# SPONSORING TEEN BOYS DIRECTLY, SPONSORING TEEN BOYS' LITERACY PRACTICES INDIRECTLY

By

Deborah Monique Vriend Van Duinen

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**ABSTRACT**

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The national attention to boys' underachievement in literacy over the past two decades has resulted in many research studies focusing on the literacy practices that teen boys chose to do in their own time and for their own purposes. Often these out-of-school literacy practices are contrasted with school literacy. This qualitative in-depth interview study with 21 adolescent boys reframes understandings of teen boys' literacy practices in its analysis of the various literacy sponsors in teen boys' lives, sponsors that include more than just school and teachers. Drawing on New Literacy Studies and youth culture studies, I adapt Deborah Brandt's concept of literacy sponsorship and apply it to teen boys' experiences with literacy. I explore the people, institutions, and commercial forces that encourage, teach and support as well as discourage and withhold teen boys' literacy practices. Using methodology that indirectly gets at teen boys' literacy practices through the use of interview artifacts, my study asks the following questions: What are the texts, contexts, participants, functions and motivations involved in adolescent boys' literacy practices? When literacy is sponsored, what else is being sponsored? How do boys respond to this sponsorship? What motivates the boys to participate in the literacy practices they do?

Specifically focusing on teen boys' family, sports, and church sponsorship situations, I propose that these literacy sponsors are directly sponsoring ways of being teen boys, and in the process indirectly sponsor ways of being literate boys. I offer the term "gendered literacy

sponsorship” to describe how these sponsorship situations have consequences on how teen boys view themselves and what they are capable of doing and being.

This dissertation is dedicated to my three sons,

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**Open Your Eyes**

When you see me,
See me.
It's the least that you can do.

Sharon G. Flake (2010),
*You don't even know me: Stories and poems about boys*

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

## LIST OF TABLES

## CHAPTER 1: "JUST A BUNCH OF BONEHEADS?"

"You're studying teenage boys?" an acquaintance incredulously asked me at a summer time barbeque. "They're just a bunch of boneheads!" he said. His comment earned him laughter from those standing around us. After hearing that I was indeed doing a dissertation study on teenage boys and that I was interested in the kinds of reading and writing they do, this man, in his early 30s, who not that long ago had been a teenage boy himself, exclaimed, "Do they even read anymore?" Laughter ensued again. Obviously enjoying the responses he was receiving, he continued with what seemed to be his punch line, "Do they even know *how* to read?"

The person I talked with isn't alone in his dismissive and reductionistic views of teen boys. Teen boys often get reduced to stereotypes. They are seen as a monolithic group of unmotivated sports-watching, video-game playing, school-hating, nonreaders who passively follow popular culture trends and actively resist adult involvement in their lives. These stereotypes reflect anxiety and concern over teen boys, their interests and their capabilities, anxiety and concern that some researchers have argued "is as American as apple pie" (Barrett & Rivers, 2003, p. 2).

When anxiety about teen boys is expressed, it often reveals particular characterizations of adolescence and boys. These characterizations are important to examine because they often determine what people identify as the "problems" surrounding teen boys as well as the proposed "solutions." Donna Alvermann (2009) writes that "unless that period of time in young people's lives is scrutinized to reveal at least some of its various constructions, one runs the risk of prescribing solutions for a subpopulation that may or may not fit any of its members particularly well" (p. 15). In other words, analyzing the social constructions of adolescence, and of teen boys

in particular, matters because of how these constructions determine which interventions and proposed responses get envisioned and carried out.

In this study, I examine the intersections between characterizations of adolescent boys and their literacy practices. In the last two decades, boys' low performances on standardized tests of reading and writing have attracted international attention from a variety of disciplines and theoretical and methodological perspectives. From the late 1990s to the present, there has been a wave of research on boys' underachievement in schools with many of them focusing specifically on their literacy achievement levels. In 2006, for example, a *Newsweek* cover coined the term "boy crisis", (Tyre, 2006) which later appeared in *New Republic* and *Esquire* articles, a *Today Show* segment and many newspaper and Internet editorials. In his recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* editorial, Thomas Mortenson (2008) argued that because educators have focused on raising educational and career achievements for girls in the last 40 years, men and boys today are in "profound crisis."

And yet, not everyone agrees. To some, the whole idea of a "boy crisis" has been used by conservatively-minded authors who blame "misguided feminists" (Mead, 2006, p. 17) for focusing too much attention and resources on female students instead of equally distributing them between boys and girls. To others, the "boy crisis" is used by more liberally-minded authors who maintain that schools today use instructional methods that are "particularly ill-suited to boys' interests and learning styles" (Mead, 2006, p. 14).

In "The Boy Crisis—Fact or Myth?," Barnett and Rivers (2006) argue that the statistics used in these discussions do not take race or class into consideration. They posit that if there is a crisis, "it's among inner-city and rural boys. White suburban boys, overall, are not in crisis. On average, they are not dropping out of school, avoiding college or lacking in verbal skills" (p. 5).

Clearly then, there are many ways in which to approach the discussions about boys and their school achievement levels. In "The Truth about Boys and Girls", Mead (2006) concludes that there is a "free market for theories about why boys are underperforming girls in school, with parents, educators, media, and the public choosing to give credence to the explanations that are the best marketed and that most appeal to their pre-existing preferences" (p.17).

Identifying some of these pre-existing preferences or constructions of teen boys was one goal of this study. In fact, the study's design was a direct response to this. Though there is adolescent literacy research that examines teen boys' literacy practices through such methods as researcher observations, parent questionnaires, teacher surveys and standardized test scores, I choose a methodological approach that allowed me to hear from teen boys themselves. I wanted to learn about their experiences as teenagers and as literate teen boys but I wanted them to tell me. And, tell me they did.

In telling me about their experiences, the teen boys shared what matters to them. I was amazed at the diversity their experiences represented, shattering the characterization that "teen boys" are all the same. I was delighted by the creativity and resourcefulness that they demonstrated in their incredibly rich literate lives, proving wrong the stereotypes about their lack of reading and writing. Simply put, these teen boys were anything but "a bunch of boneheads."

This dissertation study is, in many ways, a description of the landscape in which teen boys' literacy practices take place. In this description, I try to show that teen boys' experiences are greater than their individual capacities. I also try to show the complexity, texture and nuance involved in boys' literacy practices and, ultimately of boys themselves. However, an important part of this study is to go beyond rich descriptions of who teen boys are and of their literacy practices. As wonderfully diverse as they both are, as delightful as I found them to be, I want this

study to go beyond what some adolescent literacy researchers have described as a kind of voyeurism (Moje, 2008).

Thus, my study is not a series of case studies of individual teen boys or of particular literacy practices that I see across the teen boys. Instead, this study looks across teen boys' literacy experiences to find patterns. I argue that the ways in which different people, institutions, and commercial interests view teen boys have consequences on how teen boys view themselves and on what they are capable of doing and being. In doing this, this study offers a way to reframe teen boys' literacy practices. Often viewed as being either "in" or "out of" school, as being "self-sponsored" or "schooled", this study argues that teen boys' literacy practices need to be seen as occurring within a variety of sponsored situations.

Reframing discussions about teen boys and literacy is timely and important. In September 2009, the Carnegie Council for Advancing Adolescent Literacy (CCAAL) released "Time to Act: An Agenda for Advancing Adolescent Literacy for College and Career Success," claiming that an "adolescent literacy crisis" has struck U.S. public schools and that few American youth are able to demonstrate specialized reading skills (CCAAL, 2009). Citing outcomes of the standardized test National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), the report draws attention to how the majority of young people today, though able to understand the main idea of a text passage, for example, are not able to show "proficient" or "advanced" reading skills such as integrating information across multiple texts or critically relating the meaning of a text to their personal experience. When broken along gender lines, the NAEP data suggest that these reading achievement levels also demonstrate a widening gap between males and females with male students, and particularly minority male students, showing less reading gains than their female counterparts since 1992 (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007).

The report authors use crisis language to describe adolescent literacy and identify a gap between basic reading and writing skills that American youth currently exhibit and those specialized literacy skills required for success in an increasingly networked American society shaped by new media and emerging communication technologies. The authors also argue that "basic" literacy skills are no longer sufficient in our developing digitized multimedia environment. Adolescents need to be able to communicate in multiple ways. The report points out that the U.S. public schools continue to use "outmoded approaches" in teaching students how to read and continue to rely on "inoculation" models of literacy learning, ones focusing on teaching adolescent students "how to read" rather than how to "read to learn" across various contexts and content. The authors conclude that it is "time to act," that new ways of approaching literacy instruction and literacy in general are urgently needed.

This recent report clearly emphasizes the importance of continued adolescent literacy research on teen boys' literacy practices. While my study does not directly address teaching adolescents "how to read", it does offer a new way of approaching teen boys' literacy practices. Within current school contexts, literacy curricula and instructional practices are often positioned in ways that make it possible to view adolescents' literacy practices on their own terms, as operating in isolation from the other cultural activities engaged in by youth. In reality, adolescents' literacy practices, and teen boys' literacy practices in particular, reveal larger notions of what it means to be a teen and a teenage boy.

In what follows, I first review the relevant research on teen boys' literacy practices. Then, I synthesize research on literacy sponsorship. Based on this review of the literature, I next articulate a theoretical framework for this study and propose research questions.

## Literature Review

### Teen Boys' Literacy Practices

The research on teen boys' literacy practices tends to frame it in terms of in and out of school categories. Much of the early research on teen boys' literacy practices focuses on the kinds of literacy practices teen boys prefer. Much of the research on teen boys' literacy practices has been in response to the "boy crisis" and to teen boys' literacy underachievement in schools. Some researchers have sought to examine what teen boys are doing with literacy outside of school, trying to identify the literacy practices teen boys like. Others have focused on why teen boys choose the literacy practices they do. In my study, I respond to this previous research by examining the sponsorship of teen boys' literacy practices. In doing so, I will explore not only what literacy practices teen boys engage in and why but also how these literacy practices reflect their various identities as adolescent boys.

#### The "what" of teen boys' literacy practices.

Adolescent literacy researchers have responded to national studies showing teen boys' underachievement in literacy by examining what teen boys do with literacy. In her seminal book, *Differently Literate,* Millard (1997) concludes that boys and girls have different reading and writing preferences, that they have different attitudes toward schooled literacy and that they experience literacy differently outside of school. She asserts that teen boys tend to make different reading choices than girls, preferring "action, facts and figures" over "fiction, feelings and relationships" (p. 66). In addition, Millard notes that teen boys tend to choose "alternative forms of narrative distraction, such as favorite television programs, video recordings and computer games" (p. 75). Other researchers have pointed to teen boys' success with alternative literacies

related to manga, comic books, zines, films, trading cards, and chat rooms (Blair & Sanford, 2004; Mallett, 1997; Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

Many studies of teen boys' literacy practices examine what teen boys do with literacy on their own terms and in their own time. Often ethnographic in nature and situated within sociocultural perspectives of literacy, these studies employ a sort of "funds of knowledge" approach to teen boys' literacy practices. "Funds of knowledge" research (Gonzalez, 2005) refers to research that focuses on minority students and the contrast between their in school and out of school engagement. In a similar way, adolescent literacy researchers have argued that teachers need to learn more about and draw on teen boys' "rich" and "untapped" out-of-school literacy experiences. Sanford and Madill's (2007) study, for example, examines video game play and creation/composition as a learning activity that consumes a great deal of teen boys' out-of-school time. They point out that teen boys, who have been categorized as unsuccessful learners, resist such views and are successful in the videogames they play. They argue that while teen boys participate in unsanctioned literacy activities these activities are rich in language and literacy skills. Similarly, in his ethnography case studies of three 15-year-old males from different ethnic and class backgrounds, Gustavson (2007) describes the creative literacy practices that mattered to the youth in his study. He describes Miguel, a graffiti writer who also enjoys fly tying; Gil, a turntablist; and Ian, a zine writer; to argue that each demonstrates highly motivated learning when able to pursue topics and interests that matter to him.

Collectively, this body of research calls for a reframing of the current literacy curriculum. Millard concludes that the current literacy curriculum leaves teen boys at a disadvantage. Booth (2002) writes, "Out-of-school literacy practices for many boys often go unrecognized or untapped in the school classroom. What boys value as literacy texts can unintentionally be

dismissed or demeaned in school" (p. 21). For Booth and others, the "what" of teen boys' literacy practices, whether that be in the genres or mediums they prefer reading, the content they choose to write about, or the ways in which they prefer to talk about literature, is dismissed, demeaned, and unrecognized (Booth, 2002; Pirie, 2002). Because of this, teen boys are disengaged from literacy learning in school. To engage and motivate teen boys as literacy learners requires changing the existing literacy curriculum to allow for a broader definition of literacy and to make room for the kinds of literate activity that teen boys enjoy doing.

While there can be a tendency to romanticize teen boys' literacy practices (Moje, 2008), this body of research makes important contributions to the field. It has revealed many of the literacy practices in which teen boys participate. In so doing, this research has helped literacy educators to broaden notions of literacy and to rethink assumptions about what teen boys do with literacy. However, with its focus on the "what" of teen boys' literacy practices, this body of research also has limitations. For one, the underlying logic claims that if schools make space for the literacy practices teen boys enjoy, then teen boys will succeed in school literacy and in life. Teen boys' literacy practices are treated as being equal, as all on the same playing field. But, literacy practices aren't all treated equally. They don't have the same currency across contexts. One goal of this study is to examine teen boys' literacy practices with this in mind. Teen boys may have "untapped" literacy experiences outside of school, but this doesn't necessarily mean that so long as schools change, teen boys will achieve more school success. Another limitation of this research is that the emphasis on the literacy that boys choose to do often overlooks some of the factors that might influence these choices. It is this consideration of the "why" of teen boys' literacy practices that I now discuss.

**The "why" of teen boys' literacy practices.**

The "why" of boys' literacy practices has been approached from a variety of methodological and theoretical approaches. Some researchers have focused on the relationships between gender and literacy, exploring how being a teen boy influences reading and writing choices. Others have examined the kinds of literate practices teen boys enjoy doing and have identified common characteristics. In the paragraphs that follow, I briefly summarize these two approaches.

A number of research studies on teen boys' literacy practices examine the role that gender plays in why teen boys choose the reading and writing texts they do. This body of research is often divided along theoretical lines. On one side, researchers operating with a concept of gender as biologically determined and inherently different, argue that boys choose the literacy practices they do simply because they are boys. Boys' biological needs and propensities are the reasons they read less than girls and read different things than girls. They are more active, they have different concerns and questions and they think about themselves and the world differently. Boys choose to read "boy books", books with male protagonists and masculine topics, because they more readily speak to their experiences as boys (Gurian, 1998; Gurian, Henley & Trueman, 2001).

Other researchers, and I must add, most adolescent literacy researchers, argue that teen boys' identities as readers and writers are multiple. They argue that one reason teen boys make the literacy choices they do is because of how literacy has been construed by society and schools in particular as "feminine." Martino (2001b, 2003c), a leading researcher in this area, draws attention to the fact that teen boys often perceive themselves as non-readers. In one of his studies, he describes how teen boys perceived English to be a girls' subject. They resisted

engaging in English classes in order to affirm their masculinity. Martino concludes, “If reading and English are perceived to be feminized practices and if boys establish their masculinity on the basis of denigration and inferiorization of the other, then it is possible to understand why they might refuse to engage in such a practice” (p. 173). Martino and other researchers argue that there are different ways that teen boys can and should be able to respond to literacy (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997; Davies, 1993; Dutro, 2003; Rowan, Knobel, Bigum, & Lankshear, 2002).

Analyzing these decisions and perceptions has led many of these scholars to examine the many different ways in which boys experience their gender and thus, literacy as well. Collectively, these studies call for an examination of “the ways in which some versions of masculinity may endorse greater connections between literacy and masculinity than others” and recognize that “‘ways of being a boy’ which position literacy and masculinity in opposition to each other are no more natural or permanent than any other form of masculinity” (Rowan et al., 2002, p. 69-70).

Sadly, the polarization of these “gender debates” often leaves researchers talking past one another. The focus shifts from teen boys and literacy to debates over views of gender. This has led some researchers to carefully position their work so as not to be placed on one side or the other. Smith and Wilhelm (2002), for example, write that they don’t want their work to be “another entry in the gender wars” (xvi). Though they acknowledge the social constructions of gender in school, they attempt to “reframe” the discussion. Rather than examining why teen boys choose the literacy practices they do, Smith and Wilhelm foreground the literacy practices themselves and look across them to find common characteristics. As Smith and Wilhelm are seen as leading scholars in the field, it is worth spending time detailing their study and its findings.

Their study, though published almost 10 years ago, remains, in many ways, the "go to" study on teen boys and literacy.

Using Csikszentmihalyi's four basic principles of flow as a lens with which to think about boys' in school and out of school literate lives, Smith and Wilhelm interviewed 48 adolescent boys, along with data collected from literacy logs, an activity ranking sheet and the boys' responses to various profiles of teen boy readers, they conclude that boys experienced "flow" in the activities they choose to do on their own. They identify these "flow" experiences as ones providing a sense of competence and control, a challenge that requires an appropriate level of skills, clear goals and feedback, a focus on immediate experiences, and a recognition of the importance of social relationships. Teen boys' school literacy experiences typically did not reflect these flow experiences. Smith and Wilhelm conclude that

> the reason boys reject schoolish forms of literacy is not that they see such literacy as feminized, but because of its very schoolishness—that is, its future orientation, its separation from immediate uses and functions, its emphasis on knowledge that is not valued outside of school (p. 84).

With this conclusion, Smith and Wilhelm reorient the discussion on the "why" of teen boys' literacy practices. Teen boys reject literacy in school not because it is feminized or because they don't, as boys, enjoy reading and writing. Rather, teen boys reject literacy, they assert, because of its schooled nature. "Even when they were invited to do so" Smith and Wilhelm (2009) write later, "the boys in our study did not dismiss literacy as feminized" (p. 364). These findings have been used as a basis for other studies. Blair and Sanford (2004), for example, examine the ways teen boys adapt or reshape school literacy activities so that they are more meaningful and pleasurable for them. While often viewed as resistance, Blair and Sanford argue

that the boys in their study "transformed" school literacy practices in ways that allowed them to shape their social identities. As with Smith and Wilhelm, they conclude that the ways boys enjoyed using literacy on their own terms were very different than the ways they were being asked to read and write in school.

Smith and Wilhelm's reframing of teen boys and literacy highlights the role that schools play in encouraging – and discouraging – particular ways of using literacy. In contrasting teen boys' out of school literacy practices with those done in school, Smith and Wilhelm set up schools as the major literacy sponsor in teen boys' lives. Other researchers have done the same with their focus on comparing teen boys' out of school literacy practices, treated as one category, with literacy practices in school. The assumption is that what happens out of school with literacy is similar enough to fit into one category. In addition, the assumption is that we need to bridge out of school literacy with school.

One goal of this study is to illustrate the complexities within this out of school category by examining other literacy sponsors in teen boys' lives. Out of school experiences can represent many different contexts, literacy domains and larger interests. Church-related literacy practices, for example, are very different across church traditions. Sports-related literacy practices, by nature of their various commercial interests, engage readers and writers in different ways. Though these examples share the fact that they aren't "school", they represent very different sponsorship situations. Smith and Wilhelm accurately depict the ways schools sponsor particular literacy practices; however, here, I hope to extend their findings by identifying and exploring teen boys' experiences with other literacy sponsors.

One way I will be able to do so is through my methodological approach, an approach that is significantly different than those discussed above. Most research on boys and literacy involves

researchers asking teen boys directly about their reading and writing. In this study, I approach literacy indirectly through a method I refer to as "literacy through the back door" (M. Conley, personal communication, September 5, 2005). Many researchers conclude that teen boys have narrow definitions of reading and writing, illustrating perhaps Smith and Wilhelm's (2002) argument over the powerful "schooled" nature of teen boys' literacy experiences (Love & Hamston, 2003; Martino, 2003). Methodologically, researchers have tried to counteract teen boys' narrow definitions of reading and writing through their use of literacy logs, literacy profiles and by explicitly providing broad definitions of reading and writing to their participants. However, this approach has come with limited success. Smith and Wilhelm, for example, admit that the literacy logs they asked participants to fill out wasn't always used to record all relevant activities. After seeing one of the teen boys at a movie theater and then noticing that he didn't include this activity in his log, Wilhelm asked him about it. The teen boy's response was simply that he didn't think Smith and Wilhelm were "interesting in that kind of stuff." The teen boy continued, "I thought you wanted to know about reading, you know, to learn and stuff." Smith and Wilhelm claim that this methodological "problem" was "largely resolved" in their study, (p. 96) and use the example to illustrate how "schoolish literacy" remains the way that many teen boys think about reading and writing. I think, however, it points to the limits of a direct approach in asking teen boys about their literacy practices. Thus, I designed my methodological approach to get at boys' literacy practices indirectly.

Because I want to explore other people, institutions or commercial interests who might be influencing the ways teen boys think about and approach their work with texts; I turn now to Brandt's (2001) work on literacy sponsorship to provide a conceptual framework for my exploration of other literacy sponsors in teen boys' lives.

**Literacy Sponsorship**

In this study, I draw on the concept of "literacy sponsorship", a concept taken from Brandt's (1990, 1995, 1998, 2001) work. Using a life history interviewing approach, Brandt examined over 100 people's memories of learning to read and write across their life spans. She discovered that her participants often focused their memories on the people, institutions, materials, and motivations involved in how they acquired, developed and had access to reading and writing. Brandt uses this to argue that whenever people are learning to read or write, "sponsors" subsidize the event, are responsible for the materials involved, and have their interests served in the learning. Her definition of these literacy sponsors is "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, or model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (2001, p. 2). Brandt points out that, at times, the sponsored "can be oblivious to or innovative with" the ideology of the sponsor, but that for the most part, "obligations toward one's sponsors run deep, affecting what, why, and who people write and read" (2001, p. 20). Sponsorship then involves a passing on of the sponsor's ideologies, beliefs, and values of literacy.

Brandt's use of literacy sponsorship as a conceptual approach allows her to connect literacy as an individual development to literacy as an economic development. She identifies patterns of sponsorship across her participants' life stories and uses these patterns to "track the different cultural attitudes people developed toward writing vs. reading as well as the ideological congestion faced by late-century literacy learners as their sponsors proliferated and diversified" (1998, p.). She suggests thinking about literacy as a resource in order to be able to account for why individuals seek to attain literacy (for themselves or their children) and also why economic and political interests work so hard to ration the powers of literacy. Brandt writes that

> the diversity and multiplicity of literacy practices may rightly bear witness to cultural variety and human resourcefulness. But that is not all they tell. Multiple literacy practices are also a sign of stratification and struggle. Their variety speaks of different and often unequal subsidy systems for literacy, which often lead to differential outcomes and levels of literacy achievement (2001, p. 8).

Different and often unequal subsidy systems for literacy are not often addressed in the ethnographic research on teen boys' literacy practices. As I have described earlier, this research does important work in pointing out the diversity and multiplicity of teen boys' literacy practices. And yet, the different and unequal systems are a reality for many teen boys. "Literacy" is often touted as the "way out" for teen boys. If teen boys "read" more, the rhetoric goes, they will succeed in school and in life. Consideration of literacy sponsorship in teen boys' lives provides a way to unpack some of these claims. It helps draw attention to the different ways literacy is used and to how these different uses of literacy map onto school literacy in various ways. It helps expose "schooled" literacy as representing particular ideologies, attitudes, and beliefs. And, it provides a view of school as only one of the many literacy sponsors in teen boys' lives. Teen boys receive many different messages about what literacy does: these messages influence what, when, where they read and write. In highlighting who or what might be encouraging particular ways of being literate, the concept of literacy sponsorship provides a context in which to understand teen boys' literacy practices.

My notion of literacy sponsorship departs from Brandt's use of the term. Brandt uses literacy sponsorship to examine the relationships between individual literacy development and large-scale economic development. She pays attention to specific scenes of people's literacy learning in order to identify the large cultural, historical and economic patterns that have affected

literacy learning in the past century. In contrast, I use a different analytic. I use literacy sponsorship to examine teen boys' experiences with literacy, focusing on the localized patterns of their experiences rather than on broad patterns of sponsorship across time.

Yet another way I build on Brandt's work is through my emphasis on my participants' agency. Brandt uses literacy sponsorship to identify the large cultural, historical and economic patterns that have affected literacy learning in the past century. She does not focus on individual experiences. In so doing, I draw on Selfe and Hawisher's (2004) work in which they present 20 case studies to show the sponsorship of digital literacies in people's lives, homes, schools, communities, and workplaces. Specifically, they examine how technological gateways and conditions of access influence the ways in which people acquire print and digital literacies. They argue that simplistic definitions of access aren't adequate in addressing how people acquire and develop digital literacies, pointing out that factors like race, class, interest, motivation, timing and opportunity, "support, overlap, and interact with each other to affect access – and thus, to affect the ways in which people acquire and develop electronic literacies through various gateways" (p. 26). They suggest that a matrix of various factors influence literacies on a micro-to-macro scale, pointing out that literacies can be in competition with one another and can fade as new literacies develop. They argue that when literacies become established and practiced over time, they often become invisible, so embedded in daily life that they aren't seen. This is increasingly the case, they point out, with developing technology literacies. As with Brandt, they point out the roles that class, gender, and race play not just in access to literacies but in the manifestations of literacies.

Of particular note to my study are the ways in which Selfe and Hawisher discuss agency. They specifically write that they want to "demonstrate the active agency of the participants with

whom we worked" (p. 12), drawing on ideas that human agents both shape and are shaped by the cultural, educational, economic, and social contexts they inhabit" (p. 12). In doing so, they make an implicit critique of Brandt's work. While Brandt discusses the agency of the sponsored, clearly Selfe and Hawisher want to emphasize it more. They do so by asking participants to coauthor chapters with them. They do not, however, go much further than this in terms of theorizing the agency of the sponsored. For example, Jill and Sally, the focal participants of their first chapter, are described as having parents who "inculcated literacy values in their children as well, encouraging most particularly those literacy practices they knew their children would later encounter as students in more formal instructional situations" (p. 42). Both from White, middle class families, Jill and Sally's literacy experiences seem to be identical to their families. Jill remembers, for example, some of her parents' literacy practices. There isn't, however, discussion on how Jill responded to these practices. The study thus implies that whatever happened, Jill was sponsored by it. Selfe and Hawisher contrast Jill and Sally with Damon, an African American male, "voted differently on his literacy allegiances than did Sally and Jill. Damon chose not to subscribe, at least, the same way as the two women did, to the conventional print literacy values and practices that many faculty at his university held up as standards" (p. 54). The authors discuss how he "rejected" the university's standards and "re-appropriated" the academy's currency. This rejection, however, seems less about agency on Damon's part and more about the ways in which his race, class and gender positioned him differently than the White middle class women. While I draw on Selfe and Hawisher's emphasis on individual agency within sponsoring relationships, I theorize this agency in a different way by emphasizing the role of negotiation. As I discuss in my data chapters, I explore how individuals can manipulate sponsorship situation to advance their own interests.

I also build on the work of Hogg (2006) who explored what motivates 12 older women in her hometown Paxton, Nebraska to be literacy sponsors to the town and its people. She also examines how these women negotiate the different ways this sponsorship is expressed and how they choose to identify themselves as mothers, wives, friends, community leaders, teachers and learners. She argues that rather than in the traditional educational duties of family that the women participated in, it was in the "nontraditional literacy work that most illuminates how they served as sponsors in ways that helped them construct their complicated identities as rural women" (p. 89). She describes two aspects of this nontraditional literacy work: writing up family histories and participating in garden and extensions clubs. She argues that the women's involvement in these activities "shows the ways they enacted and negotiated these complex identities both for themselves and for others in the town" (p. 88). Hogg's work is of interest in that she focuses on a group of people within a particular gender and age demographic. And, like mine, she uses her study to push on assumptions and stereotypes.

I extend Brandt's work by approaching literacy indirectly. Brandt focuses specifically on her participants' memories of and experiences with "reading" and "writing" relying on their understandings of those words. Given the methodological concerns about how narrowly teen boys tend to think about "reading" and "writing", I chose a methodological approach that does not ask my participants specifically about their reading and writing. I am interested in what else might be sponsored in teen boys' lives.

In sum, I use the concept of literacy sponsorship in this study to look at the different people, institutions and commercial forces that are involved in teen boys' lives. I focus on teen boys' experiences with these various sponsors and, in doing so, set my gaze on how individual boys respond to their literacy sponsors as well as on how various sponsors prepare and position

teen boys differently. I argue that teen boys' identities are an integral part of their sponsoring relationships.

In order to explore this further, I turn now to literacy and identity research from the field of adolescent literacy. Exploring the ways in which identity, as represented by particular social memberships but also by individual capabilities, provides a way for me to theorize the role of the individual, the sponsored, within the sponsorship relationship. Being a teen boy means being part of an assortment of social groups; these varied memberships position teen boys differently.

**Identity and Literacy**

In order to theorize ways in which literacy and identity might be related within sponsoring situations, I examine the adolescent literacy research that foregrounds the relationships between literacy and identity. Collectively, this rather substantial body of research, representing what Moje and Luke (2009) refer to as a "recent identity turn in literacy studies", spans many different theories on and perspectives of identity. Moje and Luke posit that much of this research examines identity because of interests in "foregrounding the actor or agent in literate and social practices" (p. 416). These literate and social practices are often studied in the context of individuals' memberships in various social groups – peers, family, classroom and work as well as those related to race, class and gender. Much of this research argues that participation in these various groups yields particular ways of being and that literacy practices demonstrate these various group members. This scholarship, I believe, provides a theoretical way to extend the concept of literacy sponsorship in the ways that I propose.

In the paragraphs below, I discuss a number of identity and literacy studies that are relevant to the purposes of my study. What these studies suggest about the relationships between

identity and literacy help to complicate some of the existing research on teen boys' literacy practices.

In her study of the literacy practices of adolescent girls, Finders (1997) discovered a significant difference between the ways middle and working-class girls positioned themselves in classrooms, schools, peer groups, and with their families. She concludes that the girls in her study used literacy practices to "construct social identities, position girls within their peer groups, and demarcate social boundaries between adults and children and school social groups" (p. vii) and that they "provided a tangible means by which to claim status, challenge authority, and document social allegiances" (p. 4). Literacy practices provided ways for these girls to differently position themselves in classrooms, peer groups, and with their families. Finders explains how school literacy practices such as writing workshop and allowing students free choice was seen by working-class girls, because they tended to view literacy as a solitary act and as a way to deny allegiance, as an invasion of their privacy. Finders' study is important to point out because she argues that there are different ways that the "social nature" of literacy gets played out. This complicates some of the findings suggested in the research on teen boys' literacy practices. Smith and Wilhelm (2002), for example, noticed that the boys in their study "had intrinsic motivation" for literate activities when these literate activities provided the occasion for social connections (p. 147). They posit that social purposes for literacy "influenced the texts that the boys selected but also how seriously the boys would take the reading." (p. 146). Similarly, Blair and Sanford (2004) note that "the social nature of …boys' literacy practices is central" for teachers to understand (p. 457). Interacting with others around literacy was important to the teen boys in both of these studies. And yet, these findings remain under-theorized,

particularly when we consider the social dynamics of adolescents. What does "the social" or "socializing" mean? For what purposes? Under what conditions?

As we shall see in other research on adolescent literacy and identity, social interactions are often predicated on the membership of many different groups. Simply labeling the reason that teen boys participate in literacy as "social" is too broad, particularly when research on teen boys' peer groups have documented how complicated these peer groups are (Connell, 1995; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Martino & Berrill, 2003). Moje's (2000) study of "gangsta adolescents" examines the ways these adolescents use literacy practices as "communicative, expressive, and transformative tools for shaping their social worlds, their thoughts, and their identities" (p. 653) and illustrates the complicated social work that these literacy practices do. In doing so, her study offers other possibilities for the ways in which identity and literacy work together. She examines "how teens construct identities in relation to a group, to become part of a larger, unfolding story" (p. 680). She focuses on the teens' literacy practices within a group that "valued their experiences even as they lived in a community and school culture that devalued, dismissed, or vilified them on the basis of their color, culture, or class" (p. 654). Her findings suggest that particular (social) literacy practices need to be understood within a larger context and that, in the case of her participants, they reflected ways of identifying with a group. These findings are furthered in research on the ways African American teen boys use literacy as ways to construct and enact identities. Tatum (2005), for example, highlights how many black males experience "turmoil" in their lives and that this then influences what and how they encounter literate texts. Kirkland and Jackson (2009)'s ethnographic study of the literacy practices of a group of self-proclaimed "cool" 11-14 year old black males examines how particular notions of being black and cool influence the kinds of language and literacy

practices that boys participate in. They argue that the cool kids enacted blackness and masculinity through coolness. Collectively, these researchers assert that there are complicated ways in which teen boys use literacy for "social" reasons.

Hinchman, Payne-Bourcy, Thomas, and Olcott (2002) also examine literacy and identity within a particular gendered ethnic group. They explore how three White, working class teen boys use literacy to enact various gender, racial and classist positions. The teen boys' literacy practices suggested "a complicated confluence of adolescence, gender, race, and class, as well as other social group memberships," (p. 242), and that each of the boys enacted his literacy practices in order to "suit his own subjectivities." In other words, these researchers suggest that even within particular social groups, teen boys' literacy practices can be diverse.

These research studies, among others, highlight the ways in which identity and literacy shape and are shaped by each other. This is particularly important to consider because of how teens are positioned, labeled and characterized by themselves and others. This positioning often determines the social and economic assets that youth have or don't have. Moje (2008) posits that "the nature of any given youth culture and its particular processes of development and maintenance are heavily dependent on access to material and human resources" (p. 212). Social membership issues are important then on a number of different levels. They matter to teens and they also matter in how they reflect the material and human resources that other people and institutions provide

Given these findings, I designed my study to explore the possible relationships among identities and literacy and literacy sponsorship. I wondered what might it look like if I brought the concept of literacy sponsorship into relationship with these literacy and identity studies? Are identities and literacy sponsored equally? In addressing these questions, I continue some of

Hall's (2003) work with literacy sponsorship. In his study of Oprah Winfrey, as a literacy sponsor, he argues that she encourages her audience members to assume particular identities around texts.

### Sponsorship of Teen Boys' Literacy Practices

Studying the sponsorship of teen boys' literacy practices is important for a number of reasons. For one, it helps break down the categories in which many teen boys are placed. One of the goals in my study is to push against narrow understandings of what it means to be a teen boy. A significant number of teen boys in my study represent the monolithic category of "White, middle class teen boy", a category not often studied in the existing adolescent literacy research. Whereas there have been a number of studies on African American teen boys (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Mahiri, 1994; Tatum, 2005) and on teen girls (Bettie, 2003; Finders, 1997), there have not been many studies addressing White, middle class teen boys. In studying this particular demographic as well as teen boys who represent other ethnic and social class groups, this study can also be framed as an intervention in the narratives of American masculinity, of White masculinity, of middle class masculinity and so on. I hope to use my study to problematize these notions of masculinity, the assumptions that teen boys' literacy practices are the way they are simply because they come from teen boys.

## Theoretical framework

Given my interest in the sponsorship of teen boys' literacy practices and of the ways in which literacy and identity might be sponsored, I now address the specific theoretical concepts I use in this study. I begin with a discussion of how I theorize adolescent boys and their various identities. I then discuss the ways in which I approach literacy. I conclude with my research questions.

## Adolescent Boys

### Adolescence.

The terms “adolescent” and “youth” mean different things to different people and are often very generally used (see Lesko, 2001; Finders, 1997). I situate my understandings of adolescence in the field of study known as youth cultures. This line of inquiry, representing a variety of methodological and theoretical approaches, questions the often taken for granted conceptions of adolescence and youth that have their roots in biology and developmental psychology. These conceptions, sometimes referred to as an “ages and stages” approach, frame adolescents as incomplete and often incompetent not-yet-adults who are hormone driven, going through identity crises and constantly in turmoil (Finders, 1997; Ito et al., 2009; Lesko, 2001). Given these conceptions, adolescents are seen as needing, desiring or wanting particular things. In Finders’ (1997) words, “The needs of the adolescent are generally regarded as universal needs, most often characterized as needs for greater autonomy, more activities with same-age peers, and greater distance from adults” (p. 121). In short, adolescence refers to a time of “becoming”, of needing adult intervention. Because of this, they are seen as lacking the competency and knowledge that adults have. They are viewed in terms of “becoming”, as not quite being there yet. In fact, there are so many stereotypes about today’s adolescent that some scholars have referred to this as a “ghettoization of youth culture” (Ito et al., 2009). In contrast, youth culture studies view adolescence as a social and cultural category. This “new paradigm” as some have called it (Ito et al., 2009) views teens and children as active and creative social agents who produce their own cultures while also contributing to adult cultures. In trying to disrupt the many (negative) stereotypes given to and expected of adolescents and problematize the

"ghettoization of youth culture" (Iko et al., 2009), scholars emphasize adolescents mediated action and agency in their daily lives.

I draw on this understanding of adolescence in how I view literacy sponsorship. Teen boys are active participants in sponsoring relationships. I view adolescents as having agency on their own. Because I view sponsorship as relational, I consider in this approach, how teen boys negotiate with their various literacy sponsors. Specifically, I argue that teen boys "give and take" from sponsors' interests, resources and ideologies and that they often do in inventive, creative and purposeful ways. I stress, however, that this "give and take" occurs within the bounds of the sponsoring relationships. Teen boys are prepared and positioned differently by different sponsors – their negotiations occur within this.

**Boys.**

Just as there are different constructions of adolescence, there are also many ideas of what it means to be a boy and, to be a teen boy in particular. In line with Smith and Wilhelm's work (2002), I do not intend for my study to be "another entry in the gender wars" (xvi). I want to avoid the tendency in the literature to name "the source and cause of masculine behavior." I don't want to deny that gender differences exist, but I do want to suggest that gender always operates in relation to particular constructions, through particular discourses, and within specific contexts. Specifically, I draw on theories of gender that suggest gender is performative, that it is acted out according to the discursive tools available to people in particular local and historical contexts (Butler, 1990). Cultural variations and changes over time influence how masculinity is expressed or encouraged.

In this study, I maintain that there are multiple ways of being a boy and that these ways of being a boy are expressed through a boy's actions, words, interests, clothing and so on. These

multiple ways, however, aren't treated equally. There are some ways of "being a boy" that hold more power and prestige than others; as Connell (2000) refers to them, some of these ways represent "hegemonic forms of masculinity." A helpful concept in my thinking about gender has been Gee's (1990) notion of Discourse, the idea that there are ways of being in the world that are expressed through words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, gestures, glances, body positions and clothes. It is through these Discourses that gender is performed. "Being a boy" then is expressed through words and actions but also through unspoken values and attitudes (Young 2000). In addition, different institutions have different Discourses and these Discourses position people "so that certain ways of thinking and acting become naturalized, how they appeal to boys' developing desires, how they exert power which feel they must respond to in some way" (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998, p. 56).

It is with these views of gender that I approach the study of gender and literacy. Literacy practices both shape and are shaped by gender subjectivities (Cherland, 1994; Davies, 1989, 1993; Gilbert, 1989). In other words, the particular Discourses of masculinity that teen boys are encouraged or expected to participate in, shape and are shaped by their literacy practices.

**Identity.**

Given my articulation of adolescence and boys, I now discuss specifically how I conceptualize their identities. In this study, I view adolescent boys' identities as "hybrid, metadiscoursive, and spatial", situating myself in what Lewis and Del Valle (2009) have described as a "third wave identity construct" (p. 317). I maintain that teen boys construct different identities as they move from one context to another. Thus, I refer to teen boys' multiple identities, as religious teen boys, as sports-loving boys, as sons throughout my study. While I use the categories of race and class in my study, I try not to essentialize teen boys' experiences on

the basis of their racial and ethnic backgrounds or their social classes. I acknowledge and try to hold in tension the fine line between understanding that there are some practices that are common to racial and ethnic, gender, social class and age groups and that male youth within these groups can't be reduced to these common practices.

In identifying teen boys' various identities, I rely on Moje and Luke's (2009) "identity as narrative" metaphor to describe my theoretical assumptions about identity. They describe this metaphor as a "dominant metaphor in adolescent literacy research" and one that is most often used in literacy studies that rely on interviews. While they caution that there is the risk of representing "an overly coherent subject", they assert that this approach to identity offers "rich possibilities for examining the 'gel' of identities" (p. 429). Given my interests in exploring the ways in which literacy and identity surface within literacy sponsorship situations, this "narrative as identity" perspective seemed most appropriate.

**Literacy**

In this study, I draw on sociocultural perspectives on literacy and, in particular, the work of the New Literacy Studies. New Literacy Studies, a movement in qualitative research, maintains "reading and writing only make sense when studied in the context of social and cultural practices of which they are but a part" (Gee, 2000). Moving away from a focus on individuals and their "private minds", New Literacy Studies foregrounds "interaction and social practice." This perspective of literacy situates cognitive and linguistic skills within complex networks of meaning-making practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Literacy then is not just about a set of uniform technical skills to be imparted to those lacking them. Instead, literacy, by its nature of being socially embedded within communities, is understood as being experienced differently by members of different ethnic groups, age groups, sexes, and socioeconomic classes

(Barton, 1994; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984, 2001). Literacy then is made up of multiple literacies, embedded in many different socially situated cultural practices.

One of the particularly difficult things for me in this study was deciding how broadly I would define literacy. I knew that I wanted to look at more than just "reading and writing of alphabetic texts" as Brandt (2002) did. Over a decade has passed since Brandt published her work; adolescents today live in an increasingly networked and emerging technology-dependent society. The teen boys in my study are typical of many "screenagers"(Luke & Luke, 2001, p. 40) in being the first generation to transit through an electronically mediated childhood. They prefer multimodal texts that typically draw from and integrate print, images, music, spoken word (Moje, 2008). My definition of literacy needed to account for these changes as well as for the kinds of reading, writing, and viewing of texts that my participants talked about participating in. However, I wanted to keep Moje's (2000) cautions about broad definitions of literacy in mind, definitions that "conflate literacy with all forms of representation" and thus, "make it difficult to talk about what literacy is and what can or should be done with it" (p. 655). The definition I have settled on for this study is one that I take from one of the professional organizations in my field of study (National Council of Teachers of English). The literacies I examine in this study include reading, writing, and uses of new media including non-digitized multimedia, digitized multimedia and hypertext or hypermedia (National Council of Teachers of English, 2007). Given this definition of literacy, I use "texts" to refer to print, visual and digital texts. Thorough out my study, I use the phrase "work with texts" to refer to teen boys' specific acts of reading, writing, viewing and talking about texts.

**Literacy events and practices.**

Because I am interested in the meaning that teen boys give to their work with texts, I use the concept of literacy practices. Much of the work in the New Literacy Studies rely on the concepts of "literacy events" and "literacy practices", concepts that date back to the beginning of the development of this perspectives of literacy (c.f. Heath, 1983). A literacy event is an observable event that involves reading and/or writing (Sreet, 2001). Researchers foregrounding literacy events have focused on particular situations where reading and writing occur and have identified characteristics of those events. The literature on teen boys and literacy has often emphasized the particular literacy events in which boys participate. The concept of literacy practices enfolds specific literacy events and includes the attitudes, awareness, and values that surround them. Literacy practices refer to a "broader cultural conceptions of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts" (Barton, 1994). The meanings people associate with their literacy practices cannot be observed but talking with people, "linking their immediate experience out to other things that they do as well" (Barton, 1994, p. 11) are ways in which to learn about these particular ways of approaching and doing literacy. Sociocultural perspectives of literacy assert that each person has a view of literacy, about what it is and what it can do for them, about its importance and its limitations. These socially situated beliefs, values, and purposes shape how and why people use literacy. Literacy sponsors are influential in this regard. Though they might provide access to specific literacy resources and activities (i.e. books, Internet connection), they also sponsor particular ways of interacting with texts. In this study, I examine teen boys' literacy practices in order to explore who or what might be sponsoring them, the particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing point to possible sponsoring relationships.

**Literacy as Discourse.**

Throughout this study, I also use the term Discourse in my thinking about literacy. While I have already discussed this term in the context of thinking about gender, it is worth repeating. Discourse, Gee's (1991) convention for naming socially recognized ways of being in the world, highlights how there are socially accepted associations among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or "social network", or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful "role" (p. 131). The concept of Discourse is particularly salient for my study in my examination of the various literacy sponsors in teen boys' lives, sponsors who prepare and position teen boys to "be" in the world in particular ways. When we apply the concept of Discourse to adolescents, we say that Discourses produce certain expectations of youth in different social sites and practices, expectations that include reading and writing.

**Literacy domains.**

New Literacy Study scholars have identified that different literacies are connected with different domains of life, such as home, school, church and work. Domains, described as "structured, patterned contexts within which literacy is used and learned", are different places where people act differently and use language differently (Barton, 1994). Thinking about teen boys' literacy domains was a helpful way for me to categorize different kinds of literacy sponsors. Using this concept was a way to unpack the broad "out of school" label that describes so much of teen boys' literacy practices. In Chapters 3-5, I analyze the literacy sponsorship situations as found in three different literacy domains, looking at teen boys' family, sports and church experiences, experiences that reflect particular ways of being with texts.

**Elements of literacy.**

In this study I draw on Szwed's (1981) concept of an ethnography of literacy for my analytic framework. Szwed's work extends a body of literature in the sociolinguistic field referred to as the ethnography of communication and parallels the perspectives of literacy espoused by the New Literacy Studies. He draws extensively on Hymes' (1964) notion of the communicative event, a notion that highlights the importance of considering components such as the setting, participants, norms and genres of particular speech acts. Though Hymes originally intended the ethnography of communication to include literacy, Szwed was the first one to use Hymes' work to further conceptualize understandings of literacy and particularly that of the literacy practiced by "ordinary people in ordinary activities" (p. 424). Szwed's work comes as a direct response to the "literacy crisis" of the 1980s. He argued that scholars of literacy had not yet adequately conceptualized literacy and that there needed to be a richer understanding of how reading and writing were used in social life. To provide that richer understanding Szwed proposed five elements, taken from the point of view of members of a particular group that intersect in people's use of literacy: text, context, function, participants, and motivation. He argued that all of these elements form a complex whole that should not be reduced to simple diagnoses. Rather than viewing literacy as something one has or doesn't have, Szwed proposed imagining a plurality of literacies.

Szwed's elements of literacy address the "what" of boys' literacy practices through consideration of text (What do teen boys read, write, view and then talk about? How do they relate to texts in particular situations?). They also get at the "why" of boys' literacy practices through consideration of the context in which they occur (When, where, and why do teen boys read, write, view and talk about particular texts? In what kinds of local situations and larger

social contexts do these literacy practices occur?). However, they also address function (What values are related to these uses of literacy? What do particular literacy practices suggest about teen boys' identities?), participants involved (Who else is involved, other than teen boys in the reading, writing, viewing and talking about particular texts? What kinds of relationships are present? Are there power dynamics involved in the relationships?) and finally, teen boys' motivation (What motivates each teen boy to participate in particular literacy practices (or not) in the ways that they do? What social meanings are given to these ways of reading, writing, viewing and talking?).

Szwed defines motivation as "the nexus at which reader, or writer, context, function and text join" (p. 15). In other words, he identifies four aspects that form the nexus for motivation. Szwed argued that a person might feel motivated to do something but it is not a quality that people have across different settings. Rather, motivation emerges out of the setting, out of the mixture of participants, the function and the text. Given my interests in the sponsorship of teen boys' literacy practices, in who or what might be encouraging or discouraging teen boys' reading and writing and in which ways, Szwed's elements of literacy allow me to examine teen boys' literacy practices from a number of different angles.

## Research questions

Below are the research questions that guided my study

1. What are the texts, contexts, participants, functions and motivations involved in adolescent boys' literacy practices?
2. When literacy is sponsored, what else is being sponsored?
3. How do teen boys respond to this sponsorship? What motivates the teen boys to participate in the literacy practices they do?

My dissertation study addresses these questions through studying the content of teen boys' interviews. In chapter 2, I describe my methodological assumptions and decisions, including selection of sites/participants, generation of data sources, and means of analysis. In chapter 3, I focus on teen boys' differing family sponsorship situations. Next, I address teen boys' sports sponsorship situations in chapter 4. In chapter 5 I explore teen boys' differing church sponsorship situations. In chapter 6, I discuss these analyses in relation to previous research in Adolescent Literacy and then address the implications of my study for future adolescent literacy research.

# CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I describe the study's methodology. First, I explain my methodological assumptions. Then I describe the participants and study site. I then look at how the interview data were collected and generated. I conclude with a description of the ways I approached those data in order to be able to address my research questions.

## Methodological Assumptions

In order to study adolescent boys' literacy practices, I designed an in-depth interview study. My view that literacy is not a set of uniform technical skills to be given or taught but rather is socially embedded meant that in order for me to learn about my participants' literacy practices, I needed to learn from them about teen boys' personal experiences. Since qualitative interviewing provides access to the content of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior, I chose this. My desire to get at literacy through the back door meant that I needed to have teen boys talk, on their own terms, about what mattered to them and what was significant in their lives.

Many adolescent literacy researchers who have studied literacy practices use ethnography to study the various social contexts within which they take place and to understand what is happening (Barton, 1994; Heath, 1983; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Street, 1995; Street, 1993). In many of these studies, researchers have followed participants over extended amounts of time. Gustavson (2007), for example, studied the literacy practices of three 15-year-old males from different ethnic and class backgrounds over the course of a year. Likewise, Petrone's (2008) ethnographic study of teen boys in a skateboard park spanned almost two years. In foregrounding participants' voices and framing things from their perspectives, ethnography allows for an in-

depth understanding of what happens in a particular context. As such, this kind of research has been immensely beneficial to the literacy field.

While beneficial to the literacy field, this kind of research, however, does not always provide access to the meanings that are associated with people's literacy practices. Following around teenage boys for several months – perhaps even years – might provide access to their work with texts but this access might not reveal the meaning making that surrounds them. In-depth interviewing provides researchers with this access. Because I am interested in teen boys' experiences with their literacy sponsors, I chose to do an in-depth interview study.

Specifically, I draw on Seidman's (2006) "in-depth phenomenologically based interviewing" approach, an approach that extends out of life-history interviewing. I modeled my interview phases, length of interviews, duration between interviews and interview prompts on his "open-ended, in-depth inquiry" approach (p. 19). I tried to "build upon and explore" my participants' responses to the open-ended questions that I asked, and to have my participants' reconstruct [their] experience(s) within the topic of study" (p. 15). An assumption of this methodological approach and one my study operates with is the assumption that what people say is valid. Because I was interested in the teen boys' experiences of their literacy sponsorship situations, I wanted to foreground their voices and the meaning they make within those experiences.

I have always liked listening to people's stories. I view stories as a way of knowing. As Seidman writes, "Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness" (p. 7). I recognize the importance of language and stories in a person's life as ways toward knowing and understanding. Seidman writes, "at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in

understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they made of that experience" (Sideman, 2006, p. 8). As a researcher, I see it as a privilege to gather the stories of people through interviewing and to come to understand their experience through their stories. In addition, and, as an extension of Seidman's work, I draw on Pahl and Rowsell's (2010) theory of artifactual literacies, the idea that artifacts or objects are ways to get at what is important and meaningful to people. They posit that artifacts can indicate the different ways in which people participate in multiple literacies. In asking my participants to bring in artifacts to their interview, I make the assumption that these artifacts connect to their stories and meaning making and literacies.

Another methodological assumption is its focus on the content of the interviews. Because of my interests in looking at sponsorship of literacy practices across teen boys' experiences, this study offers a referential analysis. My study is not a collection of case studies of individual boys, nor is it case studies of specific literacy practices. Rather, I look across teen boys' literacy practices and identify similarities and differences. I try to account for something that goes beyond individual differences but also beyond categorical distinctions. In so doing, I focus on the content rather than on how that content is expressed. These decisions reveal assumptions on my part as a researcher.

## Site and Participant Selection

Twenty-one adolescent boys participated in my study ranging in ages from 12-17 and, overall, were diverse in terms of their educational experiences, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and interests (see Table 1). As with Brandt (2001), I did not attempt to mirror the census profile of the county in which I collect data. However, I did try to achieve diversity across participants so I could explore all the potential variations in their literacy experiences.

I contacted a variety people in a small Midwestern city (population: 33,000) who worked with or around teenage boys. These contacts included coaches, Boy Scouts leaders, librarians, skateboard shop owners, and youth group leaders. I asked these contacts for recommendations of particular boys with whom to talk. After receiving these recommendations, I recruited volunteers from after school clubs, sports teams, a variety of high schools, church groups, and library groups. I started by interviewing whichever teen boys were willing to talk with me and then targeted particular teen boys in order to achieve my goal of having a diverse population.

My original plan was to interview 12-15 teen boys. In order to achieve this, I contacted a large number of teen boys. In so doing, I was able to recruit more volunteers than I expected or anticipated. Stereotypes of teen boys suggest that they don't like to talk about what matters to them and especially don't like to talk with adults. In many ways, this was true of my expectations about them and about the difficulties I anticipated in trying to find boys willing to talk with me. However, to my surprise, it was relatively easy to find teen boys willing to talk with me. The increased number of participants says more about them and less about the work I put into finding them.

In addition, I originally planned to study early adolescent boys, boys between the ages of 12-15. This, too, was based on my assumptions, reinforced by some research I read (Lummis, 1988), that younger boys might be more willing to talk and talk more easily with an adult female. Here too, my assumptions proved to be incorrect. One third of the participants willing to talk with me ended up being "older" teens. I will discuss later the implications that this rather substantial age range had on the data I collected.

I selected participants from a Midwest city known for its small town atmosphere, Christian conservative values, and flower festival. These characteristics made it an interesting

place to study teen boys. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, this had particular ramifications for considering the teen boys' church involvements.

In Table 1, I describe the study participants. The categories I use, aside from age and school, are inferential. I based them on the background information that the teens provided in the interviews. The names are all pseudonyms.

**Table 1: Meet the Crew**

| Name | Race / ethnicity | SES | Age | Grade | School | School performance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Adam** | White | Middle | 14 | 8 | Public | High |
| **Alan** | White | Middle | 14 | 8 | Public | Average |
| **Alberto** | Latino | Working | 15 | 10 | Charter | Average/low |
| **Asher** | Asian American | Middle | 12 | 7 | Charter | Average |
| **Blair** | White | Middle | 12 | 7 | Charter | High |
| **Chris** | White | Working | 17 | 12 | Private religious | Low |
| **David** | White | Upper | 12 | 8 | Public | High/average |
| **Eric** | White | Middle | 14 | 9 | Charter | High |
| **Freddy** | White | Working | 16 | 11 | Charter Alternative | Low |
| **Henry** | White | Upper | 12 | 7 | Charter | High |
| **Isaac** | White | Middle | 12 | 8 | Charter | High |
| **Jamal** | African American | Working | 17 | 12 | Public | Low |
| **Jayson** | African American | Working | 15 | 10 | Public | Low |
| **Jeremiah** | African American | Middle | 14 | 8 | Private religious | High |
| **John** | White | Upper | 12 | 7 | Charter | Average |
| **Jordan** | White | Middle | 15 | 10 | Public | Average |
| **Keith** | Cambodian American | Working | 17 | 11 | Charter Alternative | Low |
| **Kyle** | White | Middle | 12 | 7 | Charter | High |
| **Mark** | White | Middle | 12 | 7 | Charter | High |
| **Neil** | White | Middle | 16 | 11 | Public | Average |
| **Tommy** | White | Middle | 15 | 9 | Private religious | Average/low |

## Data Sources and Their Relationships

In order to address my research questions, I chose in-depth interviews as my data sources. I wanted to study the meanings with which teen boys attributed to their work with texts. Thus, I designed my interview study to have two phases. Because I wanted a chance to interview my participants twice but to also have the chance to meet and interview all the participants once before meeting with any of them for the second time, I designed the interview phases to take place several months apart. One reason for this is that I wasn't sure what kind of information or stories the teen boys would share with me. Getting at the teen boys' literacy practices indirectly sounded good on paper but it involved a fair bit of risk on my part. I had no idea what my participants would talk about and what artifacts they would bring. I wanted the chance to look across the interviews and identify themes, intentionally leaving the purpose of my second interview vague so that I could respond to the issues that were raised in the first interview. On a different matter, I also wanted to have two interview phases so I could "incorporate features that enhanced the accomplishment of validity" (Seidman, 2006, p. 24). Interviewing the teen boys twice allowed me to pursue things they mentioned in the first interview.

I designed my interviews to be shorter than what Seidman (2006) suggests for this kind of interview. After conducting a number of practice interviews with teen boys and reading scholarship on interviewing teens/children (Lummis, 1988), I decided that my interviews would last around 30 minutes. While some participants seemed to want the interview to last longer, the attention spans, interests and availability of other teen boys indicated that my chosen time frame worked well.

As mentioned in my theoretical framework, a significant dimension of my study was my decision to get at my participants' literacy practices indirectly, through the back door (Conley,

2005). I did not want to ask them specifically about “reading” and “writing.” Existing literacy research on teen boys often cautions about methodological approaches that ask about “literacy” or “reading” and “writing.” In addition, I wanted to examine literacy sponsorship in ways that didn’t directly ask participants about their experiences with reading and writing. This approach is consistent with my theory of literacy. A view of literacy as a social practice suggests that many of our literacy practices are “invisible” because of how embedded they are in our everyday lives (Barton, 1994). Thus, I decided I would explore and examine what teen boys nominated as significant in their lives by organizing my first interview around artifacts and my second interview around texts that were mentioned in relation to these artifacts. In the paragraphs that follow, I further describe my first and second interview phases.

It is important to note that my goal of getting at literacy indirectly wasn’t entirely successful. Some of the boys, presumably because of reading the descriptions of my “literacy” study on their consent forms, talked specifically about not liking to read or write. Talk about school reading and school writing came up quite a bit. In every interview, the boys mentioned “reading” and “writing” often. However, those words were used within the context of what the teen boys talked about. In this, my approach was successful.

Another important aspect of my approach to getting at teen boys’ literacy practices indirectly was letting the boys choose the interview location. I did this so that they would be comfortable. I was also hoping that this might reveal aspects of their various literacy practices. This was not entirely successful. Logistical issues made this more difficult than I anticipated. While I tried to avoid meeting in school contexts because I didn’t want the interviewing experience to be framed as “school oriented”, this was, in a surprisingly large number of cases, the most convenient place for many of them to meet. For some this was due to their busy sports

schedules. For others, meeting at home wasn't an option. Keith, for example, wasn't staying at his house during the interviews but was instead "crashing" at his girlfriend's grandmother's house. Choosing an interview location was also something that some parents, mostly mothers, ended up choosing for their sons. In some cases, this was because of transportation issues (some participants were too young to drive). In other cases, (middle class) parents simply made decisions for their teen sons, illustrating an issue that I discuss in Chapter 3.

When I was able to meet in locations that seemed to have significant meaning for my participants, I felt like I was able to have a "richer" interview experience. By this I mean that the interviews generally lasted longer and the teen boys were more animated. In addition, it provided me a better sense of some of their particular literacy practices. In Adam's case, it was only because of the fact that we met at his house that he could get up during the interview to get his fantasy football notebook. In Chris' case, I was able to see his "home away from home" myself. Interviewing Jamal and Jayson at their after school club gave me a better sense of their community experiences. In contrast, I felt like my least successful interviews were the ones conducted in schools. Those interviews were generally shorter and the boys seemed more constrained in what they talked about.

## Data Collection Procedures

### Phase 1 Interviews (Identity Artifacts)

In the first interview, I used Lindquist and Halbritter's (2008) interview design. I asked participants to bring with them three portable artifacts to represent their past, present and future selves. This particular interview approach focuses the interview around participants' discussion of their chosen artifacts, using the artifacts not as ends in themselves but as ways to explore the

participants' educational histories, interests, and cultural and community influences. I adapted the interview protocol to suit my particular demographic and purposes (see Appendix A).

I used the artifacts to reveal the contexts of teen boys' literacy practices. In this, I did not focus on the artifacts themselves or on the specific literacy practices that they indexed but instead used the artifacts and the teen boys' talk about them as ways to help me think and talk about teen boys' literacy practices. The artifacts, then, were necessarily a direct line into my participants' most interesting or dominant literacy practices. In addition, given that I had no way of telling how much thought teen boys put into choosing the artifacts they did, I did not base my interpretation of their literacy practices solely on the things surrounding what they choose, as telling as they were.

Using these artifacts in the first phase was more difficult than I expected. I struggled, particularly at first, with knowing how to direct my line of questioning around the artifacts. When Chris showed me this bag of his cut hair, for example, I remember breaking out in a cold sweat. What did this have to do with anything? How does a haircut reveal literacy practices? However, as I realized time and time again, I needed simply to trust the method. In talking about his haircut and literally about his cut hair, Chris opened a whole line of conversation about his different groups of friends and about what he did with each group. Chris' cut hair proved to be a very helpful artifact.

In addition, asking my participants to bring artifacts wasn't always as successful as I had hoped. A number of the teen boys forgot to bring their artifacts or said that they were not sure of what to bring (see Table 2). While some literally forget the objects at home or at school, others completely forgot about my request. When this happened, I gave them a few minutes at the beginning of the interview to think about what they would have brought.

In the table below, I outline the interview location and the teen boys' chosen artifacts.

**Table 2: Phase 1 Interview Locations and Artifacts**

| Participant | Place | Present day artifact | Past artifact | Future artifact |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adam | His house (dining room) | Tennis racquet | *Harry Potter* book | College science book |
| Alan | His house (dining room) | Wakeboard* | Wakeboard* | Wakeboard (sponsorship)* |
| Alberto | My house (dining room) | Soccer ball | Being shy* | Regional Mexican soccer team jersey |
| Asher | School library | Legos | Legos | Legos |
| Blair | School library | Football* | *Green Eggs and Ham* (Dr. Seuss) | Being a surgeon* |
| Chris | Coffee shop | Iphone, longboard, air soft gun* | Long hair [cut off, in a ziplock] | Video camera |
| David | Coffee shop | Football | Football | Wakeboard* |
| Eric | His house (dining room) | Lacrosse stick | Legos* | Wanting to be an elementary school teacher |
| Freddy | School Educational support room | YouTube improv videos | Birthday card to his mother | YouTube comedy videos |
| Henry | School library | Skateboard | Skateboard | Skateboard |
| Isaac | Library coffeeshop | Computer joystick | Screwdriver | Computer disk |
| Jamal | After school club | Basketball | Got in trouble* | Have a family* |
| Jayson | After school club | Football | Got in trouble* | Give money to charities* |
| Jeremiah | His house (living room) | Baseball | Being a jokester* | Be a leader* |
| John | School library | Soccer ball, skateboard | Soccer ball | Professional athlete* |
| Jordan | Library coffee shop | Tennis racquet | Soccer glove | College* |
| Keith | School gymnasium | Basketball | Court document* | Community college application |
| Kyle | School library | Swimming* | Being shy* | College* |
| Mark | School library | Computer mouse | Legos* | Doctor* |
| Neil | His house (front porch) | Soccer ball | Winnie the Pooh video | Graduation tassle |

**Table 2 cont'd**

| Participant | Place | Present day artifact | Past artifact | Future artifact |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tommy | School Educational support room | Football | Used to be hyper* | Police officer / Marines* |

* represents when the boys forgot to bring an artifact but described for me what they would have brought in and/or what they wanted to express.

**Phase 2 Interviews (Artifacts related texts)**

I designed my second interview to be an opportunity for participants to elaborate on the artifacts and experiences they mentioned in their first interviews and specifically on the texts (print, visual, digital) that were directly mentioned in the first interview or related to the artifacts and experiences discussed. In asking my participants to bring in texts, I didn't use the word "texts" but rather referred to specific things that the participants mentioned in their first interview. My reasoning for this second phase interview design was twofold. For one, texts were brought into the first interview in natural ways. For example, Adam got out his cell phone during the first interview to show me a recent text message he received from one of his friends. When Alberto talked about watching YouTube soccer videos, he saw my laptop on the table and asked if he could just show me an example of them. In addition, because of how I positioned myself in the interviews, as a learner and as an outsider to the boys' interests, it made sense for them to bring in and explain to me how they used texts and what the texts were.

A second rationale for this structuring of the second interview was that it gave me a glimpse into how the teen boys used the texts. Nearly all the teen boys talked about using the computer and Internet and so, I offered the use of my computer and Internet when I asked them to bring in texts. While this might have caused them to choose more digital texts, I did make sure to emphasize the specific texts they talked about in their first interviews.

As with my use of artifacts, this texts idea presented some difficulties. There were a few instances that the teen boys forgot to bring in texts. However, we were able to look up some of these or were able to at least see related web content of what they had forgotten. For example, Freddy really wanted to show me one of his video games but wasn't able to bring his video game player to our interview. Yet, we were able to access a few YouTube video clips of his favorite video games and thus, I was still able to get a sense of Freddy's work with those kinds of texts. Another difficulty surfaced when, at times, the teens became so immersed in the texts that they seemed to forget that I was there. Jamal, for example, got so into a web sports game that he played it without talking for five minutes. This difficulty, however, gave me an idea of the ways in which the teen boys interacted with some of the texts. Playing a web sports game for some boys was an intense activity; for others it seemed to be a casual undertaking. Yet another difficult arose because of technical problems with the Internet. Some of the sites that the teen boys wanted to go to were blocked at some of the schools where I conducted the interviews and the Internet connection in some coffee shops was too slow to access particular sites and programs. Despite these difficulties, having my participants bring in their artifact-related texts ended up working very well. One specific way it added to my data was in how it allowed me to see the different ways my participants maneuvered their ways through websites and search engines. I noticed very different levels of fluency with which they were technically literate. Freddy and Keith, for example, were painfully slow in their typing, in how they navigated their way through search engines. Freddy typed with one finger. Isaac, in contrast, showed me the website he created and was able to tell me the differences in approach between Google Video and YouTube.

As with my first interview, I used semi-structured questions in an effort to get my participants to tell stories and situations about their specific and general use of these literacy texts. I modified prompts taken from Moje's and Tysvaer's (2006) interview protocol, used for assessing literacy "processes" and "practices." The domains they use to structure their questions were helpful in how I thought about the kinds of questions I wanted to ask my participants (see Appendix B).

In Table 3, I outline the interview locations and texts from this second phase of interviews.

**Table 3: Phase 2 Interview Locations and Texts**

| Participant | Place | Main texts discussed |
|---|---|---|
| Adam | His house (dining room) | Tennis YouTube videos,<br>*Harry Potter*,<br>Fantasy football notebook,<br>Milicia Whiskey.com |
| Alan | His house (dining room) | Alliance wakeboarding magazine,<br>Ronix wakeboarding website,<br>School writing assignment |
| Alberto | My house (dining room) | YouTube: Portuguese language learning<br>*Dark Dude* (Hijuelos)<br>Notebook (soccer formations)<br>Fox sports website |
| Asher | School library | Lego.com<br>Stock market game<br>Facebook.com |
| Blair | School library | Police magazine<br>detroit.tigers.mlb.com<br>The Giver writing assignment<br>Yahoo news |
| Chris | Coffee shop | Various newspapers online<br>Free computer/phone applications<br>eBay.com<br>Creative writing assignment<br>Church devotional |
| David | Coffee shop | Ski magazine<br>newschooler.com<br>YouTube videos (building ramps, rails)<br>School writing assignment |

**Table 3 cont'd**

| Participant | Place | Main texts discussed |
|---|---|---|
| Eric | His house (dining room) | Lacrosse organization website<br>*The Outsiders*<br>School writing assignment<br>Video on skateboarding tricks |
| Freddy | School counselor office | Greeting card<br>YouTube videos – comedies<br>Jak and Daxter video game |
| Henry | School library | Hunger Games<br>Skateboarding catalog<br>YouTube skateboarding tricks |
| Isaac | Library coffee shop | Online games (bored.com)<br>Book recommendation website<br>His own website<br>School website<br>Prezi.com |
| Jamal | After school club | School website<br>Math website<br>Poem he wrote<br>YouTube: breakdancing videos |
| Jayson | After school club | NFL.com<br>addictinggames.com<br>YouTube: breakdancing videos |
| Jeremiah | His house (living room) | *Monster*<br>Call of Duty<br>fordvehicle.com<br>Writing assignment for school |
| John | School library | *A Day No Pigs Would Die*<br>ESPN.com<br>Burton snowboarding video |
| Jordan | Library coffee shop | TENNIS magazine<br>*Harry Potter* |
| Keith | School gymnasium | YouTube videos<br>Myspace<br>Poem he wrote<br>ESPN.com |
| Kyle | School library | *Eldest*<br>*The Giver*<br>*Harry Potter* |
| Mark | School library | Ski place website, Nastar.com<br>Miniclip.com<br>Lego.com |

**Table 3 cont'd**

| Participant | Place | Main texts discussed |
|---|---|---|
| Neil | His house (front porch) | ESPN.com,<br>YouTube (soccer injuries)<br>Essay for school |
| Tommy | School Educational support room | *Slight Edge*<br>Notebook with drawings in it<br>Nike.com<br>craigslist |

## Data Analysis Procedures

During and after the interview process, I generated many memos. I made memos after each transcription and identified passages that intrigued me, noting, for example, where Alberto said he felt comfortable talking about soccer and where he didn't. I also wrote down information that characterized each teen boy. This was something I continued to struggle with throughout my data analysis and writing – how to characterize the teen boys. I made numerous charts of my participants and identified their ages, social class, ethnicity or race, family education background and so on. I identified sponsors mentioned in each interview (people, institutions, commercial interests) and explored themes of what else might be sponsored in and around the instance of literacy sponsorship. I wrote memos after reading several articles/books on literacy: summarized them, thought about them in relation to my data; came up with new questions.

I transcribed the interviews over several months, one at a time. I often stopped to write down questions that I had as I transcribed and highlighted parts that seemed particularly interesting or rich. At first, I treated the interviews as separate from each other. Then, I found it easier to read each teen boy's interviews together. One aspect of my transcription that requires note was my constant need to Google or learn more about the things that the boys talked about. There were many times in an interview that a boy was talking so fast or listing a number of

different things that I was unable to ask them all the things I didn't know about. In addition, I didn't want to stop the flow of conversation. A particular example came up when David talked about his twin tips and ski jumps. While I was transcribing, I had to stop numerous times to figure out what he was talking about. At other times it was hard for me to understand what the boys were saying because of dialect (African American Vernacular English for Jamal, Jayson). Because I was focusing my analysis on the content of what the boys talked about, I did not do in-depth transcription and analyze the interview data in terms of discourse analysis. While Brandt (2001) edits her participants' narratives to reflect Standard Edited English for the sake of "greater clarity and efficiency for the reader" (p. 14), I did not do this. I left the ways in which the teen boys talked largely intact because it seemed more reflective of their personalities and previous experiences with language. In keeping with an ethnographic tradition, I have also tried to use their terms.

Once I transcribed my interviews, I began coding for all the instances of particular literacy practices, and then of particular literacy sponsors. Specifically, I identified the texts that were mentioned and/or discussed at length. Many of the boys talked about the same texts. Then, as I tried to identify the other elements in Szwed's (1981) framework, I started noticing that the other literacy elements, though the text was the same, were different. As I did this, I found it helpful to use the terms: literacy event, literacy practice, literacy domains. From there, I tried to identify the various literacy sponsors that were directly or indirectly present in the teen boys' experiences with literacy (or in the particular literacy practices), looking for the possibilities of overlap. It was easy for me to identify sponsors as people and institutions. I had a harder time identifying the nonhuman sponsors.

It is important to note how my study changed over time. My focus on literacy sponsorship never changed but the way I approached it has. Early on I used the term "agency" to describe the teen boys' reaction to sponsors. I also found myself dissatisfied with the sponsoring labels I identified in my data after the first interview. For example, teachers were often mentioned as people who recommended books. A couple of boys who mentioned this, however, talked about it in very different ways – using the same category (teacher as literacy sponsor) didn't seem to fit. The sponsorship seemed relational. In the same way, parents as sponsors needed unpacking. The teen boys talked about their parents doing different things with them. The idea of sponsorship as a relationship came through, that teen boys' agency was determined in part by the kind of relationship to their sponsor.

In addition, I kept coming back to how the teen boys in my study didn't focus on their literacy practices when they talked about them. While I worked so hard to get at literacy indirectly in my methodological approaches in order to study literacy directly, I began to notice that what the teen boys talked about, when they talked about their work with texts seemed to be more about who they were or wanted to be. In using Szwed's (1981) framework, I began to see patterns of sponsorship that pointed to other things being sponsored. Because I was interested in teen boys' talk about their literacy practices, I used their talk to help me sort out between direct and indirect sponsorship. I noticed in my conversations with my participants that, in many cases, the specific acts of reading and writing were incidental to other things. Put a different way, the embedded nature of much of teen boys' reading and writing made me consider what else might be sponsored. I then noticed a pattern in which literacy was being sponsored but it was being sponsored indirectly. In the chapters that follow, I discuss how particular ways of being teen

boys are directly sponsored in various sponsorship situations. I argue that teen boys' literacy practices are indirectly sponsored in these situations.

## Limitations of My Methodology

Because my focus was on how teen boys experience the sponsorship of their literacy practices, I designed this study in a way that let the teen boys "speak their lives" (Kvale, 1996). In telling various people about my study, many have asked if and how I knew what the teen boys' were saying was "true." In short, I don't. Some scholars discuss the limitations of investigations based on participants' reported perceptions of their own social practices (Denzin, 1970). I need to acknowledge these. I need to acknowledge the possibility that the teen boys in my study might glorify themselves, exaggerate what they do or don't do and tell me things that they think I wanted to hear. In addition, in allowing teen boys to "speak their lives", I need to recognize the possibility that they might not mention or talk about all the experiences that are important in their lives. Particularly given the kind of in-depth ethnographic focused interviews I did, I must account for the fact that the teen boys in my study might not have talked about experiences or literacy practices that were significant in their lives. Though I tried in the interviews to encourage the boys to discuss artifacts and texts from a variety of angles, hoping that in so doing, mention of people, institutions, affinity groups and so on would surface, I was not always successful. For example, not one talked about topics or behaviors that might be seen as "inappropriate". The closest a boy came to this was when Keith was showing me his MySpace page and some photos of his girlfriend came up, pictures that he didn't feel comfortable sharing. It made me wonder what other things the boys were not sharing. In addition, it is possible that the teen boys simply chose not to discuss things that were important to their identities. Perhaps other teen boys than the ones who discussed it with me, also had religious commitments and

involvements that they simply didn't think to mention in the interview and/or feel was important to bring up.

However, in choosing the methodological choices I did, I have been able to foreground my participants' meaning making of their experiences. This, I argue, allows to describe the sponsorship of teen boys' literacy practices in great specificity.

**Synchronic View of Teen Boys' Literacy Practices**

My data provides one snapshot of teen boys' literacy practices, situated in a particular time and space in their lives. The teen boys in my study talked with me at two different points in their lives. In my description of their literacy practices and the sponsorship patterns that they reflect, I do not mean to suggest that boys are static in what they do or think. I am unable to make claims about their experiences that go beyond the particular times and spaces that my study represents.

In addition, the boys in my study had to be willing to be interviewed. In addition, they represent teen boys from a particular time and place, but they are not representative of all teen boys. However, during my interviews, I took seriously Seidman's (2006) challenge that my job "is to go to such depth in the interviews that surface considerations of representativeness and generalizability are replaced by a compelling evocation of an individual's experience" (p. 51). The use of artifacts and texts in my interviews were ways that I used to help me go "to such depth." Nonetheless, my study cannot make generalizable claims about all teen boys or about all teen boys in the particular town in which they all lived.

**Looking At Teen Boys Representing a Significant Age Range**

In deciding to look at the ages of the teen boys I did, ages 12-17, I remain consistent with how "teen boys" as a category is used in other research studies. And yet, teen boys between the

ages of 12-17 represent a broad span despite the one category that is used to describe them. Moje (2008) writes, “the difference experienced by youth of different ages in access to information, relationships, and spaces is potentially enormous” (p. 209). I did notice significant differences between the younger teen boys and the older teen boys. The ability to drive independently, their overall freedom in terms of school activities, working outside of their families, the different sports offerings they had or were given access to. Moje observes that in her long-term ethnographic study she noticed a change in her teen participants over time. She reflects their “talk about their sense of self and their concomitant identity enactments have shifted over time” (p. 209). Cautioning against lumping all adolescents together, she challenges adolescent literacy researchers “to consider the content and linguistic demands faced by a 10 year old in reading the text of a content area equivalent to those faced by a 17 year old in the same content area promises to lead to risks a glossing over on each end of that spectrum” (p. 209). Moje’s concerns, in many ways, point to the fragility of this “one size fits all” category of “teen boys”, something I hope to address in this study. I address Moje’s concerns by highlighting in the different data chapters when different experiences seem to surface because of age.

## Researcher Positionality

This study, in many ways, can be seen as a story about adolescent boys’ literacy practices. When I first started developing this study, I remember wondering if, as a female researcher, this story about adolescent boys was one that I was able to tell. Existing literature emphasizes how males and females operate on different spheres and with different discourses (Lummis, 1988; Tannen, 2001). In addition, much of the work on teen boys and literacy is done by male scholars (c.f. Smith and Wilhelm, 2002; Newkirk, 2002; Brozo, 2002; Booth, 2002; Petrone, 2008; Mahiri, 1991; Tatum, 2005; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009) and, though I knew it was

logically possible for me to do a study on teen boys, I wondered if my outsider status would prevent me from understanding teen boys or being able to access their stories. Interestingly enough, what I didn't consider at the time were all the other ways in which I represented an outsider to many teen boys. While I am female, I am also a white, middle class, 30-something female.

As I conducted my study, I didn't always acutely feel my outsider status. More often than not, I did feel an outsider because of my age. The teen boys in my study were born from 1992-1998 (the year I graduated from college!). They have been described as the Generation Z, Net Generation, Internet Generation, digital natives. They prefer texts that are multimodal, their texts typically draw from and integrate print, images, spoken words, music, and even performances. Teens today experience a much different literacy landscape than I did as a teen. Even though I consider myself fairly technologically savvy (I have a blog, I regularly use email, I am Facebook proficient), I quickly realized that my purposes and uses of the Internet and today's technology are very different than teens today, or at least of the teen boys in my study. At the time of the study, I didn't text. I didn't realize that very few of them use email anymore. I was surprised at how often kids IM each other on Facebook (I use it for the email capabilities), or how prevalent texting on phones is, or how popular YouTube use is. While I have an interest in digital literacy practices in today's age – I don't IM. In fact, instant messaging some of the boys in order to set up the interviews was some of the only instant messaging I had ever done. In so many ways then, I was peripheral to the world my participants were sharing with me because of my age and literacy experiences.

To inform my position on US youth culture, I spent a lot of time prior to the interviews and in between the interviews thinking about and strategizing my position as an interviewer. I

read about gender issues in interviewing (Seidman, 2006; Spradley, 1979). But, it was also important for me to not position myself as a teacher figure. Because I didn't want to focus my talk on schooled notion of literacy, I didn't want my behavior or language to suggest a teacher role. However, I also didn't want to come across as a "wanna be teen." To achieve these goals, I made a number of decisions about how I would position myself and my study to the boys. I introduced myself as "Deb." I described my research study to the teen boys as a study on what teen boys enjoyed doing. I wore clothing that while wasn't formal or working professional, wasn't too informal. I tried to suspend my own value judgments about my participants' engagement with different texts in order to better understand and appreciate what youth themselves saw as important forms of literacy (felt this most strongly when Keith showed me YouTube videos of gang fights).

What worked the best for me was deliberately positioning myself as a learner in the interviews. I didn't want to appear to be an expert in what they talked about even if I knew something about it. To do this, I asked the teen boys to explain words they used to me, to give me specific examples of what they were talking about. I wanted to appear as someone genuinely interested in what the teen boys liked or didn't like. However, I also didn't want to appear as a "poser." In between the interviews, I tried to familiarize myself with what they talked about. I subscribed to a skateboarding catalog. I read books they mentioned (i.e., *Lightning Thief*). I played video games they talked about. And, in doing this, I realized that this position was incredibly easy for me to assume. I was an eager learner time and time again. I was genuinely interested in what they talked about.

I share this as a way of describing myself as an outsider telling their story. And yet, their story is also my story. I care deeply about teenage boys. I am a mother of three young boys. As I

interviewed my participants, pregnant at the time with my third boy, I often found myself wondering if any of my sons would be like my participants. Would my sons care about similar things? Would they be involved in the kinds of sports and activities that my participants discussed? Would my sons have similar experiences with church and school? Later, as I analyzed my data, I also found myself contrasting constructions of boyhood with that of girlhood and reflecting on how my daughter's literacy experiences are already constructed so very differently than my sons'.

Reflecting on this positionality is important to do because, as Dyson and Genishi (2005) suggest, "the effort to understand others' understandings is mediated by the researcher's own professional, personal, and collective knowledge and experiences" (p. 82). Thus, as a researcher who is also a mother of young boys, my understandings of my participants' experiences link these roles together. In a similar way, my experiences as a former high school teacher also mediate my work. In many ways, this study began when, during my high school English teaching years, I often lamented to colleagues that I felt that I didn't teach the seemingly unmotivated and lower achieving teen boys in my literature classes very well. When I taught a film class to some of them, I remember being surprised at how much effort and enthusiasm they put into that class compared to a required English class. I had a similar experience when I taught Summer School English classes to area high school students. In my job interview for the position, I remember the summer school director looking at me and saying "These kids are going to be a far cry from the AP kids you're used to teaching." She was right. The kids weren't AP students – some of them were at 5$^{th}$ grade reading levels. They also weren't the mostly White middle to upper middle class students I was used to teaching at a private religious parochial high school. Most of them were Latino, African American and Asian. And, most of them were boys. I loved my experiences

with these students. We laughed, read poems, and wrote letters and essays. I make no claims as to the effectiveness of my teaching but I can say that these students forced me to rethink my assumptions about particular kinds of teen boys.

I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know the teen boys in my study. Though my interactions with them only lasted one semester, I was surprised at how much I was drawn into their lives. I think they trusted me, they took time to meet with me, they thought it mattered to talk with me. I found myself thinking about their particular situations and contexts in between and long after my interviews with them. Several months after I collected my data, I remember seeing, with excitement, Keith's son's birth announcement in the local newspaper. I found myself checking the high school sports pages in the same newspaper for mention of Neil, David, Eric and Henry. I continue to run into some of them at various locations and events. They often initiate conversation with me, asking me about my kids or my research. Some of them continue to express interest in talking with me. "When's my third interview?" Chris jokingly emails to my Facebook account. "You'll have to stop by and see the baby," Keith told me the last time I saw him. When I see Jamal every now and then, he often tells me that he still wants me to see a video of him performing one of his freestyle raps in church.

I am also part of the story in other ways. As I wrote this study, I implicated myself in the ways that I described some of the middle class parents in my chapter on family literacy sponsorship situations. As I prepared the chapter on sports-related literacy practices, I remember rolling my eyes at my brothers when I was younger when they launched into heated debates about their favorite hockey players and teams, writing them off at the time as talk about boring and useless statistics. And, as a churchgoer, I see myself in some of their church experiences. I

share this to reemphasize that telling this story of adolescent boys and their literacy practices matters on a personal level to me. It is my story as well.

## CHAPTER 3: SPONSORING TEEN SONS: FAMILY SPONSORSHIP SITUATIONS

> Sometime it sucks, like sometimes I wish they be more involved in my life but I can understand why they're not, they don't really understand like half the stuff that's going on and so, but then like it sucks sometimes but other times it doesn't. I get more freedom. I believe I get more freedom than most kids do. I don't have to check in at home when I don't feel like it. I can be gone for two weeks and just show up one day, they won't even ask where I was at, as long as I show up and as long as I'm still alive.
>
> Keith, 17 year old, Asian American

> Like one night I didn't even write one draft, you know, my mom is an editor, I was like, "Hey, Mom! Can you proof read this?" and she's like, proof reading for her means, like check all these for mistakes because I just can't spell, even with spell check I'll get the words wrong, so yeah, she has to check all of those and if she doesn't like something she's like "Hey Jordan, come here! I'm going to change this" and I'm like, "Go ahead" and she does. She changes paragraphs sometimes. It's like wow, it sounds better when she does it.
>
> Jordan, 15 year old, European American

Keith and Jordan recount vastly different interactions with parents. While Jordan's mom helps him with his high school writing assignments, correcting his spelling but also, more substantially, changing entire paragraphs, Keith's parents "don't really understand like half the stuff that's going on," in part, because they don't share the same language as their son. As Cambodian immigrants, they speak Cambodian and very limited English. Keith and his six siblings, on the other hand, speak English and very limited Cambodian. According to Keith, his

parents are “not at all” involved in his schooling. Despite the different ways that these teen boys’ parents are involved in their lives, Keith and Jordan both seem to find these interactions, more or less, acceptable. Keith says he wishes that they would be more involved but also seems to benefit from the freedom that their “involvement” provides him. Jordan seems to enjoy his mom’s editing.

Parents are often viewed as sponsors of their children’s literacy practices. The above quotes suggest, however, that parents sponsor much more than just literacy practices. Though these sponsoring relationships often occur in and around literacy practices, as in the case of Jordan and his mother, these literacy practices point to particular ways of being a teen son. In this light, Keith and Jordan’s comments illustrate significantly different ways that being teen sons are sponsored by families.

In this chapter, I review relevant literature related to family literacy practices. I then describe the various family situations represented in my study. Next, I explore the different messages teen sons receive about what it means to be a teen son from their families, from parents in particular. I examine how these different ways of being teen sons affect their literacy practices, ways that significantly influenced by social class.

## Beyond Bedtime Stories

Research on family literacy practices has provided rich descriptions of the many kinds of literacy environments that exist within family life (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Heath, 1983; Lareau, 2000a; Wells, 1986). Many studies focus on families with young children and their literacy development and learning. There is less research, however, on family literacy practices in families with older children, children who are independent readers and writers (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993; Millard, 1997; Rogoff, 1993a) The research that has been done

recognizes the important role that family literacy values continue to play on older children, the importance a family attached to literacy practices in general influences the ways in which individual family members approached literacy (Selfe & Hawisher, 2004). A major finding in the family adolescent literacy research has focused on the different kinds of literacy environments that exist within family life and how, for some families, the literacy they practice in the home does not correspond with literacy practices in schools.

My work in this chapter responds to the work by Love and Hamston (2001, 2003, 2004; Hamston & Love, 2000, 2003) as well as to Lenters' (2007) study. Unlike most of the adolescent literacy research on family literacy practices, their work focuses on families with teenage children. One argument they make is that, although the boys in their study are teenagers and no longer experience "bedtime reading" as a shared literacy event with their parents, family literacy practices continue to affect how these teen boys read and write. It is here where Love and Hamston focus their research. In their large study of adolescent boys' leisure reading dispositions Love and Hamston (2001) look at the boys' family leisure reading dispositions in conjunction with the boys' current leisure reading dispositions, categorizing the boys as being committed readers or reluctant readers. Using Rogoff's (1993) framework of cultural activity, they show how the teen boys were encultured into particular family literacy practices.

What stands out in this work is Love and Hamston's theorizing of teen boys' agency in family literacy situations. In their 2003 study, they examine how the teen boys "appropriated or resisted" particular family literacy practices in order to use reading for their own purposes. They highlight three boys who responded differently to their parents' literacy expectations. They argue that the teen boys "differentially choose from the range of positions made available within their habitus, often articulating their need for an intimate reading-related connection to be maintained

with their families" (p. 173). They describe how one boy "strategically placates" his family's literacy expectations and demands so that he can read what he prefers while another boy compromises between what his parents wanted him to be reading and what he read on his own time. In this description, they point out that though both of these boys fit into the same committed reader category, the boys respond to family literacy practices differently. Of these findings, Love and Hamston argue that family literacy practices comprise a "complex dialectic" whereby teen boys often negotiate with their parents, in very different ways, to balance their reading autonomies and short-term goals with their family's longer term goals for them. Lenters (2007) makes a similar argument in her study of a 8 year old boy from a middle class family. In her analysis of what contributes to Max's literacy development, she concludes that though his family literacy practices represent a significant part of this development, Max's experiences with peers and community contribute to the ways in which Max responds to his family's literacy practices.

Collectively these scholars point to teen boys' agency in the context of family literacy sponsorship. Their work suggests that, often in very smart ways, teen boys appropriate, resist and repurpose the kinds of literacy practices that their parents encourage them to do. It is here where I want to extend this scholarship. While Love and Hamston make continual reference to social class and the "range of positions made available" to the boys based on their social class positioning", (2003, p. 173) they do not elaborate on this other than to note the fact that the teen boys in their study come from middle to upper middle class families. They do not discuss how positioning in this particular social class affects the teen boys' literacy practices, on the part of the teen boys themselves or their parents. I address this in this chapter in my comparison of the positioning of middle class and working class teen boys. In foreground this positioning, I extend

Love and Hamston's (2003) and Lenters' (2007) work. These scholars look specifically at literacy practices, as reflected in their methodological approaches and data analysis. For example, Love and Hamston design their studies to be comparisons between "committed readers" and "reluctant readers." In my work, I consider the ways in which parents indirectly sponsor their teen boys' literacy practices through their sponsored notions of what it means to be working and middle class.

To theorize this, I turn now to Lareau's (2000, 2003, Lareau & Weininger, 2008) work on social class and families. Collectively, her research explores the effects of social class on parenting strategies and the implications of these strategies on children's future lives. To do this, she draws on Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social and cultural capital. Bourdieu argues that the family is an important site of social and cultural reproduction. In essence, he suggests that social class provides social and cultural resources that must be invested or activated, however, to become a form of cultural capital. The end result, Bourdieu argues, is attainment of social profits from these investments. Lareau takes these ideas to analyze the ways in which forms of social cultural capital appear in family life. In her 2003 study, she specifically discusses the ways parents promote educational success, the different leisure activities and social networks that the families participate in, child rearing activities, and how work and school are separated. Lareau's study identifies the mostly invisible but powerful ways that parents' social class influences children's life experiences. Using in-depth observations and interviews with middle-class and upper middle class, working class and poor families, Lareau examines key elements of family life: time use for children's leisure activities, language use in the home and interventions of adults in children's institutional lives and concludes that the social class differences between the families led to particular "cultural logic of child rearing."

According to Lareau, working-class parents in the United States believe in what she terms “the accomplishment of natural growth,” a parenting strategy that emphasizes informal play, often in and around the house. Lareau outlines how working-class parents, using what she considers a more hands-off approach than their middle-class counterparts, believe that kids will grow and develop naturally as they navigate the world. In contrast, middle-class parents operate with a belief that it is their responsibility is to develop their children through sports, music lessons, and other activities, an approach Lareau terms “concerted cultivation.” Two of the main differences between the two parenting strategies revolve around the organization of children’s daily lives and the extent to which parents believe they should be involved in the inner workings of their children’s activities in schools and other institutionalized settings.

Lareau suggests that whereas middle-class parents tend to advocate for their children in institutionalized settings, working-class parents value respect for authority, particularly of teachers and principals, and prefer to give their children the autonomy to navigate their own relationships with peers and the outside world. Because middle class children experience more talking at home, for example, they develop greater verbal ability, larger vocabularies, more comfort with authority figures, and more familiarity with abstract concepts. She concludes that these middle class children “appear to (at least potentially) gain important institutional advantages…they acquire skills that could be valuable in the future when they enter the world of work” (p. 6). They were open to sharing information and asking for attention and acted as though they had a right to pursue their own individual preferences and to actively manage interactions in institutional settings. In sum, they were “trained in the rules of the game that govern interactions and with institutional representatives…they also learned how to make rules work in their favor” (p. 6). Lareau argues that, in contrast, working class children experience long periods of leisure

time, child-initiated play, clear boundaries between adults and children. They showed an emerging sense of constraint in their interactions in institutional settings and were less likely to try to customize interactions to suit their own preferences. Lareau concludes that "it is these class differences and how they are enacted in family life and child rearing that shape the ways children view themselves in relation to the rest of the world" (p. 4). It is in these ways of viewing themselves that I explore in this chapter.

In this chapter, I examine the sponsorship of teen sons' literacy practices in and through the different ways families sponsor what is means to be teen sons. I consider parents' literacy practices, the ways in which teen sons are encouraged to view their positions as teen sons in relation to the adult world, to the present and future and to institutions. I argue that patterns emerge based on family social class differences. I first discuss the teen boys' varied family situations. I then discuss how different families sponsor different notions of what it means to be a teen son and examine how teen sons' literacy practices are indirectly sponsored.

## "I Wish They'd Just Let Me Do My Stuff": Teen Sons' Different Family Sponsorship Situations

### Teen Boys' Family Situations

The teen boys in my study represented families with differing experiences and dynamics as well as differing social classes and ethnicities. In Table 4, I describe some of these differences. The categories that I use are inferential, based on the background information that the teen boys provided in the interviews. Using Lareau and Weininger's (2008) findings that "cultural repertories vary sharply across social classes but not across racial groups" (2008, p. 123), I focus on the social class differences between the teen boys' families, comparing "middle class" teen boys with "working class" teen boys. I do not mean to suggest that all working class

teen boys are the same nor all middle class teen boys. Rather, I use these categories as a way to discuss different family sponsorship situations.

**Table 4: Teen Boys' Families**

| Name | Ethnicity | Social class | Age / Grade School | Family Features | Parents' Occupation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adam | White | Middle | 14 / 8th Public | 2 siblings | F: Business M: Human Resources |
| Alan | White | Middle | 14 / 8th Public | 2 siblings | F: Teacher M: Teacher |
| Alberto | Latino | Working | 15 / 10th Charter | Grandparents have been his guardians since he was a baby; visits father regularly; Spanish is home language | F: Factory |
| Asher | Asian American | Middle | 12 / 7th Charter | One younger brother | F: Banking M: Human Resources |
| Blair | White | Middle | 12 / 7th Charter | 2 brothers | F: Police officer M: "Stay at home mom" |
| Chris | White | Working | 17 / 12th Private religious | Father is not consistently employed; Grandparents often give money to help out the family | F: Custodian M: "Sells stuff on eBay.com" |
| David | White | Upper | 12 / 8th Public | 2 brothers | F: Business M: Office |
| Eric | White | Middle | 14 / 9th Charter | 2 siblings | F: College professor M: "Stay at home mom" |

**Table 4 cont'd**

| Name | Ethnicity | Social class | Age / Grade School | Family Features | Parents' Occupation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Freddy | White | Working | 16 / 11th Charter Alternative | Has 5 half siblings; Parents are in their 60s | F: Retired M: "doesn't work" |
| Henry | White | Upper | 12 / 7th Charter | 1 brother | F: Business M: Human Resources |
| Isaac | White | Middle | 12 / 8th Charter | 1 younger sister | F: Engineer M: Therapist |
| Jamal | African American | Working | 17 / 12th Public | 2 older siblings, parents moved to be safer" | F: Factory M: Church |
| Jayson | African American | Working | 15 / 10th Public | 1 younger brother; lives with mother, recently got in trouble with the police | M: Factory |
| Jeremiah | African American | Middle | 14 / 8th Private religious | 2 older siblings, sister is getting her Ph.D | F: Pastor M: Community activist |
| John | White | Upper | 12 / 7th Charter | 2 siblings | F: Chiropractor M: Flower shop |
| Jordan | White | Middle | 15 / 10th Public | 2 younger brothers | F: Custodian M: Editor |
| Keith | Cambodian American | Working | 17 / 11th Charter Alternative | 6 siblings, he often stays at his girlfriend's house | F: Factory M: "at home" |
| Kyle | White | Middle | 12 / 7th Charter | 2 brothers | F: Principal M: "At home" |

**Table 4 cont'd**

| Name | Ethnicity | Social class | Age / Grade School | Family Features | Parents' Occupations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mark | White | Middle | 12 / 7th Charter | 2 siblings | F: Engineer, Ph.D<br>M: "At home" |
| Neil | White | Middle | 16 / 11th Public | 3 siblings, | F: College professor<br>M: Small business owner |
| Tommy | White | Working class / Middle | 15 /9th Private religious | Lives with his dad and 2 step sisters | F: Small business owner |

F: Father M: Mother

**Directly sponsoring teen sons, indirectly sponsoring literacy practices**

Within these different families, I now examine the ways in which teen sons are sponsored across social classes and how teen sons' literacy practices are indirectly sponsored through this. I argue that upper, middle, and working class families seem to sponsor different ways of being teen sons. This then has implications on teen sons' literacy practices, on what they are encouraged to read or write and on how and where they are encouraged to do so.

In the sections below, I look at some of the specific ways in which middle class and working class families sponsor notions of being teen sons, ways that, at times, overlap and at times seem to contradict each other.

**Teen sons learn about literacy by watching their parents**

I first discuss the different ways teen sons talked about their parents' gendered literacy practices. While mothers and fathers might not have explicitly talked about or even drawn attention to the fact that they demonstrated differences in their literacy practices, it was clear that

teen boys observed their parents doing different things insofar as many participants shared these experiences with me. This was true across social classes. However, as I point out, gendered literacy practices also seem to reflect social class differences.

Nearly all of the middle class teen boys talked about seeing their parents read different kinds of books in their free time. They could tell me book titles or specific writing tasks associated with their parents' literacy practices. The differences that they noted in terms of what their mothers read and wrote compared to what their fathers read and wrote confirms other research on parents' differing literacy practices (Love & Hamston, 2003). Often this observation was accompanied by the teen boys identifying with what their fathers read or wrote. Alan, for example, described seeing his dad and mom reading different things. Alan said, "My dad reads a lot of like, he reads a book called *Blackwater.* He reads a lot of books like that and my mom she reads like all sorts of other books. It'll be like some action one and then some like love story." According to Alan, his dad seems to read mostly nonfiction. *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army* (Schaill, 2008) is about Blackwater USA, the self-described private military contractor and security firm. He contrasts this with what his mother reads. Later in the interview, Alan was clear to point out how much he disliked reading fiction but would, if he had the time and interest, read nonfiction. Here, he identifies with his father's literacy practices. In a similar way, Kyle talked of his father's literacy practices as being similar to his own. While Kyle noted more similarities between his parents' leisure reading (both are avid fiction readers) than Alan did, he still identified differences between what his parents enjoyed reading. Of his mother, he said "Right now she's reading like, *A House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1991). She reads lots of books like that. Like *3 Cups of Tea* (Mortenson, 2007)." His father, on the other hand, was "into fantasy, just like me" Kyle noted.

Differences in book genres were not the only differences mentioned. Alan also talked about seeing his parents use the Internet for different purposes. He contrasted what they did on the computer. “I think Mom goes on it every morning to do school work [she is a teacher] so she doesn’t go on it just for fun” he said. “But my dad, he just went on it because we sold our boat, we sold it through [a regional boating company]. He just checked on it and stuff. He just checks out like the boats and stuff.” Here, Alan compares his mom’s work-related computer use with his father’s recreational use. While his mom uses email, word processing, and websites for teaching and learning purposes, (“My mom uses it a lot to type papers [for a Master’s class]” he said. “and I think she wrote a book on it once.” When I asked Alan what kind of book it was, he shrugged. “I really don’t know”, he said matter-of-factly, “I never asked her”), he frames his dad’s use as “for fun.” Though his father accomplishes tasks on the Internet, just as his mother does, Alan describes their purposes as being different. Alan uses the phrase “he just” three times when talking about his father checking up on a boat that he was trying to sell. This seems important to highlight because, as I discuss further in the next chapter, Alan identifies with his father’s interest in and work with boats and the recreational activities that go along with the boating world. It is something that Alan often does himself. His use of the computer aligns much more with his father’s use. The way he talked about schooling emphasizes how unlike he is with his mother.

In a similar way, Blair talked about seeing his father, a police officer, reading “like police stuff, POLICE magazine.” His mom, on the other hand, he reflected “reads magazines for fun”, describing these magazines later as “magazines for women.” Though Blair observed his parents reading similar “texts”, both magazines, he makes gender distinctions between the content of these texts. In my second interview with Blair, he brought in a copy of his dad’s recent copy of

POLICE magazine to show me an example of something he himself enjoyed reading. As he paged through the magazine he explained, “It has all the weapons and the stuff they use.” He paused on one page that had a picture of two policemen putting handcuffs on a man. “There are articles about capturing people and bringing them to jail.” He explained that he likes reading it “because like it’s about bad people going to jail and it has action.” As with Alan, Blair identifies with his father’s purposes for reading, which in his case means reading for work, for learning. Though some might describe the magazine as serving entertainment purposes, Blair seemed to think of his dad’s leisure reading as possessing work-related meaning. “Action” was a way that Blair also described the books he enjoyed reading.

Middle class teen boys also talked about their parents’ writing. Though fathers’ work related writing tasks were mentioned more often than mothers’, it seemed that the kinds of writing the teen boys observed were more indicative of parental occupations than of gender. For example, Kyle and Eric talked about their fathers grading papers. Jeremiah mentioned his father writing sermons throughout the week. Isaac talked about paperwork his mom did for her counseling clients. Michael’s dad writes lab reports at home. Henry’s mom fills out forms for her human resources job. In all these instances, parents didn’t seem to draw attention to their writing tasks (Brandt, 2001) or view them as “writing” in terms of how schools use the term. Teen boys, however, notice them.

I now draw attention to the ways in which working class teen boys also talked about the differences between what their parents did with literacy. Freddy, for example, talked about seeing his mother “read stuff about make up” on the Internet. He described his father, on the other hand, as reading “all kinds of biography books.” Of his father’s reading habits Freddy reflected,

> He has hard cover books and not just with *Godfather*, but he'll like a lot of rock and roll stuff like he'll look up Bob Dylan, he'll read books on Bob Dylan and the Beatles and um you know you know all them old groups like Buddy Holly. He'll, ah, look at present day singers. He really likes Elvis Presley. He reads a lot of stuff about him, all kinds of biography books, you know what I'm saying? Like he'll go to the library a lot and then he comes home and he brings home books about stuff that they have that's now on exhibit, whatever that word, is in a museum and stuff like the very first guitar that Elvis Presley used and they'll have it in the book and all that kind of stuff. Pretty much all the books I seen him read.

Here, Freddy describes how his father reads "all kind of biography books", books that reinforce or support his interests in the films and TV shows he watches and in the music he listens to. It seems that one of the reasons Freddy's father reads is in order to build his knowledge of popular culture. He reads about 60s music groups because he likes that kind of music. He reads whatever he can about *The Godfather* saga because he loves watching the films. An expression of this love or enjoyment is to learn as much as one can about it. This kind of reading is very different than reading for aesthetic pleasure, the sorts of reasons that some of the middle class parents read but also different than what he identifies his mother as reading. In her case, she reads for pragmatic purposes.

Alberto also talked about what his father read. Alberto's father, a Latino man in his 40s, enjoyed reading fiction. Alberto described him as having "hundreds" of Louis L'Amour books (Western fiction novel). "He has every book of his" Alberto reflected. "He reads them after he gets home from work." For Alberto's father, a factory worker who often worked the early morning shift, reading was not related to work in the least. Instead, it seems to provide him with

a way to relax. This represents another distinction between some of the middle and working class fathers' literacy practices.

I share the differences in what the teen boys' noticed about their parents' literacy practices not to suggest the reasons for these differences. Rather, in my attempt to build my larger argument about how teen boys are encouraged into ways of being teen sons, I share these differences in order to start making this case. Teen sons' literacy practices, I argue, are sponsored in complicated family situations that go beyond a generic "parent-son" relationship or individual experience. Highlighting the different texts parents choose to read or write is only part of this sponsorship situation. What I want to suggest is that often, but not always, underlying these different choices in texts are gendered and class-based discourses about literacy that encourage particular gendered and class-based ways of being and acting.

**Teen sons learn about literacy by engaging with parents**

The teen boys in my study also talked about the literacy practices that they shared with their parents. Here too, teen sons were able to identify differences between mothers and fathers, with mothers often playing a more active and explicit role in their teen sons' literacy development. While parents probably didn't intentionally try to sponsor their teen sons' literacy practices differently, it is important to point out that the teen boys in my study talked about these differences. My findings suggest that these gendered experiences also fall along social class lines. In other words, middle class teen boys tended to experience literacy differently with mothers and fathers than working class teen boys do.

Many middle class teen boys talked about their mothers reading picture books aloud to them when they were younger. In fact, these bedtime stories were some of the past artifacts that the teen boys chose to bring with them to their first interviews. For some of the teen boys, this

seemed to change when they got into their later elementary school years. Four of the boys (Henry, Adam, Isaac, Neil) talked about their fathers reading to them (as well as their brothers) during this time in their lives. When I asked Neil if his mother ever read to him and his older brother, he laughed. “No, I don’t think so” he reflected. “It’d be something that my dad would do. He’d be the one, like when I was younger, then my mom, she’d read to me like the little kids books like Dr. Seuss. But, like my dad would read every night to me and my brother.” His laughed intrigued me. Was it that he couldn’t imagine his mother enjoying books like *Lord of the Rings*? Was it that he couldn’t imagine his mother wanting to read longer books aloud to him? For some of the boys, this seemed to make sense because of the fantasy or science fiction genre of the books. Adam, for example, read the *Harry Potter* and *Narnia* books with his dad before going to bed. “We’re kind of into fantasy” he explained, in almost apologetic terms, lumping himself and his father together. Implicitly, Adam makes a contrast to his mother and sister both of whom “never really got into *Harry Potter*.” Adam explained, “He would read them to me and then the second time we read them, the series, I read it to him and he'd read it back out loud.” Adam’s father read to him until he was 10 years old, just two years prior to the time of my study. Adam reflected, “I enjoyed the story a lot better when my dad read it, just because I got to really focus on it and when I read it, I wasn't like the greatest reader. I struggled with the words and it was kind of choppy sentences.” Though Adam talks about the act of reading aloud, and how it helped him with comprehension, it was clear that the reading aloud time was also an opportunity for him to spend time with his father. When I asked him why his mom didn’t read out loud to him, he reflected, “I saw my mom a lot more. It's maybe so that I could spend more time with my dad.”

Other middle class teen boys talked about literacy practices that involved their whole families. “We’re ALL readers.” Kyle said when he described his family to me. Kyle recalled fond memories of his parents reading picture books to him and his three older brothers when he was younger. Kyle said, “My parents would always read us picture books sometimes, Dr. Seuss. I don't remember most of them but they started reading a lot longer books like *Harry Potter* size books because my brothers are older than me but I just listened, I didn't really understand any of it but they did do that.” Kyle’s house seems to have specific reading spots in it. When I asked Kyle where he liked to read, he described his “favorite” spot in the house, the sun room. He said, “There’s lots of windows in it and it’s next to trees and stuff so I like that place. I’m usually on the couch.” Reading in Kyle’s family, however, wasn’t limited to the house. Kyle mentioned bringing books along when his family is out doing errands. He said, “I bring a book a lot of places like when we get a haircut, our brothers always have to wait in line, so I usually read a book.” In addition, Kyle’s family listens to books during summer vacation trips across the country (“We listened to the whole *Harry Potter* series last summer”). Kyle often recommends books for his parents to read, saying that they enjoyed reading *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan, 2006), a book he recently recommended. An important aspect of reading for Kyle and his family seemed to be talking about what they read with each other, sharing recommendations, and clarifying and critiquing parts of what they read.

An interesting dimension of teen boys’ family sponsorship experiences were the roles that older siblings played. For Eric and Jeremiah, their close relationship with older sisters created opportunities for their sisters to recommend particular books. Both of them read books their sisters told them about and enjoyed reading them. Eric’s older sister, a high school senior, recommended that he read *The Outsiders* (Hinton), a book Eric describes as one of his favorite

books “of all time.” Jeremiah’s older sister, an assistant principal and Ph.D student, recommended that he read Walter Dean Myer’s *Monster*. “She just wanted me to read something while I was over there spending some time with her in Philadelphia” he said. “I liked it” he said of *Monster*. “It was good. We talked about the court scenes.” In Jeremiah’s case, his sister asked him questions about the book after he read it, interacting with the texts in ways that might parallel how texts get talked about in English classes. These examples illustrate the ways in which particular literacy experiences fit within the context of relationships or ways of being with different family members. In these instances, older sisters seemed to have played roles similar to that of school teachers, introducing and encouraging their younger brothers to read books they otherwise wouldn’t have read.

Literacy practices embedded in relationships were also evident in working class families. However, these kinds of relationships seem to be different in the kinds of relationships they encouraged. Whereas parents and older siblings often played school teacher-like roles to middle class teen sons and brothers, relationships in working class families didn’t seem to reflect this. Rather, these relationships often reflected more equal partnerships, something I elaborate on later. Freddy, for example, talked about watching *Godfather* film clips over and over with his parents. Tommy and his father watch political news together and read the same business related non-fiction books. When Keith talked about instant messaging with his older sister who now lives in California, I couldn’t help but contrast his experiences with her to that of Eric and Jeremiah and the experiences they had with their older sisters. While these older sisters played teacher-like roles with their younger brothers, Keith’s sister acts more like a peer. “I talk to her on MySpace” Keith said. “I don’t have nobody else to talk to. I write long messages to her. I tell her what’s going on with my relationship with [my girlfriend], and I ask her how everything’s

going, how she's doing." In these examples, parents and older siblings do not seem to interact in "teacher" and "teaching" roles as they seem to do in middle class families.

As with the previous section, I share these differences in literacy practices not to suggest the reasons for these differences. Rather, I use them to continue to describe the complicated ways in which teen boys are sponsored into ways of being teen boys. This involves, as I have argued in this section and the preceding one, seeing and participating in particular gendered and class-based literacy experiences. These experiences, while often not explicitly discussed, contribute to the ways in which teen boys view themselves as teen boys, ways that include what, where, when and how they read and write. In the following sections, I discuss sponsored ways of being teen sons that aren't directly focused on particular literacy practices as these sections do. In these descriptions, however, I argue that the sponsorship of these particular ways of being teen sons, ways that map onto social class difference between the families, indirectly involve their literacy practices.

**Teen sons as full participants in the adult world vs. teen sons as not yet adults**

One way that differing views of teen sons surfaced was in how the teen boys talked about themselves in relation to adults. This was one of the things that stood out most to me. What some of the middle class teen boys talked about doing at home and in how their parents included or didn't include them in various activities seemed to be very different than how working class teen boys talked about their family experiences. For working class teen boys, their parents seemed to include them as full participants, as partners in various endeavors. In contrast, middle class parents seemed to treat teen boys as needing significant amounts of guidance, assistance and involvement from adults. Lareau's (2003) work classifies these different approaches as different approaches to parenting, reflecting differing middle and working class values and perspectives.

In the sections that follow, I highlight how these differing notions of teen sons have implications on teen boys' literacy practices.

**Full Participants.**

One of the most striking examples of the ways in which some teen boys were viewed as full participants in the adult world was in Tommy's experiences with his father. Rooted in his relationship with his father and taking place in the context of a workplace, Tommy was encouraged to be a contributing member to his dad's business, a consignment furniture store. He was given considerable responsibilities for a 15 year old:

> My dad, he teaches me, he does it along with me, he'll be doing stuff like be working on the house or whatever and I'll help him and I'm constantly working with him and I work for him at work and I work after school or on Sat or whatever and when we don't have school like on snow days I was working for him, put nine hours in, I do pretty much everything um, like taking stuff from the warehouse to the store, arranging the warehouse, cleaning it up, you know, it needs to be swept, the floor, taking out garbage, if we get new things in and, you know, unload the trailer, sort it.

In this way, Tommy's father and Tommy see him as a full participant in the business. Tommy took his work seriously, seriously enough for him to want to read business books and learn more about how best to run a business:

> Me and him read a lot of business books. Like how to build a small business and stuff, you know, like I forget what it's called. There's this book that I got for my birthday, um, it's about how, you know, it's for teens but it's based off of one that my dad's reading too, you know, teaching you how to make choices in life and how little things count and how

you shouldn't rush things, like, don't, like, you gotta be able to wait for something, so. I think it's *Slight Edge*. I don't really like reading but I'll get into some books like this. Though Tommy told me a number of times throughout my two interviews with him, that he didn't like reading, his talk about what he did in his "free" time, his time away from school revealed that he read. When I asked him why he didn't like reading, he said, "It's not real fun for me unless it's, like when I was young I really liked mystery books but now it's more business and stuff and those aren't the most fun but I'll still, you know, enjoy reading them." Implied in Tommy's response is a distinction between reading for fun, an acceptable practice when younger, and what he should be reading now that he's older.

Tommy experiences partnership or full membership with his father's adult experiences in two other ways. One was in how Tommy stayed current with political news, particular during the recent election. Though Tommy talked about struggling to do his homework assignments, he also talked about how he liked to read and watch political news. He said, "I just watched it one time and just liked it. My dad had it on FOX News." He reflected, "I didn't miss like an episode of anything that had to do with the election. I watched everything." When I asked him why, he reflected "I guess just to know what's going on, to learn more about how things work in the government so I understand it more. I didn't like how the election turned out though" he said with a shake of his head. Here, Tommy talks about participating in election coverage with his father as a fellow concerned citizen despite the fact that he is not yet of voting age.

Yet another way that Tommy is treated as a partner in what his father does is in how the two of them buy, fix up and then sell small machines. Although Tommy acknowledges still being in the process of learning, this learning experience is one in which he is apprenticed rather than being taught explicitly. In other words, he learns from his dad by watching, experimenting

on his own and asking when he needs help. He explained, “My dad’ll ask me to help. Sometimes I’ll ask to help him and then he’ll just kind of teach me as we go. As he’s doing it, I’ll ask him what pieces are, how to do stuff, what’s the best way to do it, just stuff like that.” He later said proudly, “He showed me how to use every single tool.” Tommy learns how to fix small machines, not because it’s a fun hobby but because it’s a way for him and his dad to make money. He explained what happens,

> My dad found a lawnmower that some Indians didn't know how to work it anymore and they were moving so they had to get rid of it. So I had to fix that and I sold it and then I bought another lawnmower about a month ago and I fixed that and sold it…I bought it for $200 and sold it for $750. I spent about 3 hours fixing it up. They [the people he bought the lawnmower from] had $550 on it. We talked him that much down.

Tommy’s dad finds small machines to buy, machines that people want to get rid of because they’re broken. After fixing up these cheap purchases, Tommy and his father sell them at a higher price on sites like craigslist or eBay and make a sizable profit. In these business endeavors, Tommy is treated as a contributing member. Though he doesn’t highlight all the research involved in locating, buying, fixing up and then selling a lawnmower, there is substantial research involved. Knowing how to fix a lawnmower requires a particular set of skills. There are pieces and parts that need to be fixed, removed or replaced. Then there’s figuring out what a fair price for the repaired lawn mower might be. This involves collecting and synthesizing information. After this, there’s the act of putting together an advertisement that attracts buyers’ attention and showcases the features of the small machine. Finally, there’s the negotiation that occurs when finding interested buyers. Tommy does not draw attention to this

work, these particular literacy practices. And yet, they represent significant uses of his time and energy.

Tommy's experiences illustrate the ways in which he is encouraged, as a teen son, to be a contributing member in adult experiences. These, I argue, have an effect on his literacy practices: they contribute to the reasons that he does what he does with particular texts. Chris' experiences also reflect this. His love for technology, computers and phones in particular, was something that he was expected to finance on his own. Chris' parents were not able to pay for things that Chris wanted to buy and so Chris was left to his own initiative to find, pay for and take care of his technological needs. Chris talked extensively with me about the computer repair research he did, going to sites like hacintosh.com, rapidrepair.com ("It has a lot of instructions on how to take off a part and it's a good place to buy iPod replacement parts" he said), and Macworld.com. In order to pay for what he needed, Chris sold stuff he found in thrift stores on eBbay. He said,

> I sell and buy stuff on eBay, cause I gotta buy stuff for cheap. Shoes. Zippos, air soft parts. I go to a lot of junk stores. If you find the right stuff you can make good money, like books, collectibles. I've done a lot of research. I got 50 bucks for a pair of shoes. I got them for like a dollar. Shipping was 4 bucks but they paid for it. It's like, I'll find something, buy it and then sell it.

What Chris talks about here isn't a kid version of eBay. It's real. He's a full participant of the commercial exchanges on eBay. It's possible and likely that the people he's buying from and selling to do not know he is a 17 year old. While Chris' parents weren't directly involved in his literacy practices as Tommy's father was, their approach to letting Chris figure things out on his own, real things that had material and monetary consequences, influenced his work with various texts.

**Not yet adults.**

In contrast to Tommy and Chris' experiences as full participants in adult experiences, other teen boys seemed to receive messages that they, as teen sons, need adult input and guidance and that they weren't ready yet to know what was best for them. Often this was expressed in terms of limiting what the teen boys wanted to do and forcing them, under threat of punishment or promise of reward, to do more of what they thought their sons should be doing. As I will demonstrate in the paragraphs below, this was often expressed in terms of the teen sons' school work and, specifically, in terms of the teen sons needing to read more books. This concern over the teen sons' reading, I argue, reflects a view of teen sons as not being able to identify or do what is best for them. Teen sons need adult input and intervention.

In many ways, middle class teen sons have the privilege of being able to hold off adult responsibilities and concerns. For many, their help is not needed in the ways that families need their working class teens. Whereas Tommy's father might have relied on Tommy's work for the success of his business, many middle class teen sons are completely uninvolved in their parents' work endeavors and in bringing in financial resources for the family.

In this context, the middle class teen boys often talked with me about what their parents said to them about their reading and writing. John's parents, for example, frequently tell their son, a successful student, that he should be reading more. John describes his parents' expectations this way,

> They know I can read and write. They know I can read really difficult stuff if I try but I really just don't and I don't take it too seriously and they get mad about it because I should be reading every night and I should be reading fast and stuff like that. I don't know. I tell them that I don't really like reading and if they ask me to read and I'll just try

to put it off until I get grounded and then I'll start reading because I don't want to stay in trouble but I definitely don't like reading for some reason.

Here, John identifies his parents' expectations that he take reading seriously, that he read quickly, that he read often. He gets grounded if he doesn't read. What is communicated through this is John, at this point in his life can't be trusted to do what he likes to do and on his own terms. Though John talked about being able to read *Harry Potter* when he was five years old, it was clear to him that his parents were worried about him and "knew what was best." In his talk, he seems to concede that his parents, in fact, do know better than he does. He acknowledges that he takes the "easy" way out most of the times when it comes to reading. He reflected,

> My parents know that I have to read a whole bunch of homework and they know that I don't like reading and I'll just ask people if they can help me or stuff like that because I don't spend the time to actually read and that bothers them a lot.

And, it bothers him, on one level. But not enough to stop doing it. In fact, in asking friends for help, John is able to maintain and develop social relationships while satisfying the requirements placed on him from school.

In Eric's family, his parents make him and his younger brother read for a half hour every day. As in John's situation, Eric is a strong student. He does well in school and is a very capable reader. Instead of reading, however, he would much rather be doing other things. He reflects that his younger brother and him "don't like to read. But we do it anyways. We would rather skateboard than read (Earlier in the interview he said, "If I could, 12 hours a day, I'd skateboard. It's super fun."). That's basically it. We would rather, like my mom tells us to read and then me and Evan sit there and we're like 'Wouldn't you rather be skateboarding right now?' and I'm like 'Yeah I would', so yeah." Though Eric identifies how what he wants to do with reading doesn't

fit with what his mom expects of him, he still complies. Though he would rather be skateboarding, he still reads. This, however, isn't the end of the story. He says, "My mom makes us kind of read but like me and Evan always like get a comic book and tell her we're reading. We read like *Calvin and Hobbes* and those are really funny." Eric and his brother satisfy his mother's demands to read every night but Eric takes from the situation by reading comic books, books that his mother doesn't consider "real" reading.

Yet another example of how parents sponsor a view of teen sons as "not yet adults", comes from Asher. Asher told me that he checks his grades on his school's website "all the time." His parents frequently check his grades and, when they don't like what they see, they take away some of his privileges. "My dad'll check my grades and if they comment that I'm not doing well then he'll know I'm not studying for it enough and I'm doing other stuff." Other stuff, for Asher, was playing video games and surfing the Internet. He reflected, "I wish that they would just let me do my stuff."

While Asher's "stuff" was seen by his parents as playing mindless video games and wasting time on the internet, it was seen by him as important and significant. During both of my interviews with him, he talked primarily about his favorite websites. One of these was LEGO.com. Interestingly enough, as a tactic to get Asher away from the computer, his parents encouraged him to play more and they bought him "15,000" pieces last Christmas. Asher reflected, "They'll buy us anything as long as it doesn't connect us to TV or video games." What's interesting is that Asher started to post his creations on LEGO.com, in essence using what his parents gave him to get away from using the Internet to get back on the Internet. In essence, Asher repurposed his parents' literacy expectations.

On this LEGO website, Asher was a contributing member. He was expected to maintain standards. The feedback he received influenced what he did. The feedback he gave influenced what others did. He explained it, “There’s categories on the website. And then you’ll have to make it, take a picture, upload it, put it on, write a name, description, post it.” For Asher, he had an authentic audience. He was motivated, even talking about revising posts he made after seeing spelling or grammar mistakes. He said, as he showed me the website, “This one is my first five star one.” He pointed to the creation he posted. “Someone wrote that they liked the side wall. I listened to them and I can see what they need [what he posts] and then I remember that for my next one.” He showed me his lowest rated creation. He reflected, “I understand why I got a low score. It’s because it’s supposed to be a monument and I kind of know monuments but this one didn’t turn out well.” Asher’s involvement in the LEGO world was one in which he was seen as a full member. His opinion mattered. His expertise helped others.

The other websites Asher showed me also illustrated this. One was a stock website that Asher saw someone else in the computer room at school playing on. He said, “I thought it looked interesting and I figured out what it was.” Asher explained: “I don’t know if this is for my age, but it’s for stock stuff and I don’t know much about what stocks are, but you can buy them, you have fake money and you can buy companies and you get the name of the stock. There’s just this cool stock stuff.” When I asked him to elaborate on it, he said, “I like that it has to do with like business.” He said, “You can type something and read information about it and I’ll usually read if it’s good, fair price rating based on things. I’ll only buy things that are recommended or that are really high. I can do research here on any of the companies posted” [he shows me how the website posts real information about real companies like McDonalds, Ford]. Asher was able to pull up a chart of his progress, a chart showing his winnings and losses over the past several

months. I was the only person Asher showed this chart to and, was the only one who he told about his favorite sites. For Asher, though this was “just for fun”, it was something that seemed real to him, something that connected with what he wanted to do in the future “go into business and make a lot of money” he said.

I share Asher’s example to show how, though Asher’s parents seemed to view him in terms of “not yet adult”, as needing explicit guidelines, punishments and bribes, his online activities showed that he, in fact, was capable of many things. In sum, however, teen sons, like John, Eric and Asher, receive strong messages from well-intentioned parents that what they are interested in or what they want to do with their time are instincts that they should not trust. These messages, coming from middle class parents, reflect views of teen sons that stand in contrast to views of teen boys that emphasize their knowledge, capabilities, right now.

**Teen sons as focusing on the present vs. teen sons as preparing for the future**

The way that teen sons were viewed in terms of their position with the adult world correlates with ways of encouraging teen sons to view the present and the future. In this section, I discuss how the teen sons in my study were also sponsored in terms of how they should view the present and the future. This has implications on how teen sons are encouraged to think about the future and their future involvements in it and, along with this, about their literacy practices. As with the earlier section, these differing views seemed to relate to social classes. I noticed that families sponsored differing ways for teen sons to think about the future. Directly, they were sponsoring particular ways of thinking about the future. For middle class families, teen sons were being groomed to think about and prepare for the future. For working class teen sons, their sense of the future was different. They talked more about what they were doing now.

**Focusing On the Present.**

The family situations of the working class teen sons seemed to sponsor a view of teen sons as focusing on present day circumstances. On one hand, there are practical reasons for this. When faced with not having enough food as Keith talked about, of missing the bus and having to walk to school, as Freddy did, as not being sure if he could still live in his house as Chris did, it's hard to have a view of the future. On another hand, it also seemed to reflect, at least in the case of the teen boys in my study, a lack of educational possibilities in the future. Though Keith brought in a community college application as his future artifact, something I later found out he had quickly grabbed from the guidance counselor's office on his way to the interview, it was soon clear when he talked about it that he had no idea of what he wanted to study. But ways in which the working class teen boys seemed to talk about the future was only one expression of the theme of them focusing on the present. In the paragraphs below, I describe the ways in which Freddy, at home and at school, seems to live out this particular way of being a teen son at home.

At home and at school, others know Freddy as being "the funny guy." Whether it's cracking jokes at random moments or inserting quotes from famous movies or TV shows, Freddy loved to make people laugh. And, as I soon discovered in our time together, he also liked to laugh. Both of my interviews with Freddy were dominated by talk about various TV comedy skits performed over the years. It was clear that he had extensive knowledge about comedians, comedy shows and comedy skits, derived no doubt from the many YouTube videos, websites and books about 1980s "Saturday Night Live" skits involving Chris Farley, John Candy, and current comedy acts by comedians such as Frank Commando that Freddy referenced. This was rather impressive given that Freddy was born in 1994. In our second interview, Freddy described in detail some of his favorite Chris Farley skits. When I asked him about what sorts of projects

Chris Farley was doing currently [I had forgotten that he died], Freddy quickly replied, “Oh he's dead. He died a long time ago. It sucks. Everyone misses him. ‘97. December. Yeah.”

Though Freddy enjoyed watching these comedy skits over and over, he also incorporated them in his conversations with people in his efforts to make them laugh. In the passage below, he describes how he includes his film and TV knowledge into “performances”:

> When it comes to performing, I do it for kids. It wasn't going in front of class and usually done and even today, at random, someone be talking to me and I heard from what they were talking about kind of like a movie and then when they be saying that I be thinking about that movie and I add what I think of that movie. My mom tends to be using old-fashioned terms same thing as my dad. They be saying “Oh geez”, they say you know, and sometimes they say “Oh geez” and you know the movie *Fargo* and she be saying that and I say, “Oh Margie and I had a nice cup of coffee today” and that's how they talked in *Fargo,* when they say “Yeah.” That's just what I do.

Freddy takes what he knows and uses it as a way to establish social connections. He doesn’t push the conversation in a different direction but instead, tries to support what is already being talked about. Another way he establishes himself as being funny is in sharing the video clips he finds and enjoys. When telling me about where and when his love for impersonations started, he reflected how he involved his parents from the start. He described, “Yeah, the first time I watched it [a Frank Commando impersonation] I called them over and they just started laughing really hard and my mom can't stop laughing when she hears that Bill Clinton clip because she knew a lot about Bill Clinton” [as he says this to me, Freddy breaks out into a Bill Clinton impersonation, making me laugh]. It is the shared experiences together that really seem to strengthen Freddy’s relationships. When he talked about the clips he shared, it seemed very

important for him that the people find the clips as funny as he does. I experienced this myself. In our second interview, for example, he said to me five different times “I know you’re going to love this.”

Freddy reflected that though he had always been known in his family as “the funny guy”, frequently making his mother and father laugh, it was in his later elementary school years that he “started taking it public” and expressing this side of himself at school:

> It was in 5th grade, in elementary school, when I started taking it public, usually it's on special occasions, like at Christmas and when we had cookies around, I thought I would add more onto it and make people laugh and just do something so people go home for the holidays and just be pretty happy.

When I asked Freddy how he came to love comedy and making people laugh, he paused for a moment and then described his “obsession” with comedy as coming out of something his dad was “obsessed” with:

> Where I got it from, my dad really had like an interest, he was obsessed with *The Godfather*, I swear he has the whole collection. He has 1, 2, 3, and he has behind the scenes and deleted scenes and takeouts and ever since I was little he always had it on all the time and ever since I was little I kind of gained an interest in that and I kind of really liked it and him just speaking Italian, and after watching it for some long, I was doing impersonations for him and soon I took it to school and I was doing it at school and soon I was doing other things and I actually did them quite well…It’s been like on special occasions, that's as far as I went.

In this passage, Freddy describes how he remembers his father being “obsessed” with a series of movies, watching them over and over and over. In many ways, his father’s work with *The*

*Godfather* films is similar to Freddy's. Pleasure is foregrounded, a pleasure that seems to grow the more the text is watched. While there is "talk" around the text, it is not talk that attempts to analyze the film. And yet it is talk nonetheless. Talk that serves as social connection.

I share Freddy's example to illustrate that the ways in which Freddy and his family seem to focus on the present experience, on the moment here and now. While I don't mean to suggest that Freddy, and working class families in general, have no regard for future endeavors, I do suggest that the ways in which Freddy is encouraged to be in the present and the future are different than middle class teen sons.

**Preparing For the Future.**

In contrast to Freddy's enjoyment of texts for their immediate pleasure and for the ways in which they support the interests he has here and now, when many of the middle class teen boys talked about their literacy practices they seemed to focus on what some of these practices would "get" them in the future. This has overlap with the earlier category of middle class teen boys being sponsored as "not yet adults", as needing constant parental intervention. This parental intervention is often framed in terms of helping teen boys prepare for the future. Middle class parents seemed to express a deep investment in their sons' futures and seemed to expect their teen sons to join them in this investment. In so doing, teen sons were often asked or told to put aside their personal interests and preferences. Interestingly, it is through explicit literacy expectations that many middle class parents communicate this way of being a teen boy. However, as I will argue, these literacy expectations aren't ends in themselves. Rather, they point to particular ways of viewing what literacy can do for middle class teen sons.

The ticket to a good future was often framed as needing to read. Because middle class parents desire a good future for their teen sons, they encourage them to read more; doing so

generates the desired cultural and social capital. But, it is not just about reading more, it was about reading more books. Though the middle class teen boys in my study read a lot, what they read, however, wasn't often fiction or nonfiction books, the kinds of things middle class parents saw as what teen boys needed to do in order to do well not in school. We see this kind of thinking in what some of the teen boys said about their parents.

In talking about how his parents didn't think he "read" enough, Henry explained, "My parents like it when I get good grades. I need good grades cause I want to go to college and I want to get a good education." Here, Henry connects his parents' desire for him to read more "books" with them wanting him to "get good grades." Similarly, John talked extensively about how his parents were worried that he wasn't reading enough:

> They know it's going to be a problem if I don't take care of it sooner than later because as you get higher in grades you have to do more work and a lot of reading, you have to read books and write essays and stuff like that so if you can't read you're out of it…

Here, John describes his lack of reading "books" as something that he needed to "take care of," as something that either happens or doesn't. People unable to read, he reflects, are "out of it." His parents want him to attend to his reading because they don't want him to be "out of it."

This parental push is not for the sake of reading. For the most part, it is about getting teen sons to achieve a good future. And, since reading books was a way to achieve it, this is what the teen sons needed to do now. Teen sons' literacy practices, then, are seen as targets to achieve particular kinds of social and cultural currency for the future. What is particularly interesting about this to me is that the literacy practices many of the teen boys talked about enjoying on their own time often focus on the immediate experiences. This presents a tension between what middle class parents want their sons to do with literacy and what their sons want to do.

Despite this tension, many middle class teen sons ultimately seemed to buy into this way of preparing for the future. Though John complained about his parents' seemingly high expectations of him and his school grades, he seems to recognize that they have his best interests in mind. He reflected, "They want me to do the best that I can because they want me to have a life that I'll enjoy instead of jobs that I don't really want to do throughout college and after college. They just want me to have a good education." John acknowledges that his parents want him to have a life he'll enjoy. As we shall see in the next section, buying into this way of being a teen son affects the ways teen sons are encouraged to view institutions like school.

**Teen sons as managing interactions within institutions vs. obeying institutions**

The ways that teen sons were encouraged to view and participate in institutions, particularly schools, was another way that illustrated the differing family sponsorship situations between the teen sons. Middle class teen sons, for the most part, seemed to be encouraged to "actively manage interactions in institutional settings", to make rules work in their favor and to use their individual preferences as reasons for modifying or changing things within institutional settings (Lareau, 2003). Working class teen sons, on the other hand, seem to be sponsored into ways of respecting institutional authority and accepting institutions as they are.

Many of the middle class teen sons talked about ways in which their parents, mostly mothers, managed interactions in their school settings or encouraged them to do so. Alan's mother, for example, hired a Spanish tutor for him when she found out Alan was failing Spanish class. She then arranged for him to switch Spanish teachers midway through the semester. This kind of involvement in school experiences is also seen in the ways Jordan talked about his mom. He recalled his mom intervening when he was in second grade: "In like second grade, I had to get first grade spelling words because I just could not spell. It was just way too hard. So my mom

finally went in and was like ‘He needs smaller words.’” This is not surprising when one recalls Jordan’s mother’s editing help on his school work. Clearly, she is proactive in helping her son do well in school.

The ways parents intervened in school situations were not the only ways that seemed to reflect this approach to institutions. The middle class teen sons themselves seemed to manage interactions in school in ways that suited their interests and needs. This is evident in the ways in which Blair and Eric talk about their school work. For Blair, a very high achieving student with high self-esteem (“I’m the smartest in my class” he told me. “I won the school geography bee last year”), school seemed to be a place that lacked what he needed. He described how he didn’t like Spanish class “because it takes so long to cover one thing and I could probably just learn a lot more if I just learned it myself on like Rosetta Stone or like in high school or something.” He elaborated, “I only hear something one time and I get it. I HATE when you have to do stuff over and over like repetitive stuff.” According to Blair, his parents “say not everyone can be what they want to be but they say I’m so smart that I can do anything I want to be, like my other family members.” He described himself as “advanced,” as “smart.” “Everyone says I have a lot more potential than everybody else.” Eric also commented about how he spends about 20 minutes on each class’ homework, except when it’s “busy work”, something he describes as “like a worksheet, like a word search, teachers always give you busy work and stuff.” When I asked him to define it further, he said that busy work for him is: “it's like um hmm kind of like worksheets but like word searches that like they don't want to grade, they don't feel like grading so they give out busy work so it's just kind of like a waste of time.” In my second interview with him, Eric brought in a writing assignment he had to do for a history class, an example of writing that he did. He described in great detail the strategies he uses when writing essays in his History

class. He writes about things his teachers specifically talk about enjoying or liking in whatever book or whatever they are talking about.

In contrast to these “managed interactions” with schools and school work, the ways that some of the working class teen boys talked about school seemed to reinforce a different view of institutions, a view that institutions were to be obeyed. Keith described his parents, for example, as being uninvolved in his schooling. “Not. At. All,” he said. He continued, “The decision to come to school every day is mine,...My decision to pass is mine.” Lareau’s argument is that working class parents have different views on their relationships with institutions like schools. Their lack of involvement with schooling says less about their values of education and more about the ways in which they view the authority that schools represent. In Keith’s case, the most involved that “adults” have been in his schooling was probably when he was on probation. In the past number of years, Keith described himself as being “on probation and then off probation and then on probation.” He reflected, “I have a bad temper and if someone gets me mad, I’ll fight them.” These fights are what put Keith on probation several times, an experience he describes as having “to be on top of everything when I'm on probation, they check up on me, they check with teachers, they check my attendance and my grades.” Keith seems to accept this arrangement as a given. He doesn’t question what happens or what he is expected to do. Nor do his parents. Unlike the involvements of some of the middle class parents that leave them very involved in all aspects of their teen sons’ lives, Keith’s parents remain separate from his school and other contexts.

Despite Keith’s parents’ lack of involvement in his school, Keith was very resourceful. When Keith talked about his school experience, he shared with me that he himself initiated a change from the public school he had previously been attending to the charter alternative school he was now attending. He describe his reasons for the change because he had heard from friends

that “it was an easy school” and that “they help teens graduate on time.” He reflected, “It seems at [the public high school], they only care about the smart kids, if you fail, they don’t help you. But here they help you regardless of whether you want help or not. Like here they want you to pass.” Despite the fact that Keith seems to be sponsored in ways that encourage him to obey institutions and go along with institutions (and the consequences of not obeying those institutions), he demonstrates his resourcefulness within this sponsorship situation. It might be easy to label Keith as an uninvolved, unmotivated student, but there are definitely aspects of his experiences that show ways in which he was very involved and motivated.

## Discussion

In this chapter, I have examined the different ways of being teen sons that are directly sponsored by families. Existing family adolescent literacy research tends to focus on the ways that families explicitly sponsored teen boys’ literacy practice. This research often focuses on the direct sponsorship relationships between parents and children. In this chapter, I have tried to demonstrate that teen boys’ family sponsorship situations are greater than individual relationships and that these individual relationships are complicated. They reflect multifaceted relational dynamics, something that the existing research on family literacy practices doesn’t seem to address.

In my descriptions of the teen sons’ differing sponsorship situations, I have argued that there are differences in the ways that teen sons are encouraged to be, ways that map onto social class differences. Social class then shapes teen sons’ literacy practices, affecting what and how and when and why they work with texts. Their motivation to participate in the literacy practices they do, I argue, is based on notions of teen sons that are sponsored.

An important thing that I wish to stress in this chapter is the ways in which teen sons respond to family sponsorship situations. While I have tried to provide a description of the ways in which particular notions of teen sons are sponsored by families and parents in particular, I do not mean to suggest that teen sons simply receive these messages. As is evident in my data, teen sons are active participants in their family sponsorship situations, responding in ways that are creative and surprising. They often negotiate parents' demands and expectations to fulfill their own needs and desires.

**Gendered Literacy Sponsorship**

I began my findings section with a discussion of some of the ways in which teen sons see their parents doing different things with literacy as well as experiences literacy with their mother and fathers in different ways. I come back to this now because of how this pattern surfaced across social class categories. What is of particular importance to me are the tacit ways that gendered literacy practices get expressed and taught. What I have tried to argue in this chapter is that discussions about gendered literacy practices need to account for much more than just the "what" of literacy practices. The teen boys in my study noticed these "what" differences in their parents' literacy practices and mentioned them in their interviews. However, teen boys' literacy practices are also being sponsored in gendered ways in how they are being sponsored as teen sons. Do teen daughters receive the same messages that teen sons do in terms of their positioning in relation to the adult world, to institutions, and to the future? While the answer to this is beyond the scope of my study, I wish to suggest that there are particular ways of being teen sons and that they influence teen boys' literacy practices – what they are expected to do with texts. I will continue this discussion in the next chapters.

**Conceptions of teen sons**

When I consider the ways in which Tommy and Chris, as full participants in the adult world, show incredible responsibility and resourcefulness, I wonder if more middle class teen sons, if they were expected to participate in more adult experiences and concerns, would rise to the occasion. When their interests aren't taken seriously or labeled as "mindless entertainment" or "wasting time", it's possible that some teen sons retreat into their separate and different teen boy cultures. This seems particularly possible when teen sons' future orientations, with often little connections to what teen boys enjoy doing in the present, leaves some of them overwhelmed, or, conversely, ready to throw in the towel.

The tensions represented in the ways of being middle class sons were particularly interesting for me to think about given the fact that I am middle class and have three sons. I found it fascinating that though many middle class sons are sponsored into ways of being teen sons that encourage their dependence on their parents, and possibly on their mothers in particular, they are also encouraged to act in ways that emphasize the future and their future independence. In addition, while many middle class sons seem to receive the messages that their current interests and decisions need adult input (i.e. parents need to help them decide what to read), they are also encouraged to interact with institutions to suit their own preferences and needs.

**Different currencies**

I also wish to point out is that teen sons' literacy practices also have different currencies outside of the home. In her work, Brandt (1998) argues that social class provides more access to different opportunities for literacy. She writes that people from poorer and less socially and economically privileged racial backgrounds often had "less consistent, less politically secured

access to literacy sponsors, especially to the ones that can grease their way to academic and economic success" (p. 170). What Brandt says here sheds light on the differences that I have discussed in this chapter. While I made a point to emphasize teen sons' responses to sponsorship situations, I also want to acknowledge that these responses are tempered by the ways in which teen sons are positioned and prepared differently because of social class. There is often little currency for some of the working class teen boys' literacy practices in schools. Tommy is learning how to be a phenomenal mechanic. And yet, mechanics are not deemed socially prestigious in society. Mechanics won't get him a scholarship to a division one school. Freddy knows a lot about comedy. And yet, this comedy knowledge doesn't really pan out in the classroom. In comparison, what many of the middle class boys did on their own time or the ways in which they accessed their interests were ways that more easily mapped onto school literacy experiences.

**Sponsorship of writing**

Another point worth mentioning is the differences I noticed in the sponsorship of writing. This was particularly interesting to me given the expressed concerns of middle class parents about their teen sons' reading. While they seemed to be very involved in their teen sons' reading, this didn't seem to be the case for their writing. In this, reading and writing were sponsored differently. This supports Brandt's (2003) findings that writing didn't seem to be as broadly sponsored or endorsed by parents, that it was less explicitly taught and publicly valued than reading. She argues that it is because "writing practices are embedded in mundane word and are more stratified generationally" (p. 167). And yet, writing is increasingly becoming important in our changing digital society. For middle class parents, then, who encourage their teen sons to be invested in the future, this poses an interesting situation. And, I think it represents some of the

tensions represented in my data. On their own time, teen boys engage in writing practices that represent the changing digital society. Many middle class parents, however, do not view these practices of “worthy” of teen sons’ time and effort.

## CHAPTER 4: SPONSORING SPORTS-LOVING TEEN BOYS

> I don't tell people about soccer at school because nobody is interested in it…I've tried to talk to them about soccer and they don't care. I don't talk to teachers about it - they're all into college football. I don't watch college sports.
>
> Alberto, 15 year old, Mexican American

> I've told people I play tennis and they're like, ah, it's a girly sport and I ask them why and they just think it is. So I say, you try it and you play and I say, play me and we'll see and then sometimes and then they always refuse. I think they're scared, but I don't know.
>
> Jordan, 16 year old European American

In the family literacy chapter I highlight how families directly sponsor different ways of being teen sons and how teen boys' literacy practices are indirectly sponsored. In this chapter, I turn to teen boys' involvements in sports, as athletes and as sports fans, to explore the ways in which teen boys' sports-related literacy practices represent particular sponsorship situations. Though "sports" is often used as a category to describe what "all" teen boys enjoy, teen boys' sports involvements are actually quite varied and complicated. The above quotes from Alberto and Jordan indicate how different sports have different perceptions associated with them and how teen boys' sports involvements are very much identity related. "Sports", as a category, simply doesn't describe how sports-related literacy practices function in teen boys' lives.

Adolescent literacy research on teen boys' work with sports-related texts has revealed that these literacy practices are often quite sophisticated in nature. Often framed as being what teen boys choose to do on their own time and outside of school settings, researchers have noted

that teen boys often use their sports-related literacy practices to gain social solidarity with and status from their peers. Given these findings, I wondered, are teen boys' sports-related literacy practices really self-sponsored? Are peers the only other participants involved? How might commercial interests, as producers of many of the texts teen boys encounter, serve as sponsors to teen boys' literacy practices? When literacy is sponsored, what else is being sponsored? How do teen boys respond to these sports sponsorship situations?

Such questions seem particularly intriguing given that sports are such an important part of many teen boys' lives. In addition, the sports market is a multimillion dollar one. Children Now, a children's advocacy and research group, reported that "98 percent of US boys ages eight to seventeen consume some form of sports-related media, 82 % do so at least a couple of times a week, and 90% watch televised sports." (Children Now, 1999, p. 2) Over a decade later, and with additional ways in which to watch/read about sports-related media (i.e., cable, pay-per-view TV, sports video games), I can only surmise that this statistic is now higher.

To explore these questions, I examine teen boys' sports-related literacy practices to identify the ways in which commercial interests might be sponsoring these literacy practices. I then explore what else might be sponsored along with teen boys' literacy practices. I argue that what gets directly sponsored is particular ways of being sports-loving teen boys. Teen boys' sports-related literacy practices get indirectly sponsored through these encouraged and produced ways of being sports-loving teen boys.

To do this, I first review some of the research on teen boys' sports-related literacy practices. I then describe what the teen boys in my study said about their sports involvements and then discuss how commercial interests sponsor particular ways of being a sports-loving teen

boy. Within this context, I consider how teen boys' sports-related literacy are indirectly sponsored.

## On Whose Terms?

Research on teen boys' sports-related literacy practices describes these literacy practices as "rich" and "complex." Often situated in the kind of research on teen boys' literacy practices that focus on the "what" of these practices, this body of research typically argues for a reinterpretation of what teen boys do with their sports-related literacy practices. Newkirk (2002), for example, writes,

> Take one of my son's (and my own) favorite genres, tables of team standings. This is not merely raw information. Not some transactional bit of data. For the skilled reader this table is full of stories, even morality tales, though it takes a bit of prior knowledge to construct them. (p. 70)

In this passage, Newkirk unpacks the literacy practice of reading sports statistics. He argues that in order to really understand this genre, one needs to be a "skilled reader" and needs to have "prior knowledge" in order to see the tables of numbers as "full of stories." In a similar way, Tierney (2008) identifies both the "sophisticated skills" involved in his son's boogie boarding and the many media that surrounded these involvements. He concludes that "to be a boogie board rider entailed walking, talking, watching and analyzing boogie boarding" (p. 103). Admitting that these complicated literacy practices were ones that he himself failed at first to see, Tierney argues that involvements such as these need to be recast as "real-world learning experiences." (p. 103)

Other researchers have examined some of the reasons why boys engage in these sports literacy practices. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) for example, discuss how teen boys' sports-related

literacy practices were for the purpose of keeping track of sports scores so that the boys can appear knowledgeable with their sport-loving friends. Similarly, Love and Hamston (2003) assert that many of the teen boys in their study chose sports-related reading material, even when at the expense of parental approval and school success, for the purposes of peer solidarity. Though these researchers argue that teen boys' sports-related literacy practices are "social", they do not further theorize the peer relationships that surround these literacy practices. As I have already pointed out in Chapter 1, teen boys' peer relationships, in particular, are varied and complicated. This reveals then a significant gap in the field.

Mahiri's (1991, 1994) research responds to this gap in his revelation of the sophisticated literacy practices of the preadolescent African American boys and his theorizing of the "rites" of participation in which these practices fit. In his ethnographic study of a neighborhood basketball association program, Mahiri (1994) describes, in great details, the teen boys' "close and extensive readings of certain required texts-newspaper accounts of sports events, basketball card collections and associated guidebooks, and computer sport game screen texts and instruction books" (p. 143). He argues that these "spontaneous or adaptive readings" of a variety of sports-related texts involved sophisticated literacy abilities such as analyzing, discussing, interpreting, and so on. Someone who plays a computer sports game, for example, needs to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of both teams, the players' abilities against those of their opponents, then designs particular plays and then needs to evaluate reasons why the outcome is a win or lose. Mahiri argues that these literacy practices make up the boys' "rites" of participation in a basketball sports discourse.

While Mahiri contributes to the research on teen boys' sports-related literacy practices in his theorizing of the social work of these literacy practices, he, like the other researchers, frames

these literacy practices as being self-sponsored, that is, that teen boys' sports literacy practices are viewed as what teen boys do on their own and with their same age peers. Mahiri (1994), for example, describes the teen boys' engagement in "an array of activities on their own that revealed highly sophisticated, spontaneous, and adaptive literacy practices tied to personal interests motivated by sports discourse" (p. 143). Mahiri uses his framing of the teen boys' literacy practices "on their own" as a contrast to the explicit sponsorship of the teen boys' literacy development in and through the activities and events in the basketball program. Though he situates his work in youth cultural studies and notes the static views of youth and of African American males in particular, he fails to address how the producers of the texts the teen boys engaged in might be marketing and encouraging particular views of them as consumers. This is where I hope to extend his work.

In his introduction to his 1994 study, Mahiri describes how basketball is often seen to many African American males as a way out, as a ticket to a successful life. In so doing, he acknowledges the corporate interests in the discourse surrounding basketball playing and following. I argue, in this chapter, that teen boys' sports-related literacy practices are not entirely self-sponsored because there are other literacy sponsors involved. While the interests and ideologies of these sponsors aren't always explicitly or directly expressed, they remain an important part of these sports-related literacy practices. In this chapter I focus mostly on the role that commercial interests play in sponsoring teen boys' literacy practices but acknowledge the complicated ways in which commercial interests share and are shaping youth cultures and the different ways in which teen boys interact with each other.

In addressing commercial interests as literacy sponsors, I do not mean to suggest that they are sinister, entirely negative, or monolithic. In fact, I'm grateful for the restaurant that

sponsored my daughter's recreational soccer team last fall. I do, however, wish to show the influence that commercial interests have in teen boys' sports involvements. In some ways, this commercial sponsorship is so overt that it becomes underestimated. Televised college and professional sports teams have commercial breaks as a natural part of the game. Countless sports athletes endorse various products, some of which are not even directly related to the sport they play. Lebron James, for example, was a favorite NBA players of some of the teen boys in my study, endorses Coca-Cola, Club Cadet (lawn equipment), and State Farm Insurance. And yet, commercial interests are savvy and often hidden under the guise of providing sports fans and athletes "neutral" entertainment. And provide they do. There's cable, satellite and pay-per-view TV, sports talk radio, sports video games, and daily SportsCenter shows on ESPN and ESPN2 to name just a few.

In sum, marketing infiltrates pretty much every aspect of teen boys' lives. From clothing to bedroom decorations to books, sports marketing fills teen boys' lives from a young age. Corporations, by nature of market competition, create particular markets for everything from sports equipment, viewership, clothing, and TV show spinoffs and then try to target and even produce consumers who fit these market demographics. The *Teen Market Profile* illustrates the ways that commercial interests are inextricably tied into boys' literacy practices (Association of Magazine Media, 2004). The profile states that the teen market is a "force to be reckoned with" because of increased buying by teen boys and because of larger family expenditures on their teens. The profile claims that eight out of ten teens read magazines, that they read a variety of magazines and that they trust advertisements in magazines more than advertisements on TV, radio or internet (p. 16). They caution that teens have more choices than ever, that they multitask media, and that, because "they are raised in the age of information and uncertainty, they are

skeptical" (p. 4). They point out that gender is a major driver of magazine title selection (numerous magazines and websites specialize in sporting and recreational topics; many are targeted specifically to male youth).

In sponsoring teen boys' involvements in sports, then, commercial interests are implicated as one of teen boys' literacy sponsors. How? In this chapter, I argue that commercial interests (and the ways they shape and are shaped by culture) directly sponsor particular ways for teen boys to be sports-loving teen boys. Teen boys' sports-related literacy practices and the peer to peer interactions that surround these practices are reflections of these ways of being sports-loving teen boys.

## "10:1 Investment": Complexities in Teen Boys' Sports Sponsorship Situations

In the sections below, I describe the teen boys' sports involvements, emphasizing their range. Next, I outline the ways of being sports-loving teen boys that seem to be directly sponsored by commercial interests. I show how literacy is being indirectly sponsored through these notions of who sports-loving teen boys are and of what they do with their sports interests. As part of this, I discuss how teen boys work with or push against these sponsored ways of being sports-loving teen boys.

### Teen Boys' Sports Involvements

In the first phase of my interviews, 18 of the 21 teen boys in my study choose sports-related artifacts to represent their present day identities. These artifacts spanned a range of sports and, for the most part, represented sports that the teen boys enjoyed participating in either competitively or on their own. The artifacts, however, also represented sports that the teen boys enjoyed following or watching. As is demonstrated in the chart below, the teen boys' sports involvements span a variety of levels of participation, organized leagues and teams and ways in

which these teams and leagues were followed. The teen boys participated in school teams, travel teams, after school club teams and as individuals. They followed professional sports teams, college teams, and high school teams. Some attended games. Others followed on websites, newspapers, and TV. In following these teams and sports, there seemed to be "active" and "passive" involvements that influenced the what, how and when of their work with sports-related texts. The teen boys often identified a "main" sport that they followed, a sport they watched and followed nearly every day. Other sports were followed but with less intensity. Teen boys also talked about casually watching other sports here and there and maintaining a basic understanding of what was going on.

Collectively, these sports involvements represented significant amounts of teen boys' time and energy. Participating in a competitive sport required hours spent in practices, games and off-season weight-lifting and cross training. For some teen boys, the off season represented a time for individual lessons and sports camps that seemed to be just as intense as school play. Being sports fans also required hours of time. The teen boys talked about spending considerable amounts of time reading up on, watching and then talking about sports. Many talked about watching sports games "all day" on the weekends and often "all evening", particularly during playoff time.

While these sports involvements represented significant investments on their part, teen boys didn't seem to mind. In fact, many seemed to be motivated by their future aspirations in sports. A number of the teen boys mentioned the college athletic scholarships or corporate sponsorships that they were working towards. In fact, one third of the teen boys brought in sports-related artifacts that represented who they wanted to be in the future.

The work involved in sports sponsorship involves much more than simply participating in the sport. Tommy, a 9th grader and hopeful Division 1 football player, acknowledged this when he talked about needing to study more and get his high school grades higher. “Otherwise I won’t get the stuff done I need to and if you don’t get good grades” he reflected, “you won’t be looked at by colleges. If I want to play football and get a scholarship and go to State, then I have to work hard.” For Tommy, working hard, on and off the field, was necessary in order to be considered for sponsorship. Sports sponsorship, achieving a college scholarship in his case, requires more than just being a good athlete on the field. In many ways, this goes against Smith and Wilhelm (2002)’s finding that “the immediate experience was key” and that teen boys played sports because they enjoyed them, “not to win a scholarship or to impress others” (p. 41). In contrast, the future investment the teen boys in my study hoped to get out of their sports involvements was something that they talked about with me. Invested in these futures, however, often came at quite a price. For some of the teen boys, their “regular” school team play was accompanied with club teams (travel teams for elite players), private coaching sessions, summer camps, off season lessons, and time in the gym lifting weights (even when it wasn’t mandated from the coach). In what seemed to be an extreme example, Henry played school sports as a way to keep in shape for his travel soccer team. At our second interview, Henry said, “Cross country ended and my mom wanted me to stay in shape for soccer season for the winter [club] soccer season, so she had me do basketball, so now I'm playing basketball.” In addition, a number of the teen boys talked about being glad a particular sport was “over for the season” because of the immense time commitments. Three of the teen boys even mentioned enjoying less organized sports such as skateboarding and wakeboarding because these sports involvements didn’t involve practices and having to do drills.

In Table 5, I describe the teen boys' various sports involvements.

**Table 5: Teen Boys' Sports Involvements**

| Name | Sports-related Artifact | Sports Participation | Sports followed (actively) | Sports followed (more passively) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adam | Tennis ball (present) | Tennis (school), Basketball (school), Water sports (own) | Tennis, Basketball | Football |
| Alan | Wakeboard (past, present, future) | Wakeboarding (sponsored) | Wakeboarding | Football |
| Alberto | Soccer jersey (future), soccer ball (present) | Soccer (school; pick up) | Soccer (Mexican, International) | Basketball |
| Asher | Soccer | Soccer (recreational team) | | |
| Blair | Football | Skiing (school) Football (city) Swimming (city) | Football | Baseball |
| Chris | Air soft gun Longboard | Cross country (school), Air soft (on own) Longboarding (on own) | Longboarding | |
| David | Football | Football (school), Basketball (school), Freestyle skiing (own), Wakeboarding (own), Snowmobiling (own) | Football, Skiing | Basketball |
| Eric | Lacrosse stick | Lacrosse (school), Skateboarding (own) | Lacrosse, Basketball | Hockey, Football |
| Freddy | "Not into sports" | | | |
| Henry | Skateboarding (past, present, future) | Skateboarding (sponsored) | Skateboarding, Basketball | Football |
| Isaac | "Not into sports" | | | MSU pep band |

**Table 5 cont'd**

| Name | Sports-related Artifact | Sports Participation | Sports followed (actively) | Sports followed (more passively) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jamal | Basketball | Basketball (after school club, pick up) | Basketball | Football |
| Jayson | Football | Football (school), Basketball (after school club, pick up) | Football Basketball | Baseball |
| Jeremiah | Baseball | Baseball (school, private lessons), Basketball (school), Football (school) | Football, Baseball | Basketball |
| John | Soccer ball | Soccer (travel team, school) Cross country (school), basketball (school), Skateboarding (own) | Soccer, Football | Basketball |
| Jordan | Tennis ball (present) Soccer glove (past) | Tennis (school, summer camp, private lessons) | Tennis | Baseball, Soccer |
| Keith | Basketball | Basketball (school, but only 2nd year playing) | | Basketball |
| Kyle | Swimming / "Not into sports" | | | Basketball |
| Mark | | Ski (travel team) | Skiing | |
| Neil | Soccer ball | Soccer (school, travel team) | Soccer (International), Basketball | Football |
| Tommy | Football | Football (school), Basketball (school) Dirt bike riding (own) | Football, Basketball | Baseball |

## Directly Sponsoring Sports-Loving Teen Boys, Indirectly Sponsoring Sports-Related Literacy Practices

Across these different sports involvements, I now examine how ways of being sports-loving teen boys are directly sponsored and how teen boys' sports-related literacy practices are indirectly sponsored. I explore how teen boys are encouraged to be consumers in and through their various sports identities, how these sports identities represent memberships in different groups, how sports involvements are positioned in relationship to the adult world and how sports-loving boys are viewed in terms of what they have to offer to particular sports communities. In this discussion, I highlight how these ways of being influence teen boys' sports-related literacy practices.

### Sports-loving teen boys: you are what you wear.

Commercial interests, for good reason, sponsor ways of being sports-loving teen boys that encourages them to be consumers. If you are a sports-loving boy, it is not just about your skills on the field. It's also about how you look off the field. This "look" is really a particular Discourse as it's also about how you act, what you say, and so on.

This was immediately apparent to me during my interview with the teen boys. Whereas this wasn't the case for all of the teen boys, a number of teen boys immediately stood out to me as representing a particular "look" associated with the sports that they played or followed. There was Chris, a longboarder, who wore black skinny jeans, graphic T and baggy sweatshirt during the first interview. He sat across from me at the coffee shop table with his longboard carefully placed beside him. David, in contrast, was wearing baggy jeans and an Ohio State University shirt when I first interviewed him, a shirt that seemed to accentuate his stocky and muscular frame. Henry's sandy colored curly hair hung just over his eyes, a far cry from Michael's

carefully groomed and short dark hairstyle. Alberto wore one of his Mexican soccer jerseys to his interview, telling me later that he owned five of them and regularly wore them to school.

The very nature of the sport elicits particular identities. Football is a hard hitting, violent and tough sport. Football athletes typically are big, built and bold. In contrast, soccer involves more footwork, finesse and figured play. Soccer athletes need to be different in size and ability. The rules of engagement, of play, of performance are different. Basketball is a fast game. It involves teamwork. Tennis, on the other hand, is an individual sport, requiring different skills and stamina.

And yet, the nature of the sport didn't represent all of the reasons that different sports seemed to have such different associated identities. When I asked the boys to talk about the sports-related artifacts they brought in, most of them talked about the ways their participation in particular sports identified them. Henry said that he brings his skateboard with him to class and uses his class binders and school bags to display his favorite skateboarding company stickers. Adam talked about spending time online trying to decide on which tennis racquet cover he wanted to have, which look of shoes he wanted. Henry was aware of the skateboard culture, of the kind of world he enters. He describes the skateboarders in the town as "being between 14-18" and contrasted this with skateboarders in bigger cities who are more often between "12 to in their 20s." Eric brought his lacrosse stick with him to school every day. Identifying with your chosen sports then was something that clearly went beyond the field or court or rink.

Achieving this look, on and off the field, court, or rink often took money. When I asked some of them to show me which websites they frequented, three took me to sporting company websites. They were shoppers, frequenting these sites to keep up on sales and new merchandise.

Many, but not all of them, seemed to have a lot of buying power and seemed to use this frequently.

When Alan and Henry, the two teen boys in my study who were currently sponsored by local stores, talked about their sponsorship experience, both of them highlighted the free things they received. These free things, while they included equipment or parts, mostly centered on clothing. Alan proudly said,

> I get 20% off everything in the pro shop and 50% of equipment every year and I get to wakeboard with a bunch of good people. I don't have to compete [this summer] cause I'm the youngest one on the team but I'll probably compete next summer, yeah.

Alan listed for me, in great detail, all the things he bought with his discount, everything from swimsuits, sweatshirts, sunglasses, boards, bindings and boots. What surprised me was that a number of the things he mentioned didn't directly have to do with wakeboarding. The sunglasses, sweatshirts and T-shirts are not things one wears when one wakeboards. In addition, one of the lifejackets Alan showed me, one that he was hoping to get, was not certified. Alan and other wakeboarders choose it for its look rather than for its functionality as a lifejacket. The importance Alan places on his "look" as a wakeboarder motivates him to shop and to research different merchandise and equipment. His literacy practices, then, are focused around trying to find and achieve particular identities as a sports-loving boy.

A closer analysis of a skateboarding company's seasonal catalog reveals that particular identities are indeed what the producers of the text are trying to achieve. Two of the teen boys in my study brought with them to their second interview CCM's skateboarding catalog. On the inside cover of this almost 100-page catalog, a catalog that features clothing first and skateboard parts at the very end, is this disclaimer:

> Content shock? We do our best to try and not carry graphics and designs that may be offensive to anyone. However, skateboarding has always celebrated the individual and has supported non-mainstream ideas. Please keep this in mind when looking through the catalog. We have tried to provide many choices in each product category so you can find something appropriate for you (CCM 2010).

In this disclaimer, the company describes "skateboarding" as celebrating the individual and supporting non-mainstream ideas. It seems ironic to me that in trying to make money off these characteristics of skateboarding, the company markets mainstream groups of boys and thus, has changed the nature of the skateboarding world with consumers like Henry and Eric, both of them school successful, White, middle class teen boys (see Petrone, 2008).

As an aside, the location in which a teen boy lives determines some of this identity. On this note, it matters that my study takes place in a small Midwestern town on the shore of one of the Great Lakes. The organized sports that are available to them are influenced by location. Unlike my husband, a southern California native who played volleyball in school like many (but not all) teen boys in his high school, a sport that could be played outdoors throughout the year, my brothers grew up playing organized and pick up hockey in our small Ontario, Canada town. I played on the badminton team in my high school, a sport enjoyed by many Canadians (a nod to our British history). This is a sport I have yet to see organized at the high school or college level in the Midwest. Basketball and football hold a lot of prestige in the small town in which my study took place. And, while soccer participation is on the incline, it still remains a younger brother to the more institutionally and fan supported sports of basketball and football.

**Sports-loving teen boys: one size doesn't fit all.**

Embedded in this "you wear your identity" as a sports-loving teen boy, is the reality that these different identities are not equal. On one level, "sports" as a topic serves as a unifier, particularly for males. My husband can walk into just about any social situation, talk about sports with other males and make initial and easy social connections. Following sports is social and provides you with an ability to connect with a lot of different people. And yet, as gender theorists have pointed out, there are masculinities at play (Martino, 2001, Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998). The teen boys in my study brought this up in how they talked about their own sports-related identities. They often articulated how peers who followed or participated in different sports were different. They expressed this most strongly when I asked them follow up questions about their sports artifacts, asking them if there were any stereotypes of people who played the sport that they had mentioned. I was surprised at how emotional many of their responses were. Though framed, in many ways, as good-natured joking, it was clear to me that underneath the joking there was a sense of proving that the sport they participated in was "good" or "right." David, for example, talked about how soccer players weren't as athletic as football players because "they don't hit." Eric, a lacrosse player described his sport as being the best of football and soccer, the "supreme sport" in his opinion.

Though the teen boys didn't mention this directly, it was clear that social class and ethnic and racial identities were part of this picture. Particular sports require access to particular resources. And, these resources often carried associations with them. Jamal, an African American, described basketball as "my game." In talking about basketball with me, Jamal told me some information about basketball's history. When I asked him how he knew all of that, he said that he read a book about "the founder of basketball." "I wanted to know who started

basketball and I didn't want nobody telling me about it" Jamal explained. "I love basketball and I want to know everything about basketball." Jamal played on his school team last year but then quit because, as he described it, "the coach was racist to me." Though the coach called him at his house at the start of this year's season to try to convince him to play on the team again, Jamal refused, choosing instead to play on the basketball team at his after school club. In both of his interviews Jamal talked about playing "pick up" basketball with his friends. Interestingly enough, this was something I didn't hear from many of the middle class teen boys who played lots of organized sports.

Contrasting Jamal's sports experiences were David and Alan's experiences with sports. The yearly ski trips that David went on with his family, for example, were not something that all families are able to do. David's love for skiing, undoubtedly developed on these trips, then, sets him apart because of his access to those resources. Alan, as a wakeboarder, needs to have access to a boat, someone to drive the boat, a body of water and so on. Alan described how, in his large public school, "only like ten" kids of the whole school were into water sports like he was, and, he added, that these ten kids were all his friends. When I asked him to elaborate on this, he reflected, "A lot of people in my school can't really get into a boat, like most kids in my school haven't even gone to a lake. It's just weird because me and my friend go there a lot in the summer cause like we're bored." In this quote, Alan demonstrates some awareness that he has access to resources that others don't. He spends the entire summer at his family's cottage on the lake. His father hired a personal wakeboarder trainer for him last summer, a trainer who his father got to know as a frequent customer at a regional boating store. It is this boating store that later sponsored Alan as a wakeboarder, a store that Alan describes as "giving us free magazines and stuff" when he and his father go there. The literacy practices that surround Alan's

involvements in wakeboarding tend to be focused around publications that target boys and others within his upper middle class demographic.

What I hope to highlight here is that the teen boys' sports-related literacy practices are often focused around texts designed for particular demographics. Teen boys often participate in these practices as a way of identifying with other teen boys who played or followed similar sports. As such, social class and identification with racial groups also influenced what sports the teen boys choose to follow. Many of the teen boys talked about being college football fans of colleges that their parents or grandparents attended. Neil's grandfather went to University of Michigan – it was his favorite team. David's parents were Ohio State fans because they went there. David and his family attended at least one Ohio State basketball game every season. In contrast, Alberto, who is hoping to be the first in his extended family to go to college, said that few people in his school follow Mexican and European soccer like he does. Though it represents such a significant part of his identity, he said,

> I don't tell people about soccer at school because nobody is interested in it…I've tried to talk to them about soccer and they don't care. I don't talk to teachers about it - they're all into college football. I don't watch college sports.

Alberto's quote demonstrates how a sport often isn't a great equalizer. Though he has extensive "sports" knowledge, his regional Mexican soccer knowledge doesn't have the same social currencies that college football knowledge seems to have at his college preparatory charter school.

But social class and ethnic group identities were only part of how sports identities competed with each other. Other teen boys talked about ways in which their chosen sports were seen as "girly" and "gay." Jordan and Adam, both tennis players at their respective high schools,

were involved in sports but these involvements were often framed in different ways by their peers. Jordan said,

> I've told people I play tennis and they're like, ah, it's a girly sport and I ask them why and they just think it is. So I say, you try it and you play and I say, play me and we'll see and then sometimes and then they always refuse. I think they're scared, but I don't know.

Though Jordan and Alan both seemed to shrug off these sorts of comments as their friends just "joking around", this view of their sport and, because of their involvement with it, of them as well, clearly bothered them. Challenging their friends to a match in an effort to prove that they weren't "girly" or "gay", I suppose, was a way that they responded. Adam defensively said about his friends, "They think it's easy just to toss the ball and to hit it in a box but it's really not that easy cause you got to hit it hard and be smart and stuff."

In the paragraphs that follow, I explore the possibility of how these sports identities affect their literacy practices. During my second interview with him, Adam made a reference to a "fantasy football league" that he and his friend spent the summer working on and playing. He described it this way,

> I used to do this fantasy football league with a friend. We had it in this book and we had each team on a different page and all the players, injuries and side, and home field. I'd draw the logo and then write the coach names, the mascot, all the players' names of every position. I had a friend that would do the same thing. It was just me and him. It's kind of embarrassing. We had our own countries and states. We'd be in the same room drawing in our own books.

When he later showed me the notebook, after much prompting on my part, he reemphasized the fact that he was “embarrassed” by it now. “I’ve never shown anyone” he said when he handed it to me.

The notebook was incredible. There were 30 teams and 26 players on each team. Each team, city, player, and mascot had made up names. The teams were divided into 2 leagues. There were detailed statistics for each team, player and for the leagues. In addition to this there were a number of tournaments, humorously named “Soup bowl” and “Toilet bowl” in which Adam’s team played against his friend’s. Even more incredible, however, was how these tables and statistics seem to come to life to Adam when he started talking about them. As he turned the pages of the notebook, Adam described how he and his friend would use the made up teams and players and enact games with each other. He explained,

> You play a game. We keep track of how many touchdowns we have. There are jersey numbers, positions, over all team ratings. When we play, we'd have good and bad teams play against each other and we'd say that for the bad teams they couldn't catch the ball sometimes.

Clearly Adam was emotionally invested in this fantasy league. And yet, it was something he hadn’t shown anyone other than the friend with whom he worked to create and enact it. When I asked him why he hadn’t shown the notebook to his friends, particularly to the ones that were into football (as Adam had described some of them earlier), Adam reflected, “A lot of my friends are serious and don't have real imaginations and I guess if I showed it to them they'd probably laugh and go ‘it's so stupid’.”

For Adam, having a “real imagination” wasn’t something he could be proud of with his sports-loving friends. And yet, he had used his imagination to create a sports league. In order to

do so, Adam needed to have extensive knowledge about football rules, structures and plays. And yet, this knowledge, at least in how Adam had enacted it, wasn't something that he felt "fit" with "acceptable" ways of being a sports-loving teen boy.

"Acceptable" ways of being sports-loving teen boys and how these excluded some of the teen boys' literacy practices also surfaced when Jordan talked about when and where he shared his knowledge of fiction. Jordan described tennis playing as "consuming" his life. He commented that everyone who knew him knew that he was a tennis player. This wasn't the same about his love for reading. Though Jordan read "at least two books a week" and made regular trips to the public library with his family, this wasn't a part of his life that he showed at school, to his teachers and to his peers. Of a recent experience in his English class, Jordan described, "We had to keep track of books and like, I read like, I don't know, I just didn't mark any down, she's [his English teacher] like, 'have you read any?' and I was like 'I read like seven books a week' and she's like, 'you didn't write any down' and I'm like 'no'." Jordan talked about how he didn't like how books got discussed in English class ("I don't like how teachers read books, every five minutes they pause and like talk about it. I'd rather read a book straight through without stopping") as part of the reason he didn't write any of his books down. He also talked, however, about how he didn't talk about books with his friends either. "I read but I'm not like geeky or anything" he said defensively.

Given these comments about when and where Jordan assumed his identity as an avid reader, I was surprised when Jordan mentioned talking about books with his tennis friends during the lunch break at his summer tennis camp. "We got in a big discussion about the Harry Potter books" he said referring to one particular lunch break. "I was like, 'I read all the books in a week' and they were like, 'Wow, dude, you're good' and I was like 'Thank you'." He then

explained how, when many of them said they "like didn't get why Harry had to die", he explained his interpretation to them. "I did it in like five minutes and then they totally understood" Jordan reflected. The book discussions that Jordan and his tennis camp friends have together don't typically fit into what sports-loving teen boys talk about, or at least into what sports-loving teen boys are assumed to want to talk about. And yet, from Jordan's description, this group of teen boys was very engaged in his literary analysis of the *Harry Potter* books. Of particular note to me in the situation that Jordan describes here is that in the discussion he identifies himself not just as a reader and an avid reader at that but also as an "expert" in reading, as having something to offer to the group. I wonder what it was about tennis camp and his peer group there that opened a space for him to share his love for reading. Though I have no way of knowing, I offer one possibility. Perhaps within a peer group in which one's masculinity is not questioned, Jordan more readily shares this part of who he is and of what matters to him.

**Sports-loving teen boys: separate from adults.**

Another way of being a sports-loving teen boy that seems to be directly sponsored is that sports-loving teen boys do different things than adults and do these things away from their watchful eyes. Sports can bring families together. A number of the teen boys talked about aspects of their sports involvements as being family involvements. David, for example, described his family as "a football family" when he told me about how he and his parents had attended every one of his brother's high school football games, home and away. In a similar way, Neil referred to his family as a "soccer family" because his dad and his brothers were all "into" soccer. He clarified, later, that his mom wasn't "like one of those soccer moms." And yet, many sports, or at least in how the teen boys talked about the practices surrounding these sports, are positioned in ways that emphasize the distinctiveness of teen boy culture. For some sports, it is

the very nature of the sport. You don't see a lot of parents trying skateboarding, air soft gunning, long boarding or free style skiing. For example, even though Alan's dad is often the driver of the boat when Alan wakeboards, he is relatively uninvolved in Alan's wakeboarding world. "My dad doesn't know what a lot of the tricks are called" Alan said. "I don't talk about it with him."

That Alan doesn't "talk about it" with his dad seems to reflect more than just the fact that his dad can't physically do the tricks Alan does. As I listened to Alan talk about his wakeboarding interests, interests that motivated him to read a biography and various articles in a magazine and on websites, as well as to watch countless YouTube videos and instructional DVDs, it became clear to me that the culture surrounding his wakeboarding world was one that seemed to set itself as separate from adult behaviors and concerns. In the excerpt below, Alan describes for me a TV show that features one of his favorite wakeboarders, Parks Bonifay.

> It's just a bunch of guys doing dumb stuff whenever they want. Like they hooked a ski rope to a bridge and the bridge was a hundred feet high and they hooked a ski rope and he'd stand up on the back of the Sea-Doo and as they went by he'd have to grab the ski rope and who ever could touch the top of the bridge first. He just does dumb stuff. It was cool.

While Alan describes the "dumb stuff" that Parks Bonifay does as "cool", my interpretation of what he describes is more like risky and dangerous. Alliance Wake, Alan's go- to website for wakeboarding information, seems to emphasize the "coolness" of its products. The tricks and stunts that featured wakeboarders do are cast as the riskier the better. On a side note, the website also features "Alliance girls", girls in bikinis posing by various water scenes. Clearly not wakeboarders themselves, these girls are categorized along with the accessories that Alan proudly claims with his sponsorship contract.

Wakeboarding isn't the only sport culture that seems to encourage this view of teen boys as different from the adult world. The culture surrounding freestyle skiing, another popular sport among teen boys, at least teen boys who have access to the sport, is also one that emphasizes risk and going out of bounds. In the paragraphs below, I describe the literacy practices that surround David's participation in this sporting culture. Rather than using these literacy practices to describe how David's literacy shows evidence of a sporting culture, I show the complexities involved in these literacy practices. A significant aspect to David's involvements in freestyle skiing centered on him creating and building his own ramps and rails. "I like have a rail that just has a PBC pipe on the top" he said, "it's like three feet tall and I just asked my mom if we could go to the hardware store to get some wood and she brought me and we got wood and screws and then tried to plan it out on a piece of paper." No small task to be sure, David seemed to take great pride in his ability to design and then build these ramps and rails. The research, however, did not end when the ramps were built. In describing what he and his friends are currently trying out, "grinding a rail" with twin tip skis, David showed me a skiing blog. Days before my interview with him, David submitted a question in the discussion forum about whether or not their idea was a good one. He explained his question to me:

> Like my skis are AR5s, like Armatta 5s, because center mounts is a new big thing....so it's right in the middle of your ski for twin tips, because twin tips have a tip in the back and in the front and so um, like those and so, you can go up and switch...people go up jumps backwards, when you have it right in the center, when you're grinding a rail, usually you're on your toes grinding the rail but that allows you to be just like in the center of your foot grinding. I want to see if center mounts on AR5s is a good thing, I want to see if people have tried it and if they liked it.

While to some observers, David and his friends might be just horsing around and doing crazy stunts together, David has actually put a lot of time and thought into what he tries to do. Being crazy is indeed part of it but there's much more going on than that. In essence, David is researching whether or not putting center mounts on his particular brand of skis would help him "grind rails" better. Grinding the rail (sliding down a rail with skis or snowboards) is one of these tricks. Placing mounts on his skis in particular positions (the center in this case) can help the performance of particular kinds of tricks. People who do a lot of backward tricks often have center mounts on their skis. David is checking to see if center mounts would work for his particular brand of skis. He later described for him how he hopes to "jib" down the rail, grinding one way and then the other. My point in sharing this is to complicate the notion that teen boys are simply cultural dupes. This simply is not the case. While all of the ramp and rail building happened within his free time and with his same aged peer friends, this is not to say that teen boys aren't doing interesting and innovative things within these cultures.

**Sports-loving teen boys: full participants and experts.**

One of the most distinctive messages that get sponsored in terms of ways of being a sports-loving teen boy, at least in some contexts, is that teen boys are full participants and contributing members in the sports world. This might seem to be at odds with previous sponsorship notions that I've mentioned, namely that teen boy culture is seen as being at odds with adult culture, but I think that there are enough other opportunities in which this is true that it is worth discussing. Particularly in some of the sports-related literacy practices that the teen boys mentioned is the most evident.

In many ways, teen boys' sports involvements allow them the opportunity to be treated as contributing members within particular Discourses. I saw this most clearly in Henry and Alan's

sponsorship relationships. These relationships became official with the signing of a contract, a real document. There's no kid version. And, these contracts are serious. There's no free ride. Sponsored athletes, male youth included, have to meet specific expectations and demands on behalf of the sponsors. On a website for Descent longboards, the description of sponsorship reads:

> We expect our sponsorships investments to return a ten to one value—which means that if we agree to give you a $175 board, we expect a return of $1750 worth of blogs, videos, skate shop contacts, competition exposure, test riding, and anything else you can think of. And, just to sweeten the deal, we'll give you a sales cut of anything we sell as a result of your efforts! Once you meet the 10:1 value you can even make some scratch out of the deal! (www.descentlongboard.com)

A 10:1 value represents a significant relationship, particularly on the part of the sponsored long boarder. This relationship is based on the assumption that male youth, the typical longboarder demographic, are able to write on blogs, make contacts with other companies, make and produce videos and so on. Teen boys aren't viewed as needing to acquire more knowledge, literacy skills or maturity. They are invited into the discourse as full members. I saw this play out in how Henry, the sponsored skateboarder, talked about what he does at the store that sponsored him. He explained to me, in great detail the hows and whys of various skateboard parts,

> You can break your axle. There's the boards. You have the trucks which is like the axle, you have the bearings which go inside the wheels like ball bearings. You have the wheel. You also have hardware to hold the trucks on. You have king pins to keep the trucks together. There's a lot of parts inside the trucks that you need to buy like bushings and

stuff like that. You get your starting board when you're young but then you keep that and eventually when something breaks you get a new part so you eventually get a new board.

In this passage, Henry demonstrates his expertise in being able to fix skateboards. His expertise illustrates how his involvements in skateboarding aren't "just something to do" because he's bored or because he's trying to get out of school work. His involvements don't represent a kid version of the real thing. He's a skateboarder and he gets treated as a full member of the skateboarding world. Fantasy football leagues are an example of how commercial interests use this way of being a sports-loving teen boy for their advantage. Any teen boy can sign up to play in a fantasy football league. There, they are not viewed as needing adult input or extra help because of their age. Rather, they are treated as full members of this fantasy sports world. They win and lose as contributing members.

I now share an example of how one teen boy assumes this way of being a teen boy, as a full member and expert, in different contexts. Alberto, the 15 year old Mexican American self-proclaimed soccer fanatic, positions himself as an expert on soccer. He reads extensively online and follows as much as he can about Mexican regional soccer teams, particular his favorite team, Chevas, on TV. Alberto was able to tell me every year that his team has won a championship. He has a sense about what might make a good owner. He also knows about World Cup soccer, an entirely different kind of soccer play, style and structure than Mexican soccer, he later explained to me. He said,

> I read articles on the internet like articles about what's happening to a soccer player like the other day one of my favorite soccer players he got moved to a second division team by the owner of Chevas and I was like what? This dude is crazy! He's really quick, he's like 28 already, 5-8, he used to play for Chevas, he still does but they moved him down to

> the younger team. I was like why? It's a dumb decision because um for this year, every year teams can buy new players and transfer new players and this year the coach got one new player and got rid of like 10 and because he wanted to get rid of the team, he started the season with zero new players. He's a rich guy who doesn't like to spend money.

This passage demonstrates how Alberto analyzes what he reads about his team through his position as an expert. “This dude is crazy!” he says about the owner of the Chevas team. Alberto has his own ideas of which strategies the owner should have taken in terms of attracting new players and maintaining current ones.

Another way that Alberto expressed his expert status was in his practice of drawing soccer formations in a notebook he kept in his bedroom. “Soccer formations” to Alberto were diagrams of player positions on a soccer team. He puts Xs for each of the 11 players on a team and arranges them differently so that different plays can occur. After drawing the positions of the players, he adds in arrows (often upwards of 10) to show the plays that can occur. “It’s just part of me, making up this stuff” he said. Referring to the many soccer game replays and highlights on YouTube that he watches as where he gets his ideas for his different formations, he proudly stated, “I have over 100 of these.”

Alberto took his notebook with him to our second interview. “There’s three defenders” he said, pointing out to me one of his favorite formations. “One middle, center, mid, left center mid, wide center mid, left forward, right forward.” After drawing in a number of arrows, indicating the possible strategy that this formation of players would use, he explained that this formation, a relatively straight-forward one, would be better suited for high school players who weren’t as expert as college players. His school coach, he explained, often relies on an “easy” formation. “He does 4 defenders, 4 midfields, 2 forwards” Alberto said. When I asked him if he ever shared

these diagrams with his school coach, he quickly said, “No” and then added, “he doesn’t know as much as me.” When I asked him about this, he said,

> I don't really like my coach that much. He's really cocky and he doesn't know how to do certain things and my dad is always complaining and my grandpa too. They're always complaining about the coach and saying he doesn't know what he's doing. I agree too because he doesn't.

Alberto’s critique of his coach, “he’s really cocky” is similar to his critique of the Chevas’ team owner. In the passage, Alberto implicates his dad and grandpa in his criticism of the coach. Both of them seemed to represent a significant part of Alberto’s soccer involvements. His father, a semiprofessional soccer player in Mexico, remains a huge soccer fan today. Similarly, Alberto’s grandfather, although now too old to play, frequently watches soccer on TV with Alberto. “I’m always talking to them about soccer and sports” Alberto said. Sharing what he reads online with his grandfather represented a particularly interesting experience as his grandfather is unable to read in Spanish or English. With them, Alberto is not a “kid” who doesn’t know as much. He contributes to the talk about soccer as an equal member of the discourse.

One of the reasons I highlight Alberto’s soccer experiences is that while his expert status might be accepted and even expected in his Latino community, a community known for its strong soccer affiliations, this expert status does not seem to pay off in some of the other contexts in his life. As mentioned earlier, Alberto doesn’t even talk about soccer at school. In addition, though he desires to get a Division 1 college soccer scholarship, his chances aren’t very good. Playing on a small school team that doesn’t have a reputable soccer program and not playing in a club or travel team, is reason enough for this.

This kind of disjoint between a particular way of being a sports-loving teen boy in one context compared to another also surfaced in how Jamal, a 17 year old African American, talked about breakdancing. Jamal "loved" breakdancing. He described, in great detail, how he and his cousin posted a YouTube video of themselves breakdancing. He said,

> I got my own dance video on there. It's under "dance off" and me and my cousin we put it on the computer and we see who is looking at us. We're like our own little dance crew. We did it when I was 14. I did another one when I was 16. My oldest cousin he videotaped it. He thinks like we going to be on the next American Dance or something. I be dancing since I was little. I love dancing. I go to the clubs, S club, Club revolution with my cousins on weekend.

While Jamal and his cousin spent considerable amounts of time creating and producing these videos, acts that require certain amounts of "expert" knowledge and status, won't pay off in the same ways that it does for other boys. For one, Jamal's school banned breakdancing moves at their school dances. Though Jamal's talent in breakdancing might be as good as if he were in his "own little dance crew", it's not something he can share with his school peers. For another, it isn't something that allows him future rewards in the same way that finessed soccer, basketball or football skills might. Being on "the next American Dance" is a small possibility but one that remains small.

In this section I have attempted to show how sports-loving teen boys, while treated in some ways as fitting into specific teen boy cultures are also treated, in other contexts and experiences, as full members within particular Discourses.

## Discussion

In this chapter, I have examined the ways that teen boys' sports sponsorship situations directly sponsor particular ways of being sports-loving teen boys and indirectly sponsor their sport related literacy practices. Whereas in the previous chapter, I focused on the differences between families of different social classes, I focus here on the messages that teen boys receive, in general, from commercial interests. However, I try to demonstrate that teen boys' sports sponsorship situations represent a nexus of various relationships involving commercial interests (at times a local shop, at other times a national corporation) but also peer relationships and teen boys' membership in various social groups. In describing teen boys' sports sponsorship as a situation, I make room for nonhuman actors and a variety of actors involved.

### Sports-Related Literacy Practices As Social

Previous research on teen boys' literacy practices has revealed that social relationships often determine why and how teen boys approach the sports texts that they do (Smith and Wilhelm, 2002 Blair and Sanford, 2004). The findings in this chapter suggest that the social dynamics that surround teen boys' involvements in sports are much more complicated that what previous research has addressed. While sports are often framed as masculine activities and thus, a unifying thing for teen boys, it can also be seen as a way to separate teen boys. Just as the teen girls in Finders' (1997) study had perceptions of the social consequences for their actions, so too do teen boys have perceptions, real or imaginary, of the possible consequences of their sports-related literacy practices. Finders writes, "Carrying the wrong kind of book, writing the wrong kind of story, passing notes to the wrong people, all might mark one as an outsider or as an insider in the wrong group" (Finders, 1997, p.118). To the teen boys in my study, following the

wrong team, writing on the wrong sports blog, or playing in the wrong sport could mark them as outsiders or insiders.

Related to this is something that I haven't yet talked about in this chapter. Though 18 out of the 21 teen boys in my study talked about sports as representing their present selves, three of the teen boys in my study did not. This fact points to the importance of remembering that there are ways of being a teen boy that don't entail a love of sports, even when there are powerful messages that suggest this. I will return to this issue in my final chapter.

**Sports Sponsorship**

Another thing I want to highlight is that the teen boys in my study "got" sports sponsorship. They saw it displayed in the various texts they read and viewed – athletes endorsing particular products, individuals participating in venues or contests organized by companies. They aspired to corporate sponsorship for themselves. They envied peers who had achieved it. This talk about sponsorship was a wonderful surprise in this study. Though I had selected the literacy sponsorship as a lens for studying teen boys' literacy practices, I didn't expect the participants in my study to bring up sponsorship on their own terms. And, talk they did. At least half of my participants referred to corporate sponsorship or college scholarship in their interviews. This illustrated for me how much sponsorship described the current sports landscape for teen boys. It was in the teen boys' talk about sports sponsorship that I was able to further theorize my thinking about literacy sponsorship as relational. I struggled for a long time with how to conceptualize this relationship. It wasn't until the teen boys in my study started talking about their experiences with corporate sports sponsorship (Henry – skateboarding; Alan – wakeboarding) or about their envisioned experiences (David hoped to become a sponsored wakeskater; Eric talked about his friend who was a sponsored skateboarder) that I came up with my "give and take" description of

sponsorship relationships. Teen boys get the "give and take relationship with corporate sponsorship. Though many of them emphasized the "free" things they would receive or did receive as sponsored athletes, they understood that these free things came at a price (a 10:1 investment as the longboard website describes).

While I have tried to provide a rich description of the ways in which particular notions of sports-loving teen boys are sponsored by commercial interests, I do not mean to suggest that teen boys simply receive these messages. As is evident in my data, teen boys respond to sports literacy sponsorship situations. They are active in these situations and respond in ways that are often creative and surprising. In corporate sponsorship situations, there is an element of surprise on the part of the sponsor. They can't always predict how the sponsored boys will do in the competitions. They don't know the content or even effect of the created videos, the discussion board participation or the social networking done by the sponsored boys. The sponsor enters a relationship with the sponsored. The outcome of this relationship becomes a mix of the sponsor's intentions and goals but also of the sponsored. The same is true for teen boys and the sponsoring relationships they enter with commercial interests.

**Critical literacy opportunities**

Given the discussion above about ways in which teen boys respond to some of the narrow ways that are offered to them, I still think this area is a rich area in which to talk with teen boys about critical literacy practices. Primarily targeting males, advertisements for cars, alcohol and food in sports publications often rely on the sexualization of women. Helping reveal commercial interests and sponsorship of ways of being teen boys is a direction that literacy education can take. Helping teen boys see the interests of the producer in the webpages, advertisements, video

games and so on would enable them to negotiate and respond to these sponsorship situations in more ways. Too often sports-related texts are treated as texts without producers.

**Beyond Self Sponsorship**

When I first started studying teen boys' sports-related literacy practices, my focus was on the literacy practices themselves. This was consistent with the focus in previous research (c.f. Mahiri, 1991; Tierney, 2008; Newkirk, 2002) that has highlighted the complexities surrounding boys' sports-related literacy practices. However, the teen boys in my study didn't seem to view the reading, writing, and viewing they did around their sports involvements as acts of reading and writing. Their talk about these practices kept pointing to what surrounded them. Consistently, the teen boys in my study didn't see their sports-related literacy practices as acts of "reading" and "writing." While they would talk in length about what they read on a website or contributed to on a sports blog, they defined themselves as "hating to read" and "not being a writer." Their sports-related literacy practices were just what they did as sports-loving teen boys.

One way to interpret this is to say that the teen boys in my study have narrow definitions of reading and writing. I think this is indeed true. However, I would clarify this and say that the teen boys in my study defined acts of reading and writing as the kinds of reading and writing they did in school. In this, they identify schools as literacy sponsors. This is significant because it opens the discussion to explore who or what else might be sponsoring their notions of what it means to read and to write. It is here where I have tried to argue that sponsorship situations, in and through how particular notions of what it means to be a sports-loving teen boy get sponsored, also serve as literacy sponsors to teen boys. This view of literacy sponsorship, a view I have chosen to call gendered literacy sponsorship, draws attention to the particular ways of interacting around, consuming and producing texts that are being sponsored to a specific group

of people, in this case, teen boys. As such, the "self-sponsored" sports-related literacy practices really aren't self-sponsored. My argument in this chapter is that this is not the whole picture. While teen boys did often do sports-related literacy practices on their own terms and in places and spaces that were chosen by them, other sponsors are present. Commercial interests, for example, are threaded throughout the texts that the teen boys mentioned. In addition, as my description shows, teen boys' sports involvements are often anything but self selected. Class and race, location and accessibility all play into teen boys' sports decisions and situations.

**Hooking Teen Boys with Sports**

One of the goals of my study is to listen more to teen boys and what matters to them. It is obvious from my interview data that sports involvements are significant to the teen boys in my study. It consumed a lot of their time and energy. It influenced their future goals and dreams. It influenced their choice of clothing and friends. As adolescent literacy researchers, I think we need to take teen boys' sports-related literacy practices more seriously. I began this chapter summarizing how some of the existing research on boys and literacy tends to frame teen boys' sports-related literacy practices as being self-sponsored. This, I think, is one of the reasons that teen boys' sports-related literacy practices are often used as "hooks" in the literacy classroom. The work in this chapter in many ways goes against the call in the previous literature to use sports as a hook to get teen boys into reading. Literature on boys and literacy often suggests that teachers or parents use "sports" books, nonfiction or fiction, as ways of hooking boys in to reading. The logic goes something like this: Most teen boys are interested in sports. Most teen boys don't enjoy reading/writing. If parents and teachers can get teen boys the "right" kinds of books or literacy experiences, ones that are about the sports they play and/or follow, the "problem" can be solved. While I don't doubt the success of this in particular times and places

(Brozo, 2002), I want to reframe the discussion. It's not just about what teen boys read. Teen boys' literacy practices, I argue in this chapter, reflect how and why and what and when they want to be seen as teen boys. This suggests one explanation for why, in some contexts, boys read materials they do but don't in other contexts. Too often, literacy educators try to get at literacy directly. This direct gaze rests most easily on the what of boys' literate activities. What we realize, as I did when I asked my participants indirectly about their literacy practices, that there are many factors that surround decisions over what to read and write and view. It's more than asking Alan to bring in his wakeboarding magazines into class. It's not that simple. Wakeboarding sponsors view him as a smart, articulate, invested boy. I'm not sure that English classes always do the same.

## CHAPTER 5: SPONSORING RELIGIOUS TEEN BOYS

> I love how the pastor be doing the preaching, doing things like teaching you about real life and stuff, what's really going to happen and how the world going to come through, like if people don't bow down now some people are surely going to die in hell so I don't want to be like one of them other peoples who go to hell I want to go to heaven.
>
> Jamal, 17 year old African American

> My church has an indoor skate park. My friends and I skateboard there together.
>
> Alan, a 15 year old European American

In the previous chapter, I explored some of the ways in which commercial interests sponsor ways of being sports-loving teen boys, ways that complicate some of teen boys' peer interactions. In this chapter, I focus on how churches as institutions directly sponsor ways of being religious teen boys and indirectly sponsor teen boys' literacy practices. As the above quotes indicate, church experiences can be vastly different from church to church, and from person to person. Jamal and Alan talk about their church involvements in very different ways. Jamal talks about listening to his pastor "be doing the preaching." Alan, on the other hand, frames his church experience in terms of what he enjoys doing with his friends when he's there.

Research on church literacy practices has revealed that church involvement presents rich opportunities for literacy learning, development and experience. Research has also highlighted how these involvements can be very different than involvements in schools. In fact, some of the research suggests that it is because of these different involvements that youth don't succeed in schools. As I will illustrate in this chapter, the different ways that teen boys are sponsored as

religious teen boys influences the ways in which they experience and are encouraged to experience literacy practices. My analysis of teen boys' religious literacy practices reveals that what was directly being sponsored in church sponsorship situations wasn't literacy but particular ways of being religious teen boys.

## More Than Just Different Literacy Practices

Research on church literacy practices has tended to focus on the church experiences of African Americans and other minority groups. These studies have revealed that church involvements are often rich sites for literacy practices – sermons, church bulletins, newsletters, Bible studies, Sunday school and Vacation Bible school classes to name just a few (Edwards & McMillon, 2000; Edwards & McMillon, 2008; McMillon & McMillon, 2004; Moss, 1994, 2001; Ek, 2008; Ek, 2005; Farr, 1994, 2005). Though the researchers don't identify churches as "sponsors" of literacy, it is clear from their findings that they do see them in this light. This research tends to contrast the "rich" and "empowering" literacy practices found in churches to that of schools. Moss's work, for example, argues that the African American sermon, as a literacy event, is inherently different than that of an academic essay. She writes, "The African-American sermon stands as a model of a literate text which in many ways is the antithesis of the academic essay and promotes a type of literacy which is the antithesis of the most popular academic notions of literacy" (p. 197). This research has highlighted the rich experiences with literacy within African Americans churches and has argued that these literacy experiences influence the way that African Americans view and experience school literacy.

A significant finding in these studies is that youth, in many church contexts, are often highly engaged and motivated. Their participation in school, however, reveals a very different picture. Of particular note is work by Edwards and McMillon (2000, 2008). In their work, they

address the issue of church as a literacy sponsor from a variety of ways. In their 2000 piece, they contrast the differences between a church environment and a school environment of African American students and their engagement in each of these environments. In particular, they examine the experiences of one African American boy, Joshua, a boy who was considered exceptionally literate in his Sunday school class but social illiterate in his kindergarten class. They looked at ways in which the different environments encouraged or discouraged his attempts to be a reader and argue that, unlike his school experience, he had a rich literacy experience in his Sunday School classroom because his teacher "created a nurturing environment where students felt safe to take risks" (p. 119). Edwards and McMillon's work is important work in the field. Their focus on African American church experiences has brought about important discussions about how to connect the outside of school and school lives of African American students.

Their research on African American church literacy practices as well as the other studies mentioned earlier, sadly, has not yet been extended to other ethnic or racial groups or age groups. There remains little research on the religious literacy practices of teen boys and particularly that of White and middle class teen boys. In this study, I hope to extend Edwards and McMillon's (2000) work by addressing church as a literacy sponsor to teen boys from a variety of racial and ethnic groups. I argue in this chapter that many teen boys' religious identities are important to them. Recent statistics on the number of teens who participate in religious activities suggest that many teens, girls and boys, are involved in church. In his discussion of the main survey and interview findings of the National Study of Youth and Religion, "a unique research project on the religious and spiritual lives of American adolescents conducted from 2001-2005", Smith and Denton (2009) conclude that religion is significant to many of today's American teenagers and

that, as a whole, they are anything but religious or irreligious. The authors points out that the "vast majority" of teenagers embrace some religious identity, that the "majority" are affiliated with a religious organization and that a "sizable minority" are regular participants in local communities of faith. This study reports similar findings with the 2003 Gallup Youth Survey. In this survey 92 percent of teens considered their religious beliefs important to them. 43% of them reported that they attended church or synagogue in the past seven days. This is significant particularly as this percentage is higher than the number of adults reporting the same thing. The Gallup Survey also reported that one third of all teens say that faith is the most important influence in their lives and that this is higher for African-American teens (52%) (Lyons, 2003).

Studying teen boys' church literacy sponsorship situations is particularly important because of some of the assumptions that seem to be made about teen boys' religious involvements in the existing research on teen boys and literacy. For one, research on teen boys' literacy practices tends to lump church literacy experiences in the monolithic category of "out of school." In their study, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) approach church-related literacy practices as a way of showing that, in contrast to schooled literacy practices, teen boys participate in literacy practices in which they feel valued. They describe one of their participants, Robert, a boy who didn't like to share what he read in school, as someone who frequently "would get up in front of the congregation each Sunday with ease" (p. 146). They quote Robert as saying "I read the Sunday school book. Read that, study the lesson. And then on Sunday, we go over the lesson and he asks us questions about it. And, we stand up in front of the church, like that" (p. 146), In a later interview Robert reflects, "And in church, it seems like more people pay attention to what you're doing." (p. 147). To Smith and Wilhelm, I would argue that there is a lot more at play in church experiences than a group of people who "pay attention" to you. Their analysis of their

participant's experiences in church barely scratches the surface of what could be discussed. Gustavson (2007)'s analysis of one of his participant's church involvements is also underdeveloped. In his study of teen boys' out of school literacy practices, he identifies one of his participant's experiences of playing his guitar in an evening worship service as "an uncommon space" in his learning as a turntablist. He categories this teen boys' church participation in the same category as his participation in a jazz band and in a recording studio, a categorization that I think is misguided because of how different each of these contexts are from each other.

Other assumptions about church in existing research on teen boys and literacy are that churches are "unexpected" literacy spaces and reflect "unmasculine" behaviors. Smith and Wilhelm (2002), for example, suggest that being involved in church isn't typical for most teen boys. In their discussion of why and how they created one of the interview profiles they did for the participants in their study to respond to, they write, "We crafted one of the profiles to invite the boys to discuss the belief that school literacy is not appropriately masculine. The description of the young man in the profile includes a number of details that might make him as feminine, or at least unconventionally masculine. We made him a reader and a church-goer." (p. 364). Later, in their description of one of the participants in their study, a church- goer active in his youth group and a member of a Christian rock band, they describe him as not fitting "the profile of the male straitjacketed by 'habitus' and conventional conceptions of masculinity" (p. 25). Teen boys' church involvements and their associated literacy practices clearly remain an area in which more adolescent literacy research need to take place.

In addition to extending the existing adolescent literacy research on church-related literacy practices to the study of teen boys' literacy practices, I also want to extend Edwards and

McMillon's (2000) work by examining what else might be sponsored other than literacy practices. Though Edwards and McMillon emphasize the cultural differences between these two contexts, their analysis rests on the differences between literacy practices. I want to see how these cultural differences might play out in the ways in which teen boys' identities as religious teen boys might influence their church-related literacy practices. To do so, I draw on work by Ek (2009) who examined an immigrant Mexican Pentecostal male adolescent's differing experiences in church and school contexts. She argues "that the church created a nurturing and supportive environment for engagement in language and literacy practices while the school marginalized Edgar and failed to provide effective teaching and learning in either English or Spanish. (p. 2). Ek's work highlights how churches do more than just sponsor literacy practices. Though she noted the specific literacy practices and how they were different from church to school contexts, citing such things as Bible reading as a family literacy practice, literacy as community reading, and interactions with teachers not peers, she also identifies how identities as youth and as Latinos are developed and produced through church involvement. This builds on an earlier study (2005) in which she examines how Protestant churches influence not just literacy practices but also the language, socialization and identity of Latino immigrants. She argues that it is in and through the language and literacy practices such as class lecture-sermons, prayers, hymns and collective Bible readings, that youth are socialized into a Protestant Christian identity. Ek's work suggests that there is much more going on in teens' church involvements than just literacy practices. She uses church-related literacy practices to illustrate the ways in which teens' various identities get developed and maintained.

Peshkin's (1988) ethnographic study of a Fundamentalist Christian school also points out, albeit in very different ways, the ways in which identity and religious literacy practices are

intertwined. He draws attention to how the school's doctrine is central to everything that happens in the school. In classroom discussion, for example, the goals of salvation and spiritual maturity and the emphasis on being of one mind and heart, take precedence over other goals and influence what and how gets read, discussed and written. So, although students still have English and science classes, go to basketball games and have cheerleaders, they engage in these activities within an atmosphere where God's business comes first. His account provides an in-depth look at the ways in which the school-religious community sponsors the literacy practices. Of note to me is how he draws out the ideologies of the sponsor and traces this ideology through such varied experiences/expressions as how teachers view their jobs and student participation in school activities.

In drawing on studies such as these, I view teen boys' church involvements as literacy sponsorship situations. I examine the sponsorship of literacy in and through the different ways churches sponsor what it means to be a religious teen boy. I look at how teen boys are encouraged or discouraged to approach texts, other churchgoers, their involvements and participation in church. All of this, I argue, directly influences the ways that boys are then encouraged to engage with texts and different literacy discourses.

To do this, I first discuss the teen boys' varied involvements in church-related activities. I then discuss how different churches sponsor different notions of being a religious teen boy. In this discussion I examine how teen boys' religious literacy practices are being indirectly sponsored.

## "I Love Being With My People": The Differing Sponsorship of Religious Teen Boys

### Teen Boys' Church Involvements

11 out of the 21 boys in my study talked, at least to some extent, about their church involvements. On one level, this isn't surprising. The town in which my study takes place is known nationally for its Christian and conservative values. One of the jokes in the community is that strangers get asked the question, "Which church do you go to?" Given the almost 200 churches in the community (quite remarkable for its population size of 40,000), the question might seem fitting. However, the question reveals the assumptions, made by many in the community, that everyone is religious, that everyone is a Christian, and that everyone has membership in a church. Originally founded by Dutch immigrants, the community has a large percentage of citizens with Dutch American heritage. Many of these citizens and others go to church, and, specifically, many go to Reformed or Christian Reformed churches, denominations that have their beginnings in this town and larger region. As is the case with many churches, class and racial divisions in the town are largely replicated in church attendance. The community and the region that surrounds it is known for its philanthropic organizations and efforts, its support for organizations that promote conservative values (i.e. Right to Life, Focus on the Family) and its many private parochial Christian schools. Many civic events, club meetings and large gatherings of people in the town and greater region begin proceedings with prayer. Collectively then, the expression of Christianity here has it own unique flavor, mirroring to some degree that which is found in other Midwest small town Christian communities but being distinct in its historical roots with specific denominations.

And yet, even as a member of this Christian conservative community, I was surprised. Even as one who knew full well that historically the Christian church has been a significant

sponsor to many people, I was surprised that half of the teen boys in my study talked about their church involvements. One of the reasons for this was that I did not directly ask the boys about their church involvements or faith commitments. None of the artifacts that the boys brought to their interviews directly related to their church involvements. But, as they began to talk about their artifacts, these church involvements surfaced. For example, Jamal brought in a basketball to represent who he saw himself as in the present. When I asked him where he played basketball, he talked about how he liked "being with his church people" at the after school club he attended, a club run by an evangelical Christian nonprofit organization. Later, when Jamal talked about who he was in the past, he talked about how he used to get in trouble a lot. He credited his going to church as being the reason he was trying to make changes in his life. In other examples, Adam talked about how his involvement in tennis (a tennis racquet being his present day artifact) often prevented him from attending his church's youth group. Chris mentioned his "church friends" when he talked about the reactions he got from his different groups of friends after he cut his long hair (his past artifact). These examples illustrate how though boys might not draw attention to church or to their church-related activities when describing themselves, their identities as religious boys are a salient part of who they are.

While all of the boys talked about attending church at least weekly, their experiences within their various church situations were very different. The chart below describes the teen boys' varied involvements in their different churches. One reason for the differences is quite simply because their churches, though all representing the Christian tradition, were very different from each other. In my small data set, my participants attended the following kinds of churches: Assemblies of God, Evangelical mega church, African American Baptist church, and a Reformed high liturgy church. (In this chapter I use the word "church" and other words and phrases from

the Christian tradition to reflect the experiences of my participants). In worship, theology and involvement, these churches differ from each other. An extension of this is that churches have different ways of interacting around texts based on the theology to which they espouse. Particular texts can be read in different ways. Christian fundamentalists will read passages from the Bible in much different ways than, say, Universalists. Not only will they take and make different meanings from the same "text" but they will interact with these meanings differently and put them to different uses, for example, to defend particular actions or behaviors.

Another way the teen boys' experiences were different were that they were involved in different ways. I highlight these involvements to illustrate that, at least for these teen boys, church represents a significant part of their daily lives. All of them talked about attending church at least weekly. As my data suggests, however, these teen boys experienced church in different ways. The point I am trying to make is that church doesn't represent the same thing for everyone. The table below summarizes the teen boys' differing church involvements and then different kinds of churches that they attended.

**Table 6: Teen Boys' Church Involvements**

| Participant | Ethnicity | Age / Grade | Church characteristics | Church involvement |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alan | White | 14 / 9th | Evangelical, mega church | Sunday service, Youth group, Mission trip |
| Alberto | Latino | 15 / 10th | Pentecostal, Spanish speaking | Sunday service, Sunday school, social events |
| Chris | White | 17 / 12th | Protestant (Calvinist) | Sunday service, Youth group |
| Eric | White | 16 / 9th | Protestant (Calvinist) | Sunday service, Monday after school club, Youth group, Wednesday church dinners, Sunday school |
| Isaac | White | 14 / 8th | Protestant (Calvinist) | Sunday service, Youth group (2 churches), Church summer hike |
| Jamal | African American | 17 / 11th | Pentecostal, African American | Sunday service, Sunday school, Bible study, performances during service |

**Table 6 cont'd**

| Participant | Ethnicity | Age / Grade | Church characteristics | Church involvement |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jayson | African American | 15 / 9th | Pentecostal, African American | Sunday service, lunch after service, Bible study |
| Jeremiah | African American | 14 / 8th | African American | Sunday service, lunch after service, Bible study, youth group (a different church) |
| John | White | 15 / 9th | Protestant (Calvinist, liturgical) | Sunday service, youth group, mission project) |
| Neil | White | 16 / 11th | Protestant (Calvinist, liturgical service) | Sunday service, Sunday school, Wednesday church dinner/ activities |
| Tommy | White | 15 / 9th | Protestant (Calvinist) | Sunday service |

## Directly Sponsoring Religious Teen Boys, Indirectly Sponsoring Religious Literacy Practices

Within these different church situations and involvements, I now examine the ways of being a teen boy that are sponsored and how this indirectly involves the sponsorship of teen boys' religious literacy practices. I argue that different churches seemed to sponsor different ways of being a religious or church going boy. This then has implications on teen boys' religious literacy practices, on what they are asked or encouraged to read and write, on how they are asked to interpret texts, and on how they are expected to interact with others.

In the sections below, I look at some of the specific ways in which different churches sponsor notions of being teen boys, ways that at times overlap and at times seem to contradict each other. I do not mean to imply that churches need to or do fit in either category; rather, I do so to set up a spectrum of sorts.

## Religious Teen Boys: Separate and Different vs. Part of The Family

One of the most noticeable differences in how churches sponsor ways of being teen boys is in the positioning of teen boys in relation to other groups of people. For some churches, teen boys were positioned as being separate from the rest of the church community. I describe this positioning as "teen boy culture." In contrast, other churches seemed to position teen boys as being an integral part of the larger church family. I describe this positioning as "extended church family." In the sections that follow, I will discuss how this positioning was evident in how churches appealed to teen boys and how they structured activities for teen boys.

### Separate and different.

In the kinds of activities provided for youth and the ways in which these activities were marketed, some churches emphasized teen boys as being separate and different from the rest of the church community. In using the term "marketed", I do not mean to demean the ways in which churches attempt to attract newcomers. Rather, I use the appeals they make to youth and male youth in particular to examine how notions of teen boys are being sponsored.

At Adam's church, there were separate worship services for teens, services usually led by a youth pastor and a contemporary music style worship band. In addition there were youth group activities held on a week night that were designed to be primarily social in nature. Alan talked about similar kinds of activities and experiences at his church. His church boasted of an indoor skatepark located in the "youth" wing on the church's large facilities. The assumption seems to be that youth, and male youth in particular, need these separate and different activities and locations in order to want to come to church and to enjoy being there. It is implied that they are so significantly different than adults that they need their own versions or entirely different

experiences than what adults do or have. It is implied that if there weren't these separate things, then it is possible that teens and teen boys in particular wouldn't be involved in church.

On Alan's church's website, this appeal is made to teens:

> We realize that you don't want to just sit in church and listen to someone preach. We know you love to skateboard, chill with your friends, Guitar Hero and engage in amazing worship….There's killer events like cookoffs, friend day, potlucks, study breaks, youth rallies, beach nights and other nights of just plain chillin'!

Embedded in this description of what happens in the church's youth group are assumptions about what teens like and don't like to do. The assumption is that teens "don't want to just sit in church and listen to someone preach." Instead, teens would rather be doing things like skateboarding, hanging out with friends, and playing Guitar Hero. It would take "killer events" to convince such teens, teen boys in particular, to come to church and youth group. And, as is suggested by the indoor skatepark, it would take the church adapting to what teen boys like to do to get them to come to church.

Skateboarding, while also enjoyed by females, is still a mostly male dominated sport. That Alan's church committed to building and maintaining an indoor skatepark says something about the importance they have placed on trying to attract and maintain teen boy participation. If teen boys weren't interested in skateboarding prior to attending the youth group, it seems that they might after participating for awhile. My guess is that Alan's church has also included things in the youth group space that target notion of what teen girls like to do such as coffeeshop areas and comfortable couches and chairs. However, the point remains that the church in its marketing and physical space decisions sponsors particular notions of what it means to be a teen boy. And, it seems to work. Alan talked about his church youth group in the context of his enjoyment of

skateboarding. Skateboarding with his friends was one of the reasons he expressed why he went to youth group. The indoor skatepark seems particularly significant in illustrating how churches sponsor particular ways of being a teen boy because of how skateboarders have historically been positioned by mainstream society. Skateboarding has been construed as oppositional to mainstream society and, as such, has been a place for nonmainstream teen boys to express opposition to societal norms. Over the past decade, however, skateboarding has become much more mainstream. While corporate sponsors still hold onto its "bad boy" image, skateboarding clothing is now marketed to mainstream boys just as much as to nonmainstream boys. It has become much more accepted as a leisure activity for boys across social class and racial groups. Henry, Eric and Alan, all middle class White boys who do well in school and who identify as skateboarders attest to this. I share this to suggest that skateboarding today still holds an edgy appeal but is "safe" enough for churches to use it as a way to attract male youth. My guess is that churches like Alan's wouldn't have considered indoor skateparks a decade ago.

The teen boys in my study who attended these churches seemed to be aware, at least to some degree, of some of the ways in which church leaders tried to appeal to them. In the excerpt below, Adam describes what happens at his youth group every week and demonstrates his awareness of what is being done on his behalf. He says,

> First you shoot baskets inside for a bit. We hang out at the beginning and then we have a talk session, they'll show videos so we'll stay interested, a talk, show another fun video and then you go to your group and you say the most important things or favorite things in life and you come back out and share. Your group does it on a big piece of paper.

Adam's description demonstrates that he "gets" what happens in his youth group. You get to do what you want at first – shoot baskets, hang out. Then, youth group leaders use a video "so we'll

stay interested." Then, there's a variety of predictable activities. Adam's ability to describe the strategies used on him in almost caricature style, illustrates his awareness of the ways he is being viewed. I don't mean to suggest that in being able to do this Adam's involvement is less than sincere or that his youth group is trying the "wrong" approach. Rather, I wish to highlight how teen boys like Adam are often very aware of the ways of being youth and male youth in particular that are being encouraged.

Adam doesn't try to resist these conceptions of teen boys. He uses these conceptions, I think, for his advantage. When he talked about church, Adam framed his involvement in church in terms of his peer relationships. He said that he often doesn't attend youth group when he knows that his friends won't be there. Alan's experiences are similar. Alan said he attends a different youth group than what his church offers because his friends go there. This makes sense. When a view of teen boys positions them as separate and different than the rest of the church community, they are encouraged to participate with peers for social reasons.

In addition to the kinds of activities that are offered to teen boys, another expression of this sponsorship is seen in the kinds of texts that teen boys encounter. As with activities, teen boys are encouraged and expected to use texts that are specifically designed for their separate and different interests as male youth. The substantial commercial market of "teen" and "boy" versions of the Bible illustrates this. A quick look on Amazon.com reveals versions of the Bible or Bible related materials specifically marketed for teens: Student Life Application Bible (New Living Translation), Teen Study Bible (New International Version), Extreme Teen Bible (King James Version revised and updated), and Youthwalk Devotional Bible (NIV), to name just a few. There are also versions of the Bible geared specifically for teen boys. What is of interest to me are the assumptions about what it means to be a teen boy that are made in the marketing, layout

and content found in these texts. Zondervan, one of the most trusted Christian publishing houses in the United States, produces a series of Bibles and devotionals for boys. This series boasts that it "helps boys become more like Jesus mentally, physically, spiritually, and socially smarter, stronger, deeper, cooler" and helps them "grow toward maturity and manhood." The additional features inserted throughout these books highlight assumptions made about boys' interests and abilities. For example, there are "special entry spaces for everything from fun doodles and sketches to quick responses to the texts" and a "Gross!: Gross and gory facts in the Bible" subsection. The back cover of the devotional attempts to attract boys with its description that the book has a "humorous, cheeky, and sometimes gross style." These marketing choices illustrate particular ways of being boy that are being sponsored by the corporations producing these texts, and, less directly, by the churches who promote and use these texts in their church activities. Boys like gross and gory things. They prefer "quick responses to the text" and like to "doodle" (Strauss, 2009).

These particular notions of what it means to be a boy becomes even more apparent when we contrast them to ways in which older teen boys are targeted as readers. A quick look at Bibles marketed to older teen boys reveals a very different notion of what it means to be a teen boy. No longer encouraged to enjoy gross or gory things, teen boys are seen, at least for the purposes of the target audience of LivingStone Corporation's Bible for Teen Guys (2003), as being "ready for war." The product description of this Bible reads,

> The Revolution Begins with You! In case you didn't know, you're in a war. Your enemy is dead serious. He wants you to think the battle raging around you is no big deal. It is a big deal. Your life, your relationships, your world—it's all a big deal, and it takes a big, God-filled heart to make a difference. It's time to stand up and fight for what is right.

> Time to be a revolutionary—living your faith on the edge, challenging things that need to be challenged, discovering new possibilities, and helping others to discover them as well. Fill your hands with Revolution. It'll open your eyes, strengthen your courage, and guide you like a compass toward a life worth living. But this is a Bible! Yeah—a Bible like none other you've ever read, for today's teenage guy going toe-to-toe with a hard-hitting world.

This description encourages male youth to view their life experiences in "revolutionary" terms. They need to go "toe-to-toe with a hard-hitting world." Nowhere in this description does it encourage boys to share their emotions or respond to the world in affective ways. Another layer of the assumptions reveal that male youth aren't expected to want to read the Bible. It takes "a Bible like none other you've ever read" for them to want to read it.

My point in all of this is not to decry the marketing of Bibles or of Biblically related reading material. Rather, I wish to highlight how particular versions of being a teen boy, of teen boys as representing a separate and different culture, are sponsored in and through various church activities and texts. It is through this direct sponsorship of what it means to be a religious teen boy that literacy practices are indirectly being sponsored. The versions of the Bible listed above encourage particular ways of reading, interpreting, interacting with and responding to the text. As we shall see in the next section, different notions of being a teen boy encourage other ways of responding to texts.

**Part of the family.**

In contrast to the notion that boys represent a separate and different group, other churches seemed to sponsor the idea that teen boys were part of a larger church family. In these church sponsorship situations, teen boys were not treated as entirely different from other demographic

groups. They simply represented one of the many groups that made up a greater sense of "family." Communal or pot-luck lunches after the service, multigenerational social gatherings, and worship services that were for old and young alike were some of the activities that reinforced this sponsored way of being a boy. I saw this sponsorship most evident in the African American and Latino churches that the teen boys attended. When Jamal, Jayson and Alberto talked about their church involvements, for example, they didn't emphasize their peer relationships as many of the other teen boys did. Instead, the things they mentioned about their church involvements often included mention of older or younger people and of instances where they helped out as full-fledged contributing members of the church. Jayson, for example, regularly spends his Sunday afternoons helping to make and then serve the lunch provided for the congregation after the worship service. After my second interview with Alberto, he left to attend a 50th wedding anniversary celebration for a couple who went to his church.

Though these teen boys talked about going to youth Sunday school classes, these experiences seemed to be embedded in the larger experiences of the church. In addition, the separate and different aspects of teen boys' experiences were also embedded in the church family. Jamal shared with me that several months ago his pastor approached him and asked him to write and perform a freestyle rap for the Sunday service. Jamal gladly did this and since then has continued writing, choreographing and performing raps for worship. He eagerly explained to me his most recent song, a song in which he involved some of the younger kids in the congregation. "G.O.D. that's what I call it. The kids have shirts with the G. O. D. on them, they dance to it." Freestyle rapping in many contexts defines male youth culture as separate and different. Asking Jamal to write and perform his freestyle raps asks him to bring this part of his teen boy identity into his church going identity. He is being encouraged to include this part of his

life in who he is as a religious teen boy. In addition, this involves exposing this culture and what it has to offer to the larger congregation.

Alberto expressed how much he valued his place in his church's sense of family. The Spanish-speaking Assemblies of God church that he attended was small and diverse in terms of ages and ethnic groups. He described that there were only a handful of other teen boys who attended. Though it took a significant amount of initiative on his part to actually get to church, he had to find rides to get there because his grandparents didn't attend, it was a priority for him to go. "I don't get the chance to be myself unless I go to church", he reflected.

One way to read Alberto's experiences with church is that they are ethnic and language based. Alberto was one of the few Latino students in his college preparatory charter school and the only Latino on his school soccer team. The artifact he brought to his first interview was his regional Mexican soccer team jersey, something he said he wore "all the time", something he said his teachers and fellow students at school know about him. Unlike at school, Alberto was not in the minority in his church. His church represented a place where he was able to "be" among people who shared his language and his cultural heritage. For a time Alberto attended his father's church, an Evangelical mega church. He stopped going there, he said, because "it's mostly White people." "They aren't very friendly" he added. At his church, however, Spanish was the language spoken (though there was an English interpreter during the Sunday service). Sunday school classes were taught in Spanish. That Alberto would feel more at home here makes sense given that Alberto described himself as a "Spanish speaker." Interestingly, he later qualified his language as "street Spanish", unlike the "proper" Spanish he was currently learning in his AP Spanish class. Alberto, however, didn't like this AP Spanish class. "They try to make me change the way I talk" he reflected. "I have street Spanish because I learned from my dad and

my uncles and aunts that came from Mexico. They came up for work and stuff and they all speak slang Spanish because a lot of them didn't go to school and so I don't know a lot of proper terms." At church, Alberto didn't worry about "proper" or "street", at church he was able to just speak the way he knew how, the way he wanted. A significant reason for Alberto's church involvement then seemed to be that he was surrounding himself with a community of people and language practices that resonated with his ethnic identity.

But, not all teen boys responded to his church in the same way as Alberto did. Alberto contrasted himself to some of his church friends. Unlike some of them, he said he attended church and Sunday School every week. He seemed proud of this fact, particularly when he described to me how he needed to find his own ride to church every Sunday. It seemed that Alberto's experiences at church affected him in profound ways. He kept coming because it connected to his experiences and helped him in authentic ways. Much of Alberto's talk about his church involvements was focused around his weekly Sunday School class. This class, taught by a man in his early 40s, was one Alberto described in this way,

> We talk a lot. We don't take notes. We talk about everyday situations, like we learn the 10 commandments and how we shouldn't steal and stuff like that. The way he teaches us, he gets us, it's the way he teaches us, he'll relate it to church, it's not like how it's done in school. He writes passages on the board, we talk about it. Like we talk about Obama and where he came from and how we can be successful cause he was raised in a little town in a little city and how big he became.

It seems that Alberto's enjoyment of the class lays primarily in his relationship with his teacher, a man Alberto described as "cool." Alberto sums it up with "He gets us", an implicit comparison perhaps to other teachers in his life (school mostly) who don't fully understand him or his

struggles. But it also lies in how his teacher approaches the Biblical passages. “It’s the way he teaches us, he’ll relate it to church, it’s not like how it’s done in school” he reflected. This suggests that Alberto’s connections to his church family are not just for ethnic or language reasons. Alberto’s church seems to sponsor ways of being a teen boy that places these ways within a community of others who will listen and respond to them. Perhaps it is also that Alberto’s church sponsored a way for him to experience church in these emotional and affective ways. Church wasn’t something that you “had” to go to. It was a place for someone to connect with feelings of loneliness, fear, hurt. While this particular way of being or Discourse wasn’t just for teen boys, it does suggest that teen boys might be seeking out relationships from a larger social community than just peers.

**Religious Teen Boys: Seeking Authority vs. Interpreting Their Own Experiences**

Another difference in how the teen boys’ various church situations sponsored notions of teen boys was in how they were positioned in relation to church leaders and the Bible. A religious teen boy in some churches seemed to be one who approached the Bible as having the final and only authority in his life. In other churches, a religious teen boy seemed to be one who interpreted the Bible on the basis of his own life experiences.

**Seeking authority.**

The ways in which some of the teen boys talked about their relationships with church leaders emphasized the authority that these leaders had in their lives and in the life of their church. This was something that wasn’t unique to their experiences as teen boys. In fact, a recognition of the pastor’s authority and of that of the Bible was something that was consistent across ages. In the passage below, Jamal describes to me why he loves going to church. He says,

> I love going to church. I love the choir, how the pastor be doing the preaching, doing things like teaching you about real life and stuff, what's really going to happen and how the world going to come through, like if people don't bow down now some people are surely going to die in hell so I don't want to be like one of them other peoples who go to hell I want to go to heaven.

Jamal's comments about the pastor and his preaching demonstrate the authority that Jamal gives to the pastor. When Jamal talked about his Sunday School classes, for example, he seemed to emphasize using the Bible to find an answer, an answer that the pastor or Sunday School leader knew. In the way that Jamal described it, Sunday school classes presented an opportunity to learn about the Bible from his pastor, an expert on the Bible. Jayson, another African American who attended an African American church, talked about his Sunday School class in similar ways. He talked about writing in a notebook during his Sunday School class, writing down the pastor's elaborations or discussion of particular passages of Scripture. This approach to viewing the pastor as an authority and Scripture as the ultimate authority was one that Jamal talked about seeing his parents do at home. He said,

> My parents read the Bible a lot. They get into the word, in a room by themselves and read, they learn something in church and they got to go back and read over it and see what they figure out and they got a commentary and it supplies what it is and what it means to you.

The way Jamal talked about his parents' Bible reading seems to suggest that his parents approach Scripture in a literal way, that they go to the text to extract meaning from it. If they have trouble figuring things out, they get a "commentary" and it provides "what it is and what it means to you." Jamal talked about trying to do similar things himself, reading a Bible verse by himself and

then telling his mom what he learned. Engaging in “the word”, Jamal’s description of the Bible, was something that everyone, of all different ages, did in his church experiences. Though books are full of words, he uses “the word” as a reference for the Bible, illustrating his and his parent’s view of the Bible’s authority in their lives. They may read other books, but the Bible is “the word.” Bible reading for Jamal’s parents seems to be an individual act, an opportunity perhaps to better understand for themselves what they heard the pastor preaching about. In many ways, it seems like Scripture reading for Jamal and his parents represents an interaction. You hear the preacher talk about a text. Then, you go back over the Biblical passage and continue learning from what the preacher talked about.

Jamal’s experiences suggests that being a religious boy, at least for him and others who attended churches like his, means that you learn from an outside authority about how to live your life. This has influences on how such religious teen boys view texts and the Bible in particular. In Jamal’s case, the Bible is a text that he doesn’t question or interpret to fit his particular experiences, desires or needs. As we shall see in the next category, other teen boys are encouraged to view their experiences in very different ways.

**Interpreting their own experiences.**

In other sponsorship situations, teen boys seemed to be encouraged to view themselves in relation to church leaders and the Bible in more evenly distributed ways. A number of the teen boys emphasized that in their youth group experiences what mattered was how they applied Biblical principles to their lives. As unique people with unique life experiences, they were the ones uniquely positioned to connect with Scriptural truths. Jeremiah, an African American who attends a predominately White youth group, outside of his own African American church involvement, described his weekly youth group discussions in this way, “We don't talk so much

about God but about what God wants you to do and how to make the right decisions." My guess is that his youth group leaders wouldn't say the same thing. But, what is important to note is that Jeremiah picks this up based on what happens in the youth group. Though the church's theology might stress knowledge of God as primary and as the basis of what youth should know and do, how this gets expressed or played out to youth might convey something different.

During his second interview with me, Chris brought in a copy of the devotional that his youth group was using in their weekly meetings. This devotional illustrates this kind of interpretation approach. As Chris explained it to me, his youth group collectively reads a devotional together, one that includes a short Bible passage for the purpose of reflecting on it and making connections to daily life. Chris' youth group takes home an "assignment", one that asks them to keep reflecting on the passage and then they are expected to talk about what it meant to them in the next week's youth group.

> Early in Solomon's life, he was faithful in honoring God and his dad, David. So one night God told Solomon in a dream, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you and it's yours. Read 1 Kings 3:5 to get the full story.
>
> That's an offer even Bill Gates couldn't make….
>
> Did you read the ending to the Harry Potter series before you read the whole book? I did. I know, I know. But before you judge me, know that Solomon, who God made wise, did something similar by starting his journal with the ending – life under the sun is meaningless. This from the guy who had it all.
>
> Read Ecclesiastes 1:2-11, then wrestle with these questions.
>
> What are some things you're working really hard for?
>
> What do you hope you'll gain from all that hard work? (Storm, 2009)

The excerpt from this devotional makes cultural references (Harry Potter, Bill Gates) that connect with teens' personal experiences. Three questions are asked directly to the teen readers, questions that encourage them to take a Biblical passage and apply it to their daily lives. Commentaries aren't needed. Even reading Scripture isn't even necessary to answer the questions posed. This is such a different use of the Bible compared to Jamal's. Reading in Chris' case here involves texts other than the Bible.

Another way this view of authority is evident is in how some of the teen boys talked about their uses of the Bible. Eric, for example, talked about how his dad, a college professor, shared with him his hypothesis "that Harry Potter was like Jesus", something that Eric hadn't considered before but that he later used in conversations with his friends when they were eagerly anticipating the release date of the final book. Eric predicted to his friends that Harry would die in the last book and would come back from the dead. He recalled, "I was like, 'What if Harry dies and he comes back to life?' and then I found out that's what happened. It was like really weird." Eric was very proud of the fact that his prediction came true, so proud, in fact, that he didn't even read the final book saying that he didn't need to since he "figured it out." Though his friends didn't believe him at first, they were later impressed when they discovered that his prediction had come true. Eric recalled, "And then when the book came out, this was like four months before the book came out, and I kind of guessed and then when the book came out and everyone read it, they were like 'Wow, you were right!'" Eric's father's approach to reading and to expressing his faith, represent a particular approach to literacy. Discussing possible interpretations of characters is pleasurable to him. He engages in the imaginary world and applies his religious beliefs to that world. When Eric shares this interpretation with his peers, he gains social status. This suggests something about Eric's peer group, a peer group that is mostly

likely used to using literacy in this regard. It also suggests something about Harry Potter and its "acceptable" status for boys to read and enjoy. Not all texts have this prestige.

To highlight this particular way of approaching a religious text and how it is different than how other teen boys experience literacy, I contrast Eric's experiences with Jamal's. As mentioned earlier, Jamal's parents approach Scripture as a place to find meaning. When Jamal talked about Harry Potter, he did so by way of saying that his parents' religious beliefs led them to ban the movie from their house. Jamal said, "Witchcraft. I seen the movie but too much dealing with demons. My parents they don't want me to see it. They said a evil spirit inside that. I say ok. I won't watch it." Jamal complies with his parents' demands and seems to agree with their assessment of the *Harry Potter* books. Though both families use the same text, the Bible, it serves different functions in their lives and the families talk about it differently. In both cases, the teen boys' parents frame certain books as being religiously appropriate. In Eric's case, his dad saw the book as an opportunity to see and talk about a "Christ figure." In Jamal's case, the book was representative of things that didn't fit with their understanding of the Bible and of the way they should live out its authority in their lives. As a side note, Jamal said that his favorite books to read are horror books, books that, to me, seemed much more illustrative of the "evil spirit" than *Harry Potter*. Perhaps Jamal was exercising his agency in this situation and choosing books his parents didn't know much about. While *Harry Potter* received national attention in terms of its religious appropriateness, most horror books do not.

A possible implication of this kind of sponsorship of being a teen boy means that when teen boys' experiences aren't directly being met or addressed, they become disengaged. I offer this as a possibility because I have no way of knowing whether or not this is true. However, as is evident in Isaac's experience, the connections he is able to make to his life experiences

determine his engagement in church-related activities. When Isaac talked about his church involvement, he framed it in terms of being boring, focusing specifically on his experience of "sitting and listening to the sermon." "Sometimes it's like I can't relate so I start daydreaming" he reflected. Isaac contrasted this with his experience of going on a recent youth group trip. "But when we went to Detroit, they used really personal examples and it was really easy to relate. Detroit was fun. It was so much easier to relate to what happens." The service project that Isaac went on with his youth group to a larger urban city was something that really connected with him. He contrasts it with the experience of sitting and listening to a sermon. When teen boys' experiences, as teen boys, are foregrounded in how churches appeal to and try to "keep" teen boys coming to activities and events, it doesn't seem surprising that when these experiences aren't being drawn on, some teen boys become disengaged.

**Religious Teen Boys: Focusing On the Future vs. Focusing On the Present**

The third way that different churches seemed to sponsor particular ways of being religious teen boys was in the ways teen boys were encouraged to think about the present or the future. A religious teen boy for some of the churches seemed to be a teen boy who focused on future goals and rewards. For other churches, religious teen boys seemed to be encouraged to focus on their immediate experiences.

**Boys and future reward.**

Research on the kinds of activities that male youth enjoy doing have emphasized the immediate enjoyment and satisfaction of these activities (Smith and Wilhelm, 2002). This was not the case for all the boys in my study. In fact, a number of them emphasized their view of the future in how and why of their church involvements. Jamal, for example, reflected,

> I used to hate going to church, when I started hating going to church I was like 13, 14 and as I started getting' older I was like man, why am I not going to church because you see the devil doing his work cause I used to be getting in trouble a lot cause I was like I don't want to be doing that anymore I want to change my ways. I used to have an attitude with everybody, so I'm doing pretty good now.

In the ways that some of the teen boys talked about their churches, it seemed that the motivation for involvement and participation was for future reward. Whether or not this was explicitly addressed or connected, many of the boys seemed clear on the purpose of going to church, of reading the Bible and of following Christian principles in their lives. The teen boys talked about how they studied "how to live better lives" in their youth groups.

Many of the claims about boys and literacy highlight that they participate in literate activities for immediate and pragmatic purposes. This didn't seem to be the case for all the teen boys in my study. They seemed very aware of and motivated by the possibility of future reward. This tended to be expressed in two ways. For one, the future reward was framed in terms of life after death. Jamal talked about "not wanting to die in hell." Jamal explained that he read the Bible because of his desire "to get in heaven." Being a religious teen boy in these cases meant that you had an eye on the future, on what might happen to you after death.

Another way the teen boys expressed a view of the future was in talking about how they saw their church involvement affect their future lives. In the cases of Jamal and Jeremiah, their expressed future identities (the artifacts they brought in to the first interview) had to do with their future identities as Christians. Jeremiah didn't know what to bring for his future artifact in his interview with me. He said that he wanted to live up to his Biblical namesake, to live "as a man for God." Jamal talked about wanting to be a pastor and wanting to be able to provide for his

family. He focused his talk about his future around his Christian beliefs and commitments. In talking about his imagined future, Jamal mentioned that his older brother didn't like going to church but that he had started going again because there was a young woman at the church that he was interested in. In telling me this, Jamal chided his older brother for doing this. This illustrates for me the seriousness with which Jamal experiences his church involvements. The four nights a week that he was involved with church-related activities were significant time and energy investments. Though he lived a 25-minute drive away from his church, the time investment involved in his frequent participation at church wasn't something he mentioned. While some of the other teen boys in my study talked about how they often missed church-related events when they were too busy with sports or when their friends weren't going, Jamal seemed to choose activities and settings that fit with his church involvement. I share this to push on the notions that teen boys choose literate activities for immediate purposes. Jamal's church involvements and the reading and writing that surrounded them were not just for his day-to-day enjoyment.

**Boys and immediacy.**

Other churches seemed to place emphasis on teen boys' immediate experiences. While I don't mean to suggest that a future reward or goals for living in the future weren't addressed in these churches, the kinds of activities and involvements that they encouraged their male youth to participate in reflected more of a view of teen boys as living in the moment. There are some obvious overlaps here with the preceding categories. When teen boys are seen as being separate and different than other groups of people in church, their immediate experiences are by nature foregrounded. When their experiences are used as the lens with which to look at Scripture and about how to live, the immediacy of their experiences is emphasized.

While I have to be careful about implications I make from this, I did note a markedly different way that some of the teen boys talked about their church involvements compared to teen boys like Jamal and Alberto, Jeremiah and Jayson. For Alan and some of the other teen boys, church involvement seemed much more of something that they tried to fit in when their busy schedules allowed it. During his interview, Adam talked about some of the things his family did together. “We try to go [to church] regularly” he said, “but our lives are so hectic.” He added, “And I try to pray every night but usually I forget because I’m like texting or showering. When I pray I start sleeping.” When Alan talked about attending his church’s youth group, he confided that he didn’t like going when it was nice outside. “I’d rather be outside playing sports with friends” he said. During the summers, weekends at his family cottage took the place of going to the Sunday service. Both Alan and Adam seemed more conscious of the time involved with their church activities and seemed more aware of competing interests/involvements. Of his sports involvement, for example, Adam said it often left him too tired or busy to go to youth group on Wednesday nights.

**Religious Teen Boys: Resistance**

I conclude my findings section with this section on teen boys’ resistance to church sponsorship situations. This is an important part of teen boys’ religious experiences. While not all teen boys may resist, confront or push against their church involvements, some do. Their experiences need to be addressed as well, particularly because this resistance is often misunderstood and misread. Interestingly enough, some churches position themselves as “contemporary” and “authentic” churches and use a rhetoric of resistance to attract people (In the town in which this study took place there are about half a dozen churches like this). Yet, there is often little space in churches for resistance to the ways of being that are sponsored.

Chris, a self-proclaimed “outcast of the outcasts”, attended a religious parochial school, and attended church and youth group every Sunday. He, however, talked about not fitting into any of these places. My first read of the situation was that Chris resisted the beliefs that his church and religious school espoused. He claimed, after all, that he was an atheist and described himself as “more free thinking” than the other kids at his church and Christian school. Chris explained that his parents made him go to church every Sunday and to youth group on Sunday nights. Of his youth group experiences, Chris mentioned frequently arguing with the youth leader about political issues and about the “truth” as represented by the Bible. In some ways then Chris resists particular readings or approaches to the Bible, questioning the very authority that the Bible holds in his church and his life.

But, this doesn’t seem to be the entire picture. It seems that Chris might also be resisting who he was expected to be at church. One of the first things Chris said to me in my first interview with him was that he and his friends were “the outcasts of the outcasts.” The more he talked about his youth group, the more it seemed that the conflict and resistance was located in his expression of himself, in who Chris was trying to be. Chris talked mostly about his conflicts with the youth group leader. “I don’t like him and he doesn’t like me” he said. “He’s a Neo-Nazi Republican” he said. Chris talked about asking lots of questions in his youth group meetings. For example, he wondered aloud to me about the possibilities of miracles in today’s society. He also told me about all the discussions “about things like abortion and capital punishment” that he had “for hours” with his friends, his fellow “outcasts of the outcasts” at a local coffee shop. Such discussions are indeed within the realm of youth group discussions, or at least of some youth group discussions. In Chris’s case, such discussions did not take place in this youth group.

Embedded in various notions of teen boys are ideas about what teen boys should care about, question and resist. Chris' situation suggests that he pushes against these sponsored notions. He was the only one in his youth group who looked the way he did (long boarder look); he was the only one who smoked; he was the only one who had been suspended in school. His experiences with church highlights how there are sanctioned ways of being a religious teen boy and indirectly because of this, of responding to or even questioning the Bible or devotional texts in particular ways.

## Discussion

In this chapter, I have examined some of the different ways that being a religious teen boy get sponsored by churches from the point of view of the teen boys' involvements in their churches. This has implications, I argue on what and how and when and why boys read, write and view the church-related texts that they do. Their motivations to participate in these particular literacy practices, I argue, are based in part on the ways of being a teen boy that are sponsored in their church situations. In the subsections that follow, I discuss my various findings.

The first thing I wish to address is how teen boys' church involvements represent literacy sponsorship situations. Though my data has illustrated how particular people act on behalf of church as an institution, I propose, as in the other chapters, that literacy sponsorship be considered as bigger than individual relationships. Teen boys' church sponsorship relationships are greater than relationships with particular people. In fact, I want to argue that church sponsorship is even larger than churches themselves as institutions. Churches are characterized by the larger culture in particular ways. For example, that churches respond to the assumptions, from larger culture, that teen boys don't like to go to church or that they find church "boring" in their attempts to appeal to teen boys, indicates to me that church sponsorship is more than

individual relationships with people and institutions. Thus, I argue that teen boys experience church sponsorship situations.

Teen boys' church experiences are important to them. While not all the teen boys in my study talked about church, a significant number of them (over half) did. Their involvements in church in terms of time alone demonstrate the importance of church and their religious beliefs in their lives. And yet, the religious identities of teen boys in adolescent literacy research have not largely been addressed. Within the research on boys and literacy, teen boys' church involvements, as discussed earlier in the chapter, are often overlooked or undertheorized. In the research on adolescent literacy and identity, teens' membership in religious groups is often not adequately addressed.

A significant part of this chapter has been to highlight the ways in which the teen boys' religious literacy practices were embedded in larger church experiences. When the teen boys talked about their church involvements, for the most part, they didn't draw attention to their religious literacy practices. Many of these literacy practices were so embedded in the fabric of their daily lives that they didn't see it as "reading" and "writing."

**Bridging the Gap**

Adolescent literacy researchers who have studied church literacy practices often concluded that schools need to bridge the gap between what youth experience in church and what they experience in school. I think the discussion needs to be reframed. While the bridging metaphor between church and school literacies is helpful, it is also limiting as it implies "a" bridge between church and school. Religious traditions, denominations and even churches within denominations vary significantly from each other. Though the teen boys in my study all attended Protestant Christian churches, these churches represented very different experiences for these

teen boys. These differing experiences, I argued in this chapter, have implications for teen boys' religious literacy practices. In addition, what happens when church literacy experiences aren't "rich" and "empowering"? Are they always positive? Do they always represent experiences that should be brought into schools?

**Constructions of Religious Teen Boys**

While I have reframed from evaluating the differing ways of being teen boys, I think it important to discuss some of the implications of these constructions of teen boys. As I have mentioned throughout this study, stereotypes of teen boys abound. Sadly, I think some of the churches seemed to perpetuate some of these stereotypes of teen boys. Particularly, I think the view of teen boys as being "separate and different" sells teen boys short. Hearing Jamal and Alfredo's experiences in church, point out that all teen boys don't "need" a skatepark or separate music or activities in order to go to church and to enjoy going there. While I don't mean to discount Alan's churches efforts to appeal to teen boys, I do want to push against particular notions of what it takes to attract teen boys to come to church. These narrow constructions of teen boys have implications on teen boys' religious literacy practices. I think teen boys can handle more than just "gross and gory facts" of the Bible. They can do way more than doodle and write "immediate reactions." They are capable of much more.

These thoughts raise the following questions for me: Is there a "sanctioned" place or space to critique church literacy practices and the ways in which teen boys are being sponsored?

**Complicating "Choice"**

Church literacy sponsorship complicates the notion of teen boys' choice in reading and writing. Did Jamal "choose" to read the Bible? Or, because of how Bible reading is constructed in terms of future reward, it is more of something he has to do? I pose these questions out of my

own experiences with Bible reading. As a teen, and even now, I'm not sure that I would always characterize it as representing literacy practices that I do "for fun" or even something that I always enjoy doing.

# CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Below, I summarize the preceding chapters of this dissertation and then situate my findings about the sponsorship of adolescent boys' literacy practices in light of prior research. I then consider the theoretical, methodological, and practical limitations and implications of this study.

In chapter 1, I provided an introduction to my study and reviewed research on adolescent boys' literacy practices as well as research on literacy sponsorship. I then discussed my theoretical framework and outlined the specific research questions for my study. In chapter 2, I described the research design of my in-depth ethnographic focused interview study with 21 teen boys. I outlined my methodological assumptions and decisions, including selection of sites/participants, generation of data sources, and means of analysis. In chapter 3, I focused on teen boys' differing family sponsorship situations and examined the ways in which particular ways of being teen sons were directly sponsored and literacy practices indirectly sponsored. Next, I addressed teen boys' sports sponsorship situations in chapter 4. I discussed how teen boys' sports-related literacy practices were indirectly sponsored and that ways of being sports-loving teen boys were being directly sponsored. In chapter 5, I focused on teen boys' differing church sponsorship situations and explored the ways in which churches sponsored different ways of being religious teen boys and through this different religious literacy practices.

## Discussion

In the sections below, I situate these findings in light of prior research on adolescent boys' literacy practices, adolescent identity and literacy research, and literacy sponsorship research.

**Adolescent Boys' Gendered Literacy Practices**

I begin with a discussion of what my study suggests about teen boys' literacy practices by reviewing patterns within my data chapters and then patters across the chapters.

My different data chapters highlight the particular literacy practices that can be associated with teen boys. In Chapter 3, I outlined how teen boys' different literacy practices often reflected their membership in particular social classes. I explored the ways in which middle class teen boys experienced literacy in aesthetic ways and in ways that seem to emphasize their future orientations and their views of institutions. I discussed how, for many middle class teen boys, the literacy practices in which they are encouraged to participate are often reflective of or constituted by school literacy practices. The literacy practices that Kyle experiences with his family, reading and discussing fiction together, provides an example of this. The literacy practices of working class teen boys, on the other hand, are often not reflective of or constituted by school literacy practices. Often focused on the enjoyment of immediate experience or on the talk surrounding work with texts, working class teen boys' literacy practices reflected the ways they were encouraged to view themselves as working class teen boys. The business related non-fiction reading that Tommy does and the literacy practices that surround Freddy's interests in comedy skits illustrate some of this.

While not a specific focus in any of my data chapters, another way that teen boys' literacy practices can be described is as reflective of memberships in particular racial or ethnic groups. I think here specifically of Jamal's (African American) literacy practices surrounding his basketball interests and involvements and of Alfredo's (Latino) literacy practices surrounding his soccer interests and involvements.

Yet another way that some of teen boys' literacy practices can be described is as being associated with particular youth practices. These literacy practices are particular to youth cultures and to the ways in which youth interact with texts. In Chapter 4, I discussed how, for many teen boys, their work with sports-related texts involved digital media. Many of these literacy practices are characterized by changing technology, by mediums and modes that made me, as a 30-something, feel so much like an outsider.

Finally, as I discuss in Chapter 5, some of the teen boys' literacy practices in this study were also religious literacy practices and particularly Protestant religious literacy practices. Some of these literacy practices were literacy practices that were shared by other members of teen boys' churches and not necessarily just the ones unique to teen boys and their experiences. I think here of the ways in which Jamal and his parents interacted with religious texts, viewing the Bible, for example, in ways that reflect its authority in their lives.

In addition to these different kinds of literacy practices, teen boys' literacy practices are also gendered in nature. Across the different sponsorship situations in my study, some of the teen boys' literacy practices were masculine and reflected gendered attitudes toward and ideologies of literacy. By gendered, I mean more than choosing "boy books" or preferring particular genres of fiction over others. Though these choices are part of the picture I am trying to paint, my notion of gendered literacy sponsorship goes beyond these individual choices. I argue that teen boys experience masculine literacy practices. In making this argument, I respond directly to the literature in my field that has made associations between masculinity and particular literacy practices. In using the term masculine literacy practices, I refer to how studies such as Smith and Wilhelm (2002), Blair and Sanford (2004), Brozo (2002), Newkirk (2003) use this term. In these studies, researchers assert that there are identifiable masculine literacy practices, practices that

focus on particular forms of humor (bodily humor, gross and gory humor), on immediacy, on particular content (i.e. violence, action and adventure, fantasy).

It is these connections that are made between literacy practices and masculinity that I want my findings to address and complicate. First, I want to point out that some of these masculine literacy practices are limited and limiting. Though I could refer to existing research in the field of gender and literacy to support this claim, I turn to my findings themselves, from what the teen boys in my study said to me about what they understood to be the masculine norms. On several occasions, the teen boys in my study shared with me their reactions and, in some cases, struggles, with what they understood to be particular notions of being teen boys, things they were keeping from family and friends. Adam and Jordan, for example, talk about how their friends suggest to them that it's not ok to play tennis. While they choose to play tennis, I argue, in Chapter 4, that these choices seem to have implications on some of the other things they do.

The teen boys in my study demonstrated multiple versions of masculine literacy practices, versions that represented different masculinities and different ways of being teen boys. This has largely to do with the fact that these different ways of being teen boys represents differing identities. Considering the relationships between masculinity and literacy practices then needs to consider the complicated ways in which teen boys identify themselves. In talking about multiple masculine literacy practices, I do not mean to suggest that all teen boys engage in these masculine literacy practices. It is worth repeating that some of the teen boys' literacy practices do not seem to be gendered. As mentioned in the paragraphs above, there are a number of ways that I described teen boys' literacy practices. In addition, I do not mean to suggest that the opposite of these masculine literacy practices is feminine literacy practices. There is an

asymmetry among the terms like masculine, feminine, and queer. Though this isn't an area that I have addressed in my study, it is something that I want to acknowledge.

Along with problematizing the notion of masculine literacy practices, I want to push on the ways in which adolescent literacy researchers encourage teen boys' out of school literacy practices to be brought into the literacy classroom. I refer to this as a "stepping stone" approach, an approach that encourages literacy educators to make room in the existing literacy curriculum for teen boys' out of school literacy practices. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) assert, "We are saying that if we understand why they like what they like, we can work to create the conditions that will make students more inclined to engage in learning what they need to know" (p. 53). And yet, is this really what should happen? It is this seemingly uncritical promotion of all of teen boys' literacy practices that I wish to problematize. In this, the point of this study is not to promote a certain kind of masculinity; rather, I want my study to speak to how promoting certain literacy practices entails promoting certain masculinities. It is this that must be examined.

Problematizing this stepping stone approach provides opportunities to challenge a "one size fits all" view of teen boys and of their literacy practices. The stepping stone approach often fails to see the complicated ways in which teen boys' literacy practices are connected to certain classes and ethnicities. In this, a problematizion of the stepping stone approach can provide an opportunity for critical literacy approaches within literacy education. Examining masculine literacy practices becomes a topic for inquiry, an opportunity for conversations about how not all masculine literacy practices are treated equally, about how masculine literacy practices get contrasted with feminine literacy practices, about how some masculine literacy practices promote unhealthy view of both men and women, teen boys and teen girls. When gendered literacy practices get articulated with others, there is opportunity for discussions about inequalities. For

example, though Alfredo participated in literacy practices surrounding soccer, a stereotypical masculine domain, these practices weren't valued in the same way as, say, David's literacy practices around college football. Though Tommy's literacy practices surrounding the fixing up of small appliances and machines were masculine in nature, they didn't map onto school literacy practices like some other boys' did. Are these then "less" masculine? "More" masculine? In addition, should all masculine literacy practices in which teen boys engage have a place in the classroom? Is Alan's participation in wakeboarding literacy practices that focus on the risk and danger and the sexualization of women appropriate?

**Analytic for Studying Literacy and Identity: Direct and Indirect Sponsorship**

I have situated my study of the sponsorship of adolescent boys' literacy practices as extending existing adolescent literacy research that examines the relationships between literacy and identity. Moje and Luke (2009) point out in their recent literature review of such research that there are many ways in which notions of identity and literacy get brought into relationship. In this study, I go beyond these conceptualizations of identity and literacy and examine how to study the relationships between identity and literacy. In how I extended the concept of literacy sponsorship by asking what else is being sponsored in various situations, I posed the following questions: When is literacy being directly sponsored? When is literacy being indirectly sponsored? When is identity being directly sponsored? When is identity being indirectly sponsored? In offering these questions to other adolescent literacy researchers, I offer an analytic with which to study the relationships between literacy and identity.

Artifacts were very useful in this kind of endeavor. In this study, I used them to reveal that there is more than just direct literacy sponsorship at play in the various sponsorship situations I studied. My methodological choice of starting my interviews with what mattered to

my participants allowed me to get at identity and at literacy. Originally in response to the methodological limitations of research on teen boys' literacy practices, I designed my study in ways that tried to get teen boys to talk about literacy in and through what matters to them. Having teen boys bring in artifacts that represented their present, past and future selves, allowed me to explore the ways in which literacy and identity were indirectly and directly being sponsored in teen boys' literacy practices.

My use of artifacts in my first set of interviews allowed me to hear the teen boys' sense making about what mattered to them. Hearing this talk allowed me to hear about acts of reading and writing that were embedded into the boys everyday lives, so embedded, I suggest, that it is possible they might not have been mentioned them had I asked them to keep a literacy log or respond to a particular profile. In analyzing these literacy practices, I noticed that the meaning the teen boys gave to these literacy practices emphasized particular identities that the teen boys were either trying to assume or being encouraged to assume.

**Continuing Research on Literacy and Identity**

In offering an analytic for studying the relationships between identity and literacy, this study offers a way to study those relationships more precisely. In their literature review of existing literacy and identity research, Moje and Luke (2009) write "If scholars hope to take identity-and-literacy studies seriously, then we must clarify what it means to write about and study people's identities in relation to their literate practices" (p. 434). My study offers a way to further theorize the relationship between literacy practices and adolescents' identities.

In some ways then my study is a refinement of some of the existing research on adolescent literacy and identity. Finders (1997) and Bettie (2003)'s work with adolescent girls and the complicated ways in which identity and literacy are intertwined in their lives provides

some overlap with this study. Pursing the questions I offer in this study would further their lines of inquiry by discussing those relationships more precisely. What might the sponsorship situations consist of in these particular studies? How might gendered literacy sponsorship play out in the lives of their participants?

Another line of inquiry could explore other ways of being related to other aspects of identities. These could include race and class. I think specifically here of Seibel-Trainor's (2008) work in studying the ways in which Whiteness are constructed in and through adolescents. In Whiteness studies, for example, one could consider the following questions. What notions of being a White adolescent are being directly sponsored? How might these influence literacy practices?

**Extending the Literacy Sponsorship: Literacy Sponsorship Situations**

In considering the elements of literacy that constitute teen boys' literacy practices, I have, in this study, examined what else is being sponsored. In many ways, my use of literacy sponsorship in this study complicates existing uses of sponsorship and pushes on some of the ways in which it has been used. I have argued that particular ways of being a teen boy are sponsored in their various sponsorship situations. I have suggested the idea of literacy sponsorship situations, of literacy sponsorship as involving more than just particular people and institutions. The word "situation" is defined as a configuration or combination of things (OED). The various sponsorship situations I have described represent situations that extend beyond individual relationships. Sponsorship situations, in how I use it, represent multiple sponsors, human and nonhuman, who sponsor in a variety of ways. It is difficult in sponsorship situations to pinpoint what and how and where the sponsorship occurs. I argue that sponsorship situations involve many forces working together, at times with and at times against each other.

Another way that my study offers a perspective of literacy sponsorship is in its emphasis on the role of negotiation within sponsoring relationships. Teen boys often pushed back or negotiate sponsored ways of being boys. As I discussed in Chapter 4, the teen boys in my study "got" the concept of sponsorship. In talking with them about their goals of being sponsored as well as in the complementary ways they talked about other teen boys who were sponsored, I realized that they have a solid understanding of sponsorship and are able to manipulate sponsorship situations to advance their own interests. The teen boys in my study realized that there is a "give and take" of sorts. This perspective enables me to challenge some of the current constructions of teen boys and of their literacy practices. Various stereotypes or characterizations of teen boys often suggest that if boys are going to be "literate", at least in the ways school sponsors literacy, they need to be acted on by teachers and parents. My study argues that boys negotiate with their literacy sponsors.

And yet, my study also points out that this negotiation has limits. Boys are prepared and positioned differently by the various literacy sponsors in their lives. How they are able to negotiate with the various sponsors in their lives depends, in part, on the resources that they have available to them. What they give and take though depends on the context, on the resources of the sponsoring relationship (on the part of the boys and the sponsor). Resources play a part in this. Asher, for example, needed to have access to LEGOs, a camera, a computer and internet in order to develop his interests in making LEGO creations. It would have been harder for Keith to do this given his constraints with internet. How boys use literacy to shape their identities is another. David was very resourceful as was Chris but had access to very different resources. Boys' give and take looks different. At times they recast literacy practices into new ones.

Given this use of literacy sponsorship, I am unable to make claims about the intentions of various sponsors. The focus of my study was on what my participants said about their literacy practices. I am unable to speak to the ways in which boys' literacy practices within their sponsorship situations influenced their various identities and/or how these identities changed or developed over time.

It is important to note that this study does not account for all the sponsoring in a given literacy sponsorship situation. My data does not speak to the experiences and intentions of other people, institutions and commercial forces involved in sponsorship situations. My use of situation though views literacy sponsorship as being greater than any one particular relationship. It represents a confluence of many factors.

Furthermore, because this study took place over a limited time frame, it offers little evidence of what the expressed or intended ways of being boys were from the sponsors. I had no way of knowing if, in fact, what I inferred about the ways of being boys from the boys' literacy practices, was, in fact, what the sponsored intended.

## Implications

In this section, I now consider implications of my study for future adolescent literacy research. I begin by exploring possible future inquiry within each of my data chapters and then of my study as a whole.

### Family Literacy Sponsorship Situations

Within the family sponsorship chapter, I explored some of the different ways that families sponsored teen sons. Using Lareau's (2003) findings, I looked at some of these differences from the perspective of social class. However, within social classes, there are different family cultures. How might sponsorship situations look within these different family

cultures? How might the intersections of race and class influence sponsorship situations? How might particular sponsorship situations be affected by particular family dynamics? In terms of family literacy practice research, there has been a lot of attention to direct literacy sponsorship on the part of parents and/or caregivers. What about the direct sponsorship of identity from parents and/or caregivers? What about indirect literacy sponsorship? What about indirect identity sponsorship?

**Sports Literacy Sponsorship Situations**

I examined teen boys' various involvements in sports and the ways in which they were directly being sponsored as sports-loving teen boys. How might other sports involvements sponsor different ways of being sports-loving teen boys? What might sports sponsorship situations look like in other places and time? How might teen boys experience sports sponsorship differently because of their ages? What might sports sponsorship situations look like for teen girls?

**Church Literacy Sponsorship Situations**

In this chapter, I examined some of the different ways in which teen boys' church sponsorship situations sponsored different ways of being religious teen boys. How might other faith traditions – beyond Protestant Christianity – sponsor ways of being teen boys? How might race and class be studied and compared in church sponsorship situations? While I have described that the teen boys' churches often represent different ethnicities and races, how might these influence the sponsorship of literacy and identity? How might teen boys' expressed beliefs or commitments influence sponsorship situations? How might race and class be studied in church sponsorship situations?

**Literacy Sponsorship in Other Situations**

This dissertation does not present all of the data collected for this study. The teen boys talked about other interests that could be framed as sponsorship situations. These could include teen boys' uses of technology, video games, and music. Further analysis of data from my study could contribute to the existing adolescent literacy research on boys' video gaming (c.f. Gee, Sanford and Madrill). In addition, future study could include particular locations that represent teen boys' identities. I think, for example, of the ways in which Chris' favorite coffee shop, the one that he went to every day after school, represented a sponsorship situation for him.

Future research could also examine the ways of being a teen boy that are directly sponsored within school literacy sponsorship situations. While I have examined this in family, sports and church, future work could examine this in school context. This would continue Finders (1998/1999)'s work. In this study, she examines how pre-service teachers' constructions of adolescence influenced the ways they thought about their pedagogical practices. Referring to these constructions as "discursive filters", Finders argues that these filters shaped the ways these teachers approached their students. Though she doesn't use the language of sponsorship, in essence, Finders' study points to the ways in which literacy practices are sponsored within larger contexts of ways of being.

Though my study cannot speak to the issues of inequality across teen boys' sponsorship situations in the same ways that Brandt (2003) does, this is an area for further study. Using a literacy sponsor's framework allows opportunity to think about other issues of inequality. For example, what about issues of resources and access that get translated to schools? In her description of youth cultures, Moje (2008) argues that youth cultures are "heavily dependent on access to material and human resources" (p. 212). She argues that the ways in which youth

cultures are positioned in related to mainstream society often determines that “the social and economic resources and networks that youth have at their disposal” (p. 212). An example that she gives to illustrate this and that rings true for my participants as well is in terms of access to digital technologies. While all the boys in my study had access to computers, this access wasn’t on the same levels. Keith had to use the library’s computer. Other boys had their own laptops. This is an area of particular concern to me when we consider how school literacy achievement is often touted as the way to live a successful life. It is this area that highlights the “some boy crisis”, the fact that all teen boys’ literacy practices aren’t valued in the same ways by different groups in society.

# APPENDIX

## Appendix A: Interview protocol – Phase 1 interviews

In this appendix I describe the instructions I gave to my participants prior to the first interview as well as the interview prompts and questions I used during the interview.

I conclude with a description of how this first interview phase fits with my research questions and study design.

### Instructions Prior To Interview

I'd like you to bring with you to our interview 1-3 things – items – that you think represent the person you were in the past, the person you are now, and the person you expect or hope to be in the future. You can bring one item to represent all three "selves," two items to represent two life phases (if, for example, you can think of one item that represents both your past and present, and one that represents your future), or three different items. When I meet with you for the interview, I'll ask you about the things you brought.(Lindquist and Hallbritter, 2008)

### Interview prompts

Questions about the artifacts (the objects representing their present, past and future selves).

- Why did you choose the artifact representing your present? Why, of all the things you COULD have chosen to bring with you, did you choose to bring this? Is this the thing you think best represents the person you are, the person you'd like to be, the way you spend most of your time, or some other reason?
- Give me an example of a situating in which we'd be most likely to see you with this artifact.
- Tell me about how this artifact fits into your everyday life
- Give an example of a situation when you would not have this artifact with you.

- Is it possible that somebody could see you with this artifact and get the wrong idea about how you are? What might they conclude that would be wrong?
- Were there other artifacts you almost decided to bring but didn't? What were they?
- Do you think your parents would predict that you would bring that artifact with you today to represent your present self? What would you think they would bring to represent who you are?
    - What about your teachers?
    - What about your friends?
- Tell us about something that happened in your past in relation to that artifact – something you remember, a specific event.
- Why did you choose the (artifact representing your future)? Does it have to do with your plans, your hopes, or expectations? Is this an immediate future, or a distant future?
- When you imagine your future in relation to that artifact, give me a scenario with you in it about what you imagine yourself to be doing in the future. What do you see yourself as doing? Where will you be? Who will you be with?
- When you look at the three things you have with you, how complete a story do you think they tell about who you were in the past, who you are now, and who you expect or hope to become?

**Prompts for getting information about participants' backgrounds/family histories.**

Unlike Brandt (2003) and Lindquist and Hallbritter (2008), I did not use specific prompts about my participants' family backgrounds and history. Rather, I used general prompts to

informally elicit family background information (such as parents' educational histories, parents' occupations, siblings, school experiences and so on), prompts that I tried to embed in the talk around the participant's chosen artifacts. Below is a list of these prompts:

- Tell me about your family – your parents, your siblings, where you grew up?
- How would you describe where you grew up? Where you live?
- Have you always lived in this town?
- How would you describe yourself to others?
- What kinds of school experiences have you had?
- What sorts of things do your parents do?

As these instructions and prompts indicate, I used artifacts in my interviews in different ways than Lindquist and Hallbritter (2008). For the purposes of my study, I used the artifacts as ways of revealing the contexts of teen boys' literacy practices. Thus, my goal was not to focus on the artifacts themselves or on the specific literacy practices that they indexed. Rather, I used the artifacts and the teen boys' talk about them as ways to help me think and talk about teen boys' literacy practices. I didn't use the artifacts as a direct line into teen boys' most interesting or dominant literacy practices. In addition, given that I had no way of telling how much thought teen boys put into choosing the artifacts they did, I did not base my interpretation of their literacy practices solely on the things surrounding what they choose, as telling as they were.

**Appendix B: Interview Protocol – Phase 2 Interviews**

In this appendix I describe the instructions I gave to my participants prior to the second interview as well as the interview prompts and questions I used during the interview. I conclude

with a description of how this second interview phase fits with my research questions and study design.

**Instructions Prior To Interview**

I'd like you to bring with you to our interview some of the things you talked about in our first interview. If you are unable to bring in these, please bring in other examples of those kinds of things. I will have my computer with me so you will have internet access during our interview. When I meet with you for the interview, I'll ask you the things you brought.

**Interview Prompts**

As with my first interview, I used semi-structured questions in this second interview in an effort to get my participants to tell stories and situations about their specific and general use of the texts they brought with them to the interview. In designing these semi-structured questions, I modified prompts taken from Moje's and Tysvaer's (E. B. Moje, 2006) interview protocol, used for assessing "literacy processes" and "literacy practices".

**Prompts about the texts.**

- Tell me about…
- Show me what you read
- Talk me through how you use this
- Where, when, what do you do after you read/write this?

**Prompts to get at literacy practices surrounding the texts.**

- Can you describe a time when…
- Can you give me an example of…
- When would you say…? To whom?

- How would you respond if…?
- Tell me what you would do during a typical?
- Who would you do it with? Talk with? For what purpose?
- Tell me about the different places involved in _____ activity
- Whom do you associate with/hang out with the most? Why?

The design of this interview protocol is consistent with the purpose of my study and my research questions. This is a study of the sponsorship of teen boys' literacy practices. As such, asking my participants about the ways in which they use various texts is appropriate. I designed my second phase of interviews to be an opportunity for my participants to elaborate on the artifacts and experiences they mentioned in their first interviews and specifically on the texts (print, visual, digital) that were directly mentioned in the first interview or related to the artifacts and experiences discussed. In asking my participants to bring in texts, I didn't use the word "texts" but rather referred to specific things that the participants mentioned in their first interview.

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