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POPULAR CULTURE IN/AND SECONDARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

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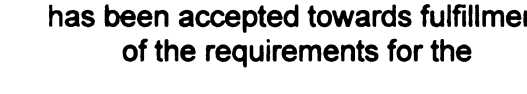

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"WAIT! I CAN USE THAT IN MY CLASSROOM?": POPULAR CULTURE IN/AND SECONDARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

By

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ABSTRACT

"WAIT! I CAN USE THAT IN MY CLASSROOM?":
POPULAR CULTURE IN/AND SECONDARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

By

Kathryn A. Schoon Tanis

Through this dissertation, I add to the field of secondary English Language Arts (ELA) and English teacher education by examining the personal and pedagogical views, values, and uses of popular culture reflected in three secondary ELA teachers' talk. Using elements of both narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and human science methodology (Van Manen, 1990), I gathered teacher talk through administering questionnaires, conducting focal group interviews, having one-on-one conversations, making classroom observations, and collecting artifacts such as university work, teaching content, examples of popular culture usage, and field notes. Through an exploration of teachers' talk about views and values of popular culture, I argue that studying ELA students' literacy practices is not enough; studying *teachers'* views of popular culture is an essential element in conversations about literacy. In this dissertation, I explore what might be gained from listening to teacher talk about personal and pedagogical views, values, and uses of popular culture. While all three teachers talked eloquently and insightfully about popular culture in general, their expansive views of popular culture did not translate into expansive uses of cultural texts in their classrooms.

The analysis of this study engages with several theories. First, aesthetic theories (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2001; Benjamin, 1936/2001; Berger, 1972; Bourdieu, 1984/2006; Dewey, 1934) are used to analyze the teachers' talk about cultural texts. Specifically, aesthetic theories are used to analyze the manner in which all three teachers talked about tensions regarding their personal and pedagogical views,

and uses, of popular culture texts and used to analyze the manner in which all three teachers talked about a hierarchy of cultural texts. Second, and more specifically, popular culture theories (Ang, 1985/2006; Cawelti, 2004; Storey, 2003) are used to examine the teachers' talk about popular culture texts as well as their personal and pedagogical views, values, and uses of popular culture. Third, English education theories (Alvermann, 2001, 2006, 2007; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2003; Gee, 2008; Hagood, Stevens, & Reinking, 2007; Morrell, 2004) – specifically, theories regarding literacy, multiliteracies, new literacies, and popular literacies – are used to explore the possible implications of the three teachers' aesthetic sensibilities on their pedagogy.

Even in the midst of the teachers' insightful talk about popular culture, all three teachers seemed to rely on the traditional, academic content of the literary canon. That is, the three teachers relied on traditional, academic literacy. Thus, this study is relevant for English Language Arts teachers who struggle with issues of popular culture and canonical literature. The insights of this study help secondary ELA teachers and English teacher educators think critically about their use(s) of popular culture texts both in and out of the secondary ELA classroom.

To my parents, Jon Mark and Mary Kay Schoon who saw this before anyone else,
to Joel E. Schoon Tanis who helped it come to fruition,
and to Harper L. Schoon Tanis who will carry it forward.

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CHAPTER ONE

"There are no innocent texts...": Popular Culture and Secondary English Language Arts

"[There] are no innocent texts...all artifacts of the established culture and society are laden with meaning, values, biases, and messages" (Durham & Kellner, 2001, p. 5).

"[What] students [need] to learn [is] changing, and...the main element of this change [is] that there [is] not a singular, canonical English that could or should be taught anymore" (New London Group, 1996, p. 63).

PREAMBLE

The first time, really, that I was exposed to the idea that, "[There] are no innocent texts," (Durham & Kellner, 2001, p. 5) was in the early 1990's when I was sitting in a movie theater watching the film *Boyz 'N the Hood* (Singleton, 1991). There is a scene about two-thirds of the way through the film when the main character Tre Styles (Cuba Gooding, Jr.) and his best friend Chris (Regi Green) go to visit Tre's father Furious Styles (Lawrence Fishburne) after taking the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test). During this visit, Furious takes the boys to a street corner in South Central Los Angeles (Compton) to "read" the text of the "'hood." Furious points out a billboard advertising a housing development for the purposes of gentrification; he directs the boys' attention to the fact that gun shops are located near liquor stores as he talks about zoning laws; and he lectures the boys about education and "getting out". And, I, in the comfort of my middle-class, small town learned about on-going issues of racism, classism, and oppression and learned that there are no innocent texts; I learned that "all artifacts of the established culture and society are laden with meaning, values, biases, and messages" (Durham & Kellner, ibid.). Through Singleton's film and the character of Furious Styles I understood that there are implicit messages behind the explicit messages of texts. Furious Styles showed me, in the early 1990's, that all texts hold

and reflect values, biases, and messages – values, biases, and messages that often serve to separate and segregate.

Now, while this trip down memory lane is interesting for me, it does not say much about the project of this dissertation. At the time that I was viewing Singleton's (1991) film, I was steeped in English literature and education courses on my way to becoming a secondary ELA (English Language Arts) teacher. After my initial reaction of horror and sadness at the on-going race and class issues in the United States as represented in this film, I realized that the text of this film, like other texts I was reading at the time, showed that there are no pure texts. Additionally, this film portrayed a message about the American Dream – an idea and a text that holds its own values and biases. Furious Styles wanted more for his son Tre and Chris (Tre's friend) than what he saw available in their neighborhood. That is, Furious, in addition to hoping his strong male presence in his son's life would help, Furious hoped Tre would get an education – he hoped that Tre would use education to realize the American Dream. As a result of my seeing this connection between the film and the text of the American Dream, I planned a lesson for one of my teaching placements using Singleton's (1991) film with the novel *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925) in order to explore, with my students, the way in which the idea of the American Dream is presented through various texts. Specifically, while I considered it important to discuss the conceptualization of the American Dream with secondary English students, I also considered it important to look across media at this idea in order to see how the notion of the American Dream continues to be communicated (through books, news media, film, music, and television, to name a few). That is, I wanted to explore with my students the idea of the American Dream and the idea that all texts of culture are laden with meaning, values, biases, and messages (Durhman & Kellner, 2001, p. 5).

However, as I realized the power of using popular culture texts (*Boyz 'N the Hood*, Singleton, 1991) with canonical texts (*The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald, 1925) as a secondary ELA teaching tool, I also realized at this time (the beginning of my teaching career) that the character of Furious Styles helped me to see that education is not the great equalizer that many hope it to be. While Kalantzis and Cope (2000) say that, "[The promise of education is universal" (p. 122), they also say, "Literacy is at the heart of education's promise...Literacy represents a kind of symbolic capital in two senses: as the pre-eminent form of symbol manipulation that gets things done in modern times and as a symbolic marker of 'being educated'" (p. 121). And, while I agree with this assessment, I also have been in enough schools to realize that the type of literacy offered to adolescents across the country is not always the same literacy. On the one hand, there seems to be a general assumption about literacy as the central element of education and as a sign of "being educated"; on the other hand there seems to be a myriad of assumptions about what literacy is, what it looks like, who should have access to it, the best way to teach it, and what it means to learn it. As a result, there seems to be different expectations for literacy for different adolescents. The American Dream – as some believed is achieved through literacy – is not presented as an option for every student.

Later in this first chapter, I will discuss the perceived literacy debate that is raging – and has been raging – in the United States. As previously mentioned, while there seems to be a general assumption about the idea that literacy equals education, there are a number of differing definitions of literacy as "symbol manipulation" (Kalantzis & Cope, 2000, p. 121), especially as it pertains to adolescents and secondary ELA. I will explore the idea that part of these differing definitions – the so-called "literacy debate" – is the proposed teaching practice of incorporating texts from the realm of popular culture into secondary English Language Arts (ELA) as a way to bridge the gap

between the academic literacy texts and skills of (traditional, canonical) secondary English and the various literacy practices and events of home or outside-of-school. However, this project – this dissertation – is not really about the literacy debate, even though this debate is the foundation for the study. That is to say, while the perceived literacy debate is what initially sparked my questions and interest, I do not intend to offer insight into this debate. What I plan to do is to examine and explore the call to incorporate popular culture into secondary ELA classes as a particular response to that debate. But, more specifically, I plan to discuss how secondary ELA teachers respond to, and interact with, this call to use popular culture texts in their classes as a response to the perceived literacy debate.

To those ends, in Chapter 1 of this dissertation I will explore the perceived literacy debate, the recommendation of incorporating popular culture texts in response to this debate, the complicated nature of defining and describing cultural and popular culture texts, and what questions we might ask (what conversations we might have with) secondary ELA teachers about the nature and role of (popular) cultural texts in the secondary ELA classroom. In Chapter 2 (methodology), I tell the story of the study by examining the questions I raised and how I made decisions about choosing the three secondary English teachers (Summer, April, and May[1]) with whom I held conversations. In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I closely examine the talk of the three English teachers. That is, I describe and discuss their responses (their talk) to the questions and thoughts I posed regarding the possible relationship between popular culture and secondary ELA. Finally, in Chapter 6, I look across the teachers, within the teachers' talk and my own journey, and beyond the study by wondering about the possibilities generated by the three English teachers' talk. As such, I aim to reflect on the notion that, "all artifacts of the established culture and society are laden with meaning, values, biases, and

[1] All names are pseudonyms chosen by the participants.

messages" (Durham & Kellner, 2001, p. 5), as I consider what such an idea might mean for secondary ELA and ELA teacher education.

PART ONE: THE LITERACY DEBATE

> "When faced with a totally new situation, we tend always to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavor of the most recent past" (McLuhan, 1967, p. 74).

One of the current driving debates in English education is that of literacy skills, specifically the perceived decline in U. S. students' literacy skills (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2003; Common Core Standards, 2010; Gee, 1996; Moje, et al, 2010; Zach, 1997; Alvermann, 2001; Morrell, 2004). On the one hand, as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Policy Research Brief (www.ncte.org, retrieved April, 2010) states, "Less than half of the 2005 ACT-tested high school graduates demonstrated readiness for college-level reading, and the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress...reading scores for 12th graders showed a decrease from 80 percent at the proficient level in 1992 to 73 percent in 2005" (p. 1) – a view of literacy that is testable and limited to academic (what I often label as "traditional" or "canonical") literacy. On the other hand, scholars like Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanic (2003) write, "Literacies are situated. All uses of...language can be seen as located in particular times and places...One result of the focus on literacy as a social practice is that literacies are positioned in relation to the social institutions and power relations which sustain them" (p. 1) – a view that complicates and situates literacy as more than "proficiency" or "readiness for college-level reading".

As this debate over the literacy skills of U. S. secondary students continues, many scholars, policy makers, and politicians have argued for new approaches to teaching reading and writing knowledge and skills across grade levels and disciplines. At the elementary level, varied approaches to teaching literacy have included an

assortment of programs directed at improving decoding, comprehension, and recall, to name a few. At the secondary level, other than the addition of standards such as the Common Core State Standards (2010) and the adoption of writing-across-the-curriculum programs (or reading and writing in the content area), along with increased pressure to teach to, and for, success in writing on standardized testing, there have been seemingly few ideas for alternative pedagogies for teaching literacy skills outside of the secondary English classroom. The responsibility for improved literacy skills appears to rest solely on secondary English teachers instead of secondary teachers as a whole. Additionally, the responsibility for improved literacy skills appears to rest mostly on traditional, academic literacy – proficient or college-ready literacy – instead of resting on situated literacy.

Moreover, the ideas for alternative approaches to teaching and improving literacy skills often only include pedagogies that approach the traditional texts and skills of secondary English education from a new angle or through a new lens. That is to say, the foundational, or traditional, textual content of secondary English classrooms appears to remain the same, while the approaches, or access, to those traditional texts has changed only slightly. The New London Group (1996) writes, "Literacy pedagogy has traditionally meant teaching and learning to read and write in page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language. Literacy pedagogy, in other words, has been a carefully restricted project – restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language" (p. 60-61; see also Semali, 2003, p. 271). As schools become more and more racially and economically diverse in population, the New London Group argues, relying on traditional literacy texts and skills – formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed – may not be enough to increase students' literacy skills in order to prepare them for future education, employment, civic duty, or participation in "public, community, and economic life" – what the New London

Group argues is the mission of education (1996, p. 60; see also Hobbs, 1998; Patel Stevens, 2001), and which others have argued is the mission of literacy education. Specifically, as students bring to school a plethora of background knowledge and home (out-of-school) literacy skills, approaching traditional literacy texts through a new lens may not be enough of a pedagogical change to aid students' learning, growth, and literacy skills for future public and community life.

In his book *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses (Third Edition)*, Gee (2008) writes, "The proclaiming of 'literacy crises' is a historically recurrent feature of Western 'developed' capitalist societies...the 'crisis' often masking deeper and more complex social problems" (p. 32). Interestingly, while Gee (ibid.) makes explicit the recursive nature of proclaimed "literacy crises", he also notes that research done by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (1986), showed that 95 percent of 21- to 25-year-olds could demonstrate a wide range of reading and writing skills (Gee, 2008, p. 32). Part of the problem, Gee (ibid.) notes, is that traditionally, "literacy" has indicated only the ability to read and write – other forms of textual engagement have not historically counted as "literacy" – a move that continues to be found in NAEP testing and results (www.nces.ed.gov) in the focus on reading and writing. This often cited "traditional meaning...[that] appears 'innocent' and 'obvious'" (p. 31), "...situates literacy in the individual person, rather than in society. As such it obscures the multiple ways in which literacy interrelates with the workings of power" (p. 31). The ability to read and write, or the ability to interact with a text, is a more complex issue than is typically recognized during discussions of literacy crises, and involves a wider range of interaction as well as a wider range of relationships – specifically power relationships – than such discussions reflect. Traditionally thought of as individual interaction with a print text, a new view of literacy – "literacy [as] inherently political, in the sense of involving relations of power among people" (Gee, ibid., p. 31) – as Gee

(2008) and the New London Group (1996) consider it, complicates the varied interactions between readers and a texts (print, visual, aural, and so on).

Hobbs and Frost (2003) in their article "Measuring the Acquisition of Media-literacy Skills" further a complicated idea of literacy when they write, "Support for expanding the concept of literacy is articulated by those interested in making classrooms sites for authentic learning in student-centered environments as well as those who see the value of recognizing reading and writing as practices that are socially and culturally constructed" (p. 330). Similarly, many argue that we are not in another literacy crisis but are experiencing quickly and vastly changing literacy demands (Alvermann, 2001; Morrell, 2004). As globalization of communication and production increases, necessary literacy skills also change and evolve. Morrell (2004) writes:

> The bottom line for today's students is that in order to contend for the American Dream, students need to develop a high level of literacy in school, placing increasing pressure on literacy educators to help them acquire those skills. The alleged literacy crisis in today's schools is not so much a testament to regressing classroom instruction and student achievement as it is a testament to the increasing literacy demands of a postindustrial, techno-literate society (p. 3).

Like Gee (2008), Hobbs and Frost (ibid.), Morrell (ibid.) argues that literacy is more complex than individual reading and writing in "page-bound, official, and standard forms of the national language" (New London Group, 1996, p. 60-61), and that literacy includes the multifarious elements of power relations and social problems, thus leading not necessarily a literacy crisis, but to a change in the demands of literacy. In any discussion of the debate about literacy skills and/or about advocating pedagogical changes to the ways which secondary English teachers teach literacy skills – writers like Hobbs and Frost, Morrell, Gee, and the New London Group argue – conversations about multiliteracies, power relationships, and the changing face of technology and globalization need to be included.

In addition to a conversation about multiliteracies and power relationships, a necessary element in any discussion of a perceived decline in literacy skills, scholars such as Gee (2008) and Morrell (2004) argue, should also include a dialogue about who has access to which literacy skills and texts and who does not have access. Gee (ibid.) maintains that while "...young adults [do] not have an 'illiteracy' problem (80 percent of them could read as well as or better than the average eighth-grade student [citing NAEP, 1986]), rather they [have] a 'schooling' problem" (p. 33). In the research Gee (ibid.) cites, the participants did less and less well on literacy tasks as the tasks became more complex and school-like, "with failure being most prominent among those least influenced and most poorly served by the schools" (p. 33). Likewise, Morrell (2002) writes about the lack of access many students, specifically urban students, have to the "'academic'" curriculum of the "'dominant' or 'mainstream' culture'" (p. 72). Failing to acknowledge the changes occurring in technology and globalization, the literacy skills students exhibit out of school, and the power relationships that inform literacy, seem to be only parts of a larger debate that also includes recognition of those students who are served by academic literacy skills and those who are not. Each of these elements adds to the complexity of the debate over the perceived decline in literacy skills as well as to the response secondary English teachers give to that debate.

All of these elements – the perceived decline in adolescents' literacy skills, the increased technological and global demand for complex literacy skills, and the power relationships that determine which students get which education – are important elements in the debate about the perceived decline in literacy skills, and also are elements in the argument many secondary English teachers use to support their inclusion of alternative texts from the realm of popular culture into their courses. That is, as a response to the literacy debate – as an attempt to teach literacy skills informed by globalization, technology, power relationships, and academic literacy skills – some

secondary English teachers have attempted to bridge the gap between the literacy skills students exercise out of school and those advocated by schools by using popular culture texts in conjunction with traditional (canonical) academic texts. Morrell (2004) supports this move by writing, "What can happen, what needs to happen, is that teachers create environments in which students can learn from each other's diverse language and literacy experiences how to see the world differently and how to participate more fully as critical citizens in a multicultural democracy" (p. 4). By including popular culture texts – texts that are alternative to the traditional, canonical texts of secondary English – teachers are attempting to narrow the gap between the students who are traditionally successful in school and those students who are not traditionally successful in school. One way they are doing this is by using alternative texts to incorporate students' multiliteracies – what the New London Group (1996) defines as "the multiplicity of communications channel and media, and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity" (p. 63). Through such inclusion of alternative, popular culture texts as a response to the literacy debate, teachers are attempting to have students learn from each other's literacy experiences, and to have students recognize that there is diversity and complexity in texts, in reading and writing, and in literacy. Through the inclusion of popular texts used in relation with traditional academic texts, teachers are attempting to reveal that, "[There] are no innocent texts...all artifacts of the established culture and society are laden with meaning, values, biases, and messages" (Durham & Kellner, 2001, p. 5).

But what does it mean to incorporate multiliteracies? And can teachers – through creating environments in which students can learn from each other's language and literacy experiences – do enough to prepare students to live in a multicultural, technical society? Is the addition of popular culture texts in order to bridge the perceived gap between and among students' literacy skills a viable alternative?

Although such a project – incorporating both the multiplicity of communications channels and cultural and linguistic diversity – is outwardly overwhelming and difficult, there are a number of scholars and teachers who argue that such a project works to increase students' literacy skills – even if that increase in learning and growth is difficult to define and/or describe. So, while a decline in students' literacy skills is debatable, many would say that there is indeed a gap – a gap that some would argue is getting larger – in literacy practices and skills between traditionally privileged and underprivileged students, a gap that not only influences students, but also influences teachers. However, any changes added in order to respond to this seemingly increasing gap, and to respond to the call for an increase in literacy skills, need to be studied carefully. While many teachers intuitively feel that incorporating what students are already doing outside of school is important (students' out-of-school, or home, literacy skills), knowing how to define and recognize an increase in literacy skill level, and knowing whether or not that incorporation leads to an increase in literacy skill level, is important. That is, many authors argue that determining whether or not to incorporate multiliteracies, to use alternative texts from popular culture, or to access students' diverse language and literacy experiences, in addition to examining how teachers and students are defining and understanding such literacy knowledge and skills, is essential.

One way in which many secondary English teachers use alternative texts in an attempt to access multiliteracies as well as their students' home literacy skills, is by incorporating popular culture texts into their classrooms. Essentially, one practice teachers use to respond to the literacy debate – as well as to respond to the gap between students who are and are not academically successful – is to integrate alternative texts from the realm of popular culture in their classrooms. Because more and more teachers are incorporating popular culture into classroom instruction (Strinati,

1995; Durham & Kellner, 2001; Morrell, 2004; Cawelti, 2004) in response to the literacy debate, it is important not only to know what the argument is for the inclusion of popular culture, but also to know how popular culture texts are used in conjunction with traditional, canonical texts. That is, it's important to know how secondary English teachers are talking about, and defining, the curricular use of popular culture. Thus, in Part Three, I will offer a critical review of the literature about the use of popular culture texts in secondary English classrooms. However, in order to begin examining the literature, defining or delineating (Guins & Cruz, 2005, p. 17) "popular culture" is a necessary first step to take. And this is where the first rub begins.

PART TWO: THE POPULAR CULTURE DEBATE

"...we make meanings and we are made by meanings. To share a culture is to interpret the world – to make it meaningful – in recognizably similar ways" (Storey, 2003, p. x).

"The medium, or process, of our time – electric technology – is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life...It is impossible to understand social and cultural changes without a knowledge of the workings of media" (McLuhan, 1967, p. 8).

In order to gain a semblance of understanding about the conversations teachers and scholars have about multiliteracies and literacy skills, defining popular culture, in contrast to other terms and ideas that surround theories of popular culture such as mass media or media studies, is an important initial step. However, defining popular culture really means defining both "popular" and "culture" as well as defining "popular culture" – a task that is more complicated than just putting together two definitions of two seemingly contrasting words. As Guins and Cruz (2005) write in the introduction to their edited volume *Popular Culture: A Reader*, "A commonly held view on popular culture is that it is simultaneously incredibly easy to talk about (Juvee is after all a skateshop) and incredibly difficult to talk about (a skateshop that associates skating with

histories of urban radical politics)" (p. 3). A somewhat typical, or traditional, definition of popular culture comes from Mahiri (2000), who considers popular culture to be the "modes of transmission (e.g., TV, the Internet, video games, music compact discs, movies) that are capable of presenting a variety of textual forms like print, pictures, drawings, animation, and sound" (p. 382). A similar definition is Strinati's: "The sense of popular culture I have in mind is indicated by...'a set of generally available artefacts: films, records, clothes, TV programmes, modes of transport, etc.'" (1995, p. xvii). While Strinati's definition seems to include and allow for more categories (i.e., transportation), both definitions seem a bit too vague and all-inclusive; these definitions, while focusing on artifacts of modes of communication, do not seem to define what is "popular" about said artifacts, nor do they explain how the artifacts would be considered as elements of "culture". After reading these definitions of popular culture, one is left to assume that popular culture is only the artifacts mass produced by current global technology. One would not necessarily come to a greater understanding of what is meant by popular culture through this reading or understanding; more is needed in order to differentiate between popular culture and other forms of culture, as well as between popular culture and mass media. As secondary English teachers continue to incorporate and integrate texts they describe as "popular culture" into their classrooms in order to bridge the apparent distance between home and school literacies, it is important to closely examine how the label "popular culture" is used and understood.

Popular

Within the debate about using popular culture in response to the apparent current literacy crisis, the place where many scholars begin in delineating "popular culture" is by theorizing the use of the word "popular." Guins and Cruz (2005) write, "The term 'popular' houses a broad range of meanings. Incorporating folk cultures' link

to organic community – of the people – as well as mass cultures' status – being well liked or merely widely available – popular culture brings together diverse and sometimes contradictory associations" (p. 9; see also Storey, 2003). Storey (2006) in his initial explanation of popular culture offers a similar description: "An obvious starting point in any attempt to define popular culture is to say that popular culture is simply culture which is widely favoured or well liked by many people" (p. 4). Because of the contradictory associations – that is, the difficulty in distinguishing between "of the people" and "well liked" or "widely available" – the route that many authors take in dealing with this stage of the process, seemingly in order to make the process smoother, is to replace "popular" with "mass." Thus, mass culture (of a large group of people) rather than popular culture (well liked or widely available) becomes the guideline in discussing and describing this particular aspect of culture. Macdonald (1957/2005) in "A Theory of Mass Culture" writes, "It is sometimes called 'Popular Culture,' but I think 'Mass Culture' a more accurate term, since its distinctive mark is that it is solely and directly an article for mass consumption, like chewing gum" (Guins & Cruz, 2005, p. 39). Without acknowledging that chewing gum could be considered popular culture in its own way, by replacing "popular" or "popular culture" with "mass" or "mass culture" in this way shifts the connotation of the label. Specifically, such an exchange implies a shift from culture or a piece of culture that is pervasive, to culture or a piece of culture that is massively gobbled up like chewing gum.

In a slightly different vein, Williams (1976/2005) summarizes two common understandings of "mass". In his essay defining both "mass" and "culture", he writes, "In the modern social sense, then, masses and mass have two distinguishable kinds of implication. Masses (i) is the modern word for *many-headed multitude* or *mob*: low, ignorant, unstable. Masses (ii) is a description of the same people, but now seen as a positive or potentially positive social force" (Guins & Cruz, 2005, p. 31, emphasis in

original). Both Macdonald (1957/2005) and Williams (ibid.) employ the use of "mass" in order to signify a multitude rather than allowing for the place or role of an element of being well liked or widely accepted. And while Williams does open the door to a mob having the potential for positive social force, this positive view is not prevalent in the literature describing mass, or popular, culture. Instead of "popular" connoting someone or something that is well liked by many, "mass" implies a mob mentality of many people moving or consuming herd-like without thinking or feeling, and even if such movement is sometimes for a positive purpose, or sometimes for a negative purpose, mass movement signifies a removal of agency. By interchanging the words "popular" and "mass", theorists like Williams and Macdonald change the way this form of culture is understood, often by implying a negative element of mob mentality.

Shiach in her essay "The Popular" (1989/2005) continues to explain and expound on the difficulty in coming to a consensus in terms of delineating the "popular" in popular culture. Shiach, in her historical tracing of the use of "popular" writes:

> All of these examples represent attempts to utilize the apparent universality of ["popular" meaning of] 'the people' while simultaneously demarcating the boundaries of 'the people' in relation to political power. At other moments, however, 'popular' refers quite explicitly to one part of the social formation: those 'of lowly birth; belonging to the commonalty or populace; plebeian'...'Popular' thus becomes associated with a cluster of themes attributed to those of low social standing (Guins & Cruz, 2005, p. 57).

Shiach continues on to compare and contrast how the use of the word "popular" has not only been used to demarcate boundaries of people, but also has meant both "of the people" and "for the people" (Guins & Cruz, 2005, p. 58). In all of her discussion, she demonstrates the difficulty of defining "popular" by elucidating the difficulty of defining the political and/or social positioning of "people", as well as of defining what is "of" or "for" the people. The task to define "popular" is challenging when the task to characterize "people" – a necessary element in discussing "popular" – is just as complicated. Consequently, whether using "popular" or "mass" to describe a particular

aspect of culture, scholars have a difficult time characterizing and classifying both "popular" and "people" for the purposes of coming to some understanding about culture. In some ways, it would seem that such difficulty would be refreshing and would lead to interesting conversations.

However, such interesting conversations are made more complicated as many authors such as Leavis (1930/2005), Benjamin (1936), Adorno & Horkheimer (1944), Macdonald (1957/2005), Nye (1970), and Williams (1976/2005), make use of a negative view of both "the people" and "the masses". That is to say, instead of approaching popular culture as something that is widely available, these scholars approach popular culture as mass consumption – much like chewing gum (Macdonald, 1957/2005). Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/2001) write:

> The most intimate reactions of human beings have been so thoroughly reified that the idea of anything specific to themselves now persists only as an utterly abstract notion: personality scarcely signifies anything more than shining white teeth and freedom from body odor and emotions. The triumph of [mass culture] in the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them (Durham & Kellner, 2001, p. 101).

What these authors communicate is a view of the masses that become the mob which blindly consumes without thought, taste, or conviction, many even going so far as to explicitly ignore their own desires. As a result, as the term "popular" becomes "of the masses", and the view of popular culture one receives by reading these theorists is a negative view – even though there seems to be little agreement on what "popular" even means.

Culture

Agreeing, or coming to a consensus, on a definition or delineation of "culture" seems to be just as difficult as for "popular": the term "culture" is often used to refer to a wide array of elements human life. "The very essence of culture," Cawelti (2004) writes:

> lies in the relationship we have with the things we unquestioningly love, enjoy, and choose to involve ourselves in. We sometimes lose sight of this in the attempt to winnow our enthusiasms and order them into patterns that, transcending the pleasure of the moment, can become part of a cultural heritage that is passed on from one generation to another (p. 121).

Cawelti, then, has a broad view of culture, one that includes any and all of the natural, normal, or ordinary aspects of living. Similarly, Durham and Kellner (2001) write, "Culture is ordinary, a familiar part of every day life..." (p. 6), and John Storey (2003) in his book *Inventing Popular Culture* writes, "In very broad terms, culture is how we live in nature...it is how we make sense of ourselves and the world around us..." (p. ix-x). According to these theorists, then, culture is an inherent element in everyday living; it is an ordinary part of life that influences how we make sense of ourselves, as well as how we make sense of the world and environments in which we live.

However, not all theorists ascribe to such an all-inclusive view of culture. Williams (1976/2005) explains, "...the most widespread use [of "culture"]...is music, literature, painting and sculpture, theatre and film" (p. 27). Thus, while some are willing to expand the idea of culture to include all elements of ordinary life and living, according to this definition explicated by Williams, the most widely accepted use of the term is that which describes art and artistic artifacts, thus limiting the term "culture" to only the tangible objects of cultural production – tangible objects that "are saturated with social meanings, [and] generate political effects, reproducing or opposing governing social institutions and relations of domination and subordination" (Durham and Kellner, 2001, p. 6). It seems, then, that this is where the idea of "culture" becomes a hierarchical notion, similar to the move of delineating popular culture as mass culture.

To further the diverse positions regarding the delineation of "culture", in describing a hierarchical (distinguishing among elite culture, popular culture, and folk culture) view of culture, Guins and Cruz (2005) write, "[The] hierarchy [is] premised upon separations between culture and civilization, the equation of 'culture' with

perfections and goodness, and social progress/order (cultural preservation) through education" (p. 5). Hence, in addition to the artifacts of culture, Guins and Cruz (ibid.) add that the use of the term "culture" also implies a standard of goodness or order that can only be passed on, or maintained, through education. This conceptualization of culture began with Matthew Arnold's (1932) work when, "the word 'culture' acquired a more restrictive meaning...referring now to a state of intellectual refinement associated with the arts, philosophy and learning" (duGay, et al, 1997, p. 11). As a result, the notion of "culture" for many theorists includes the good or perfect cultural artifacts created and preserved through a particular (often, "elite") education. That is, culture, for these theorists, is not part of the everyday, but is a specific, highly valued, admired aspect of life able to be passed on only through the transmission of education. Cawelti (2004) touches on this tension between culture as ordinary, and culture as good and perfect when he writes:

> Normatively, the concept of culture was a unifying ideal, centered on a vision of Western civilization as the climax of cultural progress and synthesis. This vision inspired the idea of the humanistic curriculum as pedagogy, leading the student to acquire a significant proportion of the artistic and philosophical canon thought to define this civilization. On the other hand, used descriptively by the late nineteenth-century disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and social psychology, culture was a concept that articulated the multiplicity of behaviors characteristic of actual human beings in different places and times...Growing doubts about the value or even the possibility of a unified culture have increasingly led critics and scholars to use the word 'culture' with qualifying adjectives – popular, working class, ethnic, folk, high, low, and middle, global, etc. The word of the postmodern is no longer culture but *hyphen-culture* (p. 252-253, emphasis added).

In order to reach some sort of delineation of the term "culture", many scholars and theorists have resorted to qualifying or describing these "hyphen-cultures", or what some call "subcultures", and through such description, relegated certain artifacts or discourses of culture to a more prestigious level and esteemed label than others. What a number of scholars in the social sciences have offered to the discussion about culture is a view of culture that is more common and everyday; however, in labeling and

qualifying – in using adjectives to describe – the concept of culture only becomes more confusing and convoluted. Instead of expounding or explaining, such labels prohibit and perplex, as well as devalue and diminish. Culture of the ordinary, everyday becomes culture of particular categories. While some ideas from the social sciences offered a new and more holistic view of culture according to Cawelti (2004), these ideas only served to further differentiate and stratify. Even though some scholars who study culture and popular culture maintain an all-inclusive, ordinary definition of culture, many theorists still maintain a position of culture that labels and excludes based on a supposed hierarchy of art and artistic artifacts.

However, Durham and Kellner (2001) offer a different take on the hierarchical debate when they write, "We...employ the term 'culture' broadly to signify types of cultural artifacts (i.e., TV CDs, newspapers, paintings, opera, journalism, cyberculture, and so on), as well as discourses about these phenomena. Since culture is bound up in both *forms*...and *discourses*, it is both a space of interpretation and debate as well as subject matter and domain of inquiry" (p. 3, emphasis added). What these authors offer is a way to think and talk about culture from a number of angles and perspectives, including both the artifacts of culture and the idea of culture as ordinary life and living. In contributing a way to talk about both the artifacts of culture in addition to the ordinariness of life as culture and conversations that happen around culture, Durham and Kellner present an opportunity to change, or to start a new, dialogue about culture. As such, they do not imply a strict differentiation within culture, or between subcultures or Cawelti's (2004) "hyphen-cultures" (p. 253). Instead of viewing popular culture as a parasite on elite culture or as chewing gum (Macdonald, 1957/2005), Durham and Kellner (ibid.), through their "different take" on culture, offer a way to talk about the myriad elements that influence and inform culture. This, then, is what Storey (1996) refers to when he writes that, "culture [is not] defined in the narrow sense, as the

objects of aesthetic excellence ('high art'); nor [is it] defined in an equally narrow sense as a process of aesthetic, intellectual and spiritual development; but [it is] understood as the texts and practices of everyday life" (p. 2); that is, for some theorists, culture is both the forms *and* discourses of culture.

Literacy and Popular Culture

Even though many theorists cannot seem to come to a common conclusion regarding the definition and delineation of either "popular" or "culture", or of popular culture's place in contemporary society, the use of popular culture in the secondary English classroom continues and is encouraged to continue. And while many theorists have a negative view of popular culture either because it is seen as a threat to (elite) cultural standards, or because it is seen as manipulative of the masses (Storey, 2003, p. 30), many teachers have a positive view of popular culture in that they see the use of popular texts as a manner of allowing them to help students gain access to traditional literacy texts and skills, allowing them to try to bridge the gap between home and school literacies, as well as allowing them to incorporate diversity into the classroom. Renee Hobbs (1998) in "Literacy for the Information Age" writes, "...educators are coming to recognize that literacy is not simply a matter of acquiring decontextualized decoding, comprehension, and production skills, but that the concept of literacy must be connected with the culture and contexts in which reading and writing are used" (np). Connecting literacy with the context of students' lived experiences spurs a number of teachers to include popular culture texts in the English classroom. The disagreement about what qualifies as popular culture, or not, does not deter a number of teachers from using alternative (popular culture) texts in order to respond to the call for an increase in U. S. students' literacy skills.

While not all teachers agree, some teachers see the use of popular culture in conjunction with traditional curricular texts as a way to discuss and connect the social and cultural context of textual consumption and production; they see using popular culture in the classroom as a way to bridge the gaps between students' home and school literacies. Thus, even though the debate about the definition, role, and place of popular culture in current society and education continues, secondary English teachers maintain and increase the use of popular culture in their classrooms in a variety of ways, and for a variety of reasons, in connection with literacy. As a result, knowing how teachers are using such texts, why they are using such texts, and whether such use indeed increases students' literacy skills, are certainly important questions to ask. Inquiring about the use and role of popular culture texts in the secondary English classroom is an important project with which to engage. There is a rub when it comes to talking about popular culture in relation to secondary ELA – a rub that requires exploration.

PART THREE: THE POPULAR CULTURE in SECONDARY ELA DEBATE

> "...in order to meet the needs of 'media-saturated pupils', teaching practices should engage popular forms...It is our conviction that competent and critical cultural consumers and commentators need to be able to examine media, culture, and society from a variety of perspectives..."
> (Durham & Kellner, 2001, p. 3-4).

> "Today's television child is attuned to up-to-the-minute 'adult' news – inflation, rioting, war, taxes, crime, bathing beauties – and is bewildered when [s/he] enters the nineteenth-century environment that still characterizes the educational establishment where information is scarce but ordered and structure by fragmented, classified patterns, subjects, and schedules"
> (McLuhan, 1967, p. 18).

Regardless of the lack of agreement about the use and purpose of popular culture, the existence of this "hyphen-culture" (Cawelti, 2004, p. 253) continues to impact teachers, students, and their relationships to texts in the secondary English classroom. For example, a negative or hierarchical view of culture in relationship to the

role and influence of "elite" culture and "popular" culture shapes how teachers and students interact with traditional academic texts as well as non-traditional "home" texts. Guins and Cruz (2005) write:

> Mass-produced commodities [texts] have been regarded as inauthentic, formulaic, simplistic, and banal. Because they are designed to appeal to global commercial markets rather than reflect the specificity of unique cultural expression, many have and continue to argue that such objects neither challenge aesthetically, morally or spiritually, nor promote active engagement and critical contemplation (p. 5).

This negative view of mass, or popular, culture as formulaic, simplistic, and banal – as not promoting active or critical thinking – is prevalent among a number of scholars who write about mass and popular culture (Leavis, 1930/2005; Benjamin, 1936/2001; Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2001; Macdonald, 1957/2005). Further, Strinati (1995) adds significant ideas to the tension between popular, or mass produced, and elite culture when he writes, "The very fact that culture came to be almost infinitely reproducible due to the development of techniques of industrial production posed considerable problems for traditional ideas about the role of culture and art in society" (p. 4). Thus, for many scholars, not only is popular culture a detriment to society because it does not encourage critical thinking, but also popular culture harms society because it is so easily produced and reproducible. That is, everyone has access to popular culture, which, historically, has not been true for elite culture (Dewey, 1934; Berger, 1972).

Such a hierarchical view of culture and of the role of culture seeps into secondary English education where some teachers feel the tension over whether or not to use popular culture texts with curricular or canonical texts: "Bud knew that teaching students about the world using familiar [popular] texts and cultural information was a strong way to engage [students] in the classroom," Hunt and Hunt (2004) write:

> but he still felt like he was neglecting a piece of his job. That piece was that

> the English teacher was supposed to connect students with the [the elite culture of] books, words, and ideas of faraway places and times...the English teacher was supposed to wear tweed and recite pithy passages of poetry on demand. The English teacher was to scorn the television, despise all reference to popular culture, and be above that lowly culture enjoyed by the unenlightened masses. The only problem was that Bud was really into that popular culture (p. 81).

The desire to connect the curriculum of English education in an engaged and meaningful way, as well as the desire to increase students' literacy skills, is what drives teachers to look for relevant and contextual means to examine alternative texts in the secondary English classroom. In addition, both teachers and students are deeply steeped in popular culture, and many enjoy both "elite" and "popular" culture. Yet, such desire and enjoyment does not mean that teachers are inoculated to the debate that occurs between the values of "popular" and "elite" culture, or that such a debate does not influence what curricular decisions are made in English education.

Scholarly disparagement of both the mass production and mass consumption of popular culture influences how teachers consider incorporating popular texts – texts with which they, and their students, interact daily. To further illustrate the tension between "elite" and "popular" culture, theorists like Macdonald (1957/2005) argue for elite culture when writing statements like, "Mass Culture is imposed from above. It is fabricated by technicians hired by businessmen; its audiences are passive consumers, their participation limited to the choice between buying and not buying. [The producers of popular culture], in short, exploit the cultural needs of the masses in order to make a profit and/or to maintain their class rule..." (Guins & Cruz, 2005, p. 40). Similar to Benjamin (1936/2001) and Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/2001), Macdonald describes mass culture as both a parasite on high culture and as homogenized (1957/2005). Based on this view, mass, or popular culture, because of the reason and purpose for which it is produced, does not elevate one to a higher experiential level of thinking or feeling like elite culture does, which some say makes the study of popular culture not

worthy of students', or teachers', time. As a result of the perceived threat to traditional ideas about culture and art in society based on the role of the technology of mass production and dissemination, the inclusion of particular texts in education – the site many consider to be the frontline of cultural transmission – become an important part in the debate. And secondary ELA teachers continue to feel the tension of the debate about what texts should be used to increase students' literacy skills. That is, secondary English teachers often hear conflicting messages, one of which is that using popular culture texts is an effective way to enhance literacy skills and the other of which is that restricting the curriculum to simply include texts from the realm of high culture is the only way to teach literacy skills.

Historically, for many scholars who write about popular, or mass, culture, the consensus seems to be that popular culture only serves to pacify and lull people – the masses – into a dull stupor (Leavis, 1930/2005; Benjamin, 1936/2001; Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2001; Macdonald, 1957/2005). As Strinati (1995) explains, "The audience is conceived of [by some scholars] as a mass of passive consumers, prone to the manipulative persuasions of the mass media, submissive to the appeals to buy mass produced commodities made by a mass culture, supine before the false pleasures of mass consumption, and open to the commercial exploitation which motivates mass culture" (p. 12). Similarly, McLuhan (1967) writes, "Print technology created the public. Electric technology created the mass" (p. 68). As seen here, the critique of popular culture comes with a critique of the mass media that creates mass consumption and exploits mass (popular) culture. Some view "the pre-mass society," Strinati (1995) writes as he explains the critique of mass media and popular culture, "...as a communal organic whole in which people accept and abide by a shared and agreed upon set of values which effectively regulate their integration into the community, and which recognise hierarchy and difference" (p. 9). The perceived move from a communal,

organic society to an individualized, amoral one is partially the fault of the mass media, some argue, and therefore should have no place in education. The argument continues, then, that secondary English education should (especially) be resistant to the inclusion of popular culture texts and, instead, remain focused on "elite" cultural texts. In this case, the purpose of secondary English education is to maintain the transmission of elite culture to the uneducated masses of adolescents.

Cawelti (2004), in an essay reflecting on his career in popular culture studies, offers a unique perspective on mass media when he writes, "The idea that media *reflect*, *express*, and *probably reinforce* attitudes and values is a subtler, more flexible, and, in my opinion, more fruitful application of the assumption that the media are involved with values" (p. 64, emphasis added). What Cawelti (ibid.) offers for those who do, and who want to, study mass media and popular culture is a way to ensure that popular culture and mass media are not conflated to mean the same thing, as well as a way to look at the media as reflecting, expressing, *and* reinforcing societal values. In so doing, he shifts the focus from the mass media determining values and behaviors in people; he opens the door, ever so slightly, to consumers of mass media having a bit of agency. Consequently, he offers some support for teachers who desire to use popular culture texts in their classrooms as a way to look at the myriad ways in which cultural texts – regardless of which "hyphen-culture" (Cawelti, 2004, p. 253) those texts represent or signify – reflect, express, and possibly reinforce attitudes and values. That is, Cawelti offers indirect support for teachers to use a plethora of texts in the classroom, and he allows them a way to discuss the way that the interaction between individual and text, or community and text, depends on the context. Cawelti (ibid.) later makes his view of using a variety of texts in the classroom explicit when he writes:

> One problem with the canon is that the works in it tend to be distanced from us because the living cultural context in which they first appeared is not available to us. On the other hand, this distancing actually sets a highly

> creative process into motion insofar as it allows us to discover all kinds of new and complex meanings that remain hidden from us so long as the text only exists in its original cultural space...Our task as teachers is to help foster in young people both a critical understanding of and a sense of discovery and delight in the great works off the past; and I think that popular culture has a key part to pay in this process (p. 128).

While there are a number of scholars who criticize popular culture and its use in the classroom, there are others, like Cawelti, who see value in popular culture and who offer ideas for the use of popular culture texts with traditional canonical, or curricular, texts in the classroom.

So, although many scholars have difficulty in reaching common ground when it comes to defining popular culture and delineating the use and/or presence of popular culture in society, and although a number of teachers feel tension about whether or not to include popular culture in the secondary English classroom, an even larger number of teachers and theorists argue for the use of popular culture in education as an element of response to the debate over the perceived decline in students' literacy skills, and they recognize that popular culture is being used to some extent for this purpose already. At the very beginning of the introduction to his book on theories of popular culture, Strinati (1995) writes, "The study of popular culture is now in the process of becoming a part of the educational curriculum" (p. xiii). That is, many teachers see the use of popular culture in the classroom as a way to increase students' literacy skills and have already begun to use it. As high-stakes testing brings more pressure for literacy improvement, and in order to appease outside administrative, governmental, and policy forces, secondary English teachers continue to look for new ways that will make certain literacy development, including new ways to help students gain access to traditional literacy skills.

Increasingly, educators are calling for the use of visual, aural, and print texts from the popular culture arena in secondary English classrooms as a way to bridge the

lives of students outside of school to the requirements of academic literacy taught inside of schools. "To be relevant," the New London Group (1996) writes, "learning processes need to recruit, rather than attempt to ignore and erase, the different *subjectivities* – interests, intentions, commitments, and purposes – students bring to learning" (p. 72, emphasis in original). Recruiting subjectivities, in this case, means tapping into the literacy practices with which students already engage. Indeed, many teachers are recognizing the need to make connections between the literacy practices students participate in outside of school with the literacy practices mandated inside of school. Hobbs and Frost (2003) write:

> Scholars who situate literacy within the contexts of culture and child development argue that the range and diversity of 'texts' used in the classroom must be expanded to include artifacts of popular culture. These scholars identify a range of potential outcomes, such as the following: (a) to increase learning by making the practices of literacy relevant to students' home cultures and ways of knowing... (b) to accommodate diverse learning styles and meet the needs of multicultural learners...and (c) to develop creativity, self-expression, teamwork, and work-place skills (p. 330).

The International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) have even joined in the call for the use of popular culture texts: "Being literate in contemporary society means being active, critical, and creative users of print and spoken language, as well as the visual language of film and television, commercial and political advertising, and more..." (quoted in Asselin, 2001, p. 47; and Morrell, 2002, p. 75). It would seem, then, that using popular culture texts in the classroom is a viable option for teachers as they work to improve students' literacy skills, and as they work to respond to the debate over what such improvement is or should be.

Even though Hobbs and Frost's (2003) list is important and impressive and would seem to work to increase students' literacy knowledge and skills, many theorists argue for the inclusion of popular culture in secondary English education simply because of the prevalence and pervasiveness of popular culture texts in everyday life.

That is, instead of using popular culture to increase learning, to accommodate diversity, or to develop certain skills, some teachers and theorists contend for the use of popular culture texts in the classroom simply because students and teachers are deeply embedded in popular culture. "Although print media continues to dominate literacy efforts in K-12 classrooms," Semali (2003) writes, "our lives are increasingly influenced by visual images...Learning how to 'read' the multiple layers of image-based communication[s]...is becoming a necessary adjunct to traditional print literacy" (p. 271; see also Simon, 2000). Similarly, Hobbs (1998) writes that, "...the problem is clear: our students are growing up in a world saturated with media messages, messages that fill the bulk of their leisure time and provide them with information...Yet students receive little to no training in the skills of analyzing or evaluating these messages..." (np). It would seem that the use of popular culture in the secondary English classroom is a good way to be relevant and to engage students in literacy studies as evidenced by those who build a case for using popular culture because teachers and students are surrounded by it. However, while the prevalence of popular culture in society would indeed seem like a practical purpose for the addition of popular culture in the English classroom, many educators and scholars have other reasons for such inclusion.

In an attempt to engage students in English education – to help them gain access to academic skills and discourses – many teachers incorporate popular culture with traditionally canonical texts (Simon, 2000; Morrell, 2004). Sommer (2001) writes, "I take a broad view of English teaching that suggests that we should be developing students' ability to respond confidently to a wide variety of texts. In my classroom, film, television, and popular texts sit comfortably alongside standard English curriculum fare of novels, poems, and drama" (np). Further, a number of authors write about how the use of popular culture texts in conjunction with traditionally canonical texts can give students access to academic literacy skills. Simon (2000) writes about how he uses the

television sitcom *Friends* (Crane & Kauffman, 1994) to help students gain access to Shakespeare, specifically the play *Much Ado about Nothing* (Shakespeare): "What they most want to talk about and understand is the television program, while what I want to talk about and have them understand is Shakespeare. We meet in the middle...*Friends* isn't simply an entrée into Shakespeare. Shakespeare is also an entrée into *Friends*" (np). Hobbs (1998) supports the use of popular culture to aid the development of students' academic literacy skills through helping them gain access to traditional academic reading and writing skills by writing, "Many educators have discovered that the analysis of contemporary media can build skills that transfer to students' work with the written word" (np).

In addition, Rector (2004) argues her inclusion of popular culture texts in the secondary English classroom in order to help students access traditional skills and texts when she writes, "When I incorporate Eminem's lyrics into my lessons, students are more willing to give Walt Whitman a try...Maybe there is a connection there and what is happening in Whitman's world of the late nineteenth century actually has something to do with the life of a student in the early twenty-first century" (Hunt & Hunt, 2004, p. 83). For some teachers, using popular culture in the secondary English classroom facilitates students' understanding of the texts and skills of academic English education in a new and deeper way. These authors reflect how popular culture can be used in relationship with canonical texts in order to increase students' literacy skills. For these teachers and scholars, then, using popular culture in the secondary English classroom is a response to the perceived decline in U. S. students' literacy skills.

Using popular culture texts because students are steeped in them, or using popular culture texts to help students gain access to the traditional English education curriculum, represents only a portion of the range of reasons why teachers use popular culture in the classroom. Like the diversity of explanations for what popular culture is

and represents in society, so is the diversity for how and why teachers use popular culture in the secondary English classroom. Yet, it seems that those teachers and scholars who support the use of, and argue for the use of, popular culture in the English classroom do so in a way that reflects the debate between "popular" and "elite" culture. For example, a number of authors who write about using popular culture do so as it pertains to helping students succeed in the realm of traditional literacy *texts* (Callahan & Low, 2004; Hobbs, 1998; Hunt & Hunt, 2004; Morrell, 2002; Roberts, 1993; Simon, 2000); others write about using popular culture as it pertains to helping students succeed in the realm of traditional literacy *skills* (Allender, 2004; Asselin, 2001; Fain, 2004; Fehlman, 1992; Griest, 1992; Hurrell, 2001; Sommer, 2001; Witkin, 1994). Instead of popular culture standing on its own as valuable and worthy of study, these authors write about using popular culture in conjunction with what already exists in English education. That is, the texts of popular culture – often, popular culture texts that are adaptations of canonical texts – are seen only as bridges or steppingstones to the canonical texts of high culture. While one could argue that such a relationship – that is, using popular culture with the canonical texts of secondary English education – is needed in order to prepare students for further education or for standardized testing, it is interesting that the way some scholars write about the texts they use in the classroom reflects the hierarchical debate of culture (Storey, 2003). Popular texts are used in service to canonical (i.e., cultural) texts.

It seems that any debate about students' literacy skills must also include a discussion about which texts are worthy of study in order to support the development and improvement of literacy skills. Strinati (1995) writes:

> In keeping with the fact that elitism can be used to refer to a set of unexamined values which give rise to opinionated judgements about popular culture, the first problem with it concerns that privilege conferred upon those positions from which popular or mass culture can be understood and interpreted. An elitist position assumes that popular or mass culture can only be understood and

> interpreted properly from the vantage point provided by high culture or 'high' theory (p. 39).

One of the ideas that influences secondary English education, and influences the decisions made for which texts to include in such studies, is that in order for "legitimate" understanding and knowledge to occur, one must interpret from the perspective of "high" or "elite" culture. That is, for some, even if popular culture is included in the classroom, one can only attain understanding when one has acquired "elite" (academic) literacy skills – the knowledge that "certificated adults" possess (Morrell, 2004, p. 117). In the end, for a number of teachers and scholars, the centering point is still the traditional, elite knowledge and skills of English education.

The number of debates and demands placed on secondary English education can feel daunting. Different and diverse ideas about what counts as literacy, as well as different and diverse ideas about how to improve academic literacy skills, drive such debates and makes them difficult discussions to have. While it remains unclear whether there truly is a decline in the academic literacy skills of U.S. students, it also is unclear what should be done to respond to this perceived decline. Secondary English teachers have incorporated, and will continue to incorporate, various texts from the arena of popular culture as one response to this perceived literacy crisis. Yet even that move toward inclusion of alternative texts for use with curricular texts is not without diverse opinions and ideas, including opinions and ideas about what counts as "popular" or "elite" cultural texts worthy of curricular inclusion.

PART FOUR: CONSIDERING TALK about POPULAR CULTURE and SECONDARY ELA

> "[What] is important here is not the fact that popular forms move up and down the 'cultural escalator'; more significant are 'the forces and relations which sustain the distinction, the difference...[the] institutions and institutional processes...required to sustain each and to continually marek the difference between them'...This is principally the work of the education system and its promotion of a selective tradition"

(Hall quoted in Storey, 2006, p. 6).

Another factor influencing the argument for an inclusion of popular culture texts in secondary English is the wealth of research that has been done studying adolescents and their out-of-school literacy practices. This research contends that adolescents not only are demonstrating myriad literacy skills, but also are doing so in interesting ways. Thus, this scholarship claims that there needs to be more effort done on the part of secondary ELA teachers in order to connect and utilize these alternative, out-of-school (i.e., not academic) literacy practices. While this research that works to persuade secondary ELA teachers that their students are reading and writing new texts in new ways – ways different than those typically taught in traditional, academic settings – is important work, to be sure, few studies have explored secondary English teachers' attitudes toward popular culture texts, including how they, themselves, negotiate the tensions between their own out-of-school engagements with popular culture and their pedagogical uses of popular culture.

Thus, this dissertation study aims to begin such an exploration. That is, I, in this study, asked three secondary ELA teachers to talk about their personal and pedagogical views and values of popular culture. In Chapter 2, I tell the story of this project including exploring some of my own personal and pedagogical experiences with popular culture. In addition, I introduce the three participants who agreed to participate in the study, and I discuss the journey of how this project came to be. In Chapter 3, I re-introduce Summer – the first participant – and explore her talk about the tension of locating cultural texts along a hierarchy (high culture versus popular culture). In Chapter 4, I re-introduce April, the second participant, and then look at her talk about tensions in the consumption of cultural texts. May, the third participant is re-introduced in Chapter 5, and her talk about the production of cultural texts and the changes she has experienced in her engagements with popular culture is discussed. Finally, in Chapter

6, I consider what can be learned from the three participants and what their talk about their personal and pedagogical views and values of popular culture can offer to the field of English teacher education.

CHAPTER TWO

Generating the Texts of Talk

> "Making the move toward incorporating popular culture necessitates a major change in the nature of knowledge consumption and production. In making this change, teachers are also expanding what counts as legitimate knowledge and challenging the notion that only certificated adults possess relevant knowledge" (Morrell, 2004, p. 117).

PREAMBLE

The conference room was full to overflowing on the bright spring day that I attended the AERA session on "Critical Literacy, Media Production, and Civic Engagement among Urban Youth" led by Ernest Morrell (AERA, Montreal, 2005). I was sitting in the ordinary, beige, hotel conference room listening to Morrell and his fellow presenters give an insightful talk about the literate lives of secondary ELA students and the use of popular culture in secondary ELA in order to enhance students' literate lives (AERA, 2005). Both in arguing that secondary ELA students already engage in a variety of literacy practices as well as in arguing that incorporating popular culture texts in secondary ELA would add to those literacy practices through exploration and validation of texts and the uses of texts, the presenters were discussing, as Morrell (2004) mentions, "[changing]...the nature of knowledge consumption and production...[and] expanding what counts as legitimate knowledge" (p. 117). That is, in discussing, questioning, and exploring the literate lives of secondary ELA students as well as in discussing, questioning, and exploring the possibilities of the inclusion of popular culture texts in secondary ELA as a potential bridge between home and school (academic) literacies, the presenters were attempting to broaden the conceptualization of the "legitimate", academic, canonical knowledge of secondary English to include other forms and practices of literacy. Specifically, the presenters were arguing that what is needed in secondary ELA is not only a broader understanding of literacy (more

broad than literacy as symbol manipulation), but also changes in an understanding of literacy practices and skills in order to better serve traditionally underrepresented and underserved adolescents (again, more broad than literacy – traditional reading and writing – as a marker of being educated).

As I listened to the presenters, I thought about my own experiences with high school English students (teaching and coaching), I thought about my experiences with pre-service English teachers (teaching and field instructing), and I thought about the role that popular culture texts had in my own teaching and learning. Specifically, I remembered the ways in which popular culture texts had enhanced my experiences as a student (for example, doing an annotated bibliography on modern American film in an interdisciplinary class), and I recalled the ways in which I had used popular culture texts as a teacher (for example, using the film *Boyz 'N the Hood* [Singleton, 1991] with *The Great Gatsby* [Fitzgerald, 1925]) in order to augment my students' experiences with texts. Additionally, I thought about the ways in which I had attempted to incorporate the study of popular culture theories and texts into my work with pre-service ELA teachers. As I thought about my experiences with popular culture texts, and as I thought about my own personal and professional views and values of popular culture texts, I thought about my former students, specifically the pre-service English teachers who had passed through my classroom(s), and wondered what they would have said about the presentation, about the literate lives of secondary ELA students, and about the use of popular culture texts had they been sitting there with me.

Because I included popular culture texts and literature about using popular culture texts in secondary ELA into my methods classes (TE 401/402, Critical Methods in the Teaching of Writing/Texts, 2004-2005; TE 802/804, Reflection and Inquiry in Secondary English Teaching and Practice, 2005-2006), and because I devoted a bit of time to thinking about, writing about, and discussing the use of popular culture in

secondary ELA in these courses, I knew that my former students who were pre-service ELA teachers had background on the topic. But, I wondered what they would think now, after they had finished their university courses, after they had finished their student teaching internship, and after they had started teaching in their own classrooms. In particular, I wondered whether or not their talk about popular culture texts in secondary ELA, or their talk about the *use* of popular culture texts would have changed between the time they were taking my methods course(s) and the time they entered their own classrooms. In essence, I wondered how many of their comments on the idea of popular culture texts in secondary ELA were, or would be, influenced by how they understood my views and values of popular culture. As I sat and listened to the presentation (AERA, 2005), I wondered whether or not those same secondary ELA pre-service teachers who had once talked about using popular culture texts in their classroom and who had written lesson plans and unit plans detailing such usage, still talked about using popular culture in their English classrooms.

Wondering about – and, to be honest, dreaming about – the relationship between popular culture and secondary ELA was not a new line of questioning for me. In actuality, popular culture texts had a way of showing up in my learning and teaching starting when I, myself, was a secondary ELA student. For example, whenever I could design my own course project as a secondary student, I found ways of exploring film, television, or popular magazines, including using images and words from popular magazines in posters and visual projects. As a college student, I tried my hand at making short films, and I continued my exploration of film, television, and popular magazines. Eventually, during my secondary teaching years, I found myself developing and teaching a grade 10 Media and Communications course. During the design stage

of the course, as my colleagues and I researched the mass media[2], I realized, more specifically, some of the potential in studying a broader range of media in secondary ELA than strictly print texts. Thus, thinking about popular culture in secondary ELA was not new for me.

However, what was new thinking (or questioning) for me during this presentation (AERA, 2005) was the question of what relationship secondary ELA teachers had, or have, with popular culture texts. That is, the majority of my graduate school career had been spent reading about, thinking about, and learning about the literate lives of secondary ELA *students* – not teachers. Included in my journey of reading about, thinking about, and learning about the literate lives of adolescents was understanding that the work concerning adolescents' literacy skills was (and is) essentially important as the gap grew (grows) wider between those students traditionally successful and traditionally unsuccessful in school. Yet, what I started to wonder was how we in English teacher education could talk about the literate lives of students without talking about the literate lives of *teachers*. That is, I wondered how we in English teacher education could hope to expand or challenge what counts as legitimate knowledge (Morrell, 2004) in secondary English without expanding and challenging not only what counts as legitimate knowledge for secondary students, but also what counts as legitimate knowledge for secondary ELA teachers. In essence, I wondered how we could expect secondary ELA pedagogy to change if teachers and their literacy practices were not considered in the equation.

Thus, I decided that for my dissertation study, what I wanted to do was to listen to secondary ELA teachers talk about popular culture, specifically their personal and

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[2]It was not until my graduate school years that I learned (realized) that "media" meant forms of communication and "mass media" was a term indicating the forms of media used to reach the largest audience. As a secondary teacher, then, I used both "media" and "mass media" interchangeably to refer to film, television, news media (both print and televised), popular magazines, advertisements, and popular music.

professional views and values of popular culture texts. This dissertation, then, is the story of how I listened to three secondary ELA teachers talk about their views and values of popular culture texts in relation to other cultural texts and in relation to their pedagogy. The stance I take is that those of us interested in English education and English teacher education must think about, talk about, and wonder about the literate lives of teachers (*and* students) if we hope to expand and challenge what counts as legitimate knowledge in secondary ELA in an effort to acknowledge and accept the literate lives of secondary ELA students and in order to effectively change as global literacies – and the demands of global literacies – change (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2003; Morrell, 2004). In order to examine teachers' talk about popular culture and secondary ELA, I, in this study, choose three secondary English teachers and examined their personal popular culture and professional pedagogical artifacts, administered a questionnaire, and conducted interviews – both individually and communally in a small focus group. In these settings, I invited three teachers to talk about their values of and views of popular culture and secondary ELA. In this study I ask, "How do these three teachers talk about both their personal and professional views and values of popular culture texts?"

PART ONE: THE ENGLISH TEACHER WHO PONDERS POPULAR CULTURE

> "Each evening we see the sun set. We know that the earth is turning away from it. Yet the knowledge, the explanation, never quite fits... The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe"
> (Berger, 1972, pp. 7-8).

Having spent almost five years teaching secondary English (grade 9 Introduction to Literature, grade 10 Media and Communications, and grade 12 Advanced Composition) and then a year writing curriculum for a film school while working on a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction (with a focus in film studies) before

entering graduate school at Michigan State University, I have diverse educational experiences that seem considerable on paper. However, the fact is that all but my student teaching experience occurred in West Michigan in small, conservative, and religious environments – my Bachelor's and Master's degrees are both from small, Christian liberal arts schools. All of my places of employment, until Michigan State, have been small, (Protestant) Christian organizations. Additionally, a minister and a teacher raised my two siblings and me in a slightly patriarchal household; thus, the lens through which I look is a small town, middle class, white, Protestant, female, heterosexual lens – a lens, which I know very well, affects what I see and how I see it. Moreover, I also realize that no matter how much I want to leave certain elements of this lens behind me, I cannot; this lens is always with me. My choice, then, for teaching and scholarship is in how to use this lens. That is, the way I let my lens influence what I see and how I see are up to me. "[Scholars] must be constantly aware," Wolf (1992) writes, "of how...differences in power can distort...perceptions and skew...interpretations" (p. 6). Wolf (ibid.) offers a helpful warning here in the reminder that not only is it important to know that "power can distort," but also it is important to be "constantly aware." Knowing that power can distort perceptions is not enough; remaining constantly aware of this fact is what is needed. Thus, it is with my particular lens – with an eye on the power that can distort and skew – that I encounter this study.

Entering the study as a scholar knowing that my view of teachers, students, administrators, schools, curriculum, culture, and cultural texts is through this small town, middle class, white, Protestant, female, heterosexual lens was intimidating because of the realization that I come from a position of privilege: I am a member of the so-called "dominant" culture. In addition, as the one leading the study, I was situated as the participants' former instructor, which was, and is, one more layer of the position of power. These elements locate me in a way that could lead to a view of the "other" – of

my participants – as "different" or "deficient". That is to say, if not careful, I could have the tendency to view my participants' acceptance of, and interaction with, cultural texts and artifacts as "different" or "deficient". I could hear their talk of experiences with culture and popular culture in a way that does not honor those experiences, views, or values. Namely, researchers and scholars in positions like mine often possess the capability to see those like me as "normal" and those unlike me as "different". As a result, I have a greater responsibility as a scholar to make sure I am careful in the decisions I make, and have made, regarding how and what texts were generated and how those texts are analyzed, read, and written about in order to ensure that I am careful to communicate my participants' voices – their talk – the best that I can. Lather and Smithies (1997) write about "'standing with'" their participants in a way that honored the voices of their participants while reflecting their work, and relationships, with their participants (pp. 7-8). Lather (1997) writes,

> Are we talking about these women? for them? with them? We should be uncomfortable with these issues of telling other people's stories...Part of me wants to begin sharing the stories we are hearing; part of me wants to move softly, with restraint, being careful to not pounce too quickly in thinking I understand their lives well enough to tell their stories to others (p. 9).

While recognizing that the lens through which I look is important, choosing how I use, and have used, that lens is even more important. I have had to constantly question whether I am speaking about my participants, for them, or with them (Lather & Smithies, 1997). The manner in which I interacted with participants needed to be a manner informed by what I know about issues of power and ethics – a manner that was both soft and restrained (Lather & Smithies, 1997). I needed to, and need to, be careful to let the participants' talk, and their voices, be heard.

For this study, "standing with" (Lather & Smithies, 1997) my participants did not seem like a difficult task because I have known the women who agreed to participate in the study for five years. Upon entering graduate school at Michigan State University

and spending a year teaching Professional Roles in Education (TE 801/803, 2002-2003), I entered the English education program as a course instructor for Teaching English to Diverse Learners (TE 401/402, 2003-2005), while also working as a field instructor for English education interns (2002-2004). It was during this time that I met the participants: I was the course instructor during their senior-year Teaching English to Diverse Learners (TE 401/402, 2004-2005) course, and then I moved with them and was the course instructor for their intern-year Reflection and Inquiry in Secondary English Teaching and Practice (TE 802/804, 2005-2006). Thus, "standing with" my participants and "telling their stories" feels natural and comfortable because of the relationships we have developed over the years. Since working with the participants as their course instructor, I have kept in touch with them through electronic mail and Facebook as a way to support and to encourage them and, at times, to offer support for their teaching. However, it is this very natural and comfortable feeling for which I have needed to be constantly aware. That is, I have needed to discomfort myself in order to hear their voices and their stories in a way that honors them.

PART TWO: THE PARTICIPANTS WHO TALKED about POPULAR CULTURE

> "Researcher relationships to ongoing participant stories shape the nature of field texts and establish the epistemological status of them...What is told, as well as the meaning of what is told, is shaped by the relationship" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004, p. 94-95).

Because the goal of this dissertation is to explore secondary ELA teachers' talk about their personal and professional views and values popular culture, choosing secondary ELA teachers who had a bit of background in thinking about and talking about the relationship between popular culture texts and secondary ELA was important. Therefore, the participants were selected based on the following criteria:

1. All participants graduated from the same teacher preparation program;

2. all participants were students in my secondary English methods courses during the 2004-2005 (TE 401/402 Critical Methods in the Teaching of Writing/Texts) and 2005-2006 (TE 802/804 Reflection and Inquiry in Secondary English Teaching and Practice) school years;
3. all participants were, at the time of the study, in their second year of classroom teaching;
4. and, as teacher candidates, all participants expressed strong interest in using popular culture texts in their classrooms.

These criteria were used to determine both who should, and who should not, participate in the study. Of the possible six teachers who met the criteria, three (Summer, April, and May) agreed to be involved (of the other three, one had recently had a baby, one could not meet during the group interview times, and one had changed her contact information so I could not contact her). The participants include:

1. Summer, an Honors College graduate who, at the time of the study was teaching grade 10 Literature and grade 11 American Literature at a large suburban school in mid-Michigan, after spending her first year teaching at a small, rural school in mid-Michigan;
2. April, who at the time of the study, was teaching grade 10 American Literature, grade 11 World Literature, and Speech, and who was coaching forensics at a large suburban school on the east side of the state;
3. and, May, who at the time of the study was teaching grade 10 British Literature and grade 9 social studies, and who was coaching swimming and diving at a private school situated on the border of a large urban center on the east side of the state.

Although the number of participants may seem small, I was committed to identifying and choosing participants whose background in teacher education, popular culture, and secondary ELA, was somewhat familiar to me. Since I knew that the participants who agreed to be in the study had studied and used popular culture texts in some of their English methods work (that is, they had studied popular culture in relation to ELA), I knew that they had some background in thinking about the possible role of popular culture texts in secondary ELA. In addition, I wanted to draw from a population (students who took my methods courses) from which I knew I had resources in course work (unit plans, lesson plans, and other response writing) and resources in established relationships. Thus, while some may see three participants as a limitation, the

affordances these particular ELA teachers offered in terms of resources (texts and artifacts from course work, established relationships, background knowledge, and prior conversations) far outweighed the possible limitation of a small group.

Because I worked with these teachers in their teacher preparation program, I have known these participants for five years. Familiarity, of course, has advantages and disadvantages. At the time of the study, I had an established rapport and trust with the participants that enabled me to generate texts (talk) and artifacts easily and enabled the participants to communicate with me about any concerns. Because of the amount of, and type of, experience we had with each other, I trusted that they would be open to talk about their views and values of popular culture; I trusted that they would push me, and each other, in thinking about these views and values. At the same time, in my interviewing, record keeping, and analysis I have needed to guard against insider bias. Thus, I needed to open my eyes and ears to the "different" – I needed to make things familiar unfamiliar. While at first glance, I seem to have thought processes socially constructed in a similar manner as the participants, in reality, we all are quite different. While we are all white, middle class women from the Midwest, as I will later show, our views and values of popular culture texts – and potential role of popular culture texts in our pedagogy – is quite different. Thus, in this study, I have had to guard against the assumption of how similar and familiar things appear to be – I have had to disrupt the familiar and look for the dissimilar.

In the following sections, I introduce each of the three participants of this study. While I know it is important to sketch a portrait of each of the three secondary English teachers, I do so hesitantly, recognizing that any picture I present is lacking in some way. The illustrations you will find below are, in essence, an incomplete view of how I see these three women or how I have come to see them in the five years that I have known them. Describing or detailing the way in which I see these English teachers is

difficult to do with written words. That is, there is not enough space in this chapter or in this dissertation to convey all that has been said and experienced with or between the participants and myself over the years. Yet, even if there were enough time and space to detail a fuller image of the participants, those representations would still be inadequate and incomplete because the descriptions would still be through my particular lens. Thus, in the following sections, while you will find introductions to the participants, those introductions are brief glimpses through my particular lens(es).

Summer Loves Tom Hanks

> "But if you do want to ask the question of what influences what, in a lot of these situations...it's almost like we're completely influenced by what we see rather than we produce the culture and then they duplicate it for us. I see it as the reverse. But I don't know..."
> (Summer, FG1, 2008, 0:34:21).

As mentioned above, at the time of the study, Summer was in her second building in as many years. During her first year of teaching in a small, rural school, I periodically communicated with Summer by offering teaching ideas and acting as a sounding board as she struggled with the adjustment to teaching and, specifically, to teaching at a small, rural school. Additionally, in this position at this small school, Summer was teaching four different classes, was the faculty coordinator of the school play (putting on two plays during the year), and was the faculty coordinator of the German Club. She felt overwhelmed and felt overworked. Thus, at the time of our conversations, she was excited to be teaching at a school where she felt supported by the administration and where she felt like she had a better understanding and grasp of the curriculum and the student population. However, in addition to this excitement in her new building, she was also anticipating moving and finding yet one more job – her third building in as many years of teaching – because her husband had just finished his Ph.D. in history and was job searching. Although she was enjoying her second school

and her second year of teaching, Summer was ready to be settled and to finally be able to have a "true" second year of teaching – a year when she did not have to change building, classes, or students.

The first thing I noticed about Summer the day she walked into TE 401 (2004) was how Dutch she looked with her blonde hair and blue eyes – a look I was used to seeing in my hometown, but not around campus. The second thing I noticed about Summer was her academic intelligence. It would be easy to say that Summer is the "smartest" of the three participants because of her status as an Honors College graduate. However, I would say that she is intelligent in a different way than the other two participants. For an example of this difference, Summer, unlike the other two participants, comes from a family of educators – her grandfather, father, mother, uncle and sister are all teachers or retired teachers. At one point in our conversation, when Summer was talking about her academic success(es), she joked that her mother said that Summer's academic success was because she was competitive and wanted to "do better" than her older siblings (Summer, Interview, 2008). However, Summer recalled that she felt that there was no other option in her family than to do well in school. If I were to essentialize Summer, I would say that she fits the traditionally academic student who works hard and knows how to play the school game.

These characteristics offered an interesting dimension to our group in that often, it seemed, Summer started to provide "academic" answers to some of the questions about popular culture and secondary ELA. For example, when I asked her during our first focal group interview to discuss the difference between art and popular culture, she responded by saying that she thinks there is a difference between art and imitation and that many popular culture texts are imitation and, therefore, not art (Summer, FG1, 2008) – a comment that seemed to move toward a set definition of popular culture. Yet, as she continued to talk, she added qualifications to this differentiation by saying that

some texts are entertaining (and not art) or informative (and not art), that "maybe that [entertaining or informational] are what is behind the classification and value [of artifacts]" (Summer, FG1, 2008, 0:40:38). Summer, it seemed, wanted to have a quick and precise definition for popular culture, or, at least, a quick and precise differentiation between art and popular culture. This desire for a quick and precise definition of a topic is often what is considered as a characteristic of someone who is traditionally academic and of someone who has figured out the school game – that is, one characteristic of the school game is that clear answers and definitions are available.

Yet, this picture of Summer is, obviously, too simplistic. While, yes, by academic standards she was successful and "intelligent", and while, yes, she did seem to want a "precise" definition of popular culture, the more she talked during our conversations, the more complicated her talk became. That is, while she still fit the essentialized definition of "intelligent", she also demonstrated talk that was much more conceptual, complicated, and complex than just that standard, traditional idea of "academic." The more Summer talked, the more she reveled that she knew a quick and precise definition for popular culture, or a quick and precise differentiation between popular culture and art, did not exist. For example, when one participant (April) was discussing her ownership of the complete *Sex and the City* (Star, 1998) series during our first focal group interview, all three participants began discussing the idea of influence and popular culture – they were asking whether or not popular culture reflected culture (behavior, ideas, choices, trends) or influenced culture. In a way that seemed to be reflecting a new thought for her, Summer said, "But if you do want to ask the question of what influences what, in a lot of these situations...it's almost like we're completely influenced by what we see rather than we produce the culture and then they [the creators of popular culture] duplicate it for us. I see it as the reverse. But I don't know..." (Summer, FG1, 2008, 0:34:21). This excerpt is interesting for two reasons:

First, I think it is interesting how Summer verbalized what she thinks about the relationship between consumers of popular culture and producers of popular culture. She begins by saying that consumers of popular culture (the masses) are "completely influenced" by what is provided by the culture industries (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1934) instead being producers of culture. Summer continued by saying that she sees "it as the reverse" – that is, "the masses" do indeed produce culture that is "duplicated" by the culture industries. Yet, in the end, Summer said, "But I don't know..." While Summer seems, at times, to want an easy answer, as she talked she reflected that she had not found an easy answer and that she realized the relationship between producers and consumers of culture is more complicated than she initially realized.

Although it would be easy to label Summer as the "intelligent" one, such a move is too simplistic, too essentializing, and not at all honoring of who Summer is or of what she brought to our conversations. Indeed, Summer is the one who taught me about "chubby chaser"[3] conventions during our first focal group interview, she is the one who talked about the mob/the Mafia as popular culture, and she is the one who had a myriad of things to say about her love of Tom Hanks. Summer's goal is to one day own every film that Tom Hanks has had a hand in whether through acting, producing, or directing, which according to the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com), is a list that numbers close to 40. So, even though Summer tried to tidy up a definition of popular culture (that which is "entertaining"), she also recognized that "curriculum in general is a construction of a perceived 'popular culture' and this too is ever changing – or should be" (Summer, Questionnaire, 2008). That is, as she talked, Summer complicated her own views of popular culture.

[3] A "chubby chaser" convention is a place for "big and beautiful singles" to meet (www.bbpeoplemeet.com). For the three participants, "chubby chasers" were made popular and relevant by the television show *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and *MTV's True Life*.

April Loves Perez Hilton

"Generally speaking, I use pop culture to grab students' attention and to link curriculum to their lives. I'm not very good (yet!) at studying/analyzing pop culture without connecting it to more canonical works...Basically, I'm still trying to find a balance between my ideal situation and my [teaching] reality" (April, Questionnaire, 2008).

At the time of our conversations April was teaching grade 10 American Literature, grade 11 World Literature, Speech, and was the forensics coach at a large, suburban high school on the east side of the state. Although April was feeling a bit more comfortable in her role as secondary ELA teacher as the end of her second year approached, she was nervous about the curricular changes that were occurring as the district realigned their standards both internally as well as externally with the state standards. Thus, April felt like just as she was getting comfortable in her teaching position, everything was changing. She, in a manner similar to Summer, felt that instead of looking forward to the comfort sometimes found in the third year of teaching, she would be facing another "first year" of teaching as she adjusted to new classes and some new course content. In addition to these changes, she was also finding that she had some different views of secondary English than some of her colleagues in the department. For example, as the English department worked to revise the curriculum to add more composition instruction, they debated what pieces of literature should be dropped entirely (to make space for that composition instruction) or replaced with another piece of literature. In discussing the novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 1885), one of April's colleagues adamantly fought for the novel's place in the curriculum because she thought it was "*the* American novel," a sentiment that this colleague continued to repeat. April questioned, "What does that mean? In terms of what they're [students are] supposed to learn, what does that mean" (Interview, 2008)? While in our conversations, April acknowledged that there are texts that have somehow been "designated as high culture" (Interview, 2008) – like *Adventures of Huckleberry*

Finn (Twain, 1885) – she often questioned the place of those texts in secondary ELA and specifically raised issues about the apparent disconnect between these "high culture" texts and her students. At the time of our conversations, this textual debate and designation was particularly important as April's department was working at revising the curriculum and moving towards standardization.

The first thing I noticed about April when I initially met her in the fall of 2004 was her dark, curly hair – both the color, and the curliness, were equally striking. The second thing that I noticed was that it seemed that her personality was as upbeat and full of life as her beautiful hair. April, in comparison with her classmates, was consistently full of energy (she was a student who talked very fast), full of interesting thoughts (she was a student who pushed ideas), and, as seen above, full of tough questions. Of the 28 students in her senior-year methods course, April was often quick to interject with, "Wait. I'm not quite sure what you are saying," which in many ways served to challenge me as her instructor. I enjoyed April's questions, her engagement with the topics of the course, and her willingness to try out new ideas as well as her readiness to make sense of what she was thinking. Of the three participants, it seemed like April was most willing to talk about the complicated nature of culture and popular culture, often saying, "Well, yes *and* no," in response to my questions. At one point, she said that as a teacher she feels torn between, "do[ing] what you need to do to get them [students] engaged [with the class] versus doing what you need to do to get them to college" (Interview, 2008). As such, it seemed that April often walked the line between the texts of high culture that are recognized and valued in secondary ELA (what students need to know to get into college) and the texts of popular culture that April knew her students recognized and valued (that which would get them "engaged").

While, like Summer, it would be easy to essentialize April based on her academic success(es), based on her work ethic, based on the fact that she is an only

child of divorced parents, or based on the fact that she is the first in her family to receive a university degree, this list is just as simplistic and just as unfair as labeling Summer as "intelligent." And, though I do think that April is intelligent and works hard, these labels do not do justice to her talk or to her engagement with the field of secondary English. Whereas Summer seemed to want a quick and precise definition of popular culture, April did not seem to want a similar definition. But, like Summer, April's talk about culture, popular culture, and secondary ELA was often complicated and complex, reflecting nuanced and insightful thinking. What April talked about the most during our conversations was her desire to use more popular culture in her curriculum, a move that she felt unable to make given the constraints she felt from the culture of her building and department. This tension was reflected in her questionnaire response when she wrote, "I still believe pop culture is a relevant teaching tool. However, I'm now faced with the reality of a jam-packed canonical curriculum, tenured teachers looking down at my use of pop culture, and parents questioning texts that use a few swear words" (Questionnaire, 2008). April did not seem to face the tension of recognizing the value of using popular culture texts in secondary English, however she did seem to face the tension of finding a place for popular culture and feeling confident in using popular culture in her classroom.

Again, like Summer, April offered a number of amusing ideas about popular culture during our conversations like candy M & M's as popular culture (and the time when one could call in to vote for a favorite color), her love of the television series *Sex and the City* (Star, 1998), her interest in self-help books and authors like Suze Orman, and her excitement at being able to swap Monty Python quotes with her students. In addition, April taught me quite a bit about celebrity gossip and celebrity gossip blogs like www.perezhilton.com -- a site that April checks daily even though she finds some of Mr. Hilton's comments inappropriate, "especially when he picks on their [celebrity's] kids"

(Interview, 2008). Yet, even here, April experiences tension: she talked about her enjoyment in her engagement(s) with popular culture, but she also talked about not always feeling that her engagement is the type that secondary ELA teachers should have. April is a self-described "gossip hound who likes to pretend she has standards" (Interview, 2008). Thus, while April talked about a broad definition and description of popular culture, she also talked about her struggle with knowing how to include – and feeling comfortable with such an inclusion – popular culture texts in the secondary ELA classroom.

May Loves The Red Wings

> [Popular culture] is what is popular or socially accepted by the masses...It changes with time, but historical popular culture can still be considered as pop culture...When I am engaged with pop culture on my own, I find myself thinking how can I bring it to the classroom[?] Can I copy this article to read with the class? Can I show this film along with the novel we are reading? Can I assign homework over the web? (May, Questionnaire, 2008).

May, at the time of our conversations, was finishing her second year teaching at a small, private school in a suburban community that bordered a large urban center on the east side of the state. Although May often wondered whether she should seek a job teaching in a public school, she was aware of the curricular freedoms she was enjoying by teaching at a private school. One teaching concern May had at the time of our conversations was that the following year not only would she have added responsibilities as the dean of grade 9, but also she would be teaching social studies full-time. While she enjoyed teaching social studies (her minor), she preferred teaching ELA (her major). Thus, like both Summer and April, May was facing a third year of teaching that appeared much more similar to a first year of teaching in that she would have all new classes; she would not be able to rely on the resources and patterns she had created and established nor would she be able to rely on some of what she had

learned during her first two years of teaching. Unlike Summer and April, May had quite a bit of freedom in choosing texts to include in her classroom and designing curriculum, so much of the work she did her first two years of teaching was very important to her as she had worked so hard to create a curriculum and gain a level of comfort with that curriculum. May wondered, during our conversations, if some of the structure (standards, standardization) that is found in public schools would have actually helped her during her first years of teaching. Yet, at the same time, she recognized how good it was to make her own decisions and knew that the changes occurring in her third year would pose challenges for her. In addition to the changes in her teaching responsibilities, at the time of our conversations May had just recently married her college boyfriend (October, 2007), had just recently bought a house, and had just recently lost her father-in-law to a sudden death (two weeks after her wedding). Thus, at the time of our conversations, although enjoying her teaching situation, May was strongly influenced by the responsibilities and demands happening out of school including settling into life in a house with a husband and helping her husband grieve his father's death.

When I first met May in the fall of 2004, I was surprised by the fact that she was shorter than I had first thought. Because she was a former swimmer, May's athletic build and her bubbly personality made her seem quite a bit taller than she actually is. And, since I first noticed her bright eyes and bright smile, her height went unnoticed. May's bubbly personality is reflected by the way she seems to talk and laugh at the same time – of the 28 students in her section of TE 401, she laughed the most and the most quickly. This quality of May's was, and continues to be, delightful for me. May carries this joyful laughter to teaching as well; she seems to laugh while talking in all situations and not at all in a disrespectful or inappropriate way. I think that May's ability to laugh and talk at the same time is reflective of the way in which May seems to find

the good in all things, including popular culture. That is, May seems to look for the value in everything she encounters, including cultural texts and artifacts. As referenced earlier, May said, "When I am engaged with pop culture on my own, I find myself thinking how can I bring it to the classroom[?] Can I copy this article to read with the class? Can I show this film along with the novel we are reading? Can I assign homework over the web" (Questionnaire, 2008)? As a later chapter will show, May does not seem to struggle with the value of popular culture texts like the other two teachers (Summer and April) do; she assumes the value of popular culture texts and works to figure out if that text will fit with the themes and texts of her classroom. May is constantly considering whether or not a text will work in her classroom. It is almost as if the value of a text is assumed and the question is of whether or not such a text will work with other classroom texts.

Like Summer and April, it would be easy to essentialize May based on academic performance or other characteristics. It would be easy to paint a picture of May based on her middle-class family life, the suburb in which she was raised, her university experience, her athletics, or any other number of facts about her life. But, as I mentioned with both Summer and April, such a picture is not fair – such a picture does not reflect the complexity of May's talk about pedagogy or about popular culture. That is, like Summer and April, May's talk about popular culture was much more complicated than I had assumed at first glance. For example, May was the first to talk about how her use of popular culture changed over time, a fact that she found interesting (FG1, 2008). What was, and is, interesting about this insight is both that May had a broad view of popular culture that included technology, franchises like *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997,1998, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2007) and *The Pirates of the Caribbean* (Verbinski, 2003, 2006, 2007), and fashion like Vera Bradley bags, and that May was aware that there were factors that influenced popular culture usage such as the

resources of time and money. May's awareness of changes in her use of popular culture reflected both a broad definition and view of popular culture as well as insight into what influences interaction with popular culture texts and artifacts. Additionally, May talked about her recognition that certain popular culture texts and artifacts mean much more to her than to others and vice versa. For example, May talked about the fact that even though she likes watching the Red Wings play hockey, the team means so much more to her husband (FG1, 2008). Thus, while knowing that May had a fairly typical middle-class, suburban upbringing might be helpful to form a picture, this picture is severely lacking in painting a picture of May's talk about culture and popular culture. That is, May talked about culture and popular culture in a way that transcended the stereotype of the suburbs.

Familiarity with these three participants offered quite a few affordances, primarily in that we could jump into conversations about popular culture quite quickly. However, what I promptly realized as I listened to all three teachers talk about popular culture was that even though Summer, April, and May were so similar (socio-culturally, economically, and educationally), their talk about popular culture and pedagogy was quite different. Even though all three teachers were experiencing and anticipating similar struggles in their classrooms as they all faced a third year of teaching that looked much more like a first year of teaching, the way that they talked about their views and values of cultural texts and artifacts was quite different. Even though, as I will show, all three talked eloquently and insightfully about cultural texts and artifacts, what they said about such texts was quite different. That is, that which looked so similar to me at the beginning, in fact turned out to be significantly different. And, I think it is these differences that can inspire and incite questions and dreams for English teacher education.

PART THREE: THE TALK about POPULAR CULTURE

> "A research method is only a way of investigating certain kinds of questions. The questions themselves and the way one understands the questions are the important starting points, not the method as such. But of course it is true as well that the way in which one articulates certain questions has something to do with the research method that one tends to identify with. So there exists a certain dialectic between question and method"
> (Van Manen, 1990, p. 1).

After the AERA (Montreal, 2005) presentation that served to shift my thinking about literacy, new literacies, popular culture, and secondary ELA, I spent some time thinking about what my question about popular culture, teaching, and secondary English really was. Like many scholars, I think, I knew I had a question but I was not quite sure how to word, or frame, that question – I knew there was a question, I just was not able, at first, to verbalize what that question was. Thus, as I began this study, I used this driving question: "What do these participants say about their experiences with popular culture?" While I knew that what I wanted to do was to listen to these three secondary English teachers talk about how they were defining, thinking about, and using popular culture texts both personally and professionally, I assumed that asking them about their experiences with popular culture would be enough. I, as a novice scholar, had not considered that how, when, and where I asked these women to talk about their experiences with popular culture would have a great effect on what they said. Because I felt that I knew Summer, April, and May so well, and because I knew how willing they would be to talk, I had not fully thought through all of the ramifications of eliciting talk. As such, in preparation for this dissertation project Van Manen's (1990) exploration of phenomenology quickly became an important tool to inspire and guide my thinking. Specifically helpful, initially, were these words: "...an appropriate topic for phenomenological inquiry is determined by the questioning of the essential nature of a

lived experience: a certain way of being in the world" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 39). While some would argue that studying the use of popular culture texts is less than an "essential" part of lived experience, many others would argue that interaction with popular culture texts is less than avoidable (Storey, 2003; Morrell, 2004), and thus, "a certain way of being in the world." In this case, for me as a scholar hoping to explore experiences with popular culture, the idea of "questioning [one aspect of] the essential nature of a lived experience" was my initial question: What is the "essential nature" (Van Manen, ibid.) of a secondary English teacher's experience with popular culture texts?

However as I continued thinking about, and preparing for, this study, I realized that what I really wondered was how these teachers *talked* about their experiences with popular culture, not what the essential nature of that lived experience was. My question was not, and is not, so much a question of experience, but was, and is, a question of talking about experiences and interactions with popular culture texts. That is, I wanted to listen to the three secondary English teachers talk about their personal and pedagogical views and values of popular culture. In the end, my question became one of aesthetics over experience. While the three teachers' experiences with popular culture could have been, and probably would have been, an interesting study, what I wanted to know was how they talked about – what they said about – their engagements (views and values) with popular culture especially in relation to their work as secondary English teachers.

Given that I wanted to listen to what these three secondary ELA teachers had to say about their views and values of popular culture, eliciting talk was the obvious textual choice for me. Therefore, I needed to both elicit and collect a wide array of teacher talk. The first step, then, as I began the study was to determine the methods I would use to obtain talk about popular culture and pedagogy from my participants. After some initial

study, I determined that the text-, or talk-generation protocol in this study would have six sections:

> 1) The administration of a questionnaire (through electronic mail);
> 2) a small-group interview and conversation (FG1) that included the participants bringing artifacts that they felt represented popular culture (audio taped and videotaped);
> 3) one-on-one interviews (Interview) with each participant using follow-up questions based on the small-group interview (audio taped);
> 4) a school visit to each participants' classroom;
> 5) a second small-group interview and conversation (FG2) that included the participants bringing artifacts from their curriculum that showed the popular culture texts they used in their classrooms (audio taped and videotaped);
> 6) field notes (both handwritten and typed on computer) created during each of the previous five steps.

In a manner similar to the formation of the group of participants, using these methods to collect teacher talk had, and has, both affordances and limitations, as I will discuss in the following section. While each method (questionnaire, interview, school visit, artifact collection) has both affordances and limitations, taken collectively I was able to gather teacher talk that was both generative and interesting. Yet, even with substantial teacher talk about popular culture, the deep and rich picture painted by this teacher talk is only one small glimpse – it is only one glance of a much larger, much more complex portrait. As Van Manen (1990) writes, "...to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld [is to] remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal" (p. 18). That is to say, there were many representations I could have created with the talk I collected because interactions with cultural texts and artifacts are "always more complex" (Van Manen, ibid.) than could ever be portrayed. But, for now in this time, space, and place, this is the depiction I am choosing to illustrate.

Questionnaire

In an effort to receive some initial comments before the first focal group conversation, and in an effort to begin forming a conception of talk about popular culture to help shape my interview questions, I administered a questionnaire to the participants through electronic mail. Again, Van Manen (1990) helped guide this decision by explaining that, "descriptions are data, or material on which to work" (p. 55). What I wanted as my starting point for the study was an initial description of the participants' thoughts, definitions, and uses of popular culture, and a questionnaire seemed like a good way to gather such descriptions. While I intended to use, and did use, the questionnaire responses to help me refine my interview questions, I also hoped that the questionnaire would aid my participants in delineating a working definition of popular culture before the first focal group interview. The tension I had in administering the questionnaire was that I did not want to give the participants too much direction, or influence their thinking too much, while still garnering some ideas – while still gathering descriptions (Van Manen, 1990) – about their current thinking about, and use of, popular culture texts. Thus, I piloted the questionnaire (January, 2008) to ensure that the questions cultivated somewhat of a thoughtful response without guiding or directing a thoughtful response too much. In addition, I wanted to be sure that the questions were easy to read, to understand, and to answer.

After determining the pilot participants (a number of educators with whom I was familiar as well as to a few people whom I knew were particularly interested in issues of, or use of, popular culture texts such as two graphic designers, two youth ministers, an artist, and a musician to name a few) I sent the pilot questionnaire through electronic mail (of the 33 pilot surveys I sent out, I received 11 replies). The questions on the pilot survey were:

1. If someone outside of your school community/a school community asked you to define "popular culture", what would you say?

2. If someone within your school community/a school community asked you to define "popular culture", would your response change?
3. When you hear the term "popular culture", what artifacts or ideas immediately spring to mind?
4. Do you use texts that you consider "popular culture" in your curricula? If so, what texts do you use and why? If not, why not?
5. Have your ideas about popular culture changed since you graduated Michigan State? If yes, how would you describe those changes? If not, what has remained the same and why?
6. What are your current "favorite" popular culture texts?
7. Do you have any feedback for Kathy regarding this survey?

Based on the feedback I received from the pilot questionnaire participants, I decided to reword the first two questions in order to combine them. I noticed that as the pilot participants read and answered the first two questions ("If someone outside [#1]/within [#2] your school community/a school community asked you to define popular culture, what would you say?"), they had difficulty differentiating responses which meant that while they described their thinking about popular culture, it felt like a partial description. Thus, as I rewrote the survey for the dissertation participants, the first thing I did was to make the first question broader in order to educe a fuller description of popular culture. Secondly, because a goal of the questionnaire was to elicit a response related to the participants' role as secondary ELA teachers, I decided to design the second question to focus on what artifacts they would label as "popular culture" as English teachers.

The questionnaire I sent to the three secondary English teachers read:

1. If someone asked you to define "popular culture", what might you say?
2. When you as an English teacher hear the term "popular culture", what artifacts, texts, or ideas immediately spring to mind?
3. Do you use texts that you consider "popular culture" in your curriculum? If so, what texts do you use and why? If you don't use texts that you consider "popular culture" in your curriculum, why not?
4. Have your ideas about popular culture changed since you graduated from Michigan State? If yes, how would you describe those changes? If not, what has remained the same and why?
5. What are your current "favorite" popular culture texts for use in your classroom? What are your current "favorite" popular culture texts for your personal use?

The survey was administered over electronic mail to the dissertation study participants the week before the scheduled interview (January, 2008). The purpose of the questionnaire was two-fold in that 1) it would generate a description about the topic of popular culture – it would help to conceptualize "popular culture" – before the participants came for the interview, and 2) it would enable me to gather some insights and ideas for the format of the interview questions. In essence, I hoped that the questionnaire would spur thinking in the participants, and I hoped their responses would give me some insights into their current views of popular culture. I believe that both of these hopes were realized.

While it was interesting to see how each of the three participants were using popular culture texts in their courses (Question #5) which I will discuss further in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, what was even more interesting was reading their definitions of popular culture (Question #1). For example, April defined popular culture as, "Media, art, music and literature enjoyed by the masses" (April, Questionnaire, 2008), and in a similar manner, Summer wrote:

> Popular culture is a genre of texts, which are widely known, recognized and celebrated among a vast and diverse representation of people within a common culture. By texts I mean everything from music, film, television, news media, literature, icons & symbols, politics, sports, and everything in between. It is typically [a] genre which is used for the purpose of entertainment, although it is also used to convey information (Summer, Questionnaire, 2008).

One intriguing thing I noticed in their responses was the way in which their definitions appeared so similar, but were really quite different. While these two participants discuss some common media as well as the idea of entertainment for a large group of people, Summer's more extensive list of texts influenced what she said during the focal group interviews – including the texts she chose to use as her artifacts (see Chapter 3). Comparatively, April's somewhat vague definition was reflected in some of the tensions

she felt as she considered a definition and description of popular culture (see Chapter 4).

A second fascinating idea that I realized reading the questionnaires was May's definition of popular culture: "What is popular or socially accepted by the masses in our local, statewide, and/or nationwide society. It changes with time, but historical popular culture can still be considered as pop culture" (May, Questionnaire, 2008). I was surprised and pleased that May added that "historical popular culture can still be considered as pop culture" – that is, texts that were popular for her parents and even before that – as part of her definition. This element of her response was a welcomed addition to the first focal group conversation and brought an interesting exchange of ideas in the first focal group interview (see Chapter 5). Although these two insights are only glimpses into the questionnaire responses, I think these excerpts show that the participants provided descriptions (Van Manen, 1990) of popular culture – descriptions that seemed to influence and guide their talk during the first focal group interview (see Chapters 3, 4, and 5). Thus, even though the participants' descriptions were not as wide-ranging as I had hoped, their responses were both interesting and were used during both focal group conversations as points of reference.

Focus Group Conversations

The first focal group interview (February, 2008) took place in a hotel suite in Okemos – a convenient, mid-way, meeting place for all participants – where we met for dinner (take-out pizza and salad) and conversation. I wanted to find and create a comfortable, yet neutral, environment that was private (not a restaurant or coffee shop) and away from their school (work) environment. This conversation was both audio and videotaped. To begin the conversational time, I had the participants share artifacts they brought that they felt represented their current conceptualization of popular culture.

Next, I posed guiding interview questions that were, in a manner, inspired by the three ELA teachers' survey responses. After having the participants introduce themselves using their chosen pseudonyms, I began to ask the following questions:

1. Please introduce yourself to the camera: name, pseudonym, school, courses taught, future goals, etc.
2. What artifacts did you bring that represent popular culture? Why did you bring these artifacts? Would your spouse/best friend/roommate be surprised that you picked these artifacts?
3. Let's look at the surveys that you sent.
    a. How did you define popular culture? Is there anything that you want to add or subtract?
    b. What are some of your current popular culture texts for personal use?
    c. Does anything change when you think about using popular culture in the classroom?
    d. When you engage with popular culture, what do you think about and/or feel (if anything)?
4. Let's look back at some of the work you did at MSU. What would you change? What does it make you think when you look back at what you wrote while you were a student?

Because the introductions (Question #1), the talk about popular culture artifacts (Question #2), and a bit of reflection on the questionnaires (Question #3) resulted in three hours of conversation, we ran out of time for consideration of artifacts from their teacher preparation coursework (Question #4), which included course journal responses, unit plans, lesson plans, and academic papers. The participants requested to have another time to meet and talk, which we did later in the summer.

The second focal group interview (June, 2008) – complete with mid-afternoon snacks like bagels and M & M candy – took place in a second-floor conference room in Erickson Hall on Michigan State University's campus. While this location felt less neutral and less comfortable than our first location, we, as a group, were facing time constraints given Summer's impending move, April's wedding plans, the end of my pregnancy, and the busyness that comes with summer break. Meeting in Erickson Hall felt like the easiest location to meet for everyone involved (I asked the participants where they wanted to meet). This second interview occurred after school ended for all

participants and occurred after I had visited each participant in her given classroom and interviewed each participant individually (see next section). Like the first focal group interview, I asked the participants to bring artifacts (their curricula and a list of the popular culture texts they used in their classrooms) and the conversation was also audio and videotaped. Yet, instead of being a second, separate conversation, this conversation picked up where the first conversation left off – asking the participants to talk both about their MSU work and about their use of popular culture in the classroom – with the addition of building on both the first focal group interview and on the one-on-one conversations. This second focal group conversation was structured around the following guiding questions:

1. First, read/skim over your initial survey [the questionnaire I sent in January] as well as what you wrote while you were a student at MSU.
    a. Is there anything you would change about your survey [questionnaire] answers?
    b. What do you notice about what you wrote while at MSU?
    c. What would you change [about what you wrote while an MSU student]? What would you add/delete?
    d. What would you like to add to your teaching now that you wrote about then [as an MSU student]?
    e. What about your time at MSU either did or did not prepare you for teaching?
    f. What has changed in you/about you since then?
2. Second, look at the curriculum that you brought in today. Given our conversation about popular culture, what questions or insights do you have about your curriculum?
3. Third, look at the list you brought me for our one-on-one interviews. What has changed in your popular culture use since high school? [This last question was based on the fact that in the one-on-one conversations with Summer and April, I did not have time to talk about the list of popular culture texts they used in high school and college and what they use today – a list I asked all three participants to bring to the one-on-one interviews.]

Even though – after giving the participants fifteen minutes to skim the questionnaires, course journal responses, unit plans, lesson plans, and academic papers that I brought for them to see – I asked the three secondary ELA teachers to respond to the questionnaires, they all began talking about their MSU work. What resulted was another three-hour conversation which started with talk about their work at MSU in

English teacher preparation, and led to talk about how the study of popular culture fit in or did not fit in with that work and what both their MSU work and their views and values of popular culture meant to them in their current teaching positions.

Given that I wanted to explore how secondary English teachers talk about personal and professional views and values of popular culture, interviewing – or having a conversation – was the best choice for text generation. However, I did not want to abruptly jump into a conversation, which is why I chose to send out a questionnaire for the participants to respond to and think about (see previous section) before the first focal group conversation and which is why I chose to have the three ELA teachers bring artifacts to both focal group conversations in order to have something tangible from which to elicit talk. Both moves (the questionnaire and the artifacts), in my opinion, served to both guide and inspire talk. Thus, the interviews provided, "a means for exploring and gathering...narrative material that...serve[d] as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 66). That is, the talk the teachers generated provided narrative material that offered me a deeper understanding of their views and values of popular culture texts and artifacts. Yet, I realize that even with the affordance of this rich and deep narrative material, some may say that focal group conversations come with more limits than affordances. That is, while the focal group conversations generated a wealth of talk, some may critique the type of talk that was produced in that there were multiple times in which the participants talked over each other, interrupted each other, or steered the conversation in a different direction. Thus, in addition to these two focal group conversations that included discussion of artifacts, I interviewed each participant individually. Specifically, after some initial analysis of the first focal group interview, I designed individual questions for each participant.

Individual Conversations and School Observations

In between the time of the first focal group interview and the second, I met with each participant one-on-one and interviewed them (while audio taping) based on comments and/or questions they posed during the first small-group interview. At a basic level after the first focal group interview, I did some preliminary analysis and focused my questions for the individual interviews around a theme for each participant. For example, after observing May teach two sections of grade 10 British literature we met at a local bagel and coffee franchise where I asked May questions about the role of, and her view of, demographics as it relates to her consumption of popular culture and as it relates to any changes she has experienced in her consumption of popular culture[4]. After observing April teach a section of grade 11 World literature and one section of Speech, we met at a local coffee franchise where I asked April questions about the role and image of the secondary English teacher as it pertains to textual consumption[5]. And, after observing Summer teach one section of grade 11 American literature and one section of grade 10 literature, we met at a local bookstore and coffee shop where I asked Summer questions regarding the value of certain texts and how she would describe the difference between art and entertainment[6]. Because the classroom

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[4] The one-on-one interview with May was the first of the three interviews. As a result, I began the conversation by asking her to talk through the list she brought of popular culture artifacts with which she engaged in high school and college and with which she currently engages. From there, I asked her to simply talk through what she thought about the idea of demographics and popular culture, an idea that she repeated during the first focal group conversation.

[5] After doing some initial analysis of May's interview, I determined that I wanted to make changes with the one-on-one interview protocol. Thus, I intended to pose these thoughts/questions to April: *STEP ONE – You said (FG1), "I do have a little bit of a guilty conscience about the fact, that like, I'm perpetuating this voyeuristic society by putting my money into it on such a regular basis, but not guilty enough to not do it." What does this mean for your personal use [of popular culture]? What does this mean for you professional use [of popular culture]? STEP TWO – Art vs. Imitation: Refer to our conversation about seeing things in "real" life. Refer to our conversation about classifying texts: imitation, entertainment, process, art, etc. STEP THREE – Inquire as to the list that she brought.* In our time together, we were able to get to Steps One and Two, but were not able to get to Step Three.

[6] Based on how well I thought April's one-on-one conversation went, I decided to repeat that interview protocol and intended to pose these questions to Summer (the questions that are underlined are the questions that I actually posed; the highlighted portions are my notes to

observations were not meant for verifying preliminary analysis but were meant for contextualizing the some of the teachers' talk, during the one-on-one interviews, I only asked clarifying questions about their teaching positions. In addition, like the focal group interviews, we seemed to run out of time in each individual interview – in each of the one-on-one conversations, I simply had to pose one question or idea and the teachers quickly began to talk and share ideas. All three secondary ELA teachers talked for over an hour and a half.

The talk that was elicited during these one-on-one conversations serves as the bulk of my analysis in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. But to clarify, the first focal group interview served to provide me with the questions and ideas I posed during these individual conversations. Specifically, the preliminary analysis of the first focal group interview in which I looked for themes in the teachers' talk (see next section) informed the questions and ideas I posed during the one-on-one conversations. In contrast, the second focal group interview, served as a time, place, and space for me to both follow-up and delve deeper into some of the teachers' responses from both the first focal group interview as well as from the one-on-one conversations. That is, the first focal group conversation (including the questionnaire and the artifacts) was a necessary element in guiding my

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myself about the order of questions – the order that I did follow): *1) How is, or in what way could, cooking be seen as popular culture (Rachel Ray)? 2) What is similar or different between what is popular to a universal audience and what is popular to you? 3) Reflect on these quotes: "...when you hit a new level in your life, new popular culture comes into your world...and it's in the same world...it's existing concurrently with your life, but yet you don't even realize it's there, you don't even acknowledge it because it doesn't affect you." Later: Disney, cartoons, books..."I don't even know..." (Summer, FG1, 2008).* *4) In reference to The L Word and Queer as Folk (the "gay" version of Sex in the City): You get "used to it" and that makes you more comfortable. I ask, "Did you feel more comfortable because of your experience watching?" Summer says yes, but "that I need to be careful because it's stereotypes." The danger is that you are reinforcing stereotypes...ASK THIS QUESTION FIRST (Summer, FG1, 2008). [I label this as "influence", but now I don't remember why. Things that "feel normal" because one sees it on TV. I also list "expectations" and "response".]* *5) The Time magazine cover she mentions: "Culture vs. Cultured" with an image of someone getting out of a cab in NYC with a map, etc. compared to the image of someone sitting in front of a computer/laptop looking at the same NYC scene. ASK THIS QUESTION THIRD (Summer, FG1, 2008).* *6) Art vs. Imitation or Interpretation; what changes when we ask Art vs. Entertainment (goal, purpose [entertainment, information, manipulation], process)? ASK THIS QUESTION SECOND (Summer, FG1, 2008).*

preliminary analysis and in providing the ideas about which I wanted the participants to talk further during their individual conversations. Moreover, the first focal group interview allowed the participants to talk about their *personal* uses of popular culture, the individual conversations allowed them to talk about their *personal* and *professional* uses of popular culture, and the second focal group interview allowed them to talk about their *professional* uses of popular culture. The three one-on-one conversations were both an enhancement and an addition to the talk generated in the focal group interviews. As I hoped, generating talk from these three secondary ELA teachers was not a problem – they were all extremely willing to talk. And, as I will show in the following chapters, the elicited talk was articulate and insightful.

Generating talk proved, as mentioned, not to be a problem for this study – my participants were ready and willing to talk with very little prompting from me. Thus, I have hours of talk on audio and videotape. However, there were moments about which I had questions or on which I needed clarification that I encountered in all of the conversations. In those cases, I would send whatever question I had to the participant via electronic mail or via a Facebook message. While this was not always an ideal method, it served to add most of the clarification I felt that I needed. In addition, there were also moments during analysis where I wished I would have asked a different question, caught an interesting thought, or worded an idea in another way. There were, as there always are in interviews and conversations, things I could have asked or worded differently. Yet, during analysis, I was also struck by all of the interesting talk from Summer, April, and May. In almost every way, the three English teachers provided more talk, and more interesting talk, than I expected, which has served to inspire my thinking about both popular culture and about English teacher education. In the next section I will describe and discuss some of my thinking about the texts of teacher talk.

PART FOUR: THINKING about TALK

> "Aren't the most captivating stories exactly those which help us to understand better what is most common, most taken-for-granted, and what concerns us most ordinarily and directly" (Van Manen, 1990, p.19)?

As mentioned above, given that my question for this study was what secondary English teachers say, or said, about their personal and professional uses, views, and values of popular culture, gathering and observing as much talk as possible was very important for me. Thus, providing a questionnaire, asking group and individual interview questions, examining artifacts, and exploring texts from the participants' university work and teaching work were all important steps in this journey. Taken together, these texts and artifacts of teacher talk have allowed me to better understand "what is most common, most taken-for-granted, and what concerns us most ordinarily and directly" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 19) regarding the teachers' personal and pedagogical views and values of popular culture. While I would never say that I fully understand these three English teachers, their engagements with popular culture, or the influence that popular culture texts have, or have had, on their teaching, I will say that I have a new, or different, understanding of the relationship between popular culture and secondary ELA based on the their talk. That is, Summer's, April's, and May's talk has allowed me to look differently at the relationship between and among the texts with which we all engage daily and to look differently the texts that are honored in secondary English. Summer, April, and May provided the most captivating talk that has inspired and challenged me.

Thinking

> "[No] conceptual formation or single statement can possibly capture the full mystery of this experience"

(Van Manen, 1990, p. 92).

As may be evident, Van Manen's (1990) description and conceptualization of "human science" – "a semiotic employment of the methods of phenomenology and hermeneutics" (p. 1) – was an important tool for me as I began to consider this study. "[The] preferred method for human science," Van Manen (ibid.) writes,

> involves description, interpretation, and self-reflective or critical analysis...The fundamental model of this approach is textual reflection on the lived experiences and practical actions of everyday life with the intent to increase one's thoughtfulness and practical resourcefulness or tact. Phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the 'texts' of life, and semiotics is used here to develop a practical writing or linguistic approach to the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics. What is novel to this text is that research and writing are seen to be closely related and practically inseparable pedagogical activities (p. 4).

Van Manen's (ibid.) research methodology was of particular interest for me as I began to consider this study because of the intersection of the lived experiences of everyday life (for example, the phenomenology of interaction with popular culture texts), the interpretation of those texts (for example, interpreting in a manner similar to interpreting literary texts), and the inseparable nature of research and writing. Even though Van Manen (ibid.) focuses on experience, his notion of the overlap of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and semiotics made sense for me as I began a study of teacher talk about interactions with popular culture. That is, I generated texts of teacher talk by asking Summer, April, and May about their everyday experiences with popular culture (phenomenology), and I interpreted (hermeneutics) those texts using a recursive process of reading and writing. In my own way, I used Van Manen's (ibid.) framework to study teacher talk instead of experience. Thus, as I began this study, I began under Van Manen's (1990) human science framework.

For example, using my field notes and the audiotapes I began preliminary analysis by simply listening to the first focal group interview multiple times. As I read, re-read, added to my field notes, and drafted thematic maps while listening to the

audiotape, I tried to pay attention to the talk or ideas that jumped out at me or struck me as interesting. That is to say, I tried to listen to determine whether or not there were phrases or ideas that a participant would repeat – I looked for a theme in each teacher's talk. From the beginning, I noticed that there were, indeed, certain repetitions in their talk: May talked about the idea of changes in consumption and demographics; April talked about the idea of a "guilty conscience" in consuming popular culture texts; and Summer talked about the idea of differences between texts that would be considered art and texts that would be considered entertainment. Van Manen (1990) suggests that such thematic analysis, "[Is] more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure – grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of 'seeing' meaning" (p. 79). So, while I attempted to simply listen to how the teachers were talking about popular culture to determine whether or not there was a topic or idea that they repeated, I also listened both to "see" what was an idea or theme from which I wanted to "make something" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 79) and to discern whether or not (how) the teachers' talk either did or did not support current research in the fields of popular culture and English education. While I was listening for those ideas that were repeated and those ideas that struck me as interesting, connecting those ideas to the current research in popular culture theory and secondary ELA was also an important move in this stage of analysis. As such, Van Manen's (ibid.) human science methodology served to guide my thinking and the beginning stages of my analysis.

From this point, I continued to use Van Manen's (1990) methodology by designing individual interview questions for the one-on-one conversation keeping in mind that, "[The] conversation...is oriented to sense-making and interpreting of the notion that drives or stimulates the conversation" (Van Manen, ibid., p. 98). Again, I did some preliminary analysis of these individual conversations by listening to the

audiotapes while reading my field notes, transcribing, listening and re-reading, transcribing, adding to my field notes, listening, transcribing, and mapping themes – a recursive cycle of reading, writing, and thinking. In essence, I interpreted the teachers' talk by listening for and focusing on a theme. From this stage, I determined that the structure of this dissertation would include a chapter on each participant. Although there was overlap in talk about certain ideas (demographics, certain popular culture texts, manner of consumption, etc.), each participant seemed to repeat a particular idea often enough to warrant further analysis. Based on the first focal group interview and the individual conversations, I determined to design the second focal group interview to concentrate on pedagogy and popular culture, a relationship that was talked about some during the first two (the first focal group conversation and the one-on-one interviews) conversations, but was not talked about in much detail.

It was at this time that I began to explore using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) model of narrative inquiry, particularly the idea that, "[Experience] is the stories people live. People live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others..." (p. xxvi). Like Van Manen (1990), Clandinin and Connelly (ibid.) take experience – lived experience – as the starting point of their research: "[Narrative] inquirers," they write, "tend to begin with experience as lived and told in stories" (p. 128). Additionally, Clandinin and Connelly (ibid.), like Van Manen (ibid.), place great importance on eliciting narratives of those experiences. They write, "We might say that if we understand the world narratively, as we do, then it makes sense to study the world narratively" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17). Given my interest in eliciting teacher talk and writing about the way in which I was interpreting those texts of teacher talk, narrative inquiry was, potentially, a good fit for my study. Clandinin and Connelly's (ibid.) emphasis on the relationship between education, experience, and life (p. xxiv),

their argument that narrative is a way of understanding experience (p. xxvi), and their focus on context (p. 27) were all elements of scholarship to which I adhered. Thus, while like Van Manen (ibid.) Clandinin and Connelly (ibid.) study experience, like Van Manen (ibid.) they also provided me with a way to think about eliciting and interpreting teacher talk.

And yet, the design of my study did not truly fit Van Manen's (1990) human science methodology nor did it truly fit Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative inquiry methodology. Specifically, the way in which I wanted, and did, focus my analysis on teachers' talk did not fully fit Van Manen's (ibid.) focus on experience. While the teachers were talking about their experiences with popular culture, I was not reading the texts of their experiences, but rather was reading the texts of their talk. Likewise, while the teachers were talking about experience and were generating narratives, I did not feel that I could categorize the teachers' talk as "story". Although they did share anecdotes and brief sketches (see Chapters 3, 4, and 5), they were not sharing stories that held Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) conceptualizations of interaction (personal, social), continuity (past, present, future), and place (situation). While I would argue that this study has elements of human science research and elements of narrative inquiry, I do not feel that this study firmly fits under either methodology.

To explain, reading the texts of talk, for me, was much like reading literature in that I fell into the pattern of reading/listening for themes and ideas, talking with others about the themes and ideas, writing about those themes or ideas, reading/listening again, talking again, writing more, reading and listening again, and so on. It was this hermeneutic (Van Manen, 1990), recursive process of reading/listening, talking, and writing from which emerged the themes and ideas you will find in the following chapters. As I previously mentioned, there were, and are, any number of themes and ideas that could have transpired from the teacher talk that would have been appropriate for this

dissertation. The ideas that I will present in the following chapters are the ideas that struck me as most interesting in my given time, space, and place. That is, given my current thinking about and study of English education, English teacher education, and popular culture, these were the themes and ideas that were most provocative to me. I have no doubt that someone else analyzing the talk of these three secondary ELA teachers would find different, albeit still interesting, themes and ideas about which to write.

This last statement – that someone else would interpret the talk of these three teachers differently – begs the question, then, of how I am accountable to my participants and their talk. That is, how am I, as a novice scholar, to be evaluated? As I have previously quoted, Berger (1972) writes, "The way we see things is affected by what we know or believe" (p. 8), a fact that is as true for me as it is for anyone else. I will always look, also as mentioned earlier, through my particular lens – how I see my participants and their talk was, and is, affected by the small-town, white, middle class, heterosexual, female, Protestant lens through which I look. The way I see things is affected by what I (think I) know and believe (Berger, ibid.). Yet, in addition, knowing how I am reading the texts of teacher talk is just as important as knowing that I look through a particular lens. As such, it is my hope that this study – and my work – is measured by the orientation to the fields of English teacher education and popular culture studies; the rich description of teacher talk; the depth of openness to ambiguity and surprise; and the strength of the argument that describing, theorizing, and advocating teacher talk about popular culture and pedagogy can, and should, inspire and incite new thinking about how, and what, we prepare secondary ELA teachers (Van Manen, 1990).

Analyzing

"[We] actively select, transform and interpret 'reality' in our inquiry" (Lather, 1991, p. 91).

As I have previously mentioned, my goal for this dissertation study was to simply listen to what Summer, April, and May said about their personal and pedagogical uses, views, and values of popular culture. I also previously mentioned the fact that "simply listening" was not as simple as I had initially anticipated. Rather, prompting talk, asking questions, and eliciting responses were all carefully considered moves. And yet, these moves would look different (to varying degrees) if I had the project to do again: the decisions I made as a novice researcher were moves that were made based on my thinking at the time, on time constraints and freedoms, and on what was interesting to me in that time, space, and place. Yet, as I consider the question of accountability as posed in the previous section, I am forced to consider the lens(es) with which – or through which – I listened to the teachers' voices. I am forced to carefully consider the moves that I made as a researcher and scholar. I must ask, in analyzing themes, was I seeking something specific? Were there things I was hoping Summer, April, and May would say? Were there things for which I was looking in their talk? How did I shape our conversations?

It is difficult for me, as a novice scholar, to be able to articulately pinpoint or describe the things that I was, or was not, looking for in the teachers' talk. In some ways, reflecting on my role as the researcher forces me to make the familiar unfamiliar in a way that I was not anticipating having to do. I wonder if (and assume that) I am too close to the topic – I have made (and am making) too many assumptions or have taken too many things for granted – to be able to describe what I was thinking, considering, or anticipating while I was listening to Summer, April, and May talk. However, it is clear to me that I was looking for *something*; I was looking for the three teachers to be able to

talk (and to talk eloquently?) about popular culture. And, when they began to talk about their tensions, or their struggles with popular culture, I found those tensions the most interesting. For example, I quickly found Summer's conflicting talk about art and entertainment fascinating. I was struck by the way in which April described her "guilty" feelings regarding her use of popular culture. May's talk about the tensions she encountered as her popular culture use changed intrigued me. Looking back on the manner in which I engaged the analysis process, I can see that I was looking for something to explain the gap, or the discrepancy, between what pre-service ELA teachers say they plan or hope to do with popular culture in their classrooms and what novice teachers end up doing with popular culture in their classrooms. As much as I do not want to admit this, when I began the analysis stage of this dissertation project, I was looking for an "answer" – I was looking to fill in a perceived gap.

Yet, what surprised me during the analysis process and the beginning stages of writing this dissertation (when I realized that finding an "answer" was impossible and not *really* what I wanted to do) was that instead of focusing on the teachers' pedagogy, what captured my attention were their aesthetic sensibilities. What was intriguing to me was the manner in which all three teachers talked about art, culture, and popular culture. Instead of concentrating on – and asking questions regarding – what popular texts the teachers used in their classrooms and how they used them, the topics and themes that I ended up analyzing (and around which I geared one-on-one interview questions) were all themes that had to do with how Summer, April, and May thought about (viewed and valued) their interactions with popular culture. For example, I looked at the way in which Summer talked about differentiating popular culture texts from high culture texts. I examined the way April talked about feeling guilty for her consumption of popular texts. And, I explored May's talk about the changes she experienced in her interactions with popular culture. While, arguably (see Chapters 3 through 6) all of the

teachers' aesthetic sensibilities have an effect on their pedagogy, I was a bit surprised that I did not want to spend more time talking about pedagogy with Summer, April, and May. I wanted to listen to them talk about their personal interactions and engagements with popular culture.

Thus, while I began this study with the intention of concentrating my analysis on the three teachers' pedagogical views and values of popular culture, what I ended up looking for were their personal views and values of popular culture. As such, the questions I intended to ask were different from the questions that I did end up asking. For example, during the first focal group interview, I intended to have Summer, April, and May compare their university work (assigned papers, journal reflections, lesson plans, and unit plans) with the current content of their classrooms looking for any changes that had occurred in their thinking about the relationship between popular culture and secondary ELA. At first, I assumed that we simply ran out of time for the teachers to do this; however, I now think it is important to note that we ran out of time because of follow-up (clarifying, expounding, explanatory) questions I asked them regarding aesthetics (For example, I asked, "What is the difference between art and entertainment?" Later, this question would guide my one-on-one conversation with Summer.). Yes, we ran out of time for some of the questions I intended to ask, but we ran out of time because we were talking about ideas and topics that struck me as interesting and which I wanted to pursue. So, although I structured the first focal group interview as fairly open (other than having the teachers talk about the artifacts that they brought), I quickly realized as I listened to Summer, April, and May talk about the artifacts they brought that they were talking in interesting ways about their aesthetic sensibilities. Thus, I decided to pursue this line of thought as our first conversation continued and as I planned for the individual conversations and second focal group

conversation. The teachers' aesthetic talk challenged me to think differently about the relationship between popular culture and secondary ELA (see Chapter 6).

After the first focal group interview, I realized more about what I, as the researcher/scholar, was looking for in order to frame or guide my writing. That is, I realized that I did "actively select, transform and interpret 'reality' in [my] inquiry" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 91). Previously, I mentioned the manner in which I looked for themes in the teachers' talk in order to structure the individual interviews. So, while I was not necessarily looking for a specific type or topic of talk in the first focal group interview (but, rather, for more general talk about popular culture), during the individual interviews I attempted to structure the conversation around a theme and attempted to have the teachers talk on that theme (Summer and the idea of art versus entertainment; April and the idea of a "guilty conscience"; May and the idea of changes in consumption and demographics). While the themes that I asked the teachers to focus on or reflect on did, indeed, come from their talk, upon reflection I understand that I choose those themes based on ideas that *I* found interesting or intriguing as well as based on ideas that were common in the current literature related to ELA and/or popular culture.

There is a strong relationship and progression from the first focal group conversation to the individual conversations and, finally, to the second focal group conversation. Specifically, the first focal group conversation was designed to try to get a general sense of how Summer, April, and May defined or described popular culture. Based on their talk in that conversation, I designed individual interview questions based on themes that I interpreted (much like a follow-up conversation to the first focal group conversation). Lastly, the second focal group interview was structured as a kind of catchall where we could talk more specifically about pedagogy and where I could ask a couple of the questions that I did not have a chance to ask during the first focal group conversation (for example, asking the teachers to compare their MSU work with their

current classroom content). As part of this progression, however, is also the fact that I began to look for the teachers to talk about more specific ideas as the conversations continued. That is to say, during the first focal group conversation, I was trying to get a sense of what Summer, April, and May were saying; I was trying to get a sense of their talk about popular culture. Based on that talk, I created questions that I hoped would prompt the teachers to talk more specifically in a one-on-one setting about an idea that arose (that I interpreted) during that first focal group interview – I was looking for the teachers to talk about an idea or about a stance (or view) toward popular culture. While at first I wanted to listen to *how* the teachers talked about popular culture (in general), by the end I wanted to listen to *what* they said about popular culture (specifically, their aesthetic sensibilities).

Yet, even though this change in my stance toward their talk changed (from how they talked to what they said), I am not sure that I wish I had asked different questions. From the initial stages of this project, I intended this project to be a beginning: the start of a conversation about thinking about the various literacy practices of teachers (much like we in secondary ELA think about the literacy practices of adolescents). Although I wished I had structured May's one-on-one conversation differently (by asking her a question about changes in cultural consumption before having her talk through her artifact list), that change was not something I could have known until I did that interview (but, it was a change I made for the conversations with Summer and April). Additionally, as previously mentioned, there are a number of directions I could have taken with the teachers' talk and there is a wealth of talk for me to consider in the future. While I was looking for the themes the teachers mentioned to occur and re-occur, this does not limit the scope of what happened or could still happen. This dissertation – the following chapters – reflect the way I wrote, rewrote, reflected, considered, and interpreted during a specific time, space, and place.

Knowing

"[Thoughtful] action [is] action full of thought and thought full of action"
(Van Manen, 1990, p. 159).

To say that I learned about myself as a researcher/scholar, or that I learned about the research process, seems to be such a gross understatement. And yet, stating what I learned is a difficult task. As I mentioned in the previous section, I think I did begin this project looking for something specific, possibly even looking for an "answer" to the apparent gap between what pre-service teachers say about the relationship between popular culture and secondary ELA and what those same teachers say about popular culture when they are novice teachers. However, that is not what this project turned out to be, and for that I am surprised and extremely grateful. While Van Manen's (1990) human science (hermeneutical phenomenology) methodology in addition to Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative inquiry methodology helped guide my thinking and helped structure this study, I learned that my work in this project is not firmly located in either one. Both methodologies offered a wealth of information and suggestions for thinking about "doing" research: about thinking, talking, and writing. And, to say that my thoughts were full of action and my actions were full of thought would seem another gross understatement: it took me two full years to see the project from start to finish. Those two years were filled with much thought.

I have mentioned multiple times now that this project is located in a specific time, space, and place. I am confident that when I return to Summer's, April's, and May's talk at a later time, space, and place, I will see differently. Yet, I feel confident in what this project is (and, I should mention, it has been read and approved by all three teachers) for now. I feel that I honored the recursive nature of thinking, reading, and

writing. I feel certain of the importance of talking about popular culture and secondary ELA. I feel sure that what these three teachers say about popular culture can have, and will have, an effect on the field of secondary ELA and English teacher education.

CHAPTER THREE

Texts of Culture: Art or Entertainment

> "The traditional way of treating the popular arts has been in effect to deny that they are arts at all, or at least not arts in the same sense as the high arts" (Cawelti, 2004, p. 14).

PREAMBLE: ART vs. ENTERTAINMENT

It was a warm day in mid-June when Summer and I met for our one-on-one interview at a local bookstore cafe. Summer, a grade 10 and 11 ELA teacher at a mid-sized suburban school near a large state university, had just finished her second year of teaching and was preparing to move to another state and her third school in as many years. We were wrapping up our conversation about the similarities and differences between art and entertainment, during which Summer often jumped back and forth between personal and professional examples of her use of popular culture texts. Finally, Summer summed up our conversation by saying,

> I think I'm conflicted about [popular culture] especially when I think about using it in my classroom...I love the idea of having something to bring into my classroom that my students can relate to and make connections across modern, and, you know, more canonical texts, depending on what I'm teaching...Basically, and when I say that I'm conflicted about pop culture, again, it's like how much *value* does it really have? And, and that's a question I have. I have doubts about it. But yet I feel like I'm in a position where I often have to defend my use of it even though I too stand on the other side of the argument sometimes (Interview, 2008, 1:05:44, emphasis added).

Summer's tension – the tension of simultaneously wanting to include texts with which students are familiar and wondering about the academic value of such texts – is a tension that pervades the literature written about using popular culture texts in secondary ELA. Recent research on the purposes of using popular culture texts in secondary ELA has referenced the tension many teachers feel regarding the value of study of popular culture texts (Allendar, 2004, Cawelti, 2004, Morrell, 2002), suggesting that in secondary ELA there remains both an implicit and explicit notion of cultural

hierarchy that privileges certain texts for study. Cawelti (2004) explains, "Canons are a way of dealing with the fundamental distinction between what might be called the culture of the immediate present and the culture of permanence" (p. 126) – the culture of permanence being that which is valued and placed at the top of a cultural hierarchy and, therefore, worthy of study. Or, in Summer's words, it seems that certain texts have more "value" than others. Whereas the research on popular culture in secondary ELA has prompted NCTE position papers (NCTE, 2008), NCTE standards (IRA/NCTE, 1996), and research on changes in multiliteracies knowledge and skills (Gee, 1996; New London Group, 1996), few studies have remarked on how the notion of a cultural hierarchy circulates in secondary ELA teachers' conceptualization of art and popular culture.

This chapter explores how the notions of hierarchy and compartmentalization were invoked in one English teacher's discussion of her personal experiences with artistic and cultural texts, and how this aesthetic commitment, articulated with a discussion of her use of popular culture in her teaching, was strongly influenced by her aesthetic ideas of originality and creativity. The chapter is organized in three parts. Overall, I use group interview transcripts, one-on-one interview transcripts, a survey, and correspondences to analyze Summer's approaches to art and popular culture. In the first section, I use Storey's (2003) notion of a cultural hierarchy and Cawelti's (2004) theorization of invention and convention to inquire into Summer's articulation of her views and values of cultural texts and artifacts, specifically her articulation of a definition of art as original and creative. In the second part, using Benjamin's (1969/2001) exploration of aura, I explore Summer's talk about art as something that is valued and appreciated. In the third part, I focus on Summer's distinction between art and

entertainment[7] as it pertains to specific personal and professional use. Finally, I conclude the chapter by drawing connections between Summer's talk and the theoretical concepts of Storey (2003), Benjamin (1969/2001), and Cawelti (2004). The analysis in this chapter will show how Summer, even in the midst of complicated ideas about art and popular culture, mobilized theorizations of cultural hierarchy, aura, and invention and convention as she talked about her definition(s) and description(s) of popular culture in relation to her views of and interactions with cultural texts both in and out of the classroom.

As Summer questioned the value of popular culture texts ("...how much value does it really have?"), it seemed that what she was questioning was the artistic value of popular texts. Storey's (2003) notion of a cultural hierarchy helps us to glean insight into Summer's comment when he elucidates his idea that a hierarchical idea of culture – a conceptualization of popular culture – was "invented" by middle class intellectuals in the late eighteenth century. He explains that, while popular culture can be found much earlier, it is not named or described as such until the second half of the eighteenth century (p. xi). Making clear the myriad ways popular culture has been subject to high culture, Storey (ibid.) writes,

> [The] efforts of urban elites [and middle class intellectuals built] organizational forms that, first, isolated high culture and second, differentiated it from popular culture...[and by these] practices of classification...put into social circulation clearly defined boundaries between entertainment and art (the legitimation of these boundaries articulating social class to culture) (pp. 32-33).

Although the idea of a cultural hierarchy is not a new idea (see also Berger, 1972; Dewey, 1934), what Storey offers here is one way to think about how a differentiation between high culture and popular culture possibly came to be. That is, the notion of a differentiation that isolated high culture from popular culture as a move made by urban

[7] During our conversation, Summer uses both "entertainment" and "popular (pop) culture" to refer to the texts from the realm of popular culture.

elites and middle class intellectuals offers a way to think about Summer's feelings of conflict ("I think I'm conflicted...how much value [do popular culture texts] really have?") when it comes to interacting with popular culture. What Summer seemed to be negotiating at the time of our conversation was a tension of differentiation, classification, and compartmentalization of cultural artifacts – a move made by a group intent on separating the classes (Storey, 2003). Such differentiation both implicitly and explicitly places pedagogical value on certain texts, a placement that causes Summer tension as she negotiates and navigates her own valuation of cultural texts and artifacts.

This notion of a cultural hierarchy explicitly stated by Storey (2003) and implied by Summer (2008) also seems to mobilize Benjamin's (1969/2001) exploration of aura. As Summer questioned the value of certain artifacts, she questions the artistic aura – the aesthetic value – of those texts. In negotiating the tension of the value of texts, Summer navigates similar concepts to those Benjamin (ibid.) describes as, "the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*, that is...a theology of art [that] gave rise to...the idea of 'pure' art..." (p. 53). As Benjamin explores aura in relation to tradition, ritual, reproduction, and art – as he explores ideas about what is connected to "'pure' art" – he seems to foreshadow Summer's questions about the differences between entertainment (popular culture) and art. As she questioned the value of artifacts during our conversation, as she tried to classify and compartmentalize texts, Summer both implicitly and explicitly considered ideas of purity within popular culture and art. Summer, like Benjamin, talked about the idea of the purity – the aura – of art, and through this examination, attempted to place artifacts along a supposed cultural hierarchy.

While Storey (2003) and Benjamin (1969/2001) can help us understand how Summer feels the need to classify and compartmentalize texts and artifacts, Cawelti (2004) can help us understand Summer's negotiation and navigation of artistic artifacts by offering insight into her tension in placing value on certain texts and withholding

value from other texts. Cawelti (ibid.) explains the difference between conventions and inventions:

> Conventions are elements that are known to both the creator and his [sic] audience beforehand – they consist of things like favorite plots, stereotyped characters, accepted ideas, commonly known metaphors, and other linguistic devices, etc. Inventions, on the other hand, are elements that are uniquely imagined by the creator, such as new kinds of characters, ideas or linguistic forms...Conventions represent familiar shared images and meanings and they assert an ongoing continuity of values; inventions confront us with a new perception or meaning that we have not realized before...Conventions help maintain a culture's stability while inventions help it respond to changing circumstances and provide new information about the world...In consequence, while public communications have become increasingly conventional in order to be understood by an extremely broad and diverse audience, the intellectual elites have placed ever higher valuation on invention out of a sense that rapid cultural changes require continually new perceptions of the world (pp. 6-7).

An important distinction for Cawelti (ibid.) is that between the elements of convention ("elements known both to the creator and his [sic] audience") that offer familiarity and stability, and the elements of invention ("uniquely imagined" elements) that offer uniqueness and new perceptions. Cawelti's (ibid.) ideas about invention can help us inquire into Summer's ideas about the value of certain texts by explaining how invention came to be valued by intellectual elites – the same group Storey (2003) cites as "inventing" popular culture. At the same time, the distinction between convention and invention, as Cawelti (ibid.) explains it, will add insight as we delve into Summer's negotiation and navigation of the value of artistic artifacts and the perceived cultural hierarchy. As Summer attempts to place artifacts along a cultural hierarchy by classifying them according to aura, Cawelti's (ibid.) distinction between convention and invention will offer language and insight to our inquiry.

Summer, during our conversation, reflected a negotiation and navigation of the tension of placing value on certain cultural artifacts while withholding value from others. Summer's tension seemed to be based largely on her views and values of art and artistic artifacts, and seemed to be based on a perceived hierarchy of cultural texts and

artifacts. That is, as Summer talked, it seemed that she placed some artifacts higher than others on a perceived cultural hierarchy. At the same time, however, Summer recognized the value of using popular culture texts in her classroom. Thus, while she seemed to recognize and value high culture, to an extent she also recognized and valued popular culture. This tension that Summer mentioned between the texts of high culture and the texts of popular culture, then, seemed to influence her pedagogical decisions.

PART ONE: ART – ORIGINAL and CREATIVE

"If it's on…on a post-it note and it's scribbled in pencil,
I still would consider it art"
(Summer, Interview, 2008, 0:51:35).

As Summer talked about the possible role of popular culture texts within secondary ELA as well as the role of popular culture in her personal life, she talked about her conceptualization of art and artifacts that she would label as "artistic". As she began to think, and talk, about art, I posed a thought based on a comment she made about the popular culture artifacts all three participants brought during the first focus group interview. At that time, Summer said, "Some of [the artifacts] are imitation…A lot of them are imitation" (FG1, 2008, 0:40:38). Thus, to begin our one-on-one conversation, I asked, "What do you think when I say the phrases 'Art vs. Imitation' or 'Art vs. Interpretation'?" Without hesitation, Summer responded:

> [During a university Literature course in 2005 was] the first time the idea had been put into my head that sometimes we are imitating things when we're calling it art …Um, I guess one of the first things that comes to my mind right now, just now that I'm out of the context of that conversation, is when I think about stories [literature] in terms of similar plots, um, I can sense that there is that connection between imitation and art…[S]o, when you think about that, on one hand, sure, it makes interpreting literature a lot easier because you're looking for similar archetypes and stereotypes and things like that. On the other hand, it makes you think about how…it made me kind of disheartened to think that maybe we're not all that original when we write things or when authors write things, um, maybe these are all sort of ideas where you steal from yourself, you steal from

> someone else, but originality, you know, and creativity are just a matter of building on someone else's ideas...(Interview, 2008, 0:13:50)

While Summer alluded to her appreciation of originality and creativity and to her consideration of those qualities to be necessary characteristics of an artistic artifact, in college she learned that these qualities of art seem to be – at least in literature – absent, or at a minimum, base, because of the tendency to imitate, to build on, or to steal from someone else's work. Summer learned that if there are no truly original plot lines or stories – if all stories have similar plots that have been borrowed from other stories or from other authors – then literature lacks originality and creativity. What was traditionally presented to Summer as "original" and "creative" was not actually original or creative at all because of imitation. From one point of view, what she accepted as "real" (Benjamin's [1969/2001] "pure") art is not original and creative after all. And, while in a secondary ELA classroom interpreting literature is made easier with the knowledge of basic, or repeated, plot lines as well as made easier with the knowledge of simple story formula, what offers ease of interpretation does not offer originality and creativity.

As we consider Summer's talk, Cawelti's (2004) differentiation between convention and invention offers language and insight into her negotiation of imitation and originality. That is, Cawelti's (ibid.) convention is similar to the imitation and repetition of plot lines that Summer learned about as an undergraduate; invention is similar to the originality and creativity that she values. What Summer values is the originality of invention – she values unique elements – but what she learns in a university literature course (that there exists the possibility of a lack of originality and creativity in literature because of the convention of imitation) disheartens and dissuades her by discouraging her understanding of, and definition of, art. What, at one time, she accepted as art has been presented to her as no more than convention: repeated elements, accepted ideas, and commonly known linguistic devices. What offers formula

and ease of interpretation through convention does not offer characteristics and qualities of art and invention, the characteristics that, for Summer, often determine whether or not a text is considered valuable and, therefore, worthy of study. Yet, even as Summer stated her value of things original and creative, as she used the labels of "imitation" and "interpretation" to try to classify and compartmentalize artistic artifacts, and as she tried to differentiate between that which is convention and that which is invention, she exhibited complicated thinking.

One of the tensions Summer faced as she talked about imitation, interpretation, originality and creativity arose when she tried to be specific about the texts that she placed lower in the hierarchy, the texts and artifacts that she considered to be imitations (conventions). While she said that she has a broad definition of art ("If it's on...on a post-it note and it's scribbled in pencil, I still would consider it art."), when Summer used the term "imitation," she referred to those texts that use convention, what Cawelti (2004) explains as, "elements that are known...beforehand... accepted ideas, commonly known metaphors, and...familiar shared images and meanings..." (p. 7). For example, the way (an imitative way) in which students are taught to write the research paper is problematic for Summer. She said,

> I feel like what happens is you take a freshman who comes out of their eighth grade where they wrote creatively and then you slap the creativity out of them. And you say, 'Don't use "I"; don't use "you"; no being verbs; intro. has to have your thesis; and it has to look like this...' And you give 'em just this formula and then they spend the next two or three years trying to fill it in so they can take their junior year test, and then their senior year you're like, 'Oh, yeah, your professors are going to allow you a little bit more flexibility here, but not so much here...' And then you teach 'em to write differently their senior year then you did all along (FG2, 2008, 0:32:22).

In secondary ELA, when teachers begin to prepare students to write the research paper (five-paragraph essay), they typically resort to the use of conventions ("And you say, 'Don't use "I"; don't use "you"; no being verbs...") – a pedagogical move similar to that of teaching convention in order to interpret literature – which, as Summer mentions,

slaps the creativity (invention) out of students. So, the awareness of the convention of repeated plot lines – or the awareness of imitation in literature – which is so helpful in interpreting literature, seems to be a similar formula to the one that serves to "slap the creativity" out of students when it comes to their own academic writing. Although Summer exhibits her tension between invention and convention even while she is explicit in her value of creativity, as a secondary ELA teacher she relies on convention. That is, even as she values creativity in student writing, she teaches the conventional academic writing of secondary English (Teaching Artifact, 2008). For Summer, there is tension, then, between convention and invention. She values the originality and creativity of invention, but as a secondary English teacher she values the pedagogical use(s) of convention.

As Summer continued to talk about imitation and formula – invention and convention – she also talked about the idea of interpretation. Not only did Summer try to differentiate between imitation and interpretation, but also, without being explicit, she tried to differentiate between the act of interpreting (an act made easier with knowledge of story formula) and *an* interpretation. She said,

> [Again], it's the idea of interpretation. I mean, you can look at a flower and paint it and every person in a room who paints it is going to make it look different. But, I think the same can be said of writing as well because everybody who describes the flower might describe it a little bit differently...I feel like the originality and creativity do exist more when I think of it terms of interpretation. And what...I just don't like the word 'imitation'. Maybe, I don't know if there was another word that meant the same thing, but when I think about imitating something I think about somebody who's...it's like copying. And I don't ever think of a copy as being as high of value or worth as the original (Interview, 2008, 0:17:15).

In this excerpt, Summer continues to explain the manner in which she values originality and creativity by explaining that interpretation can include originality and creativity, but imitation cannot because it is so similar to copying. However, an interesting turn in this excerpt is not only how quickly Summer introduces a new use of "interpretation"

(moving from using the word to describe the act of explaining something, to using the word to describe a representation of a creative work), but also how quickly she distinguishes between imitation and interpretation. For Summer, an interpretation – a representation of a creative work – includes originality and creativity in a way that an imitation does not. Because for her an imitation feels too similar to a copy that would not include originality and creativity, an interpretation feels a bit closer to "art" because of the possibility of originality and creativity. Thus, an imitation would not be considered "art" because of the lack of originality and creativity, but an interpretation *could be* considered art because it does not hold the same quality of "copying" that an imitation would hold. Yet, even in a somewhat lengthy differentiation between imitation and interpretation, the characteristics of artistic artifacts that Summer continually references are originality and creativity. Even though she acknowledges that convention may have a place in art and literature, she values the originality and creativity of invention.

The manner in which Summer values originality and creativity is apparent in the lessons she designs and teaches. For example, in describing a lesson she taught during a unit on terror and horror, she discussed using the film *Secret Window* (Koepp, 2004)[8] with short stories written by Edgar Alan Poe. She said, "But that [lesson] was just kind of my own creation. And, and honestly, in retrospect, [that was one of the] two things [lessons] that I feel were really original and creative that I will use again out of what I did because they were my ideas" (FG2, 2008, 0:25:57). While Summer referenced this lesson because it was a lesson, and unit, in which she used popular culture in conjunction with canonical texts, the interesting thing is that she describes her excitement of, and value of, the lesson because it was "really original and creative." And, therefore, she wants to use the idea again. Part of what makes the lesson

[8] *Secret Window* (Koepp, 2004) is a thriller based on Steven King's (1990) novella of the same name from the collection *Four Past Midnight: Secret Window, Secret Garden.* Johnny Depp plays the main character, a writer accused of plagiarism.

valuable (original and creative) is that it was not an imitation or an interpretation – she thought of the idea of using a popular culture text with a canonical author and designed the lesson without input from an outside person or source. Summer values the lesson because of the invention, the originality and creativity, of her idea. She values the lesson because she invented it herself.

And yet, to further complicate her thinking, as a secondary ELA teacher she still values – in a complex way – interpretation. She said,

> [I]t's easier to teach the canonical stuff because there are resources for it, because it's old enough that so many other people have taught it; there's so much interpretation already in existence, articles written, and...Even if you don't use Spark Notes[9] or other teachers' resources, you can still read editorial reviews of these texts. Everything in pop culture is so recent that you don't know even if there is a reviewer and you don't know if it's somebody's blog or some writer for *The Onion*[10] or somebody of any reliability at all. So...because there is so little already out there...interpreted about these texts that the students are forced to do more of it themselves. So that could be the benefit... You start a discussion and it's an original discussion. It's not the same discussion that [all 11th graders are having about *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925)] 'cause really when it comes down to it I think the discussions end up being pretty similar unless you put them against another pop culture piece, then your discussion changes... Maybe pop culture changes the way we even talk about canonical texts (FG2, 2008, 0:37:22).

Once again, the manner in which Summer talks about valuing original writing and discussion in her classroom is evident and echoes Callahan and Low's (2004) statement that, "[Popular] culture can become a site where the intersection of student and teacher expertise results in genuine dialogue, a dialogue that holds potential..." (p. 55). Summer mentions that the lack of interpretation or resources for popular culture texts could possibly spark a genuine ("original") classroom discussion that would entail the invention that she values. However, Summer showed complicated thinking in that while she strongly values originality and creativity, she talks about how both

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[9] According to Wikipedia, "SparkNotes, originally part of a website called The Spark, is a company started by Sam Yagan, Max Krohn, Chris Coyne, and Eli Bolotin in 1999 [which provides] study guides for literature, poetry, history, film and philosophy. There is no charge for use; the site uses advertising for revenue. Barnes & Noble acquired SparkNotes.com in 2001."
[10] *The Onion* is an on-line and print news organization that publishes satirical news stories.

interpretation and imitation (both convention) can offer a path to originality. She begins the excerpt by saying that she prefers the ease of using the interpretations available with canonical texts ("there are resources"). Yet, using texts that she would label as imitations (popular culture – texts she questions as having value), which lack previous interpretation by others, could serve as the catalyst for an original discussion. Originality and creativity are still key, whether in literature, writing, or discussion, but describing and defining them are complicated and complex. As Summer continued to attempt to describe and detail a definition both of art and popular culture by differentiating art and imitation, she continued to reflect the tension of the hierarchical debate regarding cultural artifacts. While the originality and creativity of invention are key elements for Summer, and while she uses those elements to classify some texts as worth more than others, the imitation and interpretation of convention offer complication.

As Summer talked about the characteristics and qualities of artistic artifacts – as she continued talking about imitation, interpretation, originality, and creativity – her thoughts continued to be multifarious and multifaceted. For example, when thinking about the very first artistic artifact of any genre – like the very first vase historically made – the characteristics of art, and the difference between imitation and interpretation, become less clear for Summer:

> ...so everything [all artistic artifacts] could be labeled an imitation [because there always is a 'first']...But the other thing I think about is the fact that sometimes, um, they [artistic artifacts] become so much more accessible to us because everybody can now go out and purchase a vase; everybody can go get a painting, um, everybody has access to everything; now that we have that does that mean that, you know, when everybody has it is it still as valuable? Or if you have that one-of-a-kind thing do you hold all the power? Do you have all the value (Interview, 2008, 0:20:35)?

While thinking through her ideas about imitation and interpretation, Summer realizes that technically, all subsequent artifacts of the first – or, the original – are imitations, in a sense, of the that first (original) artifact. Everything, then, could be considered either an

imitation or an interpretation. Berger (1972) might say that Summer would be, "One [who] might argue that all reproductions more or less distort, and that therefore the original...is still in a sense unique" (p. 20). For instance, following Summer's example of a vase, there was a time when vases were "invented" and each vase since then could be considered an "imitation", thus the original is still unique. Every subsequent vase is missing something inherent in the original vase. Benjamin (1969/2001) comments on the decay of aura when he writes, "Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction...To pry an object from its shell [is] to destroy its aura" (p. 52). Echoing back to Benjamin and Berger, and the idea that reproduction destroys aura, Summer's talk reflects both the notion that there is something valuable in an original artifact and that there is something lost in reproduction and increased access. When talking about artistic artifacts and attempting to describe and differentiate between imitation and interpretation, it is clear that Summer values originality and creativity – concepts that not only are difficult to depict, but also are difficult to define.

What Summer does not mention during our one-on-one conversation is how this view of originality, creativity and accessibility influences her views of secondary ELA and, specifically, the canon. That is, the texts that make up the canon have a degree of reproduction and access within secondary ELA, which may make them less valuable in Summer's estimation. However, she does not comment on this. Still, while she seemed to be creeping toward a way to consistently classify and categorize artifacts, as Summer thought and talked more, the labeling of which texts would or would not be considered artistic, how those texts would be placed along a hierarchical continuum, in addition to defining original and creative, proved to be difficult tasks. As Summer seemed to consistently reflect a hierarchical view of artistic artifacts, distinguishing between an imitation and an interpretation in addition to discussing value and access,

she also seemed to reflect tension in her thinking about art (high culture) and entertainment (popular culture). Even as she attempted to classify and compartmentalize, as our conversation progressed her thinking continued to be complicated and complex.

PART TWO: ORIGINAL and CREATIVE ART – THE MOVE to VALUE and APPRECIATION

"Art is harder to define than a text"
(Summer, Interview, 0:51:57).

The tension between originality and interpretation – between invention and convention – was not the only aesthetic concept that Summer navigated and negotiated during the time we spent talking. Another feature pertaining to artistic judgments that she verbalized was the degree to which artifacts were valued and appreciated, or what characteristics other than originality and creativity she considered as she attempted to classify and compartmentalize. In this section, I continue using Benjamin's (1969/2001) idea of aura to inquire into Summer's talk in addition to using Cawelti's (2004) theorization of popular culture to explore her thoughts about artistic value and appreciation. Specifically, I draw on Cawelti's (ibid.) previously stated idea that, "The traditional way of treating the popular arts has been in effect to deny that they are arts at all, or at least not arts in the same sense as the high arts...arts dedicated to higher purposes [that is, high art] are opposed to [popular] arts that have simple pleasure or an appeal to the baser emotions as their primary goal" (pp. 14-15). Like the way Cawelti (ibid.) adds to Storey's (2003) idea of a hierarchy of artistic artifacts by commenting on the difference in appreciation between the high arts that "have simple pleasure" and the popular arts that "appeal to the baser emotions", he adds insight to the tension that Summer navigates in that she questions the purpose of entertainment, or popular culture, while at the same time questioning an appreciation of art, or high culture.

As Summer verbalized the possible differences between artifacts that could, or would, be labeled as high culture and those that could, or would, be labeled as popular culture (and, according to Cawelti [2004], denied their artistic status) by discussing imitation, interpretation, originality, creativity, and value, the idea of "purpose" was raised. By valuing invention (Cawelti, ibid.), the purpose for the invention also became an important deciding factor in applying the label of "art" in Summer's estimation. That is, as Summer attempted (albeit in a complicated way) to place artifacts along a hierarchical continuum, the purpose of the invention became a central element in locating those artifacts. As previously mentioned, in describing popular culture artifacts, she said,

> Some of [the popular culture artifacts] are imitation. // A lot of them are imitation. // Well, I mean, if you're gonna, if you're gonna, talk about it for what it is, like and we've talked a lot about texts, um // ...[They] could be [imitation] or interpretation // um, but I think...I mean, sometimes, sometimes if you're gonna talk about what the medium is, or the text, what, what, what purpose it serves...Like, I feel like there's always gonna be a difference for me between watching a play live or seeing a movie production. Like, watching it on screen...The play is real... (FG1, 2008, 0:40:38).

Through a description of popular culture artifacts as imitation ("A lot of them are imitation..."), Summer explains that what is "real" (art) for her is that which is created for a purpose that does not include imitation. "Real" implies art for art's sake or what Benjamin (1969/2001) calls, "the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*" (p. 53): "...there's always gonna be a difference for me...The play is real..." What is real is art for art's sake; what is real has a pure purpose because it serves a different purpose than that which is imitation or interpretation. Invention (originality and creativity), according to Summer, is real and includes an accepted purpose which, therefore, implies value; convention (imitation) is not real and does not include an accepted purpose and therefore does not have the same kind of value. In attempting to verbalize her conceptualization of an

artistic hierarchy, Summer adds the notion of purpose to her ideas of originality and creativity as she categorizes and classifies the artistic quality of artifacts.

Yet, even the addition of the concept of purpose did not help Summer assuage her aesthetic ideas. She continued to explain what she thinks about the importance of purpose as she talked about original (not imitations or interpretations) artifacts through distinguishing between artistic artifacts and (written) texts. She said,

> I would almost say that it's OK, like, I would, I would classify anything as art that fit into that sort of idea [the MAPS acronym: mode, audience, purpose, situation], but I would say the thing...of having the mode, audience, purpose, situation...when a piece has been created for a more pure purpose like that's more like grounded in emotion or initial expression not, not for the purpose of going on display, not for the purpose of being published, when it's more of a pure purpose, like, you know you've created it for that, that [trails off]...I think that's when a piece of art might have higher value, at least to me. Um, like if I'm thinking about, like if somebody were to compose a song for someone that they cared deeply about because they were in this serious relationship, and then I heard that song later in an, in a concert situation, you know, I would recognize that that song, I would appreciate that song because of it's original purpose. Whereas if a song was written just solely for an assembly, you know, 'We're all gonna to sing this same song together. This is a song we wrote 'cause this is our anthem, this is our theme song.' Then it doesn't, I don't know, it doesn't have as much value. It still has a purpose, it still has an audience, but the value changes (Interview, 2008, 0:55:15).

As Summer explained a type of heuristic for categorizing artifacts as either art or entertainment/popular culture, she differentiated between having *a* purpose and having *a pure* purpose. While she began to say that, like text, any artistic artifact has Mode, Audience, Purpose, and Situation, she shifted her stance a bit and instead said that to be art, an artifact needs a pure, or original, purpose (grounded in emotion, not for the purpose of display, not for the purpose of publishing, and not for the purposes of teaching anything). Although the MAPS (Mode, Audience, Purpose, Situation) acronym is a popular pedagogical tool secondary ELA teachers use to discuss texts and literature, here Summer discovers that the formula (convention) of the acronym may not be as helpful for talking about art (invention) because, for her, "pure purpose" – *l'art pour l'art* – is an essential quality and characteristic of art and, therefore, is a

determinate in the value of an artistic artifact. So, while a text or artifact often has been created with *a* purpose, the degree of purity in that purpose changes the value.

But describing and defining purpose was a difficult task for Summer. When I asked Summer to try to be specific in her explanation and in her examples of artifacts that she considers having a pure purpose, she responded by reflecting on the act of creating because the creator wants people to see it, or creating something for art's sake. She said,

> Um, I'm still thinking about the idea of whether or not you're doing something so that other people will see you do it, almost like when you give something to charity, like are you giving some money to charity because you deeply want to – that would be a pure purpose. Or, are you doing it because you think that the press will come and interview you about it. Then, to me, it's like no longer a pure [purpose]; it's impure (Interview, 2008, 0:56:29).

The "doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*" (Benjamin, 1969/2001, p. 52) permeates Summer's conceptualization of art and not only influences her view of the purpose the artifact serves (Cawelti's "simple pleasures" or "baser emotions"), but also influences her view of the purpose with which the artist/creator created the artifact. Summer furthers this idea when she said, "So, the purpose [of the creation of the artifact] would have to, have to be more pure than just, 'I want to put this out there so that 100,000 pairs of eyes can see it'...[because the market becomes saturated and] now [the artifact is] kind of like nothing special...So, it [the artifact] kind of lost its aura" (Interview, 2008, 0:22:00). If an artist were to create an artifact in order for that artifact to be seen by the masses, that artifact no longer has an artistic aura; it's moved from being art (high culture) to being entertainment (popular culture). And, in turn, the artifact would have less value than had it been created as *l'art pour l'art*.

Although Benjamin (1969/2001) was commenting on the relationship between aura and mechanical reproduction in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", his conceptualization of aura can help us as we examine

Summer's talk about the purpose(s) of art and entertainment. Benjamin (ibid.) writes, "[By] the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions..." (p. 53). Like Summer, Benjamin believes that if the purpose of an artifact is exhibition, or as Summer says, "...whether or not you're doing something so that other people will see you do it," then the artifact becomes something different. The work of art has "entirely new functions." For Summer, the purpose of the creation and the use of the artifacts is how the function changes. The purpose of exhibition moves the artifact from the category of art (high culture) to the category of entertainment (popular culture).

Summer continued to talk about the way in which she values the "pure purpose" of an artifact by referencing art for art's sake (*l'art pour l'art*) – art that does not have the audience in mind (not for display, not for publication), when she said,

> I think...things that are created for, for, art's sake that much more valuable again because you think sometimes, 'This person didn't have me in mind when they created this. Um, this came solely from his or her own imagination and, you know, I'm just fortunate enough to see it.'...I think the ones [writers] who, who did not write for an audience tended to be more creative, more, more like art (Interview, 2008, 0:46:22).

As an example of *l'art pour l'art*, Summer furthered her idea of purity of purpose by mentioning her idea of writers who did not write for an audience – writers who were more creative, artistic, and who had a pure purpose (because they were not writing for an audience) when creating their art. She compared Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), who wrote her poems in isolation with no intent of having them published or read by an audience, with William Shakespeare (1564-1616)[11] who wrote for a wide audience with every intention of having his work published or produced. Indeed, Summer believes,

[11] Both Emily Dickinson and William Shakespeare are canonical authors. Dickinson is offered included in poetry units as well as American Literature courses. Most secondary ELA students read two to three Shakespeare plays during their high school experience.

Dickinson wrote "for art's sake" and not for an audience which makes her art more valuable. Summer said,

> I'm not saying art, I'm saying value...I redefined that. I said it still could be art, but my, my understanding of its value would change...I mean, yeah, I still have quite an appreciation and I still would place high value on Shakespeare's art, but I wouldn't, I wouldn't think of it as high in terms of value as something that would have like a personal value to me. Or if I thought about like...I don't know, I almost, I almost would place more value on an Emily Dickinson original poem that was written in isolation without the audience in mind (Interview, 2008, 0:58:00).

As Summer processed her thoughts about art and revealed her broad definition of art (many things "still could be art"), her desire to place higher value on certain artifacts is simultaneously revealed. Even though her talk shows some complicated thought regarding a definition or description of "art," she continued to want to categorize, or classify, texts and artistic artifacts by explaining which artifacts hold more value. That is, while she is reluctant to withhold the label of "art" for some artifacts ("I'm not saying art, I'm saying value...I redefined that."), Summer still seemed to want to quantify and label the value of texts and artifacts based on her ideas of originality, creativity, and purpose: "I said it still could be art, but my, my understanding of its value would change." Thus, there are some artifacts that could be labeled as having value even though they would not be labeled as "art." Here, in Summer's talk, value – and, therefore, appreciation – is determined, in part, by the perceived purity of purpose in the creation of the artifact. Those artifacts created "for art's sake" – without an audience in mind – have more value than those artifacts created with an audience in mind. Those artifacts invented "for art's sake" are more original and creative because of the purity of purpose; therefore, those artifacts have more value.

In comparison to the value placed on Dickinson's poems and art, Summer discussed her withholding value for Shakespeare's work because of his reliance on – and hope for – an audience. She said:

> And in [Shakespeare's] case, I see him less as an artist and almost more as a public speaker. Like, he had a message that he wanted to deliver to the public almost like a preacher would. And, I don't necessarily think of sermons and public speaking...speeches and things as art, even though they, you know, can be appreciated. So...I don't think I want to define what I am saying...because what I don't want to say is that to be art something has to have, something can't have been created for an audience. I don't think that that's accurate to say that either. Um, but maybe things that are...I don't know; I'm contradicting myself, but...um, I mean maybe it's not art, maybe it has a similar value of appreciation. It can be appreciated in the way that art can be appreciated. Maybe it's not necessarily art. A speech by Martin Luther King, Jr. does not necessarily have to be art but it can be appreciated by an audience. A play by Shakespeare doesn't necessarily have to be art (Interview, 2008, 0:49:19).

Even as she recognized some contradiction in her thoughts and language ("I don't think that that's accurate to say that either...I don't know; I'm contradicting myself...") in considering "pure purpose" (*l'art pour l'art*) and examples of artifacts created for exhibition, an underlying idea for Summer was that of value and appreciation – concepts that seem to go hand-in-hand for her: "I mean maybe it's not art, maybe it has a similar value of appreciation. It can be appreciated in the way that art can be appreciated." In a way similar to saying that an artifact could have value even if it is not labeled as "art," here Summer is saying that an artifact can be appreciated even if "it's not necessarily [considered] art." Although she recognized some complexity in what she is trying to explain, and although she acknowledged that she does not want to be prescriptive in her talk, a hierarchical view of art continues to weave in and through her descriptions of artistic artifacts. While Summer values original and creative artifacts that were not created for an audience and therefore labels such artifacts as "art," when she began to think about appreciating artifacts, she faced uncertainty and contradiction. In this excerpt, Summer attempts to explain her position and perception of art by positing the possibility for various levels of appreciation within the label "art". As a result, she attempted to explain that some things (speeches and sermons) did not need to be labeled as art even though, traditionally, a number are. Instead, those artifacts could be appreciated in different ways than the artifacts labeled as "art". The value of texts,

according to Summer's talk, seems to be based on originality, creativity, purpose, and appreciation, the presence of which determines where those artifacts would fall along a cultural hierarchy. As she attempted to consistently apply her personal criteria for artistic artifacts (originality, creativity, purity of purpose, and appreciation), Summer not only used a cultural hierarchy to label artifacts, but also used the hierarchy to apply levels of appreciation.

When Summer started to recognize that artistic value and appreciation was further reaching and more complicated than she initially realized, she began to discuss how she determines the artifacts she appreciates and values by discussing originality, creativity, and purity of purpose. Although she tempered her ideas by saying that an artifact can be appreciated without being characterized as "art," it seems clear that for her, an artifact is appreciated and valued if, in addition to originality and creativity, it includes the pure purpose of not being created for an audience. That is, artistic artifacts – artifacts that could be labeled "art" or "high culture" – for Summer, are original and creative (not imitations or interpretations even though there is some originality and creativity in interpretation), result from pure purposes (*l'art pour l'art*), were not created for an audience (or for exhibition or publication), and can be valued and appreciated.

PART THREE: ORIGINAL, CREATIVE, and PURE ART – THE MOVE TO INSPIRATION

> "We're frustrated, I think, because we're conflicted. We know we want to use [popular culture] as a critical piece of literature, as something to discuss and bring more to the class. And, on the other hand, we're also using it as a survival technique" (Summer, FG2, 2008, 1:15:50).

Given Summer's talk about art, and given the manner in which she seemed to want to categorize artifacts along a hierarchical continuum, one might assume that she would not recognize or use popular culture texts in her classroom because she would not classify those texts as art or high culture. However, when I asked Summer to list

the texts that she uses in her classroom that would fall under the category of "popular culture", I was amazed at how long the list actually was. The list included films like *Good Night, and Good Luck* (Clooney, 2005), *The Crucible* (Hytner, 1996), *Secret Window* (Koepp, 2004), episodes of the television show *The Simpsons* (Groening, 1989), the social networking site MySpace, and artifacts like bumper stickers. A list of texts, I should mention that includes only one adaptation of a canonical text. That is to say, Summer listed popular culture texts that were not film or television adaptations of canonical texts; she instead listed popular culture texts that were similar in theme or idea to canonical texts. Such a usage of popular culture texts is not often seen in recent literature on popular culture in secondary ELA (see Chapter 1). Yet, even though she used a number of popular culture texts in her classroom, Summer's ideas about a cultural hierarchy continued. She said, "We [secondary ELA teachers] know we want to use [popular culture] as a critical piece of literature, as something to discuss and bring more to the class. And, on the other hand, we're also using it as a survival technique" (ibid.). That is, even though in this excerpt Summer talked about wanting to use popular culture texts as critical pieces of literature, often, in reality, those popular texts are, and were, only used as survival techniques (e.g., "movie days"). Thus, although Summer talked about using popular culture texts in her classroom in more progressive ways than the literature discusses, she continued to value the high culture of the canon over popular culture. The classical texts of the canon continued to hold a higher place along the hierarchy (as critical pieces of literature) than the texts of popular culture.

Based on the manner in which Summer talked about the idea of art (high culture) versus entertainment (popular culture) during our conversation, I have wondered since that time whether or not there was a level of confidence she felt about her conceptualizations of high culture and popular culture as she began to speak that

waned as she continued to speak. Specifically, as our one-on-one conversation shifted in focus from a general discussion of high culture to a specific discussion of popular culture, she recognized more quickly some of the complexity in her talk even though quite a bit of consistency could also be seen. As an example of consistency, when I directly asked her, "Do you consider popular culture as art?" she said,

> I hate to say it, but I don't think I do...I think things that are valuable take time to create, and rest on pure emotions and pure messages...You have so much help [today in creating popular culture artifacts]...you can access things so much easier...I feel like there's a lot more help involved today. Things aren't as pure as...[and don't] involve as much skill... (Interview, 2008, 1:00:00).

In this excerpt, Summer is quite clear and consistent in defining and describing the difference between art (high art) and popular culture. In popular culture, Summer does not see the purity of purpose, originality, or creativity that she values so highly in art. She continued this consistency of thought by saying, "...I think about reality TV, and I just don't see that...there's...a lot of ingenuity there. I don't see that as being very innovative...maybe it's innovative, but I don't, I don't see it as being very creative" (Interview, 2008, 1:05:44). As Summer talked about the differences she sees between art (high culture) and popular culture, she was able to apply the ideas that she discussed as valuable in her conceptualization of art; she does not consider popular culture texts as art because there is a lack of originality, creativity and purity of purpose. She withholds labeling popular culture artifacts as valuable because of this lack.

Yet, the more she talked about the difference between art and popular culture, complexity and complication again were reflected. Summer later said, "I guess I see those two [art and popular culture] as different because the purpose is different. When I view art, I'm not necessarily looking to be entertained. I'm maybe looking more for an appreciation. But, at the same time, I can see the loophole" (Interview, 2008, 0:28:20). While the idea of appreciation is a consistent idea (based on originality, creativity, and purity of purpose), what offers complication in this excerpt is the purpose of the

viewer/consumer. For Summer, an artistic artifact needs to be created with a pure purpose in order to be considered as art, but here she adds that for an artifact to be categorized as art, the viewer needs to approach it for appreciation and not for entertainment. Summer implies that a viewer/consumer approaches popular culture only for the purposes of entertainment. Although the idea of purity of purpose and appreciation is consistent in Summer's talk, the addition of the motive of the viewer adds a new twist and a bit of complexity. And, this is where complication occurs; this is where Summer recognizes and acknowledges a loophole. In acknowledging a "loophole", Summer implies that both artistic and popular artifacts can be viewed for both entertainment and appreciation. While Summer began the excerpt explaining that only artistic artifacts can be viewed for appreciation, as she continued talking, she seemed to realize that both art and popular culture can be viewed for both appreciation and entertainment. The loophole that she acknowledges adds complication in her talk.

After her acknowledgement of this self-described loophole, I pushed Summer to define and describe what she was thinking. As Summer responded, she talked about her personal response as a viewer and consumer of both artistic and popular culture artifacts, about the type of art that she values, and about her response to that art. She said,

> [When] I see something that's obscure, then I feel like it's more original. And, it's something I might be able to duplicate in which case then maybe I could be more creative. I don't look at a, at a, painting by Monet or, um, or Picasso and think, 'I could do that.' But I might be able to look at something made out of a very strange material and think, 'Oh, yeah, I could put that together, or something like it.' And then it would be original. Maybe, maybe it's the idea that, maybe it comes back to the fact that it's something I could, I could imitate and then, therefore be more original (Interview, 2008, 0:33:15).

In this excerpt, Summer repeats her value of the artistic qualities of originality, creativity, and appreciation. And yet, she also complicates those ideas by saying that, based on a level of obscurity, what inspires her toward creativity is the possibility of imitation – an

idea that she earlier said was the opposite of originality and creativity. Benjamin (1969/2001) offers insight to Summer's talk when he writes, "A man [sic] who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it...In contrast, the distracted mass absorbs the work of art" (p. 62). That is to say, art that causes Summer to concentrate before it is obscure art – art that leads her to want to imitate and create. In contrast, commonly seen art (including, Summer mentions, Monet, Picasso, and popular culture) does not cause her to concentrate, and as a result, she simply absorbs those works. There is no reciprocity.

However, Summer's talk is complicated in that she implies that what inspires her toward creativity, even if that creativity is imitation, can be considered as art even though imitation in itself, she previously mentioned, is not a characteristic of art. Similarly, as Summer continued talking about the idea of inspiration and discussed the purpose of the viewer, or the purpose with which one would approach an artistic artifact, she said, "You might be looking at a piece of art for inspiration...to create your own. You may watch a television show to look for ways to, um, to put that into your own life. I mean you might watch a circumstance on TV and then want to go duplicate that, which is possible, but I don't think that's why a lot of us do it [watch TV]...at least not consciously" (Interview, 2008, 0:28:49). In this excerpt, Summer acknowledged that one might watch TV for inspiration and appreciation, and although she explains that she does not think this happens often, she does recognize that it could happen. Television, like art, could inspire one to creativity. So, while Summer makes it clear that for her, high culture (art) inspires her toward creativity (including, I would argue, originality, purpose, and appreciation), in this excerpt, she recognizes that TV has some potential to inspire creativity in others. In turn, the lines for Summer's description of the difference between art (high culture) and popular culture become blurred – there are

more similarities, Summer acknowledges, between high culture and popular culture than she originally was willing to admit.

As Summer continued to talk both about her personal and her professional use of art and popular culture, her talk became more complicated. Even as her description and definition of art reflected some consistency in terms of originality, creativity, purpose, and appreciation, as she tried to be more specific about her definition, that consistency showed some complexity. When I asked Summer whether or not she watches television or movies for inspiration or appreciation, she responded, "I would say, 'Yes...' And what I'm gonna say is gonna be funny because I would say the types of things I would watch for the purpose of appreciation would be imitations [adaptations] of other texts. So, I might watch...*The Crucible* [Hytner, 1996] the video version because I want to see how artfully, um, or skillfully the director was able to imitate the piece that I'm familiar with" (Interview, 2008, 0:40:30). Here, as Summer characterized what she views for appreciation (a characteristic of art) she complicates her view by saying that what she appreciates are imitations (not a characteristic of art) of other texts. So, she would watch the film (popular culture) adaptation of a canonical text (art) in order to see how artfully the film was made. In saying, "...and what I'm gonna say is gonna be funny..." Summer acknowledged that she recognizes complication in her thinking. Although there is quite a bit of consistency in her conceptualization of art and popular culture, as she began to apply those ideas to her specific use of both art and popular culture, that conceptualization became complicated. She later explained,

> ...I try to appreciate each thing as its own text separate from...separate from the other. I mean, what kind of world would we live in if everything was a reproduction of everything else? If we read a comic book, um, story and then we went and saw a movie that was exactly like it. Would we be a satisfied public if that's what we saw? I don't think so. I mean, I think you have to have some variety or some interpretation...Maybe it takes interpretation to make a good imitation (Interview, 2008, 0:41:46).

As Summer consistently talked about the manner in which she values invention, the manner in which she talked about convention became increasingly complicated. At the beginning of our one-on-one conversation, Summer was quite clear in the disillusionment she found when she learned about convention and formula in literature. Again, in this excerpt, she reinforces this: "I mean, what kind of world would we live in if everything was a reproduction of everything else?" Yet, she proceeds to say that maybe what is needed is more interpretation and imitation ("Maybe it takes interpretation to make a good imitation."), characteristics that she previously mentioned would be used to classify artifacts as popular culture and not high culture (art).

ADDENDUM

As Summer and I concluded our conversation – as she acknowledged some complication in her talk – she also made an effort to mention that she tried to "play around" with bringing popular culture texts into her classroom as much as possible. However, Summer also later said that there is tension in this: "...then it's back and forth between pop culture texts that you want to incorporate and the more canonical stuff that you feel obligated to incorporate" (FG2, 2008, 0:25:57). While Summer, herself, experienced some difficulty in verbalizing consistent definitions of high culture (art) and popular culture during our conversation, she implies in this excerpt that a bit of that difficulty comes from obligation ("...[the] stuff that you feel obligated to incorporate."). Thus, the tension Summer experiences in navigating and negotiating her views and values of cultural texts continues. That is, even though Summer acknowledged some complication in her thinking about the similarities and differences between the texts of high culture and popular culture, as she recognized a sense of obligation, she implies that canonical texts remain higher on a cultural hierarchy than popular culture texts. With such a hierarchical view of cultural texts, Summer privileges a certain type of

knowing in her classroom. That is to say, her talk about popular culture seems to reflect that there is a type of knowing that is accessed only through canonical texts and that such knowing is what is valued in school.

In addition to an apparent value of knowledge accessed through canonical texts, Summer also mentioned that she often feels out of touch with popular culture, which adds difficulty in making decisions for what could be included in secondary ELA. She said,

> I feel like I probably am more [in touch with popular culture] than I give myself credit for. But, um, I guess I'd like to be more in touch with the pop culture of things that are not just on TV....I feel like [TV is] something I'm familiar with, I feel like I should probably spend a little bit more of my time digging around in a, in a bookstore, in a library. And, go reach out for some of the things that are a little less accessible but are also the things that are going to make me more intelligent, I think (Interview, 2008, 1:23:40)

In this chapter, Summer's talk offers insight into some of the difficulties secondary ELA teachers have in describing and defining the texts of high culture and the texts of popular culture. While Summer spoke explicitly about the value of invention (originality, creativity, purity of purpose, and appreciation), she also acknowledged some value of convention (Cawelti, 2004). As she talked about her recognition of loopholes in her talk, she also recognized the difficulty in deciding which popular culture texts to use in the secondary ELA classroom and how to use them. Thus, even though there is much recent research that argues for incorporating popular culture in secondary ELA, and even though some of that research acknowledges that teachers may encounter difficulties with such incorporation, there is little that closely examines what influence English teachers' views and values of cultural texts may have in such decision making. Summer's complicated talk about her personal and professional views and values of cultural texts can offer insight into this issue.

While Summer talks about a broad definition (or view) of art, her talk does not reflect that she shared that broad definition with her students. In addition, although she

used a number of popular texts in her classroom in interesting and innovative ways, those popular texts were used in service to the canonical, academic texts of traditional secondary ELA. As such, it seems that the content of Summer's classroom points to academic knowledge and not aesthetic conversations. And, as a result, critical conversations about art, entertainment, culture, and popular culture are missing – conversations that Summer had during her tenure at MSU and conversations that she had with me. It seems, then, that Summer resorted (resorts) to the traditional, canonical, academic content of secondary ELA at the expense of critical conversations about textuality, for example.

Although Summer talked about her tensions regarding the definition of art and culture, and although she talked about her pedagogical use of popular culture, what she did not talk about was the way in which her view of art influenced her pedagogical decisions. I assume, after listening to her talk, that the way she values high culture over popular culture has a great impact on her classroom. I assume that her view of academics has a great influence on her view of texts. That is to say, I assume that Summer's use of texts in her classroom is connected to her view of the university: If Summer assumes that a university degree is the goal, then it would follow that she would feel that there is certain content that she would want her students to "learn" to be successful in their tertiary education. And, given that her teaching tenure has occurred at schools where the majority of graduates go on to further education, Summer's assumption would make sense. In essence, Summer has not had to concern herself with students who are excluded from education: the majority of her students, like herself, come from positions of privilege (white and middle- or upper-class). As such, it makes some sense why Summer emphasizes texts from the realm of high culture. And, this, I think, is what Summer's talk has to offer the secondary ELA and English teacher education: personal and pedagogical views of high and popular culture probably

(potentially) have profound effects on pedagogical decisions.

CHAPTER FOUR

Consumers of Culture: The Implied Teacher

"In many ways [the pre-service teachers'] struggles with digital literacies were actually struggles with their sense of who they should be as teachers" (Lewis & Finders, 2007, p. 108).

"I'm such a hypocrite" (April, FG1, 2008).

PREAMBLE: THE ENGLISH TEACHER

After spending a windy and rainy afternoon observing April in her classroom, she and I got into my car, took a tour of the town in which her school is located, and headed to the local Starbucks to have our one-on-one conversation. April, in the midst of preparing for exam week, was anticipating finishing her second year as a grade 10 American Literature, grade 11 World Literature, and Speech teacher. At the same time, April, as a novice teacher, was still navigating and learning the bigger tensions of the district (i.e., rewriting curriculum to meet district and state standards) and the town (i.e., managing the impact of the economic downturn in a quaint suburb previously supported by a recently closed automotive factory). As she took time to think and reflect on her teaching during our conversation, April said,

> I feel like we're [English teachers] supposed to have access. Like, we're supposed to be the ones with that...that cultural capital. We're the ones who know the classics. We're the ones who know, um, that...that secret meaning, if you will, behind the words. Like, we're, we're the ones who know. To some degree it's our job...to give [students] that capital also. But, then, at the same time, I also recognize that that's leaving out a lot. And so that's where it becomes really hard to reconcile what that means... (Interview, 2008, 0:42:45).

This tension between access – of knowing "the classics...that secret meaning" – and what that perceived, proposed, access leaves out ("that's leaving a lot out") is a tension that appears, although appears infrequently, in the literature written about using popular culture texts in secondary ELA (Hunt & Hunt, 2004; Lewis & Finders, 2007). Specifically, this tension about access – the "secret meaning"...to "give" the students –

seems to be about the role of the English teacher. While, as mentioned in Chapter 3, recent research has referenced the tension that many teachers feel regarding the use of popular culture texts in secondary English, little of that research has addressed the tensions that secondary English teachers may face between their personal and professional uses of popular culture. That is, although in the previous chapter Summer talked about struggling with the tension of locating texts and artifacts along a cultural hierarchy, April, at the time of our interview, talked about struggling with the tension of locating herself in and amongst cultural texts.

To illustrate, in a discussion of the tension many English teachers face between personally enjoying popular culture and professionally teaching high culture (enjoying the "bottom" of the hierarchy and teaching the "top" of the hierarchy), Hunt and Hunt (2004) write, "Bud [a secondary ELA teacher] knew that teaching students about the world using familiar texts and cultural information [popular culture] was a strong way to engage them in the classroom and in a larger critical analysis of themselves and their culture, but he still felt like he was neglecting a piece of his job [the classics]" (p. 81). Like Bud Hunt, April seemed to have a sense of the potential of including texts from the category of "what gets left out" into her secondary ELA classroom. Yet, she struggled to "reconcile what that means." Whereas recent research on the purposes of using popular culture in ELA has referenced the tension teachers face regarding the aesthetic and pedagogical value of such texts, little of that research has explored the relationship between the proposed and suggested use of popular culture with the perceived or implied role of the secondary ELA teacher. That is, little research has explored how teachers use popular culture outside of the ELA classroom and whether or not that personal practice supports or hinders the use of popular culture in the classroom. Thus, although the research on popular culture and secondary ELA has encouraged secondary ELA teachers to include texts from the realm of popular culture in their

classrooms, there has been little written that suggests ways for teachers to explore their particular personal and professional stances toward popular culture and how those stances are influenced by the perceived role of the English teacher. In this chapter, I aim to explore how one secondary ELA teacher (April) negotiates and navigates the tensions between her personal and professional stances (definitions and descriptions) toward popular culture. That is, by exploring April's talk about culture, popular culture, and the role of the English teacher, we will have one more close analysis of one of the tensions secondary ELA teachers navigate as they consider the perceived role of the English teacher in relation to the proposed use of popular culture in the classroom.

This chapter explores how the conceptualizations of an ideology of mass culture and cultural capital were invoked in one English teacher's discussion of her personal and professional experiences (views and values of) with cultural texts and artifacts, and how these conceptualizations, articulated with a discussion of her use of popular culture in her teaching, was strongly influenced by her ideas of the secondary English teacher. The chapter, like the one before, is organized into three parts. Overall, I use group interview transcripts, one-on-one interview transcripts, a survey, and correspondences to analyze April's talk about culture and popular culture. In the first section, using Ien Ang's (1985/2006) explanation of an ideology of mass culture, I will examine what April says about her personal relationships and interactions with culture and popular culture and what this means for her view of the secondary ELA teacher. Ang (ibid.) explains, "In this [ideology of mass culture] some cultural forms...are *tout court* labeled 'bad mass culture'. 'Mass culture is a denigrating term, which arouses definitely negative associations... Ideologies...also enable people to form an image of themselves and thus to occupy a position in the world" (pp. 190-191). This first section will use Ang's notion of the ideology of mass culture to inquire into April's talk about the image of the secondary ELA teacher and what associations are aroused through that talk. In the

second section, in addition to continuing with Ang's idea of the ideology of mass culture and through Bourdieu's (1984/2006) conceptualization of cultural capital, I will explore April's talk about the role of the English teacher in navigating and negotiating both personal and professional approaches to popular culture. In particular, I will use the idea that, "[Bourdieu] asserted that cultural 'habits and dispositions' comprise a *resource* capable of generating 'profits'...and, under appropriate conditions...can be *transmitted* from one generation to the next" (Weininger & Lareau, 2007, np; emphasis in original). That is, the analysis will focus on April's verbalization of the tensions she faced, at the time of the interview, between the resources of cultural capital habits and dispositions she values professionally as an English teacher ("access", "secret meaning") and assumed the need to transmit to her students ("...[We're] the ones who know...it's our job to give them that capital..."), with the popular culture she valued personally. In the third part, again using both Ang's (1985/2006) notion of an ideology of mass culture and Bourdieu's (1984/2006) conceptualization of cultural capital, I will focus on April's specific comments on her teaching pedagogy and uses of popular culture in her classroom. Finally, the chapter concludes by reflecting on what insights April's talk about the image of the secondary English teacher, as well as her talk about her interactions with popular culture texts, can offer the field of English education. In particular, I will explore how April mobilized the ideology of mass culture and the notion of cultural capital as she talked about her definition(s) and description(s) of popular culture in relation to her views of and interactions with cultural texts both in and out of the classroom.

As April talked about that to which English teachers are "supposed to have access", or as she talked about secondary ELA teachers being the ones "to have access...the ones [with]...that secret meaning...the ones who know", she invoked the tension described in Ang's (1985/2006) conceptualization of the ideology of mass

culture. As Ang (ibid.) explains the ways in which "mass culture" is seen as a "denigrating term", she explains the ways in which, "an individual living in the ideology of mass culture may qualify him- or herself as, for example, 'a person of taste', 'a cultural expert' or 'someone who is not seduced by the cheap tricks of the commercial culture industry' (p. 191). April used this characterization of "a cultural expert" when she described English teachers as those "with that cultural capital", as those "who know the classics". Further, Ang (ibid.) writes, "Thus a dividing line is drawn by the ideology of mass culture between the 'person of taste', the 'cultural expert', etc., and those who, according to this ideology, are not such" (p. 191). As April talked about the "access", "secret meaning", or knowledge that she felt she should have as an English teacher, she reflected Ang's description. Yet, she also implied what is left out of that list of descriptors. Specifically, April reflected an image of the secondary ELA teacher as one who has access to the secret meaning(s) found in texts, which is also an image of a cultural expert, but as April said, "that's leaving out a lot...[and so] it becomes really hard to reconcile what that means..." In mentioning that which gets left out of a conversation about cultural capital, April implies a tension between an aesthetic and pedagogical view and use of texts and artifacts. In this chapter, I explore how, as April talked about her image of the secondary ELA teacher as a cultural expert, she simultaneously talked about how she did not feel that she fully fit this image because of the tension she was experiencing between her personal taste and her pedagogical beliefs.

Although similar to the idea of an ideology of mass culture in the way each notion touches on those cultural texts that get included and those that get discarded, the idea of cultural capital is the one that is most often used in current educational theory. While an ideology of mass culture is relegated to disciplines that study popular culture specifically (for example, Media Studies, Popular Culture Theory, or

Communications), cultural capital is a concept often used in Teacher Education – specifically in social foundations courses – as a way to discuss the gap or divide between students who are traditionally academically successful and those who are not. Bourdieu (1984/2006) writes, "[All] cultural practices (museum visits, concert-going, reading, etc.) and preferences in literature, painting or music, are closely linked to educational level (measured by qualifications or length of schooling) and secondarily to social origin" (p. 466). Cultural capital, then, is the notion that cultural knowledge – knowledge of cultural objects, their production, and their use – is linked both to educational access and attainment which influences social class location. Or, as Weininger and Lareau (2007) explain,

> Despite the fact that cultural capital is acquired in the home and the school via exposure to a given set of cultural practices – and therefore has a social origin – it is liable to be perceived as inborn 'talent,' and its holder 'gifted,' as a result of the fact that it is embodied in particular individuals. Moreover, because the school system transforms 'inherited' cultural capital into 'scholastic' cultural capital, the latter is predisposed to appear as an individual achievement... [According to Bourdieu] modern systems of schooling are far more adept at validating and augmenting cultural capital inherited from the family than they are at instilling it in children who enter the institution with few or none of the requisite dispositions and skills (np).

Similar to the manner in which April described secondary ELA teachers as "the ones with that cultural capital...the ones who know...[the ones whose] job [is] to give [students] that capital," Weininger and Lareau (ibid.) call attention to the complexity of cultural capital especially as it pertains to education. As April talked about the manner in which she navigates and negotiates her personal and professional relationship with cultural artifacts, she in turn explored the complexity in the relationship between cultural knowledge and skills with academic achievement. That is, she talked about the ways she navigates and negotiates the tensions between what she deems to be the role of the English teacher with her own personal interests and values. In particular, as she questioned the access to the secret meaning that she has, or is "supposed" to have as

a secondary ELA teacher, she also questioned what she wants to, or feels she needs to, pass on to her students. Even as April talked about a sense of the complexity of the "inherited" and "scholastic" forms cultural capital, she also talked about tension in knowing what to do with it. As stated earlier, for April, "it becomes really hard to reconcile what that means."

In a manner similar to Summer (see Chapter 3), April also seemed to encounter tension and conflict regarding her personal and professional value of cultural texts and artifacts. However, in a manner different from Summer, April's tension was based on what those apparently conflicting values meant for her as an English teacher. While Summer's tension was based on a perceived hierarchy of cultural texts and artifacts, April's tension was based on a perception of who she should be as a secondary ELA teacher who is supposed to have "access" to as well as the "secret meaning" of texts in order to give that cultural capital to her students. At the same time, however, April recognized that a lot gets left out of this particular view of texts. That is, while she seems to recognize and value cultural capital in secondary ELA, she also recognizes and values that which is not included in that cultural capital. In addition, as I will explore in this chapter, April's personal value of popular culture will add further complication. As April explored the idea of popular culture and culture during our conversation, she also delved into her perceptions of the image of a secondary ELA teacher.

PART ONE: THE BADGE OF LITERACY

> "But there's the part of me that wants to be the studious English teacher..."
> (April, Interview, 2008, 0:06:10).

> "[The] English teacher [is] supposed to connect students with the books, words, and ideas of faraway places and times"
> (Hunt & Hunt, 2004, p. 81).

> "Look at me with my Badge of Literacy"
> (April, Interview, 2008, 0:16:50).

When April and I began our one-on-one conversation, we began by talking about a comment she made during the first focal group interview about her interaction with, and consumption of, celebrity gossip. During that focal group conversation, she said, "I do have a little bit of a guilty conscience about the fact, that like, I'm perpetuating this voyeuristic society by putting my money into [celebrity gossip] on such a regular basis, but not guilty enough to not do it" (FG1, 2008, 0:26:13). When I began to analyze the first focal group interview, I repeatedly read and heard that excerpt as being about popular culture in general. But, as I continued to listen, I realized that April was specifically talking about celebrity gossip instead of generally talking about popular culture. As a result, at the start of our one-on-one interview I inquired into what her consumption of celebrity gossip specifically looked like (how much time, at what time of day, what sources, etc.). Through her response, it became clear that the amount of time April spent engaging with celebrity gossip was smaller (5-7 minutes per day) than I had perceived. Based on what I understood to be a discrepancy between the actual amount of time she spent engaging with celebrity gossip and the strength of her language about that usage, I asked her to talk more about how she felt about her consumption of celebrity gossip. That is, I attempted to get her to say more about why she previously said that she had a "guilty conscience." She responded,

> On a personal level...for the most part, I'm a fairly moral individual, and, like, I can recognize that cameras, like, hounding Britney Spears[12] when she's clearly got a lot of problems right now is probably not helping her situation. And yet, I will read about it every day for the next three weeks...And, so it's like this really weird thing where I'm trying to...Like, I don't want to be the person...Like, OK, let's talk about Thoreau, right? Like, I don't want to throw my money into an industry that I don't support and that I don't believe in and that I don't think is doing the right thing...But, yet, my actions are showing that I do support these

[12] In 2008, at the time of our conversation, Britney Spears was the center of a (celebrity) media furry. After her divorce from Kevin Federline in 2007, Spears began 2008 with a supposed mental breakdown. In the early winter, after refusing to share custody of her two sons with Federline, she shaved her head, spent days under psychiatric evaluation, had her two sons removed from her care, and was put under the conservatorship of her father.

> things...This is something I talk about with my [students] all the time: 'You can't say what kind of person you're going to be. You have to be the person you want to be,'...I'm such a hypocrite (Interview, 2008, 01:27:42).

By invoking Thoreau (and his stance on living simply and inoculating oneself from the influences of "industry") in this instance, we see one of the tensions that April was navigating between what she does (reads about Britney Spears) and what she tells her students to do ("be the person you want to be"; i.e., don't let [the media] industry tell you who, or what, to be). That is, she explicitly mentions the idea that she doesn't, "want to throw [her] money into an industry that [she doesn't] support," and yet her "actions are showing that [she does] support these things." April's talk reflects that she does not want to be the type of person who consumes copious amounts of celebrity gossip, and yet she finds a degree of interest in this consumption. Or, in describing those on the other side of the dividing line from "people of taste" and "cultural experts", Ang (1985/2006) explains, "In short, these fans [of celebrity gossip] do not seem to be able to say in a positive way and independently of the ideology of mass culture: 'I like [this] because...'" (p. 196). That is, because of the influence of the ideology of mass culture (the perception that all mass culture is "bad" culture), April was not able to claim the fact that she likes reading about celebrity gossip for specific reasons, and instead says that she has a guilty conscience about her use of celebrity gossip. As a "fairly moral person", and as a person who recognizes that celebrity gossip is not always helpful for the celebrity involved (i.e., Britney Spears), April's enjoyment of celebrity gossip caused feelings of conflict and tension between that which she did enjoy (the "bad mass culture" of celebrity gossip) and that which she feels she should enjoy (the cultural capital of the classics). In talking about the tensions she faced between her consumption of celebrity gossip and her feelings of guilt because of that consumption, April reflected the influence of an ideology of mass culture on how she sees herself as an English teacher and as a "fairly moral person". Specifically, a moral person would

have actions that matched beliefs. Because, as April reflects in her talk, she reads celebrity gossip – a "bad" form of popular culture – she feels "guilty."

April continued to talk about the tension she feels between actions and beliefs, between her personal use of celebrity gossip and her beliefs as a secondary ELA teacher, as referenced earlier, when she said,

> But there's the part of me that wants to be the studious English teacher that says, 'I'm a scholar and I'm not going to waste my time on [pop music star/actor] Ashlee Simpson's wedding.' But I bought *People* [a celebrity gossip/human interest magazine] the day it came out because I wanted to see Ashlee Simpson's wedding. So, I realize that it's a paradox, but I don't really know what to do with it...It's so obnoxious of me (Interview, 2008, 0:06:10).

April makes the tension that she was navigating at the time explicit here when she said, "I realize that it's a paradox..." That is, April mentions her desire to be the "person of taste" or "cultural expert" that Ang (1985/2006) describes; she wants to be the "studious English teacher...[who] doesn't waste [her] time on [celebrity gossip]." And, yet she found herself reading about Britney Spears and Ashlee Simpson and enjoying it, even going so far as to spend money on magazines in order to read about these two celebrities. In her articulation of this tension between her personal taste in entertainment (celebrity gossip) and the image of who she should be as a studious English teacher (scholar), April is also verbalizing the dividing line, previously mentioned, that Ang (ibid.) describes between "the 'person of taste', the 'cultural expert', etc., and those who...are not such" (p. 191). That is, for April, a cultural expert would not be duped into spending money on celebrity gossip; a scholarly English teacher would not waste her/his time on the popular culture of celebrity gossip. Hunt and Hunt (2004) explain a similar image when they write, "[The] English teacher [is] supposed to connect students with the books, words, and ideas of faraway places and times...[is] supposed to wear tweed and recite pithy passages of poetry on demand, [and is supposed] to scorn the television, despise all references to popular culture, and be

above that lowly culture enjoyed by the unenlightened masses" (p. 81). So, while April indeed spent money on celebrity gossip, she felt "guilty" about it – her interactions with celebrity gossip did not fit in with her image of the scholarly English teacher, but were closer to that of the "unenlightened masses". And, thus, April's talk continued to reflect a negotiation of the dividing line Ang (ibid.) explains between those who are "people of taste" or "cultural experts" (p. 191) and, "'[those who] are...seduced by the cheap tricks of the commercial culture industry'" (p. 192). Specifically, by describing her personal engagement with celebrity gossip as a "paradox" and describing herself as "obnoxious", April reveals the conflict between that which she consumes in her personal time and that which she feels she should consume as a scholarly, studious secondary English teacher.

In order to try to get a clearer sense of why she had a "guilty conscience", and in order to try to get a sense of where this guilty conscience originated, I asked April from where she thought this view or image of "the English teacher" came. As she talked specifically about the image of an English teacher (she described someone very similar to Hunt & Hunt's [2004] tweed-wearing, poetry-reciting, popular culture-scorning male) she held, April started to verbalize a few realizations about the tensions she was experiencing of the dividing line between those who are cultural experts and those who are not. She said,

> [It's] not even just as an English teacher, but just as someone I consider myself to be: a bright person with...a strong intellect and with a lot of values that are centered around bigger things than *Us Weekly* [a celebrity gossip/human interest magazine similar to *People* magazine]. And so, there's part of me that feels it's not just about being a teacher, it's about being you know, someone with a mind that shouldn't be, as I said, kind of wasting time on [celebrity gossip]. But, then again, I don't feel like I'm losing anything because of it. I don't feel...I guess maybe I would have more time to read other things, but not really. Part of the reason that I like it, which I never really thought about before, is because it is so quick. It is so accessible. And, you can deal with it in such small pieces as opposed to trying to sit down and read a novel, which, just, in reality is not going to happen for me during the school year. At least, it's not going to happen quickly (Interview, 2008, 0:05:12).

Because, as Ang (1985/2006) says, people who like popular culture texts "are presented as the opposite of 'persons of taste', as the opposite of 'cultural experts', or as 'people who are not seduced by the cheap tricks of the commercial culture industry'" (p. 192), April, as "a bright person...with a lot of values centered on bigger things", felt that she should not be "wasting time on" celebrity gossip. The enjoyment of popular culture and celebrity gossip does not match April's image of a bright person with a strong intellect. Yet, at the time of our conversation, April found celebrity gossip accessible and easy to consume – she found it entertaining. While she states that bright people with a strong intellect know that there is more to the world than celebrity gossip, and even though she considers herself one of these people "with a mind", April also mentioned that she doesn't think that she is "losing anything" because of her interactions with the popular culture of celebrity gossip. In labeling herself as "someone with a mind [who]...shouldn't be wasting time on [celebrity gossip]," she reflects Ang's (ibid.) comment that, "Her feelings of guilt [arise] precisely because she has not escaped the power of conviction of the ideology of mass culture..." (p. 194). In this excerpt, April mentions her belief that "someone with a mind...shouldn't be...wasting time" on celebrity gossip, an example of the way Ang's (ibid.) ideology of mass culture, "[enables] people to form an image of themselves" (p. 191). That is, April is not fully able to say why she enjoys celebrity gossip even though she states that she doesn't think she is losing anything because of celebrity gossip; she still seems to be influenced by the ideology of mass culture that says that all mass culture is bad. Thus, in her talk, April exhibits tension between the person she thinks she should be as the culturally expert secondary ELA teacher who is supposed to have access to the secret meaning of the classics, and the person she is as a twenty-something woman who enjoys celebrity gossip.

As April and I continued this line of talk regarding the tension she feels about her personal popular culture use, I asked her to reflect on, and talk about, what texts or interactions she feels like she needs to "hide." Specifically, I asked her whether she had a "guilty conscience" only about her celebrity gossip use or about her general popular culture use. She responded by saying that she thinks, "it extends beyond celebrity gossip." She went on to say, "This is going to so obnoxious, and I'm aware that it's obnoxious, [but] I've never read any of Jodi Picoult's books even though they've been recommended to me time and time again. For some reason, I feel that if she is so popular and everyone's reading her, it must be beneath me in some way, that it must be pulp fiction" (Interview, 2008, 0:14:30). As a point of comparison, April continued her explanation of the texts that she might read that make her feel guilty by talking about her bookstore habits: If she is purchasing something that she would consider to be "pulp" fiction, she'll rush to the register so that she can quickly pay, get her purchase in a bag, and get out of the store. "Whereas, I'll meander with copies of my Macbeth books, or whatever, almost like...'Look at me with my Badge of Literacy'" (Interview, 2008, 0:15:25). Here, April reflects Ang's (1985/2006) explanation of the stance toward popular culture by "people of taste" when she says, "...if [Jodi Picoult] is so popular...it must be beneath me in some way...it must be pulp fiction." Ang (ibid.) explains, "...their ['people of taste'] reasoning boils down to this: '[This popular culture text] is obviously bad because it's mass culture, and that's why I dislike it" (p. 191). Because so many have recommended Jodi Picoult's books to her, April believes that the author must write "pulp fiction"; that is, if everyone likes Picoult she must be "bad" because her books would fall under the category of mass culture. Reading mass culture books, for April, does not align with her image of the cultural expert English teacher. In addition, by twice repeating the label of "obnoxious" in reference to her own opinion of pulp fiction, it is interesting to note that April recognizes that even though she consumes celebrity

gossip, she recoils from what she labels "pulp fiction". While talking about her own sort of popular culture hierarchy, April makes clear that her "Badge of Literacy" does not allow her to publically display her popular culture consumption practices. Thus, not only does April talk about the tension between her enjoyment of celebrity gossip and her perception of the image of the English teacher, but also she talks about the tensions within the category of popular culture. April resists Jodi Picoult, but accepts Perez Hilton[13]. And, as a result, labels herself as "obnoxious."

April, during our conversation, negotiated and navigated the perceived divide between that of the image of the secondary ELA teacher who is a cultural expert and person of taste – one who holds a Badge of Literacy – and that of the image of the "other". As April described her views of popular culture and herself as "obnoxious" and "a hypocrite", she reflected that this tension between the cultural expert and the other is a very real struggle for her. April talked about living on both sides of that dividing line: She verbalized real opinions of Jodi Picoult, a perceived pulp fiction author, yet talked about continuing to read celebrity gossip. However, as we continued talking, April revealed that her view of popular culture is even a bit more complex. For example, April described a broader opinion of popular culture texts in the following anecdote:

> [So] anyway, I, I referenced to Joe, I'm like, 'That kid seems like he just stepped straight out of *Dazed and Confused* [Linklater, 1993][14] ...' Joe looked at me blankly and I said, 'You know, from the movie?' And he just continued to stare blankly at me...And he said, 'Ugh, I don't waste my time on that pop culture stuff...' I was like [thought], 'Ugh, Joe you have no idea how stupid you sound right now.' Because it's such an unrealistic statement. It's *so* stupid. You can't say that: 'Oh, I don't waste my time on that pop culture.' So I asked him, I go, 'Joe, how many sports games did you watch this weekend? Because I think a pretty good argument could be made that that's pop culture too.' And, [Joe replied] 'Oh, I know, I know. But if I could give it up I would.' And, I just hate that to some degree there is such a stigma attached to pop culture as if all pop culture is *Us Weekly* [a human interest/celebrity gossip magazine, referenced

[13] Perez Hilton is "the internet's most notorious gossip columnist" (www.perezhilton.com).
[14] *Dazed and Confused* (Linklater, 1993) is a movie set in small town, Texas, on the last day of school, 1976: "The upperclassmen are hazing the incoming freshmen, and everyone is trying to get stoned, drunk, or laid, even the football players that signed a pledge not to" (www.imdb.com).

> earlier] or Perez Hilton [a celebrity gossip blogger, referenced earlier] that, like, we have to look down our noses at it as teachers, like I only deal with the *really* scholarly stuff. I thought that was so obnoxious. And I just kind of laughed at him and, you know, moved on because he's the kind of guy where there's no convincing him. But, I just, I just didn't understand how he could – what does that even mean? 'I don't waste my time on that.' (Interview, 2008, 0:02:47).

During our conversation, one of the tensions April faced as she negotiated and navigated the image she held of the secondary ELA teacher "of taste" (Ang, 1985/2006) with her own views and uses of popular culture is seen here in the recollection of this conversation with Joe, the AP Language and Composition teacher[15]. Specifically, even though April talked about often feeling conflicted ("I'm such a hypocrite...") about her own use of popular culture she was willing to defend popular culture to her colleague. As April "'negotiates' as it were within the discursive space created by the ideology of mass culture [that says all mass culture is bad]" (Ang, 1985/2006, p. 193), she not only reflected some of the tension she navigates herself, but also demonstrated a broad definition and understanding of popular culture ("Because I think a pretty good argument could be made that [sports are] pop culture too."). Even as she "hate[s] that to some degree there is such a stigma attached to pop culture," and even as she thinks it's "obnoxious" that English teachers "have to look down our noses at [popular culture] as teachers...[and] only deal with the *really* scholarly stuff," she, herself, negotiates this tension – this perceived divide – between the English teacher who has the scholarly access and secret meaning of the classics and the "other" who "'wastes [her/his] time on that stuff'". In Joe, April sees the image of the scholarly English teacher. But, in this exchange, she defends popular culture – she defends that which earlier she felt the need to explain.

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[15] There are two AP English classes in April's building: one is the AP English Literature and Composition class (fiction based), and the other, Joe, is the AP English Language and Composition (nonfiction based, with an emphasis on writing and rhetoric).

As April navigated the ideology of mass culture (Ang, 1985/2006), she negotiated the tension between the image of the scholarly English teacher who has access to the secret meaning of the classics – or who is "someone with a mind" – and that of the "other" who is seduced by the mass culture industry (Ang, ibid., p. 192). In addition, she reflected how complicated such negotiation and navigation can be. On the one hand, there is the image of the English teacher to achieve; there is cultural capital to pass on to students. On the other hand, there is the person who enjoys and engages popular culture and celebrity gossip. For April, it is difficult to see how these two images, these two cultural consumers, could exist together. It doesn't seem possible for her to be "someone with a mind" and to be someone who enjoys reading celebrity gossip. And, yet, April lives on, and with, this dividing line. She considers herself a moral person with a mind, and she also consumes celebrity gossip and wonders if she is, indeed, losing anything because of it. She feels the need to label herself as a "hypocrite" and as "obnoxious" when she describes her use of celebrity gossip, but she also feels the need to defend popular culture to her colleague. It does not seem that April is comfortable being both scholar and celebrity gossip enthusiast. April's talk reflects that she feels that she needs to be either one or the other. Thus, the tension between an aesthetic and a pedagogical view of cultural texts continues to be one that April feels the need to navigate, and this is a navigation that has implications.

PART TWO: THE CULTURAL CAPITAL

> "If it's important enough for us to be teaching to our students, then I should know it too"
> (April, Interview, 2008, 0:20:30).

> "A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded"
> (Bourdieu, 1984/2006, p. 467).

After spending a bit of time talking about her personal popular culture views and uses, I decided to inquire a bit further into April's specific views of art and culture based on her comments about the image of the secondary ELA teacher as cultural expert. While we were talking, I wondered if talking about art and culture in general would help April clarify her thoughts about, and her views of, popular culture. Specifically, as she complicated her thoughts about her personal views and uses of popular culture during the first part of our conversation, she alluded to complex thoughts about culture in general and I wanted her to talk more about this. At this point, then, I asked her, "When you say you want to 'Live up to the literary part of [being an English teacher],' what do you mean?" She responded by talking about what she was like as a high school and university student who loved literature, in addition to talking about English teachers whom she liked and respected. April commented that, as a student, she thought her English teachers read only classic or canonical literature and/or intellectually challenging fiction, quickly understood what they read, and automatically had insight on those texts from which students would benefit. However, as a practicing English teacher, and in anticipation of what she would be like in a few years after having "taught [a] book fourteen times," she said, "Poor readers don't realize that good readers still have to do work" (Interview, 2008, 0:21:25). But, this brief insight on the work that secondary ELA teachers actually do (an insight that reflected her awareness that cultural capital takes work to gain) was only a glimpse into the other side of the dividing line that separates the English teacher as cultural expert from the "other". As April described an image of the secondary ELA teacher both by reflecting on the work that they do as "good readers" and by commenting on the cultural capital she feels that they have access to, she continued to hold the vision of the English teacher that she had when she was in high school: the image of the English teacher who reads copiously and capably; the English teacher with cultural capital. She said, "I think that part of [this

image of the scholarly English teacher comes from] the English teacher part of me that in some way wants to feel, like I said, like I've got this literary something about myself that this doesn't fit in with that [popular culture] part of me" (Interview, 2008, 0:16:55). In a way, then, April is still trying to live up to that image of one with cultural capital, of one who has access and has the secret meaning, of one who understands the meaning of a work of art because she or he, "possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which [the work of art] is encoded" (Bourdieu, 1984/2006, p. 467). Even though she recognized that "good readers" don't automatically come to knowledge – they "still have to do work" – April operated with the belief that there is an image of an English teacher – that literary part – that she has held for years and that she feels she needs to "fit".

Part of the image of the secondary ELA teacher that April referenced at the time of our conversation was one who has read the long list of books that are considered the "classics" or the "canon." She reflected this view when she explained that when one of the AP English teachers in her building talks about a book April hasn't read, like the canonical text *The Sound and the Fury* (Faulkner, 1929), she feels, "Ugh. If it's important enough for us to be teaching our students, then I should know it too" (Interview, 2008, 0:20:30). Even though, as stated earlier, April mentioned that she realizes that all readers "still have to do work", at the same time she holds on to the idea that all (good?) English teachers have read the majority of the texts that comprise the canon – a task that April does not feel close to achieving. Somehow, April believes, all English teachers have knowledge about all the books, or texts, in the canon that are important for secondary students to know. April holds onto a perception of the cultural capital that English teachers have or are supposed to have, and this perception influences how she sees her role as a secondary ELA teacher. In a way, this view adds to April's feelings of guilt associated with her views and uses of culture and popular

culture: she feels "Ugh." Bourdieu (1984/2006) explains, "Even in the classroom, the dominant definition of the legitimate way of appropriating culture and works of art favours those who have had early access to legitimate culture...[through] direct experience and simple delight" (p. 467). That is, as April considers the relationship between culture, popular culture, and secondary ELA, her understanding of the cultural capital associated with secondary ELA as the legitimate way of learning leads to assumptions about experiencing cultural texts, or as Bourdieu (ibid.) explains, through "direct experience" (p. 467). April seems to consider her ability as an English teacher as a bit "less than" because she has not read *The Sound and the Fury* (Faulkner, 1929), a text that she should know, "if it's important enough to teach...students." Not only does April value the knowledge of the cultural capital of the canon, but also she values direct experience with that cultural capital. And, it is this image of the English teacher as cultural expert because of access to cultural capital that influences April's views of and value of cultural artifacts.

For April, part of a direct experience with cultural capital, the canon, and culture in general, is feeling "connected." When inquiring into her comments about experiencing culture ("...then I should know it too..."), I asked April whether it was important for her to feel connected to the artistic artifact or whether it was important for her to feel connected to the artist. She replied that it was both important for her to feel connected to the artist, "...And with culture in general ...[it is] the idea that I have seen these things [artifacts]. That I have experienced it. That I have been a part of it. That I'm not just a passive observer, but that I actively pursued it" (Interview, 2008, 0:28:23). In addition, in talking about active cultural acquisition and engagement, through comparing herself to her others, April mentioned that although it depends on the person, for her, active experience of cultural artifacts is better to do "in real life...There is something really rich about feeling like...like I feel more connected not only to the art,

but to the artist...I can see...I can imagine...There's a connection I feel by being right there...There's something powerful" (Interview, 2008, 0:38:23). Similar to her feeling "Ugh" at not having read *The Sound and the Fury* (Faulkner, 1929) – not having actively pursued it through direct reading – April feels "more connected...by being right there." Namely, April feels more connected to cultural artifacts through the active pursuit of those artifacts. In further explaining the relationship between cultural capital and education, Bourdieu (1984/2006), writes, "The manner in which culture has been acquired lives on in the manner of using it: the importance attached to...can be understood once it is seen that it is these imponderables of practice which distinguish the different – and ranked – modes of culture acquisition..." (p. 466). As April talked about the way she navigates and negotiates her relationship with culture, popular culture, and secondary ELA, she talked about her ideas of how cultural capital is acquired. It is not simply having cultural capital that is important to April as a secondary ELA teacher, but also it is the active and direct experience of acquisition that is important. While having the cultural capital of the canon to transmit to students is important for April, it is just as important to have acquired that cultural capital through active experience.

Yet, even through valuing active experience, April recognized that cultural capital "[leaves] out a lot." At the same time that she talked about the value of direct participation with cultural artifacts, April also recognized the divisions within culture and cultural capital. She explained, "It's just a reality as much as we [secondary ELA teachers] pretend that it's not that our culture is divided into different layers or different [hierarchies]... It's silly to try and pretend that it's not. And so, to some degree, I feel like you get to...participate in something that is probably typically regarded as being one of the higher ends of our culture and that's an experience unto itself..." (Interview, 2008, 0:30:39). In this excerpt, April's complicated views of culture and experience with

culture becomes a bit more explicit. Specifically, the way she navigates and negotiates the dividing line between the cultural expert and the "other" (Ang, 1985/2006) becomes more apparent. While April acknowledged the "reality" that "our culture is divided into different layers," she also acknowledged that participating in "one of the higher ends of our culture [is] an experience unto itself." In her view that the secondary ELA teacher has, or should have, access to and the knowledge of the secret meaning of cultural capital, April values active experience with the higher ends of our culture. But at the same time, she also values that which "gets left out." After explaining that she values the active experience of the higher ends of culture, she explains that, with this view, a lot gets left out: "I mean books, I mean music, I mean, like, I mean art, I mean poetry, I mean just a lot of things. I just, I feel like we [in secondary ELA] read dead white guys and as much as we try to flatter ourselves into thinking that we don't, we really do" (Interview, 2008, 0:43:49). As April lists what gets left out of the cultural capital of the canon, she alludes to her view that those texts and artifacts have value as well. Even though April is clear about the benefit of direct experience with the higher end of the cultural hierarchy, she complicates that benefit by implying that all cultural artifacts have value. Even though April explicitly values active experience with culture, she also can see value in what is not included in that experience.

As April talked about navigating and negotiating her experiences with the texts and artifacts of culture (including popular culture), and as she talked about her views and values of those texts and artifacts, she reflected the influence of an ideology of mass culture (Ang, 1985/2006) where all mass culture is seen as "bad". Specifically, April labeled herself as both a "hypocrite" and as "obnoxious" because of her views and uses of celebrity gossip and pulp fiction in particular, and popular culture in general. In addition, April talked about her view of the role of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984/2006) in secondary ELA and her belief that, "Certain people are going to get access here [in

secondary ELA] because they have this knowledge..." (Interview, 2008, 0:40:00). While she specifically references her belief that secondary ELA teachers are "supposed to have ...that cultural capital...[and are supposed] to give [students] that capital also," she also recognizes that leaves a lot of artifacts and texts out – artifacts and texts that could be valuable to secondary ELA. During our conversation, April's talk not only reflected a struggle to reconcile her personal aesthetic choices and tastes in both popular culture and high culture, but also reflected a struggle to make sense of the role of cultural capital in secondary ELA. That is, the tension April faced in her personal views and uses of popular culture carried over into tensions in her professional views and uses of popular culture.

PART THREE: THE CULTURAL EXPERT and SECONDARY ELA

"While many scholars warn that adolescents may resist teachers' attempts to have them talk about music, films, computer games, and other forms of popular culture in a school setting, these...teachers (just barely past adolescence themselves) were resistant to sharing their own pleasures in a school setting"
(Lewis & Finders, 2007, p. 111).

"I want [my students] to recognize it...and not just be these empty vessels that just absorb it all without any conscience thought"
(April, FG2, 2008, 0:29:18).

"But the apprehension and appreciation of the work also depend on the beholder's intention, which is itself a function of the conventional norms governing the relation to the work of art in a certain historical and social situation and also of the beholder's capacity to conform to those norms..."
(Bourdieu, 1984/2006, p. 472).

As April talked about her thoughts on art, culture, popular culture, secondary ELA, and the image of the secondary ELA teacher, she reflected a navigation of complicated views and values. On the one hand, she used words like "educated", "scholarly", "knowledgeable", "active", "reader", "access", and "hierarchy" to describe the Badge of Literacy and the cultural capital that "someone with a mind" (the secondary ELA teacher) would be or would hold. On the other hand, even though she described

herself as a "moral" and "educated" secondary ELA teacher, April talked about her enjoyment of reading celebrity gossip as well as of watching television and movies – activities and engagements that do not seem to fit, for her, the image of the moral, educated, and scholarly, secondary ELA teacher who holds a Badge of Literacy. While April is critical of her consumption of popular culture, she is not willing to stop that consumption, going so far as to wonder whether she is really "losing anything" because of it. And, this makes her feel "guilty". In addition, the fact that she has not read a number of the texts that would be considered part of the canon of secondary ELA adds to her guilty feelings. As Lewis and Finders (2007) explain, "[Novice teachers feel] a need to create firm boundaries between [their] private pleasure[s] and [their] professional authority..." (p. 111). In other words, April creates firm boundaries between the celebrity gossip she consumes in her private, at-home time and the classical, canonical literature that is the foundation of her professional, at-school time. Yet, for April, this boundary, or the negotiation of the tension between personal pleasure and professional pull, is not such a clear dichotomy. While she recognizes and acknowledges the potential of cultural capital for access to learning, she is also acutely aware of what is neglected. For April, there is also possibility in popular culture for access to learning.

In clarifying some of her thoughts about the relationship between popular culture and pedagogy, April talked more specifically her views of popular culture in her classroom. As she talked about developing a love of reading in her students, she commented that she felt that "we [secondary ELA teachers] are cheating" students by limiting the curriculum to the classics and the canon. April explained that, for example, by reading war propaganda students could become aware of what is being communicated to them. She said,

> I feel like when you use a broader definition of reading, that's a skill that I think we [secondary ELA teachers] all want them [students] to have as they progress into the adult world. Like, I want [students] to recognize when war propaganda is being thrown at [them]...Before a movie, instead of a preview, it's, you know, a video about the war[16]. Like, I want them to recognize it...If they support it or disagree, it's fine, but I want them to at least be aware of it...and not just be these empty vessels that just absorb it all without any conscience thought (FG2, 2008, 0:29:18).

In this excerpt, April reveals a desire for a type of critical pedagogy through which her students could "read" popular culture texts in order to recognize propaganda. In this way, April invokes Hunt and Hunt's (2004) argument that, "Students need to leave school with the ability to read more than books; they must be able to read and negotiate all of the avenues of culture" (p. 81). April, like Hunt and Hunt (ibid.), sees potential in using popular culture in order to help her students develop an awareness – conscience thought – of the artifacts that surround them. Or, that is, April recognizes that popular culture can help her students "read...all of the avenues of culture" (Hunt & Hunt, 2004, p. 81). Thus, for April, the tension continues between the texts of the canon and the texts of popular culture. While she recognizes the importance of cultural capital for access, she also recognizes the importance of popular culture for awareness.

Yet, while she acknowledged the potential for popular culture in her classroom, April also recognized potential difficulties in incorporating popular culture texts. As April talked about the possibilities she saw in using popular culture in secondary ELA, I asked her to list the popular culture texts that she used in her classroom. After she listed the adaptations of canonical texts (*Of Mice and Men* [Sinise, 1992], *The Crucible* [Hytner, 1996], *The Simpson's* "The Raven" [Treehouse of Horror I, Silverman, 1990], and *Lord of the Flies* [Hook, 1990]) that she used, she complicated the use of popular culture in her classroom by later explicitly stating her recognition that she was mostly

[16] At the time of our conversation, a frequently shown advertisement for the National Guard shown in movie theaters was a music video called "Citizen Soldier" by the band Three Doors Down.

using film texts and was not using other popular culture texts or artifacts. She went on to say,

> I know in the back of my head that elements of pop culture can be studied just for being what they are and it doesn't need to be linked up to something from the canon or it doesn't need to be an intro. to something else or it doesn't...it doesn't need to be attached, I guess, to something more...scholarly, if you want to say that? ...I have that in the back of my head but when it comes to the way that I've implemented that in my classroom, there is definitely a disconnect. Like, it's definitely an intro. for a lot of stuff in my class. And, it's definitely, you know, 'Let's evaluate the themes that this and this share...' And, it hasn't been it's own topic of conversation (FG2, 2008, 0:21:21).

In this excerpt, April uses the word "disconnect" to describe the potential she recognizes in popular culture texts – "I know in the back of my head..." – compared to the reality of the uses of texts in her classroom. While April uses film adaptations "in an attempt to make great literary works more accessible" (Lewis & Finders, 2007, p. 111), she is not fully comfortable with this use of popular culture ("...pop culture [texts] can be studied just for being what they are..."). Even though she believes that including popular culture texts in her classroom is, and can be, a good thing, she does not necessarily feel that she is using those texts in a way that they could, potentially, be used. In April's classroom, popular culture texts point the way to the canonical texts of secondary ELA instead of standing alone without connection to "something more...scholarly."

As April talked about her views and values of culture and popular culture during our conversation, she reflected some of her views and values of education. That is, as April talked about what texts and artifacts she deems important for her students ("I want them to recognize it..."), she, like Summer (Chapter 3), invoked Labaree's (1997) description of the educational goals of social mobility and democratic citizenship. Labaree (ibid.) explains that the educational goal of social mobility, "argues that education is a commodity, the only purpose of which is to provide individual students with a competitive advantage in the struggle for desirable social positions" (p. 42). By recognizing that education is a commodity, April also reflects Bourdieu's (1984/2006)

previously mentioned conceptualization of cultural capital in that "the legitimate way of appropriating culture...favours those who have had early access to legitimate culture..." (p. 467). The way in which April talked about, and referenced, the classical texts of the canon and their position within secondary ELA, reinforces the notion that one goal of education is to provide students access to "legitimate culture" (cultural capital, the classical texts of the canon) in order that they may have competitive advantage over others. With a desire to develop awareness – or access to culture – in her students, April reflects the educational goal of social mobility as well as the idea of cultural capital in that she states that she hopes her students will not be "empty vessels" – she hopes that they will learn, or acquire, cultural awareness, specifically awareness of the cultural texts of the canon.

Yet, April also invokes Labaree's (1997) explanation of the goal of democratic equality. As Labaree (ibid.) explains, the goal democratic equality is that of citizenship: "...[A] democratic society cannot persist unless it prepares all of its' young with equal care to take on the full responsibilities of citizenship in a competent manner" (p. 42). When April talked about her desire to develop "awareness" in her students so that they are, "not just...these empty vessels that just absorb it all [popular culture/propaganda] without any conscience thought," she reflected Labaree's (ibid.) notion of the public good of citizenship where all students are prepared to recognize, and to be aware of, the texts that surround them so that they are not manipulated or swayed by those texts. That is, while April talked about and acknowledged the importance of the cultural capital of the canon for access, she also talked about the importance of popular culture for awareness. April wants to use both canonical texts and popular culture texts in her classroom; she wants to study both types of texts on their own as "worthy of study"; and, in a way, she recognizes that there is more than one goal for education – that of social mobility and that of democratic equality. However, through her talk we can see

that she ends up on the side of social mobility – the side of the classical texts of the canon – more often than she ends up on the side of democratic equality. Even though April talks about her value of popular culture in her classroom, those popular culture texts serve the needs of the canon. Access wins.

ADDENDUM

In the previous chapter, a detailed examination of Summer's talk illustrated the tension that one secondary ELA teacher faced between views of and values of cultural texts and artifacts. In this chapter, a detailed examination of April's talk illustrated the tension that one secondary ELA teacher faced between views of and values of the *uses* of cultural texts and artifacts. Specifically, April's talk shows us some of the difficulty encountered in negotiating and navigating personal and professional uses of cultural texts. In April's case, she talked about feeling "guilty" because of her use of popular culture texts at home. In addition, she talked about her "obnoxious" views of popular culture texts based on the difference(s) between her views of those texts and uses of those texts. And, while April values the classical, canonical texts of secondary ELA (feeling guilty, too, because she has not read a number of texts she feels like she should have read), she talked about how she also feels a "disconnect" between what she wants to do with popular culture texts in her classroom and what she does do. April's talk is conceptually generative as she talks about certain discontinuities between her personal and professional uses of texts. In this way, we see that while recognizing popular culture use is important not only for secondary ELA students, but also for secondary ELA teachers, it is equally important to recognize that moving back and forth between personal and professional uses of cultural texts is not easy.

While both Summer and April seem to hold a hierarchical view of cultural texts, there appears to be different motivations behind their views. For example, Summer's

views and values of texts seem to be dependent on her conceptualization of art and entertainment. Conversely, April's views and values of texts seem to be dependent on her view of the secondary ELA teacher and her view of cultural capital. That is to say, unlike Summer, April is explicit in her understanding of cultural capital and how cultural capital can lead to academic access. As such, she seems to imply that she is aware that there are some adolescents who are granted access to education and some who are not. However, given her teaching context in a large, middle class, suburban school, considering the needs of those who are traditionally excluded by school does not seem to be an issue for her. Although April talks about cultural capital and about critical literacy, she does not talk about these in relation to her teaching context and situation.

April's talk, then, is provocative in that it appears that there is more she wants to do with the content of her classroom in relation to critical literacy and popular culture. Yet, her view of the secondary ELA teacher and the gap between her personal and professional views of texts seem to be a kind of block for her pedagogically. Like Summer, then, it seems that what April believes about schooling, education, and being prepared for the future have a profound effect on pedagogical decisions. April knows there is more potential for her classroom, but her talk only reflects tension in enacting this potential (either because of curricular demands, parental demands, district/state demands, or departmental demands). In the end, April's talk seems to reflect a critical perspective, but that critical perspective is one with which she wrestles and not one that she enacts in her classroom. And, as a result, the traditional, canonical, academic secondary ELA is emphasized.

CHAPTER FIVE

Producers of Culture: Participation and/in Production

"Art is thus prefigured in the very processes of living"
(Dewey, 1934, p. 24).

"[Popular culture is] what is popular or socially accepted by the masses...in society. It changes with time, but historical popular culture can still be considered as popular culture"
(May, Survey, 2008)

PREAMBLE: PARTICIPATION and PRODUCTION

The late spring day that I drove across the state to observe May in her classroom and then to interview her, was bright and crisp with just a hint of the approaching summer. May, a grade 10 British Literature and grade 9 Social Studies teacher at a small, private school in a suburb directly on the border of a large city, was in the process of wrapping up the school year and was in the process of preparing her students for exams. However, May was not only thinking about the end of the current school year, but also was thinking about the beginning of the following school year that would include her work with the social studies department to revise the curriculum, her entrance into teaching social studies full-time, and her new position as dean of grade 9.

After spending the afternoon observing May in her British Literature classes, we met at the local Einstein bagel and coffee shop for our conversation. At the beginning of our one-on-one conversation, I explained to May some of what I hoped to talk about during our time together, including the relationship between demographics and popular culture. This topic – the relationship between demographics and popular culture – came from a comment May made during our first focal group interview when she explained that, "the Red Wings just weren't that important to me...and now we [she and her husband] go to games all the time" (FG1, 2008, 0:38:23). This comment was one of many comments May made during the first focal group conversation that explored the relationship between demographics and popular culture, comments that detailed

changes in cultural consumption that she experienced and noticed in others. Yet, as May talked about the relationship between demographics and popular culture during our one-on-one conversation, she did so by explaining her uses of popular culture and how that usage has changed over time (high school to college to currently). In beginning to talk about demographics, she said, "Pop culture changes over time; times have changed; I have changed" (Interview, 2008, 0:02:40). When I asked May to continue talking about this possible relationship between popular culture and demographics, and when I asked May to continue talking about changes in her personal popular culture use and whether she thought that the culture industry (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2001) influenced an understanding of demographics or whether she thought that demographics influenced the creation of popular culture, she said,

> At this point, I guess I'm like thinking both, because, I mean, I guess like I'm probably, I'm sure I'm probably shaped by some of the popular culture but I think that there are some, um, I don't know, some levels of...like I go, I seek it, like I'm looking for it. You know, like, I don't know. I'm trying to think. I'm looking for something that would interest a 26-year-old, just-married woman... (Interview, 2008, 0:41:27).

May's comment here – especially the part about the way in which she seeks popular culture that would interest her – is reminiscent of Adorno and Horkheimer's (1944/2001) critique of the culture industry when they write, "[The culture industry] depend[s] not so much on subject matter as on classifying, organising, and labeling consumers. Something is provided for all so that none may escape; the distinctions are emphasized and extended" (p. 73). Here, May evokes Adorno and Horkheimer's (ibid.) idea that "something is provided for all," when she says that she is "looking for something that would interest" her. In this way, May seems to say that she is shaped by popular culture (or, Adorno and Horkheimer's [ibid.] culture industry). And yet, May acknowledges "both": she recognizes that she may, indeed, be shaped by popular culture, but that in addition, she seeks certain popular culture texts. In this excerpt, May

verbalizes the idea that popular culture both shapes, and is shaped by, those who consume texts and artifacts from this realm.

To illustrate the notion that popular culture may shape, as well as be shaped by, those who consume it, in arguing for the case for cultural studies and popular culture in the secondary ELA classroom, Morrell (2004) writes, "[Re-casting] popular culture as the representation of everyday activity...also re-positions young people as producers and participants in popular culture, rather than as passive consumers of popular culture" (p. 35). In saying that she goes to seek – to look for – popular culture, May reflects that she is not a passive consumer of popular culture, but is instead a participant in popular culture. And, in a later section we will see how May's participation in popular culture transfers to a production of culture. However, in this excerpt, although May acknowledges that she is "probably shaped" by popular culture, the shaping that Adorno and Horkheimer (ibid.) critique, she also explains that she is "looking for something that would interest a 26-year-old, just-married woman." That is, May's talk reflects her insight that she is both shaped by and shaping culture. Or, as Bennett (1986/2006), in his explanation of the importance of Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony, writes,

> As such, [the conceptualization of hegemony] consists not simply of an imposed mass culture that is conincident with dominant ideology, nor simply of spontaneously oppositional cultures, but is rather an area of negotiation between the two within which – in different particular types of popular culture – dominant, subordinate and oppositional culture and ideological values and elements are 'mixed' in different permutations (p. 96).

In "thinking both", May reflects a negotiation and a mix of dominant (shaped by) and oppositional (shaping) culture. While May and I began our one-on-one conversation by talking about demographics and popular culture, as May explained her position on this relationship between demographics and popular culture, she ended up talking about the ways in which she consumes and has consumed – shapes and is shaped by – popular culture. That is to say, the question I posed about demographics and popular culture

prompted May to talk about the ways in which she was not a passive, but an active participant in popular culture.

Yet, additionally, as May talked about demographics, popular culture, and her participation (often, the manner in which her participation has changed) in popular culture, she also talked about the ways in which she produces, or creates, cultural artifacts. As I will show in this chapter, May talked about the painting, writing, synchronized swimming, knitting, and home-making that she has done over the years, and she talked about the relationship between these manners of producing culture and popular culture texts and artifacts. In this way, then, May talked about the ways in which she not only participates in popular culture, but also produces culture. In comparison, then, while Summer (Chapter 3) discussed a description and definition of cultural texts and artifacts, and while April (Chapter 4) discussed the consumption of cultural texts and artifacts, May (this chapter) discusses the production of cultural texts and artifacts. Whereas recent research on the proposed uses of popular culture in secondary ELA has referenced tensions English teachers may face in choosing and using popular culture texts in the classroom, little of that research has explored the tension that may exist in teachers' own particular use(s) – and change(s) in use(s) – of popular culture including their own participation in and production of cultural texts. That is, little of that research has recognized that secondary ELA teachers have their own uses of popular culture, that those uses have possibly changed over time, and that their participation in and with popular culture could also include production of cultural texts and artifacts. In this chapter, then, I aim to explore how one secondary ELA teacher (May) talks about her personal and professional views of popular culture focusing on participation in and production of popular culture. In my analysis, I focus on the way May talked about negotiating and navigating tensions she experienced in changes in her participation with popular culture, her production of cultural texts, and how that

participation and production informs or influences her pedagogy. That is, by exploring May's talk about culture, popular culture, and secondary ELA, we will have one more close analysis of tensions English teachers navigate as they consider the inclusion of popular culture in secondary ELA.

In this chapter, I will explore how one secondary ELA teacher's notions of demographics, participation, and production were invoked as she discussed her personal and professional views and values of popular culture. Specifically, I will examine May's consideration of her demographic (as a 26-year-old, just married, woman), her discussion of particular uses of (changes in use of) popular culture, and her talk about production of cultural texts. In this exploration, I aim to use Adorno and Horkheimer's (1944/2001) conceptualization of and critique of the culture industry to characterize May as someone who participates in popular culture in an active and engaged way. That is, my analysis will show that May is more than a human being who has "been so thoroughly reified that the idea of anything specific to [herself] now persists only as an utterly abstract notion: personality scarcely signifies anything more than shining white teeth and freedom from body odor and emotions. The triumph of...the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them" (Adorno & Horkheimer, ibid., p. 101). To be specific, in her talk about active participation in and production of popular culture, May's comments about being shaped by and shaping popular culture are conceptually generative as we consider secondary English teachers' views and values of popular culture. May is more than one who has been reified by the culture industry.

Similarly, my analysis uses both Googin (2002) and Negus (1997) to discuss the ways in which May produces cultural texts. Both Googin and Negus argue against a model of literacy (Googin) and cultural engagement (Negus) that,

> [Assumes] a monolithic, natural, and universal literacy independent of those who engage in it, absent the purposes for which it is invoked, apart from the times and places it occurs, and irrelevant to the materiality of the practices. Such views construct, and perpetuate, a binary (literate/illiterate) that not only is meaningless but also culturally and socially debilitating (Googin, 2002, p. 311).

As Googin explicates a way to take a new look at sampler making and the manner in which literacy practices are both material and immaterial, we will see May's production of cultural texts in a new light that can be generative for secondary ELA. In this way, I aim to provide a picture of one English teacher who does not "behave...in accordance with [her] previously determined and indexed level, and [does not] choose the category of mass product turned out for [her] type" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2001, p. 73). Instead, I aim to paint a portrait of May, a secondary ELA teacher who consumes and produces popular culture and culture in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons.

The chapter, like the two before, is organized into three parts. Overall, I use group interview transcripts, one-on-one interview transcripts, a survey, and correspondences to analyze May's talk about culture and popular culture. In the first section, I explore May's talk about her participation (consumption) of popular culture, and I explore May's talk about how that participation has changed or evolved over time. In the second section, I look at May's talk about her production of cultural texts. Finally, in the third section, I examine May's talk about her pedagogy and the manner in which she does, or does not include her personal consumption or production practices into her secondary ELA classroom. And, through this analysis, I hope to present a portrait of "popular culture [and a secondary ELA teacher that] is viewed neither as the site of...cultural deformation nor as that of...cultural self-affirmation" (Bennett, 1986/2006, p. 94). As May said, "I'm thinking both."

PART ONE: PARTICIPATION in POPULAR CULTURE

"The adolescents, however, seem to live in the moment engaged in the literacies they enjoy"
(Hagood, Stevens & Reinking, 2007, p. 76).

In order to get a sense of the ways in which May talked about her production of popular culture and any pedagogical implications, I think it makes sense to take a close look at the way in which May talked, in general, about popular culture and her participation with popular culture. As previously mentioned, May's talk, specifically during our one-on-one interview, included an interesting emphasis on the production of (popular) culture texts. Thus, I think that first examining May's talk about her *participation* in popular culture will provide a fuller picture of her *production* of cultural texts. May began to talk about her participation in popular culture and the changes in that participation when I asked her to talk about a comment one of her students made earlier in the day of our conversation during my observation of one of her classes. After May introduced me and explained my presence and purpose in the class, May turned to her students and asked, "How would you define popular culture?" Almost immediately, one of her female students, *CosmoGirl*[17] magazine in hand, exclaimed, "Parties!" Because I had not considered parties – the idea of a group of people gathering together, sometimes covertly, and the clothing, actions, relationships, and shared experiences that accompany attendance at such a gathering – as a category of popular culture, I wanted to talk about the idea with May. As May talked about parties as popular culture – and later, as she talked about the related idea of "bar culture" – she also talked about the artifacts that she considers to be popular culture by referencing one of her responses to the initial questionnaire: "Magazines, films, photos, the Internet, certain websites, ways in which [we] communicate, TV celebrities, music, sports, colleges..." (Questionnaire, 2008). Through this talk that started as May spoke about parties, May verbalized a broad description (view) of popular culture, including the

[17] *CosmoGirl* is the version of the *Cosmopolitan* fashion magazine for teenage females.

presence of change in and among texts over time (the changes in texts that are "popular" now compared to what will be popular in five minutes or in five years) as well as changes in personal growth and interest (what is popular for May compared to what was popular).

As May talked about how, "Pop culture changes over time, times have changed, and I have changed" (Interview, 2008, 0:02:40), I began to wonder what it was that changed for her. Specifically, I wondered whether some of her popular culture consumption patterns and practices came up against the challenges that Hebdige (1979/2001) explains as an "inevitable end": "[Cultural] styles may begin by issuing symbolic challenges, but they must inevitably end by establishing new sets of conventions; by creating new commodities, new industries or rejuvenating old ones" (p. 210). As May talked about changes, I wondered if she was talking about experiencing Hebdige's (ibid.) conceptualization of the inevitability that (popular) styles end and are replaced by new conventions, new commodities, or rejuvenations of old conventions or commodities. That is, I wondered whether May was talking about her personal changes, changes in popular culture texts and artifacts, or both. So, I asked her to talk about what popular culture texts she used in high school, hoping to get her to talk about the similarities and differences she thought might exist between her uses of popular culture texts as a high school student and her students' uses of popular culture texts.

In the midst of May's talk about uses of popular culture during high school such as utilizing technology like computers (electronic mail, instant messaging, etc.), listening to music (Dave Matthews Band, Lilith Fair[18] artists), and reading magazines (*CosmoGirl*, *Seventeen*[19]), May commented on how busy she was as a high school student because of her participation in sports (swimming and diving, synchronized

[18] The Lilith Fair, founded by Grammy award-winning musician Sarah McLachlan, is a musical touring festival featuring women in popular music (www.lilithfair.com).
[19] *Seventeen* magazine is an American (fashion) magazine for teenage females.

swimming). May remarked that in examining her high school popular culture use in order to come up with a list of texts for our conversation was difficult because she did not have time to watch much television or many movies because of her extra-curricular activities (for example, sports and church youth group). May noticed, as will be seen later, that she did not engage with as many popular culture texts and artifacts during her high school years compared to later years because of her involvement in school and sports. In response to this insight, I asked May whether or not she considered her high school sports to be popular culture. She said, "Yes, absolutely," and then went on to explain her teams' use of t-shirts and hoodies (pull-over [at that time, not zip-up the type that is currently more popular] sweatshirts that have hoods), the importance of such clothing in designating how many years one was on a team, and the presence of other elements of popular culture including one t-shirt that used a quote from the movie *G. I. Jane*[20] (Scott, 1997). May's talk (Interview, 2008, 0:08:05), in this instance, evokes Googin's (2002) mobilization of Attridge when she quotes, "'[Novelty] is achieved by means both of the refashioning of the old and of the unanticipated advent of the new or, more accurately if more paradoxically, that the advent of the new is a particular refashioning of the old'" (p. 316). That is to say, May's high school sports' teams not only created an object (clothing), but they refashioned the old in that most sports teams have used clothing (t-shirts, sweatshirts, etc.) for identification purposes in order to identify themselves as part of a group and as separate from other groups. Yet, in addition, these teams refashioned the old in a manner that drew in elements from other areas of popular culture (a film). Thus, they created an advent of the new through a refashioning the old. Here, then, we see May's broad view of, and definition of, popular culture in that not only does she describe her sports teams as popular culture, but also

[20] According to Wikipedia, *G. I. Jane*, starring Demi Moore, is a fictional action film about the first woman to undergo training as a Navy SEAL.

in that she is able to talk about the presence and use of objects such as clothing as a characteristic of popular culture. Thus, in this example, we see not only the wide-ranging manner in which May describes popular culture, but also we see an example of her early participation – in some ways limited (television, film) and in some ways not (sports) – with popular culture texts.

In a similar manner, May, after talking about her participation in high school sports and sports in general as popular culture, went on to talk about her interest in boys as a high school student. As May talked about her involvement on sports teams – including the sense of camaraderie that being part of a team invoked – she also talked about those sites as being the places where she met her "two major high school boyfriends." She said, "[You] know, when you're in high school it's like you're interested in boys. And maybe that's part of the popular culture is boys. And, like, I definitely was a boy freak" (Interview, 2008, 0:16:57). In talking about boys and relationships as popular culture, May demonstrates the idea that popular culture is not just an object or a product. But, as Negus (1997) explains, "[Popular] culture should be understood more broadly as the means through which people create meaningful worlds in which to live. These 'cultural worlds' are constructed through interpretations, experiences and activities..." (p. 101). While at the beginning of our conversation, May listed a fairly comprehensive list of popular culture texts as she began to define and describe popular culture, as she continued to talk she continued to add other texts and artifacts of popular culture to this list. In this case, the text of popular culture was that of dating and relationships – a "cultural world...constructed through interpretations, experiences and activities" (Negus, 1997, p. 101). That is, as May offers the idea of dating and "boys" as popular culture, she reflects the notion that, "[Popular] culture should be understood more broadly as the means through which people create meaningful worlds in which to live" (Negus, ibid.). While much of the research regarding popular culture in secondary

ELA tends to limit the discussion to the media of popular culture (television, film, music), in this excerpt May demonstrates a broad understanding of popular culture in that she recognizes that dating and relationships are part of the school culture and, possibly, "part of the popular culture." That is to say, as May talked about her personal and professional views and values of popular culture, she consistently described a broad view of popular culture (a variety of texts in addition to sports and dating), and she portrayed a broad participation in popular culture (sports, dating).

May continued to add to her list of popular culture texts and artifacts as she talked about her personal uses of popular culture. As she moved from talking about the texts she consumed in high school (computers, music, magazines, sports, and dating) to the texts she consumed in college, May said, "But I would also say that like the bar category and alcohol category is like another thing that would go on my list [of popular culture texts] too" (Interview, 2008, 0:23:18). May continued this manner of talk by describing the "bar culture" that existed around her university's campus and the way in which people were affiliated, or affiliated themselves, with certain bars and clubs. For example, May associated herself with the bar that was a bit "quieter", where she and her friends could "sit and talk" and, later, sing and dance to music from the 1970's and 1980's which included songs like "Sweet Caroline" (Diamond, 1969). This description of bar culture as popular culture, not only reflects May's broad view of popular culture, but also reflects the shared experience of popular culture that little of the literature regarding the use of popular culture in secondary ELA has addressed. While most critics of popular culture talk about the isolated, individual consumption of popular culture, May talked about sharing experiences with teammates, boyfriends, and friends. That is, by talking about her sports teams as popular culture, by talking about dating and relationships as popular culture, and by talking about bar culture as popular culture, May reflects the value of the shared experiences of popular culture consumption. This

idea of popular culture providing shared experiences is the opposite of Adorno and Horkheimer's (1944/2001) view that, "In spite of the films which are intended to complete her integration, the housewife finds in the darkness of the movie theater a place of refuge where she can sit for a few hours with nobody watching..." (p. 83). Instead of the isolation of sitting in the movie theater alone with nobody watching, May talked about popular culture texts and artifacts that brought her together with others such as participating in sports, dating, going to the bar, and singing "Sweet Caroline" (Diamond, ibid.). Thus, not only does May have an inclusive view of popular culture texts and artifacts, but also she has an inclusive view of participating in, and with, those texts.

Similarly, as May transitioned to talk about music as popular culture and the changes in her music consumption over time, May reflected the notion of shared experience and the influence of others. That is, May explained that during her college years she started to enjoy country music. Because of the influence of new university friends, May started to listen to country music with her roommate ("We just decided that we were gonna listen to country..." [Interview, 2008, 0:32:08]), eventually persuading her other friends, including her boyfriend (now husband), to listen. Again, as May talked about her views and values of popular culture, she verbalized a wide-ranging description of popular culture. Yet, additionally, she also recognized an inclusive conceptualization of engagement with popular culture by explaining the shared experience with, and influence from and on, others. In fact, the influence May had on her spouse was so great that she and her husband danced to a country music song as their "first" song at their wedding, and they play country music for their dog when they are not home (Interview, 2008, 0:32:50).

In addition to the influence of others, however, in her talk about music as popular culture, May also talked about the influence of technology. She explained that

when downloading music became illegal, she quit downloading music and believes that, as a result, listening to music is less important than it was during her college years. Now, instead of "[jumping] on the iPod train," she purchased "a junky MP3 player and doesn't download [music] at all" (Interview, 2008, 0:26:15). And, while May still listens to the radio, she said that she feels out of touch with popular music, although if she hears a song she likes on the radio, May will "maybe look it up on YouTube" (Interview, 2008, 0:26:35). May continued to talk about music and the changes in music consumption that she has experienced and said that she wondered if "the only time you listen to music is in college" (Interview, 2008, 0:26:53). As May talked about her experiences with musical popular culture, she recognized that the influence(s) of outside factors (current and new friends, technology) is important for participation in popular culture. While May still listens to music (in the car, in the boat, at parties), she listens differently than she did when she was in college. Time, circumstance, and outside factors have changed her listening experiences. Yet, even in this, the manner in which May talked about music reflected a broad view of popular culture as well as a broad participation in popular culture.

In her talk about popular culture texts and artifacts, May demonstrated a broad view of popular culture and, in many ways, challenged commonly held beliefs about what popular culture is and how it can be used (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2001). In addition, as May talked about her participation in popular culture, she also talked about how that participation changed depending on time, circumstance, and external influences (people, technology, etc.). As such, May demonstrated the idea that Hagood, Stevens, and Reinking's (2007) offer, as quoted earlier, that, "[Adolescents], however, seem to live in the moment engaged in the literacies they enjoy" (p. 76). That is, May's talk about her views, values, and uses of popular culture reflect an extensive understanding and wide-ranging participation – living in the moment engaged with what

she enjoyed. That is to say, May's talk reflected an extensive definition and description of popular culture, wide-ranging participation in popular culture, the value of shared experience in popular culture, and the influence of outside factors such as friends and technology. What is interesting, here, in examining how May defined (or described) and participated in popular culture – in the literacies she enjoyed – it seems that all of her engagements occurred in extra-curricular settings (sports, dating, the bar, popular music). That is to say, as May talked about her definition of popular culture and her participation in popular culture, she did not mention school (other than school-affiliated sports) or secondary ELA. This lack of reference to education or school in May's talk begs the question, "Without addressing in schools the various literacies within contemporary society and building upon adolescents' post-literate experiences, schools run the risk of becoming anti-educational sites" (Hagood, Stevens, & Reinking, 2007, p. 81). While May's talk showed a wide inclusion of popular culture texts as well as a wide array of participation in popular culture, I find it interesting that May's talk did not include a mention of school. That is, as Summer (Chapter 3) discussed tension over the classification and characterization of texts as high culture or popular culture, she mentioned secondary English. As April (Chapter 4) discussed the tension of feeling guilty for her interactions with popular culture, she referenced secondary ELA. This is not to say that May did not talk about feeling tension; rather, May did talk about feeling tension over the changes she experienced in her participation with popular culture especially when she began to consider the changes that she faced in her participation with popular culture. However, it is to say that May's talk about popular culture, unlike both Summer and May, at this point in our conversation did not include a reference to secondary ELA. But, before entering that discussion, let us look at the ways in which May's participation with popular culture turned into production of cultural texts and artifacts.

PART TWO: PRODUCTION of (POPULAR) CULTURE

> "...[The] conditions that create the gulf which exists generally between producer and consumer in modern society operate to create also a chasm between ordinary and esthetic experience"
> (Dewey, 1934, p. 10).

> "Practices of creating and acquiring knowledge cannot be separated from the power that one exercises in negotiating learning"
> (Foucault, 1972, qtd. in Hagood, Stevens & Reinking, 2007, p. 77).

At the same time that May talked about her participation in popular culture, she also talked about the ways in which she, over the years, produced cultural texts and artifacts. While May talked about only remembering the "major projects" she did in high school (that is, she remembers little other work or studying she did in high school), she described at least one of those major works positively: "Like, in creative writing, we had to make books at the end. Like, that was our final thing. And, I remember doing that, probably because that's what I enjoyed...and I still have them" (Interview, 2008, 0:41:05). This enjoyment in "making books" has since spilled over into her current life as, at the time of our conversation, she was working on making wedding scrapbooks for each of her bridesmaids (Interview, 2008, 0:07:05). The idea of textual production is once again seen in the following excerpt when May said,

> And then, that [reading magazines like *Seventeen*]...and music, sort of fed into poetry...I took some creative writing classes in high school that I loved. And, I would draw inspiration from lyrics, from other songs. I would take like one line and use those...lyrics [which] also goes along with, like, how you would, like, show emotion too, like you'd like give your lyrics to like your boyfriend and that's like how you'd, you know, express your feelings or whatever...[So] anyway, and then also with those magazines, like I would take like a picture, and then I would draw inspiration from the picture. Um, I sort of got into like painting on my own and I would like pull out magazine pictures and like paint around the magazine pictures. So I would pull that sort of popular culture [magazines and song lyrics] into my own culture (Interview, 2008, 0:10:48).

While May consistently talked about her active participation with popular culture (sports, dating, listening to music) during our conversation, in this excerpt she expands the idea

of that participation to talk about how her participation with popular culture turned into cultural production. In this case, May used song lyrics to express emotion or to communicate, and in addition, she used magazine pictures to create paintings. Moreover, not only did May produce new texts by combining popular magazines with painting, but also she described that cultural production: "So I would pull that sort of popular culture into my own culture." In this example, May talked about the way in which her participation in popular culture also included creating, or producing, culture. Although many would characterize May's participation with popular culture as the ordinary (Dewey, 1934; Googin, 2002) stuff of adolescence, what May talks about doing through this blending of popular culture texts like magazines and song lyrics with her own ideas, is closing the "chasm between ordinary and esthetic experience" (Dewey, 1934, p. 10). That is, May produces "her own culture" and blends the ordinary (magazines or popular song lyrics) with the esthetic (painting and poetry). As a result, during our conversation, May not only talked about her active *participation* with popular culture texts, but also she talked about her active *production* of cultural texts.

Another example of May's production of cultural texts came when May talked about the way in which knitting reappeared in cultural conversations during her university years. As May described the "knitting craze" and learning how to knit from her mother, she described knitting's re-emergence: "Knitting became [a part of] popular culture and mainstream again" (Interview, 2008, 0:33:48). In May's experience, knitting, although traditionally an element of folk culture, entered the realm of popular culture. In fact, May also mentioned the appearance of a number of different books about knitting as well as specific knitting groups and stores during this time. In this way, as Negus (1997) writes,

> We need to understand the meanings that are given to both the 'product' and the practices through which the product is made. Culture, thought of more broadly as a way of life and as the actions through which people create

> meaningful worlds in which to live, needs to be understood as the constitutive context within and out of which the sounds, words and images...are made and given meaning" (p. 101).

That is to say, while May's participation in popular culture and culture is important, her production of culture (painting, poetry, scrapbooks, knitting) is equally important especially as we consider the possibility that this production may have been essential in helping May create meaning of "sounds, words and images" (Negus, 1997, p. 101). Like the way in which May took elements of popular culture texts to create cultural texts (painting, poetry), she does the same with knitting. Specifically, May talked about knitting her husband a holiday stocking that matched her own. She said, "I integrated it [knitting] into my own culture" (Interview, 2008, 0:33:48). Once again, May demonstrates not only an active participation in popular culture, but also active production of culture. And, in this way, evokes the possibility that meaning is created through both the process (the participation) as well as the product (in this case, knitting).

In addition to communicating with song lyrics, painting with magazine pictures, and knitting, May also talked about her desire to write. She said,

> [Movies and] TV, somehow like they're just influential to me...Like, I want to write. Like, I want to make a screenplay. I want to write a screenplay. Or, I mean, I don't know if I could ever get on board with, like, some kind of show, but, like, you know, I always get these ideas and, like, I get invested in the characters and, you know, [and I ask myself], 'How do you write that?' And, and, it gives me ideas too for like, you know, I want to write a book. Like, I want to write something, and it gives me these ideas. And, I love watching the characters, and the connections and how they grow through...and how it's set up and how whoever's writing this makes it happen...And it's funny to watch, like, how, how, the characters change, how the characters progress...And...the writers are making those changes...I just keep having this thing in my mind that I want to write something...major...I started something at one point. You know? I don't know. It's like I gotta find the time to do it, 'cause it's...I don't know...I want to do something whether it's a screenplay or like a book or I don't know. I don't know (Interview, 2008, 0:07:45).

What is interesting, in this excerpt, is that May is the only one of the three participants in this study who talks about how she has, and how she wants to, create cultural artifacts.

While, I would argue that all three participants demonstrate active participation with popular culture (even if some do feel "guilty" about it like April), only May talks about active production of popular culture. Additionally, I find it interesting that once again May is influenced by popular culture (watching a television show or a movie) to think about the decisions screenwriters make and to consider both how she could become a screenwriter and what decisions she would make to show character growth and development. That is, once again, May talked about using popular culture texts to create cultural texts – she is shaped by popular culture and is beginning to think about shaping culture. As such, May once again demonstrates both her broad view (definition, description) of popular culture, her participation in popular culture, and her production (desire to produce) culture and popular culture. That is to say, in this excerpt, we see May's views and values of popular culture in the creativity she sees in teleplays and screenplays. We see her participation in popular culture as she looks carefully (critically?) at popular television to determine how characters are developed. And, we see how she aims to produce popular culture in her desire to write a teleplay or a screenplay.

Even though my intention for our conversation was to have May talk about the relationship between demographics and popular culture, in attempting to describe demographics from the perspective of her own participation in popular culture including the changes she experienced over time, May ended up providing a detailed look at what active participation and production can, and does, look like for one secondary ELA teacher. As such, I could not help but think about Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/2001) and the way in which May's views and values of popular culture seemed to be a strong argument against their argument for the powerful persuasion of the culture industry. That is to say, in her participation in and production of culture and popular culture, May's actions demonstrate that she is not a passive, "cultural dupe" (Adorno &

Horkheimer, 1944/2001). Although May, at times, seemed a bit unsure of the changes in her popular culture use (she comments on how some of her friends are still quite active in "bar culture" but that she feels she has moved on), it remained clear that May has a broad view of popular culture, that she is an active participant in popular culture, and that she produces cultural texts of her own. However, similar to the discussion of her participation in popular culture that seems to occur outside of school, May's talk about producing cultural texts and artifacts reflects that it, too, occurs outside of school. During our conversations, that is, May did not talk about participating in, or producing, cultural texts and artifacts in school or in secondary ELA (either as a student or as a teacher). There seemed to be a gap between May's personal views and values of popular culture and her professional views and values of popular culture. In the next section, I will explore what this may mean for the relationship between May's views and values of popular culture and her pedagogy.

PART THREE: POPULAR CULTURE and PEDAGOGY

"In life that is truly life, everything overlaps and merges"
(Dewey, 1934, p. 18).

"Teachers should not teach any texts that they are uncomfortable with"
(Morrell, 2004, p. 142).

As May talked about her broad view of popular culture and her active participation in, and production of, cultural texts, I wondered whether or not she incorporated popular culture into her classroom. When I later asked May about using popular culture in her classroom she said,

> I think part of it [using popular culture texts] is that we [novice secondary ELA teachers] are young, um, and it's like [we]...wanna fill time with something and so [we ask] how can we make a connection [between the texts of the canon and] somewhere else [popular culture] and, and be confident talking about it, and [so we think], 'Oh, I saw this movie once and this would be great [as a time-filler/connection]'" (FG2, 2008, 1:11:15).

That is to say, May as a young, novice teacher both saw the value of creating connections between the in-school texts of the canon and the out-of-school texts of popular culture and felt the need to "fill time" with confidence. May continued to talk about these tensions of feeling the need to "fill time", of feeling confident, and of feeling the need to make connections between texts (the high culture of the canon and popular culture) as well as between students and texts when she said, "Another thing that's truthful, you know, you want your [students] to like you, so [you think], 'Let's watch a movie today!' Like, I'm sure that's [wanting our students to like us] more important to us as younger teachers and once I'm like 50 and teaching I won't probably give a crap if the [students] like me or not" (FG2, 2008, 1:12:28). As May mentions, in thinking about the inclusion of popular culture texts into her secondary ELA classroom, the desire to create connections between texts ("[we]...wanna fill time with something and so how can we make a connection..."), as well as the desire to create connections between her students and herself ("...you want your [students] to like you..."), are immediate concerns and have real bearing on the decision whether or not to include popular culture texts. However, May went on to say that she wants to, and does, incorporate some popular culture into her classes. She said, "Some of the ideas we talked about then [in her university methods courses], I've actually put into practice" (FG2, 2008, 0:18:53). May went on to say that she would like to go and get Morrell's (2004) book (a key text in her senior-year methods course) and re-read it because she can now, in the teaching position she had a the time of the interview, include popular culture texts in her classroom.

Yet, when I asked May to try to be specific about the ways in which she teaches popular culture, or to be specific about how she wants to use popular culture in her classes, she did not do so. So, while May talked about wanting to include popular culture texts in her classroom, the driving force behind the inclusion that she talked

about seemed to be the need to feel that she is filling time, is confident, and is making connections between school and life, between texts, as well as between her students and herself. While we can see in these excerpts that May continues to participate in popular culture by consistently looking for ways to incorporate (is consistently thinking about ways to incorporate) popular culture texts into her classroom, it is difficult to see May's production of cultural texts or artifacts. That is to say, while we can see May mobilize her broad view of popular culture in her desire to make connections between secondary ELA texts and out-of-school (popular) texts, and while we can see her participation in popular culture through her engagement in considering the use of popular culture texts in her classroom, May's production – as discussed earlier – of cultural texts is not as clear.

However, as I pushed May to think a bit more about whether or not (or how) she included popular culture texts into her secondary English classroom, May talked about the freedom she had in making decisions regarding which texts to include in her classes. Even though, at the time of our conversation, she was teaching at a small, private, college-preparatory school that had high academic expectations, the administration "liked [her] to use" popular culture. What is interesting here, as all three participants pointed out during the second focal group interview, was the assumption that May's school traditionally would not be a school that would encourage the incorporation of popular culture because it is a small, private, college-preparatory school. That is, as Summer, April, and May compared the content of their secondary ELA classes, it seemed that the content of May's classes was greater (in number texts) and more focused on traditional, academic, canonical texts. For example, in the unit on conflict and resolution (Teaching Artifact, 2008), the texts included *Hiroshima* (Hersey, 1946), *Ordinary People* (Guest, 1976), *Fahrenheit 451* (Bradbury, 1953), *Farewell to Manzanar* (Houston, 1972), *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare, 1599), and *Macbeth*

(Shakespeare, 1603-1607) – a list much more expansive than comparative units in Summer's and April's classrooms. Yet, as May talked about the freedom that she felt to include popular culture texts, she talked about some of the other texts that she used in her classes. While the content of May's classroom was academically rigorous, there was also freedom and encouragement to include popular culture texts. The list of popular culture texts that May incorporated included a 1950's (1954-1955) television episode of *Sherlock Holmes* (and other popular culture references and characterizations of Sherlock Holmes) with *The Hounds of the Baskervilles* (Doyle, 1902); the film *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977) with *Beowulf* (as well as Campbell's characterization of the hero); the film *Scotland, PA* (Morrissette, 2001) with *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 1603-1607); the film *Young Frankenstein* (Brooks, 1974) with *Frankenstein* (Shelley, 1818); and the song "Imagine" (Lennon, 1971), the song "We Didn't Start the Fire" (Joel, 1989), the film *Pleasantville* (Ross, 1998), and the film *The Truman Show* (Weir, 1998) with the novel *Brave New World* (Huxley, 1931).

Although most of these popular culture texts are adaptations of canonical texts, May also included texts with similar themes as seen in the coupling of *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977) with *Beowulf* (the theme of the hero) and as seen in the texts used with *Brave New World* (Huxley, 1931). In addition, the assessment that May used with *Brave New World* (ibid.) was a multi-genre assessment that included the creation of a utopian society complete with city planning, building, and a written artifact (Teaching Artifact, 2008). What is interesting, here, is that while May had a difficult time, at first, talking about or recalling what popular culture texts she used in her classroom and how she used them, she actually used quite a few popular culture texts. While she was not able to talk about how she used Morrell's (2004) ideas when she commented that she wanted to go back and use his book as reference, she, in the end, was able to list quite a number of popular culture texts that she included in her classroom. As such, May

seemed to break the stereotype that Summer and April (and May and I) held of a private school ELA teacher.

As seen earlier in this chapter, May's talk about her views and values of popular culture illustrated an inclusive description and definition of popular culture, reflected her wide-ranging participation in popular culture, and showed her production of cultural texts. Yet, when our conversation turned more specifically to the incorporation of popular culture into her classroom, there was not as much talk about participation and production. That is to say, I had to push May a bit more to get her to talk about her use of popular culture in her pedagogy than I did to encourage talk about her use of popular culture in her personal time. And, I began to wonder about this. Specifically, I wondered about May's production of cultural texts that occurred outside of, or disconnected from, school and secondary ELA, as mentioned earlier. As I considered May's talk about her participation in popular culture and her production of cultural texts, I was amazed and inspired by all that she did (painting, writing poetry, creating scrapbooks, beginning to write a screenplay). Additionally, I was interested to see whether or not this participation and production was included in her classroom. However, while May did talk about participating in popular culture as it related to her classroom in terms of looking for connections between popular culture texts and the content of her classroom, she did not talk about the production of cultural texts that would resemble popular culture other than the one assessment that required the creation of a utopian society. This is not to say that May did not use popular culture in her classroom. Instead, in a manner similar to Summer and April, May used a number of adaptations of canonical texts and used popular texts that were similar in theme or idea to canonical texts. But, May's personal production of cultural texts was so different from Summer and April, that I wondered if May's incorporation of popular texts into her pedagogy would also be different than Summer's and April's use of popular texts in their

pedagogy. Yet, I did not find that to be true. In the end, May's talk about how she used popular culture texts did not seem different than Summer's and April's talk about incorporating popular culture texts. Once again, like Summer and April, there seemed to be a disconnect between the teachers' talk about their personal views and values of popular culture and their talk about their pedagogical views and values of popular culture.

ADDENDUM

Although it is not my intention to try to figure out why there was a difference between May's production of cultural texts outside of school and the production of texts that she talked about encouraging inside of her classroom, I do think it is important to bring attention to this discrepancy. In essence, as May talked about her personal and pedagogical views and values of popular culture, she talked about her participation in popular culture for personal and pedagogical purposes (she is always looking for connections between her course content and popular culture texts). However, May did not talk about her production of culture for personal and pedagogical purposes – in this case, her talk was limited to the realm of personal production. In a manner similar to the way Summer and April did not mention talking about their use(s) of popular culture with their students, May did not mention her sharing about her production of cultural texts with her students. It seems then, that May's goal for education may be Labaree's goal of social mobility which, "is the perspective of the individual educational consumer, from which education is seen as a private good designed to prepare individuals for successful social competition for the more desirable market goals" (Labaree, 1997, p. 42). That is, while production of cultural texts was important for May in her personal time, the production of texts that she included in her classroom was a type of production

that would prepare her students for successful social competition. That is, her students produced the texts of the traditional, academic, canonical English classroom.

Given the nature of May's school as a private, college-preparatory school, neither is the inclusion of traditional, academic, canonical texts surprising nor is the notion of preparing students for successful social competition surprising. But, what is surprising – or, what was surprising to me – was the difference between May's participation in and production of texts outside of her classroom and her students' production of texts inside of her classroom. There seems to be, in this case, such a discrepancy in May's talk about her personal participation in and production of popular culture and her professional pedagogy. In some ways, it made sense that Summer did not incorporate many texts from the realm of popular culture into her classroom because of the tension she talked about in categorizing cultural texts. Likewise, it made sense that April did not include many popular culture texts into her classroom because of the tension she talked about regarding her personal use of popular culture. While I will take a closer look across all three participants in the following chapter (Chapter 6), I think that it is important to recognize here that May did not talk about experiencing the same tensions about which Summer and April talked. Rather, May talked about a broad view of popular culture as well as a broad manner of producing cultural texts. Thus, the lack of the transfer of this participation and production into her classroom seems to argue, "for exploring how people...act provisionally at particular times given particular circumstance within various discourses" (Alvermann, 2007, p. viii). That is to say, we in English teacher education may be well served to consider how pre-service and novice secondary ELA teachers act, or engage, the various discourses related to popular culture texts. What I mean to say is that May reminded me, as an English teacher educator, that, "You are designed as a cultural being, in language and consciousness; and you are designing, a maker of your personal life as you combine

and recombine the ranges of resources in the layers of your identity" (Kalantzis & Cope, 2000, p. 147). As May engaged in the various discourses of participation and production – as she combined and recombined a range of resources in her participation in and production of popular culture – she reminded me to consider what this participation and production looks like both in and out of the secondary English classroom. As Storey (2006) says, "It is not enough to celebrate agency, nor is it enough to detail the structure(s) of power; we must always keep in mind the dialectical play between resistance and incorporation" (p. xix). As May shows us, this is true for English teachers both inside of, and outside of, the secondary ELA classroom.

The thing that seems the most striking about May's talk is that she described such a broad view of popular culture and that she detailed the way in which her building was supportive and encouraging of the incorporation of popular culture texts. In comparison to Summer and April, although May mentioned feeling "under the gaze" of other teachers, she also mentioned the freedom she had in using texts from popular culture. Thus, there seems to be some type of gap between the freedom that she senses to use popular texts and what she actually does in her classroom. There seems to be a gap between May's personal views and values of popular culture and her professional views and values. Like Summer and April then, May falls into perpetuating the content of a traditional, academic, canonical, secondary ELA classroom. This, given her teaching position at an elite private school is not surprising; however, given the freedom and support in designing content that she talked about having it is surprising.

As a result, any critical conversation about culture, popular culture, or secondary ELA was missing from my conversations with May (again, similar to both Summer and April). Perhaps not surprising, May did not talk about having any literacy concerns for her students. I think we all assumed that May's students would go to university and

follow in whatever business or career path hoped for by their families. Yet, I wonder what discussions May would be able to have with her students if she entered into conversations about issues (such as art, access, power, and demographics) typically sparked by engagement(s) with popular culture. I wonder what dialogue she would be able to have if she were willing to share her production of cultural texts. I wonder what conversations May would be able to have with her students if she felt able to talk about her own views and values of popular culture. Because the content of the traditional, academic, canonical, secondary ELA is emphasized in May's classroom, there are many issues and conversations that are omitted. And, as such, May, like Summer and April, perpetuates the status quo.

CHAPTER SIX

SHAKESPEARE, A BADGE OF LITERACY, AND THE RED WINGS: Expanding Ideas of the Consumption and Production of Texts in Secondary ELA

"It may well be that we have to rethink what we are teaching, and, in particular, what new learning needs literacy pedagogy might now address" (New London Group, 1996, p. 61).

"Literacy is at the heart of education's promise...Literacy represents a kind of symbolic capital in two senses: as the pre-eminent form of symbol manipulation that gets things done in modern times and as a symbolic marker of 'being educated'" (Kalantzis & Cope in Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 121).

"Why study popular culture? It's tempting to answer: why not" (Bennett, 1986/2006, p. 92)?

PREAMBLE

There is a library table situated by a bank of big windows that look out onto an idyllic, Midwestern, college campus where I have spent a number of hours over the many months of this project sitting, watching the seasons come and go, thinking and writing about culture, popular culture, aesthetics and secondary ELA. Sitting at this large, beige colored table, surrounded by books, thinking and writing about the three English teachers with whom I talked about popular culture and secondary ELA, often caused me to consider my own aesthetic views and values. For every cultural or aesthetic question that Summer, April, and May raised, I raised as well:

- Like Summer, I wondered what I really thought about Shakespeare: Is he, was he, an artist or a great public speaker? How do I define "art" and "culture"?
- Like April, I wondered about my own Badge of Literacy: What does it look like, and how do I display it? How do I hide my consumption of popular culture?
- Like May, I wondered what I would say about the Red Wings: How would I describe my consumption of popular culture compared to others'

consumption? How has my consumption changed over time? And, in what ways do I produce cultural texts?

In wondering, and in thinking about, these questions, I also wondered about my own views and values of popular culture and secondary ELA. I began this dissertation talking about the film *Boyz 'N the Hood* (Singleton, 1991) to give context to how and where my wondering about popular culture and secondary ELA began. The character of Furious Styles sparked my journey exploring the possibilities for using popular culture in secondary ELA and incited my passion for thinking about the importance of education (literacy) for all and the necessity of looking between, among, and within texts.

In Chapter 2, I explored further my journey with popular culture and secondary ELA. Specifically, I wrote about my journey of incorporating popular culture texts into my learning (as a secondary and university student) and teaching (as a secondary teacher and university instructor) as much as possible. Thus, my journey with popular culture and secondary ELA, combined with the tensions about which the three teachers in this study talked, caused me to raise and wrestle with similar tensions: I revisited my own views and values of culture, popular culture, secondary English, and secondary ELA teacher education. I wondered about the way in which I privilege certain texts over others. By revisiting my aesthetic views and values, and by raising the same questions that Summer, April, and May raised, I realized that, "the way [I] look...is affected by a whole series of learnt assumptions... concerning Beauty, Truth, Genius, Civilization, Form, Status, Taste, etc." (Berger, 1972, p. 11). My learned assumptions – specifically, in this case, my aesthetic assumptions – affect what and how I see (see Chapter 2). I realized that I, too, need to hear what Furious Styles has to say about "reading" texts. This is a fact that I have had to return to again and again as I proceeded with this study.

That is to say, I recognized that as I engaged in all of this revisiting, raising (of questions), and realizing, my aesthetic assumptions regarding secondary ELA,

secondary ELA teachers, and the relationship between popular culture and secondary ELA were at play. As should be evident based in the previous chapters, I began – and pursued – this project because I value popular culture, I am fascinated by aesthetic questions, and I am interested in the potential of popular culture texts in secondary ELA. For me, it is tempting to simply say, "Why *not* teach popular culture" (Bennett, 1986/2006, p. 92, emphasis in original)? All of which is evidence that my aesthetic assumptions are, and have been, at play throughout this project.

Yet, this project has not entirely been about my own interests as an English teacher educator and scholar. While I think it is fair to say that my interest in popular culture and English education is what inspired me to begin this study, and while it is important to mention (as I have) that my aesthetic assumptions have affected this journey, it is also imperative to mention that this project would not come to completion relying solely on my interest in popular culture. In Chapter 1, I wrote that there is a rub in defining or delineating "popular culture" – there are myriad conceptualizations of both "popular" and "culture" as well as myriad conceptualizations of "popular culture". As such, I wrote, it is important to begin talking about and understanding what the argument is for using popular culture in the secondary ELA classroom and how popular culture texts are being used. Hagood (2008) supports such a move by suggesting research surrounding the following questions:

> How do *readers* define *text* and *reading* in the 21st century? And relatedly, how do readers define popular culture? Specifically, how do teachers parents, and students define these terms both for themselves and others? ...[Explicit] examinations and uses of text, reading, and popular culture as they are defined and used by teachers, parents, and students across in-school and out-of-school settings has not been undertaken (p. 545, emphasis in original).

This project was my attempt to *begin* a conversation about the use of popular culture texts in secondary ELA by asking how teachers define and use popular culture across in-school and out-of-school settings. That is to say, I hope that my examination of the

talk generated by Summer, April, and May starts (re-starts) a discussion about whether or not popular culture texts should be used in the secondary ELA classroom, how those texts should be used, and, I would add, what English teachers' views and values of cultural and popular culture texts are (or, at least, how they talk about those views and values).

As I begin this final chapter, I am facing (I am faced with) the reality of the innumerable decisions I made along the way as both a scholar and as a writer. In taking time to look across the talk generated by Summer, April, and May (as I will in this chapter), I once again realize that this project could have taken any number of different turns and forms (i.e., examining the similarities in the teachers' talk instead of the differences, or exploring the specific ways the teachers used popular culture texts in their classrooms). However, as I begin this final chapter, I, gratefully, am aware of how important these topics of popular culture, aesthetics, and secondary ELA and the work of this dissertation are. That is to say that I am grateful for the decisions that I did make (at least for now). The reading and studying that I did both to prepare for this study and to enhance this study have reminded me of the issues facing secondary ELA, especially in the age of No Child Left Behind (2001) and under the influence of "scientific literacy" (Alvermann, 2006). Alvermann (2001) writes, "The privileging of one form of literacy (academic literacy) over multiple other forms (e.g., computer, visual, graphic and scientific literacies) has been criticized for ignoring the fact that different texts and social contexts (reading for whom, with what purpose) require different reading skills" (p. 4). Yet, it seems that we still favor academic literacy (Alverman's "scientific literacy") over multiple other forms. Literacy issues are real issues with real ramifications for real teachers and real students who work and learn in real contexts with real-life challenges. As Cope and Kalantzis (2000) write in their introduction to the edited book *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*, "When technologies

of meaning are changing so rapidly, there cannot be one set of standards or skills that constitutes the ends of literacy learning, however taught" (p. 6). To explain, I have been reminded that while I am passionate about popular culture and secondary English, I also believe strongly in the work being done to further explore and examine the new, multi-, and popular literacy practices of adolescents. I believe in the exploration and examination of changing technologies and the standards and skills of literacy learning. And, while the specific work inquiring into adolescents' literacy practices and skills is not my work, I strongly believe in it – and, I want to expand on it. And, what I mean to say is that teachers' literacy practices and skills are similarly important.

The path I have chosen in this time, space, and place has been (and is) to pause to think about three secondary English teachers' talk about their personal and pedagogical views and values of popular culture. I hoped to follow Hagood's (2008) suggestion that, "Studies that examine how adults use popular culture in their own lives will assist in opening up the ways that popular culture [and literacy] is explored with students" (p. 545). My specific question about teacher talk was a question that germinated over a number of years as I began my graduate studies and as I explored the ideas of new literacies, multi-literacies, and popular literacy practices. As I explored the plethora of research on students' (adolescents') literacy practices during the first few years of graduate school, and as I immersed myself in my role as an instructor in English methods classes, I began to wonder about teachers' literacy practices. Specifically, I began to ponder the image of *the* English teacher that I held and the fact that my literacy practices did not seem to match that image (much like April's talk in Chapter 4) – I still have not read the book *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 1885) or *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne, 1850) because I have been too busy watching *Law & Order* (Wolf, 1990) and *Lost* (Abrams, Lieber, & Lindelof, 2004) and reading Ed

McBain[21] and Janet Evanovich[22]. When I first began to contemplate a potential mismatch between the image of the English teacher I held with my real-life literacy practices, there seemed to be, for me, a discrepancy between who I was as an English teacher and who I was as a thirty-something female living in current culture. Yet, in addition, although I was, and am, a proponent of popular culture, I am not always fully supportive of every aspect of popular culture. That is to say, much like Summer, I have questioned my own views and values of cultural texts. I have had to wrestle with my own cultural hierarchy. All of this is to say that I have ended up where this chapter and dissertation started: raising every question Summer, April, and May raised about their personal and pedagogical views and values of popular culture and being challenged by Furious Styles to think in, between, among, and beyond texts.

PART ONE: LOOKING ACROSS

> "I must, however, warn against the tendency to use the popular texts in these multimedia texts as 'bridge' texts or jumping off points into the more rigorous and intellectually stimulating classical work"
> (Morrell, 2004, p. 147).

At first glance, it may seem that Summer, April and May are more similar than they are different. All three are, indeed, white, middle class, educated women who teach secondary English and who have heard numerous arguments for the use of popular culture texts in ELA (Morrell, 2004). However, as I quickly learned through our conversations (2008), these three English teachers are not as similar as they seem. Instead, while all three were similar in the articulate and insightful manner in which they talked about popular culture, and while all three navigated and negotiated tensions

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[21] According to Wikipedia, Ed McBain was one of a number of pen names of Salvatore Lombino (1926-2005), who was an American author and screenwriter most famous for the novel and film *The Blackboard Jungle* (1954).

[22] Again, according to Wikipedia, Janet Evanovich (b. 1943) is an American novelist who began her career writing romance novels, but who now writes "romance adventure" novels. I have restricted my reading to her Stephanie Plum series.

related to their views and values of cultural texts, they all three talked differently about dissimilar tensions related to culture and popular culture texts and artifacts. For example, Summer (Chapter 3), in struggling with a perceived hierarchy of cultural texts and artifacts, talked about the tensions of classifying and categorizing texts. April (Chapter 4), in struggling with a perceived Badge of Literacy that she believes secondary ELA teachers (should) hold, talked about the tensions in reconciling her personal and professional uses of popular culture. And, May (Chapter 5), in her apparent lack of struggle in her value(s) and use(s) of cultural texts and artifacts, talked about participating with and producing texts in a variety of ways. Or, more specifically, Summer conceptualized what a text is, April conceptualized the consumption of texts, and May conceptualized the production of texts. Thus, for as similar as all three teachers were, or are (demographically, educationally), they each spoke quite differently about their pedagogical and personal views and values of popular culture. Even though Summer, April, and May are similar in terms of demographics and education, their talk about tensions with popular culture was dissimilar.

However, although these three secondary ELA teachers talk differently about aesthetic conceptualizations of culture and of texts, they, in turn, talked similarly about their pedagogy. That is, even though the three teachers talked differently about the texts of culture and popular culture and the tensions they felt in their views and values of those texts, the way they talked about teaching those texts was very similar: all three teachers at different times and in different ways talked about using popular culture texts as steppingstones to canonical texts. And, through using popular texts as steppingstones, the three ELA teachers evoked Labaree's (1997) explanation of the educational goal of social mobility (education as commodity; education for competitive advantage). That is, as steppingstones, popular texts point the way to the "legitimate knowledge" (Morrell, 2004) of the canon; popular texts point the way toward that which

will gain one competitive advantage. For example, Summer talked about using the film *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Burton, 2005) as a steppingstone to teach cautionary tales. April talked about using the film adaptations of both *The Crucible* (Hytner, 1996) and *Of Mice and Men* (Sinise, 1992) as steppingstones to the novels from which the films were adapted. And, May talked about using the film *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977) as a steppingstone to the epic poem *Beowulf* and the idea of the archetypal hero. As such, all three treated the texts of the canon as legitimate knowledge, and, as a result, treated the texts of popular culture as being in service to that legitimate knowledge (Morrell, ibid.), an idea that April (FG2, 2008, 0:21:19) recognized in the second focal group conversation ("[Popular culture] hasn't been it's own topic of conversation."). In adhering to the "legitimate knowledge" of the canon, the three teachers, in a way, acknowledged that education is for social mobility (Labaree, 1997). Thus, while it seemed that while Summer, April, and May were similar demographically and educationally, they talked differently about popular culture, but in turn, talked about practicing similar pedagogical moves in using popular culture texts as steppingstones – Morrell's (2004) "bridge" or "jumping off point" – to canonical texts. As such, there was a similar (demographically, educationally)-dissimilar (talk about popular culture)-similar (talk about popular culture texts as steppingstones) pattern that intrigued me, and intrigues me, in the three ELA teachers' talk. In a way, it seems as if the debate about popular culture discussed in Chapter 1 influenced these teachers and their use of texts in their classrooms. They seemed to feel the aforementioned rub in defining and delineating popular culture, especially as it relates to the content of secondary English.

In addition to using popular culture texts (mostly film) as steppingstones to canonical texts, the three English teachers restricted the texts of their classrooms to the traditional, academic texts of the canon and the traditional, academic writing

assignments that typically accompany those texts (the argumentative five-paragraph essay). That is, the texts of the three teachers' secondary ELA classes and the assignments that accompany the texts appeared to be the same (or similar) to the traditional, academic texts and assignments of the canon. For example, all three teachers talked about teaching the play *The Crucible* (Miller, 1953), the novella *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1957), the novel *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925) and conventions like the archetypal hero. What I noticed, then, as I talked with these three teachers is that it seemed as if not much had changed in the eight years that have passed since I was a secondary ELA teacher. And, what caused me to pause (what was another point of intrigue) once again was that even though Summer, April, and May generated such different talk about their views and values of culture and popular culture, the way they talked about using texts in their classrooms seemed so similar. The diversity in their talk about culture and popular culture did not seem to translate into distinctions in their pedagogy: different talk about popular culture did not transfer to different talk about pedagogy.

As I began to look across the three participants and their talk, I assumed that Summer did not incorporate many popular culture texts into her classroom because of the tension she talked about between the texts of high culture and the texts of popular culture. That is, I assumed that Summer did not think that popular culture texts were worthy of study in a secondary ELA classroom. In a similar way, when I began to consider all three teachers together, I assumed April did not include popular culture texts into her classroom because of the tension she talked about between her personal and professional views of popular culture. That is, I assumed that April felt a professional prohibition against using popular culture texts. However, when I began to consider May, who had such an inclusive notion of popular culture both in terms of consumption and production and who had such a supportive school system, I assumed

that she would incorporate popular culture texts broadly and differently than the other two teachers. And, yet, May – like Summer and April – adhered to a typically traditional, academic curriculum. As a result, I began to wonder.

It made sense to me, as I began to consider the three teachers in relationship to each other, that their use of popular culture texts would be limited to a few select texts. I understood that as novice teachers, Summer, April, and May would be navigating their new roles as professional English teachers as well as negotiating the world of secondary ELA. I assumed that, as beginning teachers, these three teachers would still be exploring the canon and finding comfort in the structure that came with the canon (in a manner similar to the cliché of finding comfort in sticking to what you know). In this, the three English teachers, in a way, evoke Lortie's (1975) notion of apprenticeship of observation. In adhering to the canon and the traditional, academic idea of secondary ELA, it seemed that the three teachers mobilized their ideas of teaching English that were both based on what they knew as well as based on their ideas of what an English teacher/classroom should be. Additionally, it made sense to me that the popular culture texts the three ELA teachers would choose to use would be adaptations of canonical texts. That is, because of the lure of structure that the canon offers, I understood as I looked across the three teachers that adaptations of canonical texts are easy ways in which to incorporate popular culture texts while still adhering to the curriculum of the canon – using popular culture adaptations of canonical texts as steppingstones is an easy illustrative tool for teachers. I understood enough of the issues facing novice teachers because of experience and study, that I recognized the three teachers' need to provide structure for their teaching through a traditional, academic curriculum provided by the canon. However, what surprised me was that there seemed to be such a discrepancy between their talk about popular culture and their talk about their teaching. That is, as seen in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, the three English teachers had interesting and

insightful things to say about popular culture and ELA. Yet, based on their pedagogical talk, I could not see how their views and values of popular culture were revealed in their classes. And, my wondering continued.

In considering Summer's, April's, and May's talk – in thinking about the similar-dissimilar-similar pattern to their talk – I found myself returning full-circle to some of the questioning that launched me on this project in the first place. What I mean to say is that during my years teaching English methods classes, I wondered what happened between students' senior years of university when they seemed to be willing to think broadly about ELA (and seemed to be willing to try new ideas) and their intern years/first years of teaching when they seemed willing to rely fully on the traditional, academic curriculum of secondary ELA. While recognizing this change is what motivated the beginning stages of this project, this study is not at all aimed at exploring that change. But what is important is that it seems that the insightful and interesting aesthetic talk generated by Summer, April, and May did not, at the time of our conversations, transfer to their talk about their teaching. Similar to the apparent disconnect between talk during their senior year and talk during their intern year, there was an apparent disconnect between Summer's, April's, and May's aesthetic talk about popular culture and their pedagogical talk. Realizing that there were differences in what Summer, April, and May said about their views and values of popular culture and that there were similarities in what they said about the content of their classrooms was, and is, important for me in my thinking about secondary ELA and English teacher education as I begin the next stage of my scholarship.

PART TWO: LOOKING WITHIN

> "We are living amidst major changes, changes creating new ways with words, new literacies, and new forms of learning. These changes are creating, as well, new relationships and alignments within, between, and among..."

(Gee in Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 43).

As I continue to consider the three teachers' talk, I wonder whether the difference between the talk about views and values of texts and the talk about the teaching of those texts could be because of the design of English teacher education programs where the study of texts resides in English departments but the study of teaching of texts resides in education departments. As McLuhan (1967) writes, "Education must shift from instruction, from imposing of stencils, to discovery – to probing and exploration and to the recognition of the language of forms" (p. 100). I would expand McLuhan's (ibid.) idea to posit that English education – English teacher education – must shift to discovery, to probing, and to exploring the forms of language, of the ways in which language is communicated (media), and how language is taught. That is, I wonder if in the study of texts during the secondary and tertiary years, we as instructors ignore or disregard the idea of aesthetics – if we divorce language and form (McLuhan, ibid.). I wonder if we in English education still teach texts under the guise of the text holding an "answer" that only need be uncovered or discovered. I wonder if the program design of English education impoverishes the notion of a text. I wonder if we as English teacher educators divorce aesthetics from literacy. I wonder if the state of current educational policy (standards and standardization) strips away any possible place for aesthetics in ELA. I wonder if, in the process of creating core curriculum we diminish what it means to consume and produce. I wonder if we perpetuate the idea of a cultural hierarchy (Summer). I wonder if we promote an idea of a scholarly, cultural English teacher who only consumes the texts and artifacts of high culture (April). I wonder if we ignore the changes that happen in cultural consumption as well as ignore the possibility for production (May), especially teacher production.

While I recognize that my teaching and my scholarship has been shaped by my small-town, Midwestern, white, heterosexual, female, Protestant experiences, and while

I recognize that I "read" the texts of the teachers' talk through this (these) lens (lenses), my thinking about culture, popular culture, aesthetics and secondary ELA has been challenged by Summer, April, and May. As previously mentioned, I had to raise and wrestle every question that Summer, April, and May raised and wrestled. Although some may argue that this raising and wrestling should not be considered as a challenge to my thinking because of the demographic (white, middle-class, female) and educational (university degree) similarities between the three English teachers and myself, I would argue that hearing the teachers talk about their tensions with culture and popular culture provoked me to consider my own perceptions about culture, popular culture, and English (teacher) education. For example, Summer taught me that while the notion of a cultural hierarchy may be an invention by 19th century intellectuals (Storey, 2004), such a notion continues to influence the way in which secondary ELA teachers think about and teach texts. April taught me that, like the notion of a cultural hierarchy (Summer), a notion of the scholarly English teacher also influences the way in which secondary ELA teachers talk about their interactions with cultural texts (as well as the way in which they seek cultural texts). And, May taught me that recognizing changes in cultural consumption and acknowledging the way in which we all are cultural producers are important moves both as English teachers and as people living in the world. That is to say, the tensions the teachers talked about taught me to think about texts and artifacts, and taught me to consider the way I *teach* texts and artifacts.

Currently, in the field of secondary ELA and English teacher education the most compelling topic for scholarship (i.e., grant money, research projects, policy documents), to which I alluded in Chapter 1, is the topic of literacy, specifically examining the literacy practices of adolescents. While the work that has been done regarding adolescents and literacy practices ("new", "multi", or "popular") is important work to be sure, I continue to wonder about where secondary English teachers fit in this

scholarship. What I mean to say is that I wonder if we in English teacher education/scholarship are neglecting a big piece of the literacy puzzle by not accounting for the views and values of ELA teachers, specifically the aesthetic views and values of ELA teachers. In addition, I wonder where the study of ELA teachers' literacy practices fits in to this scholarship. In the face of the changing demands of global literacy, much research is dedicated to examining and exploring the literacy practices of adolescents. But, what about teachers? Kirkland (2010) supports this line of questioning when he writes,

> There seems to be relatively little change occurring in English as subject matter: in curriculum or instruction, in assessments, or standards...The answer [to the questions regarding whether or not the category of English is necessary] may not exist in traditional English education at all, but in a comprehensive language education policy that incorporates curricula, instruction, and standards that reflect the many Englishes spoken I the United States and around the world. How should this language education or the *New English Education* look? How should language educators – the new ELA teachers – be prepared to teach it (p. 232, emphasis in original)?

It seems that as we both value the multiliteracies of adolescents and value "scientific" (or academic) literacy (a dichotomy, to be sure), we lose the essentially important element of the views and values of teachers. The approach for this study is, and has been, an attempt to begin to piece in that part of the puzzle – to begin that portion of the conversation. That is to say, the scholarship on adolescents and literacy is important work with more important work to be done. However, I think that it is time to paint teachers and their literacy practices into the portrait. I am hoping that a close examination of Summer's, April's, and May's talk will both complicate and extend some of the current thinking regarding the topic of literacy.

This study, then, suggests that teacher talk about personal and pedagogical views and values of popular culture can both inspire and incite contemplation of English teacher education. Or, as Hagood (2008) writes, "That popular culture is a relevant part of literacy research and instruction is based on several factors. First, the shift to more

inclusive and expanded definitions of texts...of reading...and of literacy...that incorporate visual and communicative aspects into traditionally print-focused views has opened up space for the study of nonprint" (p. 531). In essence, we need to include popular culture in literacy research and instruction for adolescents *and* for teachers. For example, through this study I hope that Summer's talk about the hierarchy of cultural texts will challenge us to consider what texts we value, which texts we consider to be the foundation for "knowledge", why we value those texts, which texts are neglected or impoverished in the process, and how we communicate the notion of a cultural hierarchy both implicitly and explicitly. In addition, I hope that April's talk about her Badge of Literacy will encourage us to engage in a discussion of the image of the scholarly English teacher, the potential relationship between teachers and students, and how that image may influence English education and personal and pedagogical cultural consumption practices. And, I hope that May's talk will promote the idea of cultural production both in and out of the secondary ELA classroom. As Storey (2006) writes, "[There] always is [or, there always should be] a dialogue between the processes of production and the activities of consumption" (p. xviii). All of this to say, I hope that this study encourages and promotes conversations within English teacher education and among English teacher educators. That is, I hope that this study encourages and promotes dialogue about the activities of production (May) and consumption (Summer and April). While this study does not aim to prove that English teachers have certain views and values of culture, popular culture, and ELA, this study does aim to illustrate that teacher talk is an important asset in the realm of ELA. In thinking about and exploring teacher talk, I am not attempting to argue that there is a certain way to "do" ELA or English teacher education. However, I am arguing that there is quite a bit that we in English teacher education can gain by listening to teachers talk about their views and values of texts and artifacts from the realms of high culture and popular culture. I

am arguing that secondary ELA teachers, like Summer, April, and May, can challenge us to ask questions about the New English Education (Kirkland, 2010). There is much to gain in listening to teachers talk about aesthetics and how teachers, themselves, make meaning with and through cultural texts and artifacts. And, although this study is limited in shape and focus by eliciting talk from three similar ELA teachers, I believe that this study does encourage English teacher educators to wonder about the relationship between and among aesthetics, culture, popular culture, and secondary ELA.

PART THREE: LOOKING BEYOND

> "We need to see ourselves – all people, not just vanguard intellectuals – as active participants in culture: selecting, rejecting, making meanings, attributing value, resisting, and yes, being duped and manipulated"
> (Storey, 2006, p. 171).

I am sure that it is obvious by now that I am biased toward an inclusion of aesthetics and popular culture into secondary ELA. While I strongly believe in the scholarship that is happening in the realm of literacy, I do not want to see discussions of aesthetics, culture, and popular culture neglected in such work. Through my conversations with Summer, April, and May, I learned that even if aesthetic discussions are not occurring explicitly in secondary ELA, aesthetic notions are occurring implicitly and influencing tensions teachers face regarding the content of secondary English. Thus, it is my hope that as we continue and progress with the scholarship on literacy – adolescents and literacy, "scientific" literacy (Alvermann, 2006), New Literacies, popular literacies, and so on – we will not forget that cultural texts and artifacts are consumed at certain times, in particular places, in a variety of ways, and for myriad purposes. Because, as Gee (2008) writes, "What appears to be crucial for success now are abilities to deal with multimodal texts (texts which mix words and images), nonverbal symbols, and with technical systems within specific, and now usually highly

collaborative, institutional practices" (p. 40), asking these broader aesthetic and literacy questions is imperative.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, there has been, and continues to be, a number of proposed responses to the perceived literacy crisis. One of these responses is the call to incorporate texts from the realm of popular culture as a particular response to the changing nature of adolescents' literacy practices. While I do not disagree with this call, I think it is a complicated call. That is to say, responding to a perceived literacy debate is not as simple as adding alternative texts to the secondary ELA classroom. The intersection of critical literacy, popular culture, and secondary ELA is a complex intersection, to be sure. As April mentioned (FG2, 2008), secondary ELA teachers perform a difficult and intricate dance: doing what they need to do in order to "engage" students in the content of the classroom and doing what they need to do to "get them to college". And, thus is the intersection of popular culture (used to engage students in the content of the classroom) and of secondary ELA (the traditional, academic, canonical content used to gain access to a "college" type of knowledge). In addition, as we saw in Summer's, April's, and May's talk, the incorporation of popular culture comes with complicated and complex views of texts, consumption of texts, and production of texts. Yet, the changing literacy demands, the changing demographics of adolescents, and the prevalence of popular culture cannot be ignored. Likewise, the increase in standards and standardization cannot be ignored. Thus, as we in English teacher education consider questions regarding the nature of secondary ELA, consider our responses to the perceived literacy crisis, and consider the call to incorporate popular culture texts into secondary ELA, I hope that we will keep teachers and their aesthetic notions in mind. As Hagood (2008) writes, we need to ask the following questions of students *and* of teachers: "(a) What texts do readers access in their day-to-day lives? (b) What media do readers employ in their uses of popular culture? and (c) How do

readers read and use popular culture to form and to inform identities?" I believe that asking these questions and exploring the intersection of critical literacy, popular culture, and secondary ELA will both dare and challenge us.

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