UNDERSTANDING HIGH ACHIEVING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS’ INFLUENCES ON
IDENTITY WITH REGARD TO READING ENGAGEMENT

A doctoral thesis

by

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to

The School of Education

In fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in the field of

Education

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
March 2015
Abstract

This basic qualitative study of eight high-achieving students in a large urban high school sought to understand how high-achieving high school students described the influences on their identities with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences. When it comes to reading, research shows that adolescents are showing signs of disengagement. Students in American classrooms come from a wide range of backgrounds with a variety of personal experiences. As such, understanding how students describe the influences on their identities where it concerns reading engagement amid their educational experiences is important because identity has been shown to be an important aspect of reading engagement. In this study, a review of the literature explored current research on reading engagement and identity, including gender, socioeconomics, and race. Using Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) social identity theory and Phinney’s (1992) components model of identity, several important findings emerged from data: supportive relationships impact reading experiences; personally meaningful reading experiences influence reading engagement; pedagogy influences reading engagement; adolescents label their reading identities; and students participate in student success cohorts.

Key terms: reading, reading engagement, engaged reading experiences, in-class reading experiences, high-achieving students, identity, and reader identity.
Dedication

For my parents,

Paul and Donna Boucher

~

Tic, tic
Acknowledgements

It has been my good fortune to count on the support of many people throughout this educational experience. I will begin by thanking my parents, Paul and Donna Boucher, who have always believed in me. Since childhood, my parents have wanted more for me than I could ever dream of wanting for myself. They have given me the space to do what I have needed to do and the confidence with which to do it. To my father, who has shown me the way. To my mother, who was always there when I came home from school and who always made everything brighter and better. I am comforted by my parents’ love, their unyielding support, and their constant reassurance. The world would be a better place if everyone had parents like mine. I am also thankful for the love and encouragement of my brother Michael, his wife Melissa, and their two sons – Joshua and Nicholas – whom I am proud to call my nephews. Since the day that I told them I was going to begin this doctoral process, they had total faith in me. In addition, I am thankful to my dog Zoe who, without fail, helped to remind me of the importance of playtime. I am also thankful to God for having blessed me with my family and for answering my prayers.

A special thank you to my closest friends from various contexts for listening to me ramble on about this doctoral program and my research for almost four straight years. I promise to find something new to ramble on about upon the completion of this dissertation.

Next, as the journey through my formal education nears its end, I would like to thank the many teachers who have served as my guides. In every stage of my education, caring, supportive, and knowledgeable teachers have inspired me. In elementary school, Mr. Patrick Wilkinson taught me to face the world head on and without fear. In high school, Mrs. Dolores Armando inspired me to follow my dreams of becoming an English teacher by modeling great teaching and writing every day. Finally, when I became a teacher myself, Mrs. Amy Slater, my
colleague, mentor, and friend, showed me the ropes, reminded me to always seek adventure, and taught me to treat each teaching experience as a lesson from which to learn and grow.

Many thanks are given to the teachers at the site of the present research. They played important roles in the completion of this work. Specifically, I am thankful to Mrs. Beth CA Jupin, for her unwavering support, her confidence in me, and for serving as a witness during the data collection process. But most of all, I am thankful for her friendship. I am also thankful to Mr. Matthew de Matos and Ms. Milagros Rodriguez for translating the consent form and the invitation to participate into Portuguese and Spanish, respectively. I would also like to thank all of my colleagues – both past and present – in the world of teaching and learning, many of whom I have come to count as friends, whose expertise, kindness, and encouragement have meant more than they will ever know. I am particularly thankful to my friend and comrade Dr. Katherine Patras Carvalho for her encouragement, reassurance, and confidence throughout this process. My appreciation is also extended to Dr. Lori Weider for her early support in this doctoral experience. Finally, I am thankful to Mrs. Tara Kohler and Mr. Andrew Kulak for their support of this work, their faith in me and in my teaching career. Of course, this research would not have been possible without the eight participants who agreed to take part in it, and to them I am eternally grateful.

Of course, I would like to thank my doctoral thesis committee including Dr. Atira Charles who served as my adviser, Dr. Tova Sanders who served as my second reader, and Naimah Ford who severed as my external examiner. This work is a product of their efforts and feedback as well as their support and encouragement along the way.

Finally, I would like to thank the many students whom I have had the honor of teaching over the last 10 years. I would not be who I am today without them.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem of Practice

According to Common Core Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy, “the Literate Person of the Twenty-First Century” is one who, in part, “actively seek(s) the wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational texts that builds on knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens worldviews” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 3). Though high-achieving students seem to have shown signs of engagement with a variety of texts, research showed that 21st-century high school students were showing signs of disengagement from reading (Miller, Warren, & NCES, 2011). In fact, a 2007 report from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) described how adolescent high school students were reading with less proficiency and less frequency than previous generations. The NEA (2007) found that “little more than one-third of high school seniors now read proficiently” (p. 13). Other national studies have reported similar findings of American teenagers not spending a significant amount of time reading and being generally disengaged from the reading that they do for school (Miller et al., 2011). Research showed that even recreational reading has declined in recent years (International Reading Association, 2014). Given the existence of disengaged students, what distinguished them from the engaged students? That is, what were the characteristics of the engaged students, referred to as “high-achieving students” for the purpose of this study, that helped them foster engagement with reading, characteristics that were not present among many of the disengaged readers at the high school level?

Further complicating the issue, it is important to recognize that Americans have become increasingly diverse within the last few decades. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has shown that while the African American population has remained relatively
steady, the European American population has decreased to about 60% of the overall population, and Hispanic, Asian, and Pacific Islander populations have been on the rise (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). The report also showed that about 14% of the total population was born outside of the United States (Aud et al., 2010). In addition, the report noted that “in 2007, an estimated 11 million elementary and secondary students, or 21 percent of all such students, spoke a language other than English at home” (Aud et al., 2010, p. 44). In fact, according to another study, “students who speak a language other than English and have limited proficiency in English are the fastest-growing population in U.S. schools” (Nieto, 2006, p. 76). Yet these students are expected to assimilate into American classrooms and become actively engaged with reading traditional texts from the literary canon (Bloom, 1994). At the same time, the Common Core has placed an increased emphasis on texts that fall outside of the realm of the traditional canon. As Alsup (2013) pointed out, while the Common Core has by no means abandoned fiction, “there is an increased emphasis on what are called ‘informational texts’ and so-called complex texts that may or may not be fiction” (p. 181).

While American schools have become more diverse, there has also been an increasing awareness that 21st-century teenagers have different interests and skills than previous generations of learners. In comparing America’s 21st-century adolescents to previous generations of learners, Prensky (2001, p. 1) asserted, “Our students have changed radically. Today’s students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach.” Prensky (2001) notably referred to the current generation of adolescents as “digital natives,” or “native speakers of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet” (p. 1). Prensky’s description of modern adolescents is useful in framing the context for 21st-century adolescent reading habits because it demonstrates the need to better understand how 21st-century teenagers identify with
their reading experiences within traditional American classrooms.

One factor that may be directly linked to reading engagement is identity. In their discussion on identity, McCarthey and Moje (2002) affirmed that, regarding adolescence and reading, “identity matters” (p. 228) for a variety of reasons, including self-efficacy. To this end, McCarthey and Moje (2002) discussed the need to foster identities through reading as a tool for helping adolescents to learn more about themselves. Further, identity matters because of the “hybrid, fluid, or shifting” nature of identity as it relates to gender, social class, and race (McCarthey & Moje, 2002, p. 234). In this way, a person’s identity is not fixed and often depends on a specific context at a given time. Moreover, a person’s perceptions of his or her identity in addition to the perceptions others have of that person in a particular context can lead to different perceptions of the self (McCarthy & Moje, 2002). Considering that the students in American classrooms come from a wide range of backgrounds, and that they have become increasingly reliant on the digital world, educators need to understand how high-achieving students describe the influences on their identities with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences.

Significance Statement

The research is clear: many high school teenagers are disengaged from the reading they are doing in high school and rarely read traditional texts in their free time (Miller et al., 2011; NEA, 2007). In fact, evidence of the problem with reading engagement has already been discovered in mainstream society outside of the classroom. For example, when the NEA (2007) released its alarming findings about American high school teenagers and reading, the need to focus more attention on the reading habits of high school students became evident because “nearly half of all Americans ages 18 to 24 read no books for pleasure” (p. 7). As the NEA
(2007) stated, “As Americans, especially younger Americans, read less, they read less well. Because they read less well, they have lower levels of academic achievement” (p. 141). However, in a more recent study, the NEA (2009) found that reading for adults was, in fact, “on the rise” (p. 1). However, this latest study included Internet reading whereas the previous studies did not. Further, the NEA (2009) explained that these results were based on adults and stated that “the recent rise in reading is not a school-based trend but a broader, community-wide phenomenon” (p. 2). Regardless, even though the 2009 report indicated that there was a relatively sharp increase in reading for adults, the NEA’s own 2012 survey on engagement with the arts indicated that reading was once again declining to the lowest levels it had seen since 2002 (NEA, 2009, 2013). As such, the reading problem with American adolescents ultimately remains. Of course, the problem is not new. As Guthrie, Alao, and Rinehart (1997) simply stated, “students do not spend any significant portion of their free time reading” (p. 439).

While it is discouraging to know that many high school students fail to engage in meaningful reading (Guthrie, 2004), research shows that students can become engaged in the reading process when they are captivated by texts that are interesting to them and relevant to their lives (Ediger, 2009; Flowerday, Schraw, & Stevens, 2004; Mercurio, 2005;). In a recent study that dealt with students’ abilities to relate to the texts that they were reading, Francois (2013) explained it the following way:

Students’ comments suggest that the act of reading is a moment when young people negotiate identities, both individual and group-based, both familiar and possible. Though reading is, at the surface, a private act, it was still an opportunity for readers to link to other people and imagine possible selves. (p. 148)

Therefore, a need existed to understand how high-achieving students described the influences on
their identities with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences.

This research has implications for scholars and practitioners interested in improving the reading experiences of high school students by facilitating life-long learning. Reading skills are considered to be an essential component of leading a successful and productive life. Therefore, the problem of decreased reading engagement is significant to both the local and national community.

If this problem is not addressed, then many students will continue to be disengaged from reading. Undoubtedly, reading skills will continue to diminish. An entire generation of Americans will be lost without the reading skills necessary to fully participate in the 21st century as well-read, knowledgeable, and informed citizens of the world. By understanding the influences on identity with regard to reading engagement, educators will better understand the ways in which they can actively engage students with reading. Likewise, parents will recognize the ways in which their children’s identity impacts their reading experiences, and students will understand the meaning that they attribute to identity as it impacts reading engagement in their educational experiences. Ultimately, these understandings will illuminate the need for students to become engaged readers in the high school classroom and beyond.

**Researcher Positionality**

Before becoming one myself, I had no idea what it really meant to be a teacher. The only examples I had were the ones that stood in front of me each day, first at a private, Catholic elementary school, and later at a vocational high school. The description of my elementary school as “private” made it sound fancier than it really was, and both schools were located in City X, a low-socioeconomic community in New England. Still, my working-class parents made my education their top priority. My parents, brother, and I lived in a humble house in this
moderately sized, seemingly diverse city.

My family was French and Native American. However, this was a piece of my identity to which I had no attachment whatsoever. I knew very little about either culture. While growing up, I did not speak French with my parents, we did not eat authentic French food, nor did we indulge in any significant customs that would, in any way, resemble acknowledgement of this part of our identity. We were simply a small American family living in an historical city in New England.

My father worked as a polisher for a well-known company that specialized in making medical instruments, and he earned a decent wage. The decent wage allowed my mother to stay home and raise me and my brother. For my parents, having one parent at home was very important. Being a one-income household also meant that we lived modestly: my parents owned one car, we did not eat out frequently, and most vacations were comprised of camping trips to a nearby town.

As a child, I considered myself to be an avid reader. I read just about everything I could get my hands on. My father bought comic books for me, and my mother ensured that the next I Can Read book was delivered to our house each month. My mother and I always read the monthly books together. I took very good care of my books, and, as a point of interest, I still have most of them stored away in my attic. By age ten or eleven, I had gained some independence, and I would ride my bicycle to the local library. In the summer months, I rode my bike to the library probably as often as once a week; during the winter, my father would drive me. The librarians knew me by name. My interest in reading continued throughout high school. I relished in-class discussions of Hawthorne, Poe, and Fitzgerald. I even managed to hold onto most of my binders from my high school English classes. It sounds silly, but they were
important to me. They were tangible reminders of the reading and learning experiences that meant so much to me as a student.

It came as no surprise, then, when I decided that I wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to be the kind of teacher who made a difference in the lives of his students by sharing my love of reading with them. After college, I decided to return home to start my career in education in the city in which I was raised. Many of my friends from college were teachers, too, and they had done the same: They returned home to make a difference in some way. Membership in the class of future educators meant that we reinforced within ourselves the notion that we were all doing our part to make a difference in the lives of young people. These friends and I shared many of the same beliefs about education, reading, and society. Their encouragement to do something worthwhile resonated with me. I truly believed that we all had the best of intentions. Although I did not attend X High School as a high school student, I was eager to begin teaching there to make a difference in my community.

In my position as an English teacher, I quickly learned that many of my students were simply not engaged with the reading we were doing in class. We read most of the typical high school texts, like To Kill A Mockingbird, The Odyssey, Romeo and Juliet, and Lord of the Flies, rite-of-passage titles that so many of us in the field of education held close to our hearts. Still, many of my students remained disengaged. I knew this to be true because many of them told me so themselves: They were never shy about voicing their discontent about reading. Other students would gradually put their heads down on their desks, or slump back in their chairs. I got to be pretty good at reading body language as a teacher, especially where it concerned reading. I also could tell that some of them were engaging in what was commonly known as “fake reading,” reading the words of a text but not really paying any attention to it.
Of course, some students had documented learning disabilities. Other students were English Language Learners. Some students had focus issues, medical problems, and other diagnosable reasons for not being able to concentrate and enjoy the reading experience that I was so eager to provide. Some students came from poverty or unstable and even dangerous homes. Several of my students arrived at school sleep-deprived and hungry, their only guaranteed meal for the day coming from the school cafeteria.

With regard to reading, however, what intrigued me were the students who had no known hurdles to overcome, but for whom reading still seemed out of reach, or at least, not appealing. I am referring to students who were – for no apparent reason – simply not engaged readers.

It is important to note, however, that this was not the case for all of my students. Many of them were interested in reading and did so frequently. They would come to class prepared to talk about their independent reading books and discuss whatever they were reading for fun. I soon began to wonder about what made some students engaged with what they were reading, while others were showing signs of total disengagement.

It is fair to say that my experiences in the classroom have contributed to my own assumptions about reading and high school students. Having recently started my 10th year in the classroom, I could not help but notice that the most engaged readers, the ones who were always prepared and excited to talk about whatever we were reading, were typically the high-achieving students who always did well academically. This made me wonder about my disengaged readers’ level of interest in what we were reading. Every time we read a text from which students were disengaged, I asked myself several questions: Were they simply not interested in the text? Was the text inaccessible? Were they bored? Maybe they were spending too much time in front of the TV? Maybe they were lazy? Was I an ineffective teacher? I knew that I had
tried to make the reading engaging, but I also knew deep down that I was failing to really engage my students in reading, and that realization worried me.

With this in mind, it did not take me long to realize that most of the texts I taught were probably out of touch with a good portion of the students in front of me. As a White male who grew up in a stable home with two parents who were supportive and had high expectations for my education, I recognized that my life experience was probably out of sync with the experiences of a good portion of my students. Not having experienced prejudice or marginalization firsthand, I knew that what I represented in the classroom was, for some students, out of touch with their own realities. Most assuredly, to some students, I was a college-educated White man wearing a tie. For those students, I probably represented an existence that was not in line with their perceptions of their own realities. While I looked at school as a place where all students would have the opportunity to succeed, to go to college, and to make a better life for themselves, a good number of my students looked at school differently. Still, there I was, teaching books written by quite a few “Dead White Men” with the best of intentions. Most of these were considered classics, books from the literary canon. Sometimes, the language was inaccessible to my students: It was from another era with which my students had little familiarity. Even though the themes were considered by many to be timeless, I began to recognize that the people in these works, and the conflicts with which they were dealing, were probably not germane to the world in which my students were living. I became fascinated with the idea that maybe the texts we were reading in class simply did not appeal to the students who were reading them. They could not relate to them, I told myself, because they probably did not see themselves in them.

Soon, I convinced myself that I had to diversify the texts that I was teaching. I had to
make reading more appealing to the individual identities of my young charges. I tried this in my own classroom in several ways. I knew from the countless hours of professional development that it was my pedagogical approach to teaching reading that mattered most. I invited students to participate in independent reading experiences. I brought in a wide range of books for students to read. I asked students to talk about their reading experiences with their peers and with me. I made it a point to make reading a central focus of my instruction every day. Though I saw a small increase in engagement in some individuals, the majority of the students who were engaged with these experiences were the high achievers who were reading anyway. I still was not really reaching the majority of my students. The high achievers were reading more, but the majority of the students in the room were still not what I would call engaged readers. Most of them did the work of reading, but it was obvious to me that they were not getting very much out of their reading experiences.

These kinds of familiarities have undoubtedly contributed to my understanding of the current research topic concerning high-achieving adolescent identity and reading engagement. Therefore, my experiences in the classroom have led to several realizations that have influenced this study. First, I recognize that the teacher has an enormous impact on student learning in the construction of meaningful learning experiences. Secondly, students need access to the wide range of reading material that exists outside of the traditional canon. Though I would never call for an abandonment of the classics, it seems that we also need to make room for student choice and independent reading experiences that speak to the identities of the readers. Finally, students need opportunities to identify with books of personal interest in class. If non-readers are not given time to read in class, it seems highly unlikely that they will pick up a book in their own free time. These realizations influenced my pedagogical approach to teaching and my efforts to
get students to participate in meaningful reading experiences in which they were engaged with the text. These realizations also informed this study, which sought to understand how students described the influences on their identities with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences.

**Research Question**

The present qualitative study was designed to answer the following research question:

How do eight high-achieving high school students enrolled in Advanced Placement and Honors English courses describe the influences on their identities with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences?

**Research Topic**

The present research is concerned with understanding how high-achieving students described the influences on their identities with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences. Engaged reading experiences are those that include texts that are diverse enough to reach a range of populations. An example of such a text might be *The Kite Runner*, which is set in Kabul, Afghanistan, and deals with friendship, loss, modern international conflicts, racism, prejudice, and atonement. Texts like *The Kite Runner* are often accessible to students because they can relate to the characters or the conflicts that are presented. As another example, the novel *My Sister’s Keeper* tells the story of a girl who is born specifically to donate her kidney to save her sister’s life. The novel also provides the opportunity for students to identify with thematic elements as they relate to their own identities, such as their relationships with siblings and questions about life and death, because the language does not distract them.

Ultimately, high-engage high school reading experiences involve texts that students appreciate because of their own personal experiences and the experiences of those around them.
This is not to say that students will not need to read texts that are not always suited to their personal interests and that are written in a modern, accessible style; but that they recognize that not all reading experiences are fraught with difficult vocabulary and allusions that they do not recognize or understand. These highly engaging reading experiences thus act as a gateway to other reading experiences as the reader builds confidence in his or her reading ability and sees reading as a tool with which they can make sense of the world around them.

While a gap exists within the literature on the issue of identity as it relates to reading engagement of high school students in the 21st century, this study follows a tradition of seminal research in the field of reading engagement. For instance, Anderson (1982) initially theorized that reading personally interesting, relevant, and important texts could have a strong influence on both recall and comprehension; he found that the extra attention given to the high-interest texts in the study may have influenced learner outcomes. In a similar way, Shirey and Reynolds’ (1988) widely-cited adult study on reading attention and interest found that research participants used fewer cognitive resources to read interesting texts and remembered the texts more clearly than less interesting texts in which more cognition was used. Since this study sought to understand the influence on students’ identities with regard to reading engagement amid their in-class reading experiences, it will add to the existing body of research in the field and illuminate the need for future research on the role of identity where it concerns reading engagement in the high school classroom.

**Definition of Terms**

In the present study, the following terms were used:
• Identity: the way an individual sees himself or herself in relation to any number of factors, both internal and external, including but not limited to gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture, religion, and membership within certain groups.
• High-achieving student: a student who is motivated to learn and who is actively engaged, enrolled, and successful in an Advanced Placement or Honors course.
• Engaged reading experience: a reading experience that matters to a student; an experience in the text to which he or she can relate or in which he or she can have an interest.
• In-class reading experience: a reading experience that is assigned, completed, or in any way developed within a high school class.

Theoretical Framework

This basic qualitative study of eight high-achieving students sought to understand how high-achieving students described the influences on their identities with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences. To this end, a review of Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) social identity theory is provided. Next, Phinney’s (1992) work on the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of ethnic identity will be explored.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory posits that a person’s membership within a particular group influences their identity as it relates to the individual’s sense of belonging within the group. Tajfel and Turner (1979) originally developed the theory in order to understand both how the psychological basis of discrimination operates between different groups and how specific social groups influence an individual’s identity. As Hogg, Terry, and White (1995) explained, “the basic idea is that a social category (e.g. nationality, political affiliation, sports team) into which one falls, and to which one feels one belongs, provides a definition of who one is in terms of the
defining characteristics of the category – a self definition that is part of the self-concept” (p. 259). In this way, an individual’s identity is impacted by their membership in a particular social group. An important premise of social identity theory is that an individual’s membership within a particular group provides the individual with a sense of pride and ultimately a sense of identity.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) determined that there are three processes involved in determining group membership. These processes include categorization, identification, and comparison. Categorization is a process of deciding which particular individuals, including one’s self, fit within particular groups based on “group-distinctive stereotypical and normative perceptions and actions” (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 260). Ultimately, this process “leads to in-group favoritism and discrimination against the out-group” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 39). This, as Tajfel and Turner (1979) explained, is a result of the “in-group’s bias” (p. 38) toward other groups. Identification refers to the ways in which someone takes on the perceived characteristics of a particular group. Social group comparison ensues because an individual’s self-esteem is enhanced due to his or her membership in a particular group, a group in which the members “define the individual as similar to or different from, as ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than, members of other groups” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40). In this way, social comparison contributes to one’s image in relation to those outside of their social group.

Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral Components of Identity

Three components of identity will inform the findings in this study. They include the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of identity described by Phinney (1992). Phinney’s (1992) model served, for the present study, as a reference for understanding how adolescents connect to identity. In this way, the Phinney model informs how the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of identity are used in this study. In Phinney’s model, the
affective component of ethnic identity refers to the strength of one’s “sense of belonging, commitment, and positive attitudes toward their ethnic groups” (Gudykunst, 2001, p. 106). The cognitive component refers to one’s willingness to understand, explore, or adopt the “traditions, history, and values” of one’s ethnic background (Gudykunst, 2001, p. 106). The behavioral component of ethnic identity, which Phinney regarded as “separate from the affective and cognitive components of ethnic identity” (Gaines et al., 2010, p. 13), is described as the measure of an individual’s willingness to participate in the cultural norms of their ethnicity (Gudykunst, 2001).

Phinney (1992) was concerned with measuring ethnic identity. Phinney’s work drew upon previous research in the field of ethnic identity, ethnic identity having been acknowledged as a type of social identity (Erikson, 1968; Marcia 1966; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Accordingly, ethnic identity includes components similar to those found within social identity, components such as “ethnic attitudes and a sense of belonging” (Roberts et al., 1999, p. 303). Though Phinney’s focal identity was ethnic identity, the focus of this study was reader identity where it concerns engagement.

**Application to the research.** As stated, in the present study, Phinney’s (1992) model served as a reference for understanding influences on adolescents’ identities where they concerned reading. The Phinney model, which, like the current research, focused on adolescents, was seen as useful in this study. That is, the Phinney model informed how the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of identity were used in the present research. To be clear, in her work, Phinney focused on measuring ethnic identity. However, the focus of the current study was on describing the influences on 'reader identity' as it related to reading engagement. That is, whether adolescents in high school are engaged, neutral, or not engaged with reading
experiences.

It is important to clarify that this study was not concerned with defining the identities of its participants but rather, understanding how the participants described the influences on their identities as readers. Therefore, the themes that emerged from this study did not define the participants’ identities. Rather, they explained influences on the participants’ identities where they concerned reading and reflected the most salient aspects of each component of identity as they related to ‘reader identity’. Finally, the present research did not look to measure identity as Phinney (1992) did, but rather, to describe influences on the components of identity as they were applied to the research.

To accomplish this, the current research considered the students’ descriptions of the influences on their identities where they concerned reading to better understand reading engagement amid their educational experiences. While these experiences were the primary area of focus for this study with regard to the influences on adolescents’ identities where they concerned reading engagement, it must be noted that this study also considered the independent reading practices and outside reading experiences that its participants described as they related to their level of reading engagement.

The focus of this study was on how the students described the factors in their lives that influenced their identities as they related to their engagement with reading. Therefore, this study did not have the same focus as Phinney (1992). Where Phinney was concerned with measuring ethnic identity, this study was concerned with understanding influences on ‘reader identity’. In this study, the influences were the concern because researchers and practitioners, to understand how to engage students with reading, can explore them. The affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of identity (Phinney, 1992) were employed to frame these influences and thus informed the emergent themes.
Outline of the Study

The current research took form of a basic qualitative study (Merriam, 2009). A basic qualitative study is one in which the researcher will “seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved” (Merriam 1998, p. 11). This study of eight high-achieving students was concerned with understanding how high-achieving students described the influences on their identities with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences.

To understand better the problem of practice, a review of the literature is presented in the second chapter. Within the literature review, there is a review of the research surrounding adolescent reading experiences both in school and recreationally. Next, a close look is taken at reading and the high school curriculum. Within this section, the current research deals with the issue of the literary canon, student choice, and independent reading practices. Since the current research is concerned with the issue of identity, the literature that has grown out of Phinney’s (1992) components model of identity is reviewed, followed by a review of Gee’s (2000) influential work on the factors that influence identity, followed by a review of student reading identity. Finally, research surrounding gender, socioeconomics, and race as they relate to the issue of identity is considered.

In the third chapter, the methodology behind the current research is explained. Included in this chapter is a description of the qualitative approach to inquiry and a review of basic qualitative research. This chapter also describes the research site, which is not named, and the researcher’s recruitment strategies. Ethical considerations are also weighed in this chapter. Finally, a review of the data collection procedures used in this study is reviewed before a description of how the data for this study were analyzed. The chapter also includes a description
of the researcher’s biases and concludes with an explanation of how human subjects were protected.

In the fourth chapter, the study’s findings are presented. First, a thorough description of the participants is provided before the data from this study are analyzed. The fifth chapter ties the findings from this study back to the literature, describes the study’s conclusions and their implications for practice, and offers recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The following literature review is organized thematically. The purpose of this literature review is to explore the link between students’ identities and reading engagement amid the students’ educational experiences. First, a review of the literature on the reading experiences of 21st-century adolescents is provided. The second topic of inquiry deals with the restrictions inherent in the traditional high school English Language Arts curriculum. Next, a discussion of identity is offered, followed by a discussion specific to reading identity. Finally, characteristics of identity focusing on gender, socioeconomics, and race are described in relation to reading engagement.

Adolescent Reading Experiences

Sometimes referred to as the “Millenial Generation” (Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009) or “postmodern adolescents” (Groenke & Youngquist, 2011), many of today’s high school adolescents have, for the first time in American history, grown up with modern technology their entire lives (Considine et al., 2009; Prensky, 2001). As such, today’s adolescents are spending less of their free time reading (Strommen & Mates, 2004) and more of it on the Internet, as well as on social media, gaming (Prensky, 2001), and with popular culture references and icons (Heron-Hruby, Hagwood, & Alvermann, 2008; Williams, 2008) outside of the traditional literary canon. In this way, adolescent culture (Alvermann, 2001) is undeniably different today than it once was; teenagers are turning to alternative mediums to get information quickly, and turning away from traditional forms of reading. Further, as Alvermann (2001) theorized, if students do not see what they are learning as relevant or important, they will not buy into it, and they will disengage from it. As Alvermann (2001) explained, simply because something is important to one group, does not mean it is important to another.
In school. It should come as no surprise that teachers have a major impact on the success of their students. For example, a recent study found that the correlation between teachers’ efficacy was “central to their success with students” (Cantrell, Almasi, Carter, & Rintamaa, 2013, p. 50). While strong teacher efficacy is an important component of students’ overall success in reading, many teachers may still find themselves struggling to adapt to today’s teenagers (Prensky, 2001). Referring to 21st-century adolescents as “digital natives” and many adults as “digital immigrants,” Prensky painted a disconcerting picture of a disconnect between teachers and students who simply are, metaphorically speaking, not speaking the same language: “our Digital Immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language” (Prensky, 2001, para. 9).

Considine, Horton, and Moorman (2009) posited that “today’s teenagers bring to school a rich and different set of literacy practices and background that is often unacknowledged or underused by educators” (p. 471). Honan (2012) argued that traditional approaches to literacy in the classroom are no longer suitable for many students. Honan’s small study of four classroom teachers investigated teacher beliefs about using digital technologies in the classroom and found that while incorporating technology into reading instruction can prove to help students, there is some dissent from teachers who do not feel comfortable enough with it yet to use it consistently. Alvermann (2002) agreed that the modern student’s literacy is decidedly different from that of the student of past generations, and thus the “need to address the implications of youth’s multiple literacies for classroom instruction” (p. 201) is critical. Alvermann, however, was cautious: “the extent to which the Internet, hypermedia, and other new technologies effectively support literacy teaching and learning in classrooms is unknown” (p. 199). Regardless, Alvermann would have
agreed that there should be a balance (Duke & Pearson, 2008) between the kinds of literacies students have and the kinds of literacies that are taught in schools, as well as a balance in how teachers approach incorporating multiple literacies in their classrooms.

Much research has gone into the ways that teachers can incorporate technology into the curriculum as a means of fostering engagement with a generation of “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001). One strategy, as recommended by Prensky (2001), is for teachers to seek ways to incorporate new media, such as digital “learning games” (Part II: But Does It Work section, para. 1) into the classroom.

Similarly, Moyer (2011) suggested the use of “digital literacies” (p. 253) in which students are allowed to use audiobooks and e-books in schools, positing that student use of a traditional text or digital book led to no difference in student comprehension; if students prefer to read from e-books or iPads, schools should let them. Moyer made a salient point in explaining that “educators, policymakers, and governmental agencies need to move beyond traditional genres” of literature and “account for the emergence of multimodal hybrid formats” (p. 255). Interestingly, Moyer did not address the financial costs of such advances in technology for schools: How could schools acquire, maintain, and replace such technology given their limited budgets? Ultimately, Moyer concluded that “the format” (p. 255) of reading does not matter, but he also cautioned that if the text is not interesting to students, they would not want to read it regardless of the format.

Prensky’s (2001) work on the need to examine traditional approaches to literacy was echoed by Young’s (2012) research, which explored traditional and media literacies in the 21st century. In Young’s (2012) study of two distinct out-of-school media literacy programs, The Philadelphia Student Union and Voices for Change, media literacy was shown to increase
motivation and engagement in the areas of reading and writing. Young’s results proved to be inspiring: students were both engaged with what they were learning and felt that what they were learning had value and relevance in their own 21st century lives. For Young, the importance of including media literacies in the landscape of literacy education did not mean abandoning traditional approaches to literacy, but rather, understanding the connections between the new and the old.

In recreation. An alarming number of high school students are disengaged from traditional reading in the classroom; thus, it is perhaps equally important to investigate the extent to which they are reading recreationally. The International Reading Association (2014) defined recreational reading as an “independent, self-selected reading of a continuous text for a wide range of personal and social purposes” (p. 2). Research showed that independent reading helps to improve reading skills (Block & Mangieri, 2002; Wilson & Casey, 2007). It is thus problematic that many teenagers often fail to read recreational texts in their free time (NEA, 2007) and struggle with reading difficult texts in class (Valdes, Bunch, Snow, & Lee, 2005). Strommen and Mates (2004) explained that, by and large, older children and teens are not spending their leisure time reading. Prensky (2001) described how teenagers spend “several hours a day, five days a week” playing video games; and teenagers have been doing it increasingly since the early seventies (Part II: Malleability section, para. 6). Prensky used this example to illustrate that teenage brains have adapted to their new environment because they have been “programming their brains to the speed, interactivity, and other factors in the games much as the boomer’s brains were programmed to accommodate television, and the literate man’s brains were reprogrammed to deal with the invention of the written language and reading” (Part II: Malleability section, para. 6).
It may come as no surprise that today’s teenagers are spending a great deal of their time using digital technologies (Alvermann, 2002; Prensky, 2001; Schmar-Dobler, 2003). Research shows that a great deal of adolescents’ time is spent on the Internet (Alvermann, 2002; Schmar-Dobler, 2003). For instance, Schmar-Dobler (2003) compared the skills students use while reading expository texts on the Internet versus the skills students use while reading traditional or print-texts and found that readers use the same strategies to read on the Internet that they would use for print. In fact, these kinds of reading practices are starting to become recognized by national studies on the subject (NEA, 2009).

Regardless, most teenagers probably do not use the Internet for expository-text reading, but for communication purposes through social media or Internet chat rooms (Alvermann, 2002). In fact, communication is seemingly one core way in which teenagers are exercising their literacy skills. It should come as no surprise to most parents and high school teachers that many teenagers spend a great deal of time text messaging. In light of this, researchers have worked to establish a link between texting and literacy (Kemp, 2011; Kemp & Bushnell, 2011), but the research is unclear. While some research indicated that there is no link between texting and reading (Kemp & Bushnell, 2011), other research indicated that there may be a connection (Kemp, 2011). In their case study, Kemp and Bushnell (2011) ultimately found that there was no evidence to support concerns that texting negatively impacts students’ literacy skills.

Outside of the realm of technology and digital learning, Williams (2008) investigated the impact of popular culture icons on teenagers and found promising results. Williams argued that popular culture often promotes literacy by example through movies, television, and videos, in which characters are often seen engaging in acts of reading (though they are not necessarily reading for school, or reading what is viewed as traditional texts by adults). Rather, they are
reading newspapers and real-world texts such as legal documents (Williams, 2008). To this end, Williams was quick to point out that society has a great deal of assumptions as to what counts as real reading, or real literacy. Williams posited that like their pop-culture icons, adolescents are also engaging in multiple, non-traditional literacies, and that perhaps high schools are lagging behind in their incorporation of these literacies in the curriculum.

The need to address modern adolescents’ multiple literacies looms large. The increase in technology in the world surrounding the classroom is evident, while the use of technology in the classroom often lags behind. Undoubtedly, more work needs to be done to advance the understanding of digital literacies in the classroom as a means of engaging students with reading. A need exists for balance between traditionally acceptable forms of reading and writing and modern applications.

**Reading and the High School Curriculum**

It is important to look beyond the influences of technology on 21st-century high school students and to examine the dichotomy between the kinds of texts that 21st-century teenagers are interested in reading and the traditional high school curriculum: What are students typically required to read in school and how do those requirements affect reading engagement? Many of the texts that students are assigned to read in school come from the Western Canon (Bloom, 1994). According to Bloom (1994), texts within the canon have artistic merit, have influenced Western culture, and are intentionally selective: “Nothing is so essential to the Western Canon as its principles of selectivity, which are elitist only to the extent that they are founded upon severely artistic criteria” (p. 21).

Ultimately, this interpretation of what students should read does not take the issue of reading engagement into account. As Wold, Elish-Piper, and Schultz (2010) described it, “the
traditional approach to teaching literature from the canon is fraught with problems” (p. 391) because students often do not relate to the texts. In fact, Wilson and Casey (2007) explained that even teachers often believe that school-assigned reading is “boring and not relevant to student’s past experiences and personal interests” (p. 44). Likewise, Prensky (2001) described the content of the current curriculum as being “from a different era” (Prensky, 2001, para. 20) and consequently one to which today’s students cannot relate. According to Hidi (2001), readers recognize whether something is interesting to them “instantaneously” (p. 200). If students can become disengaged from reading so quickly, it is important to explore the inclusion of texts that fall outside of the literary canon, in order to engage high school students in reading. For example, young adult literature and contemporary texts may be shown to have an important place in the 21st-century classroom (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). Ivey and Johnston (2013) noted that “contemporary selections in particular are inherently relevant in that, by design, they are responsive to the emotional and cultural challenges young people face in their everyday lives” (p. 257). Similarly, Kirkland (2011) described the need to recognize students’ own ideologies in reading. As Kirkland implied, there is a need for educators to situate reading as a personal and individual act, shaped by personal experiences and interests. Thus, students’ ideologies matter and should not be discarded in favor of prescribed, canonized curricula.

As Hidi (2001) explained, student interest plays an important role in reading engagement and comprehension. In fact, Hidi indicated that overall, interest “had a strong influence on the quality of learning” for most students (p. 196). In much the same way, Alvermann (2002) posited that “effective literacy instruction for adolescents must take into account a host of factors, including… students’ interests” (Alvermann, 2002, p. 203). Correspondingly, in their work on topic and situational interest, Flowerday, Schraw, and Stevens (2004) found that both
types of interest have a strong impact on both “learning and engagement” (p. 97). According to Flowerday et al. (2004), topic interest is defined as “personal interest” (p. 95) and situational interest is dependent on context and “relevance to the learning task” (p. 96). Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) did not go so far as to differentiate between types of interest in their study of an urban middle school and its students’ independent reading habits, but did find that, in general, teachers who provided the most interesting reading materials from a wide variety of sources ultimately helped to cultivate their students’ reading habits.

**Literary canon.** According to a review of the literature, a large focus in many English courses has been on the “Great Works of Literature” (p. 30), rather than the individual student, as the center of the curriculum, 1998, p. 30). In a seminal book on teaching English, Atwell (1998) called for less emphasis on the literature and more emphasis on students’ needs. Atwell’s view seemed to fall in line with the curricular orientation of humanism (Deng & Luke, 2008). According to Deng and Luke (2008), humanism provided a lens through which the curriculum is viewed so that school is seen as “a place for fostering personal development, self-actualization, innovation, and creativity, with disciplinarily knowledge relevant insofar as it mirrors a process of universal phylo and/or ontogenetic development” (p. 70). Such frameworks were in alignment with research in support of student choice in the curriculum, a curriculum that thus allows for students to become engaged with texts that are personally significant (Fisher, 2004; Flowerday et al., 2004). Atwell (1998) revolutionarily called for “a new set of priorities for the secondary English curriculum…” (p. 30). These priorities included “Pleasure. Fluency. Involvement. Insight. Appreciation. Initiative” (p. 30). Applied to curriculum design, Atwell’s view would place students at the center of curricular decisions, rather than an English faculty’s affinity for classic works.
Many classic and traditional works of literature fall into the umbrella term of the Western Canon. Bloom (1994) described the Western Canon of literature and defended its importance in the classroom: “Without the Canon, we cease to think” (p. 39). That is, the canon provides students with relevant, culturally important, and challenging materials from which to read. Having described the call for gender and ethnic considerations “admirable” (p. 39), Bloom and other traditionalists have argued for an increased focus on texts of aesthetic merit, texts that maintain a set of unchanging and universal truths, texts fixed in the liberal arts curricula; rather than for offering a multicultural curriculum simply for diversity’s sake. As Bloom described it, “The Western Canon, despite the limitless idealism of those who would open it up, exists precisely in order to impose limits, to set a standard of measurement that is anything but political or moral” (p. 33). In this way, the canon that Bloom has described is comprised of texts that have “stood the test of time,” as the saying goes, because of their literary and artistic merit. Accordingly, many schools have adopted the canon as a basis for their curricula.

In a study of the use of canonized literature in English classes, Pike (2002) found that the use of the literary canon in the classroom has value, but conceded that it can also “present a significant challenge” (p. 359) to students. Consequently, it can be understood that traditional, classic, or canonized texts should not be removed from the curriculum altogether. There is a need for balance between canonized texts and texts that students find personally significant. In taking the humanistic approach, one might see English class as an opportunity for students to uncover their own values and interests with regard to reading (Atwell, 1998; Skerrett & Bomer, 2011). Further, as Alvermann (2002) posited, “to be effective, such instruction must be embedded in the regular curriculum and make use of multiple forms of texts read for multiple purposes in a variety of learning situations” (p. 203). That is, a need exists to understand the
value adolescents place on multiple types of literacies, literacies that may not be in alignment with those that are traditionally valued in school (Alverman, 2002; Skerrett & Bomer, 2011). For example, in a study on urban adolescents’ out-of-school literacy practices, Skerrett and Bomer (2011) described the need for students’ out of school literacies – which included everything from social networking, graffiti, comics, and journal writing – to be valued by their teachers and incorporated into their learning, ultimately enriching students’ in-class literacy experiences.

**Choice.** Allowing students who might otherwise disengage from the typical high school English curriculum to engage in reading texts that are personally significant and meaningful to them may prove to be an important link between adolescents and reading engagement. In fact, research behind the importance of student choice is clear: students should have the opportunity to read interesting materials every day (Fisher, 2004; Flowerday et al., 2004; Ivey & Johnston, 2013). In the same way, Ediger (2009) recommended that students have the opportunity to choose texts that are interesting to them, and that there should be a large variety of text-types, from expository and narrative works, to poetry. In fact, the role of choice in the high school classroom, though not widely researched, has been shown to open students to reading as a means of learning whole-class skills and building capacity for reading (Morgan & Wagner, 2013). It is important to note, however, that in Morgan and Wagner’s study of a single high school classroom teacher, the role of choice did not mean removing texts from the curriculum, but continuing to “implement opportunities for choice…while also balancing more canonical texts” (Morgan & Wagner, 2013, p. 666). Regrettably, most reading that occurs in a school is devoid of choice and is in fact prescribed, required reading (Rycik & Irvin, 2001).

Luttrell and Parker (2001) described how students often come to school with a very
different set of values and beliefs about literacy than the values and beliefs provided in school. Often, students’ everyday literacies are “at odds with the demands of the school curriculum” (Luttrell & Parker, 2001, p. 245). As such, more needs to be done to connect the reading experiences students have at school with students’ personal values, cultures, and contexts – all of which may vary across students, classrooms, and schools. Echoing these sentiments, Ivey and Johnston (2013) described how “students’ choices were based on personal relevance, regardless of difficulty” (p. 272). In speaking about ability, Horowitz et al. (2005) posited that “teachers need to appreciate the range of normal differences that exists across children in classrooms even though they are all of the same age” (p. 98). That is, effective teaching means appreciating classroom diversity and building on students’ individual strengths to improve academic achievement.

Of course, in order for students to be able to choose to read material that is of interest to them, the materials must first be available (Rycik & Irvin, 2001). In addition, students must have time to read in school. As Krashen (2004) advocated, Free Voluntary Reading (FVR), or independent reading, is “one of the most powerful tools we have in the language education” and “the missing ingredient” in English classes (p. 1). Since the literature clearly illustrates the importance of student choice and interest when it comes to reading engagement, and since an appreciation for and understanding of diversity and individuality are core components of humanism as a curriculum orientation model (Deng & Luke, 2008), it is imperative that students are given some choice in what they read in school and the time to read their self-selected texts in school.

**Independent reading.** As Wilson and Casey (2007) eloquently stated, “one of the goals of literacy education should be to help students become lifelong learners” (p. 41). In order to
achieve this, however, schools need to look at the independent reading habits of adolescents. Independent reading, sometimes referred to as self-selected reading, or leisure time reading (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007), is of key importance when it comes to helping students in this pursuit (Walker, 2013). Unfortunately, as Walker (2013) has contended, “independent reading is often a vital missing ingredient in many school districts’ literacy curriculum” (p. 185). To this end, the research so far has been clear in that “there is a strong relationship between leisure reading and school achievement” (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007, p. 23). Yet in considering the decline of reading in general, Lenters (2006) offered that “schools directly contribute to this phenomenon, through devaluing adolescents’ out-of-school reading and by not stocking the kinds of texts students want to read” (p. 138). Similarly, Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) discussed the importance of independent reading as a strategy for engaging adolescent readers because it involves “choosing what one wants to read, and reading widely from a variety of sources – not just books” (p. 22).

In their study of adolescents in grades sixth and ninth, Strommen and Mates (2004) came to several interesting conclusions about independent teen reading: namely, that teachers should offer a wide-variety of interesting texts from which students can choose so that reading is not always seen as a school-related task, but an option for leisure time as well. Variety is important (Hastie & Sharplin, 2012). As Rycik and Irvin (2001) wrote, “adolescents deserve access to a wide variety of reading materials that they can and want to read” (p. 2). Similarly, Duke and Pearson (2008) posited that students should have an opportunity to read “a range of texts” (p. 108) throughout the curriculum in order to improve comprehension in a variety of text formats. The reasoning behind this sort of thinking is quite simple: students who have access to books, “lots of books” (Strommen & Mates, 2004, p. 197), are more likely to read in their free time in
addition to the reading they are required to do in school (Strommen & Mates, 2004). Moreover, as Wilson and Casey (2007) posited, “if children are enjoying reading, then they will read more” (p. 40). Further, Wilson and Casey posited that “older reluctant readers need to feel empowered and respected in their quest for literacy” (Wilson and Casey, 2007, p. 44). Yet in their study of independent reading patterns of secondary students, Wilson and Casey found that the amount of time in the school day that is spent on reading has actually declined in recent years. Worse yet, adolescents’ reading experiences both in and out of school become “increasingly negative” (Wilson & Casey, 2007, p. 45) as students get older. To this end, research has shown that students need choice when it comes to both in-school and out-of-school reading (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Lenters, 2006; Strommen & Mates, 2004; Wilson & Casey; 2007). Yet ultimately, the research is ambiguous: As Flowerday et al. (2004) wrote, the empirical research on choice and interest is contradictory because both factors “have different effects on learning and engagement” (p. 97) and that “choice” is not as strong a factor in student learning as interest is. Either way, the research calls to mind the relevance of students’ identities as they relate to their interests and how those identities might influence their text-selection.

The most successful independent reading programs are the ones in which students are able to relate to the texts that they are reading (Francois, 2013). In Francois’s (2013) study of a single secondary school serving students in grades seventh through twelfth, it was shown that a successful independent reading program included multiple factors such as time and classroom libraries, and that “teachers expected all students to read at home each day for 45-60 minutes” (p. 144). Reading at this school became a norm and an expectation. However, the most important element of their reading program was that students were able to relate to the texts that they were reading and that these reading experiences were valued by the school (Francois, 2013).
Francois (2013) demonstrated that students’ ability to relate to the texts that they are reading is paramount in the secondary education context. Likewise, according to Wold, Elish-Piper, and Schultz (2010), “literacy educators can make a difference by ensuring that their curriculum and instruction are relevant, meaningful, and accessible to their high school students” (p. 392). In order to accomplish this goal, Wold et al. (2010) suggested the use of “linked text sets” in which students choose texts (from a variety of sources in both print and non-print media) that align with the core text that may be one from the literary canon and that ultimately align with the core curriculum. By linking student-choice texts with those from the literary canon, teachers allow students to form connections between their own lives, their personal choice text, and the canon text (Wold, Elish-Piper, & Schultz, 2010). Recent research has advocated for the use of linked text sets as a tool for engagement while also supporting the standards addressed in the Common Core: “linked text sets address the Common Core’s expectation that students read multiple texts on similar topics or themes to develop their skills” (Elish-Piper, Wold, & Schwingendorf, 2014, p. 567). In their small study of one teacher who incorporated linked text sets in his unit on To Kill A Mockingbird, Elish-Piper, Wold, and Schwingendorf (2014) described how “engaging instruction is crucial for facilitating engaged reading” (p. 573). In this way, it is imperative that teachers look at balancing their curriculum with linked texts as a means of fostering engagement with the primary text and meeting the standards described by the Common Core.

Several factors must be carefully considered to advance the study of reading engagement. First, the research is clear: interest matters and plays a vital role in reading engagement. Students who are not interested in traditional texts from the literacy canon may become intrigued when offered high-interest options. Twenty-first century high school students have varied and
multiple literacies, which are often not associated with the traditional notion of what it means to be literate. Ultimately, it has become clear that more work needs to be done to infuse students’ multiple literacies with the kinds of reading they do in school.

Identity

This section deals with the issue of identity in several ways. First, the research that has grown out of Phinney’s (1992) components of identity is examined. Next, the influences on students’ reading identity are considered. A brief exploration of how the term “identity” is being used in this study will be explored in accordance with Gee’s (2000) important work on the subject. Finally, the influences on students’ reading identity are considered.

Components of identity. Phinney (1992) is well known for having developed the Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) to measure ethnic identity. Phinney is also known for suggesting that the affective and cognitive components influence ethnic identity. Accordingly, the affective component of ethnic identity refers to one’s “sense of belonging, commitment, and positive attitudes” (Gudykunst, 2001, p. 106); the cognitive component refers to one’s willingness to understand, explore, or adopt the “traditions, history, and values” of one’s ethnic background (Gudykunst, 2001, p. 106). However, Phinney’s (1992) original model evolved over time and has been applied in a variety of contexts. For example, as reported by Gaines et al. (2010), though Phinney and Ong (2007) “recommended keeping behavioral manifestations of ethnic identity separate from cognitive and affective components of ethnic identity,” more recent research has shown that the behavioral component of ethnic identity has equal salience (p. 13). In this way, the behavioral component of ethnic identity is defined as a measure of the individual’s willingness to participate in the cultural norms of the ethnicity (Gudykunst, 2001). According to Gaines et al. (2010), the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of identity
“bear a strong resemblance to the three dimensions (i.e. Ethnic Behaviors, Search, and Affirmation) that appeared in the earliest version of the MEIM” (p. 13). Consequently, recent research has revealed a three-factory structure of Phinney’s (1992) model in which the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components have shown to influence ethnic identity (Gaines et al., 2010; Gudykunst, 2001).

**Nature, institution, discourse, and affinity factors.** Gee defines the term “identity” in reference to “a certain ‘kind of person,’ in a given context” (p. 99). Gee’s (2000) concept of identity is often cited within the existing literature on literacy (Alvermann, 2001; Bartlett, 2005; Gee, 2000; Lee & Chern 2011). To better understand the influence of a variety of factors that influence identity, Gee identified four factors, which include nature, institution, discourse, and affinity. According to Gee, a person’s natural identity generally includes recognizable characteristics of the person, such as gender or race. Gee broadly described these and other identifiable characteristics as coming from a variety of natural forces.

Next, Gee described institutional identity. These identities exist as a direct result of the authorities that grant them within larger institutions. To make this point, Gee used the example of himself as a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In this case, the term “professor” is an example of a label that Gee will hold as long as the University of Wisconsin-Madison employs him. The University, in this case, is the institution. Gee extended this definition to labels that are often given to children, such as children who have ADHD. Gee argued that institutions in the medical field ultimately label this child and that because of these institutions and this label, the child will be identified as a child with ADHD. In this way, institutional identity requires formal authorization and acceptance by a larger institution.

Thirdly, Gee (2000) described discursive identity. It is through dialogue and discourse
with others that this identity is formed. This type of identity depends largely on what Gee described as “recognition” (p. 103). In this way, other, “rational individuals” (p. 103) recognize this type of identity based upon their interactions with a person. Gee used the example of someone being identified as “charismatic” (p. 103). In Gee’s example, someone is only identified as “charismatic” because of his or her interactions with other people who recognize particular traits about that person as relating to charisma.

Finally, Gee (2000) described affinity-identity. Affinity-identity is a process in which people from either similar or different backgrounds share in a common experience. Gee describes these experiences as “a set of distinctive practices” (p. 105) that influences people who may otherwise have little in common. Gee’s example invokes Star Trek. People from a wide-range of backgrounds, ages, ethnicities, and so on may share an affinitive interest in this particular phenomenon of popular culture. As such, these people have an identity that is formed based on participation in this cultural experience or interest (Gee, 2000).

Gee (2000) argued that these four factors are not self-contained; rather, they are complex and interrelated. That is, individual identities may be formed based on more than one identity component, and might even be constructed by all four components. To illustrate this, Gee (2000) used the “label” of “African American” (p. 108). For many, the label African American is part of a natural identity. For others, the label African American may also include other factors of identity, such as discourse identity, which recognizes the discourse that exists between people, either positive or negative. Likewise, a person may ascribe to being African American based on an affinity identity because of their general interest and/or participation in African American experiences, merchandise, or holidays (Gee, 2000). Additionally, a person’s identity as an African American may be seen as an institutional identity given by an institution of power. Gee
used the example of “Jim Crow” in explaining this component: during the early to middle 20th century, “traditions and laws defined a specific social position for African Americans that constructed an identity” (p. 108).

Each component of identity, according to Gee (2000), is simply a way to “focus our attention on different aspects of how identities are formed and sustained” (p. 101). Gee (2000) cautioned, however, that for some individuals in particular contexts, certain components of identity may be more “predominant” (p. 101). Often, an individual’s predominant identities are “recognized” by the individual and by the outside world (Gee, 2000, p. 101). The issue that Gee raised is how others see human beings and how they see themselves in particular contexts.

Influences on student reading identity. As Ryan and Anstey (2003) declared, “reading does not occur in a vacuum” (p. 11). Instead, “all readers have an identity which is derived from their life experiences and which provides them with resources as a reader” (Ryan & Anstey, 2003, p. 11). In this way, students’ identities have strong implications for understanding reading engagement. In fact, the role of identity when it comes to reading is widely discussed within the existing literature (Hall, 2012; Moje & Luke, 2009). According to Hall (2012), “the term reading identity refers to how capable individuals believe they are in comprehending texts, the value they place on reading, and their understandings of what it means to be a particular type of reader within a given context” (p. 369).

Reading identities can be shaped by a number of factors. Much of the literature surrounding identity can be grouped into three general categories including gender, socioeconomics, and race. As such, factors surrounding gender, socioeconomics, and race also have been shown to impact students’ identities as readers. Often referred to as the literacy achievement gap, this “disparity in academic performance between different groups” (Teale,
Paciga, & Hoffman, 2007, p. 344) often has strong implications for research in the area of reading and identity. As Skerrett (2012) declared, “adolescents who are negotiating salient elements of identity such as social class, race, and gender often select texts that highlight these issues” (p. 64). Therefore, it is important to understand how teachers can use texts that speak to adolescents’ interests and help foster their students’ emerging identities.

As Skerrett (2012) declared, “identities develop over time, are influenced by numerous social and cultural experiences, and are expressed according to social and cultural norms” (p. 63). While the act of reading within school has an impact on the formation of individual student identities, these experiences work alongside various other influences to form individual student identities. For example, after investigating the role of culture in identity formation, Bartlett (2005) described the relevance of “cultural artefacts” (p. 1). Bartlett defined cultural artefacts as “symbols, objects, narratives, or images inscribed by the collective attribution of meaning” (p. 3). In other words, cultural artefacts help members of a particular social context shape their identities from shared understandings. Drawing on a range of identity theorists, Bartlett described “cultural artefacts” as “essential to identity work” (p. 3).

Bartlett’s framework is similar to that of other researchers who described the social composition of identity formation. For example, Luttrell and Parker (2001) declared that “student identities form as a result of day-to-day activities undertaken in the name of a figured world” (p. 239). According to Luttrell and Parker (2001), a figured world is a concept that “is not abstract, but peopled, providing a context for action” (p. 239). In other words, a figured world is a world made up of experiences as they relate to meaning. For some students, the classroom represents formal learning – a figured world in which they may not meet success because they may “find their reading and writing passions at odds with the demands of the
School curriculum” (Luttrell & Parker, 2001, p. 245). Within the scope of the current inquiry, the context is the high school classroom and how students’ identities are formed by a variety of personal factors, including gender, socioeconomics, and race.

**Texts.** Texts play an important role in the formation of students’ identities (Hagwood, 2002; Norton, 2010). For example, Norton (2010) relayed the complex nature of how texts help shape identities through engagement in English-language classrooms in Canada, Pakistan, and Uganda. Norton described how the research participants, Archie comic book readers, often ascribed “real reading” (p. 4) to the kind of reading that is done in school because it was “reading that the teacher prescribed; it was ‘educational’; it was ‘challenging’ but it was seldom ‘fun’” (p. 4) as compared to reading Archie comic books. While the argument will not be made that students should be allowed to read solely for fun in school, much can be gleaned from the understanding of how students view their reading habits and how those reading habits and text preferences help shape their identities.

One possible explanation offered by Norton (2010) indicates that the concept of power becomes important to students’ identities. According to Norton, power became important to students’ identities because students are in a position of power when they can construct meaning from a text and are in a position of “powerlessness” when the texts are “teacher controlled” (p. 8). Similarly, Richardson and Eccles (2007) described the importance of individual reading and its “impact on school achievement” (p. 342). Richardson and Eccles (2007) drew upon qualitative data from the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study (MADICS), which yielded important results about the voluntary reading practices of eleventh and twelfth grade African American and European American readers, as well as post-high school students of one year. Ultimately, Richardson and Eccles (2007) found that the voluntary practices of the
participants who read books that interested them, impacted identity formation, in part because voluntary reading often “involves our own interest, as fleeting as that may be” (p. 342).

It is also significant to understand that students’ literary identities are becoming increasingly complex as they continue to spend “more time reading and writing online than they do in the classroom” (Williams, 2008). As this generation of students becomes increasingly invested in digital literacies, their identities begin to shift. Prensky (2001) has referred to this population of adolescents as “digital natives” because they have grown up in a digital world. As such, the need to understand the ever-changing landscape of literacy practices that our students engage in and how these practices shape their identities as readers is essential.

In fact, even the word “text” has taken on a variety of meanings (Heron-Hruby et al., 2008). Today, the word “text” may refer to the multiple ways in which students “convey and interpret meaning” (Heron-Hruby et al., 2008, p. 313). That is, “text” no longer refers only to the traditional literacy canon taught in schools; it can refer to multiple kinds literacies, including music, graphics, visual images, popular culture texts, and so on (Heron-Hruby et al., 2008). In essence, students view texts in many more ways than their teachers probably do. Yet, one should not assume that students are inept at reading traditional forms of literature, and in fact, they at times prefer it. For example, Groenke and Youngquist’s (2011) study of a class that was reading the book Monster by Walter Dean Meyers, is a prime example of how students can sometimes crave traditional text structure. As a postmodern text, Monster is not told in a traditional, linear way (Groekne & Youngquist, 2011). Because of their lack of familiarity with the book’s structure, students in Groenke and Youngquist’s study initially struggled with the book and found it difficult to comprehend. Eventually, with the support of their teachers, students began to appreciate the book’s core themes. From this, one may infer that it is not always the type of
text that matters, but the content of the work being studied.

Other efforts to increase student interest and engagement have sought out the use of popular culture icons. Heron-Hruby et al. (2008) suggested that more teachers should consider the use of popular-culture texts in the classroom as an opportunity for student-engagement, and that students’ interests should have a place in the curriculum. This, too, supports Williams (2008) work on the positive effects of literacy in popular culture.

In a study of a three-week summer camp program for urban high school students in which four college professors incorporated technology into classroom lessons and used graphic novels as a high-interest text to “build upon students’ interest in popular culture with traditional academic tasks,” Lawrence, McNeal, and Yildiz (2009) found that the use of such texts was effective. While the students had limited – though varying – experiences with academic uses for technology such as Microsoft Word or PowerPoint, the students still completed the program successfully in part because the curriculum tied into their own interests. In the end, the researchers concluded that the use of technology in the program “did little to increase students’ ability and willingness to critique the texts” (p. 493) in comparison to the effects the texts themselves had.

Another area in the discussion of texts that deserves consideration is the inclusion of young adult literature within the classroom as a viable genre from which students can learn (Coats, 2011; Hateley, 2013; Ivey & Johnston, 2013). As Ivey and Johnston (2013) declared, there is potential for young adult literature to be seen as “a useful tool for engaged reading among adolescents” (p. 257). Likewise, Coats (2011) made the case for including young adult literature within secondary contexts like middle and high schools. According to Coats (2011), a need exists to study young adult literature as a viable genre from which students can learn and
grow as readers in secondary classrooms. Hateley (2013) defended the inclusion of young adult literature in classrooms and argued that young adult literature is to adolescents what “the canon is to reading communities who occupy or desire social authority” (p. 2013). That is, both arenas are culturally important to the groups in which they appeal. More importantly, argued Hateley, the inclusion of these texts ultimately validates the reading experiences of young adults.

**Competence.** The concept of identity can be linked to students and their reading experiences in the classroom. Irwin (2003) relayed the importance of understanding reading as an influence on identity construction. In describing personal construct psychology, Irwin explained that “so much of the identity of learners develops from perceived competence in reading” (p. 31). Reading and identity, according to Irwin, are interwoven and influence the degree to which a student will engage in independent reading. Moreover, individual students may be recognized as struggling or disengaged readers in the classroom context and resign themselves to their attributed identities. For example, Hall (2012) described how “students’ reading identities are created over time based on their experiences in school and their understandings of the different identities available to them” (p. 369). In this way, perceived ability based on experience helps to shape students’ identities within the classroom, and by extension, perceived reader-ability helps to shape students’ reading identities.

**Culture.** The concept of culture and its influence on identity is the focus of Alvermann’s (2001) important work on adolescence and reading. Alvermann (2001) described culture as “the routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that people produce, make meaning of, and share as they work communally with others in their group” (p. 678). In this way, Alvermann related how school culture can inform identity; that is, students are often assigned labels to which they ultimately live up to. Bartlett (2005) referred to these labels, such as “slow reader” (p. 3), as a
type of “cultural artifact” (p. 3) that serves to shape students identities. As Alvermann (2001) asserted, “the possibility that as a culture we are making struggling readers out of some adolescents who for any number of reasons have turned their backs on a version of literacy called school literacy is a sobering thought” (p. 679). Further, it is essential to understand the consequences of these practices, because “students who identify as poor readers may withdraw from reading in school not because they want to but because their prior experiences suggest they will not succeed or make improvements” (Hall, 2012, p. 269). To remedy this, Alvermann (2001) implied that teachers ought to resist labeling students based on ability and instead provide them with opportunities to engage with texts in a variety of ways, including allowing students to make connections with texts that students find accessible, because “there are many different ways of being a reader” (p. 688). Alvermann (2001) ultimately concluded that self-selected reading can help to increase engagement and motivation in reading, which will ultimately improve the reading abilities of most students.

Reading identities can be shaped by a number of other factors as well. Factors surrounding gender, socioeconomic, and race also have been shown to impact students’ identities as readers. Often referred to as the literacy achievement gap, the “disparity in academic performance between different groups” (Teale et al., 2007, p. 344) often has strong implications for research in the area of reading and identity. For instance, research has shown that the use of texts that students can relate to or identify with has had positive effects on engagement. Additionally, allowing students to read texts of their own choosing may prove to be constructive as well. As Skerrett (2012) declared, “adolescents who are negotiating salient elements of identity such as social class, race, and gender often select texts that highlight these issues” (p. 64). Therefore, it is important to understand how teachers can use texts that speak to
adolescents’ interests and help foster their emerging identities.

**Teachers.** Teachers play an important role in fostering their students’ identities. For example, Skerrett (2012) declared that “educators…have sometimes positioned youth to claim strong literate identities in school” (p. 64). In a single case study, Rex (2001) detailed how an adolescent student named Kora transformed her identity with the support of a veteran teacher whose classroom practices – such as engaging in discussions with students by providing them with the background to read deeply and to engage critically in classroom discussions – allowed for discourses that impacted the students’ reading identity. In the study, Rex (2001) focused on a student who entered a class for “gifted and talented” students, or GATE, from a general education classroom. As Rex (2001) described it, “teachers play a pivotal role in mediating which way of reading and of being a reader will be privileged in each classroom and, thus, across classrooms and students’ schooling experiences” (p. 292). In this particular context, the teacher provided students with the opportunities to free themselves of their general education labels and join the membership of GATE by participating in classroom discourses, thus transforming how they thought about themselves as readers. The problem of labeling students is also described in Alvermann’s (2001) research, where a discussion of how “struggling readers” begin to identify themselves according to how they are labeled in schools based on assessment of their reading ability is presented. In both contexts, labels served as a destructive force that caused students to identify with the opinions that their teachers had of their reading ability.

With regard to curriculum, however, research out of Australia has shown that English teachers who have had some choice in what they teach generally select texts based on three principles, including “school context, and teachers’ beliefs” (Hastie & Sharplin, 2012, p. 41). Hastie and Sharplin’s study of the perspectives of English teachers when it comes to choosing
texts for students showed that teachers “value engagement,” but were also concerned with choosing “accessible texts for students of varying abilities” (p. 41). Another interesting finding from Hastie and Sharplin’s study was that the teachers’ own “passion and enthusiasm for a text is transmitted to students” with positive results (p. 42). While the results of Hastie and Sharplin’s study were inspiring, the harsh reality is that teacher autonomy continues to be limited due to mandates that restrict the choices teachers can make in selecting curriculum. This phenomenon, known as “standardizing practices” (Heron-Hruby et al., 2008, p. 312), causes many teachers to struggle with ways to provide students with engaging texts that “promote personal fulfillment in conjunction with subject mastery” (Heron-Hruby et al., 2008, p. 313).

This section explored identity. It began with a review of the research that has grown out of Phinney’s (1992) components of identity, which supported the inclusion of the behavioral component. Then, a brief exploration of Gee’s (2000) work in the field of identity was provided, including how the term identity is being used in this study. Finally, the influences on students’ reading identity were considered including competence, culture, teachers, and curriculum.

Finally, the influences on students’ reading identity were considered.

**Gender, Socioeconomics, and Race**

Much of the literature surveyed surrounding issues of gender, socioeconomics, and race and their impact on reading, concerns student achievement, as opposed to student identity. A gap exists in the literature with regard to how identity is impacted by each of these factors as they relate to reading at the high school level. However, in the review of the literature that follows, what is known about the impact of gender, socioeconomics, and race as they relate to reading engagement is described.

**Gender.** One of the key areas of focus throughout the literature concerning reading
engagement is that of gender identity. Much of the relevant research has focused on what is often referred to as the gender achievement gap; that is, the gap between achievement in reading between males and females, with females almost always outperforming their male counterparts. For example, reading assessments conducted by PISA, or the Program for International Student Assessment, have shown that when it comes to reading, gender differences remain an issue across continents (Brozo et al., 2014). Yet the research on gender identity and reading engagement is problematic because “very little is actually known about the affects of gender on reading, and we are still far from understanding if, how, or under what circumstances gender affects the literary processing of different readers” (Bortolussi, Dixon, & Sopčák, 2010, p. 300). Still, with this in mind, it is important to continue to investigate the role of gender identity in reading.

As Ainley, Hillman, and Hidi (2002) described it, there are, generally speaking, obvious differences in interest between the majority of males and females. For instance, “boys prefer adventure, sports, science, and information, while girls prefer mystery and romance” (Ainley, Hillman, & Hidi, 2002, p. 413). To investigate how gender played a role in interest in literary texts, Ainley et al. (2002) used a computer program to assess the emotions and text-comprehension of 86 tenth grade students in Australia. Students read passages of texts from the standard English curriculum, though the passages were not texts students had yet read in class. The test helped to measure the individual and topic interests of students. Ultimately, “girls responded with higher levels of topic interest to all of the text topics” (Ainley et al., 2002, p. 424). The study found that there were topics that would interest boys, and that the gender of the protagonist did not seem to make a difference (Ainley et al., 2002). However, research by Bortolussi, Dixon and Sopčák (2010) showed that while matching the gender of the reader to a
text’s protagonist did not matter, both “male and female readers showed a preference for texts with a male protagonist” (Bortolussi et al., 2010, p. 312). The researchers proposed a range of possibilities that might help to explain the results of their study, including a cultural “gender schema” (p. 313) that says that women and men have learned to accept males as “more situationally justified than women” (p. 313). It is thus implied that both males and females have been socialized to accept and see the justifications of the actions of a male protagonist more than the actions of a female protagonist.

The gender gap. A persistent thread throughout the literature on gender and reading is that of the gender gap. The gender gap refers to the discrepancy between boy and girl readers and their level of reading achievement (Brozo et al., 2014; Hunter, Gambell, & Randhawa, 2005; Rycik, 2008). Research has shown that boys have fallen behind when it comes to reading (Atkinson, 2009; Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Brozo, Shiel, & Topping, 2007; Prado & Plourde, 2011). Further, Baker and Wigfield’s (1999) study on fifth and sixth grade students showed that girls generally have better attitudes about reading than boys do, and that as a result, they are more motivated to read than boys. The amount of time spent reading has also been considered as a potential reason for the disparity between the genders. As Coles and Hall (2002) put it: “boys read less than girls” (p. 100). Plus, when boys do read, they “read less fiction than girls do at all ages” (Coles & Hall, 2002, p. 105).

In a study of the gender gap in fiction reading in America, Tepper (2000) stated that “reading is a past time that is closely linked to gender” (p. 255). Further, as Tepper declared, “not only do men and women have different preferences for the types of books they read, but women, on average, read a greater variety of books and spend more time reading than men” (p. 255). Tepper (2000) tested three hypotheses related to women and fiction, including the role of
childhood socialization, the idea that women are “simply better (more proficient) readers,” and whether or not women “read more because they have more free time to read” (p. 257). In the end, Tepper found support for the role of childhood socialization as a key factor in determining how often and how well a person reads fiction, but little support for the idea that women are simply naturally better readers than men. Tepper (2000) also found “modest support for the hypothesis that women read more because, by comparison, fewer work full-time in the labor force” (p. 272); the reading gap between men and women was considerably less when the amount of free time that men and women have outside of work was controlled. Ultimately, Tepper (2000) found that the stronger factors in determining the cause of the fiction reading gap were “gender stereotypes and childhood socialization” (p. 272).

**Masculine identities and reading.** Due to the gender gap having been widely documented in the research (Brozo et al., 2014; Connell, 1996; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995; Slavin, Cheung, Groff, & Lake, 2008), it seems imperative to take a closer look at why so many males seem more disconnected from reading than females. When it comes to issues of literacy, it is important to research gender identity as a social construction because it helps educators better understand how boys’ beliefs about masculinity affect their views of reading (Godley, 2006). According to Smith (1995), gender identity is influenced by many factors including family and school. For example, in American culture, boys are expected to conform to certain gender norms (Godley, 2006; Hall & Piazza, 2008; Irwin, 2003; McKenna et al., 1995). Children ultimately follow perceived socially accepted norms of how to act that are laid out by their parents or other adults and social experiences (Irwin, 2003). For instance, boys have been taught through socialization to withhold their emotions and to inhibit emotion in the classroom (Hall & Piazza, 2008; Smith, 1995). Godley (2006) described how boy behavior that can be
interpreted as feminine is a type of “border crossing” in that it defies cultural expectation and norms (p. 4). In order to avoid border crossing, many boys remain steadfast in acceptable, masculine behaviors within the classroom out of a “fear of femininity” (Smith, 1995, p. 56) and of the social repercussions of breaking gender barriers. In the classroom, for example, rather than embrace cooperation like many girls do, most boys refute it because they are typically competitive by nature and tend to prefer to either work alone or with the teacher directly (Daniels, Creese, Hey, Leonard, & Smith, 2001; Smith, 1995). Moreover, many schools emphasize competition amongst students, which helps to affirm and reinforce the competitive nature of boys in the classroom (Smith, 1995). Godley’s (2006) study examined literacy practices in an urban, high school English classroom and paid specific attention to gender identity norms that were promoted both intrinsically and extrinsically throughout the course, because boys often adhere to imposed gender norms – such as the concept of masculinity and what it means to be a man or manly – throughout their educational experiences (Godley, 2006; Daniels et al., 2001).

Research showed that male students often work to reaffirm their masculine identities (Godley, 2006; Smith, 1995). For example, in Hall and Piazza’s (2008) research, it was determined that boys interpret what they are reading and connect it to their view of what it means to be masculine. Again, this is because boys “have internalized…behaviors as the correct way to engage with texts in school” (Hall & Piazza, 2008, p. 33). For example, boys are not allowed to “acknowledge hurt” in American school systems (Smith, 1995, p. 60). Therefore, boys are often fearful of how their reactions and behaviors to a given text will be received by other members of the class.

The choice of text that a student is required to read in class can also affect their
engagement where identity is concerned. For example, if the text is not interpreted as sufficiently masculine, male readers simply will not sustain a vested interest in it. Sprague and Keeling (2000) described how “it is considered acceptable for girls to like ‘boys’ books,” while “it is somehow shameful for boys to reciprocate” (p. 56). As a consequence, boys do not connect with texts that do not meet their expectations of masculinity (Hall & Piazza, 2008). This point is illustrated in Gouws’ (2009) research on service-oriented learning. Gouws (2009) defined service learning as learning by means of classroom instruction combined with community-service opportunities: the students use what they have learned in the classroom to enhance their community in some way. Moreover, Gouws argued that opportunities for students to form connections with what they are reading are often missed within the classroom, but instead occur outside of the traditional classroom-learning environment with other kinds of real-world (Guthrie & Cox, 2001) literacies. That is, Gouws argued that the experiences that males have outside of the classroom are often discounted by the academic world and consequently not applied to the learning that is expected to take place in the classroom. Correspondingly, Guthrie and Cox (2001) asserted that “real-world interaction” (p. 290) is a key element of reading instruction for most students because “it evokes intrinsically motivated behaviors” (p. 291). Further, boys are not only expected to avoid femininity, but are also expected to demonstrate a level of “toughness” (Smith, 1995, p. 60).

Undoubtedly, research has shown that gender identity plays a pivotal role in reading engagement in the classroom. Many of the factors that influence gender identity stem from cultural and social constructs that exist both within and outside of school. While it is important to lay the groundwork to break some of these barriers, it is also important for teachers to engage students with reading while they are still in school. One important way that teachers can help
students to become engaged readers is to select texts that they might be interested in or at least let students choose their own texts. In addition, teachers should have a better understanding of how gender identity affects learner behaviors, in order to reach students who might otherwise be disengaged.

**Socioeconomics.** A survey of the relevant literature shows that there has been little emphasis placed on reading engagement with regard to an adolescent’s socioeconomic status, or SES, while a fair amount of research on the subject points to socioeconomics as a contributing factor in reading achievement. What is more, most research on the subject seems to center on the role of socioeconomics and reading achievement from early childhood to primary-grade level students (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; D’Anguilli, Siegel, & Maggi, 2004; Yang-Hansen, 2008) with fewer studies in the field focused on secondary level students. Thus, a gap exists in the literature with regard to how identity is impacted by socioeconomics with regard to literacy.

Strickland and Alvermann (2004) described how “family income and reading achievement are closely linked” (p. 6); students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds are “likely to become poorer readers than children from more affluent communities” (p. 7). Part of the problem is that students who come from less affluent communities have less access to books. In their work comparing Beverly Hills with Compton and Watts, Smith, Constantino, and Krashen (1997) described the astonishing differences in students’ access to books:

The differences in access to books among these communities is astounding. We expected to find that children in more affluent communities have more books in the home, but the degree of the difference was far beyond our expectations. Unfortunately, school does not help level the playing field. In fact, school makes things even more unequal; less affluent children have fewer books in their classroom libraries and school libraries. The
community also fails these children: less affluent children have access to fewer books in their public libraries. Thus, those who have more access to books from one source appear to have more access from all sources. (p. 4).

To address issues such as this, some researchers have looked specifically at school funding (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Strickland & Alvermann, 2004). As Darling-Hammond (2010) concluded, in the United States, there is more inequity than in many other industrialized nations in terms of funding. For instance, New Jersey spent close to $13,000 per student in 2004, while Utah only spent about $5,000. The problem goes beyond state-to-state discrepancies to discrepancies within the states themselves: most urban communities spend far less than their neighboring suburban towns (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

**Social class.** The problem extends beyond funding to the level of rigor and student expectations of knowledge provided in particular contexts, specifically in the sphere of social class. For example, in Anyon’s (1980) seminal work on social class and learning, social class is described as “a series of relationships to several aspects of the process in society by which goods, services, and culture are produced” (p. 4). Further, Anyon declared, “while one’s occupational status and income contribute to one’s social class, they do not define it” (p. 4). Anyon argued that to a large extent, one’s sense of ownership, or power, contributes to one’s social class. Anyon described the similarities and differences among school types, from working class schools, middle class schools, affluent professional schools, and executive elite schools. Ultimately, Anyon found “profound differences in the curriculum and the curriculum-in-use” in the schools (p. 31). For example, in working class schools, the focus was on “mechanical behaviors” (p. 32), while in middle class schools, students were taught how to “unify around common interests they will have as wage earners in a system where middle class jobs are
becoming increasingly like industrial and clerical jobs – mechanical and rote” (p. 33). There was also a heavy reliance on information gleaned from reading textbooks and understanding facts as they are stated, without deep analysis (Anyon, 1980). Anyon noted observing a teacher who, using an outdated English Language Arts textbook, responded to a student’s question about whether the answers were in the book: “Of course it’s in the book. Did I ever give you anything that’s not in the book?” (p. 13). Adding to this discussion is Teale, Paciga, and Hoffman’s (2007) work, in which it was noted that the literacy achievement gap has lead to a curriculum gap: many urban schools in predominantly low socioeconomic communities have lost focus in “comprehension instruction, instruction focused on developing children’s knowledge of the world in general and of core concepts in content domains like science and social studies, and writing instruction” (p. 345). This is juxtaposed with affluent professional schools, where the focus was on “individual development as a primary goal of education” (Anyon, 1980, p. 35), and the executive elite school where “students were given analytical and unsentimental insight into the system” (Anyon, 1980, p. 37). In contrasting these school types, it is easy to see how social class and socioeconomics can play a role in students’ educational experiences.

It is important to note, however, that in addition to issues surrounding equal access to education, students in urban schools also struggle to overcome what they see as negative stigmatization (Gosine & Islam, 2014). In their study of a low-income, urban high school in Ontario, Gosine and Islam (2014) contrasted the long-held negative perceptions of low socioeconomic urban communities to shed light on the strengths of such environments. As Gosine and Islam (2014) described it:

With its individualist emphasis and narrow definition of success, mainstream Canadian schools often fail to highlight and cultivate the strengths and assets that marginalized
One example of a strength was a “strong sense of community” in which the high school participants felt a great deal of pride. Gosine and Islam (2014) also noted the community’s ability to “embrace new people and be open to different cultures” (p. 43). Though the participants were aware of the violent realities of their community, they also felt that their community had been stigmatized by its negative portrayal in the media.

**Home life.** The level of education attainment of a student’s parent has been shown to have an enormous effect on the student’s exposure to reading (Griswold, McDonnell, & Wright, 2005). However, research on the role of family income is not consistent. For example, while Baker and Wigfield (1999), who studied the motivational factors related to student achievement, found that reading motivation is not affected by family income, Flowers and Flowers (2008) found that income has been shown to have a positive effect on a student’s reading achievement. To prove this, Flowers and Flowers (2008) analyzed data on African American high school students from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 and found that “reading achievement was significantly affected by family income, the amount of time spent on homework, and parent’s expectations of their child” (p. 160). In their study of fifth and sixth grade students, Baker and Wigfield (1999) posited that family interactions are an important element in reading motivation, but that as students get older, “they have fewer opportunities to interact with family and friends around reading” (p. 473).

**Race.** Much has been written about the need to better understand the complex nature of race as it relates to identity (Scott, 2003). In school contexts, some work has been done to better understand ethnic identity and attitudes about school. For instance, Booth, Curran, Frey, and Bartimole (2014) conducted a mixed methods study to explore the correlations among ethnic
identity, school attitudes, and school climate; and found that African American and Hispanic students had a strong identification with their respective ethnic identities. However, much of the current research on racial identity and reading achievement focuses specifically on the achievement gap that exists between African American and European American students (Flowers & Flowers, 2008). Some work has been done to measure the progress of Latino students and African American students, on the one hand, in relationship with European American and Asian American students, on the other, with regard to academic achievement in school (Turner, 2010), but the findings are often general and almost always conclude that European American and Asian students typically outperform their African American and Latino counterparts (Turner, 2010). Most often, these differences are attributed to socioeconomics (Turner, 2010).

Still, a need exists for further exploration of a wide-range of racial identities as they relate to educational progress. As Au and Raphael (2000) wrote, “historically, schools have been unsuccessful in bridging students of diverse backgrounds to the same levels of literacy achievement as their mainstream peers, resulting in a literacy achievement gap” (p. 173). As Pang, Han, and Pang (2011) described it, “although the achievement gap is one of the most important issues in the U.S. education, the academic needs of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students are frequently overlooked” (p. 378). What is more, “Whiteness” as a category often seems to be overlooked entirely (Dutro, Kazemi, Balf, & Lin, 2008). As Dyer (2005) wrote in an important chapter on the role of Whiteness and race in literary research, “Indeed, to say that one is interested in race has come to mean that one is interested in any racial imagery other than that of white people” (p. 9). Further, Flowers and Flowers (2008) posited that while there is a great deal of research – such as Baker and Wigfield’s (1999) study – on the
achievement gap between African American and European American students at the elementary level, there is an insufficient amount of research on “the extent to which home and student engagement activities affect the reading achievement of African American high school students, especially those who attend urban school systems” (p. 156). It is clear that a closer look at how racial identity plays a role in students’ engagement at the secondary level is warranted.

**Testing.** The achievement gap Au and Raphael (2000) have described is often determined by data from high-stakes testing. In much the same way, Tatum (2000) argued that current schooling practices that focus on testing effectively contribute to the marginalization of African American adolescents. Most current research seems to point to a misalignment between the needs of African American students and the perceived focus of the nation on improving high-stakes test scores. As a result, teachers’ expectations of students from diverse backgrounds might vary (Au & Raphael, 2000). For example, in research on teachers’ perceptions of Asian students, Wong (1980) found that teachers often see Asian students “model students” (p. 236). A “model student,” according to Wong (1980), is a student who demonstrates “a certain amount of intellectual ability (the ability to grasp instruction, academic competence) and one who does not cause trouble” (p. 244). Given Wong’s (1980) description of a model student, it is not surprising to see that “a disproportionate number of students of diverse backgrounds may be placed in special education and remedial reading class, where teachers hold lower expectations for their achievement” (Au & Raphael, 2000, p. 174). In this way, students who do not test well and become identified as struggling readers (Alvermann, 2001; Houchen, 2012) are then placed in remedial reading courses, where they are often taught rote skills with pre-packaged curricula (Hochen, 2012).

Test-driven education effectively narrows the curriculum to learning basic skills, while
“other critical competences are being abandoned” (Tatum, 2000, p. 37). Moreover, the focus on improving test scores seems to disregard students’ interests and focus much of the attention – that might be spent on developing life-long readers – on reading comprehension, often under the banner of improving reading achievement. Perhaps more damning is Tatum’s (2000) suggestion that “test-driven reading narrows the curriculum” (p. 38). As a solution, Tatum (2000) proposed that the “pedagogical approaches and curriculum must give students the opportunity to critically examine the society in which they are born” (p. 37). That is, students must be able to form real-world and personal connections with what they are learning.

Motivation. Research has also shown that motivation is an essential component of engagement (Olpher, 2011). What is more, motivation has been shown to be especially salient in diverse schools (Ginsberg, 2014). Ginsberg (2014) developed a framework for teachers based upon four general components meant to foster student motivation centered on, among other things, enhancing meaning (Ginsberg, 2014). In order to accomplish this, the learning that takes place in classrooms must be both challenging and engaging (Ginsberg, 2014). Particularly salient is the research that has shown motivation to be a key factor in improving student outcomes with reading (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Olpher, 2011). Still, research connecting motivation and student achievement is not always clear. For example, a study conducted by Baker and Wigfield (1999) found that fifth- and sixth-grade African American students had stronger motivation to read than their white counterparts, but the results of their study do not indicate why white students typically outperform African American students on reading assessments.

Pedagogy. Cases abound of teachers and schools innovatively helping students to connect with the texts that they are reading. One particularly salient example centered on a
teacher in a school “with a 100% African American population and with a school wide commitment to explore the African American experience” (Joseph, 1998, p. 103). In this school, students read texts such as Mary E. Lyons’s *Letters from a Slave Girl: The Story of Harriet Jacobs*, texts that open up important conversations about race through literature. Students wrote in daily journals, wrote poetry, and made connections between a wide-range of texts centered on common themes, while teachers planned for interdisciplinary units. Ultimately, as Joseph (1998) explained:

> By selecting books that pique their interest, I am able to help develop their fundamental skills along with encouraging them to participate in lively conversations. There is nothing better than having students realize that talking about books is not an isolated classroom activity, but a way to connect with their entire lives. (p. 110)

Yet while these practices seem to be successful at helping to engage African American students, they are not as widespread as they may need to be. Willis (1995) documented concerns about her nine-year old son, Jake, who grew up in a “print- and language-rich environment” (p. 40), and who struggled with his African American identity in a classroom where race seemed too taboo of a subject to tackle. As an example, Willis (1995) described her son’s marginalization when his teacher forbade him to write about race as a topic for a national essay contest on “What it means to be an American” (p. 32). Even the books available to Jake for independent reading in the classroom seemingly voided his identity as an African American reader because “all of the books were written by European American authors” (p. 42). Willis called for increased sensitivity toward cultural awareness on the part of teachers and schools, though concerns about Jake’s ability to claim his identity as an African American adolescent reader persisted.

> One approach that may help students such as Jake to claim their identities within the
context of learning and, more specifically, reading, is through critical literacy. Skerrett (2012) built a case for critical literacy as a tool for engaging students with texts that speak to their personal interests and that they can relate to. Citing studies from a wide-range of scholarship, Skerrett described critical literacy practices that include “questioning the reader and the text” (p. 65). In this way, critical literacy allows students to face issues of race, gender, and socioeconomics through reading, a practice that will ultimately help “youth identify and critique reasons for their preferences for particular texts” (p. 65). Critical literacy, according to Skerrett (2012), “calls for diverse literature that reflects students’ lived experiences, instructional approaches that emphasize discussion and reflection, and caring relationships among teachers and students” (p. 65). An example provided by Dutro, Kazemi, Balf, and Lin (2008) of an elementary school teacher who was concerned with culturally relevant pedagogy showed students reading a wide-range of folktales from a variety of different cultures, writing about an aspect of their own cultural heritage, organizing a school-wide cultural poster fair, and inviting parents to a “family culture night” where students’ works were presented. This effectively displayed an effort to bring students’ cultural and racial identities to light as relevant pieces of their student and learning identities (Dutro et al., 2008). In this way, it is worth investigating the implications of an approach in which teachers can use both their pedagogical practices and multicultural texts to foster student engagement with reading.

**Texts.** In their study on identity, Richardson and Eccles (2007) viewed “reading as an important catalyst” in adolescents’ identity development (p. 348). Richardson and Eccles (2007) argued that adolescents are often subject to a multitude of “different and competing” influences while they “are becoming increasingly aware of themselves, their values, and their beliefs” (p. 348). Having culturally relevant and personally meaningful texts available to adolescent
students can have a profound impact on how they identify as students and quite possibly affect their identities as they grow into adulthood. Au and Raphael (2000) described the call for “a new literary canon, incorporating key works by diverse authors” (p. 181) but also described the need to dive more deeply into cultural diversity than simply providing students with multicultural texts. Changes can take place at the instructional level, for example, where students’ “interest and involvement become more likely when teachers include instruction that makes explicit connections between literacy activities and students own lives and concerns” (p. 182). One such example is provided by Bean, Cantu'Valerio, Senior, and White (1999), who employed the use of a multicultural novel entitled *Heartbeat Drumbeat* by I. B. Hernandez (1992) in two grade-nine English courses – one in the Southwest and the other in Hawaii – to determine students’ engagement with the text based on their connection with the cultures presented in it. The researchers found that students were thoroughly engaged and “found their critical voices through this experience” (p. 37). The researchers suggested that the use of multicultural texts would have significant implications for teachers wishing to engage secondary-level students in reading.

Another example can be found in Kirkland’s (2011) study of a young black male whose literacy principles helped, in part, to shape his identity. Kirkland’s research focused solely on an eleventh-grade Black male named Derrick who recognized and participated in his own interests in reading, but devalued and rejected the idea of reading canonical texts that did not reflect his ideology (Kirkland, 2011). Derrick engaged in texts that were personally meaningful to him, but lacked interest in the ones that he felt no connection to. As a result of his research, Kirkland (2011) called for “educators to think of reading as an extension of self” (p. 206). That is, there is a need to understand students’ ideologies amid their reading experiences.

According to research, providing opportunities for independent reading is one example of
this approach (Au & Raphael, 2000). However, it is equally important that teachers value the
texts that students choose to read during their independent reading experiences. Like Kirkland’s
(2011) study, in Enriqvez’s (2013) case study of a 12-year-old Black eighth grade male,
coincidentally also named Derrick, Enriqvez concluded that simply providing students with
opportunities to read independently is not enough. Though Derrick was an avid reader, his
“behaviors with texts did not always comply with what teachers expected” (p.40). That is,
though Derrick was excited about reading the texts he chose, he had less enthusiasm for the
books the whole class was reading and, as a consequence, did not do as well on whole-class
assessments. Further, Derrick’s reading behaviors were seemingly not supported by his teacher
or the school because the texts that he chose to read during independent reading time were not
tied to the curriculum or any type of reading assessment (Enriquez, 2013). Consequently,
Derrick’s personal reading experiences “carried less weight than reading novels within the
school” (Enriquez, 2013, p. 40).

It is important to note that research has recommended that teachers will need to work
closely “with librarians and parents to obtain a better understanding of the types of books that
students are more likely to enjoy reading and then use these texts during reading instruction”
(Flowers & Flowers, 2008, p. 164). The texts should not be isolated from the type of reading
that is valued in the classroom: the text should be made a part of the learning experience.

Of course, a teacher should use caution in selecting texts for students, especially when the
selection is based on the teacher’s own assumptions about interest based on race. For example,
in a study on whether or not the race of the protagonist would affect the reading comprehension
of African American middle school students, Casteel (1995) found that African American
students tested higher on fictional stories with White protagonists than stories where Black
characters were portrayed. Ultimately, race did seem to matter in Casteel’s study, but not in the way that some might have predicted. Casteel speculated that several factors might have affected the results of the research, including the role of racial stereotyping in society and its influence on children, as well as the influence of the texts’ pictures of the races that were portrayed. Casteel ultimately concluded that further research would need to be done.

In Brooks’ (2006) important work, an analysis of texts and culture is called for, in order to avoid the rather assuming practice of simply choosing a text based on the race of the characters in it and hoping that students will identify with them. Brooks conducted a case study at a middle school where 95% of students identified as African American and 5% identified as being Latino, in order to understand better how students develop literature understandings through culture. Brooks found that the discussions that students had about the texts extended far beyond the race and cultural components of the characters within them and focused principally on themes that were common across racial and cultural lines. Analysis of the research focused on “recurring themes, linguistic patterns, and ethnic group practices” (Brooks, 2006, p. 389). In this way, students used their cultural awareness and experiences to understand the texts as an “entry point” (Brooks, 2006, p. 390). Brooks noted the need to delve more deeply into multicultural texts, rather than simply attributing interest because of the culture or race that they present. Instead, they should be focused on how students’ experiences contribute to their understanding of the texts, in addition to understanding how “textual features require readers to use culture” (Brooks, 2006, p. 390). Ultimately, Brooks determined that “unless we analyze books for these entry points, teachers may be limited by how they use these books pedagogically” (p. 390).

Still, teachers will need to be trained to use these kinds of skills in their classrooms. As
Skerrett (2008) found, teachers need more preparation and professional development in order to impact students’ identities as they relate to culturally relevant texts and the curricula. Skerrett found that as the curriculum becomes increasingly standardized, teachers have less control over what their students learn. Skerrett studied two urban high schools – one in the United States and one in Canada – and found that most teachers were white and lacked adequate preparation for culturally responsive teaching. Skerrett’s study showed that teachers developed pedagogical practices within diverse teaching contexts through their own experiences but not through any sort of teacher preparation program. As a result, Skerrett called for coursework that would prepare teachers for multicultural and anti-racist teaching and ongoing professional development for all teachers in the area of culturally responsive education. Teachers then will be more fully prepared to foster life-long reading engagement in the students they have been charged to teach.

A review of the research on identity as it relates to reading and engagement shows that identity plays a critical role in adolescent reading practices. Studies focused on gender seem to show that, generally speaking, female students outperform male students in reading in part because female students read more frequently. Part of the problem may lie with what research has viewed as a feminization of reading as a result of societal constructs of gender roles. Socioeconomics also plays an important role in the reading lives of adolescents. Students who have greater access to print-rich environments tend to read more than students who do not. Funding remains an important issue within this context. Research shows that an imbalance exists across school districts, communities, and states regarding the financial support for reading and literacy. Similarly, the home lives of students play a large role in their reading progress. Further, race is a persistent issue where it concerns reading identity. Race, often seen as a taboo subject, can sometimes be avoided as a topic of inquiry within classrooms due to a lack of
teacher-preparedness and White, Eurocentric curricula that are often narrowed because of an intense focus on improving statewide test scores. Indeed, more work needs to be done in developing critical literacy within classroom contexts and in preparing teachers for diverse students.

**Conclusion**

In order to fully understand the link between students’ identities and reading engagement, more work will need to be done to investigate how students’ identities impact their learning experiences. Further, researchers will need to examine the link between the kinds of texts that are being taught in schools and the texts’ relationships to the students who are charged with reading them. Future research should explore the use of high-interest texts in high school contexts. Additional work will need to be done on the use of engaging and personally meaningful texts in various content areas as well. Specifically, it will be important to research the kinds of texts that are traditionally appealing to students, such as graphic novels, memoirs, or informational texts and real-world texts. Moreover, critical literacy development must be pursued in order to understand better the effects of using diverse text-types and authors on student engagement. Implications for this research include improved curricular models for schools and pedagogical practices for teachers. Finally, more work will need to be done as it relates to issues of identity such as gender, socioeconomic status, and race; and how those factors influence not only reading achievement, but also reading engagement. Future research should also investigate how to engage high school students with what they are reading and how teachers and schools can foster engagement with reading as life-long learners.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Qualitative Approach

The overarching design of the current study was based on qualitative research. In their work on the evolution of qualitative research, Putney, Green, Dixon, and Kelly (1999) described this particular design as having a long history in educational literature and as one that has made contributions to a variety of fields, “particularly in the area of literacy” (Putney, Green, Dixon, & Kelly, 1999, p. 374). Still, a plethora of definitions exist for qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) put it simply when they defined qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3). Further, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) aptly described how qualitative research includes a myriad of approaches, traditions, and practices that the researcher could adopt. In fact, in qualitative research, it would appear that “no specific method or practice can be privileged over any other” (p. 7) as a means of understanding a particular research problem. Drawing on the work of Denzin and Lincoln (2011), Creswell (2012a) described qualitative research in the following way:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflectivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (p. 44)
Due to the fact that the present study sought to understand how students described the influences on their identities with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences, the qualitative approach provided the researcher with a clear understanding of how students think about their identities and reading engagement.

This study investigated the following question:

How do eight high-achieving high school students, enrolled in Advanced Placement and Honors English courses, describe the influences on their identities with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences?

To answer the research question, the researcher conducted open-ended interviews with students, drafted field notes, and wrote analytic memos. Taken together, these data sources helped illuminate how students described the influences on their identities with regard to reading engagement and will achieve triangulation (Creswell, 2012). The researcher collected data from students at their high school (natural setting). The research included the participants’ voices from the interviews and employed the use of general inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006) to answer the research question.

**Basic Qualitative Study Design**

According to Merriam (2009), a basic qualitative study focuses on meaning and understanding. In this way, researchers who conduct basic qualitative studies “simply seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved” (Merriam 1998, p. 11). Since data analysis for basic qualitative studies is inductive (Merriam, 2009), this study employed the use of general inductive analysis, or GIA (Thomas, 2006). GIA stems from the philosophy of constructivism, in which the “reality is fluid and changing and knowledge is constructed jointly in interaction by the researcher and the
researched through consensus” (Grbich, 2007, p. 8). Anfara and Mertz (2006) posited that constructivism “maintains that learning is a process of constructing meaning; it is how people make sense of their experience” (p. 26). In this way, students who took part in this study helped to guide its development through their articulated experiences with reading. GIA was chosen as the best qualitative approach to analysis, for this basic qualitative study, because it allowed themes to emerge from the participants’ perspectives. The researcher then analyzed these perspectives.

As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) wrote, “qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 2). As such, the researcher is the primary and often sole instrument in data analysis (Merriam, 2009). In this study, the researcher analyzed the raw data by using several coding processes described by Miles and Hubermann (1994) and Saldana (2009), in order to recognize and interpret emerging themes and patterns as they occur (Creswell, 2012; Grbich, 2007; Merriam, 2009). This method is in alignment with inductive analysis. As Thomas (2003) explained, “the primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies” (p. 2). This process, referred to as inductive coding (Thomas, 2006), includes examining “the multiple meanings that are inherent in the text” of a transcript or piece of data (Thomas, 2006, p. 241). In this way, the researcher analyzed the raw data that were collected from students and followed the path of inductive analysis. Due to the fact that the focus of the research was in understanding the participants’ perceptions and views on the phenomenon under investigation, one of the researcher’s primary objectives was to let the participants’ voices help guide the research as it was collected, analyzed, and reported. GIA offered such an approach in a basic, non-complicated way
(Thomas, 2006), and was therefore a suitable approach in the research for the current study.

In sum, this methodological approach was chosen because it helped to illuminate the influences on the identities of high-achieving students and reading engagement in the high school classroom amid the students’ educational experiences. The students’ own perspectives and worldviews were used to answer the research question. As Miles and Huberman (1994) wrote, “words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to a reader – another researcher, a policymaker, a practitioner – than pages of summarized numbers” (p. 1). To this end, the words of the students who participated in this study helped to guide it.

**Context**

The research site was X High School, an extremely diverse urban high school of approximately 2,500 students. The site was selected due to the fact that many students were underperforming in the area of English Language Arts and because it was the researcher’s place of employment. The community was urban and generally considered to be one of low-income. On statewide assessments, many students performed below the statewide average in reading.

The state in which this study took place has adopted *Common Core Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy*, which called for active engagement with both literary and informational texts (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). As such, a need existed to understand reading engagement as it related to students in this context.

The researcher was employed as an English teacher at the research site. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the headmaster of the high school. Both the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the research site enforce a protocol that forbids teachers, researchers,
and other adults from being alone in a room with minors and with students. Thus, the interviews were conducted with a witness at X High School after the close of the school day.

The person who agreed to serve as a witness for the student interviews was employed as a math teacher at X High School. The witness agreed to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. The witness also agreed to host the interviews in the witness’s classroom. The classroom, located on the third floor of X High School, was an inviting space. Inspirational posters adorned the walls, as well as posters related to the subject of mathematics. On the whiteboard, a classroom agenda was posted along with the daily homework assignment.

Holding the interviews in the witness’s math classroom was important for two reasons. First, it allowed the researcher to make the interviews convenient for the witness. Secondly, it was important to the researcher to hold the interviews in a space that felt both neutral and safe. The space was safe because it was located in a secure public school and with a witness. The math classroom was neutral because it was not the researcher’s classroom and it was not an English classroom. Since some English classrooms contain visual stimuli related to the subject, much like the mathematics classroom did, it was important to conduct the interviews in a space in which such potential influences would not interfere with or influence the participants’ responses. In English classrooms, such decor would typically include posters about specific authors, books, or genres in addition to famous literary quotations from established authors. However, since the researcher did not want to influence the participants’ responses in any way, including by means of the aesthetics of the room itself, the interviews took place in the witness’s math classroom and thus established a neutral and safe environment for both the participant and the researcher, while also maintaining a sense of familiarity for the participants.

Throughout the interviews, both the participant and the researcher sat across from one
another in individual desks with adjoining seats. The witness sat in the back of the classroom at her own desk. The doors to the classroom remained closed during the interviews to minimize the influence of noise from the hallway. At times during the interviews an after-school announcement was made over the school intercom, but these announcements never disrupted the interview in any significant way.

The interviews were conducted after school for a myriad of reasons. First, the researcher intended to avoid conflicts with the participants’ classes during the school day. Additionally, interview times would not have been possible to coordinate during the school day given the conflicting teaching schedules of the witness and the researcher. Therefore, the only time that the interviews could have been conducted for this study without interfering with the witness’s schedule or the students’ classes was after school. Consequently, only students who were able to meet after school could participate in this study. Third, though the interviews took place in a classroom, the researcher hoped that by conducting the interviews after school the participants, who are also students of the school, would not see the researcher or the witness as teachers, but rather, as a researcher and a witness in a research study.

Participants

As an educator at the site of the research who is familiar with the culture of the school, the researcher was aware that the risk that participation in a study that asked students to meet after school to talk about reading might be minimal. For this reason, the only criterion for selection was that students were enrolled in English classes and were current juniors or seniors at X High School. The researcher specified that the participants must be current juniors or seniors at X High School because they would have had at least two years of experience at the high school from which to draw. Further, since the academic schedule at the high school was
designed in a way that allowed students to take English either during the fall semester or the spring semester, but not both, it was important for the researcher to recruit only those students who were enrolled in English class at the time the interviews took place because they would have had recent experiences from which to draw during the interview process.

The purpose of interviewing high school students for this study was to gain their perspectives about their own reading experiences. To this end, upperclassmen students from three types of English courses were asked to participate in this study. X High School has an open enrollment policy on course selections, and as such, students may choose to take College, Honors, or Advanced Placement (AP) English class. College and Honors courses generally follow the same curriculum but Honors courses move at a quicker pace. It should be noted that the school prides itself on an open enrollment system in which students may opt to take the course that they believe is best suited to their needs.

An upperclassmen student is defined as a student in either his or her third or fourth year of study at the high school. The reason for choosing upperclassmen students to participate in this study was because by their junior year, students have generally had sufficient experience with high school English courses and can offer their perspectives as soon-to-be outgoing students as to the influences on their identities and level of reading engagement. Though the goal of the researcher was to gain the perspectives of upperclassmen students from all three types of courses, ultimately only high-achieving students agreed to participate in this study.

**Sampling Strategies**

In this study, purposeful sampling, sometimes referred to as purposive sampling, (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012) was employed. As Creswell (2012a) described it, purposeful sampling “means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can
purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 156). To this end, the students who participated in this study were selected purposefully in the way that they met the criteria described: students were either juniors or seniors enrolled in English class at X High School because, as students of the high school with at least two years of experience, they could describe their experiences with reading and engagement as it related to their identities.

A survey of the literature showed that several researchers have employed the use of purposeful sampling in similar studies. For example, Fox, Dinsmore, and Alexander’s (2010) study of three middle school girls who were identified as gifted readers by their teachers also stands as a clear example of a purposeful sampling strategy. Likewise, in Luttrell and Parker’s (2001) study, a total of 30 grade 9 students were selected purposefully at a high school in North Carolina. One major disadvantage of this type of sampling is that “the researcher’s judgment may be in error” (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun, 2012, p. 100). However, in the present study, the researcher’s first-hand knowledge of the population to be studied comes from experience with the population.

**Sample size.** As Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) described it, “there is no clear-cut answer” as to “what constitutes an adequate, or sufficient, size for a sample” (p. 102). To be sure, “the best answer is that a sample should be as large as the researcher can obtain with a reasonable expenditure of time and energy” (Fraenkel et al., 2012, p. 102). In many qualitative studies, the range of participants “is somewhere between 1 and 20” (Fraenkel et al., 2012, p. 103). In this study, a total of eight students were interviewed.

**Limitations.** The sample of participants selected is not without limitations. Only a limited number of students participated in this study in a large urban high school and the only
students who agreed to participate in the study were high-achieving students enrolled in Advanced Placement and Honors classes. However, the researcher is confident that the students who participated in this study spoke from their own experiences within this context and as they relate to reading and engagement.

**Recruitment and Access**

Participants were recruited from the researcher’s work site, an urban high school referred to as X High School in this study. Access to the participants was negotiated through permissions granted by the headmaster of the high school. In a private meeting about the research, the researcher described, in depth, the purpose, strategies, and need for the dissertation research to take place to the headmaster of the X High School. The researcher began to move forward with the study only once permission was granted from the headmaster.

Before the interviews could take place, the researcher had to first recruit students, from their English classes, to participate in this study. In order to gain access to students in their English classes, the researcher sought permission from English teachers at X High School to allow the researcher to visit their classrooms to explain the study to their students. This meant taking some time away from their coursework. To gain permission from English teachers, the researcher delivered invitations to the school-issued mailboxes of all 14 junior and senior class English teachers at X High School, seeking permission to visit their classrooms for the purposes of recruitment. Out of the 14 teachers who received invitations, seven teachers within the English department responded by signing the bottom of the invitation and returning it to the researcher. All seven teachers who responded granted the researcher permission to visit their classes to explain the study.

Next, the researcher drafted a visitation schedule after speaking with each teacher in
order to coordinate an optimal time for the classroom visits. In total, 12 classes were visited for the purposes of recruitment over the course of three days. The classes included one section of College English 11, one section of College English 12, two sections of Honors English 11, four sections of Honors English 12, two sections of Advanced Placement Language, and two sections of Advanced Placement Literature and Composition. It is important to note that the classroom visits were not observational in nature and therefore not part of the data collection process, but were meant solely for recruitment. After describing the study by reading an approved script, and holding a brief question and answer session, the researcher invited students who wished to participate to gain informed consent from their parents and guardians.

The next day, the researcher returned to the classrooms to collect the IRB permission forms. Students whose parents signed the IRB permission form were then contacted to set up a time for an interview after school in the classroom of the research witness. Next, the potential participants were asked to sign an assent form. Students who returned the necessary forms with permission from their parents were then scheduled to participate in this study.

**External Validity**

The findings from this study have the ability to be generalized. Because this study sought to understand how students described the influences on their identities with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences, it has several implications in the fields of identity and reading engagement. For one, the study showed how adolescents saw themselves in relation to their level of reading engagement amid their educational experiences. Secondly, the research helped to illuminate what meaning students have attached to their reading experiences in school. Finally, this study can help educators and students to analyze better the nature of identity as it relates to reading engagement in the 21st-century classroom.
Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations were made in the development of the current research. As described throughout this study, the researcher was an English teacher at the site that the research took place. The researcher did not allow the researcher’s own current students to participate in the study.

The researcher was also a member of the literacy committee at the research site and has worked on the summer reading program. In addition, the researcher was a member of the English department’s curriculum subcommittee.

Another potential limitation of this study was that the students who participated may have felt the need to provide the researcher with answers they think the researcher wanted to hear. In order to avoid this, the researcher made it known to the research participants that they should provide their most honest answers to each of the interview questions, and that their grades and academic standing would not be affected in any way, especially since the researcher was not their current English teacher.

Finally, since the participants in this study were minors and students at X High School, a witness who was employed by the school in which the research took place was asked to be present through each interview. While the students were informed that that the witness would keep their participation in this study confidential, there is the chance that one or more of the participants in this study would have held back on discussing issues with which they would have felt discomfort, especially discussing them in front of one or more authority figures in a school setting. However, it did not appear to the researcher that this was a major threat to the participants.

Permissions. The research did not begin until Northeastern University Internal Review
Board and the headmaster of the research site, X High School, approved it. As such, the researcher received IRB approval before data collection began. In addition, participants’ parents signed an informed consent form.

Invitations to participate in this study and consent forms were translated into Portuguese and Spanish by two foreign language department teachers at X High School who were colleagues of the researcher. These two teachers, along with the witness, agreed to keep their participation in this study confidential.

Once the researcher received informed consent from the participants’ parents or legal guardians, participants were asked to sign an assent form. At this point, participants were reassured of their confidentiality and reminded that they had the ability to stop their participation in the study at any time without consequence.

**Anonymity.** In order to ensure anonymity, the names of participants have been omitted from the research. Further, the research site is not named in this study. As Creswell (2012b) described it, research “needs to be sensitive and respectful of people and places” (p. 277). In this way, the researcher masked obvious characteristics of the research participants and did not name the site of the research in the study. Students were assigned pseudonyms throughout data analysis, pseudonyms that also appear in this dissertation; the research site is referred to as X High School.

**Data collection**

Data in this study consisted of interviews with students, field notes, and analytic memos. A data collection interview protocol was used to guide the research (included as an appendix). In-depth interviews with students were recorded with the researcher’s iPhone recording application and a digital recorder, which “frees the interviewer to concentrate on the topic and
the dynamics of the interview” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Field notes were written during the student interviews (Saldana, 2009). Analytic memos were written to make sense of the data once it was collected (Saldana, 2009). Triangulation was achieved through the use of interviews, field notes, and analytic memos (Creswell, 2012).

**Interviews.** In-depth, semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions and an interview protocol were conducted with students at X High School. The interviews were conducted in the classroom of the research witness after school and were audiotaped with a digital recorder and later transcribed (Creswell, 2012, p. 160) using a transcription service. In order to gain the most data from the open-ended interview questions with students, the researcher applied the use of follow-up questions and probing questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Interviews are typical in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012; Grbich, 2007). Interviews, as the primary data collection method, have been shown to provide important data about student interests. Knoester’s (2009) study of urban adolescent reading habits used open-ended interview questions as a primary data collection tool. In this study, interview questions were designed to build upon the existing knowledge of identity and student engagement with reading.

**Field notes.** In the proposed study, field notes were taken during the interviews with students. Saldana (2009) described field notes as important pieces of the data collection process. Field notes “are the researcher’s written documentation of participant observation, which may include the observer’s personal and subjective responses to and interpretations of social action encountered” (p. 33). Gibbs (2007) described field notes as “messy” and “unplanned” (p. 27). Researchers sometimes use field notes during interviews to describe “conditions of the session” (p. 27) as well as other important information about the interview session that may prove to be of value later during analysis. Field notes can be analyzed since they may “contain valuable
comments and insights that address the recommended categories for analytic memo reflection” (Saldana, 2009). Field notes can also contain a reflection on the “feelings, reactions, hunches, initial interpretation, speculations, and working hypothesis” of the researcher (Merriam, 2009, p. 131).

**Analytic memos.** Saldana (2009) described the importance of writing analytic memos after coding. For one, analytic memos help the researcher analyze the data that has been collected; and reflect on codes, categories, themes, and experiences with participants, and any problems associated with the fieldwork (Saldana, 2009). In the present study, the researcher wrote analytic memos in order to reflect on the interviews and field notes as well as to make connections with codes and categories.

**Data storage.** Computer data were stored on the researcher’s personal computer and flash drive. A password is required to enter the researcher’s computer. Confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms for each of the research participants. Hardcopies of field notes were stored in the researcher’s home office in a locked filing cabinet.

A flash drive was used to ensure that data was saved and accessible in case of a computer malfunction. The flash drive was stored in the researcher’s filing cabinet along with any raw data collection materials including primary documents. No one other than the researcher had access to the data. All data connected to the participants were destroyed following the researcher’s oral defense.

**Data Analysis**

In keeping with data analysis strategies that are typically associated with basic qualitative studies (Merriam, 2009), general inductive analysis was employed (Thomas, 2006). As Thomas (2006) described it, “inductive coding begins with close readings of text and consideration of the
multiple meanings that are inherent in the text” (p. 241). That is, the inductive approach helps the researcher to analyze and understand the “meaning in complex data through the development of summary themes or categories from the raw data” (Thomas, 2003, p. 3). Therefore, the researcher analyzed the text with a close reading before creating categories based on the themes.

Transcription. Data collected from interviews and focus groups were transcribed by a transcription service called Rev.com, Inc. Contact information for Rev.com can be found as an appendix to this document. The transcripts were read and verified according to the digital audio recordings of the transcripts once they were received. The transcripts did not include the participants’ real names.

Coding. As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) explained it, “qualitative research is endlessly creative and interpretive” (p. 26). That is, once the data from a particular study are collected, the researcher has the enormous task of reading, re-reading, coding, and classifying data to make sense of them. In the current study, the analysis of raw data began with a coding process to understand better the perspectives of students and teachers as they relate to reading engagement with personally meaningful texts.

While it is true that within this qualitative mode of analysis “there is no single interpretive truth” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 26), the researcher employed several data analysis procedures which are available for qualitative studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) to ensure validity. Along these lines, Thomas (2006) posited that in order to ensure validity, the raw transcripts in a basic qualitative study must be read several times. Through these readings, codes were developed from the transcripts. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), “coding involves attaching one or more keywords to a text segment in order to permit later identification of a statement” (p. 201). In this way, codes were reduced into key themes following the initial
analysis (Creswell, 2012b). Interview transcripts were thus studied repeatedly to allow themes to emerge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Creswell (2012a) described the process of coding as one which “involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code” (p. 184). That is, coding is a process in which units of data are broken down into concrete parts. Creswell (2012a) described the process explicitly:

Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion.

Saldana (2009) described several coding processes available to qualitative researchers. Among them, Saldana advocated for a first cycle, or initial, open coding process that derives from initial impressions of the raw data. Gribch (2007) described open coding as a “word by word, line by line analysis questioning the data in order to identify concepts and categories which can then be dimensionalised (broken apart further)” (p. 74). Coding continues, “until a process of saturation is achieved and no new information is emerging regarding the properties of the category or code” (Gribch, 2007, p. 74). In this phase, the researcher labeled units of text according to particular coding approaches, such as In Vivo coding and descriptive Coding (Saldana, 2009). In an effort to maintain the participants’ voices throughout the research, In Vivo coding (Saldana, 2009) was applied to the transcripts. Furthermore, significant statements were highlighted for further review and explicit inclusion within the text of the findings.

Other types of coding procedures were used to analyze the data as well. For example, descriptive coding, as described by Saldana (2009), was applied to this study because descriptive
Coding affords the researcher the opportunity to “summarize in a word or short phrase – most often as a noun – the basic topic of passage of qualitative data” (p. 70). Furthermore, Saldana (2009) described descriptive coding as “appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies” (p. 70). Accordingly, descriptive coding can be used with “a variety of data forms (e.g., interview transcripts, field notes, journals, documents” (p. 70).

Once the initial codes (Saldana, 2009) were complete, a second phase of analysis, often called axial coding (Creswell, 2012b; Grbich, 2007; Saldana, 2009), began, in which the researcher categorized units of text according to the codes and concepts that were developed during analysis. According to Grbich (2007), axial coding occurs when the researcher links an emergent category from open coding to “all the subcategories which contribute to it” (p. 79). Creswell (2012b) described these categories as themes and recommended that the researcher “reduce the list of codes to get five or seven themes or descriptions of the setting or participants” (p. 245). In this way, the final report includes adequate information about a few common themes, as opposed to an insufficient amount of information about a variety of themes (Creswell, 2012b).

**Member checking.** In this study, member checks (Thomas, 2006) were used to ensure validity of the findings. According to Creswell (2012a), “member checking is a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account” (p. 259). In this way, the researcher took the transcripts back to participants after the interviews were conducted to ensure that they were accurate. Participants were asked to note any discrepancies and clarify any misunderstanding; however, no major discrepancies were reported. The only discrepancy that was noted was a typo by one participant. As Thomas (2006) described it, “stakeholder checks enhance the credibility of findings by allowing participants and other
people who may have interests in the evaluation to comment on or assess the research findings” (p. 244). Through these procedures, the researcher worked to safeguard the validity and trustworthiness of the study against threats of subjectivity.

In sum, data for this study were gained from students through purposeful sampling strategies. Data collection included interviews with students as well as field notes and analytic memos to achieve triangulation. Inductive analysis was used to examine the data. Interview transcripts were transcribed by Rev.com, Inc., and coded by hand to form categories and themes from the data. Member checks were conducted to check for accuracy. Analytic memos were written as part of the process of analysis and researcher reflection. Participants’ voices helped guide the study.

**Trustworthiness**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), as cited in Shenton (2004), trustworthiness refers to a study’s credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to the internal validity of a study, that is, its research methods, sampling strategies, and use of triangulation to ensure that the data are valid. According to Creswell (2012a), triangulation “encourages the researcher to develop a report that is both accurate and reliable” (p. 259), often through the use of multiple forms of data collection. Transferability refers to a study’s external validity, and its use of rich, thick description in order for practitioners and other scholars to recognize the study as one that can be applicable to their contexts. Dependability refers to the ability for the research to be repeated and result in the same or similar results. Finally, confirmability refers to the researcher’s efforts to remain objective and minimize bias. Each one of the preceding components of trustworthiness was achieved in the present study.

**Credibility.** Credibility refers to the internal validity of a study, that is, its research
methods, sampling strategies, and use of triangulation to ensure that the data are valid. To this end, the researcher ensured that the strategies used to conduct the present research were in line with basic qualitative studies and specifically with general inductive analysis, which looks specifically at raw data to discover patterns and themes (Merriam, 2009; Thomas, 2006). Further, the researcher used In Vivo coding to include the participants’ voices within the study (Saldana, 2011) and incorporated important quotations from participants in the reported findings. Within the findings, the researcher included rich, thick description (Shenton, 2004) so that the study can also achieve dependability and confirmability. Data were triangulated through the use of participant interviews, field notes, and analytic memos. Since the researcher was an English teacher in the school in which the research took place, the researcher’s own biases were presented in full, though the researcher has worked to ensure objectivity throughout data analysis by using research-based coding strategies (Saldana, 2011).

Transferability. Transferability refers to a study’s external validity, and its use of rich, thick description in order for practitioners and other scholars to recognize the study as one that can be applicable to their contexts. This study included rich, thick description of the research site and research problem. Since the issue of reading engagement is not specific to the context that is being studied, this study achieved transferability where it applies to adolescents’ engagement with reading and their understanding of their identity as it relates to reading experiences.

Dependability. Dependability refers to the ability of the research to be repeated and result in the same or similar results. As Shenton (2004) asserted, “the process within the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results” (p. 71). Since the researcher kept careful records of the
research process, which were thoroughly articulated within the research report, dependability has been achieved. In this way, the research methodology is transparent enough for the study to be replicated if need be.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability refers to the researcher’s efforts to remain objective and minimize bias. The findings from this study were the result of understandings gained from the perspectives of the students who participated in it and not based on the researcher’s personal bias (Shenton, 2004). To ensure that students’ perspectives are accurate, member checks (Thomas, 2006) were used with students to verify the accuracy of the research data. In addition, the researcher provided a thorough explanation of potential personal biases as related to the research topic in an effort to be as transparent as possible. The research achieved triangulation through the collection and analysis of multiple data sources, such as interview transcripts, field notes, and analytic memos. Finally, the researcher included an “in depth methodological description” (Shenton, 2004) of the research process in order to allow the research approach and findings to be examined.

**Researcher Bias**

As stated the first chapter, I was an English teacher in the school in which the study took place and as such the potential threat of researcher bias existed within the study. In my role as an English teacher at X High School, I was required to attend department meetings in which we discussed a wide range of department-related issues that have, undoubtedly, informed my thinking about curriculum. Further, I was a member of the curriculum alignment committee, a subcommittee formed to revise the current curriculum to ready it to meet the needs of the Common Core. However, I am unaware of departmental conversations that have been had on engagement and student identity where it concerns the reading habits of adolescents. Instead, the
emphasis within the English department has been on that of text comprehension and analysis. Professional development has been geared toward similar pursuits.

In addition, I was an active member on the school’s literacy committee. The literacy committee was a grassroots, teacher-led initiative meant to facilitate stronger literacy skills with students. The literacy committee gave some attention to student engagement with reading through its work on the school’s summer reading program. However, a single summer reading text was chosen by teachers for students and did not take individual students’ identities into account. In addition, there was no student input given toward the selection of the text or the development of the summer reading program. With this in mind, it does not appear that my role as a high school English teacher or member of the curriculum and literacy committees affected the validity of this study

**Protection of Human Subjects**

The study was subject to IRB approval, approval of the headmaster at the research site, and each participant’s parents’ or legal guardians’ informed consent, and his or her individual assent. This study presented no obvious risks to students who agreed to participate in it. The study examined the impact of students’ identity on reading engagement. Raw data from student interviews were not shared with anyone at the research site, including other students, fellow faculty members, and administrators.

All participants in this study were required to obtain the signatures of their parents or guardians before participating. According to Creswell (2012a), an “informed consent form is a statement that participants sign before they participate in research” (p. 149). With this form, participants were guaranteed their rights to anonymity, and it was explained that no harm would come to them as a result of their participation in the study. The researcher ensured that
procedures were put into place to protect participants from risk (Fraenkel et al., 2012) through ensuring participants their “privacy and confidentiality” (Fraenkel et al., 2012, p. 69) in data collection, analysis, and storage.

Participants were reminded that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The anonymity of participants was protected through the use of pseudonyms. Recordings of the interviews were destroyed following transcription.

Some theoretical risks were worth noting. For example, students who, through the course of the interviews, described personal experiences about which the researcher may legally need to follow up on as a mandated reporter in the state, may have been put in a position of having to speak to a school support officer to ensure their own physical and emotional safety.

Participants were made aware that they may end their participation and involvement in the study at any time, and that all of the data collected from their participation up until they choose to cease participation would be destroyed, with the exception of students who are under the age of 18 and whose safety may be at risk. In such cases, students were made aware that information that was collected from their participation in the study would need to be turned over to the school support officers.

Conclusion

The qualitative approach to research described in this chapter is in alignment with other research in the area of reading engagement. This basic qualitative study employed general inductive analysis (GIA) to best illuminate the voices of students as themes emerged from their own words. The analysis of three forms of data including open-ended interviews with students, field notes, and analytic memos, helped to shed light on this problem of practice.
Chapter 4: Findings

The present basic qualitative study was designed to answer the following research question:

How do eight high-achieving high school students enrolled in Advanced Placement and Honors English courses describe the influences on their identities with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences?

This research question was answered through an analysis of the interviews with the participants in this study as presented in this chapter. The following chapter begins with an introduction to the eight students who participated in this study. Subsequently, a thorough presentation of the emergent themes from the data is presented and organized according to the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of identity (Gaines et al., 2010; Gudykunst, 2001; Phinney, 1992). Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the research findings.

Introduction to the Participants

A total of 10 potential participants returned the necessary forms to take part in this study. Out of 10 potential participants, eight students took part in the study. Two potential participants were unable to keep their appointments due to other commitments. The participants included four seniors, three of whom were enrolled in Advanced Placement Literature and Composition. One senior was enrolled in Honors English 12. Additionally, it is important to note that one of the four seniors is a former student of the researcher who, at the time of the study, was enrolled in a different English class due to a scheduling change. A total of four juniors took part in this study and all four were enrolled in Advanced Placement Language. No students from the College English 11 or College English 12 opted to take part in this study and only one student from all four Honors English courses that were visited for the purposes of recruitment agreed to
participate. The student was enrolled in Honors English 12. Thus, this study included a total of eight participants.

In this study, the participants described their identities as high-achieving students and readers in many ways. These descriptions carried the connotation that the students who participated in this study saw themselves, by and large, as successful in high school in that were able to balance doing well academically with their extracurricular and individual interests. Most importantly, however, in this study, the participants positively identified as ‘readers’. For example, in describing herself as a reader, Janie considered herself to be an “avid reader.” As Janie enthusiastically stated, “I love to read!” Anne described herself as “observant” when it came to reading. In reference to reading, Anne explained, “I can take things in if I take the time to analyze them.” Some participants, like Elizabeth, were even bolder: “My strengths for reading are basically, I guess everything.” Elizabeth further clarified that she was “a pretty engaged reader” who could not “put a book down” once she was engaged with it. Nelly called herself “thorough” when it came to reading. Meanwhile, Nick described how he was “committed to reading” while Phoebe described how she is “open minded” and intellectually curious as she proclaimed, “I like knowing a lot of stuff.” Aron even referred to himself as a “nerd” because he enjoyed comic book reading. In fact, even when participants seemed to be less confident in their reading abilities, they still showed that they were ‘readers’ and ‘high achievers’ because of their willingness to put forth the effort to understand the text that they were reading and to do well in class. As an example, Anne initially described herself as a “slow reader” who sometimes lost focus while reading. Yet it was also interesting that Anne also “re-read things” that she did not understand which ultimately showed a strong level of metacognition and self efficacy. Regardless, it was obvious from the way the participants described themselves
and their reading experiences that at this stage of their academic careers, they undoubtedly saw themselves as readers.

The students in this study identified themselves as students who were also committed to doing well academically as evidenced by their descriptions of completing assigned readings and homework for their respective classes. Aside from being enrolled in either Advanced Placement courses or honors English, the students also described themselves in terms of the commitment that it took to do well in their respective courses through the amount of time they spent on their homework each night. For example, in describing how much time he spent on his reading assignments, Nick declared, “I would say I spend as much as the assignment needed…” Likewise, Janie described how she completed about an hour and half to two hours of reading per night, while Anne said that she typically completed “four to five hours” of homework a night for all of her classes because she was taking so many Advanced Placement courses.

Outside of identifying themselves as readers and as students who were committed to meeting their academic expectations, the participants in this study also described the many ways that they identified as individuals outside of the classroom through their various interests. For example, Janie described herself as “slightly an artist” while Anne was a singer in a band. Elizabeth saw herself as a writer who enjoyed writing both fiction and personal essays. Drawing on her experiences as a writer, Elizabeth was most proud of an essay that she wrote about her experiences as a victim of bullying. Phoebe described her traveling interests and relayed how she was interested in exploring and learning about other parts of the world. Mostly, however, the students described their identities outside of the classroom in terms of their extracurricular activities. That is, meaning was derived from how the participants described themselves as athletes, like Aron and Nelly, or even through their participation in particular performance arts
arenas, like Owen, Nelly, and Nick. Some students even identified themselves as leaders in their respective groups. For example, Nelly was the co-caption of varsity soccer team while Owen served as the captain for the academic team in the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp (JROTC).

Since all of the participants in this study were either enrolled in Advanced Placement English or Honors English 12 and since most of them described how they were either involved in extracurricular activities within the school or actively pursuing personal interests such as writing, traveling, or singing, it can be deduced that this study was comprised of participants who identified themselves as high-achieving high school students.

The following participant descriptions are arranged in the order of the interviews. It is important to note that some of the students were enrolled in the exact same courses as other participants and therefore referenced the same texts during their interviews. Pseudonyms have been used to provide participants with anonymity.

**Janie.** At seventeen years old, Janie was a senior at X High School and was also a student in Advanced Placement Literature and Composition. Before taking AP Literature, Janie took AP Language as a junior. Janie labeled herself as an “avid reader” and described herself as someone who “love(s) to read.” In fact, Janie planned to major in English when she went away to college.

Janie forgot to attend the first scheduled interview. However, the researcher learned that Janie’s absence from the first scheduled interview was absolutely out of character for her. In fact, Janie, who was early for the rescheduled interview, said with some degree of modesty that she set her alarm so that she would not miss the interview again. With her eyebrows raised and her right hand clasped on her face, Janie explained that she usually never forgets to attend any
appointments and that this was completely unlike her, but that it had been a particularly busy week for her and she simply forgot to come to our first meeting. Janie unnecessarily apologized multiple times for forgetting to attend the first scheduled interview and the researcher reassured Janie that it was okay and that she had no reason to be sorry. Once Janie was comfortable, she seemed eager to get started.

Throughout the interview Janie spoke very clearly. It was obvious that Janie’s intent was to be thoughtful in each of her responses as she often paused to think about what she was going to say. Moreover, Janie came across as extremely confident; she made eye contact throughout the interview and maintained her focus when she answered each question despite distractions such as intercom interruptions. For example, at one point during the interview when Janie was describing the respect she has for authors in general, the school bell rang. Though somewhat disruptive, Janie patiently waited for the bell to finish sounding and returned to answering the question without hesitation. In some instances when Janie did not entirely understand a question, she responded simply by asking for clarification.

During the interview, it became apparent that Janie came from a supportive family that had a vested interest in what she is reading. For example, whenever Janie was assigned to read a book in class, Janie asked her mom if she has read it and, if she had, they discussed the book. Throughout the interview, Janie referred to her mother multiple times, helping reinforce the affective component of her identity. She has such a strong relationship with her mom, a commitment to reading, and a positive attitude about her reading experience.

In describing herself, Janie explained that she is a dancer. Janie’s face lit up when she began to talk about her interest in dancing and ballet. Janie even likes to read about dancing and ballet. As it turns out, Janie’s mom purchased a book for her about ballet because Janie has an
interest in learning about the experiences of other dancers.

Outside of dance, Janie had other artistic interests. For example, Janie took art classes through a young artist program at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). This tuition-based program allows students to explore their artistic interests.

Janie’s behaviors, such as reading about ballet and her participation in a tuition-based arts program, reinforced the behavioral component of her identity. The cognitive component of Janie’s identity became very apparent as she described herself as an “emerging young woman” who can easily identify with Victorian-era literature because of “universal themes” like a search for self-identity and understanding one’s role in society. Janie explained that she typically enjoyed the books that she is assigned to read, though she recognized that there are some books that she “gravitates more to” because she can “identify with (them).” In fact, Janie recalled how she often reads multiple books at the same time in order to “balance out the heavy, dense literature” that she is assigned to read in class.

In terms of the affective component, Janie described what appeared to be a sense of belonging and positive attitude within both Advanced Placement courses and the world of dance. Further, Janie’s relationship with her mother was apparent through her description of their conversations about books and their shared supported positive attitudes (Phinney, 1992) about school and commitment to reading. With regard to the cognitive component, Janie displayed confidence in recognizing that she appreciates a wide-range of literature. As Janie put it:

As a reader I mean there haven’t been many books that I’ve read that I haven’t really liked. I feel there is something’s I gravitate more to that I can identify with but when I’m reading I kind of like, respect an author from what they’re able to do, and how they’re able to tell a story and convey something deeper.
What is more, Janie also described how she has respect for authors because she “can’t see
[herself] writing a book so the fact that they can do that, and have so many people relate to and
connect to, I think is really wonderful.”

Janie connected this reading experience to her sense of self as it related to her gender
identity. For example, Janie explained that she has an interest in feminism as it relates to
literature:

It kind of was a topic in my AP Lang class but we also read a lot of Victorian era,
feminist-type articles. Like last year, at the end of the year, our teacher in Lang, she let us
read stuff from Virginia Woolf and like, even now, I feel like feminism always, like,
comes up in society so it’s interesting to always go back there.

Janie also participated in self-awareness through labeling when she referred to herself as an
“avid reader.” She also labeled herself as “a dancer” who takes ballet lessons. Janie’s self-
awareness also extended toward what she is not good at when she said, “I’m not very good at
math, math or science.” Finally, Janie described particular behaviors that have contributed to her
identity. For example, Janie described her commitment with reading and to school when she
detailed how she reads “nightly reading” for class “anywhere from an hour, or maybe an hour
and a half, two hours.” As described, Janie also participated in extra-curricular activities related
to her interests in art and dance, which are behaviors that have contributed to her sense of
identity, because Janie sees herself as a “dancer” and “slightly an artist.”

Anne. Anne, with her hair pulled back in a ponytail, placed her large, seemingly quite
heavy and obviously full backpack down on the classroom floor as she took her seat. Anne’s
smile was wide enough to light up the room, and her laugh was most certainly contagious. For
example, Anne immediately chuckled when, the researcher having introduced the witness to the
interview, the witness responded with “Thank you for having me!” and waved from the back of the room. Likewise, when the researcher, reading from the interview protocol, asked Anne for her permission to audiotape the interview, Anne responded slowly and sarcastically: “You…have…my…permission…to…audiotape…this…interview,” which emphasized her sense of humor. Equally, Anne laughed when she said that she enjoys watching the reality television show “Dance Moms” in her spare time.

Anne, the daughter of the owners of a local bus company that operates in the city in which this study took place, is a junior in high school. At 16 years old, Anne was taking an extremely heavy course load. To be sure, Anne revealed that she is enrolled in several Advanced Placement classes including Advanced Placement Language.

In the past, Anne’s mom purchased books that Anne was interested in. Anne’s relationship with her mother helped illuminate the affective component of her identity as she shared how she and her mom often discussed the books that she liked, which helps to reinforce her sense of self and, at the same time, allowed Anne and her mother the opportunity to share in a dialogue about Anne’s interests and reading experiences. However, when it comes to reading, Anne said that she often has to re-read what she has already read because she loses focus and drifts off when she reads. Anne likes to be able to picture what she is reading, but imposing thoughts about her hectic schedule often distract her. In fact, Anne said she actually does not read very often in her spare time because she simply does not have very much free time. To begin with, it was revealed that Anne kept a very busy schedule for a teenager, which included balancing a rigorous course load and participation in extra-curricular activities such as singing, tennis, and soccer. In addition, Anne attended church two to three days a week with her family. What is more, as a member of a band that Anne auditioned to be a part of, Anne went to Boston
to practice singing every Monday after school. In her role as a singer in the band, Anne has to
learn “at least one song a week.” Anne and her band had a performance scheduled every
weekend. Singing in the band took up a lot of Anne’s time. She even has a manager. As Anne
explained, some of the band’s performances were paid, while others were simply for fun. As an
example, Anne said that her band sang at anti-bullying events for free.

Anne was also a student-athlete. Anne played soccer during her freshman and
sophomore years and tennis all three years of her high school so far. Being a student-athlete
required that Anne commit to practice every day after school until around 5 o’clock. Anne had
about four to five hours of homework to complete each night when she got home from practice
because she was taking all advanced classes that required a substantial amount of homework.
For example, Anne read about seventy-five pages per week for her AP Language class and often
had to complete comprehension questions along with what she has read. Taken together, Anne
described each of these commitments as very time consuming. When Anne did have some time
to herself, she did not want to spend it reading. With a giggle, Anne said that during these times,
she wanted to either “watch TV or sleep.”

It was clear that the behavioral component of identity was the most prominent factor in
Anne’s identity. As described, Anne maintained a strict and busy schedule that left her with very
little free time. Anne appeared to move from one activity to the next and yearned for some free
time to simply relax.

During the interview, Anne continually defined herself by the activities that she
participated in. As Anne stated, “I’m a singer in a band. I play tennis for the school. I play
indoor soccer. I used to play outdoor, but I don’t have time anymore.” While Anne described
herself as someone who did enjoy reading, it was apparent that the other activities that she was
involved in take away from her motivation to read in her spare time. Still, these activities were an essential piece of Anne’s identity, and Anne seemed like she was quite motivated to do well in each of them.

Anne described herself as someone who completed all of her assignments on time and who completed her homework regularly. As Anne stated, “I usually do homework for a long time.” As mentioned, for Anne, a long time means at least several hours. When it came to reading, Anne was able to be reflective. For example, Anne described the connection she felt about a book because it related to the issue of foster care, something that she has learned a lot about through the experiences of her parents who own a bus company in an urban city and seemingly deal with issues relating to foster care on a fairly regular basis.

Phoebe. Phoebe, who was a 17-year-old junior at X High School, was enrolled in Advanced Placement Language and Composition. Phoebe’s eyes widened as she described the summer she spent in China. During her junior year of high school, Phoebe’s aunt arranged an opportunity for Phoebe to travel to China for two weeks to spend time with family. During that trip, Phoebe taught English as a language to elementary school students in grades 3, 4, and 5. Phoebe happily recounted how her students were as interested in learning about life in America as she was in learning about life in China. Phoebe chuckled as she described how her students wanted to know if she had ever seen snow. Meanwhile, Phoebe was interested in learning about their experiences in school. It became obvious that this experience had a profound effect on Phoebe. In fact, judging by her presence throughout the interview, Phoebe was the most animated when she was discussing her traveling experiences. Phoebe’s body language, including hand movements and a bright smile, illustrated how such experiences, especially the one in China, have affected her.
Since it was clear that traveling was a subject that Phoebe was most interested in, and that her past experiences in both China and Colorado have had a huge impact on her and her sense of self, it seems natural that these experiences have contributed to the cognitive component of Phoebe’s identity. For example, when Phoebe began describing her trip to China, Phoebe declared that she is very much interested in the world around her and in learning about other cultures. In this way, Phoebe showed that she valued diversity. Likewise, Phoebe’s interests were shown through what she reads. As Phoebe stated, “Whenever I see an article about something that’s happening somewhere else or even just around our area, I always click on and read about it.”

Phoebe enjoyed reading dystopian literature. As she described her experiences with dystopian literature, Phoebe became enthusiastic in discussing *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, and *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, which are all well-known contemporary examples of dystopian literature. Phoebe said that she enjoyed reading dystopian literature because she liked to think about society and the potential for what society “can become.” Peculiarly, Phoebe did not enjoy reading George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* last year in school, which is also an example of dystopian literature. Regardless, Phoebe said she did not know what else she finds interesting or enjoyable about reading dystopian literature other than how it reflects on society as a whole. With the exception of *Animal Farm*, almost all of Phoebe’s experiences with dystopian literature have come from her own desire to read them. In fact, Phoebe’s voice began to trail as she lamented the fact that she has not read more of these kinds of texts in school. Frowning, Phoebe noted that she has never had an opportunity to read a text that she has chosen for herself in high school. In describing her reading experiences in school, Phoebe declared that none of them have ever related to her own life. Though Phoebe described a
few instances of reading on her own in the past, she later declared that most of her reading experiences come from class assignments: “When we don’t have something assigned then I don’t really read.”

Interestingly, Phoebe said she enjoys reading fiction more than nonfiction. However, since Phoebe is taking AP Language, a course focused primarily on nonfiction, she mostly reads nonfiction texts these days. Though Phoebe had a few opportunities to read book-length memoirs and autobiographies that tell the stories of real-life people, they were of mixed interest to her. Ultimately, Phoebe recognized the kinds of texts that she was interested in reading, and wished she had more opportunities to read texts that she could choose for herself in high school.

At times throughout the interview, Phoebe seemed somewhat unsure of herself. For example, when Phoebe was asked what she liked to do in her spare time, she said “I don’t really know. I like to watch movies.” Later, when she was asked if she had any other interests other than traveling and culture, Phoebe, with her head tilted to one side, declared: “Not that I can think of right now.” Likewise, when she was asked about some of the reading experiences she has enjoyed outside of the realm of dystopian literature, Phoebe declared, “I don’t really know.”

A large part of Phoebe’s identity was centered on the behavioral component of identity. Though Phoebe appreciated literature and was at times aware of what she likes and does not like, she still seemed to be navigating through understanding herself and what she likes overall. Even though Phoebe recognized that she enjoyed traveling and learning about other cultures, she ultimately seemed somewhat unsure about her other interests. Still, while Phoebe said that she would try to finish reading a book that she did not enjoy, she had the ability to recognize when a text does not interest her.

Elizabeth. Elizabeth was an 18-year-old senior at X High School enrolled in Honors
English 12. Judging by her body language, Elizabeth appeared to be a somewhat shy individual at first, but ultimately Elizabeth came across as a very open person with a fair degree of confidence. While her fingers were tucked under the sleeves of her sweatshirt for most of the interview, Elizabeth openly described many of the experiences that she has had over the last four years that have helped to shape who she is today. During her sophomore year, Elizabeth struggled with school attendance because she was a victim of bullying. With her hands once again tucked away, this time under the desk, Elizabeth, who did not go into specific details, explained that a classmate targeted her, and that the bullying got so bad that in order to avoid it she stopped coming to school. Further, Elizabeth described how at the time, no one followed up with her once she stopped coming to school.

Recently, Elizabeth used this experience to write an essay about how she recovered from almost dropping out of school entirely. Elizabeth’s face began to illuminate as she described her essay, which detailed her experiences. In the essay, Elizabeth relayed how she became engaged with school again after she had experiences with teachers and faculty members who were able to get her to recommit to her education by coming to school. Elizabeth hoped that her story would help other students her age or younger who may find themselves in similar situations.

Elizabeth developed obvious habits that have contributed to the behavioral component of her identity. For example, Elizabeth’s essay about her bullying experience was not the first time she has used writing as a means of communicating her life experiences. In fact, Elizabeth spent a great deal of her free time writing. Elizabeth pulled a few strands of hair away from her face with the cuff of her sweatshirt as she described how she tried to write every day. While she mostly wrote fiction, Elizabeth also liked to write about her own life. Typically when Elizabeth was writing she either simply described her day, or revisited an idea for a story that she recorded
at an earlier time.

Elizabeth owned many books and regularly reread them. Elizabeth often read books of interest that she found on her own since she has never been given the opportunity to choose a self-selected reading title in class unless she completed all of her other course-related assignments. Elizabeth looked frustrated as she described that if she is reading in class, it is because she has finished with her work and has to find something to do to keep busy. Somberly, Elizabeth conveyed how disappointing her experiences with reading in high school have been. Elizabeth rolled her eyes as she described one particular experience in which she was supposed to read an important book in class, but that the class never got to read it; she has since forgotten the name of the book. Elizabeth shrugged her shoulders as she lamented the fact that due to the fact that she is not required to do any sort of substantial reading for her high school classes, she often simply chooses books of interest to read on her own and during her own time.

Elizabeth described how her mother wanted her to go to college after high school, but that she is not really interested in going at this point. While adjusting her cuff, Elizabeth compared this situation to a conflict that occurred in Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist* (which she had to read for school) because the main character in the book felt pressure from his father to live his life a certain way. As such, Elizabeth related to that particular conflict in the book.

Elizabeth demonstrated how her identity was connected to both the behavioral and cognitive component of identity. Elizabeth engaged with daily writing behaviors that help to contribute to her sense of identity, as she mostly wrote about herself and her life experiences. It became apparent that the act of writing allowed Elizabeth to reflect on her experiences and make sense of them. Elizabeth also read frequently and often reread books that she enjoyed. As Elizabeth declared, “I just really like learning.” To support this, Elizabeth described how she
uses the Internet to “broaden my learning.” Due to her ownership of many books, Elizabeth usually carried a book with her wherever she went. Ultimately, it became clear that Elizabeth was an extremely thoughtful individual as evidenced not only by her daily writing behaviors, but also in her varied reading experiences.

Elizabeth did not exhibit the affective component with a degree of strength within the context of her interview. For example, Elizabeth did not describe commitment to participation in extracurricular activities with her peers, and she did not describe a sense of belonging with her relationships with others where it concerned reading. Elizabeth did describe a degree of conflict with her mom, who wanted Elizabeth to go to college while Elizabeth felt that college was not really a place to which she saw herself going after high school. One of the few personal connections that Elizabeth described in her interview was that of a conversation with a computer teacher who recommended a psychology book for Elizabeth to read after Elizabeth noticed it on his bookshelf.

While Elizabeth shared her writing with others and hoped that her personal entries would make a difference in the lives of others someday, writing is, by its very nature, an individual activity and is often done in solitude. Even in class, Elizabeth described how when she would finish her work she would eventually go off to read by herself which was another individual activity. In addition, when Elizabeth described the interactions she had with her mother, she noted that she and her mom do not agree on Elizabeth’s future because Elizabeth does not want to go to college.

**Nelly.** Nelly, a pleasant 17-year-old senior with a vibrant personality, entered the room with both confidence and gusto. It was clear from her presence that Nelly was excited to talk about herself as a reader. In fact, before the interview, Nelly, who was enrolled in Advanced
Placement Literature and Composition, returned the signed informed consent and assent forms and explained that she was really excited to take part in a study because she saw herself as someone who has always enjoyed reading and has also enjoyed talking about books and her reading experiences. As the researcher later learned, Nelly’s reading experiences were quite impressive. Not only did Nelly read all of the assigned texts for her classes, but she also partook in independent reading. In the interview, Nelly described how she appreciated a wide range of texts. Ultimately, this appreciation contributed to Nelly’s cognitive identity as well as to her behavioral identity (Phinney, 1992). For example, Nelly described how she can often be found reading parts of the newspaper, especially the comic section, and that she also enjoyed reading series books in her free time. What is more, Nelly’s literacy experiences extended beyond the written page and to other media, such as podcasts and video presentations.

As it turns out, Nelly was very interested in science. Nelly’s eyes widened as she smiled and described how she often listened to TED talks on the Internet as well as Innovation Hub, a science-based podcast that discussed different scientific phenomena. Unquestionably, it was clear from the interview that through these types of habits, Nelly was able to engage in frequent, meaningful reading experiences beyond assigned in-class reading.

As the interview started, Nelly was very attentive as she positioned herself in the desk with her hands folded, making direct eye contact. Upon answering the initial questions about her hobbies and interests, Nelly, who spoke clearly and deliberately, rattled off an impressive list of diverse extracurricular activities in which she was involved. With her palms down and slightly lifted with her fingertips, Nelly humbly gazed toward the floor and revealed that at the time of the interview she served as the co-captain of the varsity soccer team. Nelly was also involved in a variety of artistic mediums within the school, including the drama club and the show choir, in
which she was heavily involved. Outside of these artistic memberships within the school, Nelly was also a singer in a band. Thus, it was not surprising when Nelly said that she liked to “stay active” since it was clear from her long list of extracurricular activities that she maintained quite a vigorous schedule. Nelly revealed that her parents have always maintained the importance of staying active. Nelly, whose parents are both college graduates, explained that her home life allowed her to live in a print-rich environment. For example, Nelly’s parents subscribed to *Smithsonian* as well as the newspaper. Essentially, Nelly alluded to having a supportive home life in which she is encouraged to do well in school and participate in a variety of extracurricular activities.

The affective component of Nelly’s identity was undoubtedly influenced by her relationship with her parents. Nelly described her parents as being very involved in her education. She shared an example of a time when her mother had a conversation with her about her essay writing, which needed improvement. Nelly explained that her mother hoped that Nelly’s wide range of reading experiences would help her to become a stronger writer. She described how her mother did not understand why she struggled with writing assignments because Nelly was such an avid reader. As Nelly recalled, her mother hoped that Nelly’s reading experiences would help Nelly expand her vocabulary and provide her with the ability to improve in her writing, but Nelly thinks she mostly just had trouble with the specific writing assignments themselves.

During the interview Nelly labeled herself as a “thorough” but “slow reader” because she goes back and rereads sections of the text that she does not immediately understand. Indeed, this type of self-labeling has influenced the cognitive component of Nelly’s identity. Interestingly, however, Nelly described that she reads slowly because she pays close attention to the text and
makes sure she understands what she is reading. Accordingly, if Nelly did not understand something that she was reading, she would go back to reread it and gain a better understanding of it. This type of close reading, of course, was an example of an engaged reading practice that has influenced the behavioral component of Nelly’s identity.

Though Nelly used to read for entertainment purposes with some regularity, during this stage of her life, she mostly read for class. Nevertheless, Nelly recognized her own reading preferences. Giggling, Nelly declared that she preferred reading fiction and hoped to read more of the classics in class because of the dialogue that came along with those texts and with her peers in AP Literature. With regard to nonfiction, Nelly said she simply “didn’t like the style of writing” and felt that reading those texts was “frustrating to get through.”

Throughout the interview, Nelly demonstrated the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of identity (Phinney, 1992). Specifically, Nelly’s sense of membership in Advanced Placement classes, her wide range of extracurricular activities, and her relationships with her parents and sibling contributed to her sense of belonging. Nelly also described herself as a Catholic who, while confident in her beliefs, was able to recognize the natural tendency for people to question their faith sometimes, as she relayed in her example of a character from a book that struggled with his or her faith, emphasizing a deep level of cognition.

Nelly participated in self-labeling by declaring that she was a “slow reader,” but she also accepted the values of engaged readers by appreciating a wide range of literature. As described, Nelly appreciated series books that she read for entertainment, as well as the classics that she was assigned to read in school. Nelly was a consumer of both digital and print literacy, as seen in her description of her interest in science by way of TED talks and Innovation Hub, as well as her family’s subscription to *Smithsonian* magazine. Finally, Nelly participated in distinctive
behaviors that helped define her sense of self. For example, Nelly was a methodical reader who worked to understand what she is reading. Nelly was not satisfied with simply glossing over the pages of a text and instead worked to understand what she is reading. For example, Nelly often annotated the text and looked forward to the class discussions. Moreover, Nelly was heavily involved in a variety of extracurricular activities that kept her quite busy.

**Nick.** A 16-year-old junior taking Advanced Placement Language and Composition, Nick relayed how he always loved reading. In fact, after describing some of his extracurricular activities, Nick stated, “I also like reading a lot. That is one of my main things.” Nick said that he was what some people may call an “advanced child” when he was younger; he credits his parents for helping him develop a love of reading. As a young child, Nick had a slight stuttering problem. To help Nick overcome his stuttering, Nick’s parents made him read out loud as much as possible: “It could be something in the newspaper or a sign on the wall. They would just say, ‘Nick, read that’ and I would have to read it.”

On the whole, Nick’s recollection of these events seemed in line with his personality. As such, Nick appeared to be a very reflective individual. He spoke very slowly and somewhat softly, often pausing to collect his thoughts. For example, Nick began his statements with “Umm” and “Well” before answering the question at hand. Likewise, he often gazed over to the wall before answering, as he thinks through his responses before focusing on the researcher. Nick placed his arms along both sides of the student desk as he positioned himself. From time to time, Nick slightly lifted his hand with an open palm as he explained his thoughts.

In elementary school, Nick participated in a reading contest to see who might be able to read the most books throughout the summer in addition to writing a book report. Nick smiled slightly as he described how he was nominated for the contest. As Nick recalled, he thought that
he read about 50 elementary-aged books, but he cannot be entirely sure. Nick chuckled slightly as he described how he remembered getting “a medal and a certificate from someone, but I can’t even remember.” In the end, however, Nick recalled the experience with some level of fondness as he declared how “it was kinda cool.”

Nick thought of himself as a “fast reader” who could usually finish whatever assignments he gets from class within an hour or two. As such, Nick described how he maintained active and engaged reading practices which contributed to the behavioral component of his identity. For example, Nick said that he could read longer books of 600 pages or more in a single day. To illustrate this point, Nick claimed that he read the novel *Divergent* by Veronica Roth the previous Sunday from cover to cover. Yet for Nick, reading novels like *Divergent* in a single day was not merely an exercise in reading quickly. Nick proved this when he began to thoughtfully articulate how he related to the main character, “Tris,” from *Divergent:*

> She grew up in a certain faction in her family and she believed that’s how she was supposed to be. Because it was her family, she believed that’s how it’s supposed to be. Everybody is so different and she recognized that and ended up joining a different faction of people. She found out where she really belonged, but still her family respected her decision. They knew that not everybody is always the same but their family is.

Nick explained that he identified with her because of the comparisons that his own parents made about him with his siblings:

> …my parents always compared all the children together I guess. It would be saying everyone is supposed to be similar but they slowly learned that not all their children are going to be the same and that we’re all going to have our own strengths and weaknesses.

Nick was also able to make a similar connection to a text that he read as part of an in-class
assignment. Nick described how he related to *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls because the memoir in the text should have been better role models for her:

> You have that empathy and sympathy for her because she went through all the struggle since she was that young and it seems the adults who should be the role models in her life weren’t really giving her a good template of a person.

Then, Nick raised his open palm as he explained how this related to his own life:

> I’ve been around adults who, I guess, adults who are supposed to be the role models for all the kids and they go off doing bad things and be hypocritical if you do something that’s not remotely as bad. It makes you think, “oh! You’ve done all these, why isn’t that important?”

Because Nick was so thoughtful about his reading experiences it came as no surprise when he explained that he saw himself as “committed to reading” and that he even took notes while he read. Even if he did not enjoy the book, not finishing it was not an option: “I won’t say, ‘Oh, I’m not going to finish this.’ I will finish the book from beginning to end.” In support of his declaration of commitment to reading, Nick explained that he had relationships with peers, including friends and classmates, that allowed him to talk about the books that they were reading both in and out of school. Nick also stated that he enjoyed reading books before seeing the movie because he believed in the truism that the book is always better than the movie.

Outside of reading, Nick was involved in the performance arts arena. Up until this interview, Nick had already played the trumpet for eight years. Additionally, Nick sang, danced, and participated in the school’s band, choir club and drama club, where he gained membership and ultimately a sense of belonging.

Though Nick admitted that he had a busy schedule, he also stressed that his schedule was
actually very organized. As Nick described it, when he was not engaged in one of his performance activities, he was either babysitting or reading.

Nick’s identity seemed to be shaped very much by the cognitive component of his identity. As described, Nick was extremely self-aware of his reading interests and what he has learned about himself as a reader. Nick was highly introspective about how books related to his life as evidenced by his analysis of both *Divergent* and *The Glass Castle*. Nick took pride in labeling himself as an “advanced child” and shared the example of the summer reading contest to show that he has been an avid reader since he was a child. Because Nick was willing to finish all of the books that he begins to read, he showed that he appreciated the written word and was willing to give each reading experience his full attention – even if the text did not immediately captivate him.

**Aron.** When Aron was 9 years old he discovered a comic book in his Easter basket. His mother had inserted the comic book into the basket along with some candy and a water gun. Almost instantly, Aron became intrigued. Since that experience, Aron has collected over 200 comic books. Aron believed that he became so intrigued with comic books because of the cliffhangers. As Aron described it, “I have to get the next one.” When Aron was a child, Aron’s mother took him to the store every month to “look at the comics.”

Aron, a 16-year-old junior taking Advanced Placement English Language and Composition, credited his early introduction to reading to his parents. Aside from his experience with comic books thanks to his mother’s Easter gift, Aron also recalled that during the summer before entering fourth grade, his mom assigned two books for him to read that had to be “more than 150 pages.” Aron, who chose to read *Moby Dick* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, admitted that he would not have read the books without his mother’s encouragement, or, as Aron
described it, “without her kind of pushing me into it.”

Aron described how his father and his grandfather influenced his reading interests ever since he was a child. For example, Aron credited his interests in history, the military, social injustices, and racial equality to his father and grandfather. Aron fondly recalled how one day, while at home, he found a book about the Black Panthers that his grandfather had given to his father. Aron read the book and it made an everlasting impression on him. Correspondingly, Aron recalled a tradition of activism among the male role models in his family: Aron’s grandfather and his father were activists during the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Aron relayed that activism had been a big part of his life ever since he was little, and that he felt encouraged to participate in that arena. In fact, as he matured, Aron, who was an athlete on the track team at X High School, started to expand his reading interests. For instance, Aron mentioned that he enjoyed reading popular series books like Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games*.

Aron admitted that in the past, he was more of a reluctant reader. Part of the problem may have been that Aron was not a self-starter. As Aron explained, he required something about the text to grab his attention to make him want to read it. Consequently, Aron frequently, and quite literally, judged a book by its cover. Aron relayed that the cover of a book sometimes enticed him to begin reading it. One example that Aron provided is that of *Poseidon*:

If it’s something exciting like for example the stories of *Poseidon*, they have a picture of the main character pulling a sword from the water with giant waves. That instantly grabbed my attention. I’m like, what’s this? It looks exciting but that’s something that easily grabs my attention.

While the cover of a book may grab his attention, Aron also admitted to being a procrastinator.
Though Aron always completed his reading assignments, he usually did not begin them until the night before they were due.

Aron, who jetted off to track practice immediately following the interview, was influenced by the affective component of his identity in a major way. That is, Aron’s relationships with his parents and grandfather undoubtedly influenced him as a reader. What is more, Aron admitted that if it were not for his mother’s persistence, he would not be the reader he is today. Though Aron recognized his need for some sort of visual stimulation or attention grabber to get started with reading a book, he also appeared to be quite committed to completing the assigned reading he receives from his teachers. While Aron labeled himself as a procrastinator, it is important to note that Aron still completed the reading assignments he was given.

Additionally, it became clear from the interview that Aron valued morality. For instance, Aron’s concern for equality was evidenced by his interest in activism. Further, Aron described how he related to a particular character from a memoir entitled *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls, because the character exhibited qualities of “loyalty.” Finally, Aron’s interest in history and the military helped to reinforce his desire to learn more about the world around him.

**Owen.** “There’s no book that I won’t read,” Owen proclaimed as he adjusted his glasses. Owen, who was a 17-year-old senior taking Advanced Placement Literature, said that he typically spends about a half of an hour, daily, reading; he also alluded to how the amount of time he spends reading is often tied to his interest in the book itself: “if I’m really enjoying the book then I’ve been known to stay up until 2:30, 3 o’clock in the morning finishing a book.” Owen’s all-night reading practices are based on whether he likes the book: “If I like the book, then it doesn’t matter if it’s AP or at home. I’ll stay up to finish it.” At the same time, Owen
described how he would persist in finishing any book that he starts. As Owen put it, “I like literature for the most part but there’s nothing that I really dislike and won’t read.” However, later in the interview, Owen described at least one reading experience that resulted in his refusal to read a book. While reading *Flowers in the Attic* based on a friend’s recommendation, Owen had a difficult time connecting to the main character. Though he did finish the book, Owen decided not to read the next book in the series: “I started to read it and I couldn’t finish the second one. It was too much and I just couldn’t.” Still, Owen’s description of this particular reading experience demonstrated that he while he does appreciate a wide-range of literature and is open to reading most books, he is also beginning to recognize his own likes and dislikes when it comes to reading. Such experiences have thus influenced the development of the cognitive component of his identity as Owen matured and became more self-aware.

In a similar way to many of the other participants in this research, Owen’s relationship with his family members was a recurring theme throughout the interview. For instance, Owen described how he and his mother talk about what Owen is reading. Specifically, Owen and his mother found a particular plot point presented in the science fiction novel *Invisible Man* by H. G. Wells funny. Owen smiled as he recounted this conversation with his mother, but for the most part, Owen credited his father to his interest in science fiction and dystopian novels. In fact, Owen’s father had a tremendous influence on him overall. For example, in his free time, Owen enjoyed playing video games. Owen recalled how his dad influenced his interest in video games and described how his whole family has “found little branches of games that we liked and it's what we do.” Overall, Owen’s family had a great deal of influence over him. Owen fondly remembered how his older siblings initially influenced his desire to become involved in the performance arts. As Owen recollected, each played an instrument, so he wanted to play one,
too. Likewise, Owen started singing in church and in the choir because of the influence of his siblings. Eventually, this led to Owen’s involvement in school performances as a member of the show choir and drama club. Ultimately, these examples helped to illuminate the affective component of Owen’s identity because they revealed how his positive and supportive relationships with his siblings and parents influenced him.

Owen also made known that he was enrolled in the Junior Reserve Office Training Corp (JROTC) ever since he was in the ninth grade. Owen described the JROTC as “a place for people to go to get a sense of military without any of the commitment,” and as a class that helps teach leadership skills, respect, and duty. For some students like Owen, JROTC was also an extracurricular activity. For example, Owen was the captain of the academic team in JROTC and conveyed how he was excited about the upcoming competition. It became clear that Owen’s membership in this organization had an impact on how he saw himself. For Owen, demonstrating discipline and responsibility came naturally as evidenced by his commitment to reading and his other extracurricular activities. Apart from it being a class and an extracurricular activity, Owen’s membership in JROTC reinforced that aspect of his identity in much the same way that his relationships with family members have exposed him to the performance arts and influenced his interests.

**Prominent Themes**

The emergent themes in this study are explanatory factors in relation to the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of identity (Phinney, 1992). They explain the connection between the students who participated in this study and their level of reading engagement. In the following section, the themes are organized around the salient aspects of the aforementioned components of identity.
In total, five major categories emerged from the data: “relationships,” “reading engagement,” “pedagogy,” “cohorts of engagement,” and “labeling.” The five major categories can be described in terms of five emergent themes, respectively: supportive relationships impact reading experiences; personally meaningful reading experiences influence reading engagement; pedagogy influences reading engagement; students participate in student success cohorts; and adolescents label their reading identities.

**Affective component.**

**Supportive relationships impact reading experiences.** In this study, the participants’ showed a sense of belonging in their identities as readers through their discussions about reading with other readers, namely their parents and their peers. Within these conversations, the participants generally conveyed positive attitudes about this aspect of their identities; through their recollections of these conversations, the participants described reading experiences that they were fond of. In this way, the data revealed that several of the participants’ identities were influenced to some extent by the supportive relationships they formed with these groups. Thus, the participants’ sense of belonging was stressed within the affective component. At home, their parents and their access to books influenced the participants’ identities. Specifically, the participants were shown to demonstrate a sense of belonging within their families through interactions with their parents and, in some cases, siblings. With their peers, shared in-class reading experiences as well as shared interests in independent reading texts influenced students’ identities. Congruently, both of these external influences helped to foster engagement with reading and for the participants to see themselves as readers.

**Parental influences.** Several participants described the influence their parents have had on their reading experiences. Typically, these experiences related to the assigned reading the
students received in class; though in a much broader way, participants described the influence their parents had on their reading experiences in general. Many of these experiences were enhanced by the conversations that participants had with their parents. For example, Janie articulated how she and her mother discuss the reading she is assigned in class:

I talk to my mom a lot so I kind of try to keep her updated on what I’m doing in school so every time I read a book or we get assigned a book I ask her if she has read it to try to talk to her about it. Even *Great Expectations*. I asked her if she’s ever read it and she said she did in high school so I like, tried to pick her brain to see how much she could remember from it….

In the preceding quotation, Janie used the word “talk” to describe one way by which her relationship with her mother, to whom she affectionately referred as “my mom,” is facilitated. By stating that she talks to her mom “a lot,” Janie established that she and her mom have an open-line of communication. When it comes to her mom, Janie explained that she wants to “keep her updated” on her academic life. As an example, Janie specified that she and her mom regularly talk about what she is reading in school. This piece of dialogue showed that Janie and her mom developed a supportive relationship when it came to reading and Janie’s schoolwork. Ergo, Janie clearly felt a high level of openness with her mom; not only was Janie willing to share her reading experiences with her mom – in part because she was genuinely curious about what her mom’s thoughts were with regard to the books she was reading and which of those books her mother had already read – but in this quotation, she also showed that she believed her mom had a genuine interest in what she is reading as well. The conversation, then, is not one-sided. Moreover, Janie’s supportive relationship with her mother provided her with an opportunity to have meaningful conversations about what she was reading outside of the
classroom: “…if I like a book, I talk to my mom a lot about them, and suggest them if I like them that much. Like the one about City X, I think my mom went out and bought it….” This quotation revealed how Janie’s mother was both an active participant in the dialogue with her daughter about her reading experiences, and that she was willing to invest in these conversations financially by purchasing the books. Janie’s mom “went out and bought” the book as a way of sharing in her daughter’s reading experience. Thus, the investments that Janie’s mother is making – both with time and money – helped exemplify how supportive relationships with a parent can influence an adolescent’s reading identity. Through this supportive relationship, Janie has experienced the power of shared intellectual stimulation through conversation with her mom.

Owen had similar conversations about reading with both of his parents. Owen was reading H. G. Wells’ *Invisible Man* independently and described a brief conversation with his mother about the book:

I actually had that same conversation with my mother a little while last night. She had also read it and she told me that she also laughed at that point, so we discussed that a little bit.

In this quotation, Owen used the word “conversation” to describe the act of engaging in a back-and-forth dialogue with his mother about *Invisible Man*. It is significant that this conversation was specific and not just about the book in general. That is, Owen and his mother did not have a simple or brief exchange about either liking or not liking the book. Rather, Owen and his mother discussed a specific incident in the book that they both found funny. It can be inferred that this type of recall from reading a book is an example of engaged reading: both Owen and his mother were able to fondly remember an otherwise insignificant moment in a text that made them laugh. In this way, this quotation emphasized Owen and his mother’s ability to engage with a text,
recall comical moments from it, and discuss it with one another. Like Janie’s conversation with her mom, Owen’s conversation with his mother served to emphasize the impact of supportive relationships between parents and their adolescent children where it concerns reading and identity. Owen’s identity, like Janie’s, was influenced by the bond he shares with his mother where it concerns reading.

Interestingly, though Owen shared this exchange about *Invisible Man* with the researcher, Owen ultimately attributed the major influence on his reading interests not to his mother, but to his father:

I get it from my dad, but I do like science fiction sometimes. I know my dad would always say, “I really love Asimov” and I tend to like Asimov. I read his entire robot tales book a couple years ago and I really did enjoy it.

Owen’s memories of his father’s reading habits and interests were acutely conveyed in the preceding quotation. Owen used the word “always” to imply that this is a recurrent statement of his father and not simply a rare one, alluding to what would appear to be multiple conversations about reading and books in Owen’s household. Further, Owen recounted how he read his father’s “entire robot tales book,” which further illustrated Owen’s effort to maintain a level of intellectual and cultural closeness with his dad. By investing time in reading that series, Owen demonstrated that he cared about what his father was reading and valued his father’s interests enough to invest his own time in them. Further, since it was apparent that Owen’s family discussed reading and books with some degree of regularity, it showed that Owen was committed to participating in conversations with his father about reading and to engaging in this part of his father’s world that was filled with science and science fiction. Definitively, it became clear that Owen’s family had a strong influence on his reading experiences because they read
regularly and frequently shared common reading experiences. As Owen described it, “In my house everyone read the *Harry Potter* s, so I was like, ‘Oh, I’ll read *Harry Potter*.’” In this quotation, Owen once again displayed enthusiasm in joining a literary experience along with members of his family. By investing time in reading a series of books that his family experienced as well, Owen demonstrated that he valued his family’s reading experiences and wanted to partake in them.

Talking about the texts that students were assigned to read in class with their parents also helped participants to identify with the texts on an even greater personal level. Anne, whose parents owned a bus company that brought students to school, described how she related to a memoir that took place in the city that Anne grew up in about the foster care system. Even though she had very little experience with foster care herself, Anne was able to relate to the text because of her parents: “It’s sad to think that, in my own city, this is happening. My parents deal with that kind of situation everyday.” In this quotation, Anne took ownership of her surroundings by calling City X “my own city” and reflected on the nature of living in an urban environment where not everyone was as fortunate as she was. Anne related to this text because her parents, as the owners of a local bus company, dealt with similar situations in their encounters with children and adolescents from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, Anne’s parents encountered students who were enrolled in the state’s foster care system. Anne implied that they had a good amount of experience with these students. Anne’s statement also left the impression that her parents described their experiences with these students either with or in front of Anne. This was evidenced by her ability to make this connection to her own reading experience: “They own the bus company and they pick up children from daycares and there’s a lot of situations where they are in foster care….” In this way, Anne reflected on what she read
about in the memoir not only because she was familiar with the urban city in which it took place, but also because she was able to relate to her parents’ personal experiences with foster care children who take the bus to school. Anne’s statements helped demonstrate how her parents’ experiences have helped shape her identity. Anne’s parents clearly shared at least some of their work experiences with Anne and thus offered her a glimpse into their lives that she would not have otherwise seen. In this manner, Anne was a participant in her parents’ lives just as they were in hers. These conversations thus helped illustrate a supportive relationship between Anne and her parents that bled into her in-class reading experience as she related the book to her parents’ discussions.

Some participants described how their parents tried to incite an interest in reading when they were young. When Aron was in the fourth grade, his mother assigned him with her own version of summer reading: “My mom insisted that if I wanted my mind to stay fresh, she wanted me to read at least two (books)....” That summer, Aron read abridged versions of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain and *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville. Aron admitted that he probably would have never read those books if it were not for his mother’s persistence. Accordingly, Aron’s mother’s insistence that he engage in summer reading conveyed to Aron that she cared about his reading habits and his reading growth. His mother took an active interest in his development as a reader by insisting that he read books outside of the required reading given by his school. This anecdote helped to emphasize the supportive relationship with his mother that Aron had where it concerned reading.

Other participants also conveyed their parents’ interest in their reading, though they did so in different ways. Nick and Nelly described how their parents compared their reading abilities to their siblings. As described earlier, Nick recalled how his parents “always compared all the
children together,” but that they learned to appreciate them as individuals. Likewise, Nelly articulated how her mother noted marked differences between Nelly and her sister when it comes to reading:

…she sort of like noticed the difference between my sister and I. Like, my sister didn’t like to read as much as I did and so my mom was just like, she would really promote it in me….

In this quotation, Nelly noted that her parents were involved enough in her reading to take an active role in it, but also implied that since her sister did not seem to enjoy reading as much, her mom focused her energy on promoting it with Nelly but not necessarily her sister. It was interesting to note the implication that two children who were brought up in the same household had different experiences with regard to their parents and their reading as determined by their parents’ expectations. However, Nelly did not go on to say that her sister did not read, simply that she did not like to read “as much” as she did. By noting this difference, however, it was also surmised that simply demonstrating a stronger regard to reading became a piece of Nelly’s identity within her own household that separated her from her sister.

This idea of comparing one’s self to another person was a prominent and recurring motif within the interviews. In Nelly’s case, the comparison is one that Nelly took some degree of pride in. Based on her mother’s actions, Nelly effectively established herself as the sibling who enjoyed reading more. This piece of Nelly’s identity informed the way she thought about herself as both a reader and as a member of her family. However, these comparisons can sometimes lead to a sense of inadequacy as well. For example, Owen compared the way he reads to the rest of his family. As Owen stated: “In my family, one of my weaknesses would be I don’t read as fast as them. I sometimes don’t always pick up on some of the things they read.” By stating this,
Owen implied that he held a particular belief about his family members’ reading abilities being stronger than his. By stating that he doesn’t “read as fast as them” or “pick up on some of the things they read,” Owen established a piece of his identity as being inferior to those members of his family with perceived stronger reading ability. For Owen, this propelled him to read more; he wanted to join in on their reading experiences and gain more from his own reading. As a result, Owen’s identity was shaped by the perception he has formed of his own reading abilities in comparison to those of his loved ones. For Owen, reading was challenging because he wanted to see himself on the same level as his family members in terms of both speed and analysis.

The influence of parents on students’ individual identities extended beyond their reading experiences, into other areas as well. Besides reading, several participants described how their parents influenced them in a myriad of other ways. For example, Nelly expressed how her parents have influenced her to both stay active and appreciate the arts:

…sports have always been like a part of something that my parents not really enforced but it was a good idea to keep us active, to keep us out and then the arts, both of my parents are actually…they got their degrees in art so I’ve always grew up with it, been around it….

In the preceding quotation, Nelly used the word “always” twice. First, Nelly used it to describe her ongoing participation in athletics. Then, Nelly used the word to describe how she has consistently been exposed to the arts. In this quotation, Nelly implied that her parents favored her participation in activities outside of school. Interestingly, Nelly used the phrase “not really enforced” to describe how her parents advocated for her participation in athletics, but did not necessary force her to participate in them. This showed that Nelly’s parents preferred that Nelly participate in activities of interest to her, and that they were open to her not participating in
activities that she was not interested in. Had her parents enforced her participation in activities, Nelly may have felt like her participation was a rule and not something that she had a say in. This spoke to Nelly’s recognition of her own freedoms within the margins of her parents’ expectations. That is, Nelly understood that her parents wanted her to participate in athletics but also recognized that they were fair about allowing her to spend her time doing the kinds of things she liked. As mentioned, Nelly noted that both of her parents had art degrees. This showed that Nelly’s parents have shared their appreciation for the arts with Nelly. It also spoke to the level of educational attainment that her parents had, as well as their willingness to appreciate both athletic and artistic mediums. Nelly’s recognition of this helped support this component of her identity. For Nelly, participation in athletics and the arts was both an expectation and an opportunity. In both worlds, Nelly found comfort, perhaps in part because she received such tremendous support from her parents in these areas.

In a similar way, Owen was introduced to playing instruments and singing because his older siblings participated in these activities and encouraged him to do so as well. Owen candidly said: “My older siblings were in band, so I was in band. They played an instrument so I wanted to play one…. ” In this quotation, Owen illustrated how his siblings have influenced his interests. Further, this quotation demonstrated that Owen looked up to his siblings; in many ways, Owen wanted to be like them. In the same way that Owen wanted to read like them by reading as quickly as they read and reading the same kinds of books that they read, Owen also wanted to participate in the same kinds of activities that they participate in. The encouragement that came from his siblings was obvious as Owen recalled their involvement in the church choir: “They were like, ‘Oh you should sing, too!’” Clearly, the supportive relationship Owen had with his siblings impacted his sense of self by as it gave Owen the confidence he desired to participate in
these arenas.

The influences on Owen from his family members also extend to other areas of interest beyond reading and the performance arts. For example, Owen and his siblings were influenced by their father’s interest in video games:

…my dad was very much one of those…Mario was a thing when he was a kid, Zeda.

Traditions carry, so my dad would sometimes play it for [my sister] when she was a kid, so as a family we all just grew up [with video games].

As Owen described it, his father’s inclination toward playing video games swayed his entire family to participate in gaming as a pastime: “We’ve all found little branches of games that we liked and it’s what we do.” The phrase “it’s what we do” is important. It referenced a family norm, a way of acknowledging something that identifies Owen’s family and, by extension, it was also a way of identifying himself. That is, Owen saw himself as a gamer in the same way that he saw himself as a performer and a reader: a means of establishing himself in his family.

In these examples, it was shown that several of the participants were able to recall how the interactions they have had with their parents and, in some cases, siblings, influenced their identities. Sometimes, like with Janie, these influences were brought about by a certain kind of openness between parent and child that allowed for conversations to occur about books and reading. Meanwhile, Anne made specific connections between what she was reading and the kinds of experiences her parents have shared with her. Aron’s mother took a proactive approach to improve his reading habits by requiring him to complete additional summer reading. Other times, however, the influence of parents and siblings became more obvious, as was the case with Owen, who recounted several ways in which his interests have been shaped by his parents and his siblings. In all, it was obvious that these kinds of supportive relationships influenced the
identities of the participants.

Access to books. Having a print-rich environment, or at least access to reading material at home, was another recurring theme. Some of the participants described how their parents made financial investments in the books that they were reading. As Janie explained, she often read things of interest that she had access to: “Umm. Just anything that’s around. I also kind of flipping back and forth with Sherlock reading a book that my mother had bought me about ballet just because try something I identify with it so I found it to be interesting.” By using the phrase “just anything that’s around,” Janie implied that there are various texts available to her at home. This notion was supported by Janie’s statement about her mother’s purchase of a book for her. That is, Janie described how her mother “bought” her a book about ballet. By using the word “bought” to describe a purchase her mother made for her, Janie painted a picture of her access to reading materials and her mother’s willingness to support that interest financially. Likewise, Anne described how her mother went out and bought a book that she was reading in class because Anne suggested it to her. Nelly’s family owned a subscription to Smithsonian magazine that also implied that her parents made a financial investment in reading at home. For her end-of-the-year project, Nelly selected an independent reading book from home to bring to school to read. Aron’s mom facilitated his interest in reading through comic books. When he was 9 years old, Aron’s mother purchased a comic book for him for Easter. Aron enjoyed reading the comic book, and Aron’s mother used this experience as a way to engage Aron with reading. Since that first comic book experience, Aron has been hooked; in fact, as Aron described it, comic books were his main source of literary entertainment, and he had over two hundred comic books. As mentioned, Aron became interested in reading about the Black Panther Party when he found a book about the subject at home; he then read the book on his own. Ultimately, these students
shared the commonality of having access to reading materials outside of school.

*Peer influences.* The participants in this study were often members of particular groups that undoubtedly influenced them. For example, seven out of eight of the participants in this study were members of Advanced Placement courses. Many of the students who participated in this study participated in specific extracurricular activities, a participation that will be presented in detail later in this chapter. At other times, these relationships were formed as friendships, or even simply interactions with classmates in Advanced Placement English. In both instances, the relationships students had with their peers were seen as a prominent theme. These relationships were always described as supportive in that they influenced the participants’ reading experiences in some way. In some instances, the reading experiences were shared because of a popular text that a friend was reading. For instance, as Owen relayed, “…my friends like to give me books to read saying ‘You should read this.’” In other instances, the reading experiences were communal because of a common classroom text. In both cases, the reading experiences of the participants were elevated because they came with a social component. More specifically, two participants noted conversations they have had with friends that impacted their reading experiences. As Janie said:

Well, with my friends sometimes out of school, we find ourselves talking about books we’re reading in class and having conversations like if we see something, or hear something that reminds us of *The Handmaid’s Tale* then we’ll talk about it for a little while.

By using phrases like “out of school” Janie illustrated how she and her friends share a common interest in reading. The experiences that they have had in class have perpetuated casual conversations outside of class that allow them to reflect on the reading they are doing in school.
This was most obvious when Janie said, “we find ourselves talking about books we’re reading in class,” which demonstrated that these conversations are not planned, but spontaneous and, at the same time, natural. Likewise, Phoebe echoed Janie’s comments about assigned reading and independent discussion by providing a specific example of this type of interaction:

I had a conversation with a friend a few days ago actually about the book that we’re reading in class right now. She was saying how she finished up to a certain part and I was, “Oh! I haven’t got there yet.” She was asking me how I felt about the book and I said so far I’m not really into it and stuff.

Perhaps most notable in the preceding quotation was the idea that Phoebe’s friend was interested in how she “felt about the book,” which further illustrates the significance of forging a personal connection to the text. By using the word “felt,” Phoebe implied that the most meaningful part of that conversation was the part in which her friend was interested in knowing Phoebe’s opinion; Phoebe replied she was “not really into it.” Though Phoebe did not supply a reason, the idea that these two peers were talking through a shared reading experience outside of school is still noteworthy because pointed to the importance of meaning associated with peer influences on reading and identity. For Phoebe, part of her identity was not only being able to read books, but also to share those reading experiences with others. Likewise, for the other participants, their interactions with peers about reading led them to feel a sense of belonging.

Summary. The part of identity that was influenced by the themes described in this section was seen as relating to the affective component (Phinney, 1992) because one of the important aspects of the affective component is a person’s sense of belonging. The participants in this study demonstrated a sense of belonging within their identities as readers through their conversations with other readers, namely their parents and peers. Therefore, within this study,
the participants’ sense of belonging within groups was highlighted as it related to the affective component.

The participants in this study demonstrated that they had a sense of belonging within their family relationships and their peer relationships because the relationships were seen to be supportive where they concerned the participants’ reading experiences. When it came to their relationships with family members, the participants described the influences that their parents and siblings have had on them. A few select examples included anecdotes provided by both Janie and Anne, who each described the conversations they had with their respective mothers about reading. Additionally, Aron described how he initially became interested in reading comic books as a result of his mother’s Easter gift to him and her insistence that he complete summer reading that she assigned personally. Likewise, Owen related how his father initially got him interested in reading science fiction.

This component of identity was also illustrated through the participants’ relationships with peers. Sometimes, these conversations were the result of in-class reading. In such cases, these supportive relationships were formed from their experiences with peers in their classes. At other times, these relationships were fostered through simple social interactions with friends. In these cases, books were recommended by friends and discussed with peers. In both occurrences, the important element was that participants recalled conversations that they had with peers about books and were ultimately able to share reading experiences socially. Thus, these types of relationships are seen as supportive to both the participants’ reading habits and their identities as a whole.

**Cognitive component.**

*Personally meaningful reading experiences influence reading engagement.* Data from
this study revealed that students often achieved reading engagement through the recognition of a personal connection with a text. This finding was seen as an element of the cognitive component because it showed how the participants were willing to adopt the values of engaged readers by engaging with reading experiences that were personally meaningful. When students did not like a particular text, even if they finished reading it, they ultimately did not enjoy the reading experience as a whole. Thus, there was a correlation between a reading experience being personally meaningful and being enjoyable. Specifically, some of the participants described how enjoyment factors into how personally meaningful the reading experience is for them. As Phoebe said, “I only really enjoy reading when I enjoy the book.” The emphasis in this quotation was on the words “only” and “enjoy,” respectively. For Phoebe, reading experiences where she does not “enjoy” the book correspond with reading experiences that are negative. The word “only” in this instance was both stark and biting: Phoebe was a student who understood that enjoyment was a major factor in the reading experience. Without enjoyment, the reading experience was not engaging. Similarly, Owen stated, “…if I’m really enjoying the book then I’ve been known to stay up until 2:30, 3 o’clock in the morning finishing a book.” Owen then qualified his statement with an explanation: “depends how much I like the book.” In both of the preceding but interrelated quotations, Owen stated very clearly that enjoyment was a contributing factor in engagement. For Aron, it did not matter if the book was an in-class assignment or an individual choice: “If I like the book, then it doesn’t matter if it’s AP or at home. I’ll stay up to finish it.” Aron used the phrase “it doesn’t matter” to make the point that the way in which he found an entry into the reading experience was not as important as the reading experience itself. Whether it was for class or for recreation, all that really mattered in terms of engagement was enjoyment. Likewise, as Elizabeth explained:
I would describe myself as a pretty engaged reader. I can’t put a book down once I’m into it. Unless I absolutely do not like a book. I will immediately put it down and won’t even try to read it anymore. I think as a person I should really try more to like other genres and get into them.

This quotation provided ample data from which to best understand the finding that personally meaningful reading experiences influence reading engagement. For instance, Elizabeth identified herself as a “pretty engaged reader.” Elizabeth supported this by articulating how she becomes so engrossed in an enjoyable or personally meaningful reading experience that she will become consumed with the book. Yet when a book is not meaningful, and when Elizabeth does not like it, she simply gives up. This was significant because Elizabeth, who identified herself as someone who was engaged with reading, resisted texts that were of no interest to her. This was also a substantial claim to make given what it said about Elizabeth’s identity as someone who understood her interests, likes, and dislikes. However, it is important to note that Elizabeth recognized that she should, “as a person,” try to experience “genres” other than the ones she has become accustomed to reading. This was an important piece of Elizabeth’s self-awareness, serving to illustrate her ability to reflect on her identity as a reader.

Aron recognized that his interest in a text affected his engagement, but in retrospect, he generally took a different approach to his disengagement by returning to the text and trying to re-read it: “My weakness is if the book doesn’t grasp my attention I easily want to zone out of it and just go through like 3 pages…what did we read again? Let me go back and see what happened.” With this, Aron described what so many readers feel when they are either bored or simply not interested in a book. For Aron, if the book he was reading was not personally meaningful, interesting, or enjoyable, it was difficult for him to stay with it and comprehend what the text is
about. As Aron stated, when the book was not interesting, he lost focus, failed to keep up with the content, and ultimately found himself asking “what did we read again?” Aron also admitted that at times, if he is disengaged from what the text is saying, he skipped sections until he found the parts of the text that were personally engaging. As an example, Aron described that there were times, in reading the required text for Advanced Placement Language and Composition entitled *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot, where he just skipped over entire sections: “When they go into unnecessary details about mitosis, that’s actually biology. Like, let me just skip to the next two paragraphs and get back to the story.” The important word in this quotation is the word “unnecessary.” As a reader, Aron has formed opinions about what is essential to the text and what is not. Aron mostly just wanted a reading experience that was well organized and not distracting. For Aron, this meant that the text was not filled with details that detract from the enjoyment of the story itself.

*Personal connections with the text.* Participants identified examples of times that they felt personally connected to a text, and typically their connection had to do with something that they could relate to within their own lives or within society as a whole. This finding was seen as an element of the cognitive component because it showed how the participants were willing to engage with reading experiences. Several participants noted the need for meaning within the text. For example, Phoebe stated, “I like reading things that have a deep meaning or something, emotional.” For Phoebe, the phrase “deep meaning” and the word “emotional” conveyed her interest in spending time with texts that teach her something about life. Further, this illustrated her engagement with texts that spoke to her, that taught her a lesson, or that she could carry with her as she continued to navigate adolescence. Of course, Phoebe was not alone in this desire. For her part, Janie described something quite similar:
I feel like on some level, Like I keep going back to this but *Great Expectations* too in some way still relates even though it’s about England and society in the 1800s like passed all that, like the essential themes are kind of universal like material objects. There’s a lot of class snobbery that goes on in that novel and valuing money and possessions over like morals and hard work so I feel like that relates to life in general.

For Janie, *Great Expectations* was significant because its themes are timeless. As a high school student who was aware of her environment and the world around her, Janie recognized that prejudice, elitism, and materialism were aspects of society that still plagued the modern, civilized world. These issues, however universal, were also important factors in understanding the self; for Janie, being introspective and recognizing these issues on a broad, “universal” scale helped her assuage the struggles of moving into adulthood in an imperfect world.

Relatedly, Janie connected her personal goals with the reading that she did independently. Janie, who was taking ballet lessons and who read about other ballet dancers, explained: “…it helps to just read stuff, like read other dancers experiences to kind of help me with my own life and what I’m going through as a dancer.” This quotation helped once again illustrate how Janie paid attention to others and tried to absorb what she could from those who came before her. Janie was able to use reading as a tool from which to foster a degree of self-improvement – whether it be in the form of personal growth on a humanistic level or through her specific interests, such as dancing. Janie used the phrases “dancer’s experiences,” “help me,” and “my own life” to convey the part of her identity that is informed by external influences. In this example, those external influences on Janie’s identity included those people who have shared similar pursuits and struggles with regard to dancing.

Remarkably, Janie recognized most of this herself as she reflected on the importance of
these personal connections with the text: “I think I’ve learned how much I value reading and how much it helps me to learn about, like, myself as a person, identify the world around me.” The phrases “value reading” and “helps me” illustrate important qualities of Janie’s identity that were impacted by the act of reading. Further, Janie elucidated that these kinds of reading experiences informed her thinking and helped her grow as she moved forward in the world. In sum, these kinds of experiences empowered Janie as she matured in this stage of adolescence, because they allowed her to see, learn from, and understand the world around her.

Nelly described a personal connection that she had with a text because it dealt, in part, with the theme of questioning one’s religion. Nelly, who identified herself as a Catholic, acknowledged that while she was reading Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* for an in-class assignment, she connected with the text because she was able to make a connection between the text and her own life:

Sort of like in the religiously kind of aspect. There was a kid…the son in the book was sort of questioning his own religion and I wouldn’t say that I’m questioning, but as I have grown…I’m a Catholic and I can sort of see, it’s not that I was questioning the religion, but I can see the flaws and the faults in it and that was sort of, that related to what he was feeling in his own but he had more of a rebellious take on it. Mine was just sort of a realization of its not as perfect as it does seem.

Nelly’s connection to this theme within the text showed that she made a personal connection with the text. While Nelly said that she was not “questioning the religion” in which she was brought up to believe, she noted that she recognized its “flaws” and “faults.” While Nelly did not classify this behavior as “questioning” her religion, she did admit that she understood that religion, as an idea, is simply imperfect. This was a remarkably profound realization for an
adolescent to make while reading a book that may otherwise have very little to do with the reader’s own life. That is, *Things Fall Apart* is a book about conflicts that arise in a fictional pre-colonial Nigerian village. It would appear, however superficially, that Nelly would have very little in common with such a text. Yet it was with a young character’s internal struggle with religion that she was able to connect, because the struggle is so universal. As a young person herself, Nelly saw a piece of herself within the text, a realization that ultimately made for an engaging reading experience.

These types of personal connections were the most prominent ways in which the participants in this study engaged with a text. When these connections were not made, it was more difficult for adolescents to become engaged with the text. An example of this was apparent in Aron’s interview. While Aron described how life lessons, however indirect or general, have also helped engage him with reading, he did not find the connection between what he has been reading in-class and his own life an easy one to make when he read a memoir about the foster care system:

> Related to my own life. That’s a tricky one . . . I thought that some of the struggles he went through...obviously not all of them, because you know I came from a very nice family where he came from a much tougher scenario. The thought that he had to overcome these problems means of education that you can...that you don’t have to let negative influences bend you to their situation. I guess I can relate to that and that I take it personal.

Using phrases like “I guess” and “that’s a tricky one” were telling. They showed that it was difficult for Aron to become engaged with an in-class reading experience on a personal level, though he was willing to stretch. Ultimately, Aron’s answer to this question seemed to be an
afterthought: he could relate to the text on the level he described in terms of overcoming “negative influences,” but that it took deliberate reflection to make that connection. That is, the connection was not necessarily apparent to him while reading it. Even more damning was the fact that Aron lost interest in the book as he moved forward. As he stated: “It felt like I’m just being dragged through the book.” Certainly, no reader wants to be “dragged through” a book. Typically, when a reader uses such negative imagery to describe their reading experience it can be classified as a reading experience that is not tremendously meaningful. Yet, for his part, Aron attempted to relate to the text on some basic level. Aron went on: “It’s pretty cool but I mean, it shows the moral…which I understand but I really can’t relate to it.” In this quotation, Aron demonstrated that he was a reader who wanted to be engaged with the reading experience and was open to the positive aspects of the experience as a whole, but also acknowledged that there have been instances when he could not relate to particular in-class reading experiences.

Delving even more deeply, students were also asked if they were able to identify with a character from a book that they have read in school and to explain what was it about the character that made them identity with him or her. This question went beyond the idea of simply engaging with a book based on the reading experience itself; it speaks precisely to how an adolescent relates to a character’s identity. According to Janie, she has identified with characters because of both gender and adolescence:

Well, I feel like being a female and being like an emerging young woman I can always identify with someone who, like a Virginia Woolf or someone who writes from the Victorian era and like right now even anyone in high school at 17 or 18, like, searching for themselves or finding where they fit in society during the Victorian era, women like struggled with that a great deal so I feel like I can always identify with a character like
Janie’s vocabulary in this quotation said a great deal about her. First, Janie immediately identified herself as a “female” and “an emerging young woman.” This type of self-identification requires a lot of thought; that is, it can be assumed that these issues of identity are items that Janie has been grappling with as she encounters texts of this type. Janie used a specific example to support her claim: she casually mentioned “Virginia Woolf” and the “Victorian era” as areas of entry for meaningful engagement as they relate to her modern context. For Janie, the issue of “finding where they (women) fit in society” is a timeless and universal theme that she can easily relate to in our modern world. Janie explicitly stated that she “can always identify with a character like that” because of her role in our modern society as a female who is coming into her own. Closely related to this point was the fact that Janie also picked up on several major issues outside of gender. For example, by using the word “emerging” and referencing high school students who are “17 or 18” and who are “searching for themselves,” Janie picked up on this aspect of her identity as a maturing adolescent who sought to understand better the world around her and to recognize where she fit into what she saw.

As shown in the following exchange, the themes of gender and adolescence were also noted in Owen’s personal connection with the character of Holden Caulfield in J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*:

*Researcher:* Why do you think you were able to identify with that character?

*Owen:* Teenage boys sometimes, their idea that sometimes there are things that they can learn from each other. That’s true for anyone, but for me…The easiest way to explain is just it was just that age where I felt I could understand where he was coming from and thus I felt that I could learn from what he was doing, why he was doing it. Why some
In this excerpt, Owen described how he connected with the character of Holden Caulfield based on two important factors that were strikingly similar to Janie’s: gender and adolescence. Owen used the term “teenage boys” to emphasize how he related to two of Holden Caulfield’s many struggles, struggles that are interrelated in some ways. Holden, as an adolescent who is working through a number of conflicts, is also learning what it means to grow up and really become an adult. For Holden, this also includes what it means to be a “teenage boy.” Issues of masculinity are common themes in The Catcher in the Rye, and Owen picked up on them as he “could understand where he was coming from.” Without going into specific details, Owen conveyed that he felt a kinship to this character in two crucial ways, which echoed Janie’s discussion of gender and adolescence from her interview. Further, Owen alluded to his in-class reading experience by describing how he could learn from the character of Holden Caulfield even when “some things didn’t make sense to other people and made sense to me.” In this quotation, Owen was referring to his classmates who also read this in-class text. Strikingly, Owen took ownership of this realization as it impacted his own sense of self because he related to the character.

For her part, Phoebe described how she enjoyed texts that allowed her to think about society as a whole. To explain, Phoebe described her preference for dystopian and utopian works of fiction:

I think it just makes me think about what our world could potentially become or how our society is right now and how it related so much to our society or what our society could become.

In this quotation, Phoebe used several important phrases that reflect her thinking as she explores the world. For one, Phoebe is interested in understanding, or at least thinking about, “what our
world could potentially become.” By this, Phoebe meant that she was connecting to the text in a way that alerted her to the dangers of certain beliefs, behaviors, and actions as they are depicted in dystopian fiction. She thus used reading as a way to explore the dangers of the real world around her, which is, arguably, one of the reasons why dystopian literature is so well received. Further, Phoebe showed that she compares her reading experiences to “how our society is right now.” By all accounts, this is an important skill for a reader – to internalize fiction and see that its relevance looms large in the real world.

Still, these are reading experiences that Phoebe has endorsed herself; they were her personal choices and were comprised of reading that she has done on her own. To be clear, these were not the kind of reading experiences Phoebe has completed in her classes. Regrettably, Phoebe described how it has been difficult to identify with in-class reading assignments. As Phoebe stated, “I don’t think a book that I’ve read in school has ever actually related to my life. I can’t think of one.” Phoebe took her time to think about this answer, which showed that she struggled to come up with an instance of reading that related to her own life. This statement, however bold, was also a sound expression of Phoebe’s frustration with her in-class reading experiences. Perhaps it was not surprising that Phoebe was later unable to describe a character that she has identified with from her in-class reading experiences. While Phoebe has been able to forge personal and meaningful connections with a text, these reading experiences have been mostly experiences that she cultivated apart from the kind of reading she has had to do in school.

**Style.** On a few occasions, students described how the style of a text, or as Janie termed it, “the way it’s written,” made them feel some type of disconnection from the work as a whole regardless of the how relatable the theme of the work is. Janie, who described how her connection to literature was sometimes based on issues such as gender and adolescence, said it
best:

*The Handmaid’s Tale*…it’s not really one of my favorite books to read. It’s about feminism and during the 1980s and again women’s roles and stuff like that, but it takes a more dystopian, radical approach. I don’t know, I like dystopian novels and *1984* is one of my favorites, but there’s just something about the way it’s written that I don’t really connect with it or I think it’s a little bit too radical.

In this quotation, Janie acknowledged that the novel tackled feminism, a subject in which she is interested, and even mentioned that it dealt with “women’s roles.” In the end, however, these topics and themes were not enough to sustain her interest. As she stated, she was unable to “really connect” with the text. Janie stated that this could have been because it was “too radical.” By “radical,” Janie seemed to be referring to the plot of the text since it was a dystopian novel that takes some liberties with regard to reality. More markedly, however, is the point that Janie focused on the style of the text itself as a probable reason for her lack of engagement with it.

Janie wasn’t alone in her reaction to the style of the text. Aron also described his frustration with the way a text was written. For Aron, his experience reading *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* was less than ideal:

…for example, one chapter will be from the office point of view. How she is investigating Henrietta Lacks. She’s interviewing her family members and then the next chapter will be about Henrietta’s life when she was alive and what was going on with the medical procedures. Such an inconsistency, I guess, with the long story line, really makes it hard to stay too stuck to something, which is in a book the very important quality to keep me stuck into the story. If I get into it a little bit, I’ll go into another one.
In this quotation, it was shown that the problem Aron had with the style of the text was less about genre or word choice and more about the way the text was presented. Aron found the organization of the text to be distracting, even going so far as to refer to this approach to telling the story as having an element of “inconsistency.” Aron wanted a more streamlined reading experience and less back and forth. Of course, recognizing this revealed quite a bit about Aron as a reader. First, Aron was able to differentiate between the times when he is most engaged with a story and the times when he is not. Secondly, it proved that Aron has had enough reading experience behind him to be able to recognize different writing styles, or at the very least, the different ways in which authors might choose to organize their stories. In order for a reader to develop preferences in style, they must have had enough experience with reading to note when they think something is not working for them.

**Pedagogy influences reading engagement.** Participants in this study demonstrated how they thought critically about their reading experiences through various learning platforms, most of which were tied to teacher pedagogy. This finding was seen as an element of the cognitive component because it described how the participants understood the nature of their engagement with reading amid their educational experiences. For example, some participants described the role of class discussion as a means of sense making. Other students mentioned the use of task assignments involving answering questions about what they were reading, or completing dialectical journals about their reading. Two participants described how they have been influenced by the personal stories of teachers. Taken together, these themes represented how the instructional choices of teachers influenced reading engagement.

**Teacher influences.** Both Aron and Elizabeth described the influence of teachers on their reading experiences. Aron, who mentioned several times that he needs some sort of attention-
grabber to facilitate his motivation to read a book, relayed how some teachers have impacted his engagement with reading:

I know some teachers who give their own personal story to relate to what they’re teaching. It helps students remember more about it because…just the connection, connections make people remember in knowledge.

The important words here are “personal,” “relate,” “helps,” and “connection.” These words helped reveal how some readers might be aided in their engagement with an in-class text. That is, outside of connecting with the text on an individual level, some students are simply navigating how to connect with the text more broadly; in these instances, this basic level of engagement is initially about the connection that the student has with the teacher before it develops into recognition of self-identity. For example, Elizabeth described a situation in which a teacher’s personal history impacted her:

I had a conversation with one of my former computer teachers not too long ago. I’d seen a book on his shelf and it was a psychology book. He had told me that when he was in college he had majored in psychology and I asked him about what had gotten him into it, and things like that. He told me that he used to read psychology books when he was in high school and it sparked my interest to read the book because that’s something I kind of want to get into and learn about. He was just suggesting that I had read this book and that it’s really something to look into if I really do want to go to college for psychology or something, and that it will prepare me for a lot of things to know about and stuff.

In this case, Elizabeth was not necessarily describing a pedagogical approach used to teach a specific lesson in a class, but a learning opportunity that was provided by the teacher when the
teacher noticed that his student was intrigued by a particular topic in a particular book. As the story is told, the teacher used an informal conversation as a strategy in which to engage this student with reading the psychology book because she showed a slight interest in it. The teacher also recommended the book and gave the student access to the text. All of this came together to form a memorable moment in this students’ mind, memorable enough to recall it during an interview that was focused on reading engagement and identity.

*Class discussion.* Several participants affirmed that class discussion is a useful tool for engagement. Particularly, Anne described her teacher’s use of a Socratic Seminar as a means of engaging the students in a class discussion about in-class reading assignments. When asked to explain what a Socratic Seminar entails, Anne explained it in the following way:

> It could depend, whether you’re having a small or a large one. Normally we have the full class, we all sit in a big circle and you take turns speaking. You raise your hand, like, “Okay, go ahead.” You’ll say, “Well, I think from…. you’ll take a page number and say your interpretation.

In a Socratic Seminar, students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss particular sections of a text. Typically, students arrange their seats in two circles for the purposes of discussion: an outer circle and an inner circle. The outer circle remains silent and observes the inner circle’s discussion, in which participants use prepared questions to get the conversation moving among their peers within the inner circle. Following the discussion, the outer circle offers commentary on what they observed before moving forward with a new topic in which the two circles change roles, with the outer circle moving to the inner circle and vice versa. In Anne’s AP English course, the teacher employs the use of the Socratic Seminar to facilitate discussion. As Anne stated, this pedagogical technique was useful in understanding the text:
I know that every time we read the seventy-five pages, we’ll have a Socratic Seminar, which is discussing what went on in the book, I guess. I like having those conversations. I feel like I get more of the concept of what I was supposed to be getting.

What Anne was describing was an opportunity to discuss the reading that she was assigned with her classmates. This discussion gave students like Anne an outlet with which to make sense of the reading with peers. As a result, students were able to engage better with the text as they reflect on their own ideas as well as the ideas of others.

Of course, the Socratic Seminar was only one vehicle by which one could engage students with the required reading. Other students described activities that required a fair amount of preparation on the students’ parts before the class began to facilitate class discussion. One such example was that of an envelope activity that two participants described. Janie recalled how the envelope activity helped her with the reading assignments in the following exchange:

*Janie:* …she likes us to annotate as we go along, so we highlight things in our books and she has this activity, like, it’s called an envelope activity. So we get like, a certain topic, we have to pick apart the setting or theme…

*Researcher:* Do you like doing those kinds of things?

*Janie:* Personally, I know a lot of people in my class don’t like it, but I like it because it helps me like actively think about what I’m reading.

*Researcher:* Oh good.

*Janie:* It keeps me engaged.

From this dialogue, it was clear that Janie understood the concept of the envelope activity. It was also shown that the envelope activity afforded students the opportunity to dive deeply into
the text through note-taking activities, such as annotation. Finally, it showed that Janie was aware of the thinking that her peers were doing with regard to this activity. When Janie stated that she was aware that “a lot of people in my class don’t like it,” she also showed that though she is aware of her peers’ perceptions, they did not influence her recognition of the value of the activity. This showed that others do not easily influence Janie, and that while she recognized their opinions, she was also able to hold on to her own.

In her interview, Nelly also described the same envelope activity. As Nelly put it, “it’s like a little activity that you write it on little note cards and you put them in an envelope and then we bring them in and when we have like, class seminars, we discuss them.” Both of these activities, however, were centered on the goal of getting students to talk about what they are reading and make sense of their reading in thoughtful and original ways. In these activities, the teacher was not providing students with the so-called right answer, but gave them an opportunity to discover the text on their own terms with their peers.

Task assignments. The phrase “task assignments” refers to specific tasks that students were required to complete by their teachers as a part of their reading experience. These tasks included annotating texts, answering comprehension or review questions, and even keeping a dialectical journal. Students took ownership of their reading experiences through the completion of these tasks because the tasks affected their performance in class. For example, Elizabeth tried to describe a class activity that she explained is used to check for reading comprehension:

…whenever we read over an article or a poem, we’ll go back the next day to refresh our memory. She’ll go over and she’ll check us for understanding, and then we have to put in our own words…summarize it in our own words what happened in the previous section and create it so it’s like a newspaper article. That way, when someone is reading
the newspaper that…it’s just in the newspaper format but it’s also not in the format of the poem we read…. 

In this exercise, students were charged with interpreting the text in a way that made them take ownership of its content and meaning. However meaningful these types of learning experiences were, there were also examples of times when the assignments that were tied to students reading were more traditional and provided less opportunity for thorough engagement with the text, as Elizabeth lamented:

We were assigned things in certain classes to read and make sentences and to go back and to answer questions at the end of the story, but it was never any…read this and annotate it and then bring it in and we’re going to go over it, or anything like that.

In this quotation, Elizabeth showed that answering questions at the end of the reading felt more like a learning activity rather than a learning experience. That is, answering questions at the end of the reading experience without reviewing them in a meaningful, collaborative way was not an optimum way of engaging students like Elizabeth with reading. Still, with regard to the kinds of reading assignments she is assigned, Elizabeth explained that it usually involves some sort of reading and question-answering activity:

Depending on the class, we may read all class if it’s just we’re focusing on one story or if we’re just doing something out of a textbook, we’ll just read for maybe half the class and do questions the other half. And that’s about it.

Elizabeth’s lack of enthusiasm about this type of pedagogical choice is evident by the language that she used to convey the experience. For example, Elizabeth used the phrase “just doing something” to describe basic textbook work. Further, she concluded with “And that’s about it” and somewhat trailed off, signaling a lack of overall engagement with the activity itself.
Elizabeth was not alone; in a similar way, Nick described how his teacher gave his class a packet of questions to answer that relate to the reading assignment the night before. After answering the questions, the students use them in their class discussion. As Nick put it, “It’s mainly used as a study guide, but we also discuss the questions if we have questions or anything.” The significant difference, however, between Elizabeth’s experience and Nick’s was that Nick was afforded the opportunity to discuss the questions in class while Elizabeth did not describe such an opportunity. Seeing as the students seemed to favor opportunities to discuss what they read as evidenced by the Socratic Seminar and envelope activity discussion, it was deduced that the role of discussion with peers in a classroom setting is a particularly prominent theme in effective and engaging pedagogy that influences student engagement.

*Personal choice.* The majority of students interviewed had a difficult time recalling instances when they were able to choose their own texts to read in class. When students have had some choice, it usually involved summer reading assignments. Both Anne and Aron in their respective, separate interviews, described these summer reading assignments as opportunities for personal choice:

*Anne:* I don't think I have had – Oh wait, yes. This summer our assignment for AP English was to go to, it was a newspaper website, and we could read any article, and we had to have a dialectical journal. You would pick an article and basically summarize it briefly, but also put your input into it. You could pick any article on that website. You had to have like, fifteen of them, I think.

*Aron:* I believe when I was coming into 9th grade year. They said that the first think that you would be getting, it might have been sophomore year. Either way, coming into freshman or sophomore year, that is at summer time that we had to read one book that
they assigned and another one where they would allow us to pick….  

Even in this example student choice was limited. Students did not have complete control over what they were to read over the summer, only partial control. The interesting words and phrases in this quotation were “had to read,” which called to mind a sense of obligation and dread, and “they would allow us,” which was reminiscent of institutional language where the one with power chooses how those with less power will spend their time. Regardless, these opportunities for personal choice, however limited, did not reflect opportunities to choose texts during the school year and in particular classes. Instead, both Anne and Aron described times when they were permitted to choose texts independently, apart from the reading that they do in school. The following exchange sums it up perfectly:

*Researcher:* Have you had an opportunity to read anything where you’ve been able to pick it yourself and choose it yourself to read for class?

*Anne:* No.

Anne’s quick, one-word response helped paint a vivid picture of a total lack of independent reading opportunities for the adolescents in this study.

Though Janie initially said that she could not recall the last time she was given a choice in what to read in class, she later described an assignment where her teacher gave her some degree of choice in reading:

Well, recently, we just got assigned in my literature class to pick a book to read independently and our teacher gave us like a list of books that usually appear on the exam, so of all the books, I chose to read Jane Eyre and I’ve started reading that….  

Again, Janie’s choices were limited to a list of books that was composed by the teacher. Janie had some choice, but not the kind of choice that would allow her to choose something entirely on
Even more striking was Elizabeth’s recollection of how personal choice looked for her in her classes. Elizabeth described how she had some choice only when she was done with all of her other assigned work: “I’ve read books in classes that I had nothing else to do.” When asked to reaffirm that she has not had an opportunity to choose what she was going to read in class, Elizabeth responded with “No, I can’t recall a time of that.” Similarly, as Phoebe stated, “I don’t really think I’ve ever gotten to choose a book to read in high school. I think they’ve always been assigned. I don’t really remember.” Phoebe articulated her thoughts on providing more opportunities for personal choice in reading:

…I wish that students or I could read more books that we actually tell a teacher that we’re interested in. I like science fiction, could we read more science fiction novels? Or any kind of stories that pertain to that, or actually to have a wide variety of books in a classroom to choose from. Or more opportunities to be able to read in class or anything along those lines.

As it were, the important words here were “wish” and “interested” because for Phoebe, interest mattered when it came to reading. By not having any valid opportunities to read texts of her own choosing, Phoebe’s independent reading practices appeared to lack value in the classroom. Of course, Phoebe was not alone. When asked to recall an opportunity to choose a text to read in high school, Nick stated, “In high school, I don’t think I had one to be honest. I can’t think of one.” Nelly vaguely recalled having to choose a text to read in her freshman year for an end-of-the-year project, but did not remember what it was. However, in his interview, Owen described an opportunity to pick his own text to read: “Yeah. It was a – you could pick a novel. You weren’t told what novel you had to read, you were allowed to pick, so it was good.” Owen chose
to read *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens based on a recommendation from his sister:

> When I had first decided to read it, I was like, this is a novel that maybe I might not have read on my own if I had gone to a bookstore. It was a novel that I knew was good. I had heard great reviews from it. My older sister who is a lit major told me that if I was interested that I should definitely go for it and the author’s a good author. So I was like, “I’ll go for it.”

Though Owen was able to think of an opportunity to choose his own text, he was only able to describe one opportunity to read a book of his own choosing after four years of high school. Still, Owen seemingly read the book only after he was given support from his sister who encouraged him to read it. Even in this instance, Owen did not necessarily choose a book entirely on his own and based on his own interests, but chose a book based on what he “heard” about it. As a result, the participants in this study did not have any real experience choosing their own texts in-class. The opportunities that they were given were mostly tied to summer reading and, throughout all of the interviews, were rarely tied to an in-class learning experience.

*Adolescents label their reading identities.* Another theme that emerged from the data was that adolescent reading identity was impacted by self-imposed labels. These self-imposed labels were articulated when the participants either directly labeled themselves or described themselves as readers. They are included within the cognitive component because they demonstrate particular values about reading and other interests. The values include perceptions about engaged reading, such as reading speed, fluency, and frequency. In the following section, evidence of self-imposed labels included instances of participants calling themselves “slow” or “fast” readers, “avid” readers, or even “engaged” readers. Thus, these types of labels signal how the participants viewed themselves in terms of their reading identities.
Of particular interest is the fact that the first four participants (Janie, Elizabeth, Nick, and Phoebe) mostly described this aspect of their identity with a great deal of pride. As described in the next several sections, their reading experiences generally have been marked with positive notions of self-identity. Following those participants’ descriptions of their experiences are those of Anne, Nelly, and Owen, who demonstrated less overt confidence. Intriguingly, this lack of confidence was mostly tied to the speed at which they read and their need to take their time while reading to ensure understanding. In fact, four of the participants directly labeled this aspect of their reading identities on reading speed – that is, being either a fast reader or a slow reader. What follows is a brief breakdown of how each participant labeled himself or herself and how these labeling connected to his or her individual identity.

*Janie.* Having portrayed herself as a student who reads frequently both in and out of school, Janie described herself in the following way: “I’m an avid reader; I love to read.” In this quotation, Janie used the phrase “avid reader” to describe herself as someone who reads what is assigned to her in school, as well as texts that she picks up on her own. In her interview, for example, Janie described how she liked to read books about dancing because, as a dancer, it helped her to hear about the journeys of other dancers. Janie’s commitment to reading was quite clear, here. By saying “I love to read” Janie was supporting the part of her identity that saw herself as a knowledgeable, curious, and well-read individual who sought to understand better herself and the world around her. Further, Janie supported this aspect of her identity with a second quotation in which she stated that she generally liked the books that she read or has been assigned to read: “As a reader, I mean, there haven’t been that many books that I’ve read that I haven’t really liked.” What is perhaps most striking in this quotation is that Janie identified herself as “a reader” at the start of the sentence. By calling herself “a reader” early in her
response, Janie was asserting an aspect of her identity that she valued. Even more interesting was the casual and nuanced way in which Janie made the statement; it came at the start of an explanation about how she typically enjoyed the books that she has had the opportunity to read.

Elizabeth. Like Janie, Elizabeth identified herself as being a strong reader. As Elizabeth stated: “My strengths for reading are basically, I guess everything. I don’t know, when I read a book or anything, reading anything, it just kind of flows with me; I can read it easily.” For Elizabeth, reading comes naturally. She did not struggle with reading and was not intimidated by it. Rather, Elizabeth labeled herself as “a pretty engaged reader” and qualified this label in the following way: “I can’t put a book down once I’m into it.” The important piece here, of course, is the ending of the sentence that states “once I’m into it,” meaning interested in it. For Elizabeth, engaged reading means reading things of interest to her.

By labeling herself this way, Elizabeth has identified something in which she both excels and very clearly takes pride. In this way, reading was rooted in the fabric of Elizabeth’s identity. Reading, for Elizabeth, was not just about learning, but also about enjoyment.

Nick. One participant who took a great deal of pride in his ability to read quickly was Nick. Nick saw himself as a “fast reader” and seemingly takes quite a bit of pride in this label: “For school, I would say I spend as much as the assignment needed which would be maybe an hour or two – about that – because I’m a fast reader.” Nick was able to move through his in-class reading assignments fairly quickly because of his ability to read quickly. It is important to note, however, that Nick did not initially comment on comprehension, an element noted by Nelly, who considered herself to be a “slow reader.” Rather, in support of his previous statements, Nick described his reading speed again, but with more specificity: “I would describe myself as mainly a really fast reader. I usually tend to read a good six hundred page or more
book in a day. I’ll just sit there and read all day.” In this quotation, Nick showed some degree of immodesty in his description of his reading practices that ultimately inform his sense of self. However, Nick later provided more insight into his reading practices:

I’m very committed to reading. If I have to, I take notes so I don’t forget where I left off. If I do, I won’t say, “Oh, I’m not going to finish this.” I will finish the book from beginning to end.

In this description of himself, Nick shed more light on his reading practices, versus his reading speed. In this description, Nick qualified this aspect of identity even further. By stating that he is “very committed to reading,” Nick set the tone for how he saw himself as a reader. He detailed how he sometimes used note-taking as a way of remembering where he “left off.” This is significant because it was the first example of how Nick went about the work of reading, rather than just simply reading quickly. In this seemingly minor detail, Nick provided a glimpse of himself working toward reading. Similarly, Nick qualified his commitment to reading by stating that he would not give up on a book after he takes notes on it. Instead, he “will finish the book from beginning to end” as a result of the internal drive that he has created within himself after he has worked through reading the book by taking notes.

Phoebe: For her part, Phoebe stated: “I’m really open-minded and I like knowing a lot of stuff.” For Phoebe, being “open-minded” and “knowing a lot of stuff” meant having the ability to explore, understand, and appreciate other cultures and places. Phoebe was a would-be traveler who has been to China and relished her experience there. This connected to Phoebe’s identity as a person who was open to understanding that which was outside of her own environment. Phoebe did not really comment on her reading identity as much as her willingness to explore the world, which in and of itself said a lot about what she valued and what she hoped to gain from
her reading experiences.

Anne. Unlike Janie, Elizabeth, and Phoebe, Anne demonstrated markedly less confidence in her reading ability. The following quotation shows how Anne saw herself when it came to reading:

I’d say I’m a pretty slow reader, to be honest. It takes me a long time and often I’ll find myself drift off while I read, and I have to reread things because I don’t like to read something and then not have any idea what I just read.

Anne used the phrase “slow” to describe her reading, a reference to the speed at which she actually reads. It was interesting that Anne would focus on the rate of speed at which she reads rather than on the many other aspects of reading that matter, including fluency and comprehension. Later, Anne described how she loses focus when she reads and how she will often “drift off” while reading. Like so many people, Anne found herself re-reading sections of texts because she lost focus during the first read through. This quotation showed that, because Anne saw her reading abilities as perhaps, sub-par, she accepted the notion that she was a “slow reader” and thus identities herself this way. Anne labeled herself this way because of her reading experiences up to this point. Further, it was because of these experiences with reading that Anne portrayed this part of her identity with very little spirit.

Nelly. As mentioned, a recurring element that occurred among several of the participants was their decision to label their identity with regard to reading based on reading speed. Like Anne, Nelly commented on being a “slow reader.” For example, Nelly stated the following about herself:

I’d say I’m a thorough reader because I’m a very slow reader as well which I know is a bad habit but it’s because I like to be thorough and I like to understand…if I don’t
understand a paragraph, I’m going to go back and read it or I’m going to try and fix it...

In this excerpt, Nelly called herself a “thorough reader,” which was significant, because it was the first way Nelly defined herself as a reader. However, Nelly felt the need to qualify the label that she gave herself by explaining it and ultimately downplaying her strengths. In calling herself a “slow reader” and then expounding on that term by calling it a “bad habit,” Nelly diminished one of her reading strengths. Somewhere along the line, Nelly learned that reading slowly is a bad thing, that re-reading a section that she does not understand somehow made her a weaker reader, when actually, some might see this sort of exercise as an example of a strength. While Nelly is confident in being “thorough,” she lacked confidence in the way in which she actually goes about the business of reading.

Owen. Another student who was focused on reading speed was Owen. Owen, who mostly compared himself to his family members, stated: “In my family, one of my weaknesses would be I don’t read as fast as them.” Again, reading speed was the initial focus of Owen’s self-labeling. At the same time, Owen also related this to comprehension but only in so far as it compared to his family members: “I sometimes don’t always pick up on some of the things they read.” Though this seemingly showed a lack of confidence about his own reading identity, Owen also explained his reading strengths:

For strength, I’d have to say when I read something and I know it, I feel like I could talk about it. I could restate what was said and I could really go into detail about it with someone who might not have read it. If there’s something that I have caught on and I know that’s true, then I can be able to tell you why and give you my reasons why.

In what may initially appear to be contradictory thinking, Owen was actually simply stating that while it takes him longer to read a text and to understand it fully, once he does, he feels confident
in his read of the text as a whole – so confident that he could discuss the book and defend whatever claims he made while discussing it.

Aron. For Aron’s part, he labeled himself according to his perceived status within adolescent subculture. For Aron, reading comic books made him a “nerd”: “I’m also a bit of a nerd. I like reading comic books.” Somewhere along the line, Aron learned that comic book reading is a nerd-like activity. The word “nerd,” of course, has a negative connotation for any teenager: arguably even, Aron was kidding. Though Aron had earlier recounted his love of comic books and how his interest first stemmed from his mother’s involvement in his reading practices as a young boy, at this point, Aron acknowledged his interest in comic books with more humility, even though Aron smiled slightly as he said it. This was telling because it showed how Aron connected this aspect of his identity to one that may not be entirely celebrated by society, whether it be the society of his peers or society as a whole.

With regard to his in-class assigned reading, Aron also called himself a “procrastinator.” As Aron explained, “I’ll be the guy to read the whole chapter or whatever needed the day before to be 100% honest.” By finishing the preceding sentence with “to be honest,” Aron provided a glimpse into his own understanding that this type of reading practice is not ideal. Further, it showed that Aron, while concerned about doing well, was mostly reading for class and not necessarily for personal engagement, interest, or enjoyment. This was evidenced by the fact that Aron mentioned that he waits until the last day to complete the reading as opposed to beginning the experience earlier on. In this way, Aron demonstrated that he was more concerned with reading when it was an assignment because he wanted to do well in the class as opposed to reading for personal reasons.

Summary. The part of identity that was shown as influenced by the themes in this
section was attributed to the cognitive component of identity (Phinney, 1992). This was because the students in this study demonstrated knowledge about the values and traditions of engaged readers through their appreciation for useful particular pedagogical approaches such as class discussions, which afforded students with opportunities to engage with texts. Students showed how they adopted the values of engaged readers through their connections with personally meaningful texts. Further, students showed how they adopted the values of certain types of readers by labeling themselves according to how they understood perceived reading values, such as reading avidly or thoroughly.

In this section, students described their experiences with literature both in and out of school. For example, students described their independent reading experiences, such as reading science fiction; and series books like the *Percy Jackson* series, *Harry Potter*, and *The Hunger Games*; as well as texts that were assigned for class, including memoirs about the foster care system; canonized texts like *Great Expectations*; classics like *Animal Farm*; and more modern novels like *Things Fall Apart*. However, an important theme from this section was that students become more actively engaged with what they are reading when they are able to form personal connections with the text, especially when what they are reading is suited to their interests. For example, Janie was a ballet dancer so she was interested in reading about ballet and dance. For Anne, reading about the foster care system in her home city really captivated her and forced her to think about her environment. As it turned out, connecting with a key theme or character was an important element of engagement for many of the participants in this study. As an example, both Janie and Owen made a thematic connection with a text based on gender. This was seen as a way in which the participants understood the values of readers because it showed that the students recognized the value of connecting with the texts that they were reading.
Interestingly, the participants in this study also described what made engagement with a text sometimes difficult. For some, the style of a text, or the way it is written, was a contributing factor to whether or not they enjoyed a particular reading experience. For others, engagement with an in-class text was strongest when they were able to engage in class discussions with the text. What is more, an important sub-theme in this section was that students very rarely had opportunities to choose their own texts in class. Opportunities for choice when it comes to reading were usually as a result of a summer reading or end-of-the-year project, and not a consistent part of their classroom experiences.

Finally, in this section the students’ self-imposed labels were discussed. Of particular interest was the recurrence of reading speed as a determining factor in how participants saw themselves as readers. Also of interest was the notion that the participants were all very committed to understanding the texts that they were reading, going so far as to re-read sections and take notes on their reading. This, too, spoke to how the participants’ awareness of certain perceived reading values which also included reading speed, fluency, and frequency. In the end, this section helped show how students’ self-labeling influenced their identities in terms of how they saw themselves as readers.

**Behavioral component.**

*Students participate in student success cohorts.* The influence of peers was a prominent theme throughout the data. Correspondingly, participants’ active participation in a myriad of other activities, including athletics, the performance arts, and JROTC, were examples of behaviors that have impacted their individual identities. This finding was seen as an element of the behavioral component because it showed how the participants were willing to participate in the activities and norms of engaged readers. For the purpose of this study, participation within
these groups will be termed “student success cohorts” because the students who took part in these activities were also demonstrating success in school through their sustained reading behaviors and membership in AP classes. A related finding was that the students’ ability to maintain strict, busy schedules comprised of balancing academic work with extracurricular participation helped influence their sense of self. Finally, many of the participants described how they participated in leisure reading outside of school, a behavior that has undoubtedly influenced their identities as readers.

*Extracurricular activities.* Six of the eight participants identified themselves as a member of at least one specific extracurricular activity. Often, these activities are school sponsored, and at other times the activities included membership in an organization, such as a band, a class, or ballet lessons, that exist outside of the school community but populated with other peers. Some students were members of multiple extracurricular activities. For example, Janie was a dancer and took dance lessons at a ballet school, and Anne was a singer in a band in addition to being a tennis and soccer player for the school teams. Nelly played soccer and was one of the captains of the team. Nick, who has played the trumpet for eight years, was also in the school’s show choir. Owen was in the school’s show choir, too, as well as the school’s drama club. Owen also took on a leadership role in JROTC. Aron, meanwhile, ran track during both the winter and spring seasons and is a former member of the school’s baseball team.

Two students did not identify as members of an organized extracurricular activity, though one of those two students, Elizabeth, described creative and personal writing as an interest and hobby that took up a great deal of her time. As Elizabeth described it:

I try to write…well I write every week, but I try to write at least once a day. Either from how my day was or just when I come home from school, and that’s about it.
While Phoebe did not describe membership in a specific extracurricular activity, she did describe her enrollment in Advanced Placement classes and her interest in traveling. As described earlier, so far, Phoebe has been to Colorado and China.

*Time management.* To no surprise, it was revealed that participation in extracurricular activities required the kind of commitment and dedication that sometimes affected other areas of the students’ lives, including school. For example, Anne described how the expectations that come with her many commitments take away from her free time, which then in turn affects her motivation to read:

You’re expected to do all your homework, do extracurricular activities, especially getting ready for college, and in my downtime I don’t want to do more work. I want to watch TV, or sleep.

Anne said she completed four to five hours of homework nightly, in addition to her involvement in these extracurricular activities. As Anne elaborated, “I don’t really read outside of school. There’s no time for it.” In this admission, Anne declared that it is because of her many commitments that she simply has very little time left for exploring her reading interests. In this way, the likelihood of Anne reading outside of the required reading for her classes was slim. Later, Anne explained: “I learned that I do enjoy reading, I just…in my spare time, that’s not what I want to do all the time.” Anne, who was expected to read 75 pages a week for Advanced Placement Language, had to balance her reading requirements among all of her courses. In order to keep up with the reading expectations of AP Language, Anne read about a half of an hour a day each week. Nevertheless, Anne managed to balance her academic commitments, which included three AP classes and one pre-AP course, with her participation in extracurricular activities, in addition to maintaining a presence in her church: “I go usually Tuesdays, Fridays,
and Sundays, obviously.” As a consequence, church took up a good portion of Anne’s time when she was not at an extracurricular event. Because of her busy schedule, Anne sometimes lost focus when she was reading and had to re-read entire sections of what she has already read:

…if I have a lot of things on my mind, like if I’m thinking, “Okay, I have to time this and time that, because I have so much homework tonight.” Then I get kind of, like, combobulated.

The operative word in this excerpt, of course, is time. Anne’s free time was limited, and most of her life was compartmentalized into scheduled chunks where she took on different roles, such as student, athlete, singer, and as a member of her church.

Like Anne, Nelly also described how she had very little free time. As Nelly put it, “I like to stay active.” In this way, Nelly played soccer and was one of the captains of the team this year. Nelly also participated in the drama club and show choir and showed that she has a strong commitment to her faith, as evidenced by her discussion recognizing the flaws in her religion when she read Things Fall Apart. However, Nelly was less stressed than Anne about her busy schedule. For Nelly, reading engagement was something that at times took patience, but was ultimately worth it:

…sometimes it takes a little bit to get into if you’re going to like, I have to sit down and read or it’s like, I could be doing this or I could watch this movie or I could be hanging out with my friends but then once you…I feel like once I get into a book, it would be easier for me to just like go with it and start to really enjoy it.

In this example, Nelly showed that she shared many of the same time management concerns as Anne. Both participants were extremely busy with Advanced Placement students who are involved in athletics, the performance arts, and their respective faiths. Notably, both students
enjoyed reading when they were able to find the time. For Anne, however, time was so limited that she was rarely willing to carve out time for reading when she could use the time, instead, to unwind. Nelly shared similar concerns as evidenced by the preceding quotation, but ultimately found that engagement within a book makes reading “easier.”

*Independent reading.* Several of the students who took part in this study read independently outside of school. In fact, reading for fun seemed to play a large role in the general reading experiences of most of the participants. As Owen put it, “I do enjoy a good book every now and then.” Janie, for her part, explained that her leisure reading often comprised the kinds of texts that are either enjoyable or related to her specific interests: “I read stuff for fun, like Percy Jackson, one of my favorite series to read. I thought it was really funny and interesting.” Phoebe noted her preferences for leisure reading as well: “In my spare time, I guess I like to read mystery and just like things that are related to *The Hunger Games* or like utopian, dystopian societies….” Similarly, Nelly described how she enjoyed reading series books like J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* and Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* in her spare time.

*Summary.* The part of identity that was influenced by the themes presented in this section was that of the behavioral component (Phinney, 1992). The themes in this section were connected to the behavioral component because they were seen as the students’ involvement in particular group norms. The norms for these students were shown through their involvement in student success cohorts, their time management, and their shared reading experiences with peers. Participants demonstrated the behavioral component of identity by developing particular habits, such as committing to their reading assignments, participating in a wide-range of activities outside of the classroom including both extracurricular and individual pursuits, and in some cases maintaining very busy schedules. Finally, the students described their independent reading
practices through their leisure reading experiences. These behaviors illuminated the participants’ commitment to their reading experiences and their experiences as high school students as a whole.

**Summary of Findings**

Participants in this study were upperclassmen students at X High School. All but one of the students who participated in this study were enrolled in either Advanced Placement Literature and Composition, a senior-year course, or Advanced Placement Language and Composition in their junior year. One student was enrolled in Honors English 12. Thus, these students were seen as high-achieving students.

The affective, cognitive, and behavioral components (Phinney, 1992) were applied to this study as a reference; they informed the emergent themes, which are explanatory in nature. While Phinney’s work measured identity with regard to ethnicity, this dissertation described influences on identity with regard to reading engagement. In this way, the themes explain the connection between the student and their level of reading engagement. While each participant’s experiences were unique to himself or herself, several commonalities existed within their interviews with regard to their identities. As such, several findings emerged that helped answer the research question.

The first major theme to emerge was that supportive relationships impact reading experiences. This theme was shown through individual participant’s explanations of conversations with their parents, childhood memories of their parents’ encouraging reading behaviors, or an access to books or other reading materials at home. Additionally, participants described how their relationships with peers influenced their reading experiences.

Next, participants became members of student success cohorts through their membership in Advanced Placement classes, where they were required to keep up with the demands of a
rigorous curriculum and reading load. Additionally, students described how they participated in independent reading outside of school and revealed how those experiences contributed to their identities as readers. These independent reading experiences were often aligned with what their family members or other peers were reading.

The third theme to emerge was that personally meaningful reading experiences influence reading engagement. For example, students were able to forge personal connections with particular texts for a variety of specific and personal reasons. A few participants described how the way a text was written, or the style of a text, became a contributing factor in their level of engagement with it.

The fourth emergent theme revealed that pedagogy influences reading engagement. Two participants described how the personal stories of teachers acted as catalysts for their engagement in a particular text or in their reading experiences as a whole. Other students described class discussion as a major component of their reading experiences. To a lesser degree, students described how task assignments, such as annotation and answering questions, worked to organize their thinking with regard to the reading assignments. Perhaps most notably, many participants explained that they were not given opportunities to choose texts that they wanted to read in class. When students have been given choice, it was either as a summer reading assignment or as a means of accomplishing a specific goal such as an end-of-the-year project or preparation for an exam. For example, one participant described how she was given the opportunity to choose a text she wanted to read only when all of her other work was completed. Finally, many of the participants participated in self-labeling. These labels were often associated with how frequently and how quickly or slowly the participants read and were seen as values of engaged reading from the perspectives of the participants.
The fifth finding that emerged through the data is that these students participated in student success cohorts. This was made evident in two ways. First, the students described their participation in extracurricular activities. In fact, participants described a myriad of activities that kept them busy outside of the classroom, resulting in the need to manage their time effectively to balance their extracurricular activities with their commitment to school. Finally, students described their independent reading practices, which ranged from reading books of personal interest to reading books that were recommended by their peers and close friends.
Chapter 5: Discussion of the Research Findings

Engaged reading is a central component of being an informed, well-rounded, and thoughtful individual. A review of the relevant literature showed that many 21st-century American students are showing signs of disengagement with reading (Miller et al., 2011; NEA, 2007). At the same time, 46 states and the District of Columbia have adopted Common Core Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy, which explicitly tackles reading in the 21st century. The majority of the research in the field of reading engagement has been done with a focus on middle and elementary aged students with considerably less focus on students at the high school level. Nevertheless, the research has shown that “identity matters” when it comes to reading engagement (McCarthey & Moje, 2002). The impetus for this study was thus the need to understand how high-achieving students described the influences on their identities with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences.

Review of the Methodology

Merriam (2009) described how, in basic qualitative studies, “the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon” (p. 6). As such, this basic qualitative study sought to understand the influences on identity with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences from the perspective of adolescents. To achieve this understanding, the researcher employed the use of general inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006). It became apparent to the researcher that GIA was the best qualitative approach to analysis for this particular study because it allowed the themes to emerge from the participants’ descriptions of their lived experiences.

After gaining permission from the headmaster of X High School to conduct the study and following IRB approval, the researcher also gained permission from seven English teachers to
visit their junior and senior classes for the purpose of recruitment. In total, the researcher visited 12 classes comprising either juniors or seniors, understood to be upperclassmen, at X High School. Altogether, eight high-achieving upperclassmen students at X High School participated in the study.

To answer the research question, the researcher conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each participant using an approved open-ended interview protocol; drafted field notes; and wrote analytic memos. Interviews were transcribed immediately following each interview by a transcription service. Field notes allowed the researcher to record observations during the interview. Subsequently, analytic memos were written to make sense of the data. The emergent themes presented in this study were the result of the researcher’s interpretation and analysis of the data. Throughout the research process, the researcher worked to understand the perceptions of students about the influences on their identities with regard to reading engagement while considering their educational experiences.

Profile of Participants

The participants in this study included high-achieving juniors and seniors at X High School. Though only eight students in a relatively large urban high school agreed to participate in this study, they all seemed genuinely eager to discuss reading and their identities even though research shows that many students are disengaged from reading (Miller et al., 2011; NEA, 2007). As a point of fact, these students made an effort to attend and participate in an interview about reading after school and amid their otherwise very busy schedules. There was no get-out-of-class motivation to participate in this study and the participants demonstrated that they had a sincere interest in participating simply by showing up after school when they could have very easily chosen to spend their time elsewhere.
All of the students who participated in this study appeared to be high achievers who were committed to doing well in school as evidenced by their commitment to their schoolwork and enrollment in either Advanced Placement or Honors courses. Seven of the eight participants in this study were enrolled in Advanced Placement Literature and Composition, a senior course, or Advanced Placement Language and Composition, the junior year equivalent. Only one participant in this study was enrolled in Honors English 12. No students from College English 11 or College English 12 elected to take part in this study. Since no students from the college English courses at X High School opted to participate in this study, it begs the question of why.

Though the focus of this study was not to compare different types of English classes, it is important to recognize that the students who participated in this study were high achievers: the Advanced Placement students are members of a select group of students who are taking courses in high school that are designed to provide students with the opportunity to earn college credit, should they receive a qualifying score on the AP exam. The Honors student is taking a course designed to be worthy of more credit than the college level English course.

Part of the reason why mostly Advanced Placement students chose to participate in this study may be tied to the level of privilege and resources that the AP students had, which helped to inform their identities as members of an elite group within the school. That is, each of the students who took Advanced Placement classes described some degree of privilege that may not be associated with most students in a large, low-socioeconomic school. For example, the students taking Advanced Placement described a high level of access to texts at home. Janie described how her mother invested in books that she was interested in, such as ballet books. Anne described how her mother purchased a book that Anne was reading in class so that they could share in the reading experience together. Nelly talked about her parents’ subscription to
the newspaper and to *Smithsonian* magazine. As a student taking Honors English 12, Elizabeth declared, “I have a ton of books,” a statement that helped accentuate that she had access to print materials as well. Further, these students had opportunities outside of the classroom that other students may not have had. Select examples include Phoebe’s description of a trip that she took over the summer to China, and Janie’s discussion of how she took tuition-based art classes at a local college and her description of how she takes ballet lessons. Thus, the students who opted to participate in this study had some degree of privilege.

Further, it was obvious that the students who took Advanced Placement courses saw themselves as high-achieving students who were engaged with their coursework. Through their interviews, they each described a certain level of commitment to their homework and to reading in general. The students all recalled reading experiences that they were engaged with both in and out of school. In fact, these students were generally able to articulate a wide range of reading experiences, which were mostly positive. Interestingly, Elizabeth, a senior who was the one student not enrolled in Advanced Placement English, had more trouble recalling positive in-class reading experiences from school. The following exchange is an example of Elizabeth’s in-class reading experience:

*Researcher:* How much time do you spend reading for school, would you say, when you are at home?

*Elizabeth:* For school, not often, because in my classes I’m not really required to read anything or we’re not given any books to go through or read for homework or anything. But in my spare time, of course, I read….

This exchange suggests some degree of inequity between the reading expectations that are placed on Advanced Placement students and Honor English students. As suggested here, Elizabeth
described how she was simply not challenged with reading anything beyond the school day. Meanwhile, Advanced Placement students demonstrated how they were consistently challenged beyond the basic high school curriculum. Part of the reason for this discrepancy may be because the College Board, which oversees Advanced Placement courses, requires that AP teachers submit a syllabus that is comparable to a college course because students who pass the AP exam with a qualifying score may receive college credit for the course they have taken. The syllabus that is designed by an AP teacher details the learning expectations of the students as well as the reading and writing expectations. In this way, individual teachers choose the texts that the students will read in their courses and set the reading and writing expectations. This is unlike College and Honors English, which follow a more prescribed curriculum.

Ultimately, the participants in this study were highly motivated learners who were able to reflect on a range of reading experiences and articulate the influences on their identities with regard to reading engagement. Taken together, these experiences may have contributed to the participants’ levels of confidence as they participated in this study.

Though it would have been useful to gain the perceptions of students who did not necessarily see themselves as high achievers, or who were not enrolled in Advanced Placement or Honors English courses, this study still provides parents and the educational community with insight into how high-achieving students described the influences on their identities with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences.

**Interpretation of Emergent Themes**

In this study, eight high-achieving urban high school students described the influences on their identities and their experiences with reading. Each of the students described themselves, on some level, as engaged readers who actively participated in the act of reading. None of the
participants in this study demonstrated a high level of disengagement from reading, though a
review of the literature showed that this is an issue facing modern American adolescents (Miller
et al., 2011).

The themes in this study were explanatory in nature. They helped to address the
following research question:

How do eight high-achieving high school students enrolled in Advanced Placement and
Honors English courses describe the influences on their identities with regard to reading
engagement amid their educational experiences?

These themes included: supportive relationships impact reading experiences; personally
meaningful reading experiences influence reading engagement; pedagogy influences reading
engagement; adolescents label their reading identities; and students participate in student success
cohorts.

In the following section, the emergent themes presented in this study are discussed in
tandem with the theoretical framework and supporting literature. To begin, a review of Tajfel
and Turner’s (1979) social identity theory is presented along with the corresponding findings
from this study. Finally, an in-depth analysis of the affective, cognitive, and behavioral
components of identity (Phinney, 1992) is presented along with the literature.

Social Identity Theory

This study was informed by Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) social identity theory. According
to social identity theory, a person’s membership within a group has strong implications with
regard to their identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity theory includes three processes,
which include categorization, identification, and comparison with regard to group membership.
Individuals can belong to multiple groups, and their membership in each group helps to inform
their identities.

The first process of social identity theory is categorization. Each of the participants in this study categorized themselves by the type of English class they were enrolled in. As mentioned, seven of the eight participants in this study were enrolled in Advanced Placement English. It was this classification that spoke to what Tajfel and Turner (1979) determined was a part of a person’s categorization. According to Tajfel and Turner, a person’s membership within a certain social group provides that person with a sense of belonging as well as a sense of pride. The participants in this study demonstrated a sense of pride in their membership within these high-achieving courses by describing their engagement with the reading assignments, class discussions, and fulfillment of the course reading expectations. For example, Elizabeth, the student enrolled in Honors English 12, thought of herself as a strong reader and described herself as an “engaged reader.” Meanwhile, the majority of students in this study were members of the group of students who take Advanced Placement English, a group that comes with a degree of clout in the world of high school academia. This was evidenced by the how the AP students presented their level of reading engagement within their AP courses. While Anne specifically described the frustration she felt with having to balance all of her AP coursework with her other activities, she also seemed to take a great deal of pride in identifying as an AP student. In another way, Nick, described himself as his parents’ more “advanced child” in relation to his siblings. Ultimately, all of the students who identified themselves as Advanced Placement students demonstrated some level of pride as a member of that group through the way they spoke about their reading experiences. Thus, these students categorized themselves as AP students and began to act that way, often engaging in reading in order to be prepared for class discussions or the task assignments related to what they were going to read. Finally, the participants in this
study also demonstrated this aspect of their social identities through their membership within particular student success cohorts, such as the many extracurricular activities in which they participated, and in which other high-achieving students accompanied them.

The next part of the process is social identification, where someone adopts the perceived characteristics of a particular group. This process became apparent in this study as the Advanced Placement students saw themselves, by and large, as readers and as successful students who engaged in practices, behaviors, and norms that contributed to their identities as students. These characteristics included completing their reading assignments, participating in class discussions, becoming involved in a variety of social and extracurricular activities, and so on. The participants in this study also identified themselves in other ways. Janie, for example, described herself as “slightly an artist.” Likewise, Anne called herself a “singer”. Still, it was the students’ identifications as types of readers that were most telling. For example, Janie called herself an “avid reader,” Anne called herself a “slow reader,” and Aron referred to himself as a “nerd.”

Finally, the last process involved in determining group membership according to Tajfel and Turner (1979) is social group comparison. The participants in this study did not explicitly compare themselves to other groups. Still, based on how they described themselves as AP students and as engaged readers, it became obvious that the students who participated in this study were able to recognize that their identities as students were, in part, shaped by their decision to enroll in AP English and to participate in engaged reading practices.

**Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral Components**

In this study, the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of identity (Phinney, 1992) were used as a reference for understanding how adolescents connect to identity. The following sections review the emergent themes, which were explanatory in nature. The themes
were informed by the components of identity that were described by Phinney (1992). Through this application, the current research sought to make sense of the influences on high achieving adolescent high school students’ identities with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences. Phinney’s model provided a framework for this understanding.

Gudykunst (2001) described Phinney’s model as including the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of identity – an application that has been employed within this study. With regard to the affective component of identity, the most salient aspect of the component was the participants’ “sense of belonging” (Gudykunst, 2001, p. 106), which was shown through the participants’ recollections of dialogue and interactions with other readers, such as their parents, other family members, and peers with regard to their reading experiences. Ultimately, this study indicated that supportive relationships impact reading experiences. Where the cognitive component of identity is concerned, several findings emerged. For one, the participants in this study demonstrated knowledge about the values and traditions of engaged readers by describing particular pedagogical approaches such as class discussions, which allowed them to engage with texts. Next, the participants showed how they adopted the values of engaged readers through their connections with personally meaningful reading experiences. Finally, students showed how they adopted the perceived values of certain types of readers by labeling themselves according to how they understood reading values, such as reading avidly or thoroughly. Finally, the behavioral component of identity, which Phinney saw separately, (Gaines et al., 2010; Gudykunst, 2001) was exhibited in this study through students’ participation student success cohorts. In the following sections, a discussion of each theme is presented along with the relevant literature.

Affective component.
The finding that supportive relationships impact reading behaviors was seen to be in line with the affective component (Phinney, 1992) because it demonstrated the participants’ sense of belonging and pride in their identities as readers. This was shown through their discussions about reading with other readers who supported their reading experiences. The participants in this study frequently described the interactions they had with their parents and family members where they concerned reading. For example, Janie, Anne, and Owen described how they talked about the books they were reading in school with their respective parents. Research showed that interactions with family members can impact reading motivation (Baker & Wigfield, 1999). In fact, the expectations of parents were found to impact achievement in reading (Flowers & Flowers, 2008, p. 160). Thus, this study helped support previous research connecting the relationships that students have with their parents, and with their home life in general, with their motivation to read, thus contributing to their reading engagement.

The students who participated in this study described how their parents provided them with access to a wide-range of texts. Some participants recalled how their parents supported their reading habits by purchasing books that they were either interested in reading or were assigned by their teachers for class. Other participants described how their parents made an investment in their reading interests early in their childhoods. One participant described how her parents subscribe to the newspaper and at least one magazine. Another participant described how she owned many books and how she carried one with her wherever she went. None of the participants described a lack of access to reading materials either in school or at home. Therefore, access to reading materials was not an issue for the participants in this study. Research has found that in general, students of low-socioeconomic status had less access to books than students in more affluent communities (Smith, Constantino & Krashen, 1997).
However, most of the research in this area is not focused at the secondary level. Moreover, though the participants in this study attended a school in a low-socioeconomic area, they did not appear to be of low-socioeconomic status themselves.

The participants in this study also described how their relationships with peers affected their engagement with reading. The peer relationships that were described by the research participants were fostered either through membership within particular groups, such as those associated with either extracurricular activities like the arts or athletics, or with particular classes, like Advanced Placement or Honors. While the literature surrounding reading engagement surveyed for this study did not focus on peer influences, this particular finding is in harmony with the affective component of identity, as these relationships ultimately helped to contribute to the participants’ sense of belonging within particular groups, as emphasized in this study (Phinney, 1992). The positive relationships that the participants in this study described with their parents and family members as well as their peers undoubtedly had an impact on their identities. Almost all of the participants in this study relayed the influence of their parents on their reading experiences, and most of the participants described the influence of the peers in various contexts.

**Cognitive component.**

*Personally meaningful reading experiences influence reading engagement.* The cognitive component of identity focuses on the individual’s adoption or interest in the “history, traditions, and values” (Gudykunst, 2001, p. 106) of their identity. In this study, the cognitive component helped to illustrate the participants’ willingness to adopt the perceived values and traditions of engaged readers through competing reading tasks, engaging in classroom reading discussions, and recognizing self-selected reading as a tradition and value of engaged readers. That is, engaged readers want to read books that are of interest to them. In fact, the students in
this study demonstrated their willingness to adopt the values of engaged readers in a variety of ways, including through their willingness to engage in personally meaningful reading experiences. That is, most of the participants in this study were able to make personal connections with the texts that they were reading in class.

While the literature surrounding identity and reading engagement was focused around the three categories of gender, socioeconomics, and race, ultimately none of the students mentioned that they made a connection with a text based on race or socioeconomics. Only two of the students in this study described how they were able to relate to the text based on gender. First, Janie, in describing herself as “an emerging young woman,” recalled how she was able to relate to the struggles of women in the Victorian era thanks to her exposure to Virginia Wolff. Meanwhile, Owen described how he related to the character of Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* as “a teenage boy.” Of course, it is important to remember that this study involved high school students who may not have been comfortable raising issues about race or socioeconomics. The researcher decided not to raise those issues within the interview, in order to avoid influencing the students’ descriptions of themselves and to see if they would be raised naturally. Mostly, the participants in this study described how they were able to identify with themes within the literature that they were reading in school. For example, Nelly identified with the personal struggles of a character in *Things Fall Apart* who began to question his religion. Though Nelly stated she did not question her own religion, she related to the idea of finding “the flaws and faults in it.”

Though a review of the literature surveyed showed a disconnection between traditional, print media and the modern, digital technology that many 21st-century students have become accustomed to in their everyday lives (Honan, 2012), this did not appear to be an issue with this
particular set of students. Instead, the driving force behind whether students became engaged with a text was whether or not they connected with a central theme or idea presented in the book, or with one of its characters. For example, Elizabeth related to the main character from The Alchemist:

...he didn’t really know which direction he wanted to go in life, and he was really stuck on learning more about the world and trying to travel and find his destiny in life, but his father had already planned for his life. And it was things he didn’t want to do. I guess I can relate to that.

Elizabeth explained that her mother wanted her to go to college, but that she is not interested in college at this point. As Elizabeth put it, “it’s just not for me.”

While Elizabeth was able to relate to a character on a thematic level, Phoebe declared that she did not identify with a single character she has ever read in school. Still, while most of the participants in this study were able to relate to a character from a text they have read in school, some of the participants in this study revealed other times when they felt disconnected from their reading experiences. For instance, two participants in this study also described how they sometimes struggled with the style of a particular text. As Janie stated, “…but there’s just something about the way it’s written that I don’t really connect with it or I think it’s a little bit too radical.” Likewise, Aron struggled with the alternating structure of a book because the focus of each chapter alternated. While the literature surveyed for this study did not focus on how a text was written specifically, it did suggest that students should experience a certain level of enjoyment while reading in order to foster an interest in reading more (Wilson & Casey, 2007). Still, these students were able to recognize what they did not like about these texts, because they were able to compare these particular reading experiences with other, more positive reading
experiences. This helped show that positive reading experiences, where students feel a sense of enjoyment with what they are reading, helped students build a sense of self-efficacy when they encountered texts that were more challenging and less appealing to them.

**Pedagogy influences reading engagement.** A review of the literature showed that the teacher pedagogy played an important role in influencing students’ identities where it concerns reading engagement (Skerrett, 2012). These identities are impacted by the way in which teachers are able to engage students with what they are reading. These educational experiences were thus important to the students’ level of reading engagement. For example, in this study, it became clear that students enjoyed opportunities to discuss what they were reading with their peers. In fact, class discussion appeared to be an important and useful pedagogical tool that helped students make sense of what they were reading in an academic context. Examples from this study included the participants’ descriptions of Socratic Seminars. Further, students mentioned other types of class discussions, some of which were aided by study guides that the students used to guide their thoughts. Though these study guides usually involved some sort of question-and-answer task, the participants who described them shared how they were used as tools for participation in class discussion.

Almost all of the students who participated in this study had a difficult time recalling instances where they were given a choice in what they were expected to read. When a participant was able to recall experiences with choosing their own texts to read in class, it was usually either because he or she had finished all of their work, as Elizabeth described, or he or she was doing an end-of-the-school-year project, as Nelly recalled. At other times, these opportunities were given as a summer reading assignment, as described by Anne. Only Owen was able to fully articulate a time in which he was allowed some degree of choice with what he
was going to read in class, but even then, he had to choose from a teacher-generated list of texts. However, when it comes to reading, the research behind student choice is clear: students should have frequent opportunities to choose their own texts to read in school from a wide-range of reading materials (Flowerday et al., 2004; Fisher, 2004; Rycik & Irwin, 2001). In addition, the research supports the idea that students need time to read in school (Krashen, 2004; Rycik & Irvin, 2001). As Wilson and Casey (2007) reported, students are not being given enough time to read during the school day. This study supports Wilson and Casey’s research since none of the participants in this study described any sort of opportunity to engage in meaningful reading in-class. Instead, almost all of the in-class reading experiences that the students described in this study were actually reading assignments that they completed for class but outside of school. In class, students participated in task activities and class discussions. Only one participant, Elizabeth, described how she was given time to actually read in class, but she also stated that she was only given time to read when she had completed the rest of her work for the day.

**Adolescents label their reading identities.** The participants in this study labeled themselves as readers. Participants referred to themselves as being an “avid reader,” or a “slow reader,” a “fast reader,” or an “engaged reader,” among other labels. This theme was seen as cognitive because it demonstrated the participants’ awareness of particular reading values such as reading speed, reading fluency, and reading frequency. It demonstrated how these participants saw themselves in relation to their perceived understandings of what good readers do.

It is important to note that the terms “self-label” and “labeling” are used differently in this study than in Phinney’s (1992) work. Phinney described how adolescents use self-labeling as a means of social categorization. However, in the present research, the term is used to show how students demonstrated their knowledge about the values of readers.
The term ‘labeling’ in this study is in line with the relevant literature on students’ identities as readers. Alvermann (2001) discussed how school culture informs identity. In Alvermann’s work, students are assigned labels in school that affect how they see themselves. Bartlett (2005) referred to labeling as a type of “cultural artifact” in that it will impact student identities. Though the literature also showed that reading identities can be shaped by other factors, including gender, socioeconomics, and race, the students in this study did not allude to any of those issues specifically with regard to how they see themselves as readers. Instead, their identities as readers seemed to be identified mostly by either how quickly, how well, or how often they read.

**Behavioral component.**

Within this study, the participants showed how they engaged in behaviors that contributed to their membership within student success cohorts. Thus, the finding that students participate in student success cohorts was seen as a part of the behavioral component (Phinney, 1992; Gaines et al., 2010; Gudykunst, 2001) of the students’ identities. That is, participation and involvement in these activities were seen as norms for most of these participants. These behaviors were shown through their involvement in student success cohorts, such as their extracurricular activities. These behaviors also included their time management and their independent reading practices. Thus, students attributed meaning to the behaviors component of their identities in a myriad of ways.

According to the literature surveyed, adolescents spend a great deal of their time in isolation and on the Internet (Alvermann, 2002; Schmar-Dobler, 2003). Prensky (2001) referred to 21st-century students as “digital natives” who spend a significant portion of their time with digital technologies. Interestingly, this was not a prominent theme among the eight participants
in this study. Instead, the participants in this study described their involvement in extracurricular activities, such as the arts and, to a lesser degree, in athletics. However, Aron and Owen, two of the male participants, did mention playing video games as a hobby. Owen described how playing video games is a pastime that he shared with his family and attributed his interest in playing video games to his father. Still, neither participant described spending any significant amount of time playing video games as opposed to reading. In fact, both Owen and Aron described reading practices that included independent reading outside of school.

Remarkably, all of the participants in this study described how they engaged with the behavior of independent reading. Janie put it best when she said simply, “I read stuff for fun.” Yet at least one of the participants made a clear distinction between reading for fun and reading for school. As Nick put it, “I think school reading is more based on learning rather than creative reading. It’s more for learning than entertainment, I would say.” Nick’s statement supports prior research in the field that saw school reading as “educational” rather than “fun” (Norton, 2010). At the same time, research has pointed to the decline of independent reading in general (Miller et al., 2011). Still, the participants in this study described outside reading interests and articulated how they were often engaged in reading about their own personal interests or with specific genres. For example, a few students, like Phoebe and Owen, discussed their interests in dystopian literature. Anne relayed that she enjoyed reading romantic novels, like those written by contemporary author Nicholas Sparks. Elizabeth described her interest in science fiction novels. Many of the participants described their interests in series books, like the Harry Potter series and The Hunger Games. However, as noted earlier, the participants in this study were high-achieving students as evidenced by their enrollment in Advanced Placement classes or Honors classes and their commitment to their schoolwork. Nonetheless, their independent
reading experiences demonstrated the participants’ individual reading behaviors. As Phinney (1992) suggested, this component of a person’s identity helps to exhibit the person’s willingness to participate in the norms of a particular group. Independent reading is understood to be a behavior in which high-achieving students engage (Hughes-Hassel & Rodge, 2007). Therefore, the independent reading that these students participated in helped reinforce both their commitment to reading and their overall identities as students.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

In this study, the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of identity (Phinney, 1992) were referenced as they related to high-achieving high school students’ identities where they concerned reading engagement. Succinctly, this study sought to understand how high-achieving students described the influences on their identities with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences.

Phinney’s (1992) discussion of the components of identity helped to inform the emergent themes in this study. Though this study did not focus specifically on ethnicity as Phinney’s work has, and instead focused on reader identity, several insights have been gleaned from the application of the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of identity to the issue of reading engagement. First, the participants in this study demonstrated a sense of belonging among family members, specifically their parents, and among their peers where it concerned reading. Reading engagement was thus attributed to supportive relationships and at times to shared reading experiences. Next, the participants in this study demonstrated the cognitive component of their identities through their interest in participating in class discussions, their ability to recognize their likes and dislikes as readers, and finally their valuing their own independent reading practices. Equally important to note is that the students who took part in
this study very readily identified themselves based on the type of reader they thought they were with self-imposed labels. Finally, the students in this study participated in behaviors that helped to frame their identities. As adolescents, these behaviors were almost exclusively tied to school and to their membership within particular extracurricular activities or course types.

Before conducting this research, the researcher believed that basic elements of identity, such as gender, socioeconomic, and race, would prevail as components of identity that influenced reading engagement. Since a survey of the literature helped document the relevance of those aspects of identity as central to a person’s identity, the current research does not refute the relevance of each of those aspects of identity as central to an individual’s sense of self. Still, it was undoubtedly surprising that the students in this study, with the exception of two participants who spoke about briefly about gender, did not identify themselves with regard to those basic aspects of identity. The one participant who came closest in addressing the issue of ethnic background was Aron, who discussed a history of civil rights activism in his family and his interest in reading about the Black Panthers. Still, Aron did not explicitly connect his own ethnic background to his interests and instead referenced his interest in that topic as a result of the influence of his father and grandfather. Instead, it became evident from the researcher’s interpretation of the data that the emergent themes within this study were not tied specifically to their gender, socioeconomic status, or race; and instead were related to the participants’ “relationships,” “reading engagement,” “pedagogy,” and “cohorts of engagement,” which resulted in the five emergent themes presented in this chapter.

Recommendations for Future Research

Limitations. This study is not without limitations. First, as an English teacher at the school in which the study took place, there was the potential for researcher bias. However, the
researcher attempted to minimize bias through the use of member checks with the research participants and the use of analytic memos. Further, while one of the researcher’s former students participated in this study, no current students were allowed to participate.

Another limitation of this study was with regard to its participants. As described in Chapter 3, X High School offered three different types of English classes to juniors and seniors: College English, Honors English, and Advanced Placement English. While the researcher intended to gain the perspectives of students from all three types of English classes, in the end, no students from College English courses agreed to participate in this study and only one student from Honors English agreed to participate. Out of the 12 classes that were visited by the researcher for the purposes of recruitment, only two were labeled as “College English.” However, opportunities to visit other college English classes were somewhat restricted because only two of the seven teachers who agreed for the researcher to visit their classrooms and taught College English courses allowed the researcher permission to visit their courses. Ultimately, no students from College English courses agreed to participate in the study. However, seven students from Advanced Placement courses participated in this study. Consequently, a limitation of this study was that the only students who agreed to participate were students who were enrolled in advanced classes, either labeled as “Advanced Placement” or “Honors English.”

Finally, the researcher made every effort to ensure that the participants in this study did not see the researcher as a teacher or person of authority within their school. For example, the interviews were conducted after school and in a mathematics classroom, as opposed to the researcher’s classroom. Regardless, the interviews were still conducted in a classroom, which may have made participants see the researcher and the witness as teachers and figures of authority, rather than as researcher and witness, even though the researcher explained that this
was not the case for the purposes of this study.

**Future research.** Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations for future research in the field of identity and reading engagement can be made. First, this study involved a very small sample of students from a large high school. Scholars wishing to replicate this study should consider ways to gain more student participants. At the same time, future studies should seek to engage students from a wider net: the students in this study were almost entirely from Advanced Placement English classes and while their participation is valuable, it would have been useful to gain the perspectives of students from other English classes, most notably College English.

A second recommendation would be to include students from the college level. This study sought to understand the implications of reading engagement as it was related to high school students, but college students, especially recent high school graduates, have a great deal to offer in the way of discussing reading engagement and their identities. For example, by the time students are enrolled in college, they may have formed other relationships outside of their families and closest friends that have helped to inform their identities and their engagement with reading.

The researcher’s third recommendation is for future research to concern itself with the growing number of students who are identified as English Language Learners. These students, for whom English is not their first language, would offer valuable insight into how student identities are supported within American classrooms as they relate to reading engagement.

Finally, since a major finding of this study was that most of the students interviewed had either vague recollections of limited experiences with personal choice with regard to reading in school, or no recollections of their ability to choose their own texts in school, it would be useful
for future research to delve into the area of choice as it pertains to reading engagement specifically.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for a number of reasons. First, this study supports the research done by Gaines et al. (2010) and Gudykunst (2001), research that advocates for inclusion of the behavioral component of identity as an important factor in determining identity in Phinney’s (1992) original components model which was originally comprised of the affective and cognitive components. Thus, this research supports a three-factor model based on Phinney’s (1992) original model.

Next, research has shown that high school students are often disengaged from their reading experiences in school (Miller et al., 2011; NEA, 2007). However, in this study, participants described several contributing factors impacting their engagement with in-class reading as they are tied to their identities. These factors included their consistent behaviors, such as independent reading and involvement in extracurricular activities; the relationships they had with family members, specifically their parents and their friends and peers; and the influence of teacher pedagogy, including the implementation of class discussion. These factors can be studied independently to further address issues of disengagement, but they can also be applied to students who are showing signs of disengagement with reading.

Several commonalities among most of the eight participants in this study were presented, including their relationships with others, their ability to self-identify, their membership within cohorts of student success, and their personal behaviors. As such, parents and teachers can look to the results of this study as a base of inquiry for the adolescents in their lives. For example, is the disengaged reader participating in meaningful behaviors that would contribute to his or her
reading engagement? If not, parents and teachers can ask themselves what can be done to engage that student in behaviors that match the findings presented in this study. Does the student have supportive relationships that influence reading engagement? Does the student have access to books or other reading materials both in and out of class? Is the student able to engage with in-class activities, such as participating in class discussions? Moreover, have there been opportunities for the student to choose their own texts to read as a means of fostering reading engagement within the classroom? Have there been opportunities for the disengaged reader to read independently in class? These questions are all very practical and ultimately can be used as a means by which to understand the possible reasons as to why a student is not engaged with his or her reading experiences.

Beyond the individual student, however, this study has implications for policymakers and educational leaders. As it stands, much more work needs to be done in the area of validating in-class reading. In the era of time-on-learning, it is a wonder that none of the students in this study could articulate a time in which they were actually allowed to read in school unless they had already finished all of their work. By not giving students adequate time to read in school, educational leaders are not validating reading as a means of learning in school. Finally, more work needs to be done to assess why students are not given more opportunities to self-select books of interest in school.

Implications for Practice

As both a scholar and practitioner, one of my goals for this study was to ensure that it was both relevant and useful in practice. As a classroom teacher, it was important for me to be able to share my findings and conclusions with my colleagues and other practitioners with the intention of improving reading engagement for high school students. In this way, this study has
important implications for practice.

First, the results of this study can be shared with my colleagues in a number of ways that would both help create change and help improve students’ level of engagement with reading. For example, teachers are required by contract to attend professional development meetings several times a year. These meetings may serve as one way in which the findings from this study can be shared and discussed with colleagues. Though an overview of the research can be provided during professional development, the real work would have to occur more consistently throughout the school year. Arguably, the most useful and practical way in which I can share the implications of this study is through the professional learning community (PLC) meetings that are built into the school schedule. In this forum, teachers gather during a scheduled time in the school day to discuss problems of practice, share concerns about students, and engage in professional development. Usually, these PLC meetings are organized by subject or grade level. Each meeting has an agenda with an objective that is developed by the collaborative. Since students’ lack of reading engagement is a well-known problem that many educators face, the topic of this research would certainly be a welcome discussion in such a forum.

To begin, I would give a generalized overview of the research topic and problem of practice. I would explain the significance of this work and give examples of my own experiences with students and reading engagement. Following an initial overview, teachers would engage in a series of professional learning community meetings that focused on specific parts of this research. In some sessions, for example, it would be important for teachers to share pedagogical practices that they are currently using to engage students with reading. An important finding from this study was that pedagogy influences reading engagement. In this study, the most commonly described pedagogical approach was to allow students to engage in
meaningful discussions about what they were reading. It is thus important for teachers to share what they do with their colleagues during PLC meetings and to be open to questions and comments. Of course, an environment of trust also would have to be created, and that work would require some careful planning as well. However, by sharing best practices in collaboration with one another and with regard to reading engagement, teachers will be participating in meaningful conversations to the benefit of students.

Outside of sharing best practices, PLC meetings would also center on other important findings from this study where it concerns reading engagement. These meetings would have implications for the school as a whole. For example, it would be useful to hold a discussion of the external factors that have influenced reading engagement as described by this research. That is, the participants’ supportive relationships with others were a major finding in this study. Using PowerPoint, I would review the kinds of conversations that the participants in this study had with their parents and with their peers and explain how these conversations informed their identities as readers. Following this, I would ask my colleagues to brainstorm ways in which these types of informal conversations about reading can be used within the context of the school, because one of the implications of the discussions described in this study is that they were opportunities for students to discuss what they were reading in low-stakes ways.

Most assuredly, these types of exchanges can be replicated in school and are especially important for students who do not have the kinds of family and peer relationships that the students in this study described. One way that these conversations can occur is through advisory. Advisory has become increasingly popular over the last several years within schools as a means of fostering opportunities for students to connect with adults in order to develop supportive relationships within the school. In advisory, teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, and
other staff members are assigned small groups of students – about six or eight students per group – and work with these students to discuss a range of topics, from their academic progress to the dangers of texting while driving. Typically, the topics are pre-determined by the school. However, the theory behind advisory sessions is that students will form connections with their advisors and develop a sense of belonging within the school community. Advisory occurs several times during the school year and usually about once a month. To make this type of exchange more effective, however, we would need to provide more opportunities for advisory to occur, though those would be the decisions of the administration. Ultimately, a need exists to develop an outline of the ways in which these types of conversations can occur in models like advisory. In this way, teachers, in collaboration, would work to draft goals and norms for advisory. It is important for members of the PLC to have a say in this change effort and in how it is developed. The importance of the teachers and staff understanding the goals of this work and demonstrating consistency with all students is paramount to its success. Therefore, much work would have to go into planning these advisories before they begin.

Regardless, advisory already provides students with the opportunity to connect with adults in an effort to establish trust and support; thus, it is seen as one forum in which the kinds of meaningful and informal discussions about reading that were described in this study can take place. By allowing students to discuss their reading experiences with their advisors and other peers, students would have the opportunity to articulate their own interests in reading and to recognize that their reading experiences are valued. Whether students discuss reading experiences centered on sports or Shakespeare, the advisor would affirm to his or her advisees that both of these reading experiences are worthwhile and important as they build capacity for reading.
Other examples of topics would include the need to address the way in which students label their reading identities. In this study, it was shown that these labels demonstrated a type of value about reading as it related to students’ perceptions of what good reading looked like. However, it is important for educators to build the confidence of students as it relates to reading, both in terms of ability and engagement. This would allow students to move away from labeling their individual reading identities. Though it would require a great deal of positive reinforcement for some students and the support of the staff in encouraging students to understand that their identities as readers are not defined by the labels they have imposed on themselves, the findings from this study showed that this would be important work in this field. Still, work in this area would have to be done with in coordination with the administration and school support services, such as school counselors and school psychologists. While this is a large undertaking, it is important and necessary work. Educators must send positive messages to students about who they are as readers. We, as teachers, have an obligation to build the confidence of all students when it comes to reading and to help them resist labeling themselves according to preconceived notions of what it means to be a good reader.

This study also showed that students were not being given the opportunity to read independently or participate in self-selected reading. Since the research on self-selected reading and independent reading clearly supports the inclusion of it in classrooms, a need exists to discuss how we can incorporate these opportunities within the classroom. To do this, I would first have a conversation with the school’s administration. Administrators need to understand that time spent reading in school is time well spent, and that if we are going to have an impact in the area of reading engagement for our students, we also need to provide them with opportunities to read in school. This can be done in several ways. Some programs are more formal, like Drop
Everything and Read (DEAR), or Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), but the goals remain the same. In each of these programs, a key component is that the adults in the building participate as well. That is, every teacher and staff member would also be expected to engage in meaningful reading as a means of modeling engaged reading for students.

The ways in which these opportunities would be provided to students would be the result of conversations with all stakeholders including administrators, teachers, and parents. I envision holding informal, community-based meetings after school with the support of my colleagues, in order to educate parents on the importance of independent reading practices, both at home and in school, and to explain the nature of the current research and the need to include independent reading opportunities during the school day at the high school level. These informal meetings would include a PowerPoint presentation and a concise review of the relevant research in the area. Parents would leave the meeting with an understanding of the goals of independent reading, as well as with a library card application: the public library allows their children to secure texts on a consistent basis with no cost to families. Depending on funding within the school, it would also be useful to provide opportunities for giveaways to promote this initiative, as an incentive to get parents and students to attend the meetings and share what they learned from the meetings with people in the community. These giveaways might include copies of books recommended and sponsored by teachers and even digital readers like Kindle or Nook.

Because this study found that the students’ participation in extracurricular activities was also an important influence on their reading engagement due to the students being involved in success cohorts, I would also seek support from the athletics department, the arts department, and club advisors. It would be important for us to have several meetings in order to discuss how we can both recognize the kinds of reading experiences that students who already participate in
these activities are having and brainstorm ways in which to include students who are not currently involved in behaviors that mirror those of the students in success cohorts. Though these discussions would be ongoing and require the input of the administration and the coaching and advising staff, the goal would develop a plan detailing how we can replicate the success cohorts that are already in existence with other students. In relation, we would also need to consider the development of a survey that asks students what other kinds of extracurricular and social experiences they would like to see offered by the school since not all students want to participate in athletics or the arts, but may have other interests instead. Coaches and club advisors can help to support this work by having informal conversations with members of their respective teams and groups about the kinds of reading their students are doing and, of course, by modeling reading themselves.

Ultimately, there is a great deal of work that needs to be done as a result of the findings from this study. As a practitioner, this kind of work is both challenging and exciting. Effective and large-scale change in the area of reading engagement will require a great deal of planning through many discussions, but this description of some of the ways in which this research is useful in practice helps to lay the foundation for what can be done. In essence, this description will help start the conversation about the practical ways in which the current research can be applied to the school setting. With careful planning, coordinated efforts by all stakeholders, and the belief that the issue of reading engagement can be addressed in meaningful ways, there is no doubt that the most effective change can occur in order to serve students as they navigate through life and their own reading experiences.

**Summary and Reflections**

On the whole, the participants in this study showed that various influences on their
identities were important when it came to reading engagement. The affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of their identities (Phinne, 1992) were influenced by a myriad of factors, including their relationships with others, particularly their parents and family members. In addition, the participants’ level of reading engagement was linked to how personally meaningful the text was, to the fact that they participated in leisure reading, and even to the mere presence of the text itself (the style in which it was written also being important). In this study, some participants described how pedagogy influenced reading engagement, either through direct influences from the teacher, and participatory activities like class discussion, task assignments, and experiences with personal choice. Participants even labeled themselves with regard to the kind of reader they thought they were based on their perceived values about reading. Finally, participants described their participation in student success cohorts through their participation in a myriad of extracurricular activities.

These findings served to illustrate how these high school students described the influences on their identities as high-achieving students with regard to reading engagement amid their educational experiences. In an age of prescribed, boxed, and canned curricula designed to propel students through school in order to demonstrate their mastery of learning standards through state-mandated assessments, it is often easy to forget that each student is an individual learner with individual backgrounds and experiences who has also developed a social identity. By extension, each student is also an individual reader with his or her own interests, likes, and dislikes. Thus, it is important for teachers and parents to capitalize on each student’s identity as a means of fostering engagement with reading.

The participants in this study described how their identities were closely tied to a variety of factors and influences. What is more, the students who participated in this study were
remarkable for their candor in describing their reading experiences. As such, the participants showed how their identities were impacted by a variety of external and internal factors, including their relationships with others, their extracurricular involvement, and their level of self-awareness. Certainly, the experiences these participants conveyed have contributed to the meaning they have associated with their sense of self.

Other factors contributed to the students’ identities as well. For example, one student brought up the issue of her faith and her ability to relate to a fictional character that questioned his religion. Two students brought up the issue of gender and how it related to their reading interests as they move into adulthood from adolescence. It was intriguing that none of the participants addressed some factors of identity that the literature showed to be prevalent. For example, though these students appeared to be ethnically diverse, not one participant in this study brought up issues of race or ethnicity. Similarly, although this study took place in a low-socioeconomic area, none of the students discussed being at a financial disadvantage or showed signs of it. None of the participants in this study lacked access to books. Just the opposite, some students described how their parents supplied them with various forms of texts, such as novels, comic books, newspapers, and magazines. The participants also described their commitment to reading for class and had definitive reading experiences from which to draw. Furthermore, many of those experiences were seen as positive ones by the participants.

Without question, it is evident that to these high achieving students, the influences on their identities where it concerns reading engagement mattered. Consequently, the students who participated in this study, with their educational experiences in mind, described a variety of influences on their identities with regard to reading.
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Table 1

*Participant Characteristics*

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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aron</td>
<td>16</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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Table 2

*Extracurricular Involvement*

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Appendix A

Rev.com Contact Information

Rev.com will transcribe interviews from this research project. Rev.com is a transcription service. Contact information for Rev.com is listed below:

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<td><a href="http://www.rev.com">http://www.rev.com</a></td>
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<td>Phone:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>888-369-0701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev.com, Inc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>461 Bush St FL 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>San Francisco CA 94108</td>
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Appendix B

Interview Guide

Institution: Northeastern University

Interviewee: ____________________

Interviewer: Stephen Joseph Boucher

Part I:

SAY: Hello! You have been selected to speak with me today in this interview because you have been identified as students who have a great deal to share about your reading experiences. This research project focuses on adolescent reading habits. Through this study, I hope to gain more insight into the reading experiences of high school students and how students actively engage and make meaning from the texts that they are reading in class. I would also like to introduce Mrs. Jupin, who will be serving as a witness throughout the interview. Though Mrs. Jupin has agreed to serve as a witness, she will not be part of our discussion. Do you have any questions so far?

SAY: I want to make sure that I am able to capture everything you say accurately so I would like to audio tape our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview?

[Participants Respond]

SAY: I will also be taking written notes today throughout the interview. These notes, along with the tape recording of this interview, will be destroyed after they are transcribed. Do I have your permission to take written notes throughout the interview?

[Participants Respond]

SAY: To meet our human subjects requirements at the Northeastern University, you must each have permission from your legal parents or guardians to participate. The form states that the information you share with me is confidential and that your participation in this study and this interview is voluntary. Do you have any questions?
[Participant Responds]

**Interviewee Background**

1. Tell me about your hobbies and interests. What do you like to do in your spare time?
2. What type of English class are you enrolled in? College English? Honors English? Advanced Placement?
3. What kinds of things do you read in class?
4. How much time do you spend reading for school when you are at home?

**Reading Identity**

1. If you could, describe yourself as a reader. What are your strengths and weaknesses? Your likes and your dislikes?
2. Tell me about your reading interests. What kinds of things do you like to read in your spare time?
3. Recall a conversation you had with someone about reading. It might have been a conversation with a teacher, a guidance counselor, a parent, or a friend. What was the conversation about? What do you think you learned about yourself as a reader from this conversation?
4. Is there a particular genre that you read the most? Why?
   A. What is it about these texts that make you want to read them?
   B. How often do you get to read these kinds of texts in school?
5. Describe a time, if any, when you had an opportunity to choose your own text to read in high school.
6. Tell a story about a time when what you were reading in school related to your own life in some way. What was it about what you were reading that related to your own life?
7. From your in-class reading experiences, can you describe a character from a book that you were able to identify with? Describe why you think you identified with that character.

8. Recall a time when you were reading a text that you had no connection to or investment in. In other words, it was a meaningless reading experience. What was the text and what made the experience meaningless?

9. What do you wish you could read in class? Why?

SAY: This ends our interview. Do you have any questions?

[Participant responds]

SAY: Thank you for your participation in this study.
Appendix C

Letter to Junior and Senior English Teachers

Date
Dear _____________________,

My name is Stephen Boucher and I am in the process of writing my thesis at Northeastern University for my doctorate. My thesis is called “Understanding the Influence of Identity on Reading Engagement”. The purpose of this research project is to explore how high school students see themselves as readers in the twenty-first century. In addition, this research will seek to understand what meaning students have attached to the influence of their individual identities on their in-class reading experiences.

For the purpose of this research, I intend to interview between 5-10 students from College English 11, Honors English 11, Advanced Placement Language and Composition, College English 12, Honors English 12, and Advanced Placement Literature and Composition.

I am writing to ask that I be allowed to visit your classroom to talk to your students about my thesis for the purpose of recruitment. I will need about twenty minutes to explain my study to them and to ask for voluntary participation. I will only need a few participants, and those students who return their informed consent forms will be asked to participate in an interview lasting approximately forty-five minutes the following week. Mrs. Beth Jupin has agreed to act as a witness during these interviews. Once I have finished completing these interviews, I will analyze the data and ask to speak to the students who participated once again. This time, I will only need to review the interview with them to check for accuracy.

If you agree to allow me to visit your classroom, please return this form below to my mailbox in the Green House Office. I will make a photocopy of it for your personal records. Once I receive your permission, I will be in contact with you to set a time to visit. However, you can choose not to have me visit your classroom at any time without consequence.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the person mainly responsible for the research, Stephen Joseph Boucher, by phone at 1 (508) 717-4450 or through email at boucher.s@husky.neu.edu. You may also contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Atira Charles, at 1 (850) 412.7753 or by email at a.charles@new.edu.

Thank you,

Stephen Joseph Boucher

By signing below, I agree to have Stephen Boucher visit my classroom for the purpose of student recruitment for his doctoral thesis.

Name: _________________________________________  House: __________________________
Course: ___________________  Block: ________  Room Number: _____________
Appendix D

Invitation to Parents

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Stephen Joseph Boucher and I am writing to you to invite your child to participate in a research study as part of my doctoral thesis at Northeastern University. The title of my thesis is “Understanding the Influence of Identity on Reading Engagement”. This research study is designed to explore how high school students see themselves as readers in the twenty-first century. In addition, this research will seek to understand what meaning students have attached to the influence of their individual identities on their in-class reading experiences.

For the purpose of this research, I intend to interview between 5-10 students from a variety of grade 11 and 12 English courses at your child’s high school. These interviews will be tape recorded by me and transcribed by a transcription service called Rev.com. Throughout the interview, Beth CA Jupin, a teacher at your child’s high school, will serve as a witness to the interview, but will not participate in the discussion.

If you would like to provide consent for your child to participate in this study, please read the informed consent form that your child brought home today. Please understand that you do not have to provide consent for your child to participate if you do not want to, and even if you do provide consent, you may choose to stop your child’s participation in this study at any time.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the person mainly responsible for the research, Stephen Joseph Boucher, by phone at 1 (508) 717-4450 or through email at boucher.s@husky.neu.edu. You may also contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Atira Charles, at 1 (850) 412.7753 or by email at a.charles@new.edu.

Thank you,

Stephen Joseph Boucher
Estimados Pais/Guardiões,

Chamo-me Stephen Joseph Boucher e escrevo-lhes para convidar o seu filho/a sua filha a participar num projeto pesquisador que faz parte dos meus estudos doutorais na Universidade Northeastern. O título da minha dissertação é “A compreensão da influência de identidade no engajamento de leitura”. Este projeto de pesquisa explorará como alunos da escola secundária identificam-se como leitores no século XXI. Além, esta pesquisa tentará compreender quais são os significados que os alunos atribuem à influência da sua própria identidade nas suas experiências com leituras dentro de aula.

Para esta pesquisa, pretendo entrevistar entre 5 a 10 alunos de vários cursos de inglês da décima-primeira classe e da décima-segunda classe na escola secundária do seu filho/da sua filha. Estas entrevistas serão gravadas por mim e transcritos por um serviço de transcrição chamado Rev.com. Durante a entrevista, Beth CA Jupin, uma professora na escola secundária do seu filho/da sua filha, servirá como uma testemunha da entrevista, porém não participará na conversa.

Se você gostaria dar autorização ao seu filho/à sua filha a participar neste estudo, por favor leia o formulário de consentimento informado que o seu filho/a sua filha lhe trouxe hoje. Por favor entenda que você não tem que dar consentimento ao seu filho/à sua filha para participar se você não quiser, e mesmo que você dá consentimento, você pode parar a participação do seu filho/da sua filha neste estudo em qualquer momento.

Se você tiver perguntas deste estudo, por favor contacte Stephen Joseph Boucher, a pessoa responsável pela pesquisa, por telefone 1(508)717-4450 ou por email boucher.s@husky.neu.edu. Também você pode contactar a Investigadora Principal, Dra. Atira Charles, por telefone 1(850)412-7753 ou por email a.charles@new.edu.

Obrigado,

Stephen Joseph Boucher
冯德明

Appendix F

Una Invitación para los Padres

Fecha:

Estimados Padres/Guardianes,

Me llamo Stephen Joseph Boucher y le estoy escribiendo para invitar a su hijo/hija a participar en un estudio de investigación como parte de mi tesis doctoral en la Universidad de Northeastern. El título de mi tesis es “Comprendiendo la influencia de la identidad en la atracción de la lectura”. Este estudio fue diseñado para explorar como los estudiantes de las escuelas superiores se ven asimismo como lectores en el siglo veintiuno. Además, este estudio busca comprender que significado los estudiantes le han dado a las influencias de sus identidades individuales en sus experiencias de lectura de clase.

Para este estudio, yo pienso entrevistar entre 5 – 10 estudiantes de varias clases de inglés de los grados 11 y 12. Estas entrevistas serán grabadas por mí y transcribirlas por una compañía llamada Rev.com. Durante la entrevista, Beth CA Jupin, maestra de la escuela superior, será testigo de las entrevistas, pero no participara en las conversaciones.

Si usted quiere darle permiso a su hijo/hija para participar en el estudio, por favor lea el consentimiento informado que su estudiante trajo a casa. Por favor comprenda que usted no tiene que dar permiso si no quiere que su hijo/hija participe, y aun cuando le dé el permiso, usted tiene derecho a parar la participación de su hijo/hija en el estudio.

Si tiene preguntas sobre este estudio, por favor contactar a la persona responsable del estudio, Stephen Joseph Boucher, por teléfono al 1(508)717-4450 o a través de la dirección electrónica Boucher.s@husky.neu.edu. Usted puede también contactar a la Investigadora Principal, Dr. Atira Charles, al 1(850)412.7753 o a través de la dirección electrónica a.charles@new.edu.

Gracias,

Stephen Joseph Boucher
Appendix G

Request for Consent

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Department of Education
Investigator: Principal Investigator: Atira Charles, Student Researcher: Stephen J. Boucher
Title of Project: Understanding the influence of identity on reading engagement.

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study:
We are inviting your child to participate in a research study. This form will tell you about the study. The researcher will discuss the study with you as well. You do not have to provide consent for your child to participate in this study if you do not want to.

Why is my child being asked to participate in a research study?
Your child is being asked to participate in this study because he or she is a junior or a senior at X High School.

Why is this research being done?
The research is being done to understand how high school students see themselves as readers in the twenty first century. It is also being done to explore the role of identity in reading engagement.

What will my child be asked to do?
Participation in this study will consist of a single interview at your child’s high school. There will be a witness at the interview. The witness is Mrs. Beth CA Jupin, who is employed as a teacher at the high school.

The interview will last about 45 minutes. The interview will be tape recorded and transcribed, but your child’s name will not be used.

The researcher will also take notes during the interview to record the researcher’s observations. Following the interview, the researcher will review the interview with your child and check for accuracy.

What are the potential risks associated with participation in this study?
As an employee with the school district, I am a mandated reporter and am legally required to report concerns about your safety when necessary. If threats to your child’s emotional or physical well being become apparent during the interview, I will contact the school support counselors and the Department of Child and Family Services for further investigation.

Will my child benefit from participating in this research?
Your child will not be paid for participating in this study. However, your child’s participation may help to better understand how to engage high school students with reading.

Who will see information about my child?
Participation in this study will be confidential. Your child’s real name will not be used.

Throughout the interview, Beth CA Jupin, a teacher at your child’s high school, will serve as a witness to the interview, but will not participate in the discussion. In rare cases, authorized people may request research information about your child and other people in the study. This is done to make sure that the research is done properly. Only authorized people from the Internal Review Board at Northeastern University would be able to see this information.

Once this project is complete, all transcripts, field notes, and audiotapes will be destroyed.

**Can my child stop participation in this study?**
Your child’s participation in this research study is voluntary. Even if your child begins this study, he or she may quit at any time. Your child does not have to answer every question in the interview. Your child can stop participation at any time without consequence.

**Who can I contact if I have any questions?**
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Stephen Joseph Boucher, the person mainly responsible for the research, by phone at 1 (508) 717-4450 or by email at boucher.s@husky.neu.edu. You may also contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Atira Charles, at 1 (850) 412.7753 or by email at a.charles@new.edu.

**Who can I contact about my child’s rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant, you may contact:

Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection  
960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA, 02115.  
Tel. 617.373.4588. Email n.regina@neu.edu.

You may call anonymously if you wish.

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above information. I am aware that I can discontinue to my participation in this study at any time without consequence.

**If under 18 years of age:**
Parent / Guardian Name: _____________________________________
Parent/ Guardian Signature: ___________________________________ Date: _______________

Print Student Name: ________________________________________
Student Signature: _________________________________________ Date: _______________
Appendix H

Solicitação de Consentimento

A Universidade Northeastern, Faculdade de Estudos Profissionais, Departamento de Educação
Investigador: Investigador Principal: Atira Charles, Aluno Pesquisador: Stephen J. Boucher
Título do Projeto: Understanding the influence of identity on reading engagement. (A compreensão da influência de identidade no engajamento de leitura.)

Consentimento Informado para Participar num Projeto Pesquisador:

Porquê é que o meu filho/a minha filha foi convidado a participar num projeto pesquisador?
O seu filho/a sua filha foi convidado a participar neste projeto porque ele/ela está na décima-primeira ou décima-segunda classe na Escola Secundária de City X.

Porquê é que esta pesquisa está sendo feita?
A pesquisa está sendo feita para compreender como alunos do nível secundário identificam-se como leitores no século XXI. Também, explorará o papel de identidade no engajamento de leitura.

O que é que pedirão do meu filho/da minha filha?
Participação neste estudo consistirá de uma entrevista na escola secundária do seu filho/da sua filha. Terá outra pessoa presente durante a entrevista. Será Senhora Beth CA Jupin, que é uma professora na escola secundária.

A entrevista durará uns 45 minutos. A entrevista será gravado e transcrito, mas o nome do seu filho/da sua filha não será usado.

O pesquisador tomará apontamentos durante a entrevista para arquivar as suas observações. Depois da entrevista, o pesquisador reverá os apontamentos da entrevista com o seu filho/a sua filha e verificará que as observações estão certos.

Quais são os perigos associados com participação neste estudo?
Como um funcionário do distrito escolar, eu sou obrigado legalmente relatar qualquer preocupação da sua segurança quando for necessário. Se houver ameaças ao seu filho/à sua filha físicas ou emocionais que aparecem durante a entrevista, eu contactarei os conselheiros de apoio escolar e o Departamento de Serviços Infantis e Familiares para obter mais informações.

Beneficiará o meu filho/a minha filha por participar neste estudo?
O seu filho/à sua filha não será pago por participar neste estudo. Porém, a sua participação pode
ajudar entender como alunos da escola secundária se engajam na leitura.

**Quem verá esta informação do meu filho/a minha filha?**
Participação neste estudo será confidencial. O nome verdadeiro do seu filho/da sua filha não vai ser utilizado.

Durante a entrevista, Beth CA Jupin, uma professora na escola secundária do seu filho/da sua filha, servirá como testemunha da entrevista, mas não participará na conversa. Em raros casos, pessoas autorizadas podem pedir a informação da pesquisa do seu filho/da sua filha e outras pessoas no estudo. Isto é feito para garantir a integridade da pesquisa. Só as pessoas autorizadas do Comitê de Revisão Interna na Universidade Northeastern serão disponíveis ver estas informações.

Quando o projeto terminará, todos os apontamentos, transcrições e gravações serão destruídos.

**É possível parar a participação do meu filho/da minha filha neste estudo?**
A participação do seu filho/da sua filha nesta pesquisa é voluntária. Mesmo que comece neste estudo, em qualquer momento ele ou ela pode desistir. O seu filho/da sua filha não tem que responder todas as perguntas na entrevista. Ele/ela pode parar a sua participação em qualquer momento sem consequência.

**Quem é que posso contactar se eu tiver perguntas?**
Se você tiver perguntas deste estudo, por favor contacte Stephen Joseph Boucher, a pessoa responsável pela pesquisa, por telefone 1(508)717-4450 ou por email boucher.s@husky.neu.edu. Também você pode contactar a Investigadora Principal, Dra. Atira Charles, por telefone 1(850)412-7753 ou por email a.charles@new.edu.

**Quem é que posso contactar dos direitos do meu filho/da minha filha como um/a participante?**
Se você tiver perguntas ou preocupações dos seus direitos como um/a participante, você pode contactar:

Nan C. Regina, Directora, Proteção da Pesquisa do Sujeito Humano
960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA, 02115.
Tel. 617.373.4588. Email n.regina@neu.edu.

Você pode chamar anonimamente se desejar.

A minha assinatura abaixo confirma que eu li e compreendo a informação acima. Eu sei que posso parar a minha participação neste estudo em qualquer momento sem consequência.

**Menos de 18 anos de idade:**
Nome de Pai/Guardião: ___________________________ Assinatura do Pai/Guardião: ___________________________ Data: ________________
Nome do Aluno: ___________________________ Assinatura do Aluno: ___________________________ Data: ________________
Appendix I

Solicitud de Consentimiento
Universidad de Northeastern, Colegio de Estudios profesionales, Departamento de Educación.
Título del Proyecto: Comprendiendo la influencia de la identidad en la atracción de la lectura.

Consentimiento informado para participar en un estudio de investigación:
Nosotros estamos invitando a su hijo/ hija a participar en un estudio de investigación. Esta carta le dará información acerca del estudio. El investigador también discutirá el estudio de investigación. Esta carta le dará información acerca del estudio. El investigador también discutirá el estudio con usted. Usted no tiene que proveer consentimiento para que su hijo/hija participe a menos que usted así lo desee.

¿Por qué se le está pidiendo a mi hijo/hija que participe en este estudio?
Nosotros estamos invitando a su hijo/hija a participar en un estudio de investigación. Esta carta le dará información acerca del estudio. El investigador también discutirá el estudio con usted. Usted no tiene que proveer consentimiento para que su hijo/hija participe a menos que usted así lo desee.

¿Por qué se le está pidiendo a mi hijo/hija que participe en este estudio?
A su hijo/hija se le está pidiendo que participe porque él o ella están en el undécimo o duodécimo año escolar.

¿Por qué se está conduciendo este estudio?
El estudio se está llevando a cabo para comprender como los estudiantes de la escuela superior se ven asimismo como lectores en el siglo veintiuno. También se está llevando acabo pare explorar el papel que la identidad juega en la atracción a la lectura.

¿Qué se le pedirá a mi hijo/hija que haga?
Participación de este estudio consistirá de una sola entrevista con su hija/hija en la escuela superior. Habrá testigos de la entrevista. El testigo será la Señora Beth CA Jupin, quien trabaja como maestra en la escuela Superior de City X. La entrevista durara más o menos 45 minutos. La entrevista se grabará y transcribirá, pero el nombre de su hijo/hija no será usado. Los entrevistadores tomaran apuntes durante la entrevista para anotar sus observaciones. Siguiendo la entrevista los entrevistadores repasarán la información con su adolescente para verificar que este bien.

¿Cuáles son los peligros de participar en este estudio?
Como trabajador del distrito escolar, yo estoy por ley requerido a reportar información que me preocupe sobre la seguridad de su hijo/hija. Si amenazas sobre el bienestar emocional o físico de su hijo/hija son aparentes durante la entrevista, yo tendré que contactar al consejero de apoyo escolar al igual que al Departamento de Niños y Familias para más investigación.

¿Por qué le beneficia a mi hijo/hija participar en este estudio?
A su hijo no se le pagara por participar en este estudio. Pero, la participación de su hijo/hija puede ayudarnos a comprender como captar la atención de los estudiantes de escuela superior en la lectura.

¿Quién vera la información de mi hijo/hija?
A través de la entrevista, Beth CA Jupin, una maestra de la escuela superior, servirá como testigo a la entrevista, pero no participara en la discusión. En un caso muy raro, personas autorizadas pueden pedir información sobre su hijo/hija u otras personas en el estudio. Esto es para asegurarnos qué el estudio sea
hecho correctamente. Solo personas autorizadas de la junta de repaso en la Universidad Northeastern podrán ver la información.

Una vez el estudio sea completado todas las copias oficiales, notas y cintas de audio serán destruidas.

¿Puede mi hijo o hija parar de participar en el estudio?
La participación de su hijo/hija es voluntaria. Aun cuando él o ella comienzan el estudio, él o ella pueden parar en cualquier momento. Su hijo/hija no tiene que contestar todas las preguntas en la entrevista. Su hijo/hija puede parar su participación en cualquier momento sin consecuencias.

¿A quién puedo llamar si tengo preguntas?
Si usted tiene preguntas sobre este estudio, por favor siéntase libre de llamar a Stephen Joseph Boucher, la persona responsable del estudio, por teléfono al 1(508)717-4450 o por dirección electrónica a boucher.s@husky.neu.edu. Usted también puede contactar a la investigadora principal, Dr. Atira Charles, al 1(850)412-7753 o por dirección electrónica a a.charles@new.edu.

¿Con quién me puedo contactar sobre los derechos de mi hijo/hija como participante?
Si tiene alguna pregunta o preocupación sobre los derechos del participante, usted puede hablar con:
Nan C Regina, Directora, Protección Estudios Humanos
960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA, 02115.
Tel. 617.373.4588 Dirección electrónica: n.regina@neu.edu.

Puede llamar anónimamente, si lo desea.

Al firmar, yo reconozco que he leído y comprendido la antecedente información. Yo estoy consciente que puedo descontinuar mi participación en el estudio en cualquier momento sin consecuencias.

Si menor de 18 años:
Padre o Guardián: ________________________________________________________________
Patrón o Guardián: __________________________________________________ Fecha: __________
Escribir el nombre del estudiante: ______________________________ Fecha: ________________
Firma del estudiante: ______________________________________ Fecha: ________________
Appendix J

Student Assent Form

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Department of Education
Investigator: Principal Investigator: Atira Charles, Student Researcher: Stephen J. Boucher
Title of Project: Understanding the influence of identity on reading engagement.

We are inviting you to participate in a research study. You do not have to agree to participate in this study if you do not want to. This form will tell you about the study.

• The research is being done to understand how high school students see themselves as readers in the twenty first century. It is also being done to explore the role of identity in reading engagement.
• Participation in this study is confidential; your name will not be used.
• Participation in this study would involve a 45-minute interview
• You do not have to answer all of the questions that are asked of you during the interview.
• Mrs. Beth CA Jupin, a mathematics teacher at your school, has agreed to be a witness during the interview.
• The interview will be tape recorded and transcribed.
• The researcher will take notes during the interview.
• Following the interview, the researcher will review the interview with you to check for accuracy.
• You can stop participation in this research project at any time.
• As an employee in this school district, the researcher is a mandated reporter and is legally required to report concerns about your safety when necessary. If threats to your emotional or physical well being become apparent during the interview, the researcher will contact the school support counselors and the Department of Child and Family Services for further investigation.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Stephen Joseph Boucher, the person mainly responsible for the research, by phone at 1 (508) 717-4450 or by email at boucher.s@husky.neu.edu. You may also contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Atira Charles, at 1 (850) 412.7753 or by email at a.charles@new.edu. In addition, if you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection by phone at 1 (617) 373-4588 or by email at n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above information. I am aware that I can discontinue to my participation in this study at any time without consequence.

Print Student Name: ______________________________________
Student Signature: ________________________________________ Date: ______________

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Appendix K

Script for Classroom Visit

**SAY:** Hello! My name is Stephen Joseph Boucher and I am here to talk to you today about an opportunity to participate in a research study. I am completing my doctoral thesis at Northeastern University and am interested in learning more about how high school students see themselves as readers in the twenty-first century. In addition, this research will seek to understand what meaning students have attached to the influence of their individual identities on their in-class reading experiences.

**ASK:** Are there any questions, so far?

**SAY:** Since many of you are minors, in order to participate in this study, you will need to have consent from your parents. If you are interested in participating in this study, I will give you two documents to take home to your parents to read. The first document is an invitation for your parents, which explains what this research study is about. The second is an informed consent form that gives me permission to interview you and to use the data that I collect in that interview in my research. If you parent agrees to allow you to participate in this study, they will have to sign the informed consent form. Once it is signed, I will provide you with an assent form, which you sign to acknowledge that you are going to participate in my research study.

**ASK:** Are there any questions, so far?

**SAY:** If your parent agrees to allow you to participate in this study and if you agree to participate in this study, I will set up a time with you to interview you about how you see yourself as a reader and what meaning you have attached to the influence of your individual identities on your in-class reading experiences. Mrs. Beth Jupin has agreed to act as witness during these interviews, but she will not participate in the interview itself. The interview will be tape recorded and transcribed so that I may read it and use it in my study. Following the interview, and once it is transcribed, I will meet with you once more to review what you said to ensure that what you said is what you meant to say.

**ASK:** Are there any questions, so far?

**SAY:** You should know that even if your parent consents and you agree to participate in this research study, you can stop your participation at any time during the interview without any consequence to you. You can also choose to skip or not answer any of the questions that are asked of you.

**SAY:** If you are interested in participating in this research study, please bring home the invitation to your parents and the informed consent forms. I will return tomorrow to collect them and to set up a time for us to conduct our interview.

**ASK:** Are there any questions?

**SAY:** Should you or your parents think of any questions after I leave today, please feel free to call or email me. My contact information is on the forms. Thank you and have a great day!