of becoming lawyers, doctors, computer programers, teachers, physical therapists, and law enforcement officers. Survey results indicated that fully one-third of the students had not yet determined their future career choices.

Although it would be foolish of me to say that students who are active readers are smarter than students who aren't, during the interviews I conducted and that I describe in the following chapter, I did notice that those students who were more active readers had a stronger sense of themselves. The three students whom I considered to be the most active readers were also the most sure of their future careers. Conversely, the two students I considered to be either non-readers or unskilled readers, had no idea what their future plans held for them. In short, the students I interviewed who were active readers were, without a doubt, the most confident and comfortable with their future plans. In the following chapter, I will address more specifically the career hopes and future expectations of seven Coalburg High School students, along with their reading attitudes and the influences that help shape those attitudes in terms of reading and literacy.

Chapter Five

Interviews

I interviewed 7 eighth grade students from Coalburg High School twice; questions from each of those interviews can be found in Appendix III and IV. Through talking with these students, I hoped to find answers to my research questions, including what specifically influenced each student regarding reading (parents, peers, etc.); note any gender differences in reading attitudes and influences; ascertain any working class values regarding reading; and discover any general working class attitudes about literacy. I asked each student about their reading history, who most influenced their reading interests, library habits, hobbies, and previous experiences while reading. Later, I asked questions about their parents and their occupations, class perception, additional questions on reading experiences and influences, why people read, and if a person can be changed by reading. But before I could analyze how these students felt about reading, I felt it important to understand some of the psychology of why adolescents and adults read for pleasure.

In his book *Lost in a Book: The Psychology of Reading for Pleasure*, Victor Nell expounds on the pleasure of reading and offers some common characteristics of what he calls “ludic readers.” (Ludic reading comes from the Latin *ludo*, meaning “to play.”) For his purposes, he claims that a ludic reader is one who reads at least one book a week, although many ludic readers often read six or more books a week. Why do some individuals become “ludic,” active, motivated readers, while others never discover the joy in reading? Nell claims that in order to become a ludic reader, certain preconditions must

be met. First, ludic readers must have the required reading skills, including being able to read and assimilate information quickly. He says that if an individual reads too slowly, the reading will not be rewarding. The second characteristic of ludic readers is that they *expect* the reading experience to be pleasurable, because reading for them has been pleasurable in the past. Lastly, ludic readers need to select the correct book, one that is interesting to the reader. Nell says that if any one of these conditions is not met, ludic reading is either not attempted or fails (3–9).

I found a great deal of truth in Nell's theory of ludic readers and looked to the student interviews for evidence. Because Nell claims that reading skills are the first and most essential condition of ludic reading, I looked at the student's perceived reading skill level. Because I am not a certified reading teacher, I am not able to discern for myself the level of reading skills in each student, but I asked each student how they perceived their reading skill, and compared notes with their teacher, who advised me as to her evaluation. In six of the seven students I interviewed, their self perceived reading skills and the teacher's perception were identical. This student, whom I identify as David, believed his reading skills to be above average, while his teacher felt that his skills were poor.

Two of the students I interviewed, I believe, do not have the reading skills necessary to become ludic readers. One of these is an ESL student struggling with a language barrier. The other student, the above mentioned David, is a troubled student according to his teacher. He rarely turns in book reports, starts fights in class, and generally produces substandard class work. Of the remaining five students, two of the students seem to lack any interest in reading. One student is in the middle of a family

divorce, and, at this point in her life, simply can't focus on reading for pleasure.

Although she wouldn't identify it as such, however, she is using reading as bibliotherapy to help her during this difficult time in her life. (In our interview, she talks about reading *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul*, and writing poetry to ease the hurt in her life.) The other student seems limited because she claims her sole interest in books consists of the mystery/suspense genre. She does not expect to have a positive experience reading any other type of book. Neither of these students are apt to have ludic reading experiences at present, but could certainly do so in the future. The three remaining students have the best chance of becoming ludic readers. One student, Marcy, is already what I would consider a ludic reader; she is the most passionate about reading. The other two students, Michael and Cathy, have had ludic reading experiences in the past. They were active readers as children, and as adolescents, have had the experience of being "lost" in a book. They have both the necessary skills and the experience of knowing that reading can be pleasurable, and I believe they could become ludic readers if only provided with the kinds of books that would incite their imaginations.

Michael

Michael is fourteen years old. He is small for his age, short, and slightly built. Michael is a very attractive boyish-looking young man. His dark eyes are framed with incredibly long lashes, he smiles and laughs easily, and appears to be very self-confident. When I talked with Michael, I found him immediately likeable and personable. He was bright and easy to talk to. He answered my questions completely and thoughtfully, very seldom responding with one or two word answers. Later, I learned from Michael's

teacher that he can be mischievous in class. Not a serious troublemaker, Michael likes to talk to the students sitting near him in class. His teacher recalled, while in the middle of a lecture, she saw him laughing and whispering to a fellow student seated next to him. She stopped lecturing, and asked him a pointed question, the answer to which would indicate whether or not he was listening. To her surprise, Michael was able to answer the question correctly. Michael usually receives good grades and appears to be above average in intelligence. Yet he has received several failing grades, which his teacher feels should have been As or Bs. She says Michael doesn't always apply himself.

Michael's home life appears to be stable. His Puerto Rican father, who is fifty-two-years-old, works at the local General Motors plant. His forty-two-year-old mother is a homemaker and does not work outside the home. She is of Polish descent. Michael has one older sister and one younger brother. The family has lived in the community their entire lives, and Michael considers himself to be part of the middle class. Michael's family are generally non-readers. He recalled that his grandmother had given him books in the past as either birthday or Christmas gifts, and he eventually tried to read those books, but wasn't always successful in finishing them. Michael said neither his brother nor sister read unless it's for a book report. He claimed his father can't read very well, and his mother only read the newspaper. When Michael was younger, he remembered his parents taking him to the library and helping select the books he wanted to read, usually selecting a book on animals.

Growing up, Michael said he didn't remember anyone in his family ever reading to him but vividly recalled his favorite book as a child. It was called *Return to Howliday*

Inn, a ghost story in which all the main characters were animals. Michael remembered being in first grade at the time and checking this book out of the library constantly. As an older student, Michael's favorite was *The High King* by Lloyd Alexander. Currently, his favorite books are "ones that have to do with evil characters, with a plot where like someone's in a spell, or like they're the underdog and they have to get something back."

Michael says that by the fifth grade, reading for pleasure became much less important to him. He told me that one of the reasons he started reading less was that the library in his school didn't have any current paperbacks, and all that was available to him "were really old books." He claimed that now he reads only when he has to, and that many of the books he is forced to read "suck." His favorite genres are science fiction and medieval fantasies. Yet despite Michael's insistence that he reads very little for pleasure, he is very much a reader—he told me he has plenty of reading materials at home, many bookcases filled with books, including a bookcase in his room. Michael recalled fondly the times he used to come home from school and disappear into his bedroom in the basement with a good book. He described to me how he read a book in one sitting: "Once I read a book, a *Goosebumps* book, for like twenty minutes I read it, but I was really in my room for like an hour and a half."

Like most of the students surveyed, Michael's hobbies are pretty typical for a teenager: He likes to watch television, play sports and video games, play with his younger brother, and hang out with his friends. When I asked Michael if his friends read a lot, he answered that two of them did, and two of them didn't. If one of his friends recommends a book to Michael, he tries to read it, but more often than not, he just never

gets around to it. However, recently a good friend had recommended a book, which Michael tried to find at the library for his next book report. He laughed as he told me that another of their friends beat Michael to the library and checked out that particular book before Michael had a chance to do so. He also told me he tells his friends about especially good books he's read.

I'll tell everybody about it, like "read this book!" A couple months later, when I stop thinking about it, it's like I remember that [good] part, and I want to go back and read it [again.]

Michael didn't think that kids who are active readers are any smarter than kids who don't read, but he does concede that those students who do read frequently most likely have a better vocabulary than those who don't. His family doesn't own a computer, but Michael has acquired computer skills. He likes to surf the Web, looking for sites on his favorite bands, Kiss and Black Sabbath, or on wrestling. Michael will also read nonfiction books "if [they're] about someone I really want to read about or something that I'm interested in." He recalled reading a book on archeology, which led him to do some digging in his backyard.

When I asked Michael to look through a box of books and select several that he would like to read, he seemed to enjoy the challenge. Michael looked through the books quickly, making immediate decisions on which books he might be interested in, and those books that he was certain he had no interest in at all. The books that he shunned were those he deemed as too "childish" (his words). I observed that any book with a cover that featured a girl's face, or had the least "feminine" touch (pink background, swans, script

type), was banished from his stack of possibilities. Eventually Michael chose *Into the Wild*, *My Brother Sam Is Dead*, *The Pearl*, and *Fallen Angels*. His choices, mostly adventure stories, confirm the previous survey findings for white males. When I asked him why he chose those books, he answered:

“I like Alaska, and these two (*My Brother Sam Is Dead* and *Fallen Angels*) are about war, and this one is an adventure (*Into the Wild*), and this one’s (*The Pearl*) about a guy trying to start a new life. This one looks real good (*Into the Wild*) because I like to hunt and my dad says we’re going to Alaska in a few years, but not like this because he (the protagonist) dies.”

Michael laughed and was still smiling as I thanked him for his time and the opportunity to talk to him.

Michael knows that reading will be very important in his future. He wants to go to college and become a writer, which is causing some family discord at home. His parents want him to become a doctor, a dream that they’ve had for him since he was little. His mother, especially, keeps reminding him that writing “don’t bring no money.” Michael lamented, “Ever since I was little, like five years old, they said I was going to be a doctor. But I don’t want to be a doctor. It takes a lot of time in school. I want to be a writer.”

Maria

Maria is thirteen years old and Puerto Rican. Her parents are divorced; her father lives in Puerto Rico and works for a hospital, and her mother lives in town and works for a fast food restaurant. She has an eleven-year-old sister. Maria was born in Boston and

later moved to Puerto Rico before settling in Coalburg with her mother. Eventually I learned from Maria's teacher that there is a problem with her mother and Maria is presently living with an aunt. She considered herself part of the working class.

Unlike Michael, when I asked Maria questions, she spoke hesitantly, softly, and in one or two word answers. She was so shy it was difficult for her at first to even make eye contact with me. Perhaps because she answered me in only brief responses, I did not notice her difficulty in speaking the English language. Her teacher informed me she was receiving ESL tutoring, but the process was a slow one. Her teacher also said that Maria was a troubled, reluctant learner who received barely passing grades. She rarely turned in book reports, and even though she was receiving tutoring, her teacher believed her academic problems were the result of the language barrier. Maria did tell me she *hated* doing book reports, because she hated getting up in front of the class and talking to everybody. She would prefer just talking to a small group of students about the book she had read.

Maria described herself as a poor reader, which is why she said she didn't read much. As a child, she remembered her mother reading *Clifford* books to her in Spanish, and, like Michael, her grandmother giving her books as gifts. Her favorite books then, as well as now, are mysteries. Maria said one reason she didn't read much was that it was easier for her to read in Spanish than in English, and she was unable to find any Spanish language mysteries. Her passion for mysteries is consistent with my research findings. The lack of Spanish language mysteries is the major reason she does not frequent her school or local library. She told me that she does have Spanish language books at home,

which, on occasion, when she's bored, she will pick up and read. She also told me her sister and mother love to read. She's not sure what types of books her eleven-year-old sister reads, but said her mother most often reads romance novels. Maria is the only student who mentioned that her mother reads romance novels, which is interesting because many of the Hispanic females surveyed said their favorite book genre was romance. Because Maria sees her mother reading romance novels, I wonder if, when older, she too will read them.

As is typical for most students her age, Maria watches TV and listens to the radio, but the station she prefers is a Spanish-speaking radio station. She doesn't know how to use a computer and doesn't play video games. Maria claimed not to have many friends but thought that her one friend reads for pleasure, or as a hobby, a little.

When Maria finds a book she enjoys, she experiences the phenomenon of time passing very quickly and said when she's engrossed in a good book she "feels like [she's] the one they're talking about," and that "time goes by pretty fast when you read." Unlike Michael, Maria thought that kids who read a lot are smarter and that you can become a better person by reading because "you learn more."

When I gave Maria the box of books, she examined every single one and read the back of the book summary, eventually choosing *Nightfall* by Joan Aiken, *After the First Death* and *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway* by Robert Cormier, *Pleasing the Ghost* by Sharon Creech, Steinbeck's *The Pearl*, *Connections*, short stories edited by Donald Gallo, and *Nine True Dolphin Stories* by Margaret Davidson. Because the class period had ended and our interview was barely complete, Maria and I did not have time to

discuss her selections. However, the books she chose definitely are of the mystery and suspense genre, the only exception being *Nine True Dolphin Stories*, *The Pearl*, and *Connections*. Perhaps it is relevant or just coincidence, but *Pleasing the Ghost*, *The Pearl*, and *Nine True Dolphin Stories* are thin books, that is, they have fewer pages than the other selections.

Maria acknowledged that reading will be very important to her future. Although she was unsure of her career goals, she expressed an interest in either becoming a secretary or a pre-school teacher. She was unsure about college, claiming she'd just like to get out of school and get a job.

Heather

Heather, in many ways, is a typical teenage girl. She is pleasant and laughs easily. Her speech is filled with the "like" and "you know" of students her age. Heather's home life appears to be stable. She lives with her thirty-eight-year-old mother and twenty-eight-year-old stepfather. (Her father died when she was only four years old.) Heather is the middle child and the only girl in her family; she has two older brothers and two younger brothers. She considers herself part of the middle class. Her family is white, primarily of Irish descent, and active in their church, which takes up a great deal of her time. Her teacher thinks Heather is a good reader and an average student.

Heather remembered being read to as a child, but it "wasn't an everyday process." She was especially fond of *Goldilocks and Three Bears*. Growing up, the only books she remembered reading were the books her teachers gave her. She remembered starting to read less in sixth grade, because "it got boring and besides, I read enough in school."

Now she only reads when she has to, primarily for book reports. “I’m not interested in reading, but I am interested in books that are interesting, or suspenseful, books that you don’t know what’s happening. That’s what I’m into.” Time and again she told me she was only interested in suspenseful books. When I asked her to clarify how she chooses books for book reports, again she told me, “Unless it’s a book that looks really suspenseful, I go out and look for books like that. The ones I find are suspenseful, I read the back of the book, then I get it. I’m really interested in suspenseful books.” When I asked her if she’s ever been given books as gifts, she told me she’d prefer other things, because “I’m just really into suspense books.” Her penchant for suspense books is consistent with my survey findings for white females.

Like two-thirds of those responding to my survey, Heather sees her parents read at home. Her stepdad, she noted, likes to read books on how to be a good stepdad, and the entire family reads the Bible. Her parents often took her to the library as a child, and she recalled they had the final say on what books she was allowed to read. Heather visited the library frequently and still gets involved in summer reading programs. This past summer, Heather read fifty books for the local library’s summer program. When I asked her why she read voraciously in the summer, but seemed to be a reluctant reader now, she shrugged and said she “likes to read, but not like that.” Her parents subscribe to Christian reading materials (she told me her family is “Christian all the way”), and other than those magazines, the only other periodical coming to the house is *Bride* magazine, because she liked to look at the pictures.

Unlike many of the other students in her class, Heather’s favorite hobby is

attending church and being involved in church activities. When I asked her what she did for fun, she responded hesitantly, “As a teen now, I love going to church to see all those people. It’s fun. We’re praying and that’s fun, too. I think going to church is fun.” A bit later, she told me that she plays video games with the family. Heather’s family owns a computer, which she uses a little, mostly, she said, just to play games with the family. She told me her family watches a lot of TV, and that her “parents are glued to it.” Her favorite shows are *Full House*, *Family Matters*, *Friends*, and *ER*.

When Heather reads a good book, one she’s particularly enjoying, she thinks about the questions that are going on in her head.

Like this book I read, the horse was in trouble. He got his foot caught in the barbed wire and I’m not sure if he’s going to live or not, and I’m wondering ‘Is he going to be ok? No, wait, is he going to die?’ I don’t know what’s going on. Like [this] Thanksgiving, I was reading this book, because when we got back from Thanksgiving, the book report was due, and I didn’t even eat turkey. I mean, I ate, but it wasn’t a lot like I usually eat, because I wanted to get back to the story because I’m like. . . some books just drag on all week, and there’s other books I can fly right through like that.”

Heather claims she can spot a book she’ll like just by looking at the cover and reading the back of the book summary. When I give her the box of books to review, she chooses *The Pearl*, *Trout Summer*, *Gooseberry Park*, *Running Loose*, *Fell*, *Jacob Have I Loved*, *Warriors Don’t Cry*, a book of Emily Dickinson’s poetry, *My Brother Sam is*

Dead, and *Nine True Dolphin Stories*. I find her choices interesting, because many of them are not of the genre she most prefers—suspense. Over and over again, Heather informed me she was only interested in suspenseful books, yet *Running Loose*, *Jacob Have I Loved*, *Warriors Don't Cry*, Emily Dickinson's poetry, *My Brother Sam is Dead*, and *Nine True Dolphin Stories* could not be categorized as suspense.

Heather thinks she'll probably start reading more when she's older and knows that reading will be important to her in college, especially if she is to become a first grade teacher.

Amanda

Amanda is an amazing young woman who has suffered a great deal during the past year. Throughout our interview while telling me about the pain of her parents' divorce and a serious medical condition recently diagnosed, Amanda maintained the poise and dignity of someone twice her age.

Amanda and her family have lived in the community their entire lives. Her thirty-seven-year-old Puerto Rican father works for the city, and her Italian American mother who is thirty-four-years-old, works as a cashier. She has a nine-year-old brother and a three-year-old sister. Amanda considers herself part of the working class.

This year, her mother and father have separated and are going through a messy divorce. Amanda seems to blame her father for the family's problems, often making sarcastic remarks about him. For example, when I asked her what she did for fun on the weekend, she raised her eyes and said she usually waited for her father to pick her and her siblings up for weekend visitations, but more often than not, he forgot about them and

“stood them up.”

In addition, the week before I interviewed Amanda, she had just been given some devastating news by her doctors. She had recently begun to experience numbness in her legs, and after a series of tests, the doctors discovered that Amanda’s spinal cord wasn’t connected. The doctors recommended surgery at which time they would take bone from her hip and insert it in her spine. She told me that the doctors tried to assure her that after the surgery she would most likely return to “normal,” but they couldn’t give her an absolute guarantee; there was the small possibility that the surgery could leave her permanently paralyzed. I felt that after she had confided all of this to me, trying to ask her about her reading attitudes and habits might seem trivial, but, much to my surprise, Amanda seemed eager to talk about her literacy. (Later I would find out she was working through the pain of her parent’s divorce by reading books such as *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul*.)

Amanda has vivid memories of being read to as a child, her mother often reading Golden Books. Her favorite book was *The Naughty Little Puppy*. Her mother also read Dr. Seuss books to her and when she was older, she read just about anything that looked interesting to her. She is especially fond of poetry and enjoys reading and writing poetry still. Like the other students I interviewed, Amanda became less interested in reading in the fifth grade, because “when you’ve been reading a long time, it’s like your mind just changes from books and you’re not even interested anymore.” When I asked Amanda why she doesn’t read now, she said, “It’s not that I don’t have time to read, even though I have less time now, right now it’s because I’m going through a rough time right now . . .

so I haven't been doing much of anything lately. I just want to get out of the house. . . and if I read a little bit . . . it's just harder." When I asked what happens to her when she's reads a book she's really "into," she told me about *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul*.

I've been crying through that book. There's this one story called 'The Bible' about a father who gives his son a bible for graduation instead of a car. . .the kid stormed out, and his father died. And [when the kid] went back to the house, he opened up the Bible and found a check for the car that he could get. And, you know, the kid was really sad because they got into a big fight before he could say he was sorry.

"How did you feel after reading that?" I asked. She replied, "I felt like it was me in there. And that's how I feel when I read. I feel like I'm the person in the story. And that's why sometimes I do like reading because I feel like I'm the person in there."

Amanda told me her mother likes to read the newspaper, magazines such as *Parents*, and has been reading her *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul* book. Her younger brother "is ok" about reading, and her three-year-old sister loves to be read to. Amanda remembers going to the public library with her mother and aunt and picking out books for herself, but now only goes to the library if she has to make copies of periodicals for homework assignments. She claimed one of the library workers doesn't like her "hanging around."

Like all of the female students surveyed, Amanda loves reading teen magazines and music magazines, especially *Vibe*. Amanda knows how to use a computer, but the

family doesn't have one at home. Her hobbies include talking on the phone, watching TV, listening to the radio, skating, and going to the movies.

Amanda didn't have much time to sort through the box of books, but she finally settled on the Emily Dickinson book of poetry; *Running Loose*, ("This looks like a good book"); *The Pearl*, ("I love this book, I've read it several times"); *Into the Wild*, *Fell*, *Jacob Have I Loved*; and *Wringer*. Her selection is an eclectic mix of books, indicating, I believe, a broad interest in a variety of different topics and genres.

Amanda doesn't think reading can change a persons' life, nor does she think reading can change a person's viewpoint. She doesn't think people who read are any smarter than those who don't. "They may read more and have a little bit more knowledge, but knowledge just doesn't come from a book, you have to get it from everywhere." She does acknowledge that reading will become increasingly important to her as she becomes older, because she hopes to become a lawyer. She laughs when she tells me if that doesn't pan out, she's fully prepared for "Plan B," becoming an interior designer.

(Note: Amanda's surgery was 100 percent successful, and she returned to school several weeks after the Christmas holiday break.)

David

At the time of our interview, David is thirteen years old, but looks more like a man than a boy. He is of average height, broad chested, and has the beginnings of a mustache. He is the direct opposite of Michael in every way. David is soft spoken, yet talks quickly, making it difficult for me to understand him at times.

David's parents are both Puerto Rican; his father is a crane operator and his mother is a telemarketer. He has an older brother and sister and one younger sister. David's family lived in a nearby community for several years before moving into the school district. David's teacher informed me after our interview that he is a troubled student. She says he is a poor reader (even though he perceives himself as an average reader), receives poor grades, and is below average compared to her other students. In addition, she said that David has poor social skills. He has a bad temper and easily "flies off the handle," which has occurred several times in class. Once during class he threw a desk across the room. I asked David's teacher if she had any idea what might be the cause of his behavior, and she said she wasn't sure. She was not aware of any family problems.

David doesn't remember reading much as a child, but said:

My grandmother and mother read to me, Dr. Suess, I think. When I was older, I read the little books, the Golden Books. It's a good pastime when you're bored and you can't watch TV or do anything else. I'll read a book in my spare time. I get bored, like over the holiday. Some of my books at home are real old, so I like getting new ones."

He remembered his grandmother buying books for him as gifts and would like to receive books as gifts now, especially scary books like Goosebumps series. His choice of horror books is consistent with my survey findings. David said his father has difficulty reading, and that his mother often reads the newspaper to his dad. He sees his mother reading the Bible, the local newspaper, and *Elle* magazine.

David used to go to the public library but has stopped going because he lost a book and owes the library over fifteen dollars.

David knows how to use a computer and the family has one in the home. He admitted he is a “news junkie,” which is unusual because none of the other students mentioned current events, and has been fascinated with the Clinton impeachment trial but claimed it’s getting “boring. . . either impeach him or leave him alone.” David surfs the Internet, looking for sports sites, video game sites, tech support, movie sites; his favorite site is the official *Godzilla* movie Web page. He also frequents chat lines and is into flight simulation.

David said that he started reading less at about nine or ten years old, even though he admits he continues to like to read “a good story.” He told me that he had recently finished a thick book for the first time in his life, *Jurassic Park*. After that, he read the sequel, *The Lost World*. David confessed that he felt the books were better than the movies. I told him that books and movies often work that way, and he replied, “Yea, someone said the books are always better than the movie. The book is more exciting. It’s totally different.” I then asked David when he read an exciting book, what was going on inside his head, to which he replied:

When I’m reading. . . I never told anybody this, but I have a photographic memory I think. In the beginning, I pictured what the girl looked like, and I pictured the pterodactyl. I pictured it . . . it’s weird. It’s like I make a movie of my own when I read it.

When I gave David the box of books to review, he carefully read the back of the

book summary of every book. He selected the following as books he would like to read: *Running Loose, After the First Death, Julie of the Wolves, Trout Summer, Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson, and Ironman*. I believe his book choices illustrate a love of the outdoors and mystery, consistent with survey results, although his choice of Emily Dickinson's book of poetry was surprising because it is *not* consistent with Hispanic males' favorite genres. He never expressed any interest in poetry in our interview.

David thinks people read because they enjoy it or because they have nothing else to do. He's not sure if people can change their viewpoints because of reading, and isn't sure if anyone can become a better person by reading. He knows that reading will be important to him in the future because, like Michael, he hopes to become a writer.

Marcy

When I interviewed Marcy, she was about to turn fourteen. Marcy is a proud, self-confident African American young woman. She, more than any of the other students, liked to talk. She talked about her family, her school work, her passion for sports. (She plays all sports except hockey and golf and hopes to play on the boy's high school football team next year if she's allowed.) Marcy loves to read, and when I asked her about her favorite books, she gave me a detailed synopsis, which was more information than I needed to know. She told me she reads about a book a week. Marcy also informed me it was an aunt who inspired her love of reading. Her family appears to be a close one. Her parents, both African Americans, are employed at the same hospital. Her father works in a service area and her mother is head nurse and supervisor of the hospital's emergency room. She has several older sisters and several younger sisters and

brothers. Her family has lived in the community their entire lives.

Marcy's favorite books growing up were *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* and Dr. Suss's *Green Eggs and Ham*. She doesn't feel there was ever a time in her life when she began reading less. She has received books as gifts many times and is proud of the bookcase in her room, which she says holds all the books she's owned since she was five years old. I asked her how would she feel if she received a book for Christmas, and she answers me, laughing, "I'd read it on Christmas Day!" Marcy considers her reading skills to be average.

Marcy is very much influenced by her parents, whom she sees reading frequently. Her father reads *Sports Illustrated* and *US News and World Report*, and her mother reads books and magazines. Marcy says that because her mother is a supervisor, she reads frequently at home for her job. Sometimes Marcy and her mother read the same books; her mom may recommend a book to Marcy, or Marcy may recommend a book to her mother. Friends have also influenced Marcy's choice of reading materials. Occasionally, a friend will recommend a book to her, which she will then try to read.

Marcy subscribes to *YM* and *Moxie Girl* magazines. Presently, Marcy likes the Goosebumps series by R.L. Stine, a genre preferred by most African American females. However, when she finds a book she likes a lot, such as *The Man in the Iron Mask*, she'll read it over and over again. Marcy first saw the movie version with Leonardo DiCaprio and was sufficiently intrigued to read the book. Like David, she thought the book was far better than movie.

When I asked Marcy if she thought people who read a lot are smarter than those

who don't, her said:

“I think people who read a lot likes more reading. It makes them learn more words, who read a lot. Those that don't read a lot, not interested in reading, it probably wasn't their best subject. Maybe with the career they're doing, they don't want to have to do with reading. . . in some careers, you don't have nothing to do with reading, you don't need to know big words. Some people like reading, some people don't like reading, it's their opinion.”

Marcy knows that reading and writing will be important in her future because she plans to become a lawyer.

Marcy appears to love books, and when I gave her the box of books to review, she clearly enjoying her task. In fact, it was almost maddening to watch her as she carefully reviewed each and every book. When the bell rang that signaled the end of the class period, she had reviewed only two-thirds of the books. We didn't have a chance to discuss her selections; *Pleasing the Ghost*, a book of Emily Dickinson poetry, *Running Loose*, *Celine*, *Warriors Don't Cry* and *Nine True Dolphin Stories*. I believe her choices indicate she has a broad interest in subject matter, from mystery stories to African American history, from animal stories to poetry. The fact that she is interested in reading different book genres is consistent with survey findings that show that girls read a greater variety of genres than boys.

One final note about Marcy: She is very proud of her African American heritage. She spoke to me at length about the most recent book she had read, *Black Diamond: The*

Story of the Negro Baseball Leagues by Pat McKissack. Because she was so passionate about that book, I asked her how she felt after reading it. I did not want to guide her response in any way, but I was hoping she would tell me how she was unaware of time passing, or how she might have created vivid visual images while she read. Instead, she talked about racial prejudice and how God had created all people equal. Later, when I asked her to go through the box of books, she immediately found Melba Patillo Beal's *Warriors Don't Cry*, based on the true story of one girl's integration of Little Rock's Central High School in 1957. She thumbed through the pages of that book almost reverently. I found her passion and pride moving.

Cathy

Two notes of interest about Cathy's interview: Hers was the last interview of the day in the last period of the school day, and, unfortunately, was significantly shorter than the other interviews. It was also her birthday. After our interview, I learned that Cathy is one of her teacher's favorite students. It's not surprising because Cathy is bright, personable, an excellent student, and an above average reader.

Cathy's family is African American. Her father is retired, and she lives with her mother and stepfather who are both employed at a local manufacturing facility. She has several older and younger brothers and sisters. Cathy had lived in another working class community in the southern part of the state before attending Coalburg High School.

Cathy remembers her mother reading to her frequently as a child, starting with Dr. Seuss books and Bible stories. She says she began reading less in the seventh grade, although she said she still enjoys reading, but only reads one, possibly two, books a

month. She considers her reading skills to be average.. Her parents, who are deeply religious, gave Cathy Precious Moments Bible stories when she was younger, but with a laugh she informed me “I don’t know how I’d feel about getting a book as a gift [now]. . .if it was a book that I was interested in and really liked, I might read it, but I’d rather have clothes!”

Cathy doesn’t have a favorite book genre, but said she’ll read anything as long as it’s not “boring.” She doesn’t often go to the library because she has boxes of books at home. Her favorite hobbies are watching television, playing her keyboard, and working on her word processor. When I asked her where reading falls in list of favorite activities, she tells me it’s “not real high, I guess.”

When Cathy reads an exciting book, she said she “pictures the scenes in her head,” and “time goes by fast when I’m really liking what I’m reading.” I laughed when I told her “It sounds like you’re a good reader, it’s a shame you don’t read more. Maybe you’re just not finding the right books to read.” She answered “That’s probably it. I like poetry, but we don’t have any poetry books here [at the school library.]”

When I gave Cathy the box of books to review, she, too, selected an eclectic mix: *Warriors Don’t Cry*, *The Moves Make the Man*, *After the First Death*, *Running Loose*, and *Nightfall*. Surprisingly, the book of Emily Dickinson poems was not among the books she selected.

Cathy knows that reading will be important in her future. She plans to become a physical therapist and said reading charts and patient information is important in any medical career. I smiled when I told her that she chose a career in which she’d make a lot

of money. She laughed when she answered, "Yea, that's what my mom tells me!"

Chapter 6

Implications for Teachers, Students, and Parents

Perhaps the most significant questions I would attempt to answer after this investigation would be these: Why are some students active, enthusiastic readers, and others reluctant readers? In addition, how important are the influences of a child's socioeconomic status, race, gender, home environment, and parental guidance in relation to reading for pleasure? Is there any way parents or teachers can change students' reading attitudes? Is it possible that *every* child can develop a passion for reading?

I developed this study to analyze the reading attitudes and influences of working class students, and along with that to see if race or gender played any part in those attitudes and influences. I report these results with a note of caution: This study was based on surveys and interviews with only a limited number of students from just one working class school district. In an ideal situation, several working class schools might be surveyed and many more students might be interviewed. For comparison, in future surveys, I might also survey students from more affluent middle class school districts, which would even help draw a clearer picture of working class students.

Family Influences

In the first of my four original questions posed in the introduction of this thesis, I surmised that there was indeed a bond between students and their parents with regard to reading attitudes and influences. The parent/child bond within this working class environment was among my most significant findings. In many interviews, students often cited that many of the books they received as gifts were from their grandmothers.

One student said an aunt was a major influence in her reading habits. On two separate occasions girls told me they had in the past shared books with their mothers. Nearly two-thirds of these students indicated they saw their parents reading, even if it was just the evening newspaper; however, only one student indicated her parent was an active reader, and she described that reading in the context of being necessary for her job. This, I believe, indicates that too often reading is viewed by the working class as simply a utilitarian skill and helps to answer the second of my original questions. Although many students said that parents or grandparents had given books as gifts to them as children, it seemed as if by the eighth grade that was no longer the case. Many view future reading as only necessary for certain careers: One student, Marcy, felt that people in certain careers didn't have to be bothered with reading, because they "don't need to know big words."

With all of the students I interviewed, except for two, students talked about their parents and families above and beyond the interview questions. The two students who did not were Maria, the ESL student, and David, the troubled young man with the temper. Interestingly, these are the two students whom their teacher identified as poor readers.

Further evidence of this closeness is revealed in a question I asked in the survey; Do you have a role model, and, if so, who is it? An overwhelming majority of these students said it was either their parents or another relative. A few even mentioned God or Jesus. I attribute part of this to the closeness of the community, along with its ethnic richness. Many of the families have lived in Coalburg their entire lives. Their extended families are there; their churches are there; their history is there.

Coalburg students may also benefit from strong community and family ties in another way: Graduation rates at Coalburg High School are significantly above average for both African American and Hispanic students. Data from the Ohio Department of Education, based on fiscal years 1996 through 1998, showed that while only 58 percent of African American students graduated from high school state-wide, African American students at Coalburg graduated at a rate of 84.2%. Hispanic students graduated at a rate of 55 percent state-wide, while at Coalburg the average was 76.2%. I asked a school official and the eighth grade language arts teacher why these graduation rates were so much higher than state averages, and although both gave several reasons (strong consistent discipline, mandatory school uniforms, high expectations, and the benefit of being in a small district), one reason above all others seemed most important—the strong ethnic backgrounds and importance of family to Coalburg residents.

Yet, while I believe family closeness is invaluable in raising children, it can be too much of a good thing, as in the case of Michael, the young man who wanted to become a writer but whose parents were insisting he become a doctor. Michael described how his parents have purchased bonds for his future education with the hope of him becoming a physician. While I have no doubt that Michael's parents only want the best for him, their determination and insistence that he choose this career is already causing Michael a great deal of stress. Still, Michael has four more years of high school ahead and plenty of time to continue to think about his future career goals.

Although Michael's plan to become a writer may be a realistic one, based on his talent and desire, my survey indicated several Coalburg High School students seemed

have somewhat unrealistic expectations, stating they wished to become movie actors, dancers, singers, professional athletes, and the like. However, a majority of students indicated they planned on professional positions: doctors, lawyers, computer programmers, teachers, or medical personnel. No students indicated a desire to become employed in traditional working class position such as welder, mechanic, plumber, etc. My survey revealed that 100 percent of African American males planned on attending college, while only 67 percent of Hispanic males said college was in their future. More males than females plan to attend college. For comparison, I asked a school official for the most recent exit surveys from last year's senior class, which showed that only 50 percent planned on attending a four year college, 10.58 percent planned to attend a two year college, and 3.82 percent planned to enroll in a technical school. The remaining students either planned to join the workforce immediately after high school, enlist in the military, or had other plans. Of course, many of these students may change their minds about future plans in the next four years. I suspect that other attitudes may change as well. For example, I'm hopeful that Marcy will realize that reading is important, no matter what career one chooses, and that Michael, who wants to become a writer, will learn that reading and writing are inexorably linked, and will value the written word even more than he does now.

Peer Influences

While family plays an important role in working class children's reading attitudes and influences, the role of peers is an important one as well in determining whether or not a child will become an active reader. Michael told me of trying to find a book in the

library that his friend had recommended, and that he was disappointed when he couldn't find it. Marcy also indicated she would read a book if her friend recommended it.

Friends are very important to these young adults, and they are immensely impressionable at this age. Most of these students spend a majority of their spare time with other adolescents, either at the mall, playing video games, bowling, at movies, or just hanging out together. They neither have, nor make, time for reading, yet do value peer reading recommendations. Many said they might pick up a book if they were bored and there was nothing else to do; the concept of actually reading a book for pleasure seems foreign to the many of these students.

Gender and Race

Based on the results of my survey, I discovered in general that girls read more than boys, yet girls read a wider variety of book genres than boys. However, I discovered that many more girls are now interested in sports, adventure, and horror stories, which differs from past survey results. While girls have adopted more traditionally "masculine" tastes in reading, I believe there is still a certain macho factor among boys at this age to not read anything they remotely perceive as "feminine." I observed this while watching Michael select the books he would like to read. He barely gave notice to *Julie of the Wolves*, an outdoors/adventure book he might have actually enjoyed. But because there was a girl on the cover, he didn't even consider it. The other boy I interviewed was less "macho" with his selections; he even chose a book of Emily Dickinson's poetry. The girls, on the other hand, were eager to read books such as *The Moves Make the Man*, *Ironman*, *Running Loose*, and *Into the Wild*. These findings helped answer the fourth of

my original questions in which I surmised that the gender gap was increasingly closing among working class males and females with regard to choices of book genres.

Factoring in the construct of race resulted in a few surprising findings, findings that indicated there were minor differences among African American, Hispanic, and white working class students, as posed in the third of my original queries. Hispanic boys read more than Hispanic girls (the only instance where boys read more than girls), and African American girls read the most of all. Another surprising result was the reading of romance novels; African American and Hispanic girls said they read them, and white females said they did not. Before undertaking this survey, I would have surmised that all working class females read romance novels. I did not expect to find such significant differences among race. Another interesting result was that of newspaper readership among white females, which was shockingly low. The results indicated that, by far, girls would rather read fashion and glamor magazines than newspapers.

Another result I find problematic was that of the reading skills perception of white females. As stated in Chapter 4, I find it nearly impossible to believe that not one of these girls is an excellent reader because white females are among the most prolific readers. In addition, I believe that statistically, *at least one* of these twenty-five females would be an excellent reader. Why they didn't label themselves as such is distressing. Many of these girls could barely credit themselves for being merely good readers; the majority indicating they were just average in their reading skills. Of course, given the research of Mary Pipher in *Reviving Ophelia*, which demonstrated time and again how teenage girls negate their skills and devalue their worth, these results are typical and

reflect her findings, but are still shocking to me nevertheless.

In addition to the above gender issues, I found computer ownership between the families of Hispanic males and females troublesome. While the number of Hispanic students surveyed was small, there was a significant enough disparity between the female and male students to warrant further investigation. (Five of the six Hispanic males said their families owned a computer, yet only three of the eight Hispanic females said likewise.)

Importance of Engagement

Based on the results of my surveys and interviews and those of previous studies, I find working class students somewhat typical in terms of reading. For instance, in a survey of 233,000 students conducted by the California Department of Education in 1989, results showed that 70% of students rarely read for pleasure. In my study, many students said to me that they read, but only when they're bored and there's nothing else to do. Yet I wonder if many students might say they are nonreaders because they feel active readers may be "uncool." Students are particularly sensitive to peer pressure at this age. And what of the 30 percent of students who do read for pleasure and recreation? *Why* do they read for pleasure? What makes them different? Why have they not only learned how to read, but have learned the desire to read as well? (Fisher 71)

Perhaps the dual goals of reading teachers and language arts teachers should be to not only teach students *how* to read, but *why* to read. The skills and the desire become equally important. However, knowing this, and discovering ways to teach desire are two separate objectives. Some teachers use book reports in their classes in order to encourage

students to read; others work at the carrot-and-stick level; that is, if students read X numbers of books, they'll receive pizza parties, fast food coupons, or other rewards. Recently I read an article in a local newspaper that told of an elementary school teacher who, on the last day of school, was planning to kiss a pig because his students had met the required reading goal. While promotional programs as this may work in the elementary grades in the short term, I'm not optimistic they will work long term or with older students.

In working with these students and their teacher at Coalburg High School, I was disappointed to discover that the teacher uses traditional book reports in her class. Many of the students told me how much they despised the book report format and expressed a desire to simply talk about the books they read with their teacher or other students. While students are at least given the choice in selecting their own books to read for these reports, they are still forced to respond to the book in a restrictive, non-interactive format.

In the Middle author Nancie Atwell says:

The ways that middle and high school English teachers have traditionally approached literature in the classroom convey considerable tacit messages about reading . . . We talk a lot. We hold forth about the lives of writers, the symbols and meanings of literature, the legacies of our literary heritage. But we rarely make time in class for students to read or allow them any say in what they read. (28)

Similarly, Louise Rosenblatt, author of *Literature as Exploration*, says:

Instead of hurrying the youngster into impersonal and so-called objective

formulations as quickly as possible, the successful teacher of literature makes the classroom a place for critical sharing of personal responses.

(272)

Atwell has discovered that literary talk among teachers and peers is crucial to children's development as readers. "It is not enough to give them books and make time for independent reading," says Atwell. "When nothing happens before or after the reading, the context doesn't support or extend readers' interests or knowledge." (40) At this age, when talking with their friends is so important, it's a pity the students I surveyed and interviewed aren't permitted or encouraged to discuss books with friends or teacher in a structured classroom environment. There *are* ways to do so. One way Atwell interacts with her students, in addition to talking about what has been read, is with dialogue journals. She writes:

I suspected their written responses to books would go deeper than their talk—that writing would give them time to consider their thinking and that thoughts captured would spark new insights. I also guessed that a written exchange between two readers, a student and an adult, would move kids deeper inside written texts. . . [f]inally, I believed this special context . . . would provide a way for me to respond to every reader and create an occasion for them to write and reflect about books: a genuine, genuinely interested audience who was going to write back. (41)

In her reading workshops, Atwell personalizes her teaching by allowing her tastes, knowledge of and responses to books, and her knowledge of middle school children to

create lifelong readers.

Instead of diminishing or silencing their voices as readers, raising my literary voice has the effect of strengthening theirs—and of bringing us closer. I become someone whose ideas and obsessions identify me, in kids' minds, with the literature I teach in ways they see as worth emulating. Reading workshop becomes an invitation to grow up into an adult world that's cool. (48)

Allowing students to respond to literature in a free and uninhibited manner is an absolute necessity, says Louise Rosenblatt. In doing so, these students can begin to achieve a sound approach to literature only when they reflect on their response to it, when they attempt to understand what in the work and in themselves produced that reaction, and when they thoughtfully go on to modify, reject, or accept it. (72)

Conclusion

As Nancie Atwell and Louise Rosenblatt demonstrate, there are ways to teach children the love of reading. In reviewing the results of my interviews, I believe it was significant that every single student I talked with had at least one positive experience while reading a book. Students smiled when they told me about a reading experience in which time had passed so quickly that they were not aware of it. All of these students have the potential to become ludic readers. Several students may need to improve their reading skills, but all students had experienced the pleasure of reading by selecting one or more books that they found interesting. This tells me there is hope that these working class students will become active readers, perhaps later at a time in their lives when the

pressures of adolescence have passed and they are comfortable with themselves as the adults they will become. Perhaps they will learn, as Anna Quindlen, author of *How Reading Changed My Life*, has learned:

All of reading is really only finding ways to name ourselves, and, perhaps, to name the others around us so that they will no longer seem like strangers. Crusoe and Friday. Ishmael and Ahab. Daisy and Gatsby. Pip and Estella. Me. Me. Me. I am not alone. I am surrounded by words that tell me who I am, why I feel what I feel. Or maybe they just help me while away the hours as the rain pounds down on the porch roof, taking me away from the gloom and on to somewhere sunny, somewhere else.

(21)

Appendix I

Books used in participant observation include:

After the First Death by Robert Cormier
All Together Now by Sue Ellen Bridgers
Celine by Brock Cole
Connections: Short Stories edited by Don Gallo
Fallen Angels by Walter Dean Myers
Fell by M. E. Kerr
Flash and the Swan by Ann Brophy
Gentlehands by M.E. Kerr
Gooseberry Park by Cynthia Rylant
Into the Wild by Jon Krakauer
Ironman by Chris Crutcher
Jacob Have I Loved by Katherine Patterson
Julie of the Wolves by Jean Craghead George
My Brother Sam is Dead by James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier
Nightfall by Joan Aiken
Nine True Dolphin Stories by Margaret Davidson
Pleasing the Ghost by Sharon Creech
Running Loose by Chris Crutcher
Selected Poems by Emily Dickinson
The Bumblebee Flies Anyway by Robert Cormier
The Van Gogh Café by Cynthia Rylant
The Moves Make the Man by Bruce Brooks
The Pearl by John Steinbeck
The Crazy Horse Electric Game by Chris Crutcher
Trout Summer by Leslie Conly
Warriors Don't Cry by Melba Pattillo Beals
Wringer by Jerry Spinnelli

CHS 8th Grade Reading Survey

It is very important you answer the following questions completely and honestly. If you are unsure of any question, please ask your teacher. Since you are not providing us with your name, all information will remain confidential. Thank you.

Circle one: Male Female Age _____

Race/Ethnic Origin: African-American Asian-American Native American Hispanic

Caucasian Are you of Italian heritage? Are you of Greek heritage?

Other (please list) _____

1. How many books do you read for pleasure a month? _____ A year _____?

(Do not include school books, but you may include books read for book reports.)

2. What are your favorite types of stories/books? (Check all that apply) Adventure Poetry Short stories Mystery Sports Space Science Fiction Horror Comic Books Romance Biography Realistic Fiction (Young Adult) Animal stories Fantasy Others (please list) _____

3. The books you read for pleasure are: purchased at the bookstore checked out of the library borrowed from friends other (please explain) _____

4. Your hobbies outside of school are: (please list all activities such as specific sports {soccer, baseball, football, etc.} video games, watching movies or television, etc.) _____

5. Do you read a newspaper? Yes No If yes, which newspaper(s) do you read?

What sections of the newspaper do you read most often? (Examples: comics, sports, news, etc.) _____

6. Do you read any magazines? Yes No

If yes, which magazine(s) do you read? (Examples: Sports Illustrated, Newsweek, YM, Seventeen, Rolling Stone, etc.) _____

7. Do you know how to use a computer? Yes No

8. Do you have a computer at home? Yes No

9. Do you use the Internet or World Wide Web at home? Yes No

Do you use the Internet or web at school? Yes No

Do you use the web at other places (a friend's house, at the library, etc.) Please explain where.

10. Please list the titles of the last two books you've read. Then, briefly write a sentence or two about why you liked or didn't like the book.

Book # 1 Title _____

I liked/didn't like this book because _____

Book #2 Title _____

I liked/didn't like this book because _____

11. Do you use your school library? Why or why not? _____

12. Do you use a public library? If so, which one? If not, why not? _____

13. How do you feel about reading? Why do you feel this way? _____

14. Write a sentence or two about the last book you loved reading. What was the title of the book, and why did you like it so much? _____

15. How do you feel about reading aloud in class? Do you like it; or dislike it? Why? _____

16. If you could ask your teacher to read one book aloud in class, what would it be, and why would you ask her to read this particular book? _____

17. Do you have a favorite place to read? Where is it, and what makes it your favorite place to read?

18. What were your favorite books (or stories) as a child? _____

19. Do your parents read a lot? Yes No What types of materials do they read?
(Books/magazines/newspapers?) _____

20. How do you feel about your skills as a reader? Would you describe yourself as a good reader, an average reader, or a poor reader? _____

21. How important do you think reading will be in your later years in high school, in college, and as an adult? _____

22. How do you feel about book reports? Do you like doing book reports? Do you like listening to other students' give their reports? _____

23. When you read a book or story, do you relate that story to your own life? Do you make a "personal connection" with the main character? _____

24. Right now, do you think your school library has the kinds of books that you, as a young adult, like to read?

Imagine you were given \$100 to buy books for your school's library. What kinds of books would you buy and why? Why do you think other students would like reading these books? _____

25. Whom do you most admire and why do you admire that person? Who are your heroes? Who are your role models?

26. Is college in your future plans? _____

27. Have you decided on future career goals? _____

Thank you for completing this survey!

Appendix III

Interview #1 Questions

1. Tell me about your reading history. Do you remember what books you read as a young child? What books were read to you? Do you remember any specific books? What were your favorites? What about reading as you got older—did you have any time for it? What are your thoughts on reading now? Do you consider yourself to be a good reader, average reader, or poor reader?
2. Did you receive books as gifts when you were a younger child? How do you feel about getting books as gifts now?
3. Tell me a little about the reading interests of your parents and siblings. What about your grandparents or significant relatives, neighbors, or babysitters. How did that affect you?
4. When you were younger, did you mom or dad take you to the library? Did you check out books? What kinds of books? Did you parents help you make selections? Did they also check out books at the same time you did?
5. Tell me about what you read now—books, magazines, etc. Does anybody help select your reading materials? What about your friends—do they read a lot?
6. What do you think of people who read a lot? Do you think they're smarter, or odd?
7. Do you have many books at home? Bookcases? What sorts of reading materials are available in your home—magazines, newspapers, etc.?
8. What do you do for fun? What about computers?
9. Tell me what happens to you when you read a good book?
10. How do you choose your reading materials? By friends' recommendations? By the book cover?

Appendix IV

Interview #2 Questions

1. Child's name and date of birth
2. Father and Mother information (approximate age, occupation, nationality)
3. Other influences stepfather, stepmother, grandparent who might live with you, special aunt or uncle?
4. Brothers and sisters (list ages, if over 18, what do they do)
5. Besides the obvious (like "survival skills" reading) why do you think people read? (Enjoyment, to learn something, etc.)
6. You all mentioned great reactions you had while reading books you really enjoyed. Why don't you then, seek more of the same by reading more?
7. When did you start reading less?
8. Do you form mental visual images when you read?
9. What do you think of the book report format?
10. Besides Coalburg, where else have you lived?
11. Do you speak any languages other than English?
12. Career choice? How important do you think reading will be in your future career choice? How important do you think writing will be in your chosen career?
13. Do you think you (or any person) can become a better person by reading?
14. Has reading ever changed your viewpoint or opinion about anything?
15. Do you think rich people read more than poor people? Why?
16. To what category do you think you and your family belong: upper class, middle class, working class, lower class?

Appendix V

Student Permission Form and Disclosure Statement

Dear Student:

Your input into this study is very important. I would very much like to talk to you further about your reading attitudes. If you would like to participate in a one-half hour interview, please sign your name below and enclose it in the survey. I will arrange these interviews with your teacher and the interviews will take place during library hours, so you will not miss any valuable class time. *Mrs. Sue Miller*

Student name (please print clearly)

(Class period)

Yes, I would like to talk with Mrs. Miller from Youngstown State University more about my reading attitudes. I understand my interview is voluntary, and I will need to obtain permission from my parent/guardian to do so.

Appendix VI

Parental Permission Form and Disclosure

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am currently a graduate student at Youngstown State University, and, having completed all my coursework for a Master's degree in English, am working on a final research project at your child's school for my thesis. I am requesting permission from you to interview your son/daughter during English class for this project, which is a study of reading attitudes of eighth-grade students. Interviews will be conducted during scheduled library hours in the months of December and January. Your child will not miss valuable instruction during class time in order to participate in this study.

Your child has volunteered to be interviewed, and if selected, I will ask him/her questions about reading attitudes in general; what they like to read, where they like to read, and how they feel about books. I will be taking notes during this interview and recording their answers into a tape recorder.

I have received permission to conduct these interviews from the Coalburg High School principal, Dr. Mary Jo Reiff, Associate Professor in English at Youngstown State University (my thesis advisor); and the Youngstown State University Human Subjects Research Committee. I will keep all information from the research confidential, using pseudonyms when discussing the research with others.

I believe the interviews will involve no risks to students in this class. If your son or daughter withdraws or declines the interview, there will be no penalty to the student in terms of grade or standing in the class.

Following is a form you will need to complete indicating your permission for me to work with your son or daughter. Your child will need to return this form to his or her English teacher ***no later than Wednesday, December 9***. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the school, or you may call me at 759-2416. Thank you for your help.

Sue Miller, Youngstown State University

I, _____, hereby give permission to have my child or legal ward, _____, to participate in an interview on reading attitudes. This research is part of an authorized research study at Youngstown State University under the supervision of Dr. Mary Jo Reiff. I understand that my child or ward can refuse to answer any question at any time or can totally withdraw from the study with no penalty.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Appendix VII

**Reading Attitude Survey Results
Hispanic Males (11) and Females (11)**

Books Read:

Per Month: Male	15 (1.3)	Per Year: Male	170 (15.5)
Per Month: Female	13 (1.1)	Per Year Female:	101 (1.1)
Per Month: Total	28 (1.2)	Per Year: Total	271 (12.3)

Genres	Males	Females	Total
Adventure	5	3	8
Poetry	1	4	5
Short Stories	2	3	5
Mystery	7	6	13
Sports	6	0	6
Space	0	0	0
Sci Fi	1	1	2
Horror	6	8	14
Comic Books	3	3	6
Romance	0	4	4
Biography	1	2	3
YA Lit	1	3	4
Animal	1	1	2
Fantasy	2	2	4
Other (medieval)	1	0	0

	Male	Female	Total
Read/Don't Read Newspapers	7 / 4	9 / 2	16 / 6
Read/Don't Read Magazines	8 / 3	10 / 1	18 / 4
Know/Don't Know			
How to use Computer	11 / 0	10 / 1	21 / 1
Have/Don't Have Computer @ home	5 / 6	3 / 8	8 / 14
Have/Don't Have Web @ home	3 / 8	2 / 9	5 / 17
Use/Don't Use Web @ school	7 / 4	7 / 4	14 / 8
Use/Don't Use Library @ School	7 / 4	10 / 1	17 / 5
Use/Don't Use Public Library	7 / 4	9 / 2	16 / 6
See/Don't See Parents Read	7 / 4	6 / 5	13 / 9

Read Skills Self Perception

	Males	Females	Total
Excellent	0	1	1
Good	3	3	6
Average	6	5	11
Poor	2	2	4

Future Plans: (Yes/No/Unsure)

	Males	Females	Total
College	7 / 3 / 1	9 / 1 / 1	16 / 4 / 2
Career	9 / 0 / 2	7 / 0 / 4*	16 / 0 / 6

*4 of the girls stated they want to be lawyers

Reading Attitude Survey Results African American Males (8) and Females (12)

Books Read:

Per Month: Male	5 (.625)	Per Year: Male	43 (5.4)
Per Month: Female*	39 (3.25)	Per Year: Female*	401 (33.4)
Per Month: Female	19 (1.6)	Per Year: Female	161 (13.4)
Per Month: Total*	44 (2.2)	Per Year: Total*	444 (22.2)
Per Month: Total	24 (1.2)	Per Year: Total	204 (10.2)

Genres	Males	Females	Total
Adventure	3	2	5
Poetry	0	3	3
Short Stories	1	4	5
Mystery	2	10	12
Sports	3	2	5
Space	1	0	1
Sci Fi	2	3	5
Horror	2	8	10
Comic Books	3	3	6
Romance	0	7	7
Biography	1	2	3
YA Lit	1	5	6
Animal	1	0	1
Fantasy	0	3	3
Other (comedy/biblical/how-to)	0	1	1

	Male	Female	Total
Read/Don't Read Newspapers	2 / 6	10 / 2	12 / 8
Read/Don't Read Magazines	5 / 3	11 / 1	16 / 4
Know/Don't Know			
How to use Computer	7 / 1	12 / 0	19 / 1
Have/Don't Have Computer @ home	3 / 5	5 / 7	8 / 12
Have/Don't Have Web @ home	3 / 5	3 / 9	6 / 14
Use/Don't Use Web @ school	5 / 3	8 / 4	13 / 7
Use/Don't Use Library @ School	8 / 0	12 / 0	20 / 0
Use/Don't Use Library/Public	6 / 2	9 / 3	15 / 5
See/Don't See Parents Read	7 / 1	10 / 2	17 / 3

Read Skills Self Perception

	Male	Female	Total
Excellent	0	3	3
Good	2	4	6
Average	4	4	8
Poor	2	1	3

Future Plans: (Yes/No/Unsure)

	Male	Female	Total
College	8 / 0 / 0	11 / 1 / 0	19 / 1 / 0
Career	7 / 0 / 1	11 / 0 / 1	18 / 0 / 2

Reading Attitude Survey Results White Males (27) and Females (25)

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Books Read:

Per Month: Male	33 (1.2)	Per Year: Male	301 (11.2)
Per Month: Female*	51 (2)	Per Year: Female*	482 (19.3)
Per Month: Female	36 (1.4)	Per Year: Female	302 (15.3)
Per Month: Total*	84 (1.6)	Per Year: Total*	783 (15)
Per Month: Total	69 (1.3)	Per Year: Total	603 (11.6)

Genres	Males	Females	Total
Adventure	13	12	25
Poetry	6	12	18
Short Stories	6	9	15
Mystery	14	22	36
Sports	19	4	23
Space	5	3	8
Sci Fi	9	3	12
Horror	13	15	28
Comic Books	14	6	22
Romance	0	4	4
Biography	4	5	9
YA Lit	2	4	6
Animal	5	2	7
Fantasy	6	10	16
Other (history/medieval/mythology)	3	1	4

	Male	Female	Total
Read/Don't Read Newspapers	19 / 8	11 / 14	30 / 22
Read/Don't Read Magazines	26 / 1	24 / 1	50 / 2
Know/Don't Know			
How to use Computer	25 / 2	23 / 2	48 / 4
Have/Don't Have Computer @ home	11 / 16	12 / 13	23 / 29
Have/Don't Have Web @ home	11 / 16	7 / 18	18 / 34
Use/Don't Use Web @ school	11 / 16	15 / 10	35 / 17
Use/Don't Use Library @ School	24 / 3	20 / 5	44 / 8
Use/Don't Use Library/Public	17 / 10	15 / 10	32 / 20
See/Don't See Parents Read	18 / 9	15 / 10	33 / 19
Read Skills Self Perception			
Excellent	2	0	2
Good	13	9	22
Average	10	14	24
Poor	1	2	3
Future Plans: (Yes/No/Unsure)			
College	25 / 1 / 0	18 / 5 / 2	43 / 6 / 3
Career	18 / 0 / 9	16 / 0 / 9	34 / 0 / 18

Two males plan on playing football for the NFL, and two girls plan on becoming professional singers/dancers/actors/entertainers) one girl answered either doctor, teacher, or secretary.

Reading Attitude Survey Results All Males (46) and Females (48)

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Books Read:

Per Month: Male	53 (1.15)	Per Year: Male	514 (11.2)
Per Month: Female*	103 (2.15)	Per Year: Female*	984 (20.5)
Per Month: Female	68 (1.4)	Per Year: Female	564 (11.75)
Per Month: Total*	156 (1.7)	Per Year: Total*	1498 (15.9)
Per Month: Total	121 (1.3)	Per Year: Total	1078 (11.5)

Genres	Males	Females	Total
Adventure	21	17	38
Poetry	7	19	26
Short Stories	9	16	25
Mystery	23	38	61
Sports	28	6	34
Space	6	3	9
Sci Fi	12	7	19
Horror	20	31	51
Comic Books	20	12	32
Romance	0	15	15
Biography	6	9	15
YA Lit	4	12	16
Animal	7	3	10
Fantasy	8	13	21
Other (history/medieval/mythology)	3	1	4

	Male	Female	Total
Read/Don't Read Newspapers	28 / 18	30 / 18	58 / 36
Read/Don't Read Magazines	39 / 7	45 / 3	84 / 10
Know/Don't Know			
How to use Computer	43 / 3	45 / 3	88 / 6
Have/Don't Have Computer @ home	19 / 27	20 / 28	39 / 55
Have/Don't Have Web @ home	17 / 29	19 / 29	36 / 58
Use/Don't Use Web @ school	32 / 14	30 / 18	62 / 32
Use/Don't Use Library @ School	39 / 7	42 / 6	81 / 13
Use/Don't Use Library/Public	30 / 16	33 / 15	63 / 31
See/Don't See Parents Read	32 / 14	31 / 17	63 / 31
Read Skills Self Perception			
Excellent	2	4	6
Good	18	16	34
Average	20	23	43
Poor	5	5	11 (includes 1 dyslexic child)

Future Plans: (Yes/No/Unsure)

College	40 / 4 / 2	38 / 7 / 3	78 / 11 / 5
Career	32 / 0 / 13	34 / 0 / 15	66 / 0 / 28



Youngstown State University / One University Plaza / Youngstown, Ohio 44555-0001

October 16, 1998

Ms. Susanne M. Miller
c/o English Journal
309 Tod Hall
Youngstown State University
CAMPUS

RE: HSRC Protocol 19-99

Dear Ms. Miller:

This is to inform you of the Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Committee action taken earlier today to issue conditional approval of the above referenced protocol, subject to the following conditions:

- (1) that the investigator provide the Committee with an actual or approximate written script of the interview themes or questions to be posed to the subjects, when such information becomes available;
- (2) that the investigator clarify the status of "surveyed and interviewed" subjects (Protocol Response #2) relative to the teachers' role in the study.

The Committee also asked me to commend the investigator and her advisor for their thorough and professional approach to the study, as reflected in the preparation of this protocol.

Best wishes for the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eric C. Lewandowski'.

Eric C. Lewandowski, CRA
Administrative Co-chair
Human Subjects Research Committee

ECL/

c: Dr. Mary Jo Reiff



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