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GENDERED LITERACY THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA:

A STUDY OF THE KIDLITOSPHERE BLOGS

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Gendered Literacy through Social Media:

A Study of the Kidlitosphere Blogs

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This dissertation observes and theorizes gendered literacy, a term that has so far been poorly defined. Gendered literacy (in the United States and other Western contexts), has been discussed as enacted by children and educators; as a quantifiable test-based outcome; as a result of biological, cognitive differences between females and males; and, as the result of the historically feminized U.S. educational system.

Data were sampled from 23 blogs in the KidLitosphere, a website aggregating over 550 blogs relating to children's literature. These data, along with data collected from interviews, were qualitatively analyzed using the constant comparative method. Research questions included:

- RQ1: What are the conceptions of gendered literacy among literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers); creators of texts for children (published authors, editors, and published illustrators); and, children/young adults, as represented in their blogging activities?
- RQ2: How do the conceptions of gendered literacy identified through the blogging activities of literacy educators, creators of texts for children, and

children/young adults compare to the theoretical conceptions identified in the literature review?

- RQ3: What similarities and differences, if any, are represented in conceptions of gendered literacy among literacy educators; creators of texts for children; and, children/young adults, as represented in their blogging activities?
- RQ4: What patterns, if any, of resistance to the dominant conceptions of gendered literacy may be found among the blog posts analyzed?

Prominent findings relate to educators' perceptions of boys' reading preferences and labeling of "boy" and "girl" books. Other findings relate to gendered literacy behaviors (other than reading preferences) and perceptions of these behaviors, including roughly equal numbers of examples describing boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading level, as compared to those describing girls'. Implications for future practice include educators' refraining from labeling of books according to boy/girl; encouraging positive perceptions of boys' reading; motivating children to read in a resistant way – to read texts that would not be considered appropriate for their sex; encouraging producers of reading materials for youth to produce more gender-neutral materials; and, fostering children's reading and literacy in ways that do not focus on gender.

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Other institutions have also nurtured this project. I am grateful to several public libraries in New Jersey: South Brunswick Public Library, Lawrence Headquarters Branch of the Mercer County Library System, and Princeton Public Library, where I gained valuable practical experience working in both reference and youth services throughout my years of graduate study. We were housed at Princeton Seminary during most of the 2000s and again in fall-winter 2012-2013, and we lived at Taiwan Seminary in Taipei for nearly five years. Having conversation partners in different universities, libraries, and countries has been a great aid.

I explored concepts of this dissertation in poster presentations at both the 2012 Association for Information Science and Technology conference (although I had to present virtually due to Hurricane Sandy) and the 2014 Association for Library and Information Science Education conference. A visit to the 2012 Kidlitosphere Conference helped me to experience in person a community I had first experienced only virtually. I am grateful to those I interviewed involved in this group, and also to the broader virtual community on which I have relied.

In this more than decade of study, I have given birth to three children, moved five times, and become conversational in Mandarin. At the end of this dissertation, I feel (and am) much older, and yet also know that this is only the beginning of my journey as a scholar. I am grateful to family members for reading over parts of this dissertation, and for helping with the care of our children at various crucial points along the way. I am also grateful to my family for believing in me and offering encouragement along the way. I am also grateful to Li Qiong Ling for helping to care for our children, from the time our twins were 4 months old, and for helping us to bridge cultures. I am grateful to my husband for reading over drafts, for his camaraderie and patience,

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Problem Statement

Literacy, defined in this dissertation as the reading and creation of texts both within school and outside of school, is a gendered phenomenon. In the United States and other Western countries and cultures, literacy, especially within the context of school and tests of verbal achievement, is conceived as easier and more enjoyable for girls and more problematic for boys. Moreover, although the term “gendered literacy” has begun to appear in scholarly literature (i.e. Almjeld, 2008; Barrs, 2000; Orellana, 1995; Sanford, 2005/2006), “gendered literacy” has been associated with multiple, disparate meanings, and a unified conceptual model has not yet been introduced. For instance, “gendered literacy” is presented by Orellana (1995) as a concept relating to gendered texts produced by children in the classroom. Sanford (2005/2006), like Orellana, presents students’ production of gendered texts as a function of “gendered literacy” but also presents “gendered literacy” in relation to teachers’ perceptions of gendered trends in terms of the middle school students’ enjoyment of reading (girls enjoyed reading, but boys did not), and attitudes toward school and the reading of textbooks (girls had more positive attitudes toward school than boys and enjoyed reading textbooks more than boys).

The conception that literacy is easier for girls than for boys is lived out in terms of quantitative measures of literacy achievement. For example, for the reading assessment that is part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, informally known as the “Nation’s Report Card” for the United States, an achievement gap in reading between girls and boys has been consistent and measured over time since 1971. Among the “more than 50,000 public and private school students” ages 9, 13, and 17 who took the test in

2012, “female students scored higher in reading than male students at all three ages” (National Center for Education Statistics, “Racial/ethnic and gender gaps narrow,” para. 2, 2013). And in 2013, among students in grade 12, “female students scored 10 points higher than males ... with no change from either 1992 or 2009” (Easton, 2014, “Reading,” para. 2).

Reactions to achievement gaps on verbal tests such as The Nation’s Report Card are often extreme and panicked. Responding to the 2011 results of the writing portion of the Nation’s Report Card, a blog entry on CNN online, states: “When it comes to writing, girls are better than boys. That’s a generalization, but it’s one that is supported by the latest writing test...from the Nation’s Report Card” (Krache, 2012, para.1-2). The writing test, administered in 2011 to “national samples of 24,100 8th graders and 28,100 12th graders” (National Assessment Governing Board, 2011, p. 1) showed a significant gap in performance between girls and boys, for both eighth graders (19 points) and twelfth graders (14 points) (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2011, “Dig Deeper into the Writing Results,” para. 4).

Beyond reporting of dire statistics, opinion pieces add to the sense of a “boy crisis” that needs to be remedied. For instance, in an *Atlantic Monthly* article entitled, “Stop Penalizing Boys for Not Being Able to Sit Still at School,” that was shared widely on social media sites, English and Latin teacher Jessica Lahey writes that at the end of the school year at the middle school where she teaches she realized, upon counting up discipline slips, that she gave slips to almost twice as many boys as girls, “and of the slips...handed out to boys, all but one was for disruptive classroom behavior” (Lahey, 2013, para. 1). Moreover, she concludes that the challenges she has faced in her

classroom experiences with boys “may have something to do with a collective failure to adequately educate boys” (Lahey, 2013, para. 3).

Rather than declaring a “crisis” in relation to boys and literacy, this dissertation seeks possible roots of this issue and provides a nuanced view of the perspectives surrounding gender and literacy in the United States. Based on the results of this dissertation study, one explanation is that perceptions surrounding boys’ and girls’ reading have helped to create this apparent problem. For example, due to the perceptions of boys as reluctant readers, some boys are less practiced readers than girls, and thereby score less well than girls on tests of verbal achievement. However, the study also provides many examples of resistance to such perceptions, moreover identifying many examples of boys who are avid readers.

1.2 Research Questions

The study’s research questions are the following:

- Research Question 1: What are the conceptions of gendered literacy among literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers); creators of texts for children; and, children/young adults, as represented in their blogging activities?
- Research Question 2: How do the conceptions of gendered literacy identified through the blogging activities of literacy educators, creators of texts for children, and children/young adults compare to the theoretical conceptions identified in the literature review?
- Research Question 3: What similarities and differences, if any, are represented in conceptions of gendered literacy among literacy educators; creators of texts

for children; and, children/young adults, as represented in their blogging activities?

- Research Question 4: What patterns, if any, of resistance to the dominant conceptions of gendered literacy may be found among the blog posts analyzed?

1.3 Young People's Literacy in the Digital Age

In the scholarship reviewed for this study, discussions of literacy incorporated the reading and creation of texts through writing, drawing, and illustrating. For the purpose of this study, reading is conceived of as one part of the larger phenomenon of literacy, which encompasses the reading and creation of multiple text types. Moreover, this study examines the reading practices, and perceptions of the reading practices, of children and young adults. The study focuses on the reading of print texts, especially books, which were the main text type mentioned among the data sampled.

Frequent reading is an integral part of the literacy learning process. According to Krashen, for children to learn to read and write fluently, they must read extensively. Krashen (2004) concludes, based on a lifetime of literacy research: "Reading is the only way, the only way we become good readers, develop a good writing style, an adequate vocabulary, advanced grammatical competence, and the only way we become good spellers" (p. 37). Moreover, Krashen claims that "free voluntary reading" (p. 1), in which children choose what they read and are not required to complete an assignment related to the reading, is better for helping children develop literacy skills than reading instruction, making the issue of children's leisure reading all that more pressing (p. 37). Children's reading preferences and practices, particularly outside required reading for school, therefore warrant scrutiny.

The anxiety surrounding young people's literacy has taken a number of forms, including the perceived "crisis" in relation to boys' reading (as discussed above) along with ongoing discussions over testing and preparation for high school or later education. With the onset of the Information Age, the capacity to use information technology and the development of new types of knowledge have become necessary components of formal literacy learning. In the field of library and information science, this has meant a retooling of what literacy means, concomitant with major changes in librarian preparation involving a new focus on information literacy and use of multiple media. For example, Lamb and Johnson (2010) encourage school librarians "to design learning environments that address the needs of 21st century learners" (p. 64). In order to do this, they should collaborate with classroom teachers to "explore the wide spectrum of electronic and interactive reading materials and consider new ways to think about infusing web-based materials into teaching and learning" (pp. 64-65). The literacy needs of the 21st century are therefore seen as encompassing a variety of print and online texts and reading experiences that allow young people to interact with texts in new ways.

Beyond exploring new media, educators should be prepared to help students deal with the explosion of information in the digital age. A growing body of work provides evidence that inquiry-based learning is an antidote to the problem of information overload (see, for example, Kuhlthau, Maniotes, & Caspari, 2006). And, reading well is fundamental for the text-focused inquiry projects characteristic of inquiry-based curricula. As Gordon (2009) points out:

It is not uncommon to observe young people successfully searching, retrieving, and locating more than enough information but feeling overwhelmed when they are expected to use the information to resolve conflicting viewpoints, or synthesize facts to create new meaning, or integrate the information with what

they already know about the topic....they may resort to cutting, pasting, and plagiarizing because they lack the skills to process the information and successfully create learning outcomes that are representative of their new knowledge. (57-58)

Gordon discusses the behaviors students fall into when they are able to find information but do not know what to do with information once they find it. Better reading abilities help students make sense of information, construct new knowledge, and integrate that new knowledge to form a new text or project.

In addition to an overwhelming amount of information, multiple access points, and varying media types, children are dealing with a context in which the nature of reading is also changing. This evolving complex social backdrop includes everything from new types of literature, an increasing public interest in young adult literature, to the proliferation of online book sellers, electronic books, and online reading.

Reading fluency is important to young people's learning and development, and reading practice, beginning in childhood, is a gendered phenomenon. The dissertation explores, through the lens of the blogosphere, how and why in the United States and other Western societies, reading, especially school-based literacy and particular genres of informal literacy, continue to be associated with femininity, while other forms of informal literacy are associated with boys and boys are perceived as "reluctant readers."

1.4 Rationale for the KidLitosphere as a Site for the Examination of Gendered Literacy

Literacy as a gendered phenomenon is discussed from a variety of different perspectives in both popular and scholarly literature. This study brings together these perspectives into a unified conceptual model and examines the veracity of this model based on analysis of a sample of blogs about children's literature. Considering gendered

reading as an important part of gendered literacy as a whole, the study seeks to understand better the ways in which young people's reading is gendered and to begin to explain how and why reading is gendered in these ways.

According to Nichols (2002), "girls and boys enter into formal literacy already having been constituted as particular kinds of gendered literate subjects" (p. 124). In this statement, Nichols stresses the connection between children's acquisition of gender roles and their literacy learning. The statement also assumes children are "constituted" in these ways, thereby negating the action of young people themselves. The study undertaken as part of this dissertation examines the phenomenon of gendered literacy in terms of how the groups responsible for children's socialization as "literate subjects" (Nichols, 2002, p. 124), including literacy educators, young people themselves, and creators of reading content for youth, understand young people's reading and literacy as gendered. For the purpose of this study, parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers are counted as literacy educators. Children and young adults, as readers and literacy learners, are also included. Finally, creators of reading materials for children include editors, and published authors and illustrators of children's and young adult literature.

To understand the full range of perspectives, this study analyzes words and images in a sample of blogs drawn from a website called the KidLitosphere, which brings together over 550 blogs focusing on a common theme: literature for young people. Some KidLitosphere bloggers communicate with one another via a listserv, a Facebook page, and through their blogs; there are also two RSS feeds, and the bloggers host an annual conference and children's book award competition.

The KidLitosphere blogs center around book reviews of literature for young people, with reflections on children's reading processes and preferences interspersed throughout. This study qualitatively analyzes data sampled from a select set of blogs according to concepts of gendered literacy identified in the research literature; identifies new dimensions of these concepts and new or resistant concepts; and, compares/contrasts the perspectives of literacy teachers (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers), literacy learners (children and young adults), and creators of reading materials for youth (published authors, editors, and published illustrators). In order to clarify the conceptions of gendered literacy identified both in the literature review and in the blog analysis and to provide insight as to their origins, the study also uses interviews with two KidLitosphere bloggers, including a mother who provides reader's advisory through her blog, and a female public youth services librarian. One person outside the KidLitosphere was also interviewed, a male author of non-fiction for children and young adults, who is vocal concerning issues related to boys' reading.

1.5 Rationale for Studying Blogs

Blogs are an important social medium, to be differentiated from other forms of social media (such as Facebook and Twitter, which are platforms for so-called "micro-blogging") in terms of their relatively lengthy narratives and tendency towards a more singular thematic focus. According to Lomborg (2009), blogs are a form of computer mediated communication distinguished by author-determined content and asynchronous blogger/reader interactivity (p. 3). Miller and Shepherd (2004) note that a blog's content is characterized by the blogger's own comments combined with links to other websites and that the blogger's most recent posts appear first on the blog (p. 5).

Among the strengths of using blog posts as a data source for this study are their accessibility (the ones analyzed for this dissertation are all publicly accessible) and the fact that they can be read unobtrusively (in comparison to other types of social media and more traditional survey research). Also, as a powerful social medium, blogs provide sociocultural commentary, and scholars (i.e. Miller & Shepherd, 2004, p. 7) have demonstrated that although blogs function as personal diaries in some respects, bloggers also intend their blogs to be read by a larger social audience.

Moreover, because blogs connect people socially, Nelson (2006) discussed how they were becoming influential in the publishing industry. Evidence suggests that blogs of the type included in the KidLitosphere website have begun impacting the publishing, marketing, and sale of materials for young people. For example, publishers regularly send review copies of books to active bloggers (in order to gauge the marketability of new books), use blogs to discover promising new authors, and benefit from the blogger grapevine spreading the word about new books (Springen, 2011). At the KidLitosphere conference in September, 2012, a publishing representative who was part of a panel discussion about the importance and influence of the KidLitosphere blogs in terms of marketing books, stated: “Newspaper reviews are dead...Real book tours don’t work,” and “there are not enough real bricks and mortar bookstores” for book marketing to work through traditional channels. Book marketing, therefore, is more ambiguous than it was in the past. Additionally, librarians and teachers serving youth are using children’s literature blogs as an alternative book review source, discovering books through blogs as well as through traditional print literary reviews (Burns, 2007; Thompson, 2010).

Blogs are only one of many sites in which gendered literacy may appear. Other possible sites include book groups, book fairs, classrooms, and libraries. However, in examining blogs, with the context of previous research on gendered literacy as a backdrop, the goal is to develop a model of the main and resistant sociocultural themes regarding young people's reading and gender. The study thereby treats blogs as textual artifacts through which broader understandings of literacy as gendered may be mapped.

1.6 Overview of Theoretical Framework and Approach to the Study of Gendered Literacy

Both gender and literacy are contested terms associated with multiple understandings. The term "gendered literacy" has been used in the context of educational research, specifically in the areas of literacy, language arts, composition, and reading. However, the literature review for this dissertation study presented in Chapter 2 goes beyond these areas of study to look at both scholarly and popular works in various fields of inquiry, including psychology, sociology, library science, historical work in education, and the context of educational testing and related research. Moreover, the research and commentary treated in the literature review describes literacy in multiple forms – as children and young adults' reading, writing, and classroom comportment in relation to literacy learning. However, the data analyzed primarily refer to gendered reading, rather than to literacy in the broader sense described in the literature review. The rationale for painting with such broad strokes in the literature review is that in order to present a fuller picture of the social framework comprising gender in terms of literacy, it is necessary to draw from many different types of scholarship.

This section will review the conceptions of gender and literacy as well as the general theoretical orientation undergirding the study described in this dissertation. To start, a social constructivist view of both gender and literacy is assumed. Because of social norms relating to gender, males and females are expected to behave differently and may behave differently in accordance with these expectations. Behavioral differences between males and females are thereby attributed to differences in the ways in which males and females are socialized rather than to essential, biological differences. Similar to the lens here applied to gender, the study of literacy behaviors examines individuals as embedded within a social fabric of literacy practices rather than focusing only on individual cognitive function. The ways in which gender and literacy – as constructs – are understood, is socially regulated, and more specifically, regulated through language.

Berger and Luckmann (1966), in *The Social Construction of Reality*, describe the dialectical nature of social reality to which this study ascribes:

Despite the objectivity that marks the social world in human experience, it does not thereby acquire an ontological status apart from the human activity that produced it...it is important to emphasize that the relationship between man, the producer, and the social world, his product, is and remains a dialectical one. That is, man (not, of course, in isolation but in his collectivities) and his social world interact with each other. The product acts back upon the producer. (p. 57)

This constructivist approach, while acknowledging the power of socially-created phenomena such as institutions and social norms – a power that seems to give them a life of their own, or a separate “ontological status” – makes it clear that they are socially produced. Berger and Luckmann thereby incorporate the notion of individual agency along with structural power, describing the give-and-take relationship between people and the social world.

Judith Butler's (1990, 1999) treatment of gender as socially-performed is helpful for this study. Vasterling (1999) refers to Butler's theorization of gender and the body as a "radical constructivism" (p. 17). A performative definition of gender (Butler, 1990, 1999) assumes the constructed nature of gender but is also concerned with the activity and agency of the individual performers who are engaged in the constructing, or performing, of gender. Butler asserts that gender norms result in gender usually being performed as a binary (feminine/ masculine) and in ways which the performer of gender already knows, has memorized, and rehearsed. In the U.S., men will generally (but not necessarily) perform a Western-defined masculinity and women, a Western-defined femininity. The focus is on the performance, but the performer is not forgotten in the analysis of the construction of gender.

In this dissertation, the literacy practices of young people are defined broadly as the reading and creation of texts both within school and outside of school. In terms of the data analyzed, however, the focus is on reading. Street's (1984) "ideological model" of literacy practices, asserting that "what the particular practices and concepts of reading and writing are for a given society depends upon the context; that they are already embedded in an ideology and cannot be isolated or treated as 'neutral' or merely 'technical,'" (p. 1) informs this study. It is presumed that literacy practices represent gendered performances and that certain practices are associated with Western-defined femininity and others with Western-defined masculinity. Key to this study is the notion that in the U.S. (and other Western cultures), formal, school-based reading, and the reading of particular genres (i.e. fictional narrative) are designated as feminine, while

other informal reading is designated as masculine, along with the perception of boys as “reluctant” and remedial readers.

A challenge for the study described in this dissertation is that it looks at the perspectives of multiple groups, including young people, along with the major players influencing young people’s uses of texts (librarians, parents, and teachers), and those (authors, illustrators, and editors) who create the texts read by young people. Based on the findings from the literature review toward building an integrated model of the conceptions of the intersections between gender and literacy (in scholarly, professional, and popular texts), it was expected that members of these groups would express these dominant conceptions in blog posts sampled from the blogs contained in the KidLitosphere. However, there was also significant resistance to or disruptions of these conceptions, found in the analysis of the blog posts.

The study is most concerned with the perceptions of gendered reading the bloggers are voicing in their blog posts. However, it is also cognizant of the roles of the bloggers as librarians, teachers, parents, and young adults, looking for patterns in the perceptions of each group, and considering the possibility that they are constructing new and resistant meanings of gendered literacy.

1.7 Theoretical and Practical Contributions of the Study

The study contributes theoretically in that although gendered literacy has begun appearing in both research and popular literature (including in the media in the form of reports on gaps in achievement between boys and girls, as mentioned in the introduction), no one has yet brought together all the conceptions of gendered literacy to form a cohesive model. This is a necessary step towards understanding how and why school-

based literacy and particular genres of informal literacy in the U.S. continue to be associated with femininity, while other forms of informal literacy are associated with boys and boys are perceived as “reluctant” readers. In addition to contributing theoretically, this study has practical implications for literacy education practitioners, for whom boys’ literacy and reading practices are of particular concern, and for those who create reading materials for children and young adults. Developing curricula, library programs, texts, and other reading materials that appeal equally to both boys and girls should be a priority. Moreover, as children and young adults are active participants in their own literacy, the study could impact them as well. Young people, who are the future creators and educators, could learn to approach literacy with a more balanced perspective in terms of gender, thereby beginning the work of sociocultural change regarding gendered literacy.

The literature on gender and literacy has focused on the origins, enactment, and outcomes of gendered literacy. Some discussions of the origins of gendered literacy have taken a biological essentialist point of view, arguing that gendered literacy is the result of significant biological, cognitive differences between females and males. Other discussions of the origins of gendered literacy have taken a historical perspective, showing how the linkage between gender and literacy is rooted in a feminized U.S. educational system and a tradition of underachieving boys.

In terms of discussion of the enactment of gendered literacy, a major theme in the research literature has been on boys’ resistance to formal, school-based literacies in their reading, writing, and classroom behaviors juxtaposed with girls’ more ready acceptance of these literacy practices. Research on parents has focused on their differing perceptions

of their daughters' and sons' literacy preferences (i.e. Nichols, 2002) and mothers' and fathers' differing modeling of literacy behaviors and support of children's reading behaviors (i.e. Scholastic & Yankelovich, 2008). Research on teachers has emphasized their differing perceptions and expectations of male and female students' literacy preferences and performance (i.e. Orellana, 1995; Sanford, 2005/2006); and, what has been written about public and school librarians' approaches to gender and literacy highlights their expectations of children's (particularly boys') literacy preferences and programmatic responses (i.e. Parsons, 2004). Outcome-centered discussion of gender and literacy focuses on quantifiable gaps on standardized tests of verbal ability, with girls outscoring boys.


The data used in the bodies of research just described, for the most part, represent data that have been gathered at the time the studies were conducted, rather than data taken from pre-existing texts, as in the case of the study undertaken for this dissertation, which uses blog posts as the main data source. There also have been no studies of gender in relation to literacy so far that examine as many different perspectives simultaneously as this study. This dissertation therefore presents a multi-faceted analysis of gendered reading in the U.S. and other Western cultures.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This Chapter begins by defining more fully the following terms underpinning the study: “gender,” and “literacy,” and how gender and literacy intersect. It then provides a review of the literature outlining the ways in which scholars understand gendered literacy. Second, it assesses the literature dealing directly with parents’, teachers’, librarians’, and children’s perspectives on gendered literacy, as well as gendered literacy within the publishing industry. It thereby presents the following conceptual model of gendered literacy, which will be fully explicated throughout the remainder of the Chapter:

Table 1

Conceptual Model of Gendered Literacy Based on Prior Scholarship

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| 1. Gendered literacy as enacted, or performed, by multiple actors  | Children/young adults: a) through boys’ resistance to formal, school-based literacy in comparison to girls’ more enthusiastic adoption of formal literacy practice in terms of reading, writing, and classroom comportment b) through girls’ and boys’ displaying differing literacy preferences in terms of reading and writing | Literacy educators, including parents, teachers, and librarians: a) through parents’ perceptions of their daughters’ and sons’ literacy preferences and mothers’ and fathers’ differing support of children’s reading behaviors b) through teachers’ perceptions and expectations of male and female students’ literacy preferences and performance c) through librarians’ expectations of children’s (particularly boys’) literacy preferences and programmatic responses | Creators of reading materials for children/young adults – the children’s publishing industry |
| 2. Gendered literacy as a quantifiable achievement gap between girls and boys | | | |
| 3. Gendered literacy as a biological phenomenon, the result of essential, cognitive differences between males and females | | | |
| 4. Gendered literacy as a remnant of the historically gendered educational system, including the feminization of the teaching profession in the U.S. and a legacy of underachieving boys | | | |

A rationale for the study follows. Next, it discusses blogs as a social medium through which to study sociocultural perceptions of gender and literacy and defines blogs according to previous iterations in the literature.

2.1 Gender Defined

2.1.1 Gender as socially constructed. In order to discuss gendered literacy, it is first necessary to define the core concepts of gender and literacy. The premise for this study is that gender is an important social organizing phenomenon within the U.S. that children learn as they develop into adults. Psychologist Sandra Bem (1993), who presents a theory of gender in U.S. culture focusing on the overlapping lenses of androcentrism, gender polarization, and biological essentialism, which she attest combine to produce and maintain male dominance (p. 2) describes the subtle ways in which children acquire cultural meanings:

Insofar as social practices communicate metamessages to the child, the acquisition of cultural knowledge can be considered a kind of subliminal pedagogy. Insofar as the child gradually deciphers the meaning embedded in social practices, the acquisition of cultural knowledge can be considered more a matter of picking up information than transmitting it; in this case, the culture itself is more a text to be read – and read by an active, meaning-constructing reader – than a lesson to be taught.

This simultaneous transmission and pickup of information is initiated every time the active, pattern-seeking child is exposed to a culturally significant social practice. (Bem, 1993, pp. 140-141)

The study described in this dissertation treats reading as an example of what Bem refers to as a “culturally significant social practice,” through which messages about gender are communicated to children, who then make meanings from these gendered messages. To illustrate, among this study’s findings is a widespread perception by educators (including parents, teachers, and librarians) of boys as “reluctant readers.”

As explained by Bem (1993), this study assumes a social constructivist approach to gender. In this dissertation, the term “gender” is therefore used to refer to the socially constructed roles of femininity and masculinity whereas “sex” is used to refer to whether a person is female or male. In some cases, quoted studies may use the word “gender” to refer to a person’s sex, but otherwise “gender” refers to social role, and “sex” refers to biological status as female or male. Social constructivist theories of gender attribute behavioral differences between males and females to differences in the ways in which males and females are socialized.

Connell (1987) also describes this theoretical orientation, but according to children’s learning of gendered social roles:

The basic idea is that this occurs by ‘role learning’, ‘socialization’ or ‘internalization’. Thus feminine character is produced by socialization into the female role, masculine character by socialization into the male role....This argument leads to an interest in the people and institutions responsible for the learning, the so-called ‘agencies of socialization’: mother, family, teachers, peers, media. (p. 49)

Connell states that males and females learn gender identities through the “agencies of socialization,” the people and institutions with whom they interact throughout their lives. Viewed through this lens, gendered literacy practices are seen as responses to gendered socialization. Moreover, regarding young people’s literacy practices in relation to gender, therefore, this study focuses on the “agencies of socialization” – parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers, and young people themselves, associated with young people’s literacy learning. Specifically, the study examines how they write about literacy in relation to gender in blog posts and connected comments.

The larger debate over the relationship between sex and gender is complex and unresolved, and this study defers such causal questions in favor of an attempt to

understand how literacy is gendered in U.S. culture. Furthermore, this project approaches gender as a socially constructed phenomenon, underpinned by cultural learning of gender roles which are historically maintained and transformed. In doing so, it sets aside other theories of gendered behavior, including biological essentialism, in which biological tendencies/traits are believed to determine male and females' differing life situations, and postmodern gender theory, in which gender is treated as constructed through discourse.

Critiques of the social construction of gender have been raised. One such critique focuses on the way in which it portrays children as submissive receptacles of social learning. For example, Rowan, Knobel, Bigum, and Lankshear (2002) note that:

children tend to be represented in unnaturally passive ways....Sex role theory or socialization literature has encouraged educators to provide children with a range of 'socialization' experiences....But it has been unable to account for the fact that boys and girls do not always take on board the preferences of their teachers. (p. 45)

Children, then, are not passive participants in the socialization process. They have their own subjectivity and can accept, challenge, or resist the roles offered them. Moreover, they are not formed in a hermetically sealed environment; they exist in constant contact with family members, social structures, and media.

Keeping such critiques in mind, it is therefore important to emphasize young people's tendency to maintain their own subjectivities while they are at the same time responding to their social environments. Gendered literacy practices are part of the social environments to which youth respond, and by recognizing the influence of individual subjectivity in terms of their responses, the study described in this dissertation adopts a social constructivist approach to both gender and literacy.

2.1.2 Gender as performative. The work of Butler (1990, 1999) is also useful in this discussion. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) goes beyond social constructionism,

questioning the way in which gender traditionally is accepted as a binary phenomenon, and critiquing constructionist theories of gender in their failure to examine who is doing the constructing of gender and how this process occurs (pp. 10-12). She proposes a theory of gender as performative. Butler (1999) explains:

As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated* [emphasis in original]. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. Although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this “action” is a public action. There are temporal and collective dimensions to these actions, and their public character is not inconsequential; indeed, the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame. (pp. 178-9)

Butler (1999) here emphasizes legitimation of the socially constructed values associated with gender, conceived in dualistic terms, through repetitive enactment of these values. Individual bodies perform gender; however, the actions are also public and through the repetitive enactment of these values, masculine and feminine gender roles are thereby maintained. This is how Butler conceives of gender as a performance that is both individual and social. Her work critiques discussions of gender roles as constructions which do not consider the activity surrounding these constructions, including how and by whom these roles are constructed. This study treats blog narratives as sites for linguistic performances of gendered literacy. A conceptual framework of gender as performative will be evident in the review of the literature related to gendered literacy, as researchers perceive that children and adults perform gendered literacy in the classroom and beyond.

In an earlier work, Butler (1988) describes what it means to say that gender is performative:

Gender is an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular

actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again. (p. 526)

In this statement, Butler compares gender to a theater script; the story described within comes to life only when individuals act it out. Similarly, this study contends that bloggers draw from pre-existing sociocultural scripts concerning gender and literacy in the language and images they use in blogs.

Researchers frequently note that children begin the acting and rehearsing of gender early on, and gender relations affect classroom behavior. For example, Blair (2000), in her study of Canadian eighth graders in a language arts class, states that the students

looked at the gender dichotomy they saw in the world around them and positioned themselves accordingly. They hung out primarily in single gender groups, often mimicking and mocking the other gender. Ridicule of those who did not clearly conform was common. The creation of differences was a part of the process of gendering, and the differences were used as a reminder of the importance and impermeability of these categories. (p. 316)

According to Blair, the children she observed in this language arts class conformed to societal gender norms by socializing in single sex groups and maintaining strict gender differentiation by teasing those of the opposite sex and scorning those who went against gender norms. Hence, from Blair's example it is apparent how acceptable performance of gender roles serves to model and correct social understandings of gender among children.

In another example, Orellana (1995) describes the writing assignments completed by the elementary students she observed for her research; the writing the students produced was markedly gendered, with girls and boys writing about different themes (pp. 695-696). When children worked together on writing assignments, it was in same sex pairs (Orellana, 1995, p. 220). Orellana also noted patterns in the themes expressed in

books produced by other students that were available in the classroom library and the books produced by the students she observed; the children mentioned the books of peers as sources of inspiration for their own books. Orellana's findings thereby show how gendered writing themes were socially transmitted and reproduced in the classroom (p. 696). Several other examples of the ways in which children perform gender in relation to literacy are described below in Section 2.4, Gendered Literacy Enacted by Children.

In summary, gender, for the purposes of this study, is defined as socially performed. It is assumed that through performances of gender, conceptions of gender are reproduced and legitimated. Alternative performances (for example, boys' enjoyment of books that would be considered appropriate only for girls) can disrupt or resist these conceptions of gender. The study described in this dissertation specifically observes performances of and resistances against gendered conceptions of literacy.

2.2 Literacy Defined

2.2.1 Literacy as a social process. This study assumes learning and language to be fundamentally social phenomena. Foundational to this concept is the work of Vygotsky (1978), who posited that "*human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them* [emphasis in original]" (p. 88). Thus, the study investigates the contours of this "intellectual life" in terms of literacy learning from the perspective of teachers of literacy – parents, public adults, and from the perspective of those who create reading materials for young people, including authors, editors, and illustrators. Orellana (1995), who examined gendered literacy from the perspective of the literacy learners – children and young adults – through an ethnographic study of students' and teachers' interactions and

artifacts produced in two bilingual (Spanish/English) U.S. classrooms, expresses it in this way: “A sociocultural perspective on literacy is rooted in the belief that people acquire literacy by interacting with others using the printed word for meaningful tasks within particular social contexts” (p. 677).

Street (1984) proposes an “ ‘ideological’ model of literacy;” the aspects he explores that are most relevant to this study are the notions that “the meaning of literacy depends upon the social institutions in which it is embedded,” and “literacy can only be known to us in forms which already have political and ideological significance” (p. 8). Street emphasizes that literacy cannot be studied as an entity separate from cultural and social context.

Long (2003), in a study of white women’s book clubs in Houston, Texas in the early 1990s, also discusses the social nature of reading – what she refers to as “the social infrastructure” of reading (p. 8). She describes the social relationships associated with reading, specifically mentioning that “early images show mothers teaching children how to read” and also noting the larger picture of family reading as “both a form of cultural capital and one of the most important determinants of adherence to reading in later life” (p. 9). She notes that because the solitary reader’s experience of “reading feels so deeply private,” (p. 16) reading has wrongly been portrayed only as an activity that is done alone, when in fact reading is a social process. She describes the “social infrastructure” of literacy as follows:

Not only is literacy always taught and practiced by real people in concrete social situations, but... reading lies in the shadow of the institutional order. It is subject both to the dictates of the state – in the public school system most obviously... -- and to looser systems of cultural authority. (p. 16)

In other words, the teaching and practice of reading happens through social relationships and through both public (school, for example) and private (families, for example) social institutions.

To summarize, literacy learning is a socially interactive process. As such, the study of literacy practice should not be studied apart from this social context, which consists of a larger cultural and institutional web. For this reason, this study examines the perspectives of major participants (educators, children/young adults, and creators of reading materials for youth) in youth literacy in relation to gendered literacy.

2.2.2 Literacy as defined within specific social contexts. Moss (2007) provides an in-depth look at literacy within an elementary school environment, noting that “the social power schools have to define what counts as literacy is encapsulated in their curricula and in their classroom practice” (p.50). Moss’s ethnographic research, a series of studies in British primary schools (data collection included observation, interviews, questionnaires, and photographs taken by some of the participants, p. 8) illustrates the ways in which the uses of texts are controlled within the school context, how these interact with assessments of students’ reading ability, and how such assessments steer students towards specific classroom activities. She also points out the ways in which schools’ uses of and labeling of texts may influence the publishing industry’s publication and production of texts, such as in chapter books and information books (pp. 96, 99-105). Drawing from Moss’s work, this study considers what counts as literacy for girls versus for boys, and how this is socially regulated. Unlike Moss’s work, this study looks beyond the classroom to consider how sociocultural meanings in relation to gender and literacy are performed by literacy educators, by creators of texts for young people, and by young

people themselves in blog posts. Treating blogs as a sociocultural site for the enactment of gendered literacy, the study thereby looks at how gendered notions of literacy play out in the texts of blogs and compares these enactments to a conceptual model of gendered literacy developed through a review of the literature.

2.2.3 Literacy as the reading and creation of diverse texts. This study utilizes an expansive concept of literacy as the reading and creation of multiple text types. This is important as young people's literacy in terms of other textual forms beyond print books, may be ignored by adults. For example, Rothbauer (2006) notes that

young people do not seem to make the same distinction that librarians, teachers, and parents do among the varieties of textual experience. Or rather they are less likely, and perhaps less willing, to privilege book reading as the highest form of literacy. (p. 21)

This statement speaks to young people's tendency to treat all texts equally rather than to prefer one over another or to view book-reading as the most important literate practice.

Rothbauer, in this statement, also contrasts the perceptions and practices of young people with those of their literacy teachers, including parents, librarians, and teachers.

Describing new forms of literacy, Sanford (2005/2006) writes:

Literacy now relates to a much broader set of texts including visual, multimodal, and digital texts that appear in many forms all around us....Billboards, magazines, the Internet, text messaging, video-all are instantly available in multiple modes to people of all ages, cultures, and classes. (p. 304)

Sanford (2005/2006) here defines literacy as the use of a broad range of texts by a broad range of people. The International Reading Association (2012) espouses a similar view of literacy, stating, in its position statement on adolescent literacy:

Internationally, adolescents representing a diverse range of cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds engage in multiple forms of literacy throughout their day....these literacy experiences may include the use of traditional print materials, the Internet, social media, instant messaging, texting, and video games,

all of which can be used as tools for understanding academic content as well as forming social relationships. (p. 2)

In this position statement, the International Reading Association discusses students' differing backgrounds, the myriad of texts and media now available to them, and the range of literacy opportunities they offer, spanning the academic to the social.

Likewise, Smith & Wilhelm (2002) suggest a semiotic definition of literacy that “would include the ability to communicate and make meaning with various sign systems, such as music, video, visual arts, and electronic technologies, and would build on the interconnections among various forms of literacy” (p. 186). This “semiotic” view of literacy, encompassing various media and forms of literacy, informed the approach to this study, although the data sampled from the blogs that were chosen from the study, mainly described traditional print texts and the reading of books.

One term (used to describe a broader approach to literacy) that has been gaining ground is “transliteracy.” Thomas has been working experimentally on projects which utilize this concept and also to cultivate and expand research on the term. She and others, in an article introducing the term, define transliteracy as “the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks” (Thomas, Joseph, Laccetti, Mason, Mills, Perril, & Pullinger, 2007). Library and information science scholars and librarians are exploring what transliteracy means for their profession as literacy learners include students who are increasingly comfortable with “fluid environments and transmedia worlds” (Lamb & Johnson, 2010, p. 64). For example, in response to the ever-changing technological landscape, Dresang (2005) suggests a theory of “Radical Change,” that is, “based on the digital age principles of interactivity,

connectivity, and access,” as a lens for examining human information behaviors, particularly those of young people, and texts, in new ways (p. 178). And, as Gordon (2009) points out:

Learning in an electronic age presumes visual literacy, media literacy, and technological literacy. The electronic landscape challenges the conventions of traditional reading and what it means to be information literate....Re-conceptualizing how we learn to read and write in print and electronic places and how we learn how to learn in new environments is the primary educational challenge. It has an immediate and powerful effect on what inquiry looks like in the school library and the kinds of intervention students need to be successful. (p.i)

Here, Gordon describes what many see as a seismic shift in reading practices in the digital age and how these changes specifically affect school librarians as they guide students in learning how to do research.

The broad approaches to literacy discussed above, including the reading and creation of various types of texts using various media, tools, and sign systems, informed the study undertaken. However, as mentioned before, the concept of reading discussed among the data sampled was described in traditional terms, as in reading print books.

Literacy is understood as a social process (as discussed by Vygotsky, 1978) in which young people, situated within sociocultural contexts (Street, 1984; Long, 2003), learn to read and create a diversity of texts (including print, digital, audio, and visual). Literacy practices are also performed within specific social contexts (in school, for example, as explored by Moss, 2007). This study, therefore, defines literacy as young people’s culturally- and socially-shaped uses of a variety of texts; in considering literacy as a gendered phenomenon, it also highlights gender as an important sociocultural aspect of literacy practices.

2.3 The Intersection of Gender and Literacy

2.3.1 Shift from a cognitive to a social focus within literacy education. This study investigates how beliefs about gender are connected to perceptions of literacy. Gilbert (1993) discusses how throughout the 1970s and 80s, the focus of literacy pedagogy was the “ungendered, classless, universal ‘child,’” and educators and researchers treated literacy learning as an individualistic, purely cognitive process (p. 212). Similarly, Millard (2003) gives a brief history of the way in which literacy began to be viewed as the result of social rather than simply cognitive forces and the contributions of feminism to this debate, noting: “As feminists had already shown that gender was constructed through *social practices* [emphasis in original], the realization that literacy itself is a set of social practices, rather than cognitive processes, became important in explanations of the interrelationship of (gendered) identity and literacy development”(p. 23). Thus, gender became an important topic in the context of research on literacy. Moreover, Gilbert (1992) states the following:

If language practices...are seen to be predominantly cognitive, predominantly individualistic, predominantly natural, then it is difficult to accept and acknowledge that it is also through language that we learn how to take up positions in our culture as women and men, wives and husbands, lovers and friends: that we learn how to function socially in our world. (p. 188)

Gilbert, writing here as a researcher who has examined language use as a gendered, social enterprise, suggests that such a perspective can have far-reaching social implications – that in fact, our learning of gendered social roles is mediated through language.

2.3.2 The association of literacy with femininity. Scholars of reading and literacy, when studying questions of gender in connection to literacy, have focused on the notion of literacy as associated with femininity and viewed in opposition to masculinity.

Millard (1994) states that “in Western societies, reading is presented largely as a girl-preferred activity” (p. 96). Likewise, Rowan et al. (2002) note that

some discipline areas – including literacy – have a decidedly feminine image, and appear to value female knowledge and experience over male. Indeed, it appears that – at least for students in developed and overdeveloped countries – literacy education in primary and secondary schools has come to be associated largely with women and women’s business. (p. 40)

Rowan et al. (2002) thereby summarize the Western world’s widespread association of literacy with femininity. This is a largely modern understanding of literacy, and represents a major shift in how literacy was previously gendered in Western culture.

Finkelstein and McCleery (2005) state that in 15th century Europe, “Mothers who were literate began the process of teaching literacy in the home” (pp. 106-107). Merchant-class boys and girls could attend the town public schools, but only boys were allowed to go on to university (p. 107). This dissertation also assumes a modern understanding of childhood as a particular life phase. In Western Europe, for example, it was only during the 19th century, with a rise in family incomes, the beginning of compulsory education, and the growth of public libraries, that books were published specifically for children (Finkelstein & McCleery, 2005, pp. 114-115).

Wittmann (1999) discusses the expansion of the reading public in 18th century Europe and how the nature of reading changed, most notably the way in which extensive reading of large numbers of texts, including novels and other entertaining works, took the place of intensive reading of a small number of religious texts, including the Bible (p. 285). There was also growth in the numbers of readers, especially among the property-owning class (pp. 287-2888). Lyons (1999) discusses the continued “expansion of the reading public” in Western Europe in the 19th century and more specifically, the

increasing numbers of women, children, and working class readers (p. 313). This resulted as the male/female literacy gap decreased, with more and more women becoming literate (p. 315). Moreover, “the expansion of primary education in nineteenth-century Europe encouraged the growth of another important sector of the reading public: the children” (p. 324), and, a decrease in the number of required daily working hours “allowed greater opportunities for reading among the working classes” (p. 333).

Lyons (1999) highlights the continuing diversification among readers in the 19th century, and also discusses the secularization of women’s reading and the resulting changes in the publishing industry, stating: “The new women readers of the nineteenth century...had other, more secular tastes, and new forms of literature were designed for their consumption. Among the genres destined for this new market of readers were cookery books, magazines and, above all, the cheap popular novel” (p. 317). It is possible that the gendered trends in feminine reading practice emerged from these historical patterns.

Long (2003), for example, discusses the historical background for women’s book clubs in America. The book clubs developed in the 19th century during the period of rapid industrialization, which led to further division between the feminine – domestic and masculine – work (outside the home) worlds. Higher education opportunities for women were growing but still minimal; the book clubs thereby served as a means for women to educate themselves from within their homes (Long, 2003, pp. 36-37). Moreover, the Civil War “fostered self reliance and tremendous organizational activity among women,” a context in which women’s clubs and literary societies flourished (p. 37). These clubs, despite their importance in terms of social reform (Long, 2003, p. 65) and founding of

educational institutions (p. 52), were never considered worthy of serious study because they were “leisure-time groups” and also composed predominantly of women (p. 31).

However, the book clubs and literary societies

established almost 75 percent of the public libraries in the nation...began kindergartens, pushed for vocational education and other curricular reforms, founded college scholarships and dormitories for women, and campaigned for universal compulsory education. (p. 52)

In this sense, they were catalysts for education in the U.S., particularly education for women.

Long also proposes that the legacy of book clubs’ focus on literature and “culture” may “account for the fact that female undergraduates have been overrepresented in academic majors involving the appreciation of art and literature. This kind of experience during college may contribute to the fact that reading groups attract more women than men even now” (p. 65). Long also notes, in a discussion of the characteristics of the books clubs she studied that “many women join reading groups during the time they find themselves isolated in the suburbs with young children” (p. 92). The history of women’s book clubs in the U.S. as described by Long thus also helps to show the ongoing association of reading with femininity.

Ross (2006), referring to reading research in the United States, notes that more than 50 years of

large-scale studies of reading....have reached certain fairly stable conclusions. Women tend to read more than men; younger people tend to read more than those over age fifty; college-educated people and people with higher annual incomes tend to read more than those without a college education or with lower incomes; whites read more than nonwhites. (p. 133)

This statement indicates that overall women more often than men report being avid readers. This finding is similar to findings in surveys of young readers (discussed below

under Section 2.3.3, Research on how children adopt gendered literacy practices), in which girls, more often than boys, describe themselves as avid readers.

As Millard (1994) points out in her work on gender and literacy, “activities that are seen as girl-preferred are surrounded with far more taboos for boys than boy-preferred activities are for the girls” (p.97). This extends to reading behaviors and literature preferences. As a result, Millard (1994) suggests:

Because boys have an overwhelming need not to be seen as ‘girlish’, it is important that books in school should be presented in ways that make them equally attractive to both sexes if both are to be given equal access to the power that comes from being a flexible reader. This poses a difficulty for teachers...because a pattern of gender differentiation is clearly discernible in their pupils’ attitudes to, and choice of, popular reading at all ages. (p. 98)

Millard here notes that books (i.e. “girl” books, “boy” books) take on gendered values, and teachers are hard-pressed to entice boys to read books that are considered “girl” books. However, teachers should still encourage students of both sexes to read all different genres.

Likewise, Alloway and Gilbert (1997) present school-based literacy as gendered. They explain that in their view the idealized literate school subject is in fact antithetical to masculinity, which is why boys, in their adoption of the masculine, tend to avoid reading and reject school-based literacy:

While the literacy classroom encourages them to express their inner selves, to appreciate the canons of literature...the wider school context subordinates them within the student-teacher authority structure...Meanwhile, outside the context of the school, boys are encouraged to understand themselves very differently. As opposed to the social construction of literacy as feminised practice, boys are expected to understand themselves within sets of masculinised practice. Their subjectivity is to be marked as different from, and oppositional to, that which is associated with the feminine. Hegemonic masculinity is not done in terms of self-disclosure, introspection, personalised and creative expression, but rather in terms of an outside-of-self, objectified expression. A focus on the psyche, on analysis of self and others, on personal relations, on moral regulation, is not endorsed within

hegemonic standards of masculinity. (“The Literate Subject, the Schoolboy, and Hegemonic Masculinity,” para. 7-8)

In other words, the internal, subjective, creative focus endorsed in the “feminized” literacy classroom is in opposition to both the school-wide context of teacher/student hierarchy (in which teachers wield the power) and the outward focus associated with the practice of hegemonic masculinity in the world outside school. Therefore, in order to assimilate to hegemonic masculinity, boys tend to reject the practices of the literacy classroom.

Few researchers address why this sociocultural association of femininity with literacy has not always translated into significant gains for women. Gilbert (1992), for one, suggests that although literacy is associated with femininity, such literacy is often equated only with culturally devalued forms of literate practice. She states:

It is men who are generally regarded as being the writers of philosophy, psychology, science, history, poetry and drama. Control of the more powerful discourses lies with men; the lower-status written forms – the service industry of writing such as secretarial work, family letter-writing, diary entries, genealogical records, story-writing – are the ones dominated by women workers. (p. 192)

Thus Gilbert (1992) offers the cultural association of the more powerful cultural texts with the work of men as an explanation for inequalities between men and women.

In summary, literacy – especially as encompassed in particular text types and contexts (school) – has come to be associated with femininity and held in contrast to masculinity within Western cultures. This study explores blogs as one site in which such notions of gendered literacy may be promoted and/or disrupted.

2.3.3 Research on how children adopt gendered literacy practices. Likewise, although scholars are interested in how children adopt gendered literacy practices, few have discussed it in depth. The scholarship treating this theme follows the following

themes: the way in which children are socialized at early ages to gendered approaches to literacy; gendered literacy in connection with mothers' influences; and, girls' tendency toward greater frequency and enjoyment of reading juxtaposed with boys' tendency toward less frequent reading and less enjoyable experience of reading.

2.3.3.1 Children's Early Socialization to Gendered Literacy. Millard (2003), in the following passage, explains how children's early socialization is influenced by gendered literacy:

Children can be seen to be forming ideas about for whom a specific activity is most appropriate, whilst being initiated into such seemingly neutral activities as sharing a book with an adult or being supported in writing a message on a birthday card. For in their interactions with adults as carers, or teachers, children begin to establish a sense of their own identities and potentialities as literate beings. (p. 23)

Children's interactions with adults, therefore, are important in their developing sense of a gendered self in the process of their literacy learning.

Porche, Ross, and Snow (2004) investigate more specifically how this social adoption of gendered literacy happens. Their findings also suggest that it manifests quite early in children's lives. For example, in their longitudinal study of a diverse sample of 83 low-income students from preschool through middle school, they found that

the early childhood data suggests the subtle beginnings of a divergence in approach to reading with girls compared to boys. During the preschool reading activity, boys spent less time talking with their mothers about the books they were reading and mothers requested less information of them compared to girls. This pattern of talking about books may be related to boys' middle school interviews, in which they tend to elaborate less on the process of reading, compared to girls. (Porche et al., 2004, p. 355)

This study suggests that boys' resistance to formal literacy begins early on, influenced by the fewer verbal interactions they have with their mothers (or fathers) in connection with books as compared to girls.

A large-scale study conducted by the National Literacy Trust of the U.K. also found evidence of gendered approaches to literacy among parents and teachers of young children. The study surveyed 1,012 parents children between the ages of three and five (Formby, 2014, p. 12). Among the parents surveyed, 75.3% of the parents of girls versus 68.7% of the parents of boys reported that their child reads every day; 82.9% of girls' parents said that their child enjoys stories "a lot," in contrast to 73.7% of boys' parents; and, 88.7% of girls' parents reported encouraging their children's literacy with a wide range of behaviors and feeling "very confident" in their ability to help their child learn to read versus 83.4% of boys' parents (Formby, 2014, p. 9). From these findings, among the parents sampled more of the parents of girls were aware of and engaged with their children's literacy than the parents of boys. However, regarding the use of touch screens for literacy activities, 36% parents of boys versus 28.2% of parents of girls reported that their child uses "a touch screen more for educational activities than for entertainment" (Formby, 2014, p. 10). Also, based on the responses of the parents surveyed, "twice as many boys as girls look at or read stories on a touch screen for longer than they look at or read printed stories (24.0% vs. 12.0%)" (p. 10). In light of these findings, among the parents surveyed, more parents of boys than parents of girls perceived their child as preferring touch screens for literacy activities.

The study also found that 67.8% of the parents of boys versus 57.8% of the parents of girls reported that their child looks at or reads "stories more with an adult than on their own" (Formby, 2014, p. 10). In contrast, based on the responses of the parents surveyed "girls are more likely than boys to look at or read stories more without than with an adult (18.1% vs. 10.0%)" (p. 10). These findings indicate that among the parents

surveyed, parents of boys perceived their sons to be less independent in their reading than parents of daughters.

2.3.3.2 Gendered Literacy in Connection with Mothers' Influences. The National Literacy Trust early literacy study discussed above, other than the presentation of findings via tables, does not comment specifically on the association of parents' sex with their responses. However, upon reviewing the tables, it is evident that in this study the parent's sex is in several instances correlated with aspects of their perceptions and support of young children's literacy. For example, among the parents surveyed, more mothers than fathers perceived their children to enjoy both "printed stories" and those presented "on touch screens." However, the difference between mothers and fathers was more pronounced when referring to "printed stories," with 83.8% of mothers and 70.7% of fathers responding that their child enjoyed "printed stories" (Formby, 2014, p. 56).

Other survey items look at the extent to which parents "engage in supportive activities when sharing printed stories and stories on a touch screen with their child," including: conversing with their child "about the story;" encouraging their child "to notice the pictures;" talking with their child "about the characters;" and engaging in "other activities related to the story" (Formby, 2014, p. 56). Of all these activities, noticeable differences between mothers and fathers are evident in terms of talking "about the characters" of printed stories, with 78.3% of mothers saying they did this versus 69.0% of fathers; and talking with their child about touch screen stories, with 59.3% of mothers versus 50.7% of fathers responding that they did this. However, in relation to doing "other activities related to the story" in terms of stories on touch screens, 39.4% of fathers and only 26% of mothers responded that they did this with their child; thus, this item is

the reverse of the trends described above of more mothers engaging in literacy-supportive activities with their children (p. 56).

The results of this early literacy study then, showed that among the parents surveyed in the U.K., more mothers than fathers perceived their children to enjoy stories. Moreover, in relation to engaging in literacy-supportive activities with their children, larger differences between mothers and fathers were found in terms talking with their children about the characters of print stories and talking about touch screen stories, with more mothers engaging in these activities. However, more fathers than mothers did other activities with their children in connection to touch-screen stories.

Solsken's (1993) ethnographic research over three years with primary school children regarding their literacy practices both at home and in school and the relationship of literacy learning to conceptions of gender and work led her to conclude the following:

Although children may not be assigned to social categories that determine their literacy behavior, the evidence from my study also shows consistent patterns over time in the choices of individual children. These patterns, I argue, have their roots in family dynamics around literacy in which children establish an orientation toward literacy, a way of defining themselves in relation to other people in literacy events. (p. 10)

Here, Solsken affirms children's volition as individuals within the sphere of influence of their families and within the larger social context of literacy practices. She asserts that the division of labor in society which results in mothers' and female primary school teachers' exerting the most influence on young children's literacy learning "may play a key role in defining literacy as a gender-linked activity and may implicate literacy in the psychological and social dynamics of establishing gender identity" (Solsken, 1993, p. 216). In other words, Solsken (1993) proposes that because women (as mothers and female teachers) tend to spend more time in contact with young children than men,

literacy (in its relationship to children's psychological and social development as gendered beings), by default, becomes an activity associated with femininity.

Millard (1994) likewise describes how many of the girls she studied expressed their love of reading as something shared among girlfriends, sisters, and mothers:

Girls frequently mentioned sharing stories with friends and swapping books with each other. They read in each other's company for long periods of time and shared reading when they stayed at each other's houses, an activity that was never mentioned by the boys. Girls also mentioned sharing books with their mothers and sister as well as their friends. When boys mentioned reading with their mothers it was to practise their reading rather than to share a common interest in story. No one described reading with their father and only one girl had a book that she had chosen because her father had been reading it. (p. 102)

Millard observes that the girls in her study read often and portray reading as a pleasurable activity they associate with their mothers and other females, whereas boys mentioned reading with their mothers only in the context of practicing their reading skills.

In a later article, Millard (1997) writes:

One of the first survey questions asked the pupils to name the person or persons whom they thought had been most helpful in teaching them to read. Mothers were consistently recorded as the key influence in the early stages of learning, but where fathers featured in the accounts it was usually as part of the parental team, rarely alone. Mothers are seen by both sexes to play a key role in their children's early acquisition of literacy, by organising events which involve their children's access to books before and beyond the reach of the school. ("Family Reading," para. 2)

Millard's survey results therefore underline children's perceptions of their mothers as their primary literacy teachers.

2.3.3.3 Girls' Enjoyment of Reading Versus Boys' Less Enjoyable Experience of Reading. Studies of larger samples of children surveying their reading preferences have yielded similar results in terms of the links between a child's sex and reading practices. For example, Scholastic Inc. and Yankelovich's (2008) study of 501 children

ages 5-17 from 25 large U.S. cities and their parents/guardians, found the following: that frequency of reading was less for children over 8 and particularly so for boys (p. 4); that the boys surveyed were more likely than girls to have difficulty finding books they enjoy (p. 16); that the children ages 5-11 surveyed selected “Mom” as their most significant source of “ideas about which books to read for fun” (pp. 19-20); and, that parents of the 5-11- year-old children surveyed selected the child’s mother as the person most likely to read to or with children at home (p. 22).

A later study by Scholastic Inc. and Harrison Group (2010) found, based on “a nationally representative sample of 1,045 children age 6–17 and their parents (2,090 total respondents)” (p. 4) that “reading enjoyment, importance, and frequency all decline with age, especially among boys” (p. 28). For instance, “only 39% of boys say reading books for fun is extremely or very important versus 62% of girls” (p. 24).

The trends pinpointed in the studies discussed above include themes already discussed: girls’ tendency toward greater frequency and enjoyment of reading juxtaposed with boys’ tendency toward less frequent reading and less enjoyable experience of reading. However, the studies also provide new insights, for example, pinpointing mothers as important literacy teachers within the family. Also, Millard’s study suggests that the reading practices shared between mothers and sons (one of working on reading skills) may differ from those between mothers and daughters (one of sharing enjoyment of reading).

As stated before, children do not wholeheartedly accept and adopt every cultural norm they encounter. Nonetheless, the proposal for the study described in this dissertation rests on the idea that the sociocultural milieu in which children in the U.S.

and other Western cultures are immersed and the beliefs about literacy that adults model for them are influential in children's socialization process in terms of literacy.

2.3.4 Intersection of gender and literacy summarized. In summary, gendered literacy represents a challenging intersection of gendered identity, sociocultural context, and literacy practices. Central to defining gendered literacy are an understanding of literacy conceived of in sociocultural terms (rather than simply cognitive) and gender conceived of as a sociocultural construction (and gender roles as learned through family and school interactions) rather than as a biological phenomenon. Moreover, a recurring theme of gendered literacy research is the ways in which, within the Western world, literacy learning and certain modes of literary interest are coded as feminine. Although scholars have long raised concerns about the ways in which literacy is gendered, few have synthesized a full understanding of gendered literacy. The study undertaken as part of this dissertation remedies this shortfall through an extensive review of the literature and creation of an integrated conceptual model of gendered literacy. Additionally, through analysis of blog data relating to literacy practices, it examines more specifically the perspectives of parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers, children/young adults, and authors, editors, and illustrators in relation to the ways in which literacy is gendered.

Although recent research on literacy has turned away from cognitive explanations of literacy learning to focus on sociocultural explanations (including gender), research that treats the intersection of gender and literacy is still relatively sparse; therefore, this study adds to this growing knowledge base. A few studies (for example, Porche, et al, 2004; Solsken, 1993) have looked at how children may adopt, through family and school

environments, the sociocultural associations between literacy and gender. This study addresses these gaps and adds to the existing literature by examining blogs as a site in which sociocultural performances of gendered literacy may occur. Furthermore, it compares the perspectives of the most prominent actors in relation to literacy learning: the teachers of literacy, including parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers; literacy learners, including children and young adults; and the creators of texts for children and young adults – authors, editors, and illustrators.

2.4 Gendered Literacy Enacted by Children

The studies discussed in this section, spanning more than 20 years of scholarship, treat children's gendered reading preferences and approaches to literacy. The majority of these studies have taken place within the school setting (i.e. Chapman, Filipenko, McTavish, & Shapiro, 2007; Maynard, 2002; Millard, 1997, 2005; Moss, 2007; Orellana, 1995; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). In contrast, the study described in this dissertation analyzes blog data as a site in which to encounter children's and young adults' reading experiences outside of school, and the blogs represent a naturalistic setting in which to gather data.

Studies suggest that girls and boys tend to read and write differently and assume differing relationships to school-based literacy activities. In this sense, researchers perceive children as enacting a gendered literacy – that is, exhibiting differing literacy practices according to gender and behaving in ways that are interpreted as gender-stereotypical. Review of the literature reveals two salient ways in which researchers portray children's enactment of gendered literacy: 1) through boys' resistance to formal,

school-based literacy in comparison to girls' more enthusiastic adoption of formal literacy practice; and, 2) through girls' and boys' differing literacy preferences.

2.4.1 Boys resist school-based literacy; girls accept school-based literacy more readily. Researchers note that although boys tend to resist school-based literacy, girls more willingly participate in it. Moreover, as will be seen in the studies discussed below, this takes three forms in terms of children's literacy behaviors: their reading, writing, and classroom comportment.

2.4.1.1 Reading. Millard (1997), in a study of 255 students, including 121 girls and 134 boys in nine different South Yorkshire (England) schools, describes what she perceives as "the gendered nature of reading" ("Introduction," para. 2). She notes that "as well as citing themselves more frequently as the person in the family who read the most, more girls expressed positive attitudes, not only to themselves as readers but also to the books they were currently reading in school" ("Self-Assessment of Reading Ability," para. 8). The female students in Millard's study, therefore, tended to portray themselves as heavy readers and articulate favorable impressions of school-based reading. Moreover,

when asked to identify the best readers in a class, both boys and girls chose to name girls, only adding, when prompted, the names of boys whom they thought read out loud in class well, but only if they made a positive effort. Boys, for their part, were content to see themselves as 'doing OK' at reading, although the number of them who expressed a positive dislike for having to read, presumably in class reading sessions, was significant. (Millard, 1997, "Self-Assessment of Reading Ability," para. 13)

In Millard's study, girls and boys alike perceive girls as better readers and girls express greater enjoyment of reading than boys, particularly of required school reading.

Millard (1997) describes other findings related to the students' perceptions of their reading abilities, stating:

Many other boys suggested that now they could read they no longer needed to do so. There were also a larger proportion of boys than girls who described learning to read as hard, and whose accounts of their learning process suggested that reading practice had been experienced as something of an imposition. (“Self-Assessment of Reading Ability,” para. 6)

Many of the boys in Millard’s study, then, characterize themselves as a-literate, seeing reading as a chore, an activity to avoid although they are able to do it.

Moss’s (2007) research focused on reading preferences enacted within the school context, including 6 classes of 7-9 year olds in 4 British primary schools over a span of 2 years (p. 60). In contrast to Millard’s findings that the boys she studied seemed satisfied to view themselves as merely average in terms of reading ability (Millard, 1997, “Self-Assessment of Reading Ability,” para. 13), Moss (2007) notes that the male students in her study did not want to be considered poor readers (p. 166). However, similar to Millard (1997), Moss (2007) found that the boys were indeed more likely to be a-literate. Moss (2007) describes her labeling of students as “can/don’t,” which she uses as shorthand for those who can read freely but don’t (p. 125). Later, she states:

There were more boys than girls in the ‘can/don’t’ category. Despite having passed the relevant proficiency threshold, boys in this group were more likely to use quiet reading time to cluster in the book corner or socialize quietly with a few friends with or without a text to hand....When they had made a choice of what to read at home they were also more likely to abandon that choice after a few pages, or alternatively stick with something they didn’t really like, spinning out reading it over many months thus obeying the requirement to be reading something with little care for what it was. (Moss, 2007, p. 167)

Like the boys in Millard’s (1997) study, the boys Moss studied resisted, by putting little effort into, curricular reading (even when given choice over what to read).

In a study of 105 fourth and fifth grade students, Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) found that among the students surveyed, girls overall showed greater positive motivation in relation to reading (p. 430). And, in Gordon and Lu’s (2008) study of a web-based

summer reading program for students at a high school in the U.S. (which was implemented in place of assigning traditional hard copy summer reading lists), among low achieving students, boys participated at a much lower rate than girls – 42% versus 72% (“Findings and Discussion,” para. 1). Similarly, Greenberg, Gilbert, and Frederick (2006), in their survey regarding the reading preferences and behavior of middle school students – 664 in a rural U.S. school and 510 in an inner city school – found that “inner-city students reported more interest in reading than the rural students did...and females in both schools reported more interest than their male peers” (p. 165). In this example, although inner-city versus rural environment correlated with interest in reading, gender was even more salient in terms of influence.

These studies reproduce a common theme in research and writing (both popular and academic) about gender and literacy. They emphasize boys’ resistance to school-based reading in opposition to girls’ greater acceptance of it. For example, the girls in Millard’s (1997) study were more likely than boys to describe themselves as readers and to display positive attitudes toward school-based reading. And, in both Millard’s (1997) and Moss’s (2007) studies, boys were more likely to characterize themselves as a-literate. Among the student participants in Gordon and Lu’s (2008) study of a web-based summer reading program, males numbered fewer than females. Male and female students alike may perceive female students as better readers (Millard, 1997) and, as Greenburg et al. (2006) observed, boys tend to characterize themselves as being less interested in reading.

A study examining data from New Zealand's National Educational Monitoring Programme likewise finds gap in reading enjoyment between boys and girls. The sample, “drawn from a stratified random sample of 124 schools at year 4 and 126 schools at year

8” (Smith, Smith, Gilmore, & Jameson, 2012, p. 203), included “480 year 4 (grade 3 in the United States) and 480 year 8 (grade 7 in the United States) students” (p. 203). Smith et al. (2012) found “modest differences in achievement and self-perception of reading ability, but that girls reported enjoying reading substantially more than did boys” (p. 205).

Similarly, a study by the U.K.’s National Literacy Trust, which in 2013 surveyed 29,422 youth between the ages of 8 and 16 regarding their reading and writing practices, found differences between boys and girls. Results of the survey showed a gap between boys and girls in terms of reading enjoyment, with a larger percentage of the girls surveyed reporting that they enjoyed reading “very much” (29.1% of girls surveyed versus 20.1% of boys surveyed). Also, 59.8% of girls versus 47.1% of boys surveyed reported “enjoying reading either very much or quite a lot” (Clark, 2014, p. 12). According to the survey, “more girls than boys also read for longer periods of time. 29.1% of girls compared with nearly two-fifths of boys (21.6%) read for one hour or longer. Conversely, more boys than girls say that they only read for 10 minutes when they read (boys 23.4%, girls 17.9%) (Clark, 2014, p. 13).

Studies such as those discussed in this review are backed by anecdotal evidence, as Brian Kenney, former editor-in-chief of *School Library Journal*, points out: “Almost everyone who works with children (as well as many parents) seems challenged, if not stymied, by trying to engage boys in reading, and, especially, sustaining their interest in reading as they grow older” (Kenney, September 1, 2007, para. 4)). Meanwhile, girls are perceived as less problematic in terms of reading.

Research and anecdotes alike present a story regarding gendered literacy that seems simple: boys more often resist reading (particularly curricular-based reading) while

girls are more likely to embrace it. However, the study described in this dissertation develops a more nuanced understanding of gendered literacy which includes the experiences of parents, public librarians, school librarians, teachers, young people, and those who create reading materials for young people, in their own words. Moreover, the studies discussed above, for the most part, either focus on the school context or survey students within the school environment. In contrast, the study completed for this dissertation looks more closely at young people's reading from an outside-school vantage point, and in using blog data, presents a less biased perspective since the participants did not respond to a survey and were not directly observed.

2.4.1.2 Writing. Researchers have noted that children approach writing in distinctively gendered ways. For example, Millard (2005), in describing her study of the writing practices on a "castle map" project of a class of 29 8 and 9 year olds in a British working class neighborhood, notes:

Interestingly, all the non-finishers were boys, although one of the 15 girls had made a very skimpy attempt at the castle map, preferring to head straight for the story booklet which she filled with tiny detailed writing, not wanting to 'waste time drawing'. All three boys who failed to complete the work had completed very little writing, although using their maps they could talk at length about their intended stories and participated fully in class discussions. (p. 62)

Here Millard highlights the boys' resistance to formal school-based literacy as represented in the writing project. Although the boys who had not finished the project orally discussed their work, they resisted doing the formal written work they were required to do. Meanwhile, in contrast to the boys, the female students embraced the project's writing tasks.

Millard (2005) further notes that in the study, boys and girls responded differently when asked about writing processes. She writes:

The boys' positive responses are typified in the following comments:

I write best on my computer at night.

I need to talk to get ideas.

I like writing poems not stories.

I love drawing. I get good ideas from film and books.

I write a lot at home and make stories from the television and computer programmes I have seen.

In contrast, the girls already seemed to be drawing their narratives from a different stock of home practices, which were closer to those of schooling. Their semiotic resources were related to their narrative pleasure in fairytales and their current friendships, which they further cemented by sharing personal and story writing at home. (p. 63)

Once again, Millard, in interpreting her students' self-reports of their literacy practices, highlights evidence for boys' preference for extracurricular literacy and girls' embracing of curricular-oriented literacy.

The National Literacy Trust survey of 29,422 schoolchildren ages 8 through 16 in the U.K. discussed in the previous section also found differences between boys and girls in terms of their writing practices and attitudes toward writing. In terms of attitudes toward writing, the study notes that 55.4% of the girls surveyed versus 38.6% of the boys reported enjoying "writing either very much or quite a lot" (Clark, 2014, p. 9). Moreover, 20.9% of girls versus 12.3% of boys reported that they "they enjoy writing very much" (p. 9). Additionally, 8.2% of the boys surveyed reported "they don't enjoy writing at all" in contrast to 19.2% of the girls surveyed (p. 9). In terms of writing practices, girls more often reported writing "more frequently outside class, with 31.8% of girls in 2013 saying that they write outside class every day compared with only 21.1% of boys" (Clark, 2014, p. 10). Among the children surveyed, 4.2 % of the boys, in contrast to 8.7% of the girls, reported that "they never write outside class" (p. 10). According to this study's findings, then, among the students surveyed, boys were more reluctant writers than girls. In contrast to Millard's (2005) and other researchers' findings to be discussed below, the

National Literacy Trust study did not find boys to be avid writers in regard to writing outside of school.

Millard's (2005) observations of boys' preference for engaging in literacy activities outside of school find some support in the broader research literature. For example, Smith and Wilhelm's (2002) qualitative study of a diverse sample of 49 middle and high school boys in the U.S. provides evidence of these boys' rich extracurricular literate lives. Based on extensive interview data and literacy logs the participants kept, Smith and Wilhelm, in "*Reading Don't Fix No Chevys*": *Literacy in the Lives of Young Men*, flesh out the boys' extracurricular engagement with and creation of varied text types in their pursuit of hobbies and interests.

The research on children's gendered writing suggests that children's writing practices may reflect distinctively gendered approaches. More specifically, it demonstrates the ways in which the girls in these studies more often embraced school-based writing while the boys resisted such projects and (with the exception of the National Literacy Trust survey discussed above) instead preferred to write about topics of individual interest in extracurricular environments. Like the studies on gender differences in relation to reading, the studies discussed in this section regarding gender differences in writing reproduce a common theme in research about gender and literacy: boys' resistance towards school-based literacy juxtaposed with girls' greater willingness participate in it. Although these studies provide valuable glimpses into children's and young adults' literate worlds, the study described in this dissertation provides a unique perspective in examining texts from blogs – texts which, unlike the texts in the studies reviewed, are both un-solicited and produced in a relatively unobserved fashion.

2.4.1.3 Classroom behaviors. Scholars have also investigated how children comport themselves in terms of classroom literacy tasks and found them to behave in ways differentiated by gender. Maynard (2002), for example, describes what she perceives as girls' and boys' differing orientations toward literacy, pinpointing girls' teacher-pleasing behavior and boys' relative dominance and risk-taking behavior as cause for concern. Maynard (2002), in an action research study conducted with teachers in a South Wales primary school, regarding the perceived literacy problems of the male students in the school, found that

the children involved in this research supported their teachers' perceptions that compared with the boys, the girls were often self-conscious and embarrassed, wanted to please the teacher and were more compliant. Boys, on the other hand, tended to be dominant and competitive, were more willing to take risks, and were less likely to do what they did not want to do. (p. 106)

Maynard here contrasts girls' compliance with school-based literacy activities and self-conscious behavior with boys' active resistance to formal literacy activities.

Blair (2000), who studied girls' and boy's language usage in a multicultural eighth grade language arts classroom in a working class, urban, Canadian neighborhood, similarly notes boys' disruption of classroom activities: "The ones who spoke first and loudest, interrupted the most, made side comments to classmates, or mocked previous ideas were most often the boys" (p. 316).

Likewise, Millard (1997), in her study of British students, observed:

In the set reading times...the majority of boys found it much more difficult to read for any sustained period of time. Girls who were talking appeared to be sharing bits of their books or swapping them rather than causing a distraction. Boys frequently got out of their places, allegedly to change their book, but usually to hang round other boys' desks, once they thought the teacher had taken their eyes off them. One boy described how reading in his class became either a race, 'it's like the first person to win or finish the book and you don't remember it at all. You're just getting through it; you just want to finish it'; or, more usually, how the

period usually broke up in whispers and an ultimate confrontation with the teacher. (“Time Spent Reading, para. 5)

In Millard’s portrayal of the classroom she observed she emphasizes boys’ tendency towards disruption, competition, and resistance towards assigned literacy activities.

In summary, according to the studies reviewed here, boys are perceived to have brought elements of competition, distraction, and in some cases, hostility, to classroom literacy activities. In contrast, girls are perceived to tend toward quiet obedience and self-conscious behavior in the classroom. A U.S. study examining a large sample supports the smaller observational studies discussed in this review noting apparent gender-based differences in classroom behavior. With a final sample of 11,300 students, the study specifically examines the relationship between teacher assessments of elementary students’ school behavior and students’ academic achievement (DiPrete & Jennings, 2012, p. 4). DiPrete and Jennings looked at data, drawn from the “Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten cohort (ECLS – K)” (p. 3), relating to “students’ test scores in reading and math at the beginning and end of kindergarten, the end of first grade, the end of third grade, and the end of fifth grade, plus teacher assessments of academic achievement and retention in grade after kindergarten, first grade, and third grade” (p. 3). Based on these findings, DiPrete and Jennings conclude “that girls in contemporary America possess advantages in social and behavioral skills over boys and perform better on standardized tests from the start of kindergarten” (p. 3). Moreover, they reject other scholars’ insistence that such social and behavioral skills are due to class-based differences, since according to the findings based on their sample, “differences in mean levels of social and behavioral skills by gender are actually larger than are differences by poverty status” (p. 3). In this study, then, like other studies discussed in

this review, girls are perceived to display better classroom behavior than boys, which may impact boys' reading achievement.

The studies reviewed here reiterate a widely found "gap" in literacy behaviors between boys and girls: boys' resistance to school-based literacy versus girls' more willing participation. The studies describe in detail a persistent social differential in boy-girl reading. However, although these studies represent glimpses of and attitudes toward gendered classroom literacy behaviors, their focus on school-based literacy is limiting. The study completed as part of this dissertation, by analyzing blogs, examines more closely young people's approaches to extracurricular reading. Moreover, in studying blogs as a sociocultural site for the performance of gendered literacy, it is possible to analyze unobtrusively how multiple actors involved in the teaching of literacy and consumption of texts for young people enact and/or resist traditional notions of gendered literacy.

2.4.1.4 Girls and boys report differing literacy preferences. Along with boys' resistance towards and girls' penchant for formal literacy, another enactment of gendered literacy involves boys' and girls' differing literacy preferences. The scholarship, discussed below, focuses on girls' and boys' differing reading preferences, differing approaches to writing, and differing uses of computers in relation to writing.

2.4.1.4.1 Reading preferences. Studies focusing on boys' and girls' differing reading preferences are based primarily on reader preference surveys. For example, Hall and Coles (1997), in a replication study, surveyed 7,976 schoolchildren (ages 10, 12, and 14) throughout England, regarding their reading behaviors. They report:

In terms of broad genre categories, the children's responses to the survey demonstrate that, as a proportion of their total reading diet, girls read

comparatively more adventure, horror and ghost, animal and school-related stories and slightly more poetry. The differences between the sexes are particularly marked in relation to books about relationships and romance. A greater percentage of boys' reading diet is science fiction and fantasy, sports-related books and war and spy stories. More boys than girls read comic and joke books, annuals and humorous fiction. Interestingly, crime and detective works are equally popular as a proportion of the reading diet of both sexes. This stands out as the only such book type in the survey. Generally the data reveal very marked differences in the subjects which girls and boys find attractive. (Hall & Coles, 1997, "Children's Reading Choices," para. 14)

English children surveyed for this study express different reading preferences in terms of genre, converging only in regard to crime and detective fiction.

The U.K.'s National Literacy Trust study (discussed earlier) which surveyed 29,422 students ages 8 through 16 regarding their literacy practices, also found distinct differences in reading preferences between boys and girls. The study notes that the girls surveyed reported reading a wider variety of texts than the boys surveyed. For example, the girls reported reading "technology-based formats, such as text messages, messages on social networking sites, emails and instant messages, as well as more 'traditional' texts, such as fiction and poems, magazines and lyrics," whereas more boys than girls reported reading "newspapers, comics and manuals" (Clark, 2014, p. 13).

A larger study of the reading preferences of students in the U.K., *What Kids are Reading 2012* (Topping & Renaissance Learning, 2012), uses data drawn from Accelerated Reader, educational software produced by Renaissance Learning. These data were created from "quizzes taken by UK pupils on books read between August 1, 2010 and July 31, 2011" and include "results for 213,527 children in 1,237 schools" (Topping & Renaissance Learning, 2012, "Summary and Discussion," para. 1). Based on data for this student sample, boys read books of similar difficulty to those read by girls, but students also showed some distinct gendered reading preferences in terms of favored

authors. Moreover, “girls tended to choose books with female role models” (“Summary and Discussion,” para. 5). Starting from year 5, a trend of male students’ preference, which was especially marked from year 7 onward, for non-fiction was clear (“Summary and Discussion,” para. 8), but boys were not choosing more difficult books and were not reading non-fiction titles “carefully”-- as evidenced in their book quiz scores (para. 9).

A similar assessment conducted in the U.K. in 2014, also using Accelerated Reader software collected data from 426,067 students (years 1 through 13) in 2,016 schools and for more than 6,544,973 books read over July 2012 through August 2013 (Topping & Renaissance Learning, 2014, p. iv), yielded different results. In 2014, in contrast to previous years, “boys seem to be doing as well as girls in terms of the difficulty of the books they are choosing” (Topping & Renaissance Learning, 2014, p. 17). Moreover, the reading “choices of boys and girls have become much more similar, although not only by girls’ becoming more like boys’ – the opposite is also true” (p. 17). Moreover, for the 2014 study, in terms of the quizzes, “boys are performing equally as well as girls” (p. vi). Thus, the 2014 results indicate some reversal of the trends noted in the 2012 study in which boys from year 5 on were reporting choosing books rated as less difficult, and in which stronger distinctions in the preferences of male students versus female students were noted.

Although these studies are based on data collected by a for-profit company, thereby introducing significant bias, they are still a useful barometer of U.K. children’s reading preferences, as the software is widely used among schools (in both the U.K. and the U.S.).

Sturm's (2003) study of 2,000 responses to a survey administered to patrons ages 2 -18 of the State Library of North Carolina, found areas of both overlap and difference in boys' and girls' reading preferences. For example, although "the top four categories" of reading preference were the same for both males and females, "the rank order is slightly different: animals, science, sports, and literature (for girls the categories of sports and literature are reversed)" (Sturm, 2003, "Results and Discussion," para. 3). Also, there were differences by sex within larger categories. For instance, girls and boys in roughly equal numbers wanted to read about science (Sturm, 2003, "Results and Discussion," para. 1), but within science as a larger category, "girls preferred geography and botany more than boys, and boys liked astronomy and anatomy more than girls" ("Results and Discussion," para. 6).

Millard (1994), in her study of English adolescents, found more girls were able to identify their favorite author and more girls chose sanctioned texts and authors as favorites (that is, ones teachers would recommend for their age group) (p. 56). Additionally, more girls than boys described themselves as heavy readers (Millard, 1997, "Time Spent Reading," para. 2). Similar to Hall and Coles (1997), Millard (1997) also found that boys reported a preference for comics ("Introduction," para. 5). Millard (1994) concludes that overall her "research...has provided strong evidence to support a prior perception that boys' and girls' orientation towards work in language – that is their attitudes to reading and writing – becomes increasingly divergent as they enter the secondary phase of education" (p. 149).

In contrast to Millard's (1994) conclusions that differences between girls' and boys' literacy preferences increase with age, Davies and Brember (1993), in their study

of 611 students (Years 2, 4, and 6) within “a random sample of six schools within the primary schools of one local education authority (LEA)” (“Abstract”) in England, found “that while there were several significant differences between the boys and girls in the younger age range, these became progressively fewer as the age group increased” (“Abstract”). Similar to other researchers’ findings, however, Davies and Brember found that “the biggest difference between the obtained and expected frequencies is that more girls than expected chose stories and more boys than expected chose comics” (“Results and Discussion,” para. 13)—providing yet another example of girls and boys demonstrating differing literacy preferences in relation to reading content.

Millard (1994) notes that

many more boys than girls read publications connected with a hobby or leisure interest, like *Angling Times* or computer magazines with facts and information, and comics that included action-packed adventures. The girls chose magazines about pop music and fashion, which contained far more narrative material and personal interest stories. (p. 103)

Millard here notes that in addition to boys’ and girls’ differing subject matter interests, text features may be differentially attractive to boys and girls. For example, the boys surveyed in this study, compared to the girls, preferred leisure reading materials with more facts and less text.

A study of the reading and writing preferences of Finnish students (ages 10 – 11: 67 boys, 78 girls), similar to other studies discussed in this section, describes girls’ greater interest in reading. Girls reported being more motivated than boys to read books and to visit the library (Merisuo-Storm, 2006, p. 117). Like other studies, Merisuo-Storm also found that boys preferred comics and non-fiction. Regarding specific reading preferences, the boys studied preferred comics, humor, and adventure (in that order).

Girls preferred the same genres but in a different order: adventure, humor, and comics (p. 117). Moreover, “most boys said they would hate to read poems, but stories and fairytales were nearly as unpopular as poems. Non-fiction and poetry were genres that least appealed to most girls. In fact for Finnish 10- or 11-year-old pupils poetry seemed to be the least interesting genre of literature” (pp. 117-118). Children of both genders reported interest in reading series books, but “boys were even more interested in series of books than girls” (p. 118). Merisuo-Storm (2006) sums up boys’ reported love of series as follows: “It is easy to pick up a book that belongs to a familiar series from the library shelf; one can predict what the story will be like. Moreover, as it is important for boys to know that the book they choose is not a “girl book,” a series of books is a safer choice” (p. 118). Merisuo-Storm thereby explains boys’ preference for series as a function of series books being convenient and predictable in terms of story, and safe in terms of gender-coding.

In critique of the types of reading preference studies described above, Moss (2007) states that such studies often

treat differences in genre preferences between boys and girls as a given, and ask few questions about why or how such preferences develop. Instead, genre preferences are understood as an expression of gendered identities which already exist fully fledged and largely independent of the social contexts in which literacy learning takes place. (p. 61)

Moss hereby criticizes what she sees as other researchers’ non-contextualized investigations into children’s reading preferences in which such preferences are seen as manifestations of children’s gendered selves. Moss presents her own research as an alternative approach – an approach she refers to as “understanding the social construction of genre preferences” (p 87). Her studies focus on the playing out of reading preferences

within the classroom -- 6 classes of 7-9 year olds in 4 British primary schools over a span of 2 years (p. 60).

As an example of Moss's (2007) more contextualized approach, she discusses the boys' (in the schools that were the sites for her research) preference for non-fiction text as a function of their being labeled less proficient readers.

Low proficiency rankings seemed to conflict more with these boys' sense of self-esteem than they did for girls....Non-fiction texts gave them somewhere to go. Indeed, precisely because of the prevalence of illustration in these texts they provided one of the few arenas where more and less able boys could meet on a level, as it were. Boys designated as weak readers could muster their expertise in response to such a text without having to stumble through the print to identify what was going on....This was an advantage in relation to boys' status politics. It seemed to work less well in terms of making progress with their reading. For one net result of the strategies they employed was that many such boys simply spent less time on verbal text. (p. 87)

Moss shows how, in the classrooms she observed, boys labeled as less able readers often chose to read non-fiction texts, which, with their abundance of illustrations, provided a less text-intensive reading experience. As a result of these boys' more often choosing non-fiction, Moss also perceived that they did not progress as rapidly in terms of their reading abilities. Moss's research thereby provides a contextualized answer to the question of why the boys in the classrooms she observed gravitated towards illustration-rich non-fiction and the effects on their reading.

McKechie (2004) analyzed the home collections of books and other texts of fifty-two children (most of whom were living in Southern Ontario, Canada) ages 4 through 12 and interviewed them about their collections. Like other studies discussed in this section, McKechie observed differences between the boys' and girls' reading preferences, in this case measured through the contents of the children's personal libraries and nuanced through qualitative interviews with the children about their reading

practices and preferences. Like Moss (2007), McKechnie (2006), in follow-up interviews with forty-three boys, found that the boys were interested in non-fiction, even noting that “when asked which was their favorite title in their collection, many identified a non-fiction work” (p. 62). Unlike Moss (2007), however, McKechnie (2006) does not see this as an indication of and/or function of weaker reading ability on the part of the boys studied. Rather, she sees it as cause for educators, including librarians, to expand “their understanding of what constitutes *real* reading, as described and lived by boys themselves” and to develop library collections accordingly (p. 66).

In terms of girls’ and boys’ differing genre preferences, McKechnie (2006), here referring to boys’ preferences, found that: “Some genres appeared more frequently and were different from the genres in the collections of the girls who participated in the larger study. These included fantasy, science fiction, sports stories, and funny stories” (p. 61). Moreover, the boys shunned certain categories, including “classic children’s fiction” and “love stories and books about groups of girls, such as the popular *Babysitter’s Club* series” (p. 61). There was overlap in boys’ and girls’ preferences in terms of some favorite series, “like the *Magic Treehouse* books,” but “other series, including *Captain Underpants*, *Redwall*, and *Animorphs*, were almost exclusively found on the boys’ shelves” (p. 61).

In yet another more qualitative, contextualized study, Dutro (2003) notes the ways in which the African-American 5th grade male classmates she studied performed masculinity in their discussions of their literacy preferences within the classroom:

The boys perform masculinities through their talk about their own and girls’ reading preferences. All of their stated preferences center on sports and super-hero comics....When I asked them what girls like to read, the books they mentioned were “books about Barbies,” *The Babysitters Club*, *American Girl* series, and *The Boxcar Children* series. Except for *The Boxcar Children* all of these series are highly gendered. (Dutro, 2003, p. 488)

In Dutro's account, gendered literacy is evident as a function of reading preference.

Dutro's male students, however, later defied masculinity while talking about the

American Girl books they had been required to read for literature circles:

Kenneth's comment appeared to clear a safe space for positive talk about the books. Even Anthony who claimed to dislike the books, jumped into the conversation to defend his favorite character. After Kenneth helped to create a space for the boys to include positive talk about these books, the conversation turned to the books in more detail. (Dutro, 2003, p. 490)

From Dutro's example of these boys who at first eschewed the girl-friendly *American Girl* books and later admitted interest when another boy tacitly approved of a change in the conversation, children's potential both to uphold and disrupt dominant conceptions of gendered literacy is evident.

Similar to Dutro's (2003) results, which attest to the malleability of the reading preferences of girls and boys, a study of the book preferences and selections of a sample of 40 first graders from four different Greater Vancouver (Canada) schools found that "only a small number of children preferred information books, with little difference in genre preferences between boys and girls" (Chapman, Filipenko, McTavish, & Shapiro, 2007, p. 540). However, when asked which books the opposite sex would prefer, "the boys chose considerable more stories than information books for girls and the reverse for boys....Like the boys, the girls also thought that boys prefer information books and that girls prefer stories (Chapman et al. 2007, p. 538). In this case, then, the children's true preferences were not necessarily the same as what would be expected based on their sex (with boys preferring information books and girls preferring stories). Additionally, even though "both boys and girls clearly liked aspects of books that might be attributed (gender-stereotypically) as more attractive to one gender or the other" (Chapman et al.,

2007, p. 544), they still held stereotypical gendered expectations of what boys and girls should prefer to read. Chapman et al. thereby conclude that their “data provide strong support for the theory that children’s conceptions of gender and literacy are socially constructed” (p. 546).

Among the studies discussed in this section, differing trends in reading preferences between the male and female participants are evident. For example, the male participants in studies by Dutro (2003), Hall and Coles (1997), McKechnie (2006), and Sturm (2003) all expressed a greater preference (in comparison to girls) for sports-related materials. Many of the studies report boys’ preference for comics (Davies and Brember, 1993; Dutro, 2003; Hall and Coles, 1997; Merisuo-Storm, 2006; Millard, 1994; Millard, 1997). Furthermore, McKechnie (2006), Millard (1994), and Moss (2007) all observed boys’ preference for fact-filled texts containing fewer words. In the study just discussed above (Chapman et al. 2007), although the children’s self-described reading preferences did not always follow the stereotype of girls preferring stories and boys preferring information books, the children, when surveyed, expected these stereotyped preferences of children of the opposite sex.

Studies of children’s reading practices are also beginning to investigate gender in relation to media preferences and reading. For example, a study of the attitudes toward reading, scores on standardized reading tests, and reading responses of 199 struggling middle school readers in Texas found that, after two months of using Amazon Kindle® e-readers during silent reading time (15-25 minutes per day at school) (Miranda, Williams-Rossi, Johnson, & McKenzie, 2011, pp. 81, 83-84), “significant increases were found for boys on one variable - the value of reading” (Miranda et al., 2011, p. 81). The increasing

popularity of e-readers is likely to fuel more studies like this one, and could examine whether gendered patterns exist in the use of e-readers.

The studies discussed in this section primarily support the perception that girls and boys have distinct reading preferences. Moreover, the study by Chapman, Filipenko, McTavish, and Shapiro (2007) suggests that even when children's reading preferences do not match the gender stereotypes, they are well aware of existing stereotypes. However, the studies, for the most part, do not examine in depth where these differing reading preferences originate. The one exception is Moss (2007), who describes a self-perpetuating cycle of underachievement within the school environment as the male students she studied, who had been pegged as less proficient readers, more often chose to read non-fiction (less text, more illustrations) and thereby missed opportunities to engage more challenging reading materials that might help them improve their reading. However, Moss (2007), in focusing so closely on the classroom environment, misses the larger sociocultural picture regarding gendered literacy. The study undertaken as part of this dissertation examines blogs as a sociocultural site in which the perpetuation of gendered values in connection to literacy may play out.

Brozo (2010) writes of his experiences as a high school English and reading teacher, saying that what he has seen in the classroom match research findings regarding boys and reading and more specifically "that males have always outnumbered females in remedial reading centers" (p. 19). Similar to other educators, he also supports the notion of boys' reading preferences as different from those of girls'. He suggests offering boys, especially boys who struggle with reading or are not engaged in reading, fiction featuring "positive male archetypes," developed from the Jungian concept of male archetypes (p.

14), including, for example, *The Pilgrim*, *Warrior*, *King*, *Healer*, *Prophet*, among others (p. 26). He also suggests offering boys “graphic novels, comic books, information books, hobby manuals, survival guides, and electronic media” (p. 5). Moreover, he notes the importance of choice, meaning that boys can choose what they read, and control, that boys help decide the assessments and activities they do in connection with the chosen texts (pp. 18-19). Brozo’s tone is positive in terms of offering strategies for helping boys to enjoy reading, but at the same time he labels boys reluctant and remedial readers.

2.4.1.4.2 Writing interests. Researchers have also observed differences in writing between girls and boys both in terms of style and in choice of narrative content. Paley (1984) shows how such differences in storytelling may begin quite early. In her account of how kindergarteners enact gender through play, she says:

Every year, the girls begin with stories of good little families, while the boys bring us a litany of superheroes and bad guys. This kind of storytelling is an adjunct of play; it follows existing play and introduces new ideas for the future...the children take over the story-plays for a more urgent matter; to inform one another of the preferred images for boys and girls. (Paley, 1984, p. 3)

In this excerpt, Paley (1984) illustrates the connection between gendered literacy and children’s development of gender identity. In conforming to gender-stereotypical modes of literacy (and play), they rehearse and teach one another gender roles.

In another study of early literacy, Solsken (1993) comments on what she perceives as important aspects of boys’ and girls’ (K-grade 2) differing literacy preferences. Although she prefaces the following excerpt by explaining that there were also genres that interested both boys and girls for both reading and writing, she discusses in detail the differences between girls and boys in the ways in which they wrote about “fantasy fiction,” stating:

the lead roles in their own stories were almost always of the same gender... Fantasy stories written by boys involved themes of physical combat and competition, disaster and rescue....The girls' fantasy stories involved searches or magical transformation – wishes, potions, events that were suddenly beautiful or strange, problematic perhaps, but not usually threatening, and problems were never resolved through violence....Male characters frequently appeared in supporting roles as fathers, brothers, and companions. These themes were especially predominant in the pieces co-authored by peers, which with very rare exceptions were always fantasy fiction and were always written in same-gender pairs, suggesting that children were negotiating important gender issues in this writing. (p. 209)

For Solsken (1993), the differing content in the fantasy stories authored by the boys and girls she observed is paramount. Stories written by boys featured adventure and competition (often violent) and almost exclusively male protagonists. Girls' stories, in contrast, more often resembled fairytales, featuring female leads and magical quests and changes. Girl and boy authors alike favored writing about lead characters who were their same sex. Solsken also notes that, when co-authoring stories, children chose to work with peers of their same sex.

The work of other researchers confirms the perception of children's reliance on gender-stereotypical literacy behaviors throughout elementary school in completing written projects. For example, Millard and Marsh (2001), based on their research on children's literacy, conclude that boys and girls approach literacy tasks in different ways.

Here they summarize such differences:

Girls often spend time on decoration and embellishment; boys focus on action, cartoon figures and scenarios. These differently gendered approaches to the use of drawing to inform writing are present from the earliest years....Clear gender differences were found in the way in which drawing related to the written word in all three classes. Girls tended to draw stylized images of children, houses and flowers providing decoration, rather than key aspects of the text in question. In some cases, girls produced drawings of houses and children, no matter how varied the topic chosen. (Millard & Marsh, 2001, p. 57)

From Millard and Marsh's observations, gendered literacy may take the form of differences in the drawings boys and girls do to illustrate narrative text in early elementary school. The girls in this study decorated their stories with stylized versions of houses, children, and flowers (often regardless of the narrative subject matter) while the boys' drawings, in contrast, were action and cartoon-oriented.

McPhail's (2008) doctoral dissertation studies whether the allowance for more choice and inclusion of more boy-friendly topics and genres (including a comic book unit) in the writing curriculum for first graders leads to better student writing. McPhail summarizes: "My analysis suggests that there were gendered literacy interests in the class and that most students felt more free, more motivated to write, and performed at higher levels when experimenting with genres of interest" (from abstract). McPhail thereby assumes the differing literacy preferences of boys and girls in the class and argues that encouraging students to follow these gendered interests in writing results in higher quality writing.

Merisuo-Storm (2006), in a study of the reading and writing preferences of a sample of 10-11 year old Finnish students (also discussed in the "reading choice" section above), found a strong correlation between enjoyment of reading and enjoyment of writing for both boys and girls (pp. 119-120). However, in general, girls' ratings of writing were significantly higher than boys' (p. 120). Regarding writing preferences, male and female students alike rated writing to a pen pal as the most enjoyable among the choices of writing activities. Girls rated writing in a diary second best among the choices of writing activities and writing stories as third best. Boys, on the other hand, rated story-writing or writing a letter to an author as second best (Merisuo-Storm, 2006, p. 120).

Exploring the Finnish students' preferences for story-writing in more detail,

Merisuo-Storm (2006) notes:

Pupils had been writing stories in school from the first grade onwards and the process was familiar to all of them. "I love it" or "I like it" were the answers given by 81% of the pupils. The boys were, however, not as eager writers as the girls. The difference between the two groups is significant.... Nevertheless, the girls enjoyed writing in a diary even more. "Would you like to keep a diary?" is the question in the questionnaire that divided the opinions of the two genders the most clearly. "I would hate it" replied 34% of the boys, and 30% of them said, "I would not like it." Both boys and girls found poetry the least attractive genre of writing. However, girls' answers were significantly more positive than boys' answers. (p. 121)

In this case, despite these students' familiarity and comfort with story-writing, the boys, in the aggregate, preferred story-writing less so than girls. And, girls preferred writing in a diary much more so than did boys. Neither boys nor girls preferred writing poetry, but girls rated it significantly higher than boys. None of the other studies examined for this literature review looked at diary-writing, but based on this study, in which girls preferred diary writing, it could be argued that diary writing is coded as a feminine literacy practice.

Orellana's (1995) findings echo those of other researchers in terms of children's gendered writing behaviors; however, Orellana also shows specifically how such behaviors are replicated and thereby cemented through classroom practice. In an article based on her dissertation research, Orellana describes her ethnographic study of two southeast Los Angeles elementary school (Spanish-English bilingual) classrooms consisting of students who were mostly Central American (primarily Mexican) first, second, and third generation immigrants.

Orellana observes that the students in Classroom B, despite having free choice in writing topics, "express themselves as gendered persons through the topics they choose to write about. In doing this, they create a markedly gendered literacy environment" (p. 696).

Orellana's "analysis of the topics revealed a marked split in the themes chosen by girls and boys, with minimal overlap" (p. 695). For example, among other topics, the boys wrote about battles between good and evil forces, sports, superheroes, vehicles, and war and peace (p. 235). In contrast, the girls' preferred themes included, for instance, "personified butterflies, hearts, rainbows, and flowers, etc.," school, and romance (p. 235). The only topics that both girls and boys chose to write about "were Animals, Ghosts, etc., Family/Home, Holidays, Friends, Disney, and Getting Rich/Money" (p. 236). Moreover, Orellana notes, "none of these were the most popular themes for both girls and boys" (p. 236). Furthermore, similar to Solsken (1993), Orellana found that the girls tended to write only about female characters while boys tended to write only about male characters (pp. 232-233). Like Solsken (1993), she also noted that when writing in pairs, students tended to work in same-sex pairs (Orellana, 1995, p. 220).

Orellana (1995) concludes that the gendered literacy environment fostered in large part through the children's book-writing activities is reproduced and reinforced via the following process:

The books that they wrote were available for others to read, and were in fact the most popular books in the class library. These books, in turn, served as important sources of inspiration for the further production of books....The role of peer culture in the text-production process should be underscored. Most students said they got their ideas from the stories that their friends had written. Since most of their friendships were divided along gendered lines, this shows how gender, as expressed through peer relations, was used to construct literacy and how literacy in turn served to construct gender. (p. 696)

Not only did the students follow gendered patterns in their writing, but in interacting with one another and one another's texts, they reproduced these gendered patterns. In Orellana's classroom examples, therefore, children's use of gender specific literacy

preferences (in this case, writing topics) became a significant vehicle for the enactment and ongoing maintenance of gender identity and gendered literacy.

Other investigations into gender differences in writing have focused on older students and have found continued differentiation between girls and boys. For example, in observing Canadian middle school students' projects over a year, Sanford (2005/2006) noted that despite having wide berth for creativity,

students repeatedly selected gender-appropriate topics and modes of presenting, not thinking or being encouraged to consider different possibilities. For example, most of the girls chose to write stories or poems about friends and family, going shopping, comparing fashion ideas. Pets and other animals figured largely in the girls' writing. Most of the boys chose to write about adventures, activities, and humorous incidents (generally involving some type of accident and embarrassment). Vehicles, machines, and weapons figured largely in the boys' representations. (p. 308)

Once again, gender stereotypes play out in these children's literacy practices, boys focusing on action and adventure, machines, weapons, and vehicles and girls focusing on activities of family and friends, shopping, fashion, and pets and other animals.

Millard (1997), based on her analysis of English high school students' writing samples, comments both on girls' and boys' differing choices of subject matter and differing writing styles. Specifically, she states that boys' "models for narrative composition are less literary than those of the girls"; they use a broader range of characters than girls but these characters display "a lack of empathy for the opposite sex and their feelings." Moreover, their writing tends to be "focused on action and the factual information provided by the texts they read or the narratives they watch" (Millard, 1997, p. 145). In Millard's assessment, therefore, boys' writing tends to be less literary and more action and fact-oriented than girls', and although boys utilize a more diverse cast of characters, these characters are less empathetic towards the opposite sex.

Although the contexts for these studies (for instance, in terms of the children's ages) are varied, they present some patterns in boys' and girls' writing topic preferences. For example, several of the researchers mention that family and domestic scenes, animals, and flowers figure prominently in the girl participants' writing (and drawing). On the other hand, boys' writing tends to include action/adventure, superheroes, and violent struggles. These studies also note that boys and girls tend to approach writing in different ways, for example in the ways in which they illustrate their stories (Millard & Marsh, 2001), utilize characters, or the degree to which they include verbal text (with boys including less) (Millard, 1997).

Although Orellana (1995) looks at how the teachers worked to make gender an important factor in the classroom literacy environments she observed (this is treated in more detail in a later section), the other studies reviewed here do not discuss the literacy teachers' perspectives, which might provide insight into the perpetuation of and/or changing of gendered norms in relation to literacy. The study undertaken as part of this dissertation, in analyzing blogs authored by young people's literacy teachers, examines how literacy continues as a gendered enterprise. Moreover, most of the studies take place in school settings. This study treats blogs as another important sociocultural site – a site that can be unobtrusively accessed – for the enactment of gendered literacy. It compares blog narratives written by literacy teachers (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers), creators of texts for children, and children/young adults, treating these blog narratives as sociocultural artifacts in order to better understand the phenomenon of gendered literacy. It then compares the blog narratives to a conceptual model of gendered

literacy developed from a review of the existing literature in an attempt to identify larger trends in terms of gender and literacy.

2.4.1.4.3 Computer usage in relation to literacy. Almjeld's (2008) doctoral thesis, "The Girls of MySpace: New Media as Gendered Literacy Practice and Identity Construction," is not a study comparing girls to boys; however, it provides a glimpse of how girls may perform gender through their use of social media. Almjeld (2008) looks at teenage girls' gendered expressions of self in 25 MySpace profiles, thereby examining "the role MySpace plays in the performance of both womanhood and teenhood" (from abstract). Almjeld (2008) finds that "MySpace appears a place where girls can speak out and find society with others playing and experimenting with identity construction" (p.155). Boys' MySpace profiles might look very different from those of the girls Almjeld studied, and although this study does no comparative analysis of this sort, it provides a potential starting point for comparison. The study is also helpful in suggesting how gendered literacy may be performed in the digital environment.

Williams (2006/2007), in contrast, is more interested in comparing girls' and boys' differing uses of computers as evidence of gendered literacy, stating:

Although the uses girls put computers to seem less directly competitive than what boys do with technology, girls often use computers for highly literate practices in ways that boys sometimes do not. A role-playing computer game favored by girls, such as *The Sims*, may involve more reading and writing than a first person shooter, such as *Half-Life*, which is popular with boys. (p. 304)

Williams, in his informal observations and conversations with adolescent girls in school settings, has found adolescent girls to be using computers as frequently as boys but using them in ways different from those of boys. These differences include girls' less competitive uses and preference for computer games and pursuits that involve them in

more literacy-intensive activities. Williams' musings are more anecdotal than empirical; however, his analysis merits further exploration in terms of the ways in which boys and girls may use computers differently in terms of literacy.

Almjeld (2008), mentioned above, looks only at girls' use of MySpace and concentrates on their use of MySpace as an identity-building exercise. The study described in this dissertation, in contrast, focuses on blogs. From the pilot study conducted prior to this study, girls (and perhaps women as well) appear to be better represented in the blogosphere than boys, and girls use "book" blogs to introduce and review books they have read. Therefore, in drawing the sample for this study, care was taken to include blogs written by males, to allow for comparison. Analyzing what these narratives say about the bloggers' literacy experiences in relation to gender is the focus of this study.

2.5 Gendered Literacy Enacted by Educators and those in the Publishing Industry

Few studies have addressed gendered literacy from the perspectives of the practitioners who traditionally guide children's literacy learning: parents, teachers, and librarians. Ironically, the focus on children's perspectives may have occluded the roles of these practitioners. For this reason, the study described in this dissertation contributes to the literature by examining the perspectives of these practitioners. The following section discusses studies that address the ways in which parents, teachers, and librarians enact gendered literacy through modeling and support of literacy behaviors and their interactions with children. In comparing the perspectives of children to those of practitioners, this study may also give insight into how children adopt gendered values connected with literacy. Since the study analyzes blogs by published authors and

illustrators, as well as editors, the following section also discusses work that has been done on gendered literacy as manifested within the publishing industry.

2.5.1 Parents' perspectives. Work on the perspectives of parents in relation to gendered literacy is scant, and when the research literature mentions parents, it does so indirectly. For example, Cherland (1994) only alludes to the beliefs about literacy held by the parents of the students in her sample. In her ethnography of the fiction reading practices of seven 6th grade girls living in a Canadian community the author dubbed "Oak Town," she observed:

Cultural constructions of gender shaped the ways in which the parents at Oak Town went about reading, as well as the ways in which they encouraged their own children to read. In turn, those cultural discourses centered on reading became part of the construction of gender. Thus it happened that while many of the sixth-grade girls were reading fiction, many of the boys were not. (p. 69)

Cherland (1994) hints at the parents' practices and beliefs related to literacy, emphasizing the effect of their influence on the children – more of the girls than the boys were reading fiction, but the reference is indirect.

In contrast, Nichols (2002) interviewed middle class Australian parents about their perceptions of their children's interests and found gendered patterns in relation to these parents' perceptions of their children's interests in literacy activities. Nichols' (2002) semi-structured interviews revealed the following regarding these parents' perceptions of their children's literacy interests:

- Boys were attributed with more interests than girls;
- Literacy related activities featured strongly in boys' perceived 'noninterests';
- Boys' non-literacy interests were much more diverse than girls' (e.g. camping, making a gaol, using numbers, being outside);
- Most of girls' perceived interests were literacy related (e.g. reading, drawing, listening to stories).

It may appear that boys and girls are simply interested in different things.

However, discourse analysis of parents' extended accounts supports the view that

these descriptions are not straightforward representations of children's 'real' preferences but discursively framed interpretations of children's interests. (p. 130)

Among Nichols' observations, literacy showcases as an activity that Australian parents more often associate with their daughters than with their sons. Nichols further argues that such beliefs may result in "a prohibition on parents engaging in direct literacy teaching with their young boys. If children do not show an interest, parents should not impose practices on them. However, even when boys do engage in literacy related activities this may be interpreted as 'not a real interest'" (p. 141). In this way, parents, within the home sphere, encourage gendered beliefs and practice in connection to children's literacy.

The research on parents' enactments of gendered literacy reflects the dominant gendered concepts discussed earlier. For example, the association of literacy with femininity is clear in Nichols' (2002) study, in which parents saw sons as not being interested in literacy, while they perceived their daughters' interests as being mainly literacy-related. Moreover, in Cherland's (1994) study, girls, more than boys, were reading fiction, presented as due to parental influence (Cherland, 1994). Fiction reading is a literacy activity more in line with school-based literacies, and as stated earlier, the research indicates that girls stereotypically are drawn toward these types of literacy.

On the other hand, a study by Scholastic Inc. and Harrison Group (2010), using survey data collected from "a nationally representative sample of 1,045 children age 6–17 and their parents (2,090 total respondents)" (p. 4), found that although "boys see reading as less important than girls do...parents of boys and girls value reading equally" (p. 24). Another interesting finding from the study was that "when asked how much they enjoyed reading when they were their child's age, dads and moms mirror boys and girls today" (p. 25). For example, 69% of moms surveyed versus 50% of dads responded that they had

liked or loved reading when they were their child's age. Likewise, 71% of girls versus 51% of boys said they liked or loved reading (p. 25). This finding suggests trans-generational gendered patterns in attitudes toward reading.

The study undertaken for this dissertation examines the blog narratives of parents who blog about children's literacy and literature in order to see to what degree the language and images they use in blogs reflects and/or resists notions of gendered literacy identified through review of the literature. It also compares parents' blog narratives with those of other literacy educators (librarians and teachers) and with those of young people themselves.

2.5.2 Teachers' perspectives. More research deals with teachers' than with parents' perspectives. Orellana (1995), who, as noted earlier, studied two Los Angeles elementary school (Spanish-English bilingual) classrooms, discusses the ways in which the teacher in classroom A instantiated gender as important in literacy activities:

Both gender segregation *and* [emphasis in original] orchestrated integration made gender salient, and given that no other means of grouping students was used in this classroom, gender emerged as the *only* [emphasis in original] variable for categorizing students in relation to their literacy learning, and it pervaded most interactions with both oral and written literacy. The teacher alternated boys and girls in all seating arrangements (as a means of limiting student-student interactions and thus achieving greater control); she emphasized "niños" (boys) and "niñas" (girls) when she called on each group, and whenever she called on students she began alternating by gender. (p. 697)

The teacher used gender as the primary organizing mechanism for all literacy-related communication in the classroom, thereby invoking a gendered literacy environment.

Murphy, like Orellana (1995), observes teachers' attitudes toward gender and literacy. Murphy's study of preschool teachers' in daycare centers revealed differing perceptions of the ways in which boys and girls (2-4) engaged in role play in the

classroom (Murphy & Elwood, 1998, p. 163). From that study, Murphy and Elwood (1998) discuss the following insights relating specifically to preschool teachers' perceptions of boys' literacy:

There was a consensus among staff about young boys' interest in mechanical things....These interests were then exploited to get boys interested in reading and were developed to maintain their interest in other activities. Two potential effects arise from this. First, it can orientate boys towards particular experiences and to observing only certain aspects of their environment and phenomena within it. Second, because books about vehicles and structures are usually written in a particular style, from an early age boys may be involved with different types of text from girls...If boys go to school having taken longer than girls to settle to listening to stories and with an interest in information type books already developed then it is likely that they will find the reading schemes for young children, based largely on stories about people, harder to access. (pp. 164-165)

Murphy and Elwood suggest that teachers' using boys' interest in "mechanical things," such as "vehicles and structures" to encourage their interest in reading but that the non-fiction texts featuring such "vehicles and structures" incorporate less narrative than other text types. As a result, boys may be less exposed to traditional fictional narrative texts and have a shorter attention span than girls in relation to "story."

Moore, Yin, Weaver, Lydell, and Logan's (2007) study also focuses on the preschool environment. The participants were five female preschool teachers, and, since the sample was the teachers rather than the preschool students themselves, many of the study's research questions do not seem suited to the sample (i.e. "How does the level of proficiency of literacy skills differ in males and females?; How do self-perceptions related to reading achievement differ from male to female students?" p. 139). However, the study is useful in that it examines the teachers' perceptions of the students' literacy in connection to gender. The authors found that the teachers perceived, "that female students seem to surpass male students in the areas of language development, word

recognition, and reading abilities” (p. 146). Once again, teachers are seen to approach classroom literacy with gendered notions of literacy.

Sanford (2005/2006), in her work in a suburban Canadian middle school, observed the teachers’ attitudes toward boys’ and girls’ literacy – specifically, teachers’ beliefs that girls are more interested than boys in school reading activities but that more of the excellent students are boys:

Ms. F commented that girls are more interested in reading, noting that "a much larger percentage of girls in my class will pick up a book and read or be really focused" and that boys "read less by choice although there are a handful of boys who are just as strong and involved in their reading." She also believes that girls have a better attitude toward school, saying "girls seem more keen to read something out of the textbook..." However, she sees girls as not being risk-takers, commenting that "girls won't do anything without asking me"; boys, on the other hand, "are more eager to take the chances; they figure things out by doing it." Mr. M suggested that girls are less naturally talented than boys, saying, "It's more uniform with the girls; there are fewer exceptional students with the girls" and that (even though girls are generally seen to have stronger literacy skills) boys "write some of the best poetry, and one is a major hockey player, too." (p. 305)

Sanford’s findings here match those of Maynard’s (2002) (as discussed in the “Gendered Literacy Enacted” section) regarding teachers’ perceptions of boys’ greater willingness to take risks juxtaposed with their unwillingness to engage in formal literacy tasks (in this case, reading from the textbook). Maynard, like Sanford, also speculates as to whether teachers may in fact prefer male students over female students, noting:

Female pupils tend to be rewarded for listening and doing as they are told while male pupils are rewarded for being ‘funny’ and assertive. However, whilst conveying and enforcing messages about ‘good’ girls being compliant and docile, it may be...that teachers actually admire the ‘sparkle’ and challenge of boys and prefer to teach them. (p.107)

The teachers participating in Maynard’s (2002) study believe girls are generally obedient while boys tend to be difficult and disruptive. However, these teachers also consider boys more interesting and exciting to teach.

In a study more than 20 years prior, Clarricoates (1980) observed similar dynamics in four socio-economically and regionally diverse English primary schools. She noted the ways in which all four schools, despite their contextual variations according to class, community, and school structures, achieved the segregation of the sexes, and she claimed that in each case, females were subordinated (p. 207). Like Sanford (2005/2006) and Maynard (2002), she comments on one of the school's teachers' seeming preference for boys: "The teachers' perception of creativity was underscored by their beliefs in sex-roles. They saw the boys as having much more imagination, and having the real ability" (Clarricoates, 1980, p. 200). As in Sanford and Maynard's examples, these teachers' perceptions of boys' superior intelligence were juxtaposed with girls' higher curricular performance and willingness to complete schoolwork.

Education researcher and former educator David Booth (2002), in *Even Hockey Players Read: Boys, Literacy and Learning*, writes:

At the end of every talk I give, parents and teachers line up to ask me questions, and they are almost always about boys in literacy trouble: they don't read, can't read, won't read, don't write, can't write, can't spell. Those of us who are responsible for educating boys are deeply concerned over the plight of many of them who can't or won't enter the literacy club. (p. 12)

Booth here stresses the notion that educators, including parents and teachers, perceive "the literacy club," as he calls it, to be primarily a girls' club, due to the perception of the overwhelming numbers of boys with literacy problems.

To summarize the studies discussed above, teachers' expectations of and beliefs about students conform to the dominant notions of gendered literacy (Maynard, 2002; Moore et al., 2007; Murphy & Elwood, 1998; Sanford, 2005/2006). At times, teachers overtly encouraged gendered literacy through their management of the literacy classroom

environment (Clarricoates, 1980; Orellana, 1995). This study examines whether these same attitudes appear in teachers' blogs, if there are variations on these attitudes, and how teachers resist these attitudes.

2.5.3 Librarians' perspectives. The research literature does not deal directly with librarians' perspectives on gendered literacy – a gap the study described in this dissertation addresses by analyzing blog narratives written from the perspectives of librarians. The professional library literature does, however, draw attention to the perceived problem of boys and reading, describing reading programs geared toward boys (for example, Welldon, 2005), and suggestions for collection development and best practice in terms of encouraging boys to read (i.e. Doiron, 2003; Jones & Fiorelli, 2003; McKechnie, 2006; Parsons, 2004). Based on this professionally-oriented literature, librarians, like parents and teachers, express views of literacy as gendered in the ways already discussed (that girls tend to embrace literacy while boys are less willing). The study undertaken helps to describe better librarians' perspectives of literacy as a gendered phenomenon.

Agosto, Paone, and Ipock (2007), in a study of adolescents' perceptions of public libraries, found that females had more positive impressions of public libraries than males (p. 399). Moreover, in a study of men and women's use of a public library, Applegate (2008) notes that her survey findings showing that men use the library much less and in different ways from women "will not surprise the observant public library director," (p. 29) thereby suggesting that librarians are well aware of gendered enactments of literacy. Applegate (2008) found that "more patrons are women, and women seem to make use of a wider variety of library resources and services" and also that "the strongest differences

between men and women appeared in the use of children's and youth collections and services" (men rarely used these services) (p. 29). Therefore, adult public library patrons also appear to enact gendered literacy practices.

Librarians, like teachers (in the classroom) or parents (in the home), may participate in and/or resist the gendering of reading within the library context. For example, librarians assert their influence through purchase selections, arrangement and cataloging of materials, reader's advisory, or program planning. The study described in this dissertation looks for such enactments/disruptions described in blog narratives authored by librarians and compares them both to those of other literacy educators, of young people, and of creators of texts for young people.

On the whole, teachers, parents, and librarians present literacy as a gendered phenomenon along the ways, based on a review of the literature, already identified – gendered literacy enacted in two ways: in terms of boys' resisting formal literacy and girls' embracing it, and girls' and boys' conveying differing literacy preferences, often in ways that have been encouraged since early childhood, as evident in the preschool studies (Moore et al., 2007; Murphy & Elwood, 1998; Porche et al., 2004) described above.

2.5.4 Gendered literacy in the children's publishing industry. The publishing industry is a world of contradictions regarding gender and literacy. On the one hand, Deahl (2010) states that the majority of those working among the lower ranks in the publishing industry overall are female. A study by VIDA: Women in Literary Arts organization (2013) tallying numbers of female versus male authors of children's and young adult literature among winners of book awards also found that women were prominent, and so claims that children's publishing is female-dominated seem warranted,

at least in terms of author recognition. However, a historical study of children's literature showed that male characters are more prevalent than female characters, thereby suggesting male bias in children's publishing (McCabe, Fairchild, Grauerholz, Pescosolido, & Tope, 2011). The section that follows discusses these trends.

2.5.4.1 Most publishing industry employees are women. Deahl (2010), in reference to the *Publisher's Weekly* salary survey, states: "85% of publishing employees with less than three years of experience are women" (para. 1). Later, the article, referencing Columbia University's Publishing Course, discusses why this might be:

Lindy Hess, director of the graduate Columbia Publishing Course, said that publishing, like teaching, has been a field that's traditionally been 'more open' to women. Hess said she also assumes that there are more female English majors out there—which may be because women like to read more than men—and that's reflected in the industry. At Columbia, the program has been 80% women and 20% men for the past four to five years. (Deahl, 2010, para. 9-10)

Additionally, as Deahl points out, because publishing is a female-dominated industry, it is low-paying compared to other industries, and there is a significant pay gap between women and men within the industry (para. 12). In this sense, then, women are marginalized even within the female-dominated publishing industry. Thus, factors of tradition and salary combine to make it difficult for the publishing industry to attract more men.

2.5.4.2 VIDA studies of literary recognition. VIDA: Women in Literary Arts organization's (2013) study of major (reaching back five years) and minor (for the year 2013) children's and young adult book awards indicated that of the 17 awards reviewed, 13 had more female author winners than male. In some cases the gap was large, as in the following cases in which there were more than twice as many female winners as males: *Booklist* Editor's Choice Books for Youth, 2013, 39 females versus 17 males; the

American Library Association Coretta Scott King Award, 2009-2013, 12 females versus 4 males; the Young Adult Library Services Association William C. Morris YA Debut Award, 2009-2013, 24 females versus 2 males; the Association for Library Service to Children Newbery Medal, 2009-2013, 16 females versus 6 males; *School Library Journal* Best Books of 2013, 48 females versus 23 males; and, the American Library Association Stonewall Book Award, 2009-2013, 12 females versus 4 males. VIDA's study indicates that women authors are well-recognized in the areas of children's and young adult publishing. However, VIDA does not provide industry statistics regarding authorship overall, having determined that "achieving an accurate count of books published by even just the major five houses proved to be a difficult and unwieldy task, given the labyrinthine nature of online and print catalogs produced by these publishers." Moreover, they were unable to "access all the information...needed to accurately count every title published in the past year" (VIDA, 2013).

An earlier tally by VIDA of author recognition in terms of adult literature paints a different picture, in which male authors are dominant. In 2009, VIDA also assessed "the gender distribution of several major book awards and prominent 'best of' lists." The result was a ratio of 592 male authors to 295 female authors (King, 2010, "Best of 2009"). VIDA's historical review of major literary awards yielded a similar count: 929 males to 454 females (King, 2010, "Historical Count"). VIDA's count of two of the major children's literature awards showed that more men have won the Caldecott Medal (through 2010), an annual award given to "the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children" (ALSC, 2014), – 49 male authors versus 23 female authors (from 2000 – 2010, there was only 1 female winner), while, in contrast, more women

than men have won the Newbery (through 2010), an annual award given to "the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children" (ALSC, 2014): 59 female authors versus 29 male authors (King, 2010, "Historical Count").

2.5.4.3 Children's publishing – male bias in content. The children's publishing industry, from the perspective of one study, is male-biased in terms of content. According to McCabe, Fairchild, Grauerholz, Pescosolido, and Tope (2011), their findings regarding male versus female character inclusion in United States-published children's books present a glaring imbalance, in which female characters are underrepresented. The study, which included winners of the Caldecott medal (1938-2000); Little Golden Books (1942 - 1993); and books listed in the *Children's Catalog* (1900-2000), examining data gathered from "titles and central characters in 5,618 books" (p. 203) found that

compared to females, males are represented nearly twice as often in titles and 1.6 times as often as central characters. By no measure in any book series (i.e., Caldecott award winners, Little Golden Books, and books listed in the *Children's Catalog*) are females represented more frequently than males. (McCabe et al., 2011, p. 197)

This relative absence of female characters compared to male characters, the study's authors conclude, represents a "symbolic annihilation" of women in children's literature (p. 199). McCabe et al. find this troubling because they assert that "children's books are a celebration, reaffirmation, and dominant blueprint of shared cultural values, meanings, and expectations" (p. 199). Therefore, the relative absence of female characters in books for children, they fear, contributes to the marginalization of women in U.S. society. These scholars' use of character inclusion as a sole proxy measure for male versus female presence in children's literature is an oversimplification, however. Without looking in more detail at the books' content, including plot and lesser characters than those who

might be included in the title or a simple description, the study provides an incomplete view. Nonetheless, their perspective is important to bring to the discussion on gendered literacy within publishing, especially as a counterpoint to the common perception that children's literature in the U.S. is universally a female-dominated space.

Among those who express this perception of children's publishing as female-dominated, Robert Lipsyte (2011), author of young adult literature (particularly of books that are marketed toward boys), in a *New York Times* essay, states,

At the 2007 A.L.A. [American Library Association] conference, a Harper executive said at least three-quarters of her target audience were girls, and they wanted to read about mean girls, gossip girls, frenemies and vampires. Naturally, authors are writing for this ready group. The current surge in children's literature has been fueled by talented young female novelists fresh from M.F.A. programs who in earlier times would have been writing midlist adult fiction. Their novels are bought by female editors, stocked by female librarians and taught by female teachers. It's a cliché but mostly true that while teenage girls will read books about boys, teenage boys will rarely read books with predominately female characters. (para. 8-9)

Overlooking for the moment Lipsyte's use of hearsay by one publisher to characterize the whole industry, his commentary is representative of a common cultural misperception of children's literature: that it is wholly geared toward girls and women and that the female-dominated professions of education, librarianship, and publishing are interested only in literature that is marketed toward girls.

Similarly, British author of children's picture books, Jonathan Emmett (2015), dedicates an entire blog, entitled *Cool not Cute!*, to what he views as the main problem behind boys and reading – a lack of picture books that young boys find appealing, so that they are less eager to read from an early age. He set up the blog in response to his own experiences and findings regarding female/male imbalance within the children's publishing industry. Emmett claims that this imbalance, with far more females than

males, extends to teaching and librarianship, and is also reflected in a female majority among purchasers of illustrated children's books.

In conclusion, although the children's publishing industry appears to be female-dominated, particularly in terms of authors recognized, it is still marked by androcentric biases in terms of a lack of female characters. What has been written about gender in the publishing industry, for example, regarding possible biases in hiring, publishing, reviewing, and subject matter, however, is meager. The study described in this dissertation tries to make up for this lack by including analysis of blog posts and comments written by published authors and illustrators and editors in relation to literature for young people and gender.

2.6 Gendered Literacy as a Quantifiable Achievement Gap

Another strand of research, which includes studies that for the most part have larger sample sizes than the studies previously discussed, points to differences between boys and girls in terms of achievement measured through test scores. For example, on standardized tests of verbal ability, especially those of reading, girls' scores generally exceed those of boys.

2.6.1 Media attention to gendered literacy. According to Greenburg, Gilbert, & Frederick (2006), "there is a consensus in the field that reading patterns and practices are highly gendered and become increasingly so during the adolescent years, with females significantly outscoring males on administered measures" (p. 160). Moreover, the verbal achievement gap between girls and boys is a popular media topic. A report by the Center on Education Policy (2010), as a result of evaluating state proficiency test scores (beginning from 2002 through 2007/08), found that boys' scores in reading trail (by as

much as 10 percentage points in some states) behind those of girls' across the elementary, middle, and high school levels. This report generated a lot of press and public interest. For example, it prompted *New York Times* op-ed columnist Nicholas Kristof's piece, "The Boys Have Fallen Behind" (March 27, 2010). Following this article's publication in the *New York Times*, Kristof followed it up with a post, entitled "The Male Half of the Sky," on his blog (March 27, 2010). As of September 7, 2010, this blog post had received 537 reader replies, and it provided an important forum for public discussion of the Center on Education Policy's report. Gender differences in education and literacy generate intense public debate. Gender, for most people, remains a core of both their personal and social identities, and such reports and statistics prey upon people's fears about one aspect of the gendered literacy phenomenon – that is, "the boy problem." "The boy problem," which represents a sub-debate within the larger issue of gendered literacy and has prompted headlines, books, and school programs designed to respond to anxiety over boys' literacy gap, has been treated in the blogosphere, and the dissertation study comments upon this where applicable. (See McKechnie, 2006, for a succinct discussion of "the boy problem" phenomenon).

2.6.2 Achievement gap studies. According to the Nation's Report Card (2007), students' reading scores in a U.S. educational survey have reflected a gender gap for the past 15 years. In 2007, fourth grade females' scores were 7 points above boys' and eighth grade girls' scores were 10 points above boys' (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007). In the U.K., results from the 2011 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams showed the most significant gender gap to date in terms of top-scoring students, with 26.5% of girls receiving the top score versus 19.6% of boys (Richardson, 2011, para. 2). In

explaining possible reasons for the gap, the spokespeople quoted invoke common stereotypes of gender and literacy, gender and classroom behavior, and boys' and girls' relationship to the educational system overall. For example, Richardson (2011) describes commentary by Ian Toone, of the Voice teaching union, stating:

that GCSEs are achievement tests rather than measures of innate intelligence and thus favour pupils who apply themselves "in a dedicated and industrious manner." "This is a trait which is more typical of girls than boys - who are more easily distracted and prefer to focus on one thing at a time," he claims...."Boys are encouraged to be more active from an early age, whereas the restless movements of baby girls are pacified. "Hence, girls develop the skill of sitting still for longer periods of time, which is useful for academic pursuits like studying for GCSEs."...This is often evident right from when children start school, with girls tending to be more ready to sit down and concentrate on reading or writing than some boys. (para. 9-10, 12-14)

This commentary suggests that the GCSE exam requires long term commitment to studying in order to do well, that Toone (who is quoted) believes that girls tend to be more driven than boys to prepare for the GCSE exam, and that girls have been encouraged (while boys have been discouraged) since infancy to develop the skills necessary for sitting and studying – skills for which they are further rewarded, when they start school. Richardson (2011) also cites Schools Minister Nick Gibb, “who believes ensuring boys can read well in the early years is the answer” (para. 15). Gibb says, "the gap often begins in primary schools, with poor reading skills a barrier. We need to intervene early on to make sure that boys can read well....” (para. 16). Gibbs thereby faults the gap in reading abilities between boys and girls for the gap evident in GCSE exam scores.

Similar to the gap in the GCSE exams, on the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in reading, girls perform better than boys. The purpose of the PISA is to assess

the “extent to which students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in modern society, particularly in mathematics, reading and science” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014, p. 23). The PISA is given to students “aged between 15 years 3 months and 16 years 2 months at the time of assessment and who are enrolled in school and have completed at least 6 years of formal schooling” (p. 22). Students are enrolled in all different types of schools and not all are enrolled full-time. In 2012, the results for approximately 510,000 students in 65 countries and economies showed that, “on average across OECD countries, girls outperform boys in reading by 38 score points. While girls outperform boys in reading in every participating country and economy, the gap is much wider in some countries than in others” (p. 199). A gap of “25 score points or less” occurred in both low-performing and high-performing countries (p. 199) and “in 14 countries, girls outperform boys by at least 50 score points. All of these countries score below the OECD average, except Finland, which performs above the OECD average in reading” (p. 199). Based on these results, the gaps in reading between boys and girls may be considered not just a phenomenon limited to the U.S. and the U.K., as discussed just prior, but an international phenomenon. Results of an earlier PISA found that “girls read more for enjoyment than boys in all countries and economies, except Korea. On average across OECD countries, there is a 20 percentage-point gender gap in reading for enjoyment” (OECD, 2011, p. 1). These findings provide further evidence for the notion of reading as a feminized practice among young people, and also introduce the possibility of an international dimension to the issue.

Following the reporting of the PISA results, explanations of what the results mean and their educational and political implications ensue. For example, following the 2009 PISA, Finland's education minister placed the blame for Finland's overall drop to third place on "a decline in reading, especially among boys" (BBC, 2010, para. 3). The reading gap between boys and girls, therefore, has been an ongoing source of contention and debate.

A number of scholars have used the OECD PISA data for further study. For example, Marks' (2008) macro-analysis of trends in gaps between girls and boys in reading and mathematics scores in the OECD's 2000 PISA project data showed that

The gender gaps in reading and mathematics are highly correlated and the magnitude of the gaps reflect the implementation and success or otherwise of policies designed to improve the educational outcomes of girls. Policies designed to improve girls' educational outcomes are likely to reduce the gender gap in mathematics but increase the gender gap in reading. (p. 106)

Marks reached this conclusion after reviewing the data relating both to student and country characteristics including (among others): students' occupational expectations; inequality of household disposable income by sex; modernization (assessed through gross domestic product and proportion of adults attaining higher education); societal gender inequality (ascertained through percentage of the country's workforce represented by women and gender gap in wages); and percentage of gross domestic product spent on the welfare state (p. 95). Marks notes that his findings may "reflect the success of policies in individual countries promoting the educational outcomes of girls" (p. 106) but offers little else in the way of analysis of the findings.

In their analysis of OECD PISA data, Chiu and McBride-Chang (2006) examined the correlations between sex and the following variables: socioeconomic status; number

of books at home; reading enjoyment; culture (nationality); and school affiliation in their relationship to the variable of reading performance (as measured in test scores) of a representative (from 43 countries) sample of 199,097 fifteen-year-old students. They found that sex was associated with reading enjoyment (more girls than boys surveyed enjoyed reading) and that number of books at home was associated with reading achievement. They note: “although most of the variance in reading achievement in relation to gender can be explained by the context in which reading is taught and learned, boys may be at somewhat more risk than girls for reading problems across cultures” (p. 358). Thus, the PISA data suggest that boys tend to enjoy reading to a lesser degree than do girls, and that girls tend to be higher achievers in terms of reading.

Ma (2008) also examined the OECD PISA data but from the perspective of “school effectiveness” theory. In this theoretical orientation, “family characteristics, home influences, and family social and cultural values” are treated as inputs (p. 441) into the school environment, which then “processes” students (school variables include both school context, i.e. teacher/student ratio, and school climate, i.e. school policy). Student achievements are then viewed as outputs (p. 442). Ma analyzed the data using two-level hierarchical linear modeling, in which students were one level and schools the second level in order to determine, both nationally and comparing cross-nationally, the extent of between-school variation in terms of intra-school gender differences in performance in math, reading, and science literacy (p. 443). At the level of international comparison, Ma (2008) found that:

gender differences in reading were most substantial in magnitude and most widespread in scope. Males and females performed equally well across all schools in mathematics in nine countries. In science they performed equally well in 14

countries. Romania was the only country in which males and females performed equally well across all schools and all subjects. (p. 454)

From this analysis, a pattern of gendered literacy achievement in which females exceed males in reading performance is consistent among the 41 nations represented in this analysis.

Other quantitatively-focused studies have analyzed both national and local educational data to examine claims relating to gender gaps in academic performance. For example, Husain and Millimet (2009) examine the claim promoted in popular literature of an educational crisis for boys in the U.S. by analyzing gender gaps in a nationally representative data set on kindergarteners through third graders (p. 39). Husain and Millimet (2009) report:

In the end, we find mixed evidence of a ‘boy crisis’ during early primary school when analyzing differences in mean math and reading test scores. The gap in math, where boys are widely cited as outpacing girls, is only statistically significant for whites, but does significantly widen over the first 4 years in school for whites as well as a few select sub-populations of children of other races. The gap in reading, on the other hand, favors girls and is fairly sizeable, especially for Hispanics, but does not widen over the first 4 years of school except for poor black and Hispanic public school students. (p. 44)

Therefore, although they shy away from calling the gender gap a “crisis,” Husain and Millimet acknowledge the gap in reading favoring girls. They also find a gap in math among white students favoring boys.

In another quantitative study of gaps between girls and boys in relation to verbal abilities, Savage, Carless, and Ferraro (2007) studied whether, for a sample of 382 English children, basic reading ability assessed at age 5, awareness of phonemes, and variables relating to student background, could predict students’ test and classroom performance at age 11. They found that early reading ability (assessed at 5 years of age),

special educational need, and phonological awareness (when controlling for early literacy skills and student background variables) significantly predicted all outcome measures of students at age 11. Moreover, they found “that gender predicted performance on the writing test, the English total test score, as well as the English teacher assessment, with girls outperforming boys on these measures” (p. 737). They found no difference between boys and girls on math performance (p. 737). This study thereby highlights an apparent gap between the female and male participants on verbal performance measures.

A “large-scale longitudinal study involving more than 1,000 6-year-old preschool children in 55 different preschool groups and a cross-validation sample of 1,100 children on the following school year” (Lundberg, Larsman, & Strid, 2012, p. 307) in Sweden looked more closely at children’s phonological awareness for possible insight into the apparent gap between girls and boys in verbal abilities (p. 308). Teachers trained the preschool students regarding “phonological awareness and letter knowledge” during an 8-month period. Students were tested before and also following this phonological training program. Students’ socioeconomic status and sex were both significant in terms of phonological awareness, “with students in less favorable socioeconomic environments showing less phonemic awareness” (p. 317), and girls displaying a greater degree of and greater improvement in phonological awareness both before and after undergoing the training program (p. 317). Lundberg, Larsman, and Strid (2012) conclude that “phonological awareness is highly teachable and modifiable” (p. 318) and “that more practice yields higher performance at least for children with low initial performance” (p. 318). The effect of socioeconomic status the researchers suggest may be attributable to “the critical importance of a stimulating home environment” (p. 318). Likewise, since

phonemic awareness, based on their findings, is “a highly modifiable ability, the observed gender difference in phonological awareness cannot easily be explained in pure biological terms. The clear advantage of girls over boys might be attributed to differences in early stimulation of relevant language functions” (p. 318). In other words, Lundberg, Larsman, and Strid suggest that girls’ early language development may, on average, be encouraged more than boys’, and this is why girls tend to start with an advantage in phonemic awareness.

Alloway and Gilbert (1997), like Lundberg, Larsman, and Strid (2012) above, found both sex and socioeconomic status to be significantly correlated with students’ test performance. Unlike some of the other studies in this section, however, Alloway and Gilbert (1997) draw particular attention to the importance of looking at socioeconomic status in terms of interpreting students’ test scores. For example, their analysis of standardized test results in New South Wales, Australia revealed that:

the New South Wales state average for girls is higher than for boys. However the data also indicate that the 10-point socio-economic ranking of students' families is strongly associated with children's literacy skills performance. While girls, at every step in the 10-point socio-economic scale, score higher than boys whose families share the same ranking, boys with the highest socio-economic ranking still fare better at literacy-related tasks than girls up to the first five points of the socio-economic scale. The data also show how boys with a socio-economic ranking of 10 still score below the state average for girls, and how boys with the lowest socio-economic rankings score worse than any other group.... In brief, given the same ranking in terms of the socio-economic resources available to their families, boys generally do less well than girls. (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997, “Gender, Literacy and Difference,” para. 1-2)

In this study, then, although sex was salient as a predictor of children’s literacy performance, socio-economic factors must also be taken into consideration when looking at achievement test scores.

Similarly, Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson (2007), in their longitudinal study of children in the Baltimore city (U.S.) school system, draw attention to socio-economic variables. Entwisle et al. found that in their sample, reading skills (as measured through grades, classroom behavior ratings, retention rates, and parental expectations regarding their children's reading achievement in school) of girls were higher than boys' but only significantly so for children in the lower socio-economic bracket (using federal meal subsidy qualification as a proxy) (p. 119). The researchers suggest that

the interaction of students' home and school experiences may hold the key to how SES and gender interact in the schooling process. The cultural enrichment and support for education that middle-class parents tend to give both sons and daughters can serve as a counterweight to alienation that boys generally feel toward school. That is, if boys generally find adjustment to the student role more difficult than girls do, then middle-class boys benefit from having parents who are more likely to reinforce the values and habits that are conducive to success as a student. (Entwisle et al., 2007, p. 117)

Here Entwisle et al., as they attempt to determine what may give boys from middle class homes an edge over those from poorer backgrounds, stress the important socializing influences of parents according to socioeconomic status. They acknowledge that boys of all walks of life may find the school environment less comfortable than girls do; however, middle income parents may better prepare their boys to succeed in school by encouraging school-conducive behaviors and attitudes. Therefore, Entwisle et al. deem students' socio-economic status (especially for boys) a crucial predictor of their academic achievement.

The following study takes a different approach to quantitative assessment, investigating whether interest in a text affects boys' and girls' performance on a test of reading comprehension. Oakhill and Petrides (2007) studied the relationships among the variables of gender, reading comprehension, and interest in the text. They assessed the

reading comprehension of 32 9- and 10-year-old students (16 girls and 16 boys) in the U.K. on two different passages, one about spiders (which the researchers had chosen as likely to appeal to boys), the other one about children evacuated during World War II. They found that the boys preferred the text about spiders while the girls preferred the text about children in World War II. Moreover, the boys “showed significantly better comprehension for a text that was considered to be the more ‘boy-friendly’, and which they themselves expressed a greater interest in reading, whereas the girls’ performance was not related to their expressed interest” (Oakhill & Petrides, 2007, p. 231) Hence, in this study, the boys’ performance may have been influenced by their interest in the text. The authors note that their findings mirror those of other researchers and posit the following as an explanation of the results:

If girls perceive reading as sex-appropriate and, therefore, a more acceptable activity, they might be more likely to read well regardless of their interest in a particular text. However, if reading is regarded as sex-inappropriate for boys, then they may require an additional incentive, such as a particularly interesting text, in order to read well. (p. 231).

Here, the children’s gendered literacy preferences are evident in that the girls seem to be more intrinsically motivated (in this case, without needing the extra incentive of an interesting text) to perform well in formal literacy tasks.

Much of the research on gendered literacy has centered on test-based evaluations of children’s abilities, and, as such, has construed gendered literacy in terms of a sex-based gap in achievement. Although some studies have also treated questions of socio-economic status or nationality in regards to reading difference, the persistent concern of scholars investigating the achievement gap is how verbal performance (as measured through testing) differs between boys and girls. This achievement gap is a major

consideration not only for educators or for children themselves, but also for parents and others. The study described in this dissertation differs in approach by considering gendered literacy as the result of persistent sociocultural beliefs, or perceptions. However, the study also, in analyzing blog narratives, looks for mentions of the widely cited achievement gap in verbal performance, since it is also possible that public awareness of this gap may serve to reify sociocultural beliefs about gender and literacy. Although the dissertation study is limited by a focus on blogs, blogs represent a valuable cultural barometer, especially since they are an unsolicited data source and bloggers use them to reflect (in a less self-conscious way than in a survey or interview, for example) on literacy as gendered.

2.7 Gendered Literacy as a Biological Phenomenon

Researchers once claimed that any differences females and males displayed in verbal, math, and science performance were the result of biological differences between the sexes (and the topic continues to be debated). For example, epidemiological (population based) studies have indicated a higher prevalence of reading disabilities among males than females (Berninger, Nielsen, Abbott, Wijsman, & Raskind, 2008). Moreover, Thompson (1987) tested the prediction that from a sample of 7-year-old New Zealand children, girls would rely more than boys on direct processing (rather than phoneme recognition) in reading words. The study's results supported Thompson's prediction: "The results indicate, at least under performance conditions of time constraints, a greater reliance on average by boys than girls in processing of phonological segments" (p. 218). Thompson's study therefore may point to some cognitive differences in the ways in which girls and boys process text. Furthermore, in a study of a sample of

36 English students (18 girls, 18 boys) of different ethnicities and average reading ability, for the boys studied (and not for the girls), visual skill performance, especially on a test of visual short-term memory, and performance on a standardized reading test were highly correlated (Huestegge, Heim, Zettelmeyer, & Lange-Küttner, 2012, pp. 119, 123-124).

These findings have a place in the full discussion of gendered literacy and deserve to be considered in addition to the social and cultural values attached to literacy in relation to gender. However, it is important not to over-determine the role of biology in gendered literacy. Philosophy professor Stephen Asma (2011) of Columbia College Chicago, for instance, argues for a middle ground in which both biology and culture provide useful analytical lenses. He suggests: “Regarding the sex/gender issue, then, we should be asking, among other things: Which traits are malleable, and to what degree?” He laments the way in which humanities scholars have shunned science, criticizing what he calls their “biophobia.”

In stark contrast, cognitive neuroscientist Cordelia Fine’s (2010) book, *Delusions of Gender: The Real Science Behind Sex Differences*, presents a harsh critique of biological essentialism. Fine coins the phrase “neurosexism” to describe popular works (see, for example, Sax, 2005; Gurian, 2011) that use biological explanations to describe differences between males and females, even as social influence is often ignored. Fine states: “although certain popular commentators make it seem effortlessly easy, the sheer complexity of the brain makes interpreting and understanding the meaning of any sex differences we find in the brain a very difficult task” (p. 133). For example, in discussing explanations of sex differences in the brain according to investigations of the effects of fetal testosterone on brain development and behavior, she notes that “foetal testosterone

has become the explanation of choice for gender inequality in science” (p. 129), despite the fact that “higher foetal testosterone in nonclinical populations has not been convincingly linked with better mental rotation ability, systemising ability, mathematical ability, scientific ability or worse mind reading” (p. 130).

Fine also reviews the history of brain research on sex differences. Regarding neuroimaging, she makes the point that although brain science has made great strides in this area it is new and not yet well-developed; therefore, it is perilous to jump to conclusions regarding behavior based on brain scans (154). Moreover, she notes the concept of “neuroplasticity” which means that “what we experience and do creates neural activity that can alter the brain, either directly or through changes in gene expression” (p. 236). In this sense, essentialism in relation to cognitive function is not supported. Moreover, Fine points out that brain differences should not be used to explain behavioral difference because of the “principle that brain difference can yield behavioural similarity” (p.142). Brain differences between males and females, then, do not necessarily point to behavioral differences. Also, scientific findings are influenced by social beliefs and norms. For example, citing both historical and current examples of scientific and popular texts on cognitive and psychological differences between men and women based on images of the brain, Fine asserts that “functional neuroimaging technologies have brought the fresh, modern zing of neuroscience to old stereotypes” (147). In this sense, Fine argues that neuroscience is being used to support and explain gender stereotypes.

Neuroscientist Lise Eliot (2009), in her book, *Pink Brain, Blue Brain*, takes a more balanced approach to the discussion of cognitive function and sex difference. She contends that small differences might be exacerbated by environmental influences. For

example, Eliot contends that spatial skills primarily are the result of teaching and experience rather than of innate ability (pp. 231-235). Moreover, she believes that males (at least within the U.S.) in general are given more opportunities to develop spatial skills. Eliot discusses the SAT as an example, positing that males generally outperform females on the math section because of males' superior spatial skills, which they have honed as a result of learning and practicing. She claims, based on her review of research in this field and the fact that roughly a third of the questions on the math portion of the SAT involve geometry (p. 230), that "spatial skills are a major reason why males outperform females on the math SAT exam and probably explains how they beat them on other math and science tests as well" (p. 230). Eliot also looks at research concerning cultural stereotypes related to math and science, concluding, "Math, science, and computer brilliance are simply not feminine, as Barbie, *Mean Girls*, and much else in popular culture tells us. Girls figure this out distressingly early" (p. 239). Hence, Eliot places blame on iconic cultural representations of gender which dissuade girls from developing the skills that would help them perform on the math and science portions of the SAT, and more broadly, from wanting to study and pursue careers in math and science.

Wallentin (2008) also presents a balanced discussion of the issue of sex differences in relation to the brain. In a critical review of studies relating to language development, cognitive processes, and sex differences, Wallentin acknowledges that although certain disorders that affect language (autism, stuttering, and dyslexia, for example) are more common in males than females, no clear evidence exists to suggest whether the associated language problems are due to cognitive differences or to some other phenomenon (p. 181). Moreover, Wallentin concludes that although "a small but

consistent female advantage is found in early language development...this seems to disappear during childhood. In adults, sex differences in verbal abilities, and in brain structure and function related to language processing are not readily identified” (p.181). Therefore, girls may display an initial advantage in language development, but by adulthood, males and females are roughly even in verbal ability.

Fausto-Sterling’s (1985) critique of biological determinism regarding gender sums up the understanding of the role of biological evidence in terms of gendered literacy that is foundational to this dissertation study:

Some scientists and social theorists (myself included) no longer believe in the scientific validity of this framework. Such thinkers reject the search for ‘root causes,’ arguing instead for a more complex analysis in which an individual’s capacities emerge from a web of interactions between the biological being and the social environment. Within this web, connecting threads move in both directions. Biology may in some manner condition behavior, but behavior in turn can alter one’s physiology. Furthermore, any particular behavior can have many different causes. (pp. 7-8)

In examining gendered literacy, it may be helpful to state that although some biological differences may exist (causation unknown) in terms of the cognitive processes of males and females, powerful social forces also help to shape the literacy practices of boys and girls, women and men.

It is difficult to ascertain whether a biological determinist or a more balanced view of biological cognitive difference between women and men is normative. Examples of both are to be found among the research and popular literature alike. A trend includes popular works (i.e. Sax, 2005; Gurian, 2011) marketed toward educators favoring the essentialist approach, which exaggerates cognitive differences between males and females and uses such differences to explain gendered behavioral differences. The study undertaken as part of this dissertation examines the degree to which biological

explanations used to explain gender differences are apparent in the blog narratives of literacy educators, young people, and creators of texts for young people. As such, this dissertation helps fill the gap in knowledge regarding which beliefs concerning biological and cognitive sex differences constitute perceptions of literacy as gendered.

2.8 Gendered Literacy as Remnant of an Historically Gendered Educational System

Another important perspective on sex difference in relation to gendered reading and literary practices is the historical context of gender and education. Since this study focuses on the U.S., the discussion is limited to U.S. Scholars have defined gendered literacy in part as the offshoot of a gendered educational system. Moreover, this scholarship follows two main themes: 1) the feminization of the teaching profession and 2) a historical pattern of boys' under-achievement, which this section will address.

2.8.1 The feminization of teaching. Prior to the advent of formal coeducation in America, boys and girls in colonial times were educated in “the dame school or woman’s school, in which a woman took care of a small group of children and taught them their ABCs, usually in her home” (Hansot & Tyack, 1988, p. 749). In the mid 1700s, the schools moved out of the home into a public building. Women were employed by the town to teach children of all different grade levels in “summer school” (p. 749). In these schools, as in family life and in the colonial dame school, a female teacher taught girls and boys together. When, in the post-Revolutionary period, girls gained access to the more formal public schools, only schools in the large, wealthy, northeastern and southern cities were single sex schools. In rural areas, coeducation was the norm because of the higher cost associated with single sex schools. Moreover, the coeducational aspect of the

rural district schools echoed other common coeducational cultural practices like Sunday school and daily family life (p. 750).

The teaching of children from the beginning was women's sphere. However, paradoxically, it was not until after the American Revolution that girls were allowed to enroll in the more formal "winter district schools" (Hansot & Tyack, 1988, p. 749). Additionally, the first district school teachers were male, but gradually (starting in the early 19th century), women joined their ranks (p. 749). Hansot and Tyack note that "girls' admission to public schools was closely connected with the concurrent feminization of teaching, justified by the analogy of the female teacher as mother. Mothers were expected to socialize their children in the family, teachers their pupils in the school" (p.750). Women were therefore seen as better suited to the work of teaching, which was viewed as requiring the same skills as mothering, and people recognized that formal education of girls could better prepare them for teaching.

Even as public education for children in New England in early America became coeducational, girls and boys were schooled with different expectations and purposes. School was a means to prepare children for their separate future adult roles as men and women. Hansot and Tyack (1988) write the following:

Advocates of the education of women during this time used largely conservative arguments: not that schooling would prepare girls for careers outside the home but that it would make them better mothers and wives. They believed that investing in what would later be called the human capital of women would increase the literacy and good moral and civic character of the next generation. By the 1830s co-education had become the norm despite the fact that Americans took special pains to separate the spheres of men and women and to create elaborate rationales of gender differences. (p. 749)

In this way, coeducation arose in concert with the strict separation of the sexes in adult social roles, and the education of girls particularly was seen as the key to ensure the literacy and morality of future generations.

After the mid-19th century, elementary school teachers increasingly, and eventually predominantly, were women. As a result,

by 1888 women composed 63 percent of the teaching force in the United States as a whole, and 90 percent in its cities. This proportion increased over the next decades. In 1921-22 women filled about 86 percent of elementary school teaching positions, whether public or private, and 100 percent of kindergartens. They also had increasing access to positions of genuine authority in the supervisory ranks of elementary education. (Monaghan, 1994, p. 30)

Based on Monaghan's (1994) assessment, it is evident that, in the U.S. for much of the 19th and 20th centuries, women dominated the teaching profession.

Ashley and Lee (2003) describe a similar feminization of teaching in England.

They note that in England following World War II:

The post war baby boom placed enormous pressure on infant schools and departments and it was assumed that women teachers would be needed to take these classes. Women were perceived to have the sort of maternal and caring instincts attributed to their sex and it was these personal qualities that were seen as essential for the education of infants. (p. 41)

Ashley and Lee's account highlights the cultural belief, similar to that espoused in America, that women are naturally more nurturing than men and thereby more inclined towards the work of teaching children.

Upon examination of women's role in higher education in the U.S., the development of teaching as a feminized profession in the U.S. becomes clear. Conway (1974) discusses women's access to higher education in the U.S. and women's ownership of teaching and other service professions. Conway argues that the development of coeducation in U.S. higher education did not serve women well because it perpetuated

the practice of women's education as complementary and inferior rather than equal to that of men. Even at Oberlin College, widely upheld as the epitome of liberal education for women, women's intellects were "considered only from the point of view of the services they might provide for men" (p. 6). The female students provided "a domestic work-force" for the college, cooking, cleaning, and doing the laundry. Moreover, they were admitted to Oberlin to encourage the psychological well-being of the male students -- to provide them with the best possible study environment (p. 6).

Conway (1974) claims that only women who attended the selective female-only colleges founded post-Civil War were independent intellectuals. Many such women did not marry; "their minds had been trained along lines which required discipline and independent effort, and they expected to put this training to a practical use which was not to be found within the narrow confines of domestic life" (p. 8). Ironically, however, such women went on to found the "women's professions" – service professions, including teaching, which Conway believes solidified traditional beliefs about women's roles into professional roles.

The feminists involved in the development of these professions, though radical for their time, did not question "the acceptance of sex-typed roles for women because evolutionary biology told them that there was a separate nurturing female temperament which was complementary to that of the male" (Conway, 1974, p. 8). Conway therefore disparages the expansion of the women's professions "as a conservative trend by which the potential for change inherent in changed educational experience was still-born and women's intellectual energies were channeled into perpetuating women's service role in society" (p. 9). Conway believes women were not able to take full advantage of their

access to higher education, instead aligning themselves to the service professions, such as teaching and nursing, and developing these professions according to stereotypically feminine characteristics.

In regards to teaching, not only were most school teachers women, but most reading textbooks were authored by women. According to Monaghan (1994), based on her study (relying mostly on primary and bibliographic sources), “even before the turn of the century women had a virtual monopoly on the authorship of primers” (p.32). An exception was that women did not produce “‘phonetic’ readers: textbooks that had diacritical markings placed not merely on the new words listed at the beginning or end of a story..., but on the actual reading texts” (p. 32). This was because “men alone had the linguistic training or technical ability, it was assumed, to do so” (p. 32). However, going forward, women were the main writers of textbooks focusing on stories. Since primarily women were writing children’s literature, “they could often be found as coauthors or authors of the new ‘literature’ texts that appeared soon after the turn of the century” (p.33). Such textbooks used shortened versions of children’s stories. Monaghan (1994) explains why women became important in the textbook industry as follows: “the feminization of the teaching force and, even more important, of the normal school and supervisory levels of education, was designating women as ‘experts’ by default” (p. 38).

Large numbers of women, in the first part of the 20th century, continued to author textbooks. As the Great Depression and World War II slowed textbook production, women were still important to the industry, but they began to lose dominance. During the Depression, women’s representation in both academia and in the professional realm (including teaching) decreased (Monaghan, 1994, pp. 35-37). Furthermore, following the

war, with the help of the GI bill, more and more men attended college and then went on to pursue advanced degrees, including in education (Renzetti & Curran, 2003, p. 103). Because mostly men were pursuing advanced education degrees, men, rather than women, were considered to be qualified to conduct reading research (Monaghan, 1994, p. 34). As a result, men came to be seen as reading experts uniquely qualified to author textbooks, and so men (sometimes co-authoring with women) came to dominate textbook authorship (p. 39). This change occurred partly as a result of the move away from a literature-based approach towards a scientific approach to education. The effect on the teaching of reading was to encourage a focus on silent reading (due to its supposed efficiency), the development of standardized reading tests, and increased research (p. 34).

One of the factors in this dissertation study is how teachers understand and respond to gendered literacy. In analyzing the blog posts and comments of literacy educators, young people, and creators of texts for young people, it looks for ways in which they address the phenomenon of teaching as a historically feminized occupation (within the U.S.). Although the feminization of teaching was not found to be an important part of the blog narratives, it was still a useful lens in terms of analysis of the data.

2.8.2 Underachieving boys. As Rowan et al. (2002) state, “For the most part, people agree that there *is* a problem relating to boys’ literacy levels but disagree about the origin of the problem and about the ways it should be dealt with” (p. 29). Educators worry about boys’ underachievement not just in literacy but in other academic areas as well. This is not only a contemporary concern. Historically, boys’ achievement has also been a source of worry, as boys (at least, in America), have tended to lag behind girls.

For example, Hansot and Tyack (1988) note that by the mid-19th century in the U.S., documents show

that girls had access in coeducational schools to roughly the same educational resources as boys and studied basically the same subjects with the same teachers. Girls received higher grades than boys and were promoted from grade to grade in larger proportions. In high schools, in particular, girls outnumbered boys by a large margin. (p.758)

From this example, it would seem that in America, girls have long tended toward higher achievement than boys. In this sense, perhaps girls' higher academic achievement presaged the gendered literacy trend. Although female achievement has often been seen as socially threatening, the gender gap in reading takes on new resonances in contemporary society, as boys are now seen as falling behind.

Similarly, Skelton (2001) discusses how “ideas that schools are ‘failing boys’ and that they construct and/or can challenge particular dominant images of masculinity...have a long history and are not phenomena of recent times” (p. 12). She describes this history in England starting with the socially and gender-stratified educational system of the Victorian era, the introduction of compulsory education in 1880 and free education in 1891 (p. 13), and a movement towards equality in education in the 1940s that was not realized until the 1960s and 70s (and even then only in terms of social class rather than sex) (p. 15). The feminist movement led to more attention focused on girls' education. As girls began surpassing boys in quantified achievement measures, educators concentrated on boys. The men's rights camp claims that boys are now the disadvantaged group. Feminists “argue that what is happening now is mainly that girls are doing better within the system, rather than that boys are doing less well” (Barrs, 2000, p. 287).

Maynard (2002) traces a parallel trajectory in the educational history of Wales (pp. 10-13), noting that the 1980s were a time of continual striving for equal opportunity in schools but also a time of making schools more girl-focused. The 1990s, in contrast, brought a concern for boys' underachievement (p. 13). In Australia, a similar historical shift, from worrying about equal opportunities for girls to the underachievement of boys and differing literacy practices, occurred (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997).

In the U.S., women's superior educational achievement was puzzling in the face of continued pay inequality. Mickelson (1989) entertained several different theories as to why women achieved despite the job ceiling but found that none of them adequately explained it. She offered instead the idea that women may not value educational gains in the same way that men do and that this should be examined (Mickelson, 1989, p. 59).

Maynard (2002) writes that in the U.K., boys' contemporary underachievement is often blamed on the "missing men" and "the feminised school" phenomena. Missing men refers to absent fathers and to the single-parent home context in which the mother may be raising her son alone. In this context, it is argued, boys' role models for masculinity may come from TV, comics, and video games rather than from fathers themselves (p. 18). The feminized school refers to the tendency for school to be an environment in which female teachers supposedly unconsciously adopt teaching practices that are better for girls and utilize materials better suited for girls. Even testing, it is now claimed, is better matched to girls' supposedly innate abilities than to boys' (p. 19). This feminized school argument possibly emerged out of the historical context of the feminization of teaching just described. Even the fact that certain teaching styles and materials are seen as

differentially beneficial to girls and boys is evidence of a pervasive cultural belief in a gendered literacy.

Maynard (2002) suggests that the obsession in Western countries with the underachievement of boys may be related to recognition of the salience of literacy in a global economy. It may also be that as long as boys outperformed girls in science and math, boys' literacy problems were ignored. There may also be concern which stems from the fact that as the under-achievement of boys crosses traditional class barriers, it becomes “too close for comfort” for those in middle and upper classes and so receives more attention (Maynard, 2002, p. 18).

Maynard (2002) also lists the various teaching approaches that have been used to try to help boys perform better, such as:

the introduction of single-sex teaching; an increase in the number of male teachers and male role-models in schools; the adoption of boy-friendly teaching strategies and assessment methods; the motivation of boys through the establishment of links between (predominantly male) sports, learning and literacy; and the inclusion on school reading lists of the kinds of books boys prefer. (p. 19)

The methods Maynard (2002) mentions here include examples of schools' commitment to gendered literacy through male teachers' modeling of literacy behaviors, single-sex classrooms, sports-themed literacy and curricular use of boy-preferred literature.

What is the success of such strategies in terms of encouraging boys' literacy?

Some research suggests that such tactics have not been particularly fruitful. For example, Sokal and Katz (2008) describe that in their quasi-experimental study of 119 Canadian third and fourth grade low-achieving (in reading) boys, that for the boys working with male teachers, “that neither male reading teachers nor computer-based reading had a significant effect on boys' reading performance when compared with the alternative” (p.

88). Sokal and Katz, based on their study's findings, therefore, urge caution in terms of making policy decisions regarding instituting male teachers for male students or incorporating technology into the reading curriculum.

The study discussed in this dissertation analyzes blog posts and comments by educators, young people, and creators of texts for young people to see if, and in what ways, the legacy of underachieving boys impacts ongoing discussions of gender and literacy.

2.9 Study Rationale

2.9.1 Lack of a full definition of gendered literacy. Literacy and reading in the U.S. (and other Western cultures) is a gendered phenomenon; more specifically, it is promoted as a feminine domain. This study seeks to provide an integrated conceptual model of gendered literacy. Although researchers present the phenomenon of gendered literacy from a variety of different standpoints, they have not yet produced a unified explanation. Guzzetti, Young, Gritsavage, Fyfe, and Hardenbrook's (2002) review of literature regarding gendered literacy in *Reading, Writing, and Talking Gender in Literacy Learning* represents one attempt at achieving a more complete understanding of gendered literacy. However, their approach is limited. For example, they restrict their review to "complete reports of qualitative or observational studies that investigated text or text-based activity with informants drawn from or situated in classrooms" (Guzzetti et al., 2002, p. 9). Hence, they exclude survey research and more quantitative studies, and the studies they review are classroom-based (p. 9). Furthermore, they focus their discussion on implications for pedagogy rather than working to build theoretical understanding of gendered literacy, as this study does.

2.9.2 Overview of a model of gendered literacy. As explored in the literature review above, previous studies have discussed how gender is “done” in terms of literacy practices and classroom interactions, particularly how children themselves enact it. The research so far points to two main ways in which gendered literacy is enacted by children: 1) in terms of boys resisting school-based literacy while girls are embracing school-based literacy; and, 2) girls and boys displaying differing literacy preferences. Gendered literacy is also enacted by educators – by teachers, in their differing expectations of and perceptions of male and female students and in their gendered management of the literacy classroom; by parents, through their modeling of literacy behaviors and beliefs about their children’s literacy preferences; and by librarians, specifically in their expectations in terms of boys’ literacy and programmatic responses to this perceived “boy problem.” Researchers have also investigated the interactions between gender and literacy as variables in studies with a more quantitative approach, presenting gendered literacy as a quantifiable outcome, usually in terms of girls outscoring boys on standardized tests of verbal ability. In other cases, researchers have portrayed gendered literacy as a result of biological, cognitive differences between females and males. Still other researchers have addressed the historical context of gender in relation to literacy, focusing on the feminization of the teaching profession in the U.S. and a legacy of boys’ underachievement. Additionally, recent studies have addressed gender dynamics within the publishing industry.

2.9.3 Overview of the methodologies previously used to study gendered literacy. Scholars have used diverse methodologies to study gender and literacy, and this review has covered a range of approaches. Qualitative analyses have included:

examination of children's writing samples; observation of classroom literacy activities; surveys of and interviews with children regarding reading preferences and writing process; action research with teachers; observations of mother/preschool child reading interactions; ethnography in a classroom setting; content analysis of teen girls' My Space pages, and historical reviews. More quantitative approaches have included: experimental research regarding the relationships among variables such as children's sex, reading preferences, and reading comprehension; larger scale studies comparing boys' and girls' performance on standardized tests of verbal ability; and, experimental research regarding the ways in which children process texts.

2.9.4 Gaps in the research on gendered literacy. The thrust of the studies discussed in this literature review has been to examine how gender and literacy are related, and they have, for the most part, shown that children perform literacy in ways indicating that literacy is culturally promoted as a feminine activity, more appropriate for girls than for boys. The studies address the gendered dimensions of literacy practice that children learn as they become literate, particularly within the school context. However, individually they do not present any summary of what gendered literacy is. Also, the studies only scratch the surface as to how literacy is promoted in this way and how this cultural belief system is maintained.

Based on the assumption that blogs represent a significant site for the social performance of gendered literacy, this study qualitatively analyzes a sample of blogs from the KidLitosphere, an important social networking space within the blogosphere for people whose primary work and/or recreation center around literature for children and young adults. The analysis focuses on adding to, nuancing, and identifying possible

resistances to a model of gendered literacy presented by scholars in the following ways: as enacted in terms of girls and boys approaching literacy in differing ways as well as by educators, as a quantifiable achievement gap (usually discussed in terms of standardized test scores), as the result of cognitive differences between males and females, and as the result of a historically female-dominated educational system. Specifically, the analysis addresses the perspectives of literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers), creators of reading materials for children (published authors, editors, and illustrators of children's and young adult literature), and of children themselves.

2.9.5 Importance of social media. Social media are interwoven with the fabric of daily life, both at the individual and social levels, particularly for people who have regular internet access and frequently use social media. Some scholars (see, for example, Turkle, 2011) have alleged that social media are in fact socially-isolating. Moreover, they argue that the virtual interactions social media provide are, on the one hand, convenient and easy but on the other hand, (unlike real friends and acquaintances), easily put off or ignored altogether. Moreover, social media isolate people by claiming time and energy that could be directed toward face-to-face interactions and relationships. However, other researchers disagree. For instance, reports by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, a U.S. non-profit organization that, using a combination of phone (random sampling), online, and qualitative surveys, along with government, private, and academic research, “produces reports exploring the impact of the internet on families, communities, work and home, daily life, education, health care, and civic and political life” (Pew Internet, 2012, “About” section, “Our Mission”), suggest otherwise.

One such report, “The Social Side of the Internet” (Rainie, Purcell, & Smith, 2011), states that social media users overwhelmingly identify themselves as members of social groups:

Groups and their members are using all kinds of digital tools to bind themselves together and some of the most innovative involve social networking sites like Facebook (used by 62% of the internet users in our survey), Twitter (used by 12% of internet users), blogs, and texting (used by 74% of the cell phone owners in our survey):

- 48% of those who are active in groups say that those groups have a page on a social networking site like Facebook
- 42% of those who are active in groups say those groups use text messaging
- 30% of those who are active in groups say those groups have their own blog
- 16% of those who are active in groups say the groups communicate with members through Twitter (p. 4)

Findings like these present a snapshot view of the significance of social media, including blogs, and suggest that social media, for the most part, may be complementary to and enhance people’s social engagement.

The report further notes that,

those who are active in social media are among the most heavily involved group participants: 82% of those who use social networking sites such as Facebook say they are active in groups vs. 77% of the internet users who are not users of such sites; and 85% of Twitter users are active in groups vs. 79% of the online Americans who are not Twitter users. (Rainie, Purcell, & Smith, 2011, p. 6)

Based on these data, social media use correlates strongly with social group involvement.

The report includes a break-down of the types of social groups survey respondents claimed to be active in, finding that: “11% are active in literary, discussion, or study groups such as book clubs” (p. 6). Additionally, it describes differences between women and men regarding group involvement, stating:

Women are more likely than men to be active in church groups, consumer groups, support groups, parent groups, literacy groups and performance groups among

other things. At the same time, men are more likely than women to be connected to groups involving sports or sports fan activities, veterans, and gaming groups. (p. 7)

What is noteworthy in these findings for the purposes of this study is that users of social media are active in book clubs and other literary pursuits and that among these book-club-joining users of social media, women are better represented than men. Due to the correlations between social media use and gendered social group involvement, social media are an important site for gendered literacy.

2.9.6 Choosing to study blogs (over other social media). Why study blog posts, rather than Facebook updates, or tweets, or text messages? For the purposes of analysis, blog posts provide longer narratives, thereby yielding richer data, than other types of social media. For example, a tweet must consist of 140 characters or less whereas a blog post can be as long as needed. Furthermore, blogs are historically older than other forms of social media, so examining blog posts may give a sense of trends over time (some of the blogs examined in the study date back to 2004). Additionally, blogs, in general, are publicly accessible, so they can be accessed unobtrusively.

Nelson (2006), in an article touting the promise of blogs for potential authors and for the publishing industry, illustrates how blogs were becoming significant:

Blogs have created a new point of entry for outsiders into the book publishing industry....Writers are using blogs to build audiences that strengthen book proposals. As a result, many publishers have offered book deals to bloggers over the last few years....Professionals at all stages of the publishing process are blogging. Readers have launched literary blogs, fan blogs, and genre blogs. Librarians are writing about issues in library science, new acquisitions, and funding. Booksellers access blogs for news and recommendations, and sometimes they “cyber sell” a book that they really like through a blog. Web sites...support blogs on industry-related topics and monitor blogs for news. Literary blogs contain novel reviews, personal essays, information about authors, and links to news about books. Literary bloggers offer sharp opinions and commentary about

positive and negative trends in the publishing industry. Several publishers have launched blogs. (p. 6)

Writers, readers, librarians, booksellers, and publishers have actualized many of these predictions (from 2006) of their use of blogs as a crucial point of social connection regarding books.

For example, the KidLitosphere blogs are influential both within the community of Kidlit bloggers as well as in the wider worlds of teaching, and the publishing, marketing and sale of materials for young people. Sarah Bean Thompson (2010), a young adult librarian who is also a KidLitosphere blogger, explains, in an article published in *Voice of Youth Advocates* (a major professional magazine for youth services librarians), how she, in her roles as a blogger, reader, and librarian, uses the KidLitosphere blogs. As a blogger and reader, she states: “I admit it-blogging is one of my biggest addictions. I love to see what other people are reading and hear their thoughts on the books, and I like that I can share my opinions along with them” (Thompson, 2010, p. 470). As a young adult librarian, Thompson claims to use book blogs (she cites two examples from the KidLitosphere) as a source for reviews beyond those published in professional journals, thereby aiding her in reader’s advisory and collection development work. Moreover, she says that, for her, the blogs serve as “an extension of the teen advisory group” (Thompson, 2010, p. 470). Speaking of her relationship as a young adult services librarian to the youth in her library’s teen advisory group, Thompson explains how reading teen book blogs extends her outreach capacities for teens in the library. She states:

These teens also rely on me to keep them up-to-date about new books to read. Reading about what other teens are reading and looking forward to expands the feedback from my local teen advisory group into a large group of book lovers. (p. 470)

Thompson's comments are anecdotal and represent only one librarian's viewpoint, but it is likely that other librarians are using the KidLitosphere blogs in the same manner.

Similarly, KidLitosphere blogger Elizabeth Burns (2007), in *School Library Journal* (the dominant U.S. school librarian professional journal), states: "Book blogs are fast becoming an important aspect of the children's literature world, and if you're not already plugged into these resources, you should be" (p. 40). Burns presents school librarians with a convincing list of potential reasons to consult book blogs:

Say you've just read a book and want to rave (or rant) about it, or you need to figure out which books to buy on a limited budget. Where can you turn? Sure, there are print publications, such as *School Library Journal* and the *Horn Book*. But as great as those magazines are, you may want more in the way of diverse opinions and extended reviews, not to mention a place to get answers to your questions or connect with fellow bibliophiles....Blogs are a rich source for reviews....Blogs also offer publishing news..., author interviews..., and the latest Newbery award gossip. (pp. 40-41)

In this commentary, Burns, like Thompson (2010) above, emphasizes the social functions of blogging and blog-reading as well as librarians' consultation of book blogs as sources of alternative and more in depth book reviews, interviews with authors, and publishing and book award news.

In yet another example, a *Publisher's Weekly* piece discusses the growing influence of mother-authored blogs reviewing children's books within the publishing industry. The article states that such bloggers, for the most part, "consider themselves children's book bloggers who happen to be moms—rather than 'mom bloggers'" (Springen, 2011, para.15). Quoting marketing and publicity directors for well-known children's book presses, the article notes that publishers are paying attention to children's literature blogs and taking advantage of them as marketing opportunities. As an example, "Candlewick, which reaches out to about 450 mom (and dad) bloggers, offers them

review copies and reader prize packs” (para. 16). In another example, the article quotes Simon & Schuster’s children’s publishing division marketing director: “ ‘For us, especially with fewer and fewer places for us to be able to sell picture books in terms of bricks-and-mortar, we really need to look to other sources,’ says Rettino” (para. 6). In this way, bloggers are important to publishers in that they review and potentially help sell new books.

The article also claims that the “mom blogs” are sometimes a way that publishers discover new talent. For instance,

Ree Drummond (aka The Pioneer Woman) became a blogging sensation, then author of *The Pioneer Woman Cooks*, and then author of the bestselling picture book *Charlie the Ranch Dog*. When she blogged about how she wrote the story, she got more than 800 comments. Kate Jackson, senior v-p, associate publisher, and editor-in-chief of HarperCollins Children’s Books, found Drummond’s blog, and the two decided the family’s colorful pooch would make an ideal picture book star....

Jackson “dips into” at least five or 10 blogs (and not always the same ones) every day, she says.... She often learns about new blogs from links on the sites of her favorite writers, such as Drummond. “Your antenna is always up,” she says. “Where is the next great children’s book coming from?” (Springen, 2011, para. 9-10)

In this case, Ree Drummond’s blog was key to her becoming a published author of a children’s book and that Kate Jackson, of HarperCollins Children’s Books, reads blogs daily, always with the notion that she may discover a promising, publishable new writer. Although Drummond’s blog is not part of the KidLitosphere, it does point to a trend in publishing that affects bloggers such as those included in the KidLitosphere.

2.9.7 Blogs defined. The Pew Internet & American Life Project website describes blogs as follows: “Blogs, or online journals, are a way for internet users to express themselves creatively or to document their experiences. About one in ten internet users contribute to a blog; one in three internet users read blogs” (Pew Internet & American

Life Project, 2012, “Research on blogs”). This description stresses what users do when they blog (creatively document their lives) and incorporates U.S. statistics (2010) on blogging behaviors.

Lomborg (2009) defines the blog more specifically as “an author-driven, asynchronous and informal genre of CMC that uses various modalities and entails some interactivity” (Lomborg, 2009, p. 3). In other words, blogs represent a form of computer mediated communication characterized by the following features: the author (blogger) primarily determines the content; and, readers of the blog have the opportunity to interact with the blog (usually by posting comments), but their interactions with bloggers in this sense are asynchronous. Moreover, bloggers use various modalities to create the blog while readers also use various modalities to read the blog.

Miller and Shepherd (2004), in another article discussing the purpose of blogs, claim that “there is strong agreement on the central features that make a blog a blog. Most commentators define blogs on the basis of their reverse chronology, frequent updating, and combination of links with personal commentary” (p. 5). The important points in this definition include the elements of time – active blogs are frequently updated and the most recent posts appear first on the blog – and content, which consists of the blogger’s own commentary combined with links. Moreover, Miller and Shepherd believe that blogging comprises two main forms of social action: “self-expression and community development” (p. 7). As Miller and Shepherd state, “Even as they serve to clarify and validate the self, blogs are also intended to be read” (p. 7). In other words, although there is a diary-like component to blogging, blogs also serve as a means for developing social networks.

2.9.8 Usage and purpose of blogs. Like Miller and Shepherd (2004), Nardi, Schiano, and Gumbrecht (2004) conceive of blogging primarily “as social activity” (p. 222). In contrast to other scholars who focus on the diary-like aspects of blogging, they link blogging to social purposes: “Blogs are a manifestation of diverse social motives, in which the inscriptions in the blog communicate specific social purposes to others” (p. 225). In this sense of encompassing social communication, blogs are a significant window through which to view the social world. In their ethnographic study of 23 informants and their blogs, Nardi et al. (2004) categorized the motivations for blogging (some bloggers expressed more than one) among their informants as the following:

1. Update others on activities and whereabouts
2. Express opinions to influence others
3. Seek others’ opinions and feedback
4. “Think by writing”
5. Release emotional tension. (p. 225)

The blogs examined in this pilot study primarily review children’s and young adult literature. As such, the bloggers do not write extensively about their personal lives, nor do they write in a confessional style. Therefore, they most closely follow Nardi et al.’s (2004) descriptions of “express opinions to influence others,” “seek others’ opinions and feedback,” and “think by writing” on the list above.

On the other hand, Nardi et al. (2004), although noting the social purposes of blogs, also observed that the bloggers they studied favored very little interactivity in their relationship with their blogs’ readers. They state: “Many bloggers liked that they could be less responsive with blogging than they could in email, instant messaging, phone, or face to face communication. They seemed to be holding their readers at arm’s length” (p. 228).

In other words, although blogs help bloggers develop social networks, they also serve as a means to broadcast the self without much interactivity with blog readers. Nardi et al. (2004) also note that, among their study's participants, "The relationship between blogger and reader was markedly asymmetrical. Bloggers wanted readers but they did not necessarily want to hear a lot from those readers" (p. 227), and, "bloggers wanted to express themselves without the 'threat' of immediate feedback. When feedback came, it was often in other media, after time had passed. Blog comments were infrequent and often said very little" (p.228). Bloggers, therefore, seem to see their blogs as a safe (safe in the sense of not attracting immediate attention) venue in which to tell stories and share opinions.

In contrast to other scholars' focus on the Internet's capacity for identity-bending recreation, Miller and Shepherd (2004) note that

Bloggers...seem less interested in role playing than in locating, or constructing, for themselves and for others, an identity that they can understand as unitary, as real....To the extent that the blog has become a widely understood and shared rhetorical convention, it functions as a site of relative stability....The blog might be understood as a particular reaction to the constant flux of subjectivity, as a generic effort of reflexivity within the subject that creates an eddy of relative stability. Infinite play, constant innovation, is not psychically sustainable on an indefinite basis. In a culture in which the real is both public and mediated, the blog makes real the reflexive effort to establish the self against the forces of fragmentation, through expression and connection, through disclosure. (p. 11)

Miller and Shepherd, then, comment on the blog as a site in which bloggers actually construct a more fixed identity, for the benefit of both themselves and their readers, perhaps in response to other functions and locations of computer mediated communication which allow for more subjective interpretations. Miller and Shepherd view blogs as a genre characterized by reflexivity and personal revelation in the service of anchoring the self and protecting the self from fragmentation.

2.9.9 Blogging trends. The writing of the blogs that provide the bulk of data for the study is referred to as “macro-blogging,” in contrast to the “microblogging” that users of social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter engage in when they post status updates (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010, p. 2). According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project report, *Social Media & Mobile Internet Use among Teens and Young Adults*, micro-blogging has gained in popularity, particularly among youth, while macro-blogging has declined:

Since 2006, blogging by teens has dropped from 28% of teen Internet users to 14% of online teens in 2009. Teens are now beginning to resemble their elders in their likelihood of blogging, as about 12% of adults have consistently reported blogging since February 2007. This decline is also reflected in the decline of the number of teens who say they comment on blogs within social networking websites – 52% of social network using teens report commenting on friends’ blogs within these sites, down from 76% commenting in 2006. (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010, p. 24).

Therefore, fewer teens are now blogging (a percentage on par with adults), and fewer are commenting on others’ blogs accessed through social networking sites. Nonetheless, macro-blogging (that is, authoring traditional blogs) is still an important form of social media among adults overall. Additionally, older adult bloggers have actually increased in numbers:

The prevalence of blogging among adults as a whole has remained consistent because the decline in blogging among young adults has been marked by a corresponding increase in blogging among older adults. For example, in December 2007, 24% of online 18-29 year olds reported blogging, compared with 7% of those thirty and older. By 2009, that difference had nearly disappeared—15% of internet users under age thirty and 11% of those ages thirty and up now maintain a personal blog. Among adult internet users, blogging is equally common among men and women; whites, black and Hispanics; and those with low and high levels of income and education. (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010, p. 24).

According to the Pew Internet research, then, the percentage of age 30 and over bloggers increased, and likelihood of blogging is roughly the same based on educational and income level, race (black, Hispanic, white), and sex.

2.10 Literature Review: Summary

Although scholars have begun to refer specifically to the phenomenon named “gendered literacy,” no one has yet brought together the various definitions to form a cohesive picture of the phenomenon. The study undertaken for this dissertation thereby addresses a major gap in the literature overall by positing an integrated conceptual model of gendered literacy based on the existing literature, including 1) gendered literacy as something enacted both by children and by the educators concerned with children’s literacy, including parents, librarians, and teachers; 2) gendered literacy portrayed as a quantifiable outcome, usually in terms of girls outscoring boys on standardized tests of verbal ability; 3) gendered literacy portrayed as a result of biological, cognitive differences between females and males; and, 4) gendered literacy portrayed as an artifact resulting from the historical feminization of the teaching profession in the U.S. and a legacy of boys’ underachievement. (See the introduction of this chapter for a table describing the conceptual model).

The study then examines blog narratives authored by literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers); creators of texts for children (published authors, editors, and published illustrators); and, children/young adults, and compares the notions of gendered literacy expressed within those blog narratives with those identified in the literature in order to both nuance and expand the phenomenon known as gendered literacy.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS

The purpose of this study is to examine gender as it relates to literacy in the United States from a variety of perspectives, including those of literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers), children and young adults, (literacy learners), and creators of reading materials for children (editors and published authors and illustrators of children's and young adult literature). It also compares the conceptions of gendered literacy identified through data analysis to conceptions identified in the literature review with the goal of creating a conceptual model of gendered literacy.

This section begins by first describing gaps in the literature to which the study responds. Second, it describes the goals of the study and research questions. Third, it discusses the meta-theoretical perspective underpinning the study and then, more specifically, the qualitative methodology as well as the rationale for analyzing data collected from the KidLitosphere blogs. Fourth, the pilot study is outlined in detail. Fifth, the data collection procedures and analysis are described. Finally, the study's limitations are discussed.

3.1 Responding to Gaps in the Literature

The study fills a gap in the scholarship on “gendered literacy,” a conceptual term that, although used more and more in both research and popular literature (including in the media in the form of reports on gaps in achievement between boys and girls), has not yet been fully described. A more cohesive model of gendered literacy is important in terms of understanding how and why school-based literacy and particular types of informal literacy in the U.S. continue to be associated with femininity, while other forms of informal literacy are associated with boys and boys are perceived as “reluctant readers.”

In this study, gender is defined as socially constructed (through repeated performance) and literacy as the socially-learned reading of multiple text types in multiple contexts. As described in the literature review, studies relating to gendered literacy, with few exceptions (Cherland, 1994; McKechnie, 2004, 2006 “Spiderman”; Nichols, 2002; Scholastic & Harrison Group, 2010; Scholastic & Yankelovich, 2008; Sturm, 2003), have focused on the context of school, either surveying children regarding their attitudes toward curricular reading or surveying them about extracurricular reading from within the classroom space. The study of gendered literacy from within the school produces a view of gendered literacy that highlights girls rather than boys, due to perceptions of girls as more enthusiastic readers than boys. The study described in this dissertation, in contrast, takes a new approach to the discussion by looking at gender and literacy practice from within the blogosphere, and as will be seen, a view of boys as enthusiastic readers, similar to girls, is evident in the data.

The literature on gendered literacy presents multiple concepts of gendered literacy. One of these concepts is of gendered literacy as an enactment. Gendered literacy is enacted by children 1) in terms of boys’ resistance of school-based literacy in contrast to girls’ embrace of school-based literacy (DiPrete & Jennings, 2012; Gordon & Lu, 2008; Maynard, 2002; Millard, 1997, 2005; Moss, 2007; Smith, Smith, Gilmore, & Jameson, 2012; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002) and, 2) girls’ and boys’ differing literacy preferences (i.e. Chapman et al., 2007; Dutro, 2003; Hall & Coles, 1997; McKechnie, 2004; Topping & Renaissance Learning Ltd, 2012). Gendered literacy is also enacted by educators. For example, parents perform gendered literacy in the ways in which they model literacy practice to their sons and daughters (Cherland, 1994) and hold differing expectations of

literacy practice for their sons and daughters (Nichols, 2002; Scholastic & Harrison Group, 2010). Although there is a significant body of literature relating to young people's enactment of gendered literacy, there is a lack of literature relating to parents' perspectives on gendered literacy. This study will make up for this by examining blog narratives and comments written by and referring to the perspectives of parents.

Literature on librarians' perspectives on gendered literacy is equally lacking, and it is practice- (rather than research) oriented. Librarians enact gendered literacy through the ways in which they develop collections and programs to deal with the apparent "boy problem" in relation to gendered literacy (Doiron, 2003; Jones & Fiorelli, 2003; Parsons, 2004). The literature on teachers' perspectives is more robust. Teachers enact gendered literacy through their differing expectations of female and male students' verbal abilities and literacy behaviors (Maynard, 2002; Moore et al., 2007; Murphy & Elwood, 1998; Sanford, 2005/2006) and through their control of the literacy classroom in ways which draw attention to gender (Clarricoates, 1980; Orellana, 1995). The study described in this dissertation makes up for the gaps in the literature regarding the perspectives of librarians and teachers towards gender and literacy by examining blog narratives authored by and representative of the perspectives of both groups. In examining these blog narratives, the study focuses on educators' understandings of gender in relation to young people's literacy, thereby providing explanation as to why educators enact gendered literacy in the ways described in the research literature.

Research on how gendered literacy is enacted by the children's publishing industry appears primarily in the news media, focusing on the relative lack of female representation within the industry, and using this as an explanation of the perceived "boy

problem” – that is, the perception that boys do not enjoy reading and do not read as much as girls (i.e. McKechnie, 2006 “Becoming a reader”). The beliefs of authors, illustrators, and editors in relation to gender and literacy have yet to be fully addressed, and this study does so by analyzing blogs representing these perspectives.

The literature on gendered literacy as enactment has focused on children’s performance of gendered literacy, and as discussed earlier, most of these performances have been examined from within the school context. This study, in examining gendered literacy as performed by multiple actors within the blogosphere, provides a new approach.

Researchers and the media have also treated gendered literacy as a quantifiable outcome, usually discussed in the context of girls’ superior performance on standardized tests of verbal ability. Although this literature is not found to be part of the discussion of gender and literacy among the blogs sampled, it provided background for perceptions how gender and literacy are connected.

Researchers have also portrayed gendered literacy as resulting from differences in biological, cognitive function between females and males, and such portrayals range from conservative biological determinist views to more balanced arguments combining nature and nurture. This literature spans a broad array of texts, including scientific research literature, the media, and popular practice-oriented education books. However, the present study contributes to the discussion by looking at the degree to which these debates are a part of blog narratives relating to gender and literacy.

Lastly, other scholarship has treated gendered literacy as an artifact resulting from the historic feminization of the teaching profession in the U.S. and a legacy of boys’ underachievement. The present study looks specifically at which, if any, aspects of this

historical narrative appear in blog posts relating to gender and literacy, finding, in the end, that this perspective is represented in only a small number of blog posts and comments among the blogs sampled.

3.2 Research Goals

In reviewing the literature, although researchers have begun to use the term “gendered literacy” (i.e. Almjeld, 2008; Barrs, 2000; Orellana, 1995; Sanford, 2005/2006), they have defined it in many different ways, no one having yet aggregated these various definitions to arrive at a complete understanding of the phenomenon. To this end, the study fills a gap in the literature by bringing together these theoretical insights to arrive at a multi-faceted, nuanced view of gendered literacy. The goals of the study are therefore two-fold:

1. To develop an empirical model of gendered literacy that articulates patterns and resistances in the ways in which literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers), literacy learners (children and young adults), and creators of reading materials for young people (published authors, editors, and published illustrators), understand the connection between literacy (particularly reading) and gender in U.S. culture.
2. To compare this model to a conceptual model based on previous literature.

3.3 Research Questions

- Research Question 1: What are the conceptions of gendered literacy among literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers); creators of texts for children (published authors, editors, and published

illustrators); and, children/young adults, as represented in their blogging activities?

- Research Question 2: How do the conceptions of gendered literacy identified through the blogging activities of literacy educators, creators of texts for children, and children/young adults compare to the theoretical conceptions identified in the literature review?
- Research Question 3: What similarities and differences, if any, are represented in conceptions of gendered literacy among literacy educators; creators of texts for children; and, children/young adults, as represented in their blogging activities?
- Research Question 4: What patterns, if any, of resistance to the dominant conceptions of gendered literacy may be found among the blog posts analyzed?

3.4 Methodological Approach

Overall, a social constructivist view of both gender and literacy is assumed in this study. Because of social norms relating to gender, males and females are expected to behave differently. Behavioral differences between males and females are thereby attributed to differences in the ways in which males and females are socialized rather than to essential, biological differences. Similar to the lens here applied to gender, the study of literacy behaviors should examine individuals as embedded within a social fabric of literacy practices rather than focusing only on individual cognitive function. The ways in which gender and literacy are understood is socially regulated, and more specifically, regulated through language.

This qualitative study shares the characteristics of naturalistic inquiry identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985), including a natural setting, the use of a human instrument (principal investigator as researcher), purposive sampling, inductive data analysis, emergent design, tentative application, focus-determined boundaries, and special criteria for trustworthiness (pp. 39-43). The setting is the KidLitosphere, a website bringing together over 550 blogs addressing various aspects of children's literature; a purposive sample of 23 blogs was drawn both for representation of the groups of interest and for the blogs' topicality relating to gender, reading, and youth when blog posts and comments were sampled from those blogs. Data were read through and analyzed inductively using the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify themes, which were then coded to facilitate analysis. See Table 6 for examples of the ways in which the data were coded. The study design was not determined from the start, but followed the exploratory approach inherent to naturalistic inquiry. Because this is a qualitative study, conclusions made based on the findings are limited in scope. However, this dissertation provides a detailed rendering of the KidLitosphere context with the goal of facilitating transferability, that is, facilitating other researchers' use of the study's findings in other social contexts. The findings are trustworthy in that the data analyzed, which are quoted extensively in the Findings sections, Chapters 4-7 of the dissertation, clearly present the phenomenon of gendered reading from the perspective of the bloggers and commenters. Additionally, confirmability of the study is facilitated through detailed description of the procedures followed.

More specifically, the study follows the "grounded theory" approach outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This approach was taken because although gendered literacy

has been discussed from a variety of perspectives, a full, nuanced conceptual model has yet to be introduced. Moreover, an extensive exam-outcome-based literature in regard to gender and verbal performance (discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.6, Gendered Literacy as a Quantifiable Achievement Gap” above) already exists. An interpretive approach looks at the conceptions of gender and literacy that help to produce the social framework in which a consistent achievement gap, with female students outperforming males, occurs. Although data coding and analysis follows the grounded theory approach, the study began with “a provisional ‘start list’ of codes,” as described by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 58). This list of codes issuing from a conceptual model of gendered literacy, developed from the literature review and from the research questions, were the lens through which the data were analyzed. Thus, the generation of theory began, in part, during an initial phase of exploring the literature.

Starting with existing literature and general concepts of gender and literacy formed from this body of literature, the groups to be studied – literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers); creators of texts for children (published authors, editors, and published illustrators); and, children/young adults – were decided. The KidLitosphere blogs were chosen as the site of the study because the bloggers represent all the groups of interest and because the blogs represent a natural setting in which themes of gender and literacy are eminent. In choosing the blogs from which to sample data for analysis, representativeness of the groups of interest, but also theoretical saturation, for example including blogs that were mentioned as frequently read, were considered. Also, analysis of blog data shaped subsequent interview inquiries.

Many possible data points exist for the study described in this dissertation. Qualitative content analysis of blog posts allows for an unobtrusive way in which to study gendered literacy and to examine multiple perspectives. Interviews with individual bloggers were also used to clarify further the conceptions of gendered literacy identified in the model. However, interviews do not provide the main source of data since they represent an obtrusive means of gathering data. Similarly, written sources of data directly solicited from the participants – for example, prompting participants to write about gender in relation to literacy – would also be an obtrusive way in which to examine the phenomenon. Qualitative analysis of blog content was therefore the main method used, while interviews were used for triangulation and to provide a secondary data source.

3.5 Pilot Study Design

At the time of the pilot study, the KidLitosphere had not yet been decided upon as the site from which to choose the blogs. Also, the pilot study focused to a greater degree than the final study on aspects of the blogs analyzed, such as the scope of the blog's influence. Nonetheless, the pilot study helped with decisions regarding which groups of people to focus on for the final study and highlighted the need for a clearer coding framework in the analysis of the blog data.

3.5.1 Choosing blogs for analysis. Based on trying various key word combinations and search engines, many of which yielded blogs having little to do with gendered literacy, Firefox web browser and the Google advanced search function, “All these words,” within the domain: .blogspot.com, were used to search: “read girl boy blog.” A blog was included only if the blogger was a parent, teacher, public or school librarian, or a child/young adult. Additionally, the blog's topic/content had to focus on

children's/young adult reading/literacy and had to have been updated within the past month.

3.5.2 Data analysis. The following questions guided the data analysis for the pilot study:

1. What is the blog's main purpose?

- The "About" statement and/or the first post were read to answer this question.

2. What concepts does the blogger associate with children's/young adults' reading/literacy?

- These were based on qualitative analysis of sentences containing the words "read" (and variants, i.e. reads, reading).

3. Are these concepts of children's/young adults' reading/literacy the same or different among blogs by parents, teachers, public and school librarians, and children?

- Blogs' expressed concepts of reading/literacy were compared.

4. What concepts of gendered literacy do the blogs express or embody?

- The "About" statement and/or first post were read to answer this question.

Concepts were assigned according to those identified in the research literature as well as any new and/or resistant concepts identified in analyzing the data.

5. How do the concepts of children's/young adults' reading/literacy connect, or not, to concepts of gendered literacy?

6. Are the concepts of gendered literacy the same or different among blogs by parents, teachers, public and school librarians, and children?

- The blogs' stated purposes and concepts of gendered literacy were compared.

7. What is the scope of the blog's influence?

- How many people have looked at the blog? (if available, from counter function)
- How many people follow the blog? (if available, from “Followers” section)
- How many comments (from readers) does each sample post have?
- Who is the intended audience (as stated in the “About” section or first post)?
- Who comprises the actual audience (as reflected in the comments)? Authors' characteristics were identified through names, stated occupation, photos, linked blogger profile, etc.
- How may the blog's comments be characterized?
- Does the blog author belong to a community of other bloggers? This was determined by examining the number of blogs in the blog's blogroll, the number of comments posted by other bloggers listed in the blogroll, and the number of references to other blogs in the blogger's posts.

3.6 Pilot Study Results

3.6.1 Bloggers' characteristics. For the pilot study, a small sample of blogs was examined in order to help determine the feasibility of using blog data to answer the research questions. The pilot study examined three blogs—one by a male schoolteacher, one by a teenage girl, and one by a mother (who is a school librarian). To determine these bloggers' characteristics, the blogs' “About” statements, first posts, Blogger profiles, and photos (if available) were reviewed. Among the bloggers, the mother/ school librarian's posts were the longest, with an average of 561 words per post (including the post title), based on the three posts examined (three most recent consecutive posts, as of September

28, 2010). For this pilot study, the three most recent (as of September 28, 2010) consecutive posts were analyzed. For the male teacher's blog, *The Boy Reader*, posts from June 15 and 16, 2010, and September 1, 2010 were analyzed. For the teenage girl's blog, *Frenetic Reader: YA Book Reviews and Such*, posts from September 26, 27, and 28, 2010 were analyzed. For the mother's blog, *Books for My Boy and Yours: A Blog about Books that Boys Will Enjoy Hearing and Reading*, posts from September 4, 12, and 22, 2010 were analyzed. This blog related to themes identified in the male teacher's blog (*The Boy Reader*), so for *Books for My Boy and Yours: A Blog about Books that Boys Will Enjoy Hearing and Reading*, the October 10, 2010 post, which was the fourth consecutive post following the September 4, 12, and 22, 2010 posts, was also analyzed.

The three blogs share a common primary purpose – to review books. However, the male schoolteacher's blog specifically reviews books for boys, while the teenager's blog reviews young adult fiction, and the mother/school librarian's blog reviews early elementary books.

Since such a small number of blogs was examined, the data set was limited for this pilot study. Therefore, it was only possible to identify potential patterns and to compare the blogs to one another. The bloggers' motives in starting their blogs were identified, along with the blogs' possible spheres of influence based on the following measures: number of "followers," number and content of comments in the posts analyzed, and the intended versus the actual audience for these blogs (based on the blogger's "About" section or first post and blog readers' comments). The blogger's degree of connection with other bloggers was also estimated by examining blog rolls and the

number of times the bloggers referenced other blogs. Appendix A is a table showing how the pilot study analysis was organized.

3.6.2 Bloggers' motives. The bloggers, based on their "About" statements, expressed different motives for starting their blogs. The male teacher stated that he would like to introduce boys to "books besides Captain Underpants" (01/03/2008, first entry). The mother's motive in starting her blog is both personal and public, combining her roles as both mother and school librarian. She states that she wants to raise her young son "to be a reader." She also hopes her "blog helps others encourage boys to read." In this sense, her motive is similar to that of the teacher, who wants to help boys find good books to read, except that the teacher, in his "About" statement, names boys as an audience rather than their caregivers or teachers. The female teen blogger's motive in starting her blog, as she states in her "About" page, is ambiguous: she states that her reason for starting the blog is her "extreme and frenetic (hence the blog title) love of reading." A reader could infer from this that her motive is to keep track of what she reads, to share her reading with others, or a host of other reasons.

3.6.3 Bloggers' experiences of children's/young adults' reading. In order to examine bloggers' experiences of young people's reading, each sentence containing the words "read" (and variants, i.e. reads, reading) in each blog post sampled, was archived. Other words related to reading—watching, listening, observing, noticing, consuming, etc.—had been considered as search terms, but reading was the way bloggers typically described literacy practice. A brief description of each sentence was recorded. Then similar ideas were combined. Finally, after a list of sentences for each blog describing the

main themes of each post had been written, the sentences were compared across the blogs. The images in the blog posts and in the blog frame were also examined.

Blogging represents a secondary experience of children's/young adults' reading/literacy; it is the blogger's reflection on the primary experience of children's/young adults' reading/literacy. In this sense, this study treats blog narratives as proxies for reading and literacy practice. However, these narratives are a valuable window onto the gendered sociocultural conceptions and expectations encompassing children's/young adults' reading/literacy.

3.6.3.1 Reading children's/young adult books as daily practice. The bloggers are similar in their experiences of children's and young adult literacy. All three bloggers conceive of reading children's/young adult books as a pleasurable daily practice. The male teacher reads at home in the evenings and while on vacation; the female teenage blogger, based on her daily postings of book reviews, reads all the time; and the mother/school librarian blogger reads with her son before he goes to bed in the evening.

However, the mother/school librarian also presents reading with her son as a chore, something to be done at the end of the day even when they are both tired. She brings anxiety to the task, expressing her fear that school-based reading will become something her son resists. She describes her diligence in taking him to the library weekly and selecting books for them to check out. Her son's school homework is to read for 15 minutes each day and record the books he has read in a reading log. This blogger does not think reading should be assigned as homework; she implies that reading together should already be a home practice and is judgmental of other parents who she imagines would not read to their child unless it is required as homework. She notes that she has read to

her son daily since he was an infant. At the same time, she states that she finds reading with her son (as he works to become an independent reader) frustrating. However, she is pleased that her son stays focused while reading at bedtime even though he is tired. Thus this mother's account of her experience of helping her son form as a reader relates the experience as one characterized both by pleasure and stress.

3.6.3.2 Planning future reading. All three bloggers dedicate sentences in their blogs to planning what they will read next. For the male teacher, this primarily takes the form of his search for books that reluctant readers will enjoy. The female teen blogger mentions pleasure reading she is planning to do or lists books she has recently bought. The mother plans what to read next in the context of what she will read with her son to help him develop as a reader (i.e. working up to longer books). Moreover, the male teacher and the female teenage blogger both mention suspense as a pleasurable aspect of reading. The male teacher and the mother both express the belief that certain texts are better suited to boys. The teacher mentions that reluctant readers (especially boys) prefer short texts that require less time spent reading. Similarly, the mother recommends a book that “celebrates boys’ imaginations” and non-fiction early readers about animals; she feels that many boys, like her son, enjoy reading about animals and prefer books that don’t need to be read from beginning to end.

3.6.3.3 Teaching reading. Both the male teacher and the mother discuss reading in the context of teaching, and both mention reading aloud as a part of teaching reading. However, they mention different aspects of teaching reading. The male teacher also comments on the boys’ book club he manages and his sense of responsibility for encouraging reluctant readers, especially by providing them with the “perfect” book. The

mother also discusses the following aspects of teaching reading: reading together with her child, choosing books for him to read, taking him to the library weekly, and teaching the mechanics of reading (particularly her frustration associated with this).

3.6.3.4 Other unique aspects of children's/young adults' reading addressed by the bloggers. The male teacher and the mother blog about other unique aspects of children's and young adults' reading. For example, the male teacher describes reading children's books and finding good children's books (especially ones suited to reluctant readers) as requiring time and money. He typifies the process of converting reluctant readers (whom he describes as usually male) as hard work, requiring significant outputs of time and money to find good books and the right books (the ones that will win over reluctant readers). He is also the only blogger of the three who specifically mentions reading reviews and actively seeking recommendations of children's books.

The mother contributes a unique perspective in her commentary on reading as homework. She does not think reading should be called homework, judges other parents for not reading to their children unless required to do so, and fears that school-based reading will become something her son resists. Her perspective is also unique among the three blogs examined in that she focuses on quantities, for example in terms of books ("a nice pile of books," "a bag full of books" from the library); words (her son feels accomplished when "he has read all of the words"); facts ("these books are packed with facts."); and in terms of the numbers of times she and her son have read a book (reading a book multiple times helps her son develop a sense of story and memory for plot).

3.6.3.5 Concepts of gendered literacy expressed or embodied by the blogs. By reading the blogs' "About" statements, first posts, and images, the main concepts of

gendered literacy expressed or embodied by the blogs were assessed. These concepts include those identified in the research literature as well as any new and/or resistant concepts identified in analyzing the data.

The blogs authored by the male teacher and by the mother share concepts of gendered literacy. Both draw from the concepts of boys' resisting literacy and girls and boys having differing literacy preferences. The female teen blogger's blog embodies the concept of girls' embracing literacy, both in and out of school (in reading, writing). She also introduces a new concept, which, based on further searching, seems like it will recur. This is the phenomenon of the extreme female teen reader and extreme blogger – she posts book reviews on her blog on a daily basis. Moreover, she states that her motive for starting the blog is her “extreme and frenetic (hence the blog title) love of reading.”

No examples of resistance to the dominant conceptions of gendered literacy were found in this sample.

3.6.3.6 Blogs' influences on blog readers. The blogs were also examined in terms of their plausible scope of influence, based on several measures. For example, Blogger has a “followers” function. The female teenage blogger had accumulated the most “followers” – 787 – of the 3 blogs. The male teacher had 70 “followers,” and the mother had no “followers” section on her blog. The male teacher's blog (of the posts analyzed) garnered the most comments – 10 total (7 females and 3 males). The female teenager's blog posts listed 7 comments. The mother's blog listed no comments.

The comments were categorized according to their content – some comments fit more than one category. The most common theme of the comments on the male teacher's blog was affirmation of the blogger's description of the teacher's role in relation to

reluctant readers. The second most common category was that of extraneous friendly comments. Other themes included expressions of gratitude for book recommendations, affirmation of the blogger's description of reluctant but proficient readers, reflection on the commenter's own experience with her reluctant reader son (two comments), suggestions of websites or blogs to visit (two comments), and an expression of gratitude to the blogger for visiting the commenter's own blog.

Comments posted on the female teenager's blog (of the posts analyzed) were characterized according to the following two categories: expressions of gratitude for the blogger's book recommendations and affirmations of the blogger's book reviews. The mother's blog received no comments on the posts analyzed.

The intended versus the actual audience for these blogs, based on the blogger's statements in the "About" section or first post, and the comments of the posts analyzed, was also noted. In the case of the male teacher, the intended audience is different from the actual audience. The teacher refers to "my boy readers" and mentions that he wants to broaden their reading preferences beyond "Captain Underpants," a series published by Scholastic that is suggested (by Scholastic, on the Scholastic website) for readers ages 7-10. In this sense it would seem that his audience is elementary school-aged boys. However, the comments posted to his blog entries (among those analyzed) are written by teachers, parents, school librarians, and children's literature authors and illustrators. These commenters (rather than elementary school-aged boys) represent the blog's true audience. The female teenage blogger does not specifically mention who she intends her audience to be. All of the comments to her posts were by other female readers, with ages ranging from high school to college to early 20s. All, based on their comments, are avid

readers, including some avid readers of young adult fiction. One commenter is also an aspiring writer of young adult fiction, and one is an aspiring young adult librarian. The mother intends others in a position to “encourage boys to read” as her primary audience. She specifically mentions “parents,” but since the posts analyzed did not receive any comments, the actual audience for her blog cannot be assessed.

3.6.3.7 Bloggers’ connection to other bloggers. In analyzing the blogs, the degree to which the blogger belongs to a community of other bloggers was also assessed. This was accomplished by examining blog rolls – the list of blogs the blogger supposedly follows or otherwise supports and therefore includes on their own blog as a list of links with the blogs’ titles. The female teenager’s blog roll was the largest, containing 24 blogs. The male teacher’s blog roll included 12 blogs. The mother’s blog had no blog roll. In terms of a blog roll, then, the female teenage blogger is the most well-connected. The number of times the bloggers referenced other blogs in the posts analyzed was tallied. The female teenage blogger was also the most well-connected to other bloggers in this regard, mentioning two other blogs among her posts. The male teacher and mother did not reference any other blogs in the posts I read. I also examined the number of comments posted by other bloggers listed in the blog author’s blog roll as another measure of the blogger’s connection to other bloggers. The male teacher’s posts were commented on by four bloggers listed in his blog roll. The female teenage blogger, despite having an extensive blog roll, did not receive any comments on her posts from other bloggers in her blog roll. On this measure, the male teacher’s blog was the most well-connected to other bloggers.

3.6.3.8 Discussion of pilot study. This pilot study pointed to the feasibility of a larger project. It showed the value of blogs for studying literacy practice in connection to gender. Blog data offer advantages over other means of studying experiences of reading (observation, a traditional testing environment, interview), and this study shows how studying blogs allow for a rich analysis of how different subjects view, understand, and explain their reading practices and their encouragement of others' reading. Blogs lend themselves to such analysis, and allow the researcher to observe bloggers' stated reasons for reading, along with their "role" in helping others to read (dutiful teacher, concerned parent, enthusiastic reader, etc.). However, the pilot study also led to an expansion of the categories of types of bloggers to include published authors, illustrators, and editors. Because blogs are interactive in nature, they allow the bloggers to share resources and to interact directly with other bloggers and readers. Beyond this, blogs offer unique perspectives on gender and reading. In most cases, gender is less often a stated focus, but bloggers invariably raise the question in discussing their experiences, their passions, or their understanding of the value or meaning of reading.

3.7 Final Study: Procedures

Due to the insights gained by analyzing blog data in the pilot study, together with the goal of studying an aggregation of blogs representing the perspectives of more groups than were represented in the limited pilot study, the KidLitosphere organization/website was explored as a possible starting point for a the study. Following initial skimming and review of the KidLitosphere blogs, the KidLitosphere was identified as an important site for the discussion of issues relating to gender and literacy.

3.7.1 Sampling and data collection. A theoretical sample of blogs was selected based on the principal investigator's attendance at the KidLitosphere conference in September of 2012. The conference was also helpful in terms of confirming that the KidLitosphere as a community, is composed mainly of women. Head counts conducted by the principal investigator at two of the panel discussions revealed 41 women and 5 men at the first session, and 40 women and 2 men (including the presenter) at the second session.

One of the blogs chosen for analysis was the blog of the conference organizer. Another blog was of a presenter at the conference. Yet another was that of a blogger who served on a panel at the conference. Many of the other blogs were selected based on a process of snowball sampling from the blogs of these presenters and panelists (for example, blogs included in their blog rolls). Others were selected from the membership lists of the KidLitosphere blogs.

Because there are eight types of bloggers of interest in the study: parents, public librarians, school librarians, teachers, young people (children and young adults), and published authors, editors, and published illustrators, data were sampled from two blogs of each type, one by a male, the other by a female, for a total of sixteen. One more blog by a father, for a total of two fathers, is included due to the lack of bloggers who are fathers in the KidLitosphere. Similarly, B8, by a male librarian, is included even though another blog by a male librarian had already been included, because so few male librarians are represented in the KidLitosphere. B18, by a well-known male author/illustrator, is included, even though another one by a KidLitosphere presenter had already been included, based on the presumption that the majority of authors of children's books

are women. B4, by a mother, is included even though a blog by a mother had already been included, because so many of the posts discuss gender, literacy, and reading. B21 is also chosen for inclusion based on the relevance of its posts to gendered literacy. Two other blogs, B22 and B23 (although they are different from the previously decided-upon types), are also included because they are mentioned as frequently read blogs by other blogger/panelists at the KidLitosphere conference. Bloggers' and commenters' self-descriptions of their roles are taken at face value. In the process of analyzing the data, in determining bloggers and commenters' roles, if they refer to their own children (even if mentioned in another comment within the collected data set), they are counted as parents, or if they refer to their students, they are counted as teachers (or a school librarian, based on whether they mentioned the library as the setting for their work). A child's perspective is counted as a child's perspective even if it is recounted by an adult. The following table describes the blogs:

Table 2

Blog Descriptions

| Blog | Blogger Identity | About the Blogger/Blog | Blog Start Date | # of Blog Posts in Sample | # of pages of text in Sample* | How Blog Was Chosen |
|-------------|--|---|------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| B1 | Child (F) | Middle-school girl who read all the Newbery winners; blog features book reviews. | October 2009 | 9 | 15 | One of the only young bloggers in the KidLitosphere. |
| B2 | Young Adult (F) | Recent college graduate starting an MFA for writing youth literature; blog features book reviews and author interviews. | June 2006 | 32 | 122 | One of the only young bloggers in the KidLitosphere. |
| B3 | Public Librarian, Youth Services (M) | Blog features book reviews, particularly of "boy" books, written by librarians and children. | June 2007 | 49 | 141 | One of the few blogs in the KidLitosphere incorporating the voices of young people. |
| B4 | Parent (F), editor (but not of children's books) | Mother of two daughters. Blog's primary purpose is reader's advisory in response to adults, particularly parents, who | March 2009 | 11 Collected only the first 11 results for | 260 | Blog was chosen because many posts deal with gender, literacy, and reading. |

| | | | | | | |
|-----|---|--|----------------|---|-----|--|
| | | write e-mails to the blogger asking for reading suggestions for children. | | this blog because these posts and comments provide enough rich data for analysis. | | |
| B5 | Teacher (F) | Blog focuses on children's literature, particularly in terms of the blogger's classroom experiences; blogger for the <i>Huffington Post</i> . | September 2006 | 8 | 33 | Panelist at the KidLitosphere conference. |
| B6 | Teacher (M) | Fourth grade teacher; blog focuses on book reviews of middle grade titles. | August 2006 | 32 | 41 | From browsing the KidLitosphere member list—blog title suggested a male teacher. |
| B7 | Public Librarian, Youth Services (F) | Youth Materials Specialist of a major public library; has reviewed books for <i>Kirkus</i> and <i>The New York Times</i> ; author of a children's book; this <i>School Library Journal</i> (online) blog features book reviews, with a focus on diversity issues in children's literature. | June 2007 | 15 | 143 | KidLitosphere conference organizer. |
| B8 | Public Librarian, Youth Services (M) | Blog features book reviews, particularly of "boy" books, written by librarians. | May 2010 | 10 | 36 | One of the few male youth services librarians included in the KidLitosphere. |
| B9 | School Librarian (F) | Features book reviews of materials for youth of all ages. | June 2004 | 16 | 35 | Linked from B15's blogroll. |
| B10 | School Librarian (M) | Male elementary school librarian; <i>School Library Journal</i> (online) blog; 2014 Caldecott committee member; contributor of both reviews and articles for <i>School Library Journal</i> . Blog features book reviews. | November 2007 | 15 | 98 | Linked from B22's blog roll. |
| B11 | Parent (F) and youth services librarian. | Blog features reviews of books for younger children (elementary school); discussions of issues relating to children's literature and children's literature events; and, details of her work and personal life. | January 2006 | 13 | 62 | Linked from B7's blogroll. |
| B12 | Parent, homeschooler, author/illustrator (M). Blogs from the perspective of a father. | Blog includes reviews of books he has read with his children, along with his children's comments and their illustrations of characters and scenes from the books. | October 2008 | 11 | 71 | Linked from B22's blogroll, one of few dad bloggers in the KidLitosphere. |
| B13 | Parent (M) | Blog features book reviews. | January 2008 | 11 | 24 | One of few dad bloggers in the KidLitosphere. |
| B14 | Author (F) | Prolific author; blog includes personal anecdotes and stories of current, past, and | March 2006 | 32 | 159 | Well-known author whose books are often included in school curricula. |

| | | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--|-----|--|
| | | upcoming projects. | | | | |
| B15 | Author and screenwriter (M) | Screenwriter, author of a middle-grade novel, poet, father, and school library volunteer. Blog features reviews, publishing news, brief discussion of children's literature, and his poetry. | February 2006 | 2 | 4 | Presenter at the KidLitosphere conference. |
| B16 | Illustrator (F) | Author/illustrator of children's books, illustrator for greeting cards, home wares, magazines, and posters. Blog features interviews she has done as an author and accounts of her educational presentations at schools, libraries, and museums. | November 2008 | 10 Searching on "boy girl read" retrieves no results. "Read" yields too many results, so did 2 separate searches – "boy" and "girl." | 34 | Linked from B7's blogroll. |
| B17 | Illustrator (M)/Author | African-American, prolific illustrator of children's books; author; also a former newspaper illustrator. Blog features news of his work, notes on his artistic process, and to a lesser extent, stories of his personal life. | Difficult to tell – no archive | 40+ No search function in blog itself, so went through page by page. Searching "boy, girl, read" is unsuccessful, so did separate searches on "boy," "girl," and "read" for each page. Some posts were retrieved more than once. If so, placed with the search results in which it first appeared. Stopped gathering data at 40+ posts. | 336 | Linked from B15's blogroll. |
| B18 | Author/Illustrator (M) | Prolific author/illustrator, screenwriter, and animator; winner of multiple children's literature awards, and the Emmy awards. Blog features news of his work, public appearances, and fan mail. | December 2006 | 19 Searching by "boy girl read" retrieves no results; neither does "boy girl." "Read" | 35 | Linked from B7's blogroll. |

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|--|----|--|
| | | | | yields too many results, so did 2 separate searches – “boy” and “girl” | | |
| B19 | Editor (F) | Asian-American editor of children’s books; her blog treats topics ranging from discussion of books, news of her editorial projects and personal life. | January 2006 | 8 | 45 | Linked from B7’s blogroll. |
| B20 | Book Designer/Editor (M) | Blog features news of his projects, including notes on his artistic process, and previews of upcoming books by his publisher. | April 2007 | 6 | 63 | Linked from B7’s blogroll. |
| B21 | Starting point was the blog of an editor (M) of a prominent children’s book review/literary journal; however, his current blog is not easily searchable (since it is now part of the journal’s website). Therefore, tags for current blog were examined, and sampling was accomplished by following the “Boys Reading” tag. Results are not all from the journal editor’s blog, but many of the posts relate to gendered literacy. | Posts and comments relating to gender and reading. | September 2005, but archive is only available on the website for the original blog. | 10 | 59 | Linked from B15’s blogroll. |
| B22 | Public library employee performing a librarian’s duties without a Master’s degree in library or information science (F); library consultant; mother of 2 sons. | Blog features reviews of children’s books with parents and other caregivers as the intended audience. | February 2008 | 10 Collected only the first 10 results. | 58 | Several panelists at the KidLitosphere conference mentioned reading her blog, so it was included even though it does not fit the other categories. |
| B23 | Academic library (community college) employee performing a librarian’s duties without a Master’s degree in library or information science (F) | Blog includes reviews and discussion of what she is reading, along with larger issues relating to youth literature. | August 2004 | 10 Collected only the first 10 results. | 50 | Several panelists at the KidLitosphere conference mentioned reading her blog, so it was included even though it does not fit the other categories. |

The following table reviews the types of bloggers represented in the study:

Table 3

Types of Bloggers

| Blog | Blogger Type |
|-------------|--|
| B1 | Child (F) |
| B2 | Young adult (F) |
| B3 | Public Librarian, Youth Services (M) |
| B4 | Parent (F), editor (but not of children's books) |
| B5 | Teacher (F) |
| B6 | Teacher (M) |
| B7 | Public Librarian, Youth Services (F) |
| B8 | Public Librarian, Youth Services (M) |
| B9 | School Librarian (F) |
| B10 | School Librarian (M) |
| B11 | Parent (F) |
| B12 | Parent (M) |
| B13 | Parent (M) |
| B14 | Author (F) |
| B15 | Author (M) |
| B16 | Illustrator (F) |
| B17 | Illustrator (M) |
| B18 | Author/Illustrator (M) |

B19 Editor (F)

B20 Book Designer/Editor (M)

B21 Blog of a well-known literary magazine focused on reviews of children's literature; includes posts by the editor

B22 Public librarian (F, without MLS; however, in data analysis – treated as a librarian); library consultant; mother of 2 sons

B23 Academic librarian (F, without MLS; however, in data analysis – treated as a librarian)

It should be noted that initial attempts to locate a blog authored by a boy were unsuccessful. This included examining blog rolls and following links from linked blogs, along with posting to Facebook asking for leads from the principal investigator's professional and personal circles. One response was received, but the blog, which is not a part of the KidLitosphere and is authored by a young adult male, deals exclusively with comics and television adaptations of comics. Although the focus on comics is relevant (based on the perception of comic as a "boy"-preferred text type), the blog is so unlike the other blogs sampled in the study that it was not analyzed for this study.

Prior to collecting data, exploratory procedures were tried. Keywords "boy girl read" were entered in different orders searching two different blogs: B5 and B6. The order of the keywords did not make much difference in terms of the number of posts retrieved; for example, the first one, B5, is capped at 10 posts retrieved no matter in what order the terms are searched, and searches for "boy girl" or "girl boy" also retrieve 10 posts and result in the same posts retrieved, just displayed in a different order. For B6, searching "boy read girl" retrieves 32 posts; "read boy girl" also retrieves 32 posts, as

does “boy read girl.” For this blog, then, all the results were included in the sample because for some of the blogs the results were much fewer.

In addition to their theoretical significance, blogs from which data were sampled met the following requirements: they had been updated within the past month at the start date of data collection (January 2, 2013); were easily searchable through the use of a search engine included within the blog itself; and, yielded meaningful (defined here as relating to my conceptual model of gendered literacy, presenting new or resistant dimensions of it, or introducing new concepts of gendered literacy) results when searched with the keyword search, “boy girl read.” In most cases, this produced a large number of relevant posts. In two cases when a search of “boy girl read” yielded no results (B16, B18), the search terms were truncated to “boy” and “girl,” and two separate searches were conducted (in these two cases, using “read” as a separate search term retrieved too many results to be useful). Keyword searches were thereby used to draw the smaller sample of blog posts. In one case, B17, there was no search function located within the blog itself and so data collection consisted of scrolling through the blog page by page and doing separate searches on “boy,” “girl,” and “read” for each page. Data collection continued through Feb. 8, 2013. Collected posts were gathered from the searches even they were not immediately obviously relevant.

3.7.2 Data analysis. Blog posts in which the keywords “boy, girl, read” appear, and of the comments (if any) posted by readers of the blogs were read closely and themes were identified. Comments posted to the blog were important in order to get a sense of the blog’s audience and the blogger’s possible influence of this audience. In the process of data analysis, in order to focus analysis on the text in the sample, posted videos or

links to outside texts were excluded from the analysis. Blogs were examined using the Firefox web browser. For each post drawn for the sample, a screen shot image was saved, and the text and images were copied and pasted into a Microsoft Word document. The screen shots were examined only when there was a question regarding the copied and pasted text. The Microsoft Word document was therefore the version of the text used for coding, as it also allowed for the insertion of Blog #, comments and codes, and rapid identification of those textual markings later. Ten of the blogs from which data were sampled (and from which examples were used in the findings sections) included statements prohibiting direct quotation or made similar “all rights reserved” statements. Data collected from those blogs, when discussed in the findings sections (Chapters 4-7), are paraphrased, rather than quoted directly. Although the blogs analyzed for this dissertation are publicly archived materials and freely open to the public, this seemed a reasonable way to show deference to authors’ intentions.

Coding of the data followed procedures outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). As they suggest, data analysis began with a start list of codes issuing from the conceptual model of gendered literacy (developed from the literature review) and research questions (also issuing from the literature review) (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 58). The principal investigator first reviewed all the data, blog by blog, and highlighted important text. The provisional list of concepts relating to gendered literacy developed from the literature review, detailed below, were the starting point for coding:

- Gendered literacy as enacted, or performed, by multiple actors:
 - * Children/young adults:

- a) through boys' dislike of formal, school-based literacy in comparison to girls' more enthusiastic adoption of formal literacy practice in terms of reading, writing, and classroom comportment and,
- b) through girls' and boys' displaying differing literacy preferences in terms of reading and writing.

* Literacy educators, including parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers:

- a) through parents' perceptions of their daughters' and sons' literacy preferences and mothers' and fathers' differing support of children's reading behaviors
- b) through teachers' perceptions and expectations of male and female students' literacy preferences and performance
- c) through librarians' expectations of children's (particularly boys') literacy preferences and programmatic responses

* Creators of reading materials for children – the children's publishing industry

This framework describing gendered literacy as enacted by multiple actors (children and young adults; educators including librarians, parents, and teachers; and, creators of texts for children) therefore influenced the approach to the data. However, while analyzing the data, new concepts were also identified. Moreover, some of the concepts of gendered literacy initially flagged as important in the literature review were not salient in or were completely absent from the sampled data (for example, gendered literacy as a quantifiable achievement gap). Findings were compared among the different types of bloggers. Three thorough readings of the data set and six interactions with the

data in terms of organizing and revising the codes were accomplished to ensure intracoder reliability.

In the analysis process, comments posted to a blog are treated as separate from the main blog post, but if the comments follow the same theme as the main post, that was reflected in how they were coded. Often a conversational thread originating in the blog post is subsequently taken up by the commenters and so the original post and comments are categorized under the same code. When the initial coding was finished, a master list of the initial codes identified was developed, and codes for which only one or two texts had been identified were noted.

List of Codes:

1. Authors' labeling of books as "boy books" and "girl books"
2. Authors' perceptions of boys' literacy preferences (matching traditional notions)
– only 1 text
3. Biological phenomenon, the result of essential, cognitive differences between males and females, text linking behavioral differences between girls and boys to biological differences (i.e. boys are more active, so they prefer active pursuits over reading; girls are happier than boys to sit quietly and read).
4. Books about horses appealing to girls.
5. Books about sexual relationships – only 1 text
6. Boys' dislike of formal, school-based literacy
7. Children's labeling of books as "boy" and "girl" books
8. Comments on lack of action in reviewed materials
9. Descriptions of boy/girl rivalry

10. Disparagement of boy genres – non-fiction, comics
11. Disparagement of girl genres
12. Educators' perceptions that boys dislike literacy, especially formal, school-based literacy
13. Enacted by the publishing industry, the creation of "princess culture" by the publishing industry and the media
14. Enacted by the publishing industry: labeling of/creation of “boy books” and “girl books”
15. Enacted by the publishing industry, male bias in terms of character representation in children's books
16. Enacted by the publishing industry, perception that stories about little girls dressing up will sell well – only 1 text
17. Enjoyment of violence in children’s literature
18. Female educators’ distaste for violence or death in children’s literature
19. Feminization of the teaching profession in the U.S.
20. Enacted by children/young adults, girls’ and boys’ differing literacy preferences in terms of reading and writing (perceptions that match traditional ideas of gender differences in genre preference, like boys' preference for non-fiction and comics and girls' preference for narrative fiction, especially stories about girls).
21. Enacted by children/young adults, girls’ more enthusiastic adoption of literacy practice in terms of reading (both formal and informal), writing, and classroom behaviors.
22. Girls' sharing of texts amongst friends

23. Humor appealing to both girls and boys, and humor as a "gender neutralizer,"
making some books that would normally only appeal to one gender appeal to both
24. Iconic gendered books
25. Lack of dinosaur books featuring girls
26. Librarian perception that a boy who enjoys reading or writing is an anomaly
27. Librarians' expectations that boys prefer male protagonist and that girls prefer
female protagonist, but for girls, is not as crucial.
28. librarians' label of "high interest" as code term for appealing to boys
29. Librarians' labeling of books as "boy books" and "girl books"
30. Librarians' perceptions of boys' underachievement
31. Enacted by literacy educators, including parents, public librarians, school
librarians, and teachers, librarians' perceptions of children's literacy preferences
(i.e. perceptions that match traditional ideas, like boys' preference for non-fiction
and comics; girls' preference for narrative fiction, especially stories about girls &
programmatic responses, i.e. boys-only book clubs).
32. Enacted by literacy educators, including parents, public librarians, school
librarians, and teachers, librarians' perceptions that there are more female
protagonists represented in young adult fiction than male protagonists.—only 2
texts
33. Male author commenting about the experience of writing a female protagonist's
perspective – only 1 text
34. Males in publishing

35. ALA has no prize for comics; nor has a graphic novel memoir for children ever won an award – only 2 texts.
36. Misc., Books and "fit" -- perspectives of both readers and practitioners (Books that convert kids into readers, Favorites, loved books that are read over and over)
37. Children's books handling class difference in a sophisticated way are few – only 1 text
38. Miscellaneous, Female authors commenting on writing the voice of a male protagonist
39. Miscellaneous, Gender and reading as a complicated, troubling issue
40. Misc., Girl power as a theme
41. Misc. Kids do not like brown illustrations, preferring bright colors. – only 2 texts
42. Misc, lack of/need for books on puberty especially books for boys
43. Misperception among adults that kids will not read a comic with no superheroes or manga characters. – only 1 text
44. Readers' expectations of boy voice versus girl voice
45. Motherhood and authorship – need fatherhood and authorship
46. Enacted by literacy educators, including parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers, mothers' reading with or encouragement of reading with their children
47. Mothers' censorship of their children's reading material – pre-reading, editing content in read-alouds, etc. – only 1 text

48. Enacted by literacy educators, including parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers, parents' expectations that boys prefer male protagonist and that girls prefer female protagonist, but for girls, it is not as crucial.
49. Enacted by literacy educators, including parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers, parents' labeling of books as "boy books" and "girl books"
50. parents' perception that their own gender or experience with children of only one gender makes it difficult for them to speak about children of the opposite gender
51. parents' perception that girls more enthusiastically adopt literacy practice in terms of reading (both formal and informal), writing, and classroom behaviors – only 1 text
52. Parents' perceptions that the content of "boy books" is usually less focused on emotions than that of "girl books"
53. Enacted by literacy educators, including parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers, parents' perceptions of children's literacy preferences (i.e. perceptions that match traditional ideas, like boys' preference for non-fiction and comics; girls' preference for narrative fiction, especially stories about girls).
54. Enacted by literacy educators, including parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers, parents' perceptions that a boy who enjoys reading is an exception
55. Enacted by literacy educators, including parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers, Parents' perceptions that books and reading are unwelcoming to boys.

56. Enacted by literacy educators, including parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers, parents' perceptions that "boy books" are more interesting than "girl books." – only 1 text
57. Enacted by literacy educators, including parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers, parents' perceptions that girls will read "boy books," but boys will rarely read "girl books."
58. Enacted by literacy educators, including parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers, parents' perceptions that there are more female protagonists represented in young adult fiction than male protagonists.—only 2 texts
59. Enacted by literacy educators, including parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers, parents' perceptions that there are not enough "boy books" available.
60. Enacted by literacy educators, including parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers, parents' perceptions that there are not enough "boy" chapter books (but plenty of picture books and YA books)
61. parents' perceptions that there are plenty of "girl books" available
62. Perception of boys as less verbal.
63. Perception of boys' underachievement – only 2 texts
64. Perception that mermaids appeal to girls
65. Pink illustrations appealing to girls
66. racism (white Caucasian bias) in terms of character representation , especially lack of African-American males, and cover art in children's books

67. References to KidLitosphere or online community fostered by the blogs
68. "reluctant reader" as code for boy reader
69. Resistance, resistance against the notion that gendered behavioral differences are due to innate, biological difference
70. Resistance, children's perception that gender should not be an important factor in terms of reading
71. Resistance, Dads reading
72. Resistance: feminist perspective on gendered literacy – only 1 text
73. resistance in terms of character portrayal (characters who challenge gender stereotypes)
74. Resistance, resistance in terms of children's literary preferences
75. Resistance in terms of genre
76. Resistance, literacy educators' perceptions that gender should not be an important factor in terms of reading
77. Resistance, literacy educators' perceptions that gender should not be an important factor in terms of reading
78. Resistance, parents' perceptions that gender should not be an important factor in terms of reading
79. Resistance, Portrayals of characters of color, and especially showing them on book covers
80. Resistance, Portrayals of overweight children, particularly girls, in children's books
81. Reluctant girl readers – only 2 texts

82. Resistance, specific books, series that appear to appeal to both boys and girls
83. Resistance, boys' advanced reading level
84. Resistance, boys' love of reading.
85. Miscellaneous, Some librarians exclude superhero books from collection. – only 1 text
86. Surprising encounters with books from genres tried that are perceived as preferred by the other gender
87. teachers' labeling of books as “boy books” and “girl books”
88. Enacted by literacy educators, including parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers, teachers' perceptions of children's literacy preferences (i.e. perceptions that match traditional ideas, like boys' preference for non-fiction and comics; girls' preference for narrative fiction, especially stories about girls).-- only 2 texts
89. predominance of women in the publishing industry
90. Western bias in publishing (i.e. publishing few non-Western authors/illustrators)—only 1 text
91. Women's love for reading

This list was then treated to two thematic semi-structuring processes. First, codes that were thematically similar were grouped together and most of the codes for which there were only one or two example texts were set aside. If there were only one or two example texts but it was suspected that more examples would be found in a third reading of the data, the code was kept at that point. Another loosely-organized thematic list of codes was then developed:

1. Gendered literacy as a complicated and debated issue
 - Gendered literacy as a troubling issue
 - Parents' perceptions that books and reading are unwelcoming to boys:
 - a) Parents' perceptions that there are not enough "boy books" available
 - b) Parents' perceptions that there are not enough "boy" chapter books (but plenty of picture books and YA books)
 - c) Parents' perceptions that there are plenty of "girl books" available
 - Resistance:
 - a) Resistance, children's perception that gender should not be an important factor in terms of reading preferences
 - b) Feminist perspective on gendered literacy – only 1 text
 - c) Resistance, literacy educators' perceptions that gender should not be an important factor in terms of reading
 - d) Resistance, parents' perceptions that gender should not be an important factor in terms of reading
2. Educators' perceptions of boys' literacy preferences matching the following traditional categories: non-fiction, comics, graphic novels, sports books, adventure, fantasy, science fiction, gross humor, magazines, stories with male protagonists, picture books featuring vehicles (younger boys)/Educators' perceptions of girls' literacy preferences matching the following traditional categories: realistic fiction, romance, princess themed fiction, stories with female protagonists, coming of age stories, chick lit, books with pink covers.

- Librarians' perceptions: boys prefer male protagonists and girls prefer female protagonists, but girls are more likely than boys to read a story featuring a protagonist of the opposite sex
 - Parents' perceptions:
 - a) Parents' perception that their own gender or experience with children of only one gender makes it difficult for them to speak about the reading preferences of children of the opposite sex
 - b) Parents' expectations that boys prefer male protagonists and girls prefer female protagonists, but that girls are more likely than boys to read a story featuring a protagonist of the opposite sex
 - Authors' perceptions of boys' literacy preferences (matching traditional notions) – only 1 text
 - Resistance: Educators' surprising encounters with books from genres tried that are perceived as preferred by the opposite sex
3. Explicit Labeling of children's books as "boy" and "girl" books
- Educators' labeling:
 - a) Disparagement of "boy" books
 - b) Disparagement of "girl" books
 - Librarians' labeling
 - Parents' labeling:
 - a) Parents' perceptions that the content of "boy books" is usually less focused on emotions than that of "girl books"

- b) Parents' perceptions that girls will read "boy books," but boys will rarely read "girl books"
- Teachers' labeling, including perspectives on girl power as a theme
- Children's labeling
- Authors' labeling
- Iconic gendered books
- 4. Perceptions that gendered literacy is a biological phenomenon, the result of essential, cognitive differences between males and females
 - Resistance: There are no gendered behavioral differences and/or gendered behavioral differences are not due to innate, biological difference
- 5. Gendered literacy -- interests and behaviors
 - Expressed enjoyment of violence in children's literature
 - Comments on lack of action in reviewed materials
 - Girls' and Women's Literacy:
 - a) Girls' love of reading and/or advanced reading level
 - b) Reluctant girl readers
 - c) Women's love of reading
 - d) Mothers' reading with or encouragement of reading with their children
 - e) Mothers' censorship of their children's reading material – pre-reading, editing content in read-alouds, etc.
 - f) Girls' and women's sharing of texts amongst friends
 - g) Girls' expressed literacy preferences matching traditional notions

- h) Books about horses appealing to girls, including both perceptions and expressed interest
- i) Books about mermaids appealing to girls, including both perceptions and expressed interest
- j) Books with pink covers or illustrations appealing to girls, including both perceptions and expressed interest
- k) Expressed distaste for violence in children's literature
- l) Motherhood and authorship
- Boys' and Men's Literacy:
 - a) Boys' expressed dislike of literacy activities (both formal, school-based and informal)
 - b) Boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading level
 - c) Boys' expressed literacy preferences
 - d) Men's love of reading
 - e) Fathers' reading with or encouragement of reading with their children
 - f) Fatherhood and authorship
- Resistance:
 - a) Children's literary preferences, resisting traditional notions
 - b) Humor appealing to both girls and boys, and humor as a "gender neutralizer," making some books that would normally only appeal to one gender appeal to both
- 6. Achievement gap between girls and boys, including educators' perceptions of boys' underachievement

7. Feminization of the teaching profession in the U.S.
8. Parents' perception that girls enthusiastically adopt literacy practice in terms of reading (both formal and informal), writing, and classroom behaviors – only 1 text

9. Educators' perceptions that boys dislike literacy activities

- Educators' perceptions that boys who enjoy reading or writing are the exception
- Educators' perceptions that boys are less verbal than girls
- "Reluctant reader" as associated with boys

10. Publishing Industry

- References to women in the publishing industry
- Perception of "princess culture" as created by the publishing industry
- Labeling of/creation of "boy books" and "girl books"
- Male bias in terms of character representation in children's books
- Lack of dinosaur books featuring girls
- References to men in publishing
- Lack of books on puberty especially books for boys
- Racism (white Caucasian bias) in terms of character representation, especially lack of African-American males, and cover art in children's books
- Resistance, specific books, series that appear to appeal to both boys and girls

11. Miscellaneous

- References to KidLitosphere or online community fostered by the blogs
- Boy/girl rivalry

- Male author commenting about the experience of writing the voice of a female protagonist – only 1 text
- Female authors commenting on writing the voice of a male protagonist
- Books and "fit" -- perspectives of both readers and practitioners (Books that convert kids into readers, Favorites, loved books that are read over and over)
- Readers' expectations of boy voice versus girl voice
- Resistance:
 - a) Resistance in terms of characters who challenge gender stereotypes
 - b) Resistance in terms of genre
 - c) Resistance, Portrayals of characters of color, and especially showing them on book covers
 - d) Resistance, Portrayals of overweight children, particularly girls, in children's books

In constructing the above list and in preparation for a third reading of the data, a more balanced approach in terms of gender was taken, which resulted in the adding of categories (some of which were later removed due to there not being a significant number of examples). For example, the category “fatherhood and authorship” was added because there was a “motherhood and authorship” and in the second reading of the data, there had been examples of “fatherhood and authorship” that had been ignored at that point. Another example was: “references to men in the publishing industry,” added to account for the fact that “references to women in the publishing industry” had already been identified. Ultimately, “references to men in the publishing industry” was set aside because five or fewer examples had been identified. Two other examples were: “Male

authors commenting on writing the voice of a female protagonist,” added to balance the category of “Female authors commenting on writing the voice of a male protagonist;” and “Girls’ iconic gendered books,” added to balance the category of “boys’ iconic gendered books.” Both “male authors commenting on writing the voice of a female protagonist” and “girls’ iconic gendered books” were later eliminated due to having five or fewer examples in the data. However, these categories were added at the point of the last reading of the data toward the goal of being conceptually thorough.

After a third reading of the data, the codes were reevaluated. At this point, codes for which five or fewer examples (not including the interview transcript data) were identified were set aside. Finding there were still too many codes to work with reasonably, codes for which there were nine or fewer examples (not including the interview transcript data) were then set aside. This left 40 codes, and further revision and refining resulted in the following list of 35 codes (with headings):

Perceptions of gendered literacy preferences

1. Educators’ perceptions of boys’ literacy preferences matching the following traditional categories: stories with male protagonists, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, magazines, stories featuring vehicles.
2. Educators’ expectations that boys prefer male protagonists and girls prefer female protagonists, and/or that girls are more likely than boys to read a story featuring a protagonist of the opposite sex
3. Labeling of “boy” and “girl” books

4. Parents' perception that their own childhood experience as either a boy or girl, or experience with children of only one sex, makes it difficult for them to speak about the reading preferences of children of the opposite sex
5. Disparagement of “girl” books (realistic fiction, romance, princess themed fiction, stories with female protagonists, coming of age stories, chick lit, books with pink covers)
6. Disparagement of “boy” books (non-fiction, comics, graphic novels, sports books, adventure, fantasy, science fiction, gross humor, magazines, stories with male protagonists, books featuring vehicles)
7. Boys’ iconic gendered books
8. Resistance -- Perception that a child’s sex does not and/or should not influence their reading preferences.
9. Resistance: educators' expectations of children's literary preferences
10. Resistance: resistance to labeling of books as “girl” and “boy” books

Gendered literacy preferences, in terms of boys’ and girls’ expressed differing reading preferences

11. Boys’ expressed literacy preferences matching traditional notions of what boys are perceived to prefer (including stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines)
12. Girls’ expressed literacy preferences matching traditional categories (realistic fiction, romance, princess themed fiction, stories with female protagonists, coming of age stories, chick lit)

13. Books about horses appealing to girls, including both perceptions and expressed interest

14. Books about mermaids appealing to girls, including both perceptions and expressed interest

15. Books with pink covers or illustrations appealing to girls, including both perceptions and expressed interest

16. Resistance: Children's expressed resistant literacy preferences

Evidence of gendered literacy behaviors (other than reading preferences, already described) and perceptions of gendered literacy attitudes and behaviors as expressed by girls and women, boys and men

17. Girls' expressed love of reading and/or advanced reading level

18. Girls' and women's sharing of texts

19. Mothers' reading with or encouragement of reading with their children

20. Female authors commenting on writing the voice of a male protagonist

21. Fatherhood and authorship

22. Educators' perceptions that boys dislike literacy activities

23. Association of the term "reluctant reader" with boys

24. Educators' perceptions that books and reading are unwelcoming to boys – general comments

25. Parents' perceptions that there are not enough "boy books" available

26. Resistance: Boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading level

27. Perceptions that gendered literacy is a biological phenomenon, the result of essential, cognitive differences between males and females

Gendered literacy as enacted by the publishing industry

- 28. Racism (white Caucasian bias) in terms of character representation, especially lack of African-American males, and cover art in children's books
- 29. References to women in the publishing industry
- 30. Resistance: characters who challenge gender stereotypes and/or sexual norms
- 31. Resistance, Portrayals of characters of color
- 32. Resistance: specific books, series, and genres that are perceived to appeal to both boys and girls

Miscellaneous

- 33. References to KidLitosphere or online community fostered by the blogs
 - 34. Mentions of boy/girl rivalry
 - 35. Books and "fit" -- perspectives of both readers and practitioners (books that convert kids into readers, favorites, books that are read over and over, tips for book presentation)
- Further revision resulted in a set of claims to be made about gendered literacy, based on the findings.

3.7.3 Interviews. In order to triangulate blog post data and the conclusions made from the analysis of the blog posts, data analyzed for the study also include transcripts of interviews with a select sample of three people, who were theoretically sampled based on their roles and expertise. Interviewees include: B4 blogger, a mother whose blog provides reader's advisory; B7 blogger, a public librarian who is the Youth Materials Specialist of a major public library, a reviewer of children's books for prominent publications, and was the 2012 KidLitosphere conference organizer; and, a male author of non-fiction for children and young adults, who also teaches classes for Library and Information Science

Masters students and who is a recognized opinion leader in terms of boys' reading and also vocal in the debate surrounding Common Core.

Interviews were conducted by the principal investigator via Skype (Skype was used to dial a landline), and two were recorded and later transcribed. One interviewee did not wish for the interview to be recorded. The interviews were conversational and loosely structured, guided only by the following questions asked of the interviewee: "Do you think gender and literacy/reading are related? Why? How?" Throughout the interviews, questions asked were for clarification or to ask the interviewee to expand further their thoughts on a topic raised either during the interview or on their blog. For example, in the interview with B7 blogger, a female public librarian, after being asked to elaborate on her mentioning on her blog the lack of sports fiction for girls, she stated:

It's becoming slightly more common, but I am still waiting for the girls on a soccer team series....We have girl horseback riders, we have gymnastic clubs, we've got babysitters' club, where is the sports team series of girls? Where's the softball game? ... Where's the soccer team series? (Interview 2 transcript, 2013).

Notes were kept during all the interviews. Because the main data analyzed in the study are from blogs, it was not possible to do member checking in the same way that would be possible in a qualitative study in which the researcher interacts directly with participants and informants. Therefore, validity is also ensured through surrogate member checking by conducting interviews with two of the bloggers, along with a participant outside the KidLitosphere.

Because the interviews were conducted following coding of the data sampled from blogs, the interview data were treated to the coding structure developed from the blog

data, described above. However, new themes were also identified in the interview data. As with the the blog data, they were analyzed using the constant comparative method.

3.8 Limitations

This study analyzes blog narratives focusing on commentary about literature for young people as a sociocultural site in which concepts of gendered literacy are performed with regularity. Blogs are only one of many possible such sociocultural sites that could be examined, and so a focus on blogs is a major limitation of the study. Although interviews with select bloggers provide a triangulated data source, blog narratives, as the main data source, also represent a less direct sociocultural view of gendered literacy in that the bloggers' commentary more often reflects on and reviews literature for young people rather than directly commenting on literacy as gendered. However, analysis of blog narratives also presents an unobtrusive way in which to observe both explicit and implicit reflection on gendered literacy.

Blog narratives sampled from the KidLitosphere website represent the major "voices" and perspectives in terms of literature for young people, as the blogs are written by people across the U.S. and feature commentary on English-language literature published in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. That said, bloggers are self-selected commentators, who write from a variety of motives, and online access, along with the ability to blog, influences the demographics of the bloggers represented in the KidLitosphere. Representation is also skewed by factors inherent to blogging practice, such as the platform chosen (the data sampled are from publicly-available blogs and can be accessed by anyone online) and the desire (or not) for developing social networks. Additionally, the blogs, which are theoretically-sampled, rather than randomly sampled,

represent only a small slice of the KidLitosphere, which consists of over 550 blogs. The blog posts and associated comments comprising the data set also represent only a small slice of the blogs from which data were sampled. Therefore, the study's findings, although not generalizable, may be transferable to other settings.

Likewise, determining the actual influence these blogs have in the wider world is difficult, and many of these bloggers see themselves as part of a KidLit community of people with a passion for children's literature that is separate from the wider world. However, the KidLit bloggers are also aware of beliefs about gender and literacy that exist in the wider world and at times, respond to and resist these views. In that sense, the study contributes theoretically to a model of gendered literacy by articulating both traditional and resistant patterns in relation to beliefs about the connections between gender and literacy.

3.9 Claims, Sub-Claims, and Counter Claims Based on the Data

The claims listed below, to be discussed in detail in the Findings sections, Chapters 4 through 7, which follow, describe the data analyzed in full.

Table 4

Claims Based on the Data

| Claim | Incidences |
|--|-------------------|
| 1. Gendered reading preferences, particularly in terms of educators' perceptions of boys' reading preferences and labeling of "boy" and "girl" books, are prominent. | 226 |
| 2. Gendered literacy behaviors (other than reading preferences, as described separately) and perceptions of these behaviors are important. | 203 |
| 3. Gendered reading preferences, in terms of boys' and girls' expressions of differing reading preferences, are evident. | 123 |
| 4. Participants describe the children's publishing industry in the United States as female- and white (Caucasian)-dominated. | 35 |

Claim 1, Gendered reading preferences, particularly in terms of educators' perceptions of boys' reading preferences and labeling of "boy" and "girl" books, has the most examples of all the claims describing the data sampled.

The table below displays the incidences of sub-claims and counter claims about gendered literacy based on the data sampled:

Table 5

Sub-Claims and Counter Claims Based on the Data – Totals

| | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Educators label books as "girl" and "boy"-preferred. (Claim 1, Sub-claim1) | 72 |
| In sixty-seven examples, girls' expressed reading preferences match what are perceived to be traditional girl-preferred text types (stories with female protagonists, mermaid-themed fiction, books with pink covers and/or pink illustrations, horse-themed fiction, realistic fiction, non-fiction in narrative form, romance, and princess-themed fiction). (Claim 3, Sub-claim 1) | 67 |
| In fifty-six examples, boys' expressed reading preferences match what are perceived to be traditional boy-preferred text types (including stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines). (Claim 3, Sub-claim 2) | 56 |
| Educators align boys' reading preferences with the following: stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines. (Claim 1, Sub-claim 2) | 53 |
| Children's expressions of resistant – that is, not conforming to what would be considered gender-normative preferences (as described in the Sub-claims) – reading preferences are evident. (Claim 3, Counter claim A) | 43 |
| Forty-two examples are of mothers' reading with their children or encouraging their children's reading, compared with thirty-two examples of fathers' reading with their children or encouraging their children's reading. (Claim 2, Sub-claim 1) | 42 mothers 32 fathers |
| Bloggers and commenters consistently mention certain book series, coded "iconic boy books," in reference to boys' reading. (Claim 1, Sub-claim 3) | 41 |
| Educators perceive that boys are both "reluctant" and less advanced readers. (Claim 2, Sub-claim 3) | 29 |
| Specific books, series, and genres are reported to appeal to both boys and girls. (Claim 3, Counter claim B) | 29 |
| Twenty-seven examples discuss boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading level, as compared with twenty-four for girls. (Claim 2, Sub-claim 2) | 27 boys 24 girls |
| Educators expect boys to prefer male protagonists and girls to prefer female protagonists. They also assume that girls are more likely than boys to read a story featuring a protagonist of the opposite sex. (Claim 1, Sub-claim 4) | 22 |
| Bloggers and commenters resist the labeling of books as "girl"- "boy"- preferred. (Claim 1, Sub-claim 1, Counter claim A) | 21 |
| Book characters who challenge gender stereotypes and/or sexual norms are mentioned. (Claim 4, Counter claim B) | 17 |
| Bloggers and commenters perceive white Caucasian bias in character representation and cover art, especially in terms of a lack of African-American males, in children's books published in the | 17 |

| | |
|---|----------------------|
| United States. (Claim 4, Sub-claim 2) | |
| Bloggers and commenters express the belief that a child's sex should not influence their reading preferences. (Claim 1, Counter claim B) | 15 |
| Women and mothers perceive that their childhood identity as a girl, or experience with children of only one sex, determines their qualifications to judge the reading preferences of children of the opposite sex. (Claim 1, Sub-claim 5) | 14 |
| Educators perceive that books and reading are unwelcoming to boys. (Claim 2, Sub-claim 4) | 14 |
| References to portrayals of characters of color in children's books published in the U.S. are evident. (Claim 4, Counter claim A) | 14 |
| Educators (parents, librarians, and teachers) disparage "boy" books (including non-fiction, comics, graphic novels, and gross humor) as less literary than other reading materials. (Claim 1, Sub-claim 6) | 14 |
| Parents perceive that there are not enough "boy books" available. (Claim 2, Sub-claim 5) | 13 |
| Thirteen references are to women in the children's publishing industry, versus five to men. (Claim 4, Sub-claim 1) | 13 women 5 men |
| Educators do not expect girls to prefer what are commonly perceived to be "girl"-preferred texts, or boys to prefer "boy"-preferred texts. (Claim 1, Counter claim C) | 13 |
| Educators perceive that gendered literacy is a biological phenomenon, the result of essential, cognitive differences between males and females. (Claim 2, Sub-claim 6) | 12 |
| Educators disparage "girl" books (including romance, chicklit, pink books, and princess-themed) for their lack of depth, saccharine cuteness, and promotion of feminine stereotypes. (Claim 1, Sub-claim 7) | 10 |
| Female authors and educators represented in the data discuss the integrity of female authors' writing the voices of male protagonists. (Claim 2, Sub-claim 7) | 10 |

In summary, the salient characteristics of gendered literacy according to the data sampled for this study include literacy educators' labeling of books for young people according to "girl"- and "boy"-preferred, literacy educators' perceptions of boys and girls having differing reading preferences, and a perception of boys as reluctant and less advanced readers, along with descriptions of young people's expressions of gendered reading preferences. However, other characteristics include young people's descriptions of resistant reading preferences – that is, not conforming to what would be considered gender-normative preference; descriptions of books, series, and genres that are reported to appeal to both boys and girls; and approximately equal numbers of examples referring to boys' and girls' love of reading and/or advanced reading level.

The table displayed below gives examples of how blog data were coded according to the sub-claims and counter claims based on the data.

Table 6

Coding Examples

| Claim/Sub-Claim | Example from the Data |
|---|---|
| Educators label books as “girl” and “boy”-preferred. (Claim 1, Sub-claim1) | B4 (2010): “Put him near any new books, even ones for his sister, and he practitcally (<i>sic</i>) starts twitching with anticipation of getting his hands on them.” (parent, F) Note: Some examples were coded in multiple ways. This example would also have been coded as Boys’ love of reading and/or advanced reading level, and Children’s expressions of resistant – that is, not conforming to what would be considered gender-normative preferences. |
| In sixty-seven examples, girls’ expressed reading preferences match what are perceived to be traditional girl-preferred text types (stories with female protagonists, mermaid-themed fiction, books with pink covers and/or pink illustrations, horse-themed fiction, realistic fiction, non-fiction in narrative form, romance, and princess-themed fiction). (Claim 3, Sub-claim 1) | B3 (2011): “I realy (<i>sic</i>) like the book <i>Dork Diaries</i> . It is a lot like <i>Diary of a Wimpy Kid</i> . It is about a girl that goes to a new school, a new bully and a new crush. She only has two friends. It is very funny. She is a very good artist. She is not at all popular I think a lot of people will like it. I liked it because it was very funny.” (child, F) |
| In fifty-six examples, boys’ expressed reading preferences match what are perceived to be traditional boy-preferred text types (including stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines). (Claim 3, Sub-claim 2) | B13 (2009): “As a youth, I discovered John Christopher’s Tripod trilogy the way I discovered most books, by browsing the fiction section and dismissing everything not adorned on the bottom of the spine with a rocket ship sticker, indicating its inclusion in the Science Fiction genre.” (parent, M, reflecting on childhood) |
| Educators align boys’ reading preferences with the following: stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines. (Claim 1, Sub-claim 2) | B3(2010): “Why is it cool for boys to read realistic fiction--books with no aliens or magicians, no world-dominating villains, and nothing blows up?” (librarian, M) |
| Bloggers and commenters consistently mention certain book series, coded “iconic boy books,” in reference to boys’ reading. (Claim 1, Sub-claim 3) | B3 (2008): “What books would you recommend for boys?...there are some great series out there. On one extreme, easy to read and extremely funny are the <i>Captain Underpants</i> books.” (author, F, in response to question by male librarian) |
| Children’s expressions of resistant – that is, not conforming to what would be considered gender-normative preferences (as described in the Sub-claims) – reading preferences are evident. (Claim 3, Counter claim A) | B4 (2010): “I too have a daughter that didn't like the girly books. And she also didn't want to read a lot of the early reader books.” (parent, F) |
| Forty-two examples are of mothers' reading with their children or encouraging their children’s reading, compared with thirty-two examples of fathers’ reading with their children or encouraging their children’s reading. (Claim 2, Sub-claim 1) | B12 (2011): “I love the review, and the pictures are wonderful! So did your 8 year old really enjoy and understand the book? I considered getting it and reading it to my 7 year old (2nd grade) but worried it might be too much for him.” (commenter/parent, F) |
| Educators perceive that boys are both “reluctant” and less advanced readers. (Claim 2, Sub-claim 3) | B4 (2010): “Also popular among my more reluctant boy readers: Secrets of Droon series, Charlie Bone series. Failing those, I say leave him to his nonfiction!” (teacher) |
| Specific books, series, and genres are reported to | B5 (2012): “It still is a hit among kids today, |

| | |
|---|--|
| appeal to both boys and girls. (Claim 3, Counter claim B) | boys and girls alike. One 6th grader I gave it to recently concluded that it was "...an exciting story about bravery, loyalty, and friendship." (teacher, F) |
| Twenty-seven examples discuss boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading level, as compared with twenty-four for girls. (Claim 2, Sub-claim 2) | B3 (2009): "You all constantly surprise and please me with your ability to read good stuff and show what people say about boy readers isn't always true. For instance, some say that guys don't read. Period. Or that guys stop reading after 4th grade. Well, all the reviews you've sent show differently." (librarian, M) |
| Educators expect boys to prefer male protagonists and girls to prefer female protagonists. They also assume that girls are more likely than boys to read a story featuring a protagonist of the opposite sex. (Claim 1, Sub-claim 4) | B22 (2012): "But I don't think that it's this familiarity and affection that makes me appreciate this book so strongly. I don't even think it's because I was a teenager in Baltimore too. (Although I will hand this book especially to any girl who is or has ever been a teenager here - the landmarks do make us smile.)" (librarian, F) |
| Bloggers and commenters resist the labeling of books as "girl"- "boy"- preferred. (Claim 1, Sub-claim 1, Counter claim A) | B5 (2009): "I don't think that very young children can tell the difference between a "boys" book and a "girls" book unless the concept is presented to them by someone else. I think that if they go in thinking that the book is for everyone, then they have a better chance of liking the book." (commenter) |
| Book characters who challenge gender stereotypes and/or sexual norms are mentioned. (Claim 4, Counter claim B) | B4 (2010): "It's a very multicultural, open-minded, gay-accepting book, working earnestly to smash stereotypes, open people's minds, and so on..." (parent, F) |
| Bloggers and commenters perceive white Caucasian bias in character representation and cover art, especially in terms of a lack of African-American males, in children's books published in the United States. (Claim 4, Sub-claim 2) | B11 (2009): Reference to a young adult novel that featured a white girl on the cover despite the protagonist being biracial – a cover that the publisher, in response to protest, later changed to feature a biracial girl. (parent, F) |
| Bloggers and commenters express the belief that a child's sex should not influence their reading preferences. (Claim 1, Counter claim B) | B13 (2009): "So if you're not a Goth girl, don't go browsing about the bookstore looking at the cover and thinking 'this book is simply not intended for me where is the zombie section anyway?' Because you'll be missing out. First of all the Goth girl, Sophie Blue, is pretty cool. Funny, resourceful, a talented artist, wears fishnets and combat boots to gym class, tough, bitter and sarcastic but in a charming way. She's really not bad for a guy to hang out with for a good chunk of the story." (parent, M) |
| Women and mothers perceive that their childhood identity as a girl, or experience with children of only one sex, determines their qualifications to judge the reading preferences of children of the opposite sex. (Claim 1, Sub-claim 5) | B4 (2010): "I've never been much of a non-fiction reader, so those aren't the books I kept from my childhood, they aren't the ones I pick up for birthdays, they aren't the books I gravitate toward at the library. Am I denying them a "boy" genre because I am such a girl?" (parent, F) |
| Educators perceive that books and reading are unwelcoming to boys. (Claim 2, Sub-claim 4) | B3 (2010): "And you, too, all you reader guys. Don't forget that...reading is the key to power and freedom" (librarian, M) |
| References to portrayals of characters of color in | B7 (2013): Reference to one of the few authors |

| | |
|---|---|
| children's books published in the U.S. are evident. (Claim 4, Counter claim A) | writing contemporary middle grade fiction with African-American protagonists. (librarian, F) |
| Educators (parents, librarians, and teachers) disparage "boy" books (including non-fiction, comics, graphic novels, and gross humor) as less literary than other reading materials. (Claim 1, Sub-claim 6) | B3 (2009): "I once heard a writer talk about reading lots of comics and adventure stories when he was a boy. That's not a bad thing at all. But one day his seventh grade teacher told him that he was reading widely, and it was time he began to read deeply." (author, F) |
| Parents perceive that there are not enough "boy books" available. (Claim 2, Sub-claim 5) | B4 (2010): "I find that early chapter books is the one place that's lacking, for boys specifically - there are options, but not a lot, especially not among recently published books." (commenter/parent, F) |
| Thirteen references are to women in the children's publishing industry, versus five to men. (Claim 4, Sub-claim 1) | B3 (2012): "My editor asked me to write a "boy book" like my Ruby Lu books. "Just make him like Ruby, except a boy," she said." (author, F) |
| Educators do not expect girls to prefer what are commonly perceived to be "girl"-preferred texts, or boys to prefer "boy"-preferred texts. (Claim 1, Sub-claim 4, Counter claim C) | B3 (2009): "Another big myth is that guys won't read books with girls as main characters. I know for a fact that's not true because some of you have written reviews and said that you liked the book even though the main character was a girl." (librarian, M) |
| Educators perceive that gendered literacy is a biological phenomenon, the result of essential, cognitive differences between males and females. (Claim 2, Sub-claim 6) | B4 (2012): "I've got a daughter and two sons, and the Max and Ruby books -- some of our favorites -- are completely accurate. I find the whole debate of nature/nurture tedious, in the end. I have one mild son and one nutball -- but together, they're two boys in every stereotypical way." (commenter/parent, F) |
| Educators disparage "girl" books (including romance, chicklit, pink books, and princess-themed) for their lack of depth, saccharine cuteness, and promotion of feminine stereotypes. (Claim 1, Sub-claim 7) | B8 (2010): "Why are grownups so obsessed with <i>romance</i> and <i>kissing</i> and all that mushy stuff? In a nutshell, I have no idea. Personally, I fast-forward through love scenes, never write them, and have my heart set on buying lots of cats instead of getting married." (librarian, M, interviewing a boy) |
| Female authors and educators represented in the data discuss the integrity of female authors' writing the voices of male protagonists. (Claim 2, Sub-claim 7) | B3 (2009): "Your two main characters are thirteen and eleven-year-old boys. Was it hard to get into minds of boys and write about them?" (librarian, M) |

CHAPTER 4 PERCEPTIONS OF THE GENDERED READING PREFERENCES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS

4.1 Claim 1: Perceptions of Gendered Reading Preferences

This category includes more examples than any other category from the data (226 incidences – this includes the sub-claims and does not include counter claims). The overall claim to be made in this section, based on the data, is that gendered reading preferences, particularly in terms of educators’ perceptions of boys’ reading preferences and labeling of “boy” and “girl” books, are prominent. This larger category is supported by seven sub-claims. Related counter claims, also based on the data analysis and coding of resistant themes, are listed beside the sub-claims they refute:

Table 7

Claim 1, Perceptions of Gendered Reading Preferences – Sub-Claims and Counter Claims

| Sub-Claim/Counter Claim | Incidences |
|--|------------|
| 1. Bloggers and commenters label books as “girl”- and “boy”-preferred. (librarians – 29, parents – 23, teachers – 12, authors – 5, children/young adults – 3) | 72 |
| Counter Claim A: Bloggers and commenters resist the labeling of books as “girl”- and “boy”- preferred. (parents – 10, adults of undetermined role – 6, teachers – 2, librarian – 1, children – 1, authors – 1) | 21 |
| 2. Educators align boys’ reading preferences with the following: stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines. (librarians – 39, parents – 11, teachers – 3) | 53 |
| 3. Bloggers and commenters consistently mention certain books and/or series, coded “iconic boy books,” in reference to boys’ reading. (parents – 18, children/young adults – 11, librarians – 9, authors/illustrators – 2, teachers – 1) Books referred to: (Dav Pilkey’s <i>Captain Underpants</i> – 20, Jeff Kinney’s <i>Diary of a Wimpy Kid</i> – 10, and Rick Riordan’s <i>Percy Jackson</i> – 9, Gary Paulsen’s <i>Hatchet</i> – 4; Note: Two posts/comments referred to more than one of the books) | 41 |

| | |
|--|----|
| 4. Educators expect boys to prefer male protagonists and girls to prefer female protagonists. They also assume that girls are more likely than boys to read a story featuring a protagonist of the opposite sex. (parents – 16, librarians – 4, teachers – 2) | 22 |
| Counter Claim B (addressing Sub-Claims 1-4 above): Bloggers and commenters express the belief that a child's sex should not influence the child's reading preferences. (parents – 7, children/young adults – 5, adults of undetermined role – 2, illustrator – 1) | 15 |
| Counter Claim C (addressing Sub-Claims 1-4 above): Educators do not expect girls to prefer what are perceived to be “girl”-preferred texts, or boys to prefer “boy”-preferred texts. (parents – 8, librarians – 3, teachers – 2) | 13 |
| 5. Parents perceive that their childhood identity as a girl, or experience with children of only one sex, determines their qualifications to judge the reading preferences of children of the opposite sex. | 14 |
| 6. Educators disparage “boy” books (including non-fiction, comics, graphic novels, and gross humor) as of less value than other reading materials. (librarians – 5, teachers – 4, parents – 3, adults of undetermined role – 2) | 14 |
| 7. Bloggers and commenters disparage “girl” books (including romance, chick lit, pink books, and princess-themed) for their lack of depth, saccharine cuteness, and promotion of feminine stereotypes. (librarians – 4, parents – 3, children/young adults – 2, adults of undetermined role – 1) | 10 |

The theme of perceptions of gendered reading preferences also included “educators’ perceptions of girls’ reading preferences according to the following: realistic fiction, princess- themed fiction, stories with female protagonists, books with pink covers, and non-fiction as narrative.” However, since only eight examples were identified among the data sampled, these examples are not discussed in depth here.

4.2 Discussion of Claim 1, Sub-Claims and Counter Claims

4.2.1 Sub-Claim 1: Bloggers’ and commenters’ labeling of books as “girl”- and “boy”- preferred. Bloggers and commenters (librarians – 29, parents – 23, teachers – 12, authors – 5, children – 3) label books as “girl”- and “boy”-preferred (72 incidences). Twenty-nine references to books as “boy” and “girl” books represent the perspectives of librarians, 23, those of parents, and 12, those of teachers. There are also 5 examples

representing authors and 3, children. A comment by a female public librarian, who does not have a Master's degree in Library or Information Science but is counted among the librarians in terms of her role and experience, referring to a "boy" book, reads:

On the funny side, I've brought book one in the series *Nathan Abercrombie, Accidental Zombie*, by David Lubar....David Lubar is the guy who wrote the *Weenies* books, which, if you were a 9-year-old boy, might be all you needed to hear. (B22, 2010)

In this example, the librarian labels the ideal, typical audience for a book and a book series by the same author as "a 9-year-old boy." The direct labeling used here as a presumed aid to reader's advisory is found in several other examples. One example by B6 blogger, a male teacher, directly invites girls to read a book he has just reviewed (B6, 2010). As in the previous example, the label is offered in the context of reader's advisory. The teacher labels the book for girls and also directly addresses "girls" as the book's perceived ideal audience.

Of the 29 examples for this sub-claim representing the perspectives of librarians, 18 refer to "boy" books, 7 refer to "girl" books, and 4 refer to both. Of the 23 examples representing parents' perspectives, 5 refer to "boy" books, 7 refer to "girl" books, and 11 refer to both "boy" and "girl" books. Of the 12 examples representing teachers' perspectives, 2 refer to "boy" books, 9 refer to "girl" books, and 1 to both. Of the 5 examples representing authors' perspectives, 4 refer to "boy" books, and 1 refers to "girl" books. Of the 3 examples representing children's perspectives, 2 refer to "boy" books, and 1 refers to "girl" books. Overall, 31 examples refer to "boy" books, 25 to "girl" books, and 16 to both "girl" and "boy" books.

In the following example a mother, who is also a homeschooler and was

previously a classroom teacher, comments on a request for reading suggestions for a girl, and, in doing so, refers to both “boy” and “girl” books:

She might try Cynthia Rylant's *Cobble Street Cousins*. Girly, but with different types of girls. Also, since she's into books that are traditionally "boy" books, my son went from *Fly Guy* right into Dav Pilkey's *Ricky Ricotta* series and those were the books that really catapulted him into reading independently this year. Another traditionally "boy" series she might enjoy is *Nate the Great* and that's not such a big leap from *Fly Guy*. (B4, 2010)

Although the mother, engaging in reader's advisory as in the previous examples, recommends “boy” books for a girl, she still makes a strict demarcation between “girl” and “boy” books, labeling them “girly” and “traditionally ‘boy.’” In this sense, gender-labeling of young people's reading materials is juxtaposed with more flexible ideas surrounding what young people should read.

Another mother refers to “in between” books that should appeal to both boys and girls, but while claiming to be an “idealist,” still notes a distinct separation between “boy” and “girl” books, stating: “I feel like there are very girly books and very boyish books and then there is everything in between and that should all be fair game. *sigh* I guess I am an idealist” (B4, 2010). In this sentence it is unclear if the mother is stating that “all” the books should be “fair game,” meaning they can be read by both boys and girls, or if only the “in between” books should be “fair game.” In either case, although she pictures herself as an “idealist,” gender-labeling of young people's reading materials, as in the previous example, remains part of her worldview.

4.2.2 Counter Claim A: Resistance to the labeling of books as “girl”- and “boy”- preferred. Despite the gendered expectations of educators toward children's reading preferences demonstrated in the sample, 21 examples of resistance are also found. Bloggers and commenters (parents – 10, adults of undetermined role – 6, teachers – 2,

librarian – 1, child – 1, author – 1) resist the labeling of books as “girl”- and “boy”- preferred (21). In the study overall, resistance takes the form of either not following, or actively opposing gendered expectations in regard to young people’s literacy. In this case, the greatest number of examples of resistance to the labeling of books as “girl”- and “boy”- preferred represent the perspectives of parents (10) and focus on not producing gender-based reading lists for boys and girls, not expecting boys not to want to read books with female protagonists, encouraging children to read whatever they find interesting, and commenting in relation to experiences of reading with children and seeing that their reading preferences do not follow rigid gender demarcations.

Comments by other adults, designated “miscellaneous” (6) because their roles cannot be determined from the information available, follow the same patterns as those made by parents, but also include 2 very specific comments – one, a reaction to a talk given by Jon Scieszka at the American Library Association conference, and the other, a comment regarding the rigid preservation of social norms relating to masculinity.

The reaction to Jon Scieszka’s speech is in the form of a letter, written by an adult female, responding to Scieszka’s talk and to the concept behind his “Guys Read” movement, stating that the gender roles Scieszka described do not depict all boys (for example, not all boys are hockey fans), and if books are marked or categorized as “guy” books, girls will be less willing to read them, and some boys will still not be interested in them (B21, 2012). This letter represents active resistance to Scieszka’s labeling of books as “boy” – preferred, and it also connects gender norms in relation to other activities, here invoking hockey as an example of a “boy” – preferred sport, to gender-labeling of books.

The other comment, focusing on the rigidity of social norms surrounding

masculinity, presents the gender-labeling beginning with insistence on gender-appropriate clothing for baby boys morphing into the gender-labeling of children's books:

It just seems that, around what we currently teach very small children, the rules bend easier for girls than boys. Baby girls might be dressed in blue overalls, but a baby boy won't be put in pink ones. A 3 year old girl dressing up as a construction worker would get a smile, while a 3 year old boy dressing up as a princess would be told "oh, don't let your dad see that, ha, ha, ha." And on and on and on. Until we end up talking about "girl" books and "boy" books as though the books had genders themselves. (B4, 2010)

In this excerpt the adult female commenter's perception that the taboo against boys' violation of social norms associated with masculinity is stronger than that of girls violating the rules of femininity is also evident. Although this commenter draws a connection between gendered clothing, beginning in infancy, and gendered reading, she discusses the stronger taboo against the violation of social norms associated with masculinity only in relation to gendered clothing. However, subsequently, the theme of a social taboo against boys reading feminine books will be taken up in Section 4.2.6 discussing the expression of the belief that a child's sex should not influence the child's reading preferences.

Like the commenter's letter to Jon Scieszka described above, a female librarian's comment to a parent in the library represents active resistance against the labeling of books as "girl" and "boy" books. She describes how upon overhearing a father in the library reprimanding his preschooler son for choosing "girl" books from the shelves, she approached him and, upon seeing that the boy had chosen *Olivia* (Ian Falconer) assured the father that *Olivia* is everyone's favorite. She also expresses dismay that the father was so upset at the choices of such a young child (B7, 2012). This librarian thereby challenges the father's notion that the well-known *Olivia* book is for girls, resisting his

gender-labeling of the books his son is choosing in the library.

Two comments coded according to resistance to the labeling of books as “girl” and “boy” books are by teachers. One notes that in her 28 years of teaching and her experiences reading with her own children and grandchildren, gender-labeling of books is meaningless and unnecessary. Moreover, she recognizes the taboo against boys reading books that might be considered feminine, expressing her distaste for boy-centered reading lists, which she feels contribute to boys’ feeling shame over enjoying reading books that would be considered appropriate for girls. She adds that in her experience of reading aloud with children, the books they chose as their favorites were the ones with the most interesting stories, unrelated to whether the protagonist was male or female (B21, 2012). The teacher here comments on the concept of “boy” books, legitimized through lists of recommended reading for boys, lists which she perceives as causing boys to feel that they are not allowed to read books that would be considered more appropriate for girl readers. The teacher also stresses the importance of story quality as an indicator of whether children will enjoy the story over whether the protagonist is male or female.

The one comment by an author (Lenore Look) relating to resistance against the labeling of books as “girl” and “boy” books highlights an editor’s request that she write a “boy” book: “My editor asked me to write a “boy book” like my Ruby Lu books. “Just make him like Ruby, except a boy,” she said. But I didn’t want to do that. How can you make a boy like a girl? You can’t” (B3, 2012). Here, Look highlights the role of the publishing industry in gender-ing books through requests made of authors. Although she later states, “BTW, Alvin isn’t a ‘boy book’ any more than Ruby Lu is a ‘girl book.’ If guys limit themselves to reading only about guys ..., they’ll miss out on some really

fantastic books, including Ruby Lu” (B3, 2012), she nevertheless upholds the notion of inherent differences between girls and boys in describing the impossibility of making “a boy like a girl” (B3).

The one comment by a child, a tween girl (B1 blogger), coded according to resistance to the gender-labeling of books, equates her resistance with feminism:

Gary Paulsen has a reputation of being an author for boys. In fact, my brother is a big fan of *Lawn Boy* (even though he really doesn't like to read). But, I do not like being told what is a boy book and what is a girl book, I am a feminist, as you probably guessed already. (B1, 2011)

Blogger B1 specifically resists the notion of “boy” and “girl” books, relating it to her stance as “a feminist.” She also notes that her brother, whom she paradoxically characterizes as a reluctant reader, enjoys reading books by Gary Paulsen, whose books are generally perceived as being more appropriate for boys than for girls.

In summary, 72 examples of educators’ labeling of books as “girl”- and “boy”-preferred are evident among the data, and most of these are by librarians (29) and parents (23). Moreover, in two cases in which mothers claim to be more balanced in their views, they still rely on rigid differentiation between “boy” books and “girl” books in recommendations for reading. However, 21 examples of resistance to gender labeling are also found, and they range from suggestions, such as not producing gender-labeled reading lists or encouraging children to read what interests them, to more active opposition, as in the librarian’s directly challenging a father’s insistence that his three-year-old son not choose “girl” books in the library. Other themes from this section include the following: a social taboo against boys’ violating masculine norms that is perceived to be stronger than for girls’ violating feminine norms; and the perception that masculine social norms are enforced from the time of infancy (as in, gendered clothing).

4.2.3 Sub-Claim 2: Educators' expectations of boys' reading preferences.

Educators (librarians – 39, parents – 11, teachers – 3) align boys' reading preferences with the following: stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines (53). Of the examples for this code, most are reading suggestions and reviews of books matching what are perceived to be “boy” preferred categories. The research literature (i.e., Davies & Brember, 1993; Millard, 1994; McKechnie, 2006; Moss, 2007) on children's reading preferences documents, to some extent, the notion that these categories tend to be boy-preferred. However, the literature (Chapman et al. 2007) also suggests that children's self-described preferences may differ from that which children perceive to be gender-appropriate. In this sense, the relationship between individual reading preference and social perceptions of children's reading preferences remains unclear. Moreover, the work of Dutro (2003) with African-American male students shows that children can be encouraged, within certain contexts, to step outside gendered reading boundaries.

Librarians account for 39 of the examples describing boys' reading preferences according to themes perceived to be “boy”-preferred, followed by parents (11), and teachers (3). Of the 39 examples representing the perspectives of librarians, 23 are from B3, a blog written primarily with an audience of boys in mind, and the bloggers are two male public librarians working in youth services. A typical example from B3, a review of a graphic novel, reads: “If you like high action, plot twist, great artwork, space adventure, green slime and a mouse with a mission, this is definitely the Graphic Novel for you!!!! Great stuff!!!!!!” (B3, 2010). At times, B3 blogger directly addresses boy readers, as in:

“one of your fellow reader guys, Jedi-J.T, wrote a review of the first *Barnstormers/Sluggers* book” (B3, 2009). Moreover, the reviews are of books the librarians presume would be “boy”-preferred. Overall, in terms of the alignment of boys’ reading preferences with texts that are traditionally perceived as “boy” texts, the perspectives of librarians are best represented among the data sampled.

4.2.4 Sub-Claim 3: Iconic boy books. Bloggers and commenters consistently mention certain books and/or series, coded “iconic boy books,” in reference to boys’ reading (43, including 3 examples mentioning more than 1 of the series). Some books are mentioned only in connection with girl readers, but since there are five or fewer examples (books mentioned include Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden*, Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House on the Prairie*, and Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight*), they are not discussed in depth. Books identified as “iconic boy books” are those that are frequently mentioned and almost always mentioned in relation to boy readers. They include the following: Dav Pilkey’s *Captain Underpants* series (19 examples), Jeff Kinney’s *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series (10), Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson* series (9), and Gary Paulsen’s *Hatchet* – 4.

A male school librarian states outright that from what he has seen, most readers of *Captain Underpants* are boys (B10, 2012). A comment from an interview with a female public librarian (youth collection specialist for a major Northeastern public library) supports this, as she states:

I have boys who like *Junie B Jones*, I have boys who like *Franny K. Stein*, um, that's one of the rarer characters that a boy will check out all the books of. But, you know, and then I have girls that read *Captain Underpants*, but not to the same extent. (Interview 1 transcript, 2013)

This excerpt pinpoints *Captain Underpants* as a series attracting very few female readers,

in contrast to two “girl” series which have a male readership.

The following comment about the *Captain Underpants* series – “My son absolutely loves *Captain Underpants* books, and they are the first series of books that he has wanted to read completely independently” (B4, 2010) – is typical of other comments about the series, in which it is described as a gateway to solo reading for boys.

Other examples from the data in which the *Captain Underpants* series is mentioned also describe the series as a gateway text for young boys, particularly for those who are reluctant readers. However, unlike the example just mentioned, other examples of *Captain Underpants* disparage it as potty humor unworthy of adult attention and a popular text that should only be used as a catalyst to encourage reluctant reader boys to read better, more serious literature. For example, in the course of criticizing a teacher for discouraging a young boy from reading *Captain Underpants*, a mother states:

I think *Captain Underpants* is dreadful with it's [sic] lowest common denominator kind of potty humor, but I would recommend it to a reluctant reader who likes that kind of book. The graphics, the actual kinesthetic appeal to the book, all make it worthy of being read. If a child is reading, I saw [sic] it's a good thing. Lay off the judging. (B4, 2010)

Although the mother, in this statement, is critical of the teacher, she is also critical of the *Captain Underpants* series, calling it “dreadful,” and describing the humor as appealing to the “lowest common denominator.”

Like the *Captain Underpants* series, Jeff Kinney's *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series stands out as an iconic text – it is frequently mentioned in the data sampled as a boy favorite. A typical comment by a boy, whose review of the book is posted to blog B3 (maintained by male librarians, working in youth services in a public library), reads:

Jeff Kinney really writes funny stuff! (My Nannah doesn't get some of it, but that is okay, because she is a girl.) Greg Heffley is the boy writing the diary about his

day to day life. He writes about his family and friends and stuff that happens to him in school. It has lots of funny cartoons in it too. Two of my favorites were about a guy riding a skateboard and the second is about the things you can get away with saying when there is a substitute teacher. I can hardly wait to read the next book about Greg and his brother Rodrick. (B3, 2008)

Notable in this review of the first book in the series is the boy's comments that his "Nannah" (presumably his grandmother) does not understand it "but that is okay, because she is a girl," (B3, 2008), thereby presenting the book as a for-boys-only text. The boy reader's focus on the male protagonist (Greg) and the cartoons reiterate assumptions about boy-preferred themes.

Boy readers and parents give positive reviews of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. However, a female librarian/mother, B22 blogger, is critical of the series, particularly because of the lack of moral character demonstrated by the protagonist – a middle school boy. The one concession she makes, and at the same time comparing the series to *Captain Underpants*, is that the series can serve as a catalyst for the reading of reluctant boy readers, who would otherwise choose not to read:

When I initially reviewed this book, my main reaction was: *Ick* [emphasis in original]. As the mother of boys, I imagined my own children exhibiting the unrelenting lack of consideration that mars Greg's every action, and it broke my heart to think of a child so devoid of empathy. Doesn't mean I haven't recommended the book. There are some middle grade boys - boys who think fantasy is a ridiculous waste of time, boys who read *Calvin & Hobbes* and maybe *Captain Underpants* - and when I see those guys, I press *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* into their hands.

This mother/librarian finds *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* so questionable that she would recommend it only as an option for boys who might otherwise read only comics or *Captain Underpants*. In this paragraph, the mother/librarian disparages two "iconic boy books," *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *Captain Underpants* and, in scorning *Calvin and Hobbes*, also does not count comics as a valid reading choice for boys.

As with the *Captain Underpants* series, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, even when presented in a favorable way, is still linked to reluctant boy readers. For example, a mother writes:

Diary of a Wimpy Kid. Definitely! These are the perfect book for such a kid. Just enough text to keep it book-like, but also enough art to keep it visual. Hilariously funny - my husband read them as well, chortling to himself the whole time. Also is a bit naughty and has cool-factor for reading at school. All this and a movie tie-in too...what more could a reluctant reader want? :)
My son has also lately been enjoying *Zac Power* books. I haven't looked at them too closely, but they seem to be more on the action side than the funny side. (B4, 2012)

Referring both to her husband and son's reading of the series, the mother's comments support the notion of the series as an "iconic boy book." In noting that the series is "cool" enough for "reading at school," and there is "a movie tie-in," she adds to the perception that even boys who would not otherwise want to read (or would be embarrassed to be caught reading books) will read the series.

Examples mentioning the *Percy Jackson* series are primarily written by boys (5), although there are also 3 examples by librarians, and 1 by a parent. The comments written by boys are reviews of books in the series posted on B3, a blog with an intended audience of boy readers and hosted by male public youth services librarians. A typical example reads:

One of my favorite books that I read was the *Percy Jackson* series. Percy is a teenage boy who is a Greek demigod. He goes to a camp called Camp Half-Blood and trains there for fighting because Percy goes on multiple quests. He meets two friends at Camp Half- Blood; Grover and Annabeth. The three friends go on quests everywhere....I liked this series because ther [sic] is action on every page. Plus I never stopped reading Riordan's books [sic]. Rick Riordan is my favorite author. (B3, 2012)

In this review, the boy, noting that one of the books in the series is a "favorite," focuses on the constant "action" in the plot as his main reason for liking the series. He also states

that Rick Riordan, the author of the series, is his “favorite author.”

A review by a male public youth services librarian (posted to B3) of another book (Grace Lin’s *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*) with a female protagonist references the *Percy Jackson* series as an incentive to encourage boys to read the series, stating:

Does Minli ever get to change her family's fortune? You'll just have to read to find out!! But I will tell you this--things change in a way Minli could never have predicted!! This is *one terrific book*, guys! It's not a slam-bang action fantasy like *The Lightning Thief* but it will keep you turning pages. (B3, 2009)

This referencing the *Percy Jackson* series in an attempt to entice boy readers to try a book with a female protagonist supports the iconic status of the *Percy Jackson* series as a “boy” series.

There are also a few cases in which girls write reviews of these “iconic boy books” or adults mention them as children’s favorites without labeling them “boy” books. For example, a reference to *Captain Underpants* made by a mother – addressing what she imagines as other parents’ frustration with the series as something they hope their children quickly grow out of liking– does not specifically refer to boy readers. Similar to the other examples, it refers to the series as a gateway to books that are perceived to be more sophisticated and of higher quality (B11, 2007).

Five references to *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and three references to *Percy Jackson* among the data sampled are by female readers. However, two of the references to *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* are actually reviews of another series called *Dork Diaries*, in which *Dork Diaries* is presented as a sort of “girl” version of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, as in, “I really like *Dork Diaries*. It's a GREAT BOOK! I like it because it's like *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and I like that. It's about a girl named Nikki Maxwell who goes to a new school” (B3, 2011). Reviews of the *Percy Jackson* series by girl readers are similar to those written by

boy readers – positive reviews focusing on the novels’ suspenseful, exciting plots.

The discussion of the “iconic boy series,” including Dav Pilkey’s *Captain Underpants* series (19 examples), Jeff Kinney’s *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series (10), and Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson* series (9), described above as such because of the number of times they are mentioned among the data sampled in reference to boy readers, illustrates educators’ insistence on gender-labeling of books, particularly of “boy” books. In that these series are mentioned as “boy” favorites, not only by educators but also by boys themselves, boys also perceive that these are “boy” books, thereby having internalized the gendered label.

4.2.5 Sub-Claim 4: Educators’ expectations of children’s gendered preferences for story protagonists based on whether they are female or male.

Review of the data provides evidence that educators (parents – 16, librarians – 4, teachers – 2) expect boys to prefer male protagonists and girls to prefer female protagonists. They also assume that girls are more likely than boys to read a story featuring a protagonist of the opposite sex (22). Most of the blog posts and comments coded according to this sub-claim represent the perspectives of parents (16), followed by librarians (4) and teachers (2). In some cases, the blogger/commenter’s statement is an expression of the appropriate audience for a particular book:

Throughout the adventure, Will Parker is a wonderfully flawed hero on which to rest the hopes of mankind. He is often petty and too quick to temper, sometimes childish and even lazy. He is, thus, easy to identify with. A young man will recognize his own flaws in Will (as will a still-seeking adult) even as Will becomes more and more aware of these deficiencies and learns to correct them. (B13, 2009)

In this example, B13 blogger, a father, pinpoints whom he believes to be the book’s target audience – “a young man” – and explains why this audience will identify with the

book's male protagonist. In other cases, a comment speaks to the commenter's previous experience of girls' preference for female protagonists and boys', for male protagonists, as in this mother's comment: "Brynn prefers to read books about girls, because she's such a girly-girl, but she will happily read books about boys if they are good. But I'm not sure the opposite is true. My little brother wouldn't read "girl books" no matter what (B4, 2009). In this comment the perception that the taboo against boys' reading "girl" books is stronger than girls' reading "boy" books, a theme to be further developed later in this section, is also evident.

4.2.6 Counter Claims B and C (addressing Sub-Claims 1-4 above):

Resistance to the notion of gendered reading preferences. Although, as discussed in the section prior, educators' perceptions of young people's gendered reading preferences include the assumption that a child's sex determines his/her preferences regarding the protagonist of a story, with boys wanting to read about boys and girls preferring to read about girls, there are also incidences of resistance to this notion among the data sampled. In these examples of resistance, bloggers and commenters (parents – 7, children and young adults – 5, adults of undetermined role – 2, illustrator – 1) express the belief that a child's sex should not influence the child's reading preferences (15).

The greatest number of examples of resistance come from parents (7 examples), while children and young adults are second (5). Also represented are one illustrator and two adults whose roles are not able to be determined from the text. Prominent among these examples is the notion that a gender neutral approach to young people's reading preferences is particularly important in terms of boys' reading, given that the taboo against boys reading what are perceived to be "girl"-preferred texts is much stronger than

against girls reading what are perceived to be boy-preferred texts. A blog post on B21 (the blog of a prominent literary magazine focused on reviews of children's literature) written by a mother (who is also founder and president of a library board and informal teacher), illustrates that theme. The mother believes boys, due to homophobia and a lack of tolerance for boys' behaving in ways that would be considered effeminate, face much stricter reading taboos than girls, so that it is much more difficult for boys to read any book that would be considered feminine, whereas girls, due to feminism, have a broader range of choices. She mentions classics as an example, stating that no one would have a problem with girls reading *Sherlock Holmes*, *Homer Price*, or works by Mark Twain or Robert Louis Stevenson, but boys reading Jane Austen, the Brontës, or Louisa May Alcott, might be ridiculed. The mother's resistance to the gender-segregation of children's reading choices focuses on allowing boys to read books (all classics mentioned in this example) featuring female protagonists, but she also calls for greater general acceptance for both boys' and girls' reading choices, warning against the tendency to gender-label books (B21, 2012).

Another example written by a young adult (F) in Australia, relates her experience working in a bookstore, in which she regularly meets parents who are concerned with purchasing books that are gender-appropriate for their daughters and sons. She offers a composite of her experiences, stating that if she recommends that a parent buy the *Percy Jackson* series for a girl, the parent will often respond that *Percy Jackson* is a "boy" book and could she recommend something more appropriate for a girl. Even when she tells the parent that she really enjoyed the series herself, the parent refuses her suggestion and buys something with sparkles – typically girly. She notes parents reacting in a similar

manner when she recommends *The Sisters Grimm* series for a boy. The young woman vehemently opposes the notion of “boy” books and “girl” books, expressing how much the parents’ rigidly defined gendered conceptions of what their sons and daughters should be reading bothers her. She also actively resists perceptions of the gender-appropriateness of books in recommending (through her work in a bookstore) books to parents that they perceive to be gender-inappropriate for their daughters and sons (B21, 2012).

Another example is from a much younger child – a boy. Although this example is written by a mother, it is treated here as representing the child’s perspective. The example is a mother’s description of her young son’s enjoyment of a series about fairies, his subsequent realization that the books would be perceived by outsiders as inappropriate for him (as a boy) to read (resulting in his hiding the books before a friend came over to play), his fear of the shaming he might face from other children as a result of having the books in his possession, and his moving beyond the limitations of those expectations. Later, her son resumes his resistant, voracious, and omnivorous reading practices, reading anything he himself deems interesting (regardless of whether or not it would be considered appropriate for a boy). In this example, the strong taboo against boys reading what would be perceived as girl-appropriate books is also evident (B21, 2012).

Another counter claim (addressing Sub-Claims 1-4) describing the data and illustrating resistance to the notion of gendered reading preferences is the following: Educators (parents – 8, librarians – 3, teachers – 2) do not expect girls to prefer what are perceived to be “girl”-preferred texts, or boys to prefer “boy”-preferred texts. (13) Most of these examples are represent the perspectives of parents (8 out of 13), followed by librarians (3) and teachers (2). In one example, a mother writes that it would be a shame,

if, due to gender-labeling of books, girls would pass up the opportunity to read classics like *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Treasure Island* or that boys would not read works by Laura Ingalls Wilder and Louisa May Alcott. She also states that when choosing books to read to her sons when they were young, she took a gender-neutral approach, not focusing on the sex of the protagonists but simply sharing a myriad of good stories with them (B21, 2012). The mother expresses dismay over the gendered expectations regarding reading audiences for childhood classics and tells of her own commitment to reading many different stories to her own sons, without presuming them to prefer stories with male characters.

However, even the examples that are resistant, in that the blogger or commenter is encouraging children to broaden their reading preferences, can still be gendered in the expectations they express. For example, in one book review by B6 blogger, a male teacher, he resists gendered norms of reading by encouraging boys to read the book, but he also clearly labels the book as more appropriate for girls than for boys (B6, 2011).

To summarize, an important theme among the perceptions of the gendered reading preferences of children and young adults is educators' expectations of children's gender-based reading preference in relation to the protagonists of the stories they are reading. Specifically, educators (parents – 16, librarians – 4, teachers – 2) expect boys to prefer male protagonists while girls prefer female protagonists, and they assume that girls are more likely than boys to read a story featuring a protagonist of the opposite sex (22). However, examples of resistance to this notion of children's gendered reading preferences are also found, with expressions of the belief that a child's sex should not influence the child's reading preferences and also refusals to make assumptions that girls

will prefer “girl”-preferred text or that boys will prefer “boy”-preferred texts. As with the examples relating to expectations of gendered reading preferences, parents are also best represented among the examples of resistance.

4.2.7 Sub-Claim 5: Parents’ gendered perceptions of their abilities to judge children’s reading preferences. When reviewing literature for young people, commenting about posted reviews, or discussing issues of children’s reading preferences, parents indicate that their childhood identity as either a boy or girl, or experience with children of only one sex, determines their qualifications to judge the reading preferences of children of the opposite sex. (14) The degree to which, for example, having daughters would seem to make one an expert on literature for girls or having sons would seem to make one an expert on literature for boys, is striking. All but one of the examples is drawn from B4. Moreover, all of the examples are written by women, and 12 of the 14 examples are written by mothers. For two of the women, it is unclear as to whether they are mothers. One of the examples is written by a female public youth services librarian/mother about an author/mother. B4 blogger is a mother with two daughters, and one of the main functions of her blog is reader’s advisory (answers to requests sent to her by e-mail). Here are two examples from B4, in the context of a blog post regarding recommended reading for a boy. The first is the following comment by B4 blogger: “If he were a girl, I would have a hundred ideas of what to nudge him toward next. But he’s not. He’s just a great, young reader. And I hope he continues to love reading. But I don’t know what the next captivating book might be for him (B4, 2010). The second, also written by B4 blogger, is: “But I don’t actually have a boy, and no doubt people have all sorts of different ideas of what would be just perfect. Do tell, in the comments” (B4,

2010). In both cases, the blogger asks her readership for help in recommending books for a boy because of her perception that her experience of having daughters makes her unable to recommend books for boys.

In relation to gendered literacy, then, adults', and in this case, particularly women (all the examples are by women) and mothers' (12 of 14 examples), rely on gendered perceptions of their ability to advise young readers. Their perceptions are gender-based in two different ways. First, they see this ability as tied either to their childhood experience as a boy or girl, thereby assuming that, for example, if they grew up as a girl, they could refer girls to books they themselves enjoyed reading. Second, they relate their reader's advisory ability to the sex of the child/ren they have experience raising. Hence, a mother with daughters perceives herself as well-qualified to recommend "girl" books. In contrast, there was one example in which a female librarian/mother expressed her confusion as to why readers would have, at the beginning of reading a novel, confused a novel's narrator for a girl, since the female author of the book has sons and should therefore "know" boys and how to write a "boy" voice. In this sense, the female author's experience with sons is seen as more important than her identity as female, thereby emphasizing gender as a social, behavioral experience rather than anything inherent in the sexes – and yet, the female librarian still assumes a strict division between a "boy" voice and a "girl" voice.

4.2.8 Sub-Claim 6: Educators' disparagement of "boy" books. Another way in which educators (librarians – 5, teachers – 4, parents – 3, adults of undetermined role – 2) enact gender-labeling of children's reading preferences and texts is by disparaging "boy" books (including non-fiction, comics, graphic novels, and gross humor) as less literary than other reading materials. (14) Each of these types of "boy" texts is discussed below.

Educators disparage non-fiction as a textual form that is boring and of lower worth than fiction. For example, B4 blogger states: “Lots of kids go for nonfiction for a long time before they ever go for fiction, and any reading is of course fine” (B4, 2010). In this statement, by equating non-fiction with “any reading” and presenting it as a gateway to reading fiction, she implies that it is of a lower caliber than fiction. In another example, a parent (who presumably is a mother, although it is not entirely clear) is incredulous at her son’s fascination with reading basketball stats: “(I like bball, but stats?! The box scores do seem to have jump-started his reading confidence, though)” (B4, 2010). Of note in this example is the parent’s puzzlement over why a child would want to read something as boring as basketball scores, coupled with the assumption that reading material of this type is acceptable only insofar as it serves as a bridge to other, “higher quality” reading.

In another example describing non-fiction as boring, a female commenter (of undetermined role) states:

I spent most of my life convinced that I hated nonfiction--because all it was, was pages and pages of diagrams or dates or drawings of airplanes, right? No, that's just what the kid in front of my [*sic*] in all my classes (always arranged alphabetically, for years) read. He was a totally stereotypical boy reader, and I saw what he read and wanted no part of it. I still don't like things that read like textbooks, but memoirs, histories, those kinds of things, I love. (B4, 2010)

The commenter to B4 explains that non-fiction is only palatable to her in the form of a narrative, as in “memoirs, histories.” Textbooks, diagrams, or charts, the types of non-fiction read by the “stereotypical boy reader” who sat in front of her in school, are unacceptably boring.

Comments like those just mentioned are supported among the data sampled from the transcript of an interview with an author of non-fiction for children and young adults,

who, criticizing educators' confusion of what he refers to as "literacy goals" and "socialization goals," states: "The problem is that you are hoping that reading is going to accomplish this empathic ability. Then you're not going to see reading a book that is using engine sizes of military aircraft in the Korean War as valid reading" (Interview 3 transcript, 2013). He believes that because of educators' widespread contention that reading should help develop readers' "empathic ability," (the "socialization goal" of reading) and because non-fiction does not always do this, non-fiction is thereby invalidated as an educational tool. He also notes that 'traditionally all summer reading lists have been fiction' (although he acknowledges that the choices have begun to include some non-fiction, mostly in the form of biographies) (Interview 3 transcript, 2013). At several points in the interview, he defends non-fiction as a "boy"-preferred genre, which he presents as widely underappreciated or appreciated only when presented in the form of a story. He notes that his eight-year-old son's preferred bedtime reading is "an almanac" and uses this example to demonstrate that educators need not be so preoccupied with narrative:

And, I think, here's the key thing, I'm pretty sure that the female world in America is the set of people who write, edit, publish, and purchase books for elementary school kids. By purchase, I mean, the moms in the bookstore, the school librarians, the public librarians. And almost universally you hear in that world when you praise non-fiction it's that it's not just facts. As if, it needs to have story, otherwise it's dry. Well I can tell you from my son's experience and many boys his age, dry is good. (Interview 3 transcript, 2013)

Here he contrasts the "female world" of writing, editing, publishing, and purchasing books for children and its insistence on story with the world of his son and other boy readers who enjoy reading "dry" facts.

Another theme of the examples that are disparaging toward "boy" books is that of

presenting comics and graphic novels as easier to read than regular text. A typical example, written by a commenter to B4, reads:

I have a similar issue, as two of my kids are great readers but have just been going through a very long phase where they basically only read comics. I've really gone back and forth on how/whether I should try to get them to read other things. NOT that there's anything wrong with comics, I supply them with good comics.... HOWEVER, not all text comes in speech bubbles. I would like my kids to encounter an actual paragraph every once in a while. (B4, 2010)

This parent is concerned that children need to be encouraged to read materials other than comics because the comics are not sufficiently complex to help them develop their reading skills, thereby implying that these texts are not to be considered “real” reading.

Similarly, B22 blogger, a female librarian, in the context of describing the only conditions under which she would recommend *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* for reading – to reluctant boy readers who read nothing except comics (like *Calvin and Hobbes*) – presents comics as less than ideal, stating: “There's nothing wrong with *Calvin and Hobbes* (I think it was Mo Willems who stated that for the record, and I thank him), but it can't hurt to give a kid another author to read” (B22, 2008). She presents comics as a last resort, something read only by boys who would otherwise not read.

The examples representing librarians’ perspectives relating to the disparagement of comics and graphic novels, as in the non-fiction author/interviewee’s comments listed above, point to larger institutional prejudices against comics and graphic novels as lower quality textual forms that are accepted only as bridge texts for reluctant readers. For example, one female public youth services librarian points out that a comic book has never won the Newbery Award and the American Library Association has no designated award for comics (B7, 2012). On B10, a female commenter congratulates a librarian for reviewing superhero books and including them as part of his school library’s collection,

adding that she has been disappointed to encounter both school and public librarians who feel that superhero-themed books should not be part of a library collection (B10, 2011).

In summary, comics are not considered for awards and they are sometimes excluded from library collections for youth, despite being widely-read by youth and particularly, by boys.

The non-fiction author/interviewee also comments on what he perceives as an institutional preference for fiction:

YALSA ...used to have a Best Books for Young Adults. They've now changed that award to Best Fiction because they've decided to eliminate non-fiction. They have a non-fiction prize. But there's no discussion of current books for teen groups to consider that can include non-fiction.... And so that's what worries me is the kind of complacency that reading is story, that fiction is more important than non-fiction. And I think once you have a kind of rigidity and blindness I do think some readers are going to not be noticed. And I think in this case those readers tend to be boys. (Interview 3 transcript, 2013)

In this excerpt, the author discusses the Young Adult Library Services Association's (a division of the American Library Association) focus on fiction in its "Best Books" category and his fear that, as a result, boy readers of non-fiction will be left out of discussions of quality literature for young people.

In yet another example of the disparagement of perceived boy-preferred genres, a public youth services librarian intimates that sports fiction for boys is generally of low quality. She says she is behind on reading sports fiction for boys and her embarrassment that she failed to write about the one interesting book that she did read in which the male protagonist actually played sports (B7, 2013). Here, she implies that boys' sports fiction is usually unworthy of her attention and often does not include a protagonist who is an actual player of the sport described in the story.

The sampled data have no examples of actual teachers voicing their disparagement of "boy" books; rather, the examples are all relayed from experience of

teachers' voicing disparagement, as in B4 blogger's posting of this parent's comment:

When we told [the teacher], at conferences, how much he was enjoying his chapter books, she said that she's trying to encourage all of them to read picture books too, to emphasize 'core concepts,' by which I think she meant things like story arc, character development, etc. She said that there are some really great picture books that the kids can enjoy, and without those 'core concepts,' they will be in trouble in higher grades, and she added, sort of offhand, that "*Captain Underpants* won't be winning any awards." (B4, 2010)

In the excerpt, the parent's interaction with the teacher indicates the teacher's elevation of picture books as preferred reading for young children to experience the major concepts of narrative rather than chapter books. The teacher's disparagement of *Captain Underpants*, an iconic boy-preferred text, is also evident.

4.2.9 Sub-Claim 7: Disparagement of "girl" books. Bloggers and commenters label books for young people according to gender by describing their disapproval of certain books according to certain qualities of "boy" and "girl" books. The previous section discussed "boy" books; this section will discuss the "girl" books, according to the following sub-claim: Bloggers and commenters (librarians – 4, parents – 3, children – 2, adults of undetermined role – 1) disparage "girl" books (including romance, chick lit, pink books, and princess-themed) for their lack of depth, saccharine cuteness, and promotion of feminine stereotypes. (10)

Four examples by librarians express disapproval of "girl" books (4), followed by parents (3), children (2), and one commenter of undetermined role. Librarians' disparagement of "girl" books focuses on a dislike for romance (a male librarian calls it "mushy stuff," B8, 2010) and for chick lit, maligned for a lack of depth, both in terms of emotions explored and character portrayal (B23, 2008). Parents' disparagement of "girl" genres focuses on a dislike for the color pink and sparkles. One mother, for example, says,

“UGH to the sparkly pink section in general” (B4, 2010). Another (also a librarian), reviewing a new book series marketed to tween girls, describes one of the “slim sparkly books”:

It wasn't just the weak characterization, the bright-cute tone, the cloying and hideous falseness of the whole thing. It was the way it was trying to do this to my daughter.... They were trying to sell her an identity, complete with likes and dislikes, interests and outlooks. Come on! Here's a self all ready made, for those little 'tweens who aren't so sure who they are. You have nothing to lose...but your *soul*. From its compulsive dichotomization (I'm sporty, and she's into music!) to the quiet menace of its insistence on girls' having crushes on boys (you WILL be heterosexual and obsessed, you WILL care without end about what others think of you), I hated it, hated what it offered as a story, hated what it was trying to tell my child about herself. (B4, 2009)

This mother, B4 blogger, criticizes not only the packaging of the books: “with pink and glitter and cutesy illustrations” but also rails against the tween girl identity characterized by dichotomized interests and heterosexual boy-craziness, marketed through this book series. Although B4 blogger is feminist in her critique of the book series, she assumes that her daughter and other girls will be drawn in by all the qualities that make it a book marketed to tween girls – the pink covers, boy-crazy female main characters, and simplistic narration.

Every one of the four examples referring to perceptions that girls will prefer princess-themed texts discussed here refers to the creation of “princess culture” by the publishing industry and the media. For example, B7 blogger, a female public librarian of a major U.S. library system, faults Disney with making the Grimm stories un-palatable for boys by overplaying the princess aspects of the stories and eliminating violence and bloodshed (B7, 2012). B7 blogger defines the Disney fairytale audience as girls-only and names a focus on princesses as the main reason why girls would prefer these stories and the lack of violence or other frightening elements as the reason why boys would not

prefer these stories. She thereby assumes that girls will identify with princesses and boys will identify with the villains.

B13 blogger, a father, offers a similar assessment of Disney princess movies, without specifically naming girls as the preferred audience, although he mentions that all his children (two girls and a boy) enjoyed *Tangled*, the movie he contrasts with the Grimm version of the Rapunzel:

Here's what the Grimm's versions have in common with *Tangled*:

1. Hair
2. Desirable vegetation
3. Involvement of royalty
4. Magical tears

That's about it.

I won't spoil anything about *Tangled* except to say that the filmmakers have made Rapunzel a princess because the world can't have enough Disney Princesses. She also has eyes so large they make anime drawings look subtle and understated. (B13, 2011)

B13 blogger, like B7 blogger above, comments on Disney Princesses as a profitable commodity and criticizes Disney's interpretations of the original stories.

The child commenter mentioned in this category, who disparages the perceived "girl"-preferred genre – romance, is a middle school boy who writes fiction for fun. He, in an interview with his author mother, specifies that his novel is "science fiction and adventure. And mystery, too. But no romance" (B8, 2010). He says he would not "waste words" on romance. Moreover, in an e-mail exchange with the male youth services librarian, who asks the boy, "Why are grownups so obsessed with *romance* and *kissing* [emphasis in original]...?" he responds, "In a nutshell, I have no idea. Personally, I fast-forward through love scenes, never write them, and have my heart set on buying lots of cats instead of getting married" (B8, 2010). In linking romance and "love scenes" in stories to his own aversion to someday getting married, he implies that the romance of

both stories and real-life are a girl-preferred feminine domain that he detests. Moreover, he delineates clearly between femininity and masculinity, to the point of overcompensation, perhaps out of fear that his love of writing will result in his being labeled feminine. This also speaks to the social taboo surrounding boys reading “girl” texts, which is perceived to be stronger than for girls reading “boy” texts.

4.3 Summary/Connection to Research Questions

4.3.1 Response to RQ1. In answer to the first research question posed in this dissertation – RQ1: What are the conceptions of gendered literacy among literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers); creators of texts for children (published authors, editors, and published illustrators); and, children/young adults, as represented in their blogging activities? – perceptions of children’s and young adults’ gendered reading preferences represent the largest body of examples drawn from the entire data sample and are therefore a key piece of the puzzle that constitutes gendered literacy.

Of the examples included in Claim 1: Perceptions of Children’s and Young Adults’ Gendered Reading Preferences, educators’ labeling of books as “boy” and “girl”–preferred are most prevalent among the ways in which educators enact these perceptions in the data (72 examples), followed by educators’ aligning boys’ reading preferences with the following themes: stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines (53). Also important the nearly exclusive mention of certain book series, coded “iconic boy books,” in reference to boys’ reading, both as a perceived and expressed preference (43). Other ways, albeit to a lesser extent than the others, in which

educators enact perceptions of children's and young adults' gendered reading preferences, are through expectations that boys prefer male protagonists and girls prefer female protagonists (along with the assumption that girls are more likely than boys to read a story featuring a protagonist of the opposite sex) (22); parents' perception that their childhood identity as either a boy or girl, or experience with children of only one sex, determines their qualifications to judge the reading preferences of children of the opposite sex (14); educators' disparagement of "boy" books (including non-fiction, comics, graphic novels, and gross humor) as less literary than other reading materials (13); and, educators' disparagement of "girl" books including romance, chick lit, pink books, and princess-themed) for their lack of depth, saccharine cuteness, and promotion of feminine stereotypes (10).

4.3.2 Response to RQ2. To answer to the second research question addressed in the dissertation – RQ2: How do the conceptions of gendered literacy identified through the blogging activities of literacy educators, creators of texts for children, and children/young adults compare to the theoretical conceptions identified in the literature review? – the conceptions of gendered literacy identified in the literature review are reviewed below:

1. Gendered literacy as performed by multiple actors, including children and young adults, literacy educators, and those in the publishing industry.
2. Gendered literacy as a quantifiable achievement gap between male and female students.
3. Gendered literacy as the result of biologically-based cognitive differences between males and females.

4. Gendered literacy as the remnant of the historically gendered educational system (in the U.S.).

The data coded according to perceptions of gendered literacy relates to the first concept of gendered literacy presented in the literature review-based conceptual model, in which gendered literacy is seen to be enacted, or performed, by multiple actors, including children and young adults, literacy educators, and those in the publishing industry.

4.3.3 Response to RQ3. The third research question posed in this dissertation – RQ3: What similarities and differences, if any, are represented in conceptions of gendered literacy among literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers); creators of texts for children (published authors, editors, and published illustrators); and, children/young adults, as represented in their blogging activities? – is addressed by discussing the representation in the data (categorized according to Claim 1: Perceptions of Children’s and Young Adults’ Gendered Reading Preferences) of all these perspectives.

In terms of Sub-Claim 1: labeling of books as “boy” and “girl”-preferred, librarians (29) are represented most in terms of labeling, with parents a close second (23), and teachers (12), authors (5), and children (3) also represented. Among the examples included under Sub-Claim 2: perceptions of boys’ reading preferences align with stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines, librarians are the writers of the most examples (39), with parents (11) and teachers (3) represented to a much lesser extent. In terms of Sub-Claim 3: the almost exclusive mention of certain book series, coded “iconic boy books,” in relation to boys’ reading, both as a perceived

and expressed preference, parents are the main commenters (18 examples), with children/young adults (11), librarians (9), authors/illustrators (2), and 1 teacher also represented. Among comments relating to Sub-Claim 4: educators' expectations that boys prefer male protagonists and girls prefer female protagonists, and their assumption that girls are more likely than boys to read a story featuring a protagonist of the opposite sex, parents are represented the most in the data (16 examples), followed by librarians (4) and teachers (2).

Sub-Claim 5 describes a unique way in which parents enact the perception of gendered reading preferences – by perceiving that their childhood identity as either a boy or girl, or experience with children of only one sex, determines their qualifications to judge the reading preferences of children of the opposite sex (14). Among comments illustrating Sub-Claim 6: disparagement of “boy” books (including non-fiction, comics, graphic novels, and gross humor), librarians (5) and teachers (4) are equally represented in the data, with parents (3), and adults of undetermined role (2) also represented. Among the comments illustrating Sub-Claim 7: disparagement of “girl” books, the representation is similar, with librarians (4) and parents (3) leading, with 1 comment by an adult of undetermined role. However, comments by children (2) are also represented in the data coded according to this category.

The overall trend in the data is that librarians and parents are the main commenters regarding perceptions of the gendered reading preferences of children and young adults. Nonetheless, comments by children and young adults are important in terms of the mention of certain book series, coded “iconic boy books,” in relation to boys' reading, both as a perceived and expressed preference; in terms of comments in the data

disparaging “girl” books; and, in the labeling of books as “boy” and “girl”-preferred.

4.3.4 Response to RQ4. For the fourth research question – RQ4 What patterns, if any, of resistance to the dominant conceptions of gendered literacy may be found among the blog posts analyzed? – the most prominent form of resistance to the perception of gendered reading preferences (Counter Claim A) comes from educators in response to the labeling of books as “girl” and “boy” books (21). Of these resistant comments, 10 represent the perspectives of parents, while 6 represent other adults of undetermined role. The examples also include 1 by an author, 1 by a child, 1 by a librarian, and 2 by teachers.

Counter Claim B: the expression of the belief that a child’s sex does not and/or should not influence their reading preferences (15 examples) is also an important form of resistance to the perception of gendered reading preferences, as represented in the data. Among these comments, parents (7 examples) are best represented, and children and young adults are second (5 examples). However, the comments also include two by adults of undetermined role and one by an illustrator.

According to Counter Claim C, educators also resist the notion of gendered reading preferences by expressing resistant expectations of children's literary preferences (that is, not expecting that girls should like what are perceived to be girl-preferred texts and that boys should like what are perceived to be boy-preferred texts) (13), and as in the other two forms of resistance, parents are the main commenters (8). Comments by librarians (3) and teachers (2), however, are also represented. Looking at the study sample overall, comments by parents accounted for most of the resistant examples in terms of the three categories of resistance discussed in this section.

Although what is most evident among the data is the labeling of young people’s

reading preferences and of texts according to “boy” and “girl,” broader issues are also evident. Educators’ gender segregation of young people’s reading preferences devalues certain text types, especially in the context of the discussion of text-types that are tolerated only as bridge texts to help reluctant reader boys learn to enjoy reading including, the “iconic boy books” *Captain Underpants* and *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, as well as non-fiction, comics, graphic novels, and gross humor. As in examples citing boys’ enjoyment of reading lists and tables, contrasted with educators’ disapproval of this type of reading, there is a bias in favor of knowledge gained from story over factual knowledge.

CHAPTER 5 GENDERED LITERACY BEHAVIORS AND PERCEPTIONS OF GENDERED LITERACY BEHAVIORS

5.1 Claim 2: Gendered Literacy Behaviors and Perceptions of Gendered Literacy Behaviors

Claim 2 states that gendered literacy behaviors (other than reading preferences, as described separately) and perceptions of these behaviors are important among the data sampled. The findings classified according to this claim account for 203 total incidences and thematically cover a broader range of sub-themes than the other claims. However, the unifying theme is that they represent expressions and perceptions of gendered literacy behaviors, in contrast to the reading preferences and related perceptions discussed in the other sections. For example, while other sections deal with girls' and boys' specific expressed reading preferences or perceptions of what they would want to read, this section discusses broader examples of their expressed enjoyment of reading. Sub-Claims include the following:

Table 8

Claim 2, Perceptions of Gendered Literacy Behaviors – Sub-Claims

| Sub-Claim | Incidences |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 1. Forty-two examples are of mothers' reading with their children or encouraging their children's reading, compared with thirty-two examples of fathers' reading with their children or encouraging their children's reading. | 42 (mothers), 32 (fathers) |
| 2. Twenty-seven examples discuss boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading level, as compared with twenty-four for girls. | 27 (boys), 24 (girls) |
| 3. Bloggers and commenters perceive that boys are both "reluctant" and less advanced readers. (librarians – 10, parents – 9, teachers – 7, author – 1, adults of undetermined role – 1, children/young adults – 1) | 29 |

| | |
|---|----|
| 4. Educators perceive that books and reading are unwelcoming to boys. (librarians – 11, parents – 3) | 14 |
| 5. Parents perceive that there are not enough "boy books" available. | 13 |
| 6. Educators perceive that gendered literacy is a biological phenomenon, the result of essential, cognitive differences between males and females. (parents – 11, educator of undetermined type – 1) | 12 |
| 7. Female authors and educators represented in the data discuss the integrity of female authors' writing the voices of male protagonists. (authors – 7, librarians – 2, parents – 1) | 10 |

5.2 Discussion of Claim 2, Sub-Claims

5.2.1 Sub-Claim 1: Mothers' compared to fathers' reading with their children or encouraging their children's reading. There are 42 examples of mothers' reading with their children or encouraging their children's reading, compared with 32 examples of fathers' reading with their children or encouraging their children's reading. This section will first discuss the examples referencing mothers' reading with their children or encouraging their children's reading and then discuss examples referencing fathers' reading with their children or encouraging their children's reading.

5.2.1.1 Mothers. Blog posts and comments relating to mothers' reading with their children or encouraging their children's reading may be organized according to the following sub-themes: mothers reading to or with their children – reading that is usually described as a sustained activity in the relationship between mother and child, mothers recommending books (often to other mothers), mothers selecting books (borrowing or purchasing books and seeking reader's advisory), and adult/young adult daughters sharing books with their mothers. Overall, the examples for this sub-claim account for 42 of the total examples for the overall category of gendered literacy behaviors.

Twenty-four of the examples relate to mothers reading to or with their children. Many of these examples describe books mothers have enjoyed reading aloud to or with their children. For example, a commenter to a post on B22 writes:

Thank you sooo much for reviewing this book! I was drawn in by the cover art right away and bought the 2 compilation books. Now, every night my six year old and I can't wait for bedtime so we can read 2 more *Tashi* stories.... *Tashi* seems like a great alternative to the sometimes boring *Magic Tree House* series. I recommend these books to anyone with a little boy! (B22, 2010)

In this example, the mother highlights the nightly bedtime reading she does with her son and her recommendation of the *Tashi* book series (Anna Fienberg, Barbara Fienberg, and Kim Gamble) specifically for boys. Another example of a mother (commenter) describing specific reading selections and experiences reads, "I read aloud to him *The BFG*, which was a lot of fun, and also *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, which really made an impression on him (to my surprise)" (B4, 2010).

In another example under the larger theme of mothers reading to or with their children, a mother describes her fifteen years of experience reading both with her sons and with other children and conversing about books with them as part of book clubs (B21, 2012). This blogger's description includes not only reading she does with her own children but also with other children in her community; moreover, these are activities that she has consistently engaged in over a long period of time.

Mothers' role in book selection for their children, through borrowing or purchasing books and soliciting reader's advisory, is another sub-theme of this category and accounts for 16 examples in the larger category of mothers' reading to/with their children and encouragement of their children's reading. For example, in this post, from B22, a mother comments, "Thank you so much for this post! I am always looking for new

books for my daughter, especially in summer. I have printed this post and I'm off to the library now!" (B22, 2010). In this comment, she notes she has been influenced by a post about reader's advisory and intends to borrow the book from the library. In saying that she is "always looking for new books," she implies that helping to provide her daughter with reading material is an ongoing priority for her. A mother/commenter to B4 states,

I have made a few purchases of books he might like (*Nate the Great*, *The Great Brain* series, various youth *Star Wars* chapter books, *The Graveyard Book*, etc.) but nothing seems to spark much lasting interest. I am hoping for the day when I will see him so engaged in a book that he will make the effort to return to it until he has finished it, but I am also wary of being pushy on the subject. I would be grateful for suggestions of other books or series that might appeal to him. (B4, 2010)

This mother is seeking reader's advisory for her son and mentions books she has purchased for him previously. Like the mother in the previous example, finding reading materials that will interest and engage her child is an ongoing priority.

A commenter for B12 responds to a post, saying, "I love the review, and the pictures are wonderful! So did your 8 year old really enjoy and understand the book? I considered getting it and reading it to my 7 year old (2nd grade) but worried it might be too much for him (B12, 2011). Here, a mother is considering obtaining a book for her son and seeking further clarification as to whether it would be appropriate for him.

In another example of this sub-theme of mothers' seeking books for their children, a woman (presumably a mother), in response to posts by a dad blogger of a homeschooling family, who posts reviews (in dialogue form) of the books their family has read together, states: "I love your kid reviews. I've now called my husband over two weeks in a row to read your transcription of your discussions. What a great way for dad and kids to bond – over books" (B12). Implied here is the notion that the commenter

would like for her husband to learn from the dad blogger's example of reading books with his children – and perhaps, that he does not often read with his own children.

Ten examples deal with mothers' recommending of books to other readers of the blogs – in many cases, other mothers. For example, a commenter on B4, says, "My son and I read *Dunderheads* by Paul Fleischman this week. I love the drawings, he loves the story, and it's a fitting recommendation since it's a tale about a group of seemingly no good students giving an unfair teacher the what-for" (B4, 2010). This comment is in response to a mother's writing to B4 blogger in search of reader's advisory for her son and the son's teacher's insistence on picture books as the preferred textual examples of core narrative concepts. Educators' valuing of linear, story narratives over other text types, including non-fiction, comics, and graphic novels is a theme that was discussed earlier in detail in the section describing Claim 1, Perceptions of the Gendered Reading Preferences of Children and Young Adults, Sub-Claim 6, Educators' disparagement of "boy" books.

B4 is a blog dealing primarily with reader's advisory, and B4 blogger comments that she receives more responses to requests for reading suggestions for girls than for boys: "it's easier to recommend a book for someone you feel is a lot like you: a reading girl, or a former reading girl," she observes. In support of this, in an interview with B4 conducted for this study, she states (in answer to a question regarding her blog readership) that her readership consists mainly of women and librarians (Interview 2 notes, 2013). Moreover, of readers who solicit reading recommendations, 99% are women, 80 to 90% are mothers, and the other readers consist of aunts, teachers, and godmothers. However,

in terms of children for whom recommendations are sought, she estimates an even balance between boys and girls (Interview 2 notes, 2013).

Five examples refer to young adult and adult daughters and mothers sharing books, such as this mother's comment on B4: "My daughter just bought this book this week, read it, and handed it over to me, saying, 'You should read this. It's a good book'" (B4, 2010). B4 blogger responds to this comment, saying, "I always love it when they hand a book over to me with that seriousness and generosity. It's sort of the recompense for losing the bedtime story reading" (B4, 2010). In saying this, B4 blogger legitimizes the commenter's experience by also claiming it as her own –her own daughters have offered her books to read. It also suggests the way in which mothers' and daughters' sharing of texts begins in early childhood but continues into the tween and teen years and on into adulthood. These examples, in effect, are the result of mothers' sharing reading with their daughters from the time their daughters were young. In yet another example (a comment on B4), a woman reflects on both her childhood reading of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Secret Garden* and of listening to it on audiotape with her mother as an adult, saying,

Thank you for updating; when I read your original post, I wondered whether I misremembered my adult rereading, in which my experience was extremely similar to yours. I remember the first chapters word for word, I think of it as Mary's book, I have tremendous attachment to my memory of the story, and then I listened to it on tape with my mom a few years ago, and we were both very surprised and puzzled at its (sexist, racist) weirdness as Colin takes over the story. The funny thing is, in retrospect it was a book that I read many times in childhood, but not all the way through. It isn't that I never read the end, but it was the beginning I read over and over, and that meant so much to me..... (B4, 2009)

In this example, the reading experience shared by a mother and her adult daughter involves not only reading the text together but also discussing the sexism and racism they perceive in the story.

In the example which follows, in contrast to the others just mentioned, the mother, rather than the daughter, is the implied recommender of a text. A young girl, reviewing a book by Enid Blyton that her mother read as a child, writes, “My mom read St Clares [sic] when she was little, so I read it too” (B3, 2011), indicating that she read the book at her mother’s suggestion.

5.2.1.2 Fathers. In terms of fathers’ reading with their children or encouraging their children’s reading, three comments describe adults’ fond memories of their fathers’ reading to them when they were children. One commenter describes her father’s reading aloud the *Dealing with Dragons* series to her when she was twelve as one of her most cherished memories (B23, 2011).

Children mentioned range in age, from older children, like the pre-teen in the previous example, to the kindergartener in the following example, in which a father expresses his dismay over his daughter’s insistence on labeling reading materials according to gender, and the way in which he and his wife resist the gender-labeling by encouraging their young daughter to read what she wants to read rather than what would be a “girl”-appropriate text. He adds that, as a result, her reading choices have significantly expanded (B21, 2012). In this example, as in previous examples, a very young child is portrayed as readily gender-labeling books.

Of the examples relating to fathers’ reading with their children or encouraging their children’s reading, 12 are posts or comments from B17, the blog of an African-

American male illustrator/author. Eight of the examples from B17 describe the blogger's helping his son with homework, as in when he prefaces his news about finding a literary agent by stating that before he could blog about his good news, he had to drive home from doing an author visit at an elementary school in another part of the state, then listen to his son read aloud, and then read the grocery list his wife had forgotten to take with her to her over the phone (B17, 2008). This example highlights the fact that helping his son with reading homework is one of his responsibilities as a father and also demonstrates his struggle to balance work and home duties.

Other examples from B17 recount the blogger's sharing leisure reading with his son, as in an example in which he shares his excitement at the prospect of first reading and then sharing a book series, that he labels as appropriate for boys, with his son (B17, 2008). In this example, B17 blogger also specifically labels the books as appropriate for boys. However, in another excerpt, he asks his son's teacher if he can start reading chapter books, including the *Junie B. Jones* (Barbara Park) series, featuring a first-grade female protagonist, with his son (B17, 2007). Therefore, B17 blogger, in choosing a series with a female protagonist, demonstrates a flexible approach to gender in terms of choosing reading materials for his son.

5.2.2 Sub-Claim 2: Boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading level, as compared with girls'. Twenty-seven examples discuss boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading level, as compared with twenty-four for girls.

5.2.2.1 Boys' love of reading. References to boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading level are found in five different blogs and account for 27 examples. Comments relating to boys' love of reading consist of descriptions of younger boys who

enjoy being read to and also those of boys who are already reading independently. Boys' writing is also mentioned in two comments. These examples stand in stark contrast to Sub-Claim 3, the perception that boys are both "reluctant" and less advanced readers, to be discussed later.

Eleven comments relate to mothers reading with sons. Two more comments describe parents reading to sons, but it is not clear whether the parent is a mother or father. More specifically, these comments often refer by title or author to the books the parent and child have shared together, as in the following comment in response to a blog post on B4:

Our first chapter book was also *James and the Giant Peach*. We moved on to *Esio Trot* after that, then *Ramona the Pest*, now we're doing *The Mouse and the Motorcycle*. My son is 4 and-a-bit but sounds a lot like the boy in the letter. I love the comments here and will be bookmarking this when we're done with Ralph and need some more books. (B4, 2012)

Like the mother who wrote this comment, many parents share their reading recommendations or their intentions to read other books mentioned on the blog.

Six comments mention boys' independent reading, and these examples also stand in contrast to the widespread perception of boys as reluctant and remedial readers. Among these comments, some also describe boys being read to, especially boys who are making the transition to reading independently. For example,

I'm on the bandwagon with this one as well, being one of 3 girls but now faced with a 6 year old son who loves reading. I highly recommend (for his age) *Three Tales of My Father's Dragon* by Ruth Stiles Gannett. He has fallen hopelessly in love with these quiet, wonderful, just-on-the-edge-of-scary stories, and he can read 90% of it by himself. (B4, 2010)

In this comment, as in the example above, the mother mentions the specific title of a book she and her son, an advanced reader (this is implied based on the fact that the series she

mentions is geared toward the reading level of an 8 year old), have enjoyed. She also suggests, in the first line “being one of 3 girls but now faced with a 6 year old son who loves reading”), that, as a female, she finds it difficult to envision the kinds of books her son will enjoy. This topic was explored in more detail in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.7, Claim 1, Sub-Claim 5 – Parents’ perception that their childhood identity as either a boy or girl, or experience with children of only one sex, determines their qualifications to judge the reading preferences of children of the opposite sex – section of the findings.

Examples referring to boys’ love of reading and/or advanced reading level are directly counter to the perception of boys as both “reluctant” and less advanced readers. Some of these examples compare reading to satisfying a hunger. For example, a mother commenting on B4 notes: “My 7 1/2 year old son has been an avid reader since he was 4 1/2, starting with the *Magic Tree House* books. He ate those up....” (2010). Other similar comments include: “When it arrived in the mail, my son, a voracious reader of both chapter books and comics, pounced on it, read it from cover to cover immediately and then refused to hand it over” (B13, 2009); and, “My son is now three and is still devouring books at an incredible rate” (B4, 2009).

Another important sub-theme is that of re-reading the same books again. For example, a mother states:

I also have to especially thank the reader who suggested *My Father's Dragon* -- we read it on a long airplane journey about three weeks ago, and my son adored -- a-DORED -- it (and so do I, actually). It has been in constant rotation ever since (as in, we finish it, and we start right back at the beginning). (B4, 2009)

The three-year-old boy mentioned in this example loves *My Father's Dragon* (Ruth Stiles Gannett) so much that he asks his mother to read it to him over and over again. Here is another example, a review written by a boy, posted on B3: “I enjoyed this book so much

that I read it twice and I cannot wait to read the second book *The StoneKeeper's Curse* in this series. I recommend this book” (B3, 2010). These examples illustrating boys’ avid enjoyment of books are directly counter to the perception of boys as reluctant and less advanced readers (Claim 2, Sub-Claim 3), a perception to be discussed in detail in a following section.

Three comments included in boys’ love of reading refer to boys’ writing, including a ten-year-old boy who enjoys writing. His mother writes of her son:

I too have a reader/writer. He's ten and is constantly on the computer typing like a maniac....He's also an avid reader. Dark Omen did a fabulous job and seems very self assured. And has a great imagination. I loved the interview. I'm going to have my son come in and read it. Maybe it'll help him when the other kids make fun of his love of writing. (B3, 2011)

In this comment, the mother responds to a post on B3 describing an interview the B3 blogger, a male librarian, had done with the son (“Dark Omen”) of a female author of science fiction for young adults. The mother responds to this story of a boy who loves writing by referring not only to her own son’s love of reading and writing but also to the ridicule he has faced from peers because of it.

5.2.2.2 Boys’ advanced reading. References to boys’ advanced reading include parents’ expressions of concern with keeping advanced readers away from texts that would not be considered age-appropriate. For example, here a mother commenting on B4 describes the difficulty she is facing in finding books for her two-year-old son:

He is very articulate, and LOVES books....Thing is, he has a fairly long attention span, so all the picture books that are meant for his age just have too few words per page to really keep us going (I'm thinking *The Gruffalo*, *Duck in the Truck*, John Burningham, Maurice Sendak, etc). But, many proper books (here I'm thinking of things like Roald Dahl, *Paddington*, etc) have too few pictures (he still does like to have *some* pictures) and occasionally are just too scary or grown up....Basically it feels like I've found all the things that hit the mark in

terms of length of story and age appropriateness (which seem to be in a bit of a conflict maybe?) – but I'm sure there must be more out there. (B4, 2009)

The mother is looking for books appropriate for her young son, a precocious reader, that will satisfy his love for longer stories but also have enough illustrations along with gentle subject matter (not “too scary”). Another comment, by a public elementary teacher relating to boys’ writing refers to disadvantaged kindergarteners’ advanced reading and writing, stating that most of her students are able to read and write. They can compose sentences and print legibly, and she makes a point of saying that it is not just the girls who are doing well but also the boys (B17, 2009). Here, the teacher directly articulates the normative perceptions – that kids, and particularly boys, in poverty are doomed to underachieve – and identifies the ways in which her kindergarten students are breaking those norms. Moreover, she celebrates the achievement of learning to read for both girls and boys.

5.2.2.3 Girls’ love of reading and/or advanced reading. Of the references to and by girls who love to read and/or who display an advanced reading level, 12 are written by parents, 7 by adult women reflecting on their love of reading starting in childhood, 3 by children and young adults, and 2 by librarians. Comments may be characterized according to 5 major sub-themes: 1) reading a large number of texts; 2) the ability to read very fast; 3) precocious reading; 4) the discussion of girls’ reading in direct opposition to boys and/or masculinity; and 5) spending a large amount of time reading. The sub-themes overlap in the data in the sense that some comments were characterized by more than one sub-theme.

Twelve of the comments relate to girls reading a large number of texts in terms of quantity. For example, a mother, reflecting on her own love of reading as a girl and following a discussion of how to engage her son in reading, states:

As a child who needed books like I needed air to breathe (I recall rummaging around in the basement once for something, anything new, and magically discovering the Narnia books in a box), it's hard for me to comprehend not having a deep level of engagement in reading. Do you think I am expecting that he should make a leap into lengthier chapter books too early? (B4, 2010)

In this excerpt, the commenter describes her childhood need for books – a need that drove her to read every book in her house – as equivalent to needing “air to breathe” and describes her anxiety over her son’s reading. She is concerned that because her son does not read in the same way she did as a child, he will not be a good reader. She notes that, except for non-fiction or certain fiction series, he will start books but not finish them, and is not yet interested in reading chapter books.

A young teen, B1 blogger, refers to her project to read all the winners of the Newbery Medal, an annual award given by the American Library Association to the author of a work of children’s literature: “When I was ranking these, I had fun thinking again about each book. It is amazing how many of them I really did like!” (B1, 2010). Her dedication extended to reading even those books she did not enjoy in order to meet her goal of reading them all. As in the examples of boys’ love of and advanced reading, girls’ love of reading is also described as equivalent to eating, such as “voracious reader” (two examples – B4, 2010; B22, 2010), “voracious lifetime girl reader” (B4, 2010), “a child hungrily reading everything in sight” (B4, 2009), and “I started devouring books the day I learned to read, but not a single one of my six brothers has ever picked up a book voluntarily” (B4, 2010).

A second sub-theme (6 comments) is that of an ability to read very fast. For example, B1 blogger, a young teen, describes how she read a book: “It is also a short, fast book to read (I plowed through it in under 2 hours), which makes it a great summer reading book” (B1, 2011). Other examples mention “turbo-charged skimming” (B4, 2010), “a fast reader/skimmer” (B4, 2010), “an inordinately fast reader” (B4, 2010), “a super fast reader child” (B4, 2010), and “I read freakishly fast” (B4, 2010).

The third major sub-theme is that of describing instances of girls’ precocious reading (6 examples), as in, “My daughter is an excellent reader and pushed herself” (B4, 2010), or “In K Diana was reading way out there beyond anything that made sense, *James and the Giant Peach* etc, but she loved, too, an illustrated ABC” (B4, 2010). Blog posts and comments fitting this sub-theme, similar to blog posts discussing boys’ precocious reading, are often accompanied by mothers’ comments about monitoring their daughters’ reading to make sure they are not reading anything objectionable and also women reflecting on their own precocious childhood reading. For example, a mother describes her daughter’s reading habits:

She loves imagination and fantasy. She really liked *Time Traveler’s Wife*, until I found out she was reading it and stopped her (due to adult content). This is why I say she likes somewhat complex plots – the time travel complexity of the story line she really liked. (B4, 2010)

This mother is both concerned about protecting her daughter, an advanced reader, from “adult content” and about helping her daughter find sufficiently complex reading material. Another woman reflects on her childhood reading: “Just to make you feel better (maybe?), I read pretty much every book in my parents’ library by the time I was in 5th grade and that included some seriously disturbing stuff...and I turned out just fine” (B4, 2010). Mothers’ concerns with preventing their children from reading age-inappropriate material,

in light of this statement, are unfounded and represent yet another means, in addition to gender-segregating, to try to determine their children's reading choices.

Three comments categorized in the larger category of girls' love of reading and/or advanced reading level mention reading in direct opposition to boys and/or masculinity, which, when juxtaposed with the many examples of boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading discussed just prior, appears illogical. One commenter notes, "I too, of course, would have LOVED to be a tomboy as a child—I was an aspirational tomboy!—only temperamentally was happier making a cake or reading a book than climbing over a fence!" (B5, 2008). Reading, along with baking, here is identified as a girlish activity whereas tomboy (girls behaving like boys) behavior is defined as more active, for example, "climbing over a fence." Similarly, in response to B4 blogger's post regarding her daughter's refusal to read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, other non-fiction, or anything related to realism, including realistic fiction, a mother complains, "Try being a voracious lifetime girl reader and having boys – who prefer sports" (B4, 2010). Here, the mother, in calling herself a "lifetime girl reader" and contrasting that identity with that of her sports-loving sons, associates reading with femininity and sports with masculinity.

The last major theme of the comments related to girls' love of reading and/or advanced reading level is that of spending a large amount of time reading (2 comments). For example, one mother states:

Right now, I'm reading *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to my barely 5 year old and she is enthralled. Like, she weaseled 4 chapters out of me on Sunday and decided yesterday we need to start reading during the day since bedtime keeps getting in the way of more story. (B4, 2012)

In this example, the mother describes sharing a book that would be considered at the reading level of an older child, with her daughter, and bedtime reading is supplemented

with daytime reading to satisfy the daughter's growing reading appetite. The emphasis on "more story" in this excerpt echoes what the non-fiction author interviewed for this study perceives as a preoccupation with narrative resulting in institutional bias against other textual forms. He states that "the moms in the bookstore, the school librarians, the public librarians" insist that, for example, non-fiction "needs to have story, otherwise it's dry" (Interview 3 transcript, 2013).

Another mother describes her young daughter's tendency to read into the night: I have a daughter who just turned 8 and our challenge is she just can't stop reading and it doesn't make her tired. I try putting her to bed earlier but even as late as 10 after reading for 2 1/2 hours she still wants to keep reading. (B4, 2010)

The girl in this example happily reads to herself in bed, long past her bedtime, and as such, exemplifies the voracious girl reader. Nonetheless, many examples of voracious boy readers, as described earlier, are found among the data sampled. These examples stand in contrast to the perceived reluctant boy reader, as described below.

5.2.3 Sub-Claim 3: Educators' perception that boys are both "reluctant" and less advanced readers. Educators (including librarians – 10, parents – 9, teachers – 7, author – 1, adults of undetermined role – 1, also 1 child) perceive that boys are both "reluctant" and less advanced readers (29). The term "reluctant reader" is thereby associated with boys (with the exception of two examples among the data in which reluctant reader girls are mentioned), and this label is also paired with an assumption that boys are less advanced readers. In one example, B1 blogger, a girl reader, recommends a book with a male protagonist based on potential appeal "for reluctant boy readers," thereby directly linking the terms "boy" and "reluctant reader" (B1, 2011).

Most numerous among the examples for this category are comments made by librarians – ten of the twenty-nine examples. A male librarian states outright: "Yeah,

reading is enjoyable and educational – and most guys don't think the two can ever go together!! That's one reason I run this blog – to prove that those two words CAN go right next to each other” (B8, 2010). In this statement, he indicates that boys’ distaste for the educational aspects of reading represents his primary motivation for maintaining the blog. A female school librarian’s comment is more subtle. She writes, of author Brian Jacques, that boys, if they enjoy reading, often like Jacques’ *Redwall* series, but the books are large so that boys who are hesitant to read may be put off by their size (B9, 2006). In specifically stating that boys like the author’s books, if they enjoy reading, she implies that many boys do not enjoy reading. Another comment is written by the male illustrator/author of B17, but, in noting that as part of a state library association conference he was a panelist for a discussion focusing on encouraging boys’ reading, he points to librarians’ perceptions that boys in particular need prodding in order to overcome their tendency towards reluctance to read (B17, 2012).

Parents’ perspectives (9) are also significant. B4 blogger, in response to a request for reader’s advisory, writes,

My hunch is that he likes to be read to because for him reading is still hard. It's a lot of work to get through words on the page, and sometimes seeing so many sort of defeats a kid before he starts. A graphic novel slips the words by in un-overwhelming (sorry for non-word) bubbles... (B4, 2010)

In this excerpt, B4 blogger, herself a parent of daughters who enjoy reading, suggests a graphic novel as ideal for a boy who does not enjoy reading. B4 blogger also assumes that since the boy does not enjoy reading, he is not a skilled reader.

Similar to the example just mentioned, a father notes,

Let’s not forget to mention how attractive *Frankie Pickle* may look to educators eager to convert new readers. For my son, who loves reading, *Frankie Pickle* was simply an extra delectable treat. But it’s [*sic*] comic book elements could be a big

draw for reluctant readers as well, perhaps providing just the ticket to the marvelously rich and delightful world of literature. (B13, 2009)

Although his own son is an eager reader, the father refers to the perceived problem of reluctant readers and suggests that this series featuring a male protagonist and with many similarities to a “comic book” may appeal to reluctant readers. He suggests its “comic book elements” as a bridge to texts of higher literary value, a theme that is also discussed in , Chapter 4, Section 4.2.8, Claim 1: Educators’ perceptions of children’s reading preferences and labeling of “boy” and “girl” books, Sub-Claim 6, Educators’ disparagement of “boy” books (including non-fiction, comics, graphic novels, and gross humor) as of less value than other reading materials.

Another example, a comment by a male (all that can be determined is that he is an older brother) mentions that he was able to convince his younger brother, whom he describes as a typical reluctant reader, to read the *Encyclopedia Brown* series (B23, 2007).

The examples by teachers refer less directly than the previous examples to the perception of boys as reluctant readers. One example is when a male teacher, in a book review on his blog, implies that fourth grade boys are selective (rather than voracious) readers (B6, 2007). Another example, by B17 blogger (as in the librarian example just mentioned) refers to teachers’ perceptions of boys’ dislike of reading by mentioning a school conference in which he participated as a speaker, the purpose of which is to motivate boys’ reading (B17, 2011). A school would only hold such an event because the school’s educators perceive that boys need to be encouraged to read.

One example refers to an author’s perspective and is a quote by the girl blogger (a young teen) of B1, from her interview with author Jon Scieszka. In response to a question about why he started the “Guys Read” blog, Scieszka states: “I started GUYS

READ to help just boys because as a group, boys struggle with reading more than girls do” (B1, 2010). Scieszka began the site as a response to the perceived problem of boy readers, and as in the other examples mentioned, the linkage of reading difficulties with boys is thereby reinforced.

5.2.4 Sub-Claim 4: Educators’ perception of reading as unwelcoming to boys.

Educators (including librarians – 11, parents – 3) perceive that books and reading are unwelcoming to boys. Nine comments from this section are from B3 and one from B8; both blogs have the aim of encouraging boy readers, specifically because the blogs are meant to make up for the lack of acceptance and encouragement boys are perceived to face as readers. Seven of these comments protect the male librarian-managed blog space by symbolically making female readers – either girls who write book reviews and send them in or female authors the bloggers interview – into “honorary guys.” These comments have been coded as evidence of the perception that books and reading are unwelcoming to boys because the male librarians, while allowing females to share the blog space, have to make these female guest commenters into “guys” in order to do so. For example:

Now, just to be clear--even though this blog is primarily for boys, we don't mind if girls write in. We want to know about good books and, if girls can tell us about some, we don't mind....In fact, we're so glad to hear from them that we give them the greatest honor we could possibly bestow--we make them HONORARY GUYS!! [emphasis in original] (all this generosity is further proof--as if any more is needed-- of the awesome greatness of boys!) (B3, 2011)

In this statement the male librarians/bloggers clarify that females are only allowed to share the blog space with boys within certain limits. In order to share the space, by having their book reviews posted, they must be labeled “honorary guys,” and boys should be lauded for their willingness to share the blog space with girls.

Two other examples from B3 picture the male librarian in masculine poses, i.e. flexing a muscle and holding up a book with that same arm, or, in another case in B8, wearing a “got books?” t-shirt, the caption describing the male librarian as, “striking his MANLIEST pose and showing that he is a walking advertisement for guy reading” (B8, 2012). The male librarians’ behaviors here represent overcompensating responses to their perceptions of the social association of reading with femininity.

In another example, B4 blogger refers to the world of reading as an “enchanted garden” she has always been a part of and refers to the sudden realization that boys were “standing outside the garden gates” (B4, 2010). A commenter picks up on the metaphor and recommends B12, by a father/homeschooler blogger who reads with his children, “for anyone with a boy looking in sadly on the secret garden of girl lit” (B4, 2010). These examples portray the world of children’s reading as girl-dominated and a place where boys feel unwelcome. In another similar post, B4 blogger muses, “What Does It Mean to Be a Boy?...In truth, I have (of course) no answer to the question in my headline. But it’s something I think about, in all sorts of ways: life, school, literature. Many of the things I love seem...inhospitable to boys” (B4, 2011). Through the metaphor used here of boys’ facing a closed door, barring them from entering the world of literature and reading, once again, the association of reading and literacy with femininity, rather than masculinity, is seen, and is presented as a distinction learned from an early age.

5.2.5 Sub-Claim 5: Parents’ perception regarding a lack of “boy books.”

Parents perceive that there are not enough “boy books” available. (13) Eleven of the examples are from B4, a blog by a mother of two daughters (also an editor, but not of children’s books), and all of these are written by mothers. As stated prior, this blog’s

readership, in the blogger's estimation, is primarily female. The trend is a perception that there are enough "boy books" for young children and young adults but not as much for those in the elementary and middle grades. For example, a mother writes:

There are a wealth of options for girls, and not so many for boys. I worry as my son gets older about what I will find for the in-between stage - I think as he gets older there are a lot of science fiction options, but for the elementary years there seem to be less choices. (B4, 2010)

This sentiment is echoed in the mothers' statements mentioned above, which are responses to a post in which B4 blogger comments that when she writes about reader's advisory for girls, she receives more responses than when she writes about boys. To illustrate, she writes, "Posts about books for girls get about 3 times the response rate that posts about books for boys get. The post about the brother and sister? A whole bunch of people recommended for her, and didn't have anything for him" (B4, 2010). In response to the post, seven comments by mothers relate to having had trouble finding suitable reading materials for sons or the perception that other parents do. In one case, a mother notes that although she does not have trouble finding reading materials now for her young son, she projects that she soon will, stating, "I've certainly heard it said before, but my son's only three so there's lots of options for him yet. Somehow I never really thought until now that, hey, this is going to be my problem soon, too" (B4, 2010). In this case, she implies that reading the thread of comments has reminded her of the general perception that it is more difficult to find boys' books and now presents a "problem" she is about to face. Another comment in this section is by a school librarian (also a mother), who laments the difficulty of finding humorous books that are appropriate for boys (B6, 2012).

5.2.6 Sub-Claim 6: Educators perceive that gendered literacy is a biological phenomenon, the result of essential, cognitive differences between males and females.

All but one of the examples regarding the perception that gendered literacy is the result of biologically-based cognitive differences between males and females can be attributed to parents. The one comment not attributed to a parent may actually be a parent, but there is not enough information to identify the commenter definitively as a parent. Several sub-themes are apparent in the comments for this category. One sub-theme is the perception that boys learn to read later than girls. Another is the perception that girls and boys have innate differing reading preferences and, relatedly, that girls are somehow wired to enjoy reading while boys are not. Finally, another sub-theme is the perception that boys are more active than girls and so are less inclined to enjoy school-appropriate behaviors, including reading.

The first sub-theme, the perception that boys learn to read later than girls, is evident in the following mother's response to B4 blogger's post bemoaning the fact that she receives more reading suggestions for girls than for boys. She comments: "Part of the problem is that most boys don't read as early as girls, which means that there are rows and rows of pink, sparkly chapter books with titles like *'The Pet Fairy'* (B4, 2010). Here the commenter connects the lack of early readers marketed for boys with boys' reading ability, which she claims develops later than that of girls'.

The blogger for B13, in a post titled "Boys, reading, and what to do about it," discusses his ambivalent views on the perceived "crisis" surrounding boys' literacy but also announces the imminent debut of a blog to discuss literature for teen boys, noting: "And when it comes to reading, it certainly seems, based on a quick scan of the available titles in the teen section of my local Barnes and Noble, that teenage boys are certainly

doing less of it than girls. So efforts like Guys Read and Guys Lit Wire seem more than warranted” (B13, 2008). In response, a commenter states:

Michael has a pile of international research about boys' brain development and the "reading gap" that begins early and too often widens as they grow. He was inspirational and informative. His speaking gigs are on his website. If the topic interests you, he is a one-man juggernaut [*sic*]/advocate for boys' literacy. (B13, 2008)

The commenter points to the work of Michael Sullivan (children’s librarian, library director, and adjunct instructor in several universities), which emphasizes the reading problems and preferences of boys specifically. The commenter expresses tacit agreement with Sullivan’s conclusions regarding the early-onset “reading gap” between boys and girls by stating that she finds him “inspirational.”

Another sub-theme for this category is the notion that girls and boys have innate differing reading preferences. For example, a mother states:

But, practically, as the parent of a 3.5-y-o boy and a 14-month girl, I have already discovered that both children some [*sic*] stereotypically gendered preferences that are, as far as I can tell, totally innate. My son has been fascinated with truck and diggers from a young age. My daughter, so far, is much more interested in pictures of other babies than he ever was. Generally, I think we can say that there are certain qualities of literature that, on average, may be more or less likely to appear [*sic*] to boys or girls. I will be delighted to keep on offering good books of all kinds to both of them, but I am also not going to try to bend them to my gender- neutral will when it comes to reading. I'm just going to give them what they enjoy. (B4, 2010)

This example is included here rather than in the section discussing educators’ perceptions of boys’ and girls’ differing reading preferences because of the way in which the mother assumes these differing interests are “totally innate” and her insistence that although she herself has a “gender-neutral will” in regard to reading preferences, her children do not conform to it.

A related sub-theme is a perception that girls are predisposed to enjoy reading, while boys are not:

I started devouring books the day I learned to read, but not a single one of my six brothers has ever picked up a book voluntarily. My husband and his three brothers start looking green around the gills when asked to read. Of my male friends, perhaps one or two read for leisure; the rest tend to roll their eyes when their wives talk books with me. I'm tempted to think from this that there most [sic] be SOME genetic predisposition at work. (B4, 2010)

The commenter states that among her male relatives and friends, she knows very few who enjoy reading. She softens the last sentence above by saying that, based on her experiences, she is “tempted to think” that the reason her female relatives and friends enjoy reading, while her male relatives and friends do not enjoy reading, is a “genetic predisposition.” However, by invoking the biological terminology – “genetic predisposition” – she suggests a biological determinist stance regarding males and reading.

A closely-related sub-theme is the way in which bloggers and commenters discuss boys as more active than girls. A mother comments:

I have a 5-year-old boy and a 3-year-old girl, so I guess we make good anecdotal data for untangling birth order from gender? ;) They are both pretty crazy and active, but my son is more so. My daughter is sometimes snuggly or likes to put things in order. My son is only happy if he's creating something or destroying it and his favorite thing is to use things (anything) in a manner for which they were not intended to be used... Without any real justification, I think birth order is linked to bossiness, but I really do think boys are a lot more active and crazy than girls. Even when they're little babies, I had to babyproof to the nines for my son, and everyone I know who was lackadaisical about it had girls. I came into parenting a staunch gender neutralist, but had to change my tune somewhat-- although I believe there's a ton of overlap. I love seeing my daughter's energy, confidence, and even defiance as evidence of that. (B4)

The mother directly describes her belief that boys are more active than girls, illustrating by describing her son as more active than her daughter – an activity level that she

perceives as beginning in infancy, as she states that she felt that she had to baby-proof her house for her son to a degree more extreme than friends with girls had to baby-proof.

Although she tempers her message by saying that her girl is also active and that there is “overlap,” she insists that “boys are a lot more active and crazy than girls.”

Similarly, another commenter who describes herself as “Mom of boys” states:

I have two boys, so I can't respond to the girl/boy dynamic, but I can say (from my perspective) that the older boy is a sweet, cerebral, energetic five year old. His three year old younger brother, however, is that force of chaos you so describe. Is it because he is three? Or is it because he is a boy? Or is it because he has an angelic older brother? I dunno. I do know the family with two girls the same ages as our boys spends most of the time with us with their mouths agape asking questions like, "Are they always so energetic? Is it safe to let them run around like that?" (B4, 2012)

The implication in both this statement and the one prior is that boys are more active than girls and that this tendency toward greater activity is directly linked to their being male.

One comment in this category also describes school as unsuitable for boys because of boys’ (assumed) less willingness to sit still. For example, B4 blogger writes: “What Does It Mean to Be a Boy? In truth, I have (of course) no answer to the question in my headline. But it's something I think about, in all sorts of ways: life, school, literature. Many of the things I love seem...inhospitable to boys. I see my girls in school, watch them thrive, and wonder at the extent to which school (especially elementary school, with its focus on behaving yourself and being orderly) seems to be tough on boys.”

5.2.7 Sub-Claim 7: Female authors’ and educators’ discussion of the integrity of female authors’ writing the voices of male protagonists. Seven of the ten comments are excerpts from interviews with female authors. For instance, a female author of young adult literature, when asked about writing from a male perspective says that boys’ talk is more terse than girls’, they do not as freely express their emotions or their problems even

though they experience emotions similar to girls' (B2, 2008). This author notes marked differences between writing the voices of boys and girls, indicating that her "boy" dialogue is less verbose. She expresses assumptions about boys' communicative behaviors, including that they have more trouble expressing emotion than girls and that their speech uses fewer words and is less focused on emotion than that of girls.

Two comments refer to spending time with boys in real life as the key to writing believable male characters. For example, another female author states, "I guess I've known enough boys through my life, well enough that the knowledge was just in there for me when I needed it" (B3, 2008). Similarly, the author from the B2 interview mentioned above comments that her previous experience as a teacher allows her to understand the ways in which boys talk (B2, 2008). The assumption is that the way in which boys communicate is fundamentally different from that of girls. In another instance, in reference to a male protagonist that other readers have felt to be inauthentic, to the point of mistaking the protagonist for a girl for much of the novel, B7 blogger, a librarian, states that the author, a mother, has two sons, as a means to defend the author's credentials for writing a male voice (B7, 2012). Here, the assumption is that there is a particular knowledge to be learned about boys' speech as different from that of girls.

Other comments speak to a female author's ability to write a convincing male voice, as when B7 blogger, a librarian, writes of a particular female author that she does not think anyone would fault that author with writing an inauthentic voice for the boy narrator in her novel (B7, 2012). And a mother states, "I think there are a bunch of more contemporary fiction authors who really get boys though....But there are female authors who seem to really get boys as well" (B4, 2010). Here, it is assumed that male authors

would “get” boys better than female authors, although there are some female authors who are up to the task. Similar to the previous examples, the knowledge of boys’ communicative behavior is assumed to be different from that of knowledge of girls’.

Two comments refer to the author’s feeling of knowing the characters well. One female author, writing about doing historical research prior to writing a novel, states: “The emotional aspects of the boys seemed to evolve as I did the research and outlined the plot. By the time the actual writing started, I knew these boys pretty well” (B3, 2009). Another states,

There was this character in my head that I really loved—a youngest boy with a whole bunch of brothers. And he was trying so hard to be a man among the men of his family and yet he wasn’t really like them....I had to write the book to find out what would happen to him. (B3, 2010)

This excerpt emphasizes the notion of a boy struggling to follow and fit in with his brothers and fathers, and suggesting that their masculinity should be the characteristic that binds them together. This assumption of a unifying masculinity, in this case focused on the presentation of the boys’ “emotional aspects” in the process of the author’s creating a convincing narrative, represents yet another way in which the segregation of boys’ and girls’ reading materials may occur.

5.3 Summary/Connection to Research Questions

5.3.1 Response to RQ1. In answer to RQ1 – What are the conceptions of gendered literacy among literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers); creators of texts for children (published authors, editors, and published illustrators); and, children/young adults, as represented in their blogging activities? – the conceptions of gendered literacy identified in this section, representing a range of behaviors, are reviewed below:

1. Forty-two examples are of mothers' reading with their children or encouraging their children's reading, compared with thirty-two examples of fathers' reading with their children or encouraging their children's reading.
2. Twenty-seven examples discuss boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading level, as compared with twenty-four for girls.
3. Bloggers and commenters perceive that boys are both "reluctant" and less advanced readers. (librarians – 10, parents – 9, teachers – 7, author – 1, adults of undetermined role – 1, children – 1) (29)
4. Educators perceive that books and reading are unwelcoming to boys. (librarians – 11, parents – 3) (14)
5. Parents perceive that there are not enough "boy books" available. (13)
6. Educators perceive that gendered literacy is a biological phenomenon, the result of essential, cognitive differences between males and females. (parents – 11, educator of undetermined type – 1) (12)
7. Female authors and educators represented in the data discuss the integrity of female authors' writing the voices of male protagonists. (authors – 7, librarians – 2, parents – 1) (10)

Considering the overall picture for the sub-claims detailed above, the data examined presents slightly more evidence of mothers' involvement in their children's reading than fathers', but the disparity is small. Moreover, there are roughly equal numbers of examples of boys' reading in comparison to girls' reading. However, perceptions that boys dislike reading and that there are not enough materials available that are suitable for boys' reading abound. Also, adding to the perception of boys' books

as distinct from girls' books is commentary surrounding female authors' ability to write a credible male voice.

5.3.2 Response to RQ2. A response to RQ2 – How do the conceptions of gendered literacy identified through the blogging activities of literacy educators, creators of texts for children, and children/young adults compare to the theoretical conceptions identified in the literature review?) – first requires a review of the theoretical conceptions of gendered literacy identified in the literature review:

1. Gendered literacy as performed by multiple actors, including children and young adults, literacy educators, and those in the publishing industry.
2. Gendered literacy as a quantifiable achievement gap between male and female students.
3. Gendered literacy as the result of biologically-based cognitive differences between males and females.
4. Gendered literacy as the remnant of an historically gendered educational system (in the U.S.).

Comparing the theoretical conceptions listed above to the sub-claims described in this section, most of the sub-claims exemplify #1 (gendered literacy as performed by multiple actors). However, B4 blogger's comment here also speaks to #4, gendered literacy as the remnant of the historically gendered educational system (in the U.S.):

What Does It Mean to Be a Boy? In truth, I have (of course) no answer to the question in my headline. But it's something I think about, in all sorts of ways: life, school, literature. Many of the things I love seem...inhospitable to boys. I see my girls in school, watch them thrive, and wonder at the extent to which school (especially elementary school, with its focus on behaving yourself and being orderly) seems to be tough on boys. (B4, 2011)

This comment refers to the perception of school as a feminine domain and the behaviors associated with femininity that the school environment supposedly fosters, including sitting still and behaving well. Such assumptions about school as a feminine environment may stem from the historical predominance of female teachers in elementary education in the U.S.

5.3.3 Response to RQ3. In response to RQ3 – What similarities and differences, if any, are represented in conceptions of gendered literacy among literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers); creators of texts for children (published authors, editors, and published illustrators); and, children/young adults, as represented in their blogging activities? – based on the sub-claims for this section (detailed above), perceptions of boys’ attitudes toward reading and literacy may be compared with boys’ expressed attitudes. For example, two sub-claims deal with educators’ perceptions:

1. Sub-Claim 3: Bloggers and commenters perceive that boys are both “reluctant” and less advanced readers. (librarians – 10, parents – 9, teachers – 7, author – 1, adults of undetermined role – 1, children – 1) (29)
2. Sub-Claim 4: Educators perceive that books and reading are unwelcoming to boys. (librarians – 11, parents – 3) (14)

In contrast to these examples relating to educators’ perceptions of boys’ reading and the “unwelcoming” social climate surrounding boys’ reading, 27 examples relate to boys’ expressed love of reading and/or advanced reading level. Moreover, a code titled “boys’ expressed dislike of literacy activities” was part of the original coding scheme, but due to having nine or fewer examples, it is not discussed in depth here. However, four of the

examples are notable in that they are ones in which either a boy describes himself or a boy's relative (in two cases, a parent, and in one case, a sister) describes him as not liking to read but then adds exceptions to suggest that the "reluctant" reader label is incorrect. For instance, B1 blogger says of her brother: "Gary Paulsen has a reputation of being an author for boys. In fact, my brother is a big fan of *Lawn Boy* (even though he really doesn't like to read)" (2011). Similarly, a parent describes a son as follows:

He has a harder time staying engaged when he is reading. We read out loud every day and he loves it, but is not as comfortable reading himself. He will pick up *Captain Underpants* (read an entire one yesterday morning before getting out of bed, first book all the way through on his own in one sitting ☺) and likes funny stories. He loved Judy Bloom's *Superfudge* series too, but we read that series out loud. (B4, 2010)

In each of these examples, despite the sister and parent's mentioning instances in which the boy referred to has enjoyed reading, they insist on communicating the perception that a boy dislikes and, in the second excerpt, has difficulty with reading.

For Sub-Claims 3 (relating to the perception that boys are "reluctant" and less advanced readers) and 4 (the perception that books and reading are unwelcoming to boys), librarians' perspectives are dominant. One perspective on gendered literacy unique to parents in terms of the data sampled is the perception that there are not enough "boy books." Parents are also prominent among examples for Sub-Claim 3 (perception that boys are "reluctant" and less advanced readers).

In reviewing the coding of the data, it was apparent that incidences of fathers' reading with children had been neglected because of the original creation of multiple categories. One example, which originally had been categorized under "Male authors who are fathers discuss their involvement in their children's literacy and work/parenting balance," points out a book series as being appropriate for boys and mentions the

blogger's intention to read the series and then read them with his son (B17, 2008). This example was later included in the larger category of fathers' reading with their children or encouraging their children's reading. Moreover, B12 blogger is a homeschooling father/illustrator whose entire blog focuses on his sharing books with his own children, and these examples had been coded under other categories. Later, they were also categorized as fathers' reading with their children or encouraging their children's reading. However, among the data sampled, mothers (42 examples) are still more prominent than fathers (30 examples) in terms of reading with their children or encouraging their children's reading. Even for Sub-Claim 2 – Twenty-seven examples discuss boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading level, as compared with twenty-four for girls – mothers play a prominent role in boys' reading, as eleven of the examples relate to mothers' reading with sons.

5.3.4 Response to RQ4. RQ4 asks: What patterns, if any, of resistance to the dominant conceptions of gendered literacy may be found among the blog posts analyzed? In terms of the sub-claims discussed in this section, Sub-Claim 2, which refers to boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading level, was originally labelled as a counter-claim, but since there are more examples of boys' than girls' expressed love of reading and/or advanced reading level (24), it was later combined with the sub-claim relating to girls' love of reading, presenting a comparison, as follows: Twenty-seven examples discuss boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading level, as compared with twenty-four for girls. Therefore, although boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading level may be considered a counter claim in relation to the other codes relating to societal perceptions of

boys' literacy, in terms of actual numbers of examples among the data sampled, it is more normative than resistant.

CHAPTER 6 GENDERED READING PREFERENCES

6.1 Claim 3 Boys' and Girls' Gendered Reading Preferences

Gendered reading preferences, in terms of boys' and girls' expressed differing reading preferences, are third most prominent among the conceptions of gendered literacy evident in the data – 123 total incidences. Two sub-claims relating to boys' and girls' gendered reading preferences can be made about the data coded according to this larger category. Resistance to these claims is found in the form of the instances in which children express resistant (that is, not conforming to preferences that would be considered gender-normative) reading preferences and in which certain titles and series are mentioned as appealing to both girls and boys.

Table 9

Claim 3, Boys' and Girls' Gendered Reading Preferences – Sub-Claims and Counter Claims

| Sub-Claim/Counter Claim | Incidences |
|---|------------|
| 1. In sixty-seven examples, girls' reading preferences match what are perceived to be traditional girl-preferred text types (stories with female protagonists, mermaid-themed fiction, books with pink covers and/or pink illustrations, horse-themed fiction, realistic fiction, non-fiction in narrative form, romance, and princess-themed fiction). | 67 |
| 2. In fifty-six examples, boys' reading preferences match what are perceived to be traditional boy-preferred text types (including stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines). | 56 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counter Claim A: Children's resistant – that is, not conforming to what would be considered gender-normative preferences (as described in Sub-Claims 1-2 above) – reading preferences are evident. | 43 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counter Claim B: Specific children's books and series are reported to appeal to both boys and girls. (children/young adults – 14, librarians – 5, parents – 5, adults of undetermined role – 3, teachers – 2) | 29 |

6.2 Discussion of Sub-Claims and Counter Claims

6.2.1 Sub-Claim 1: Girls' reading preferences matching traditional

perceptions. In sixty-seven examples, girls' reading preferences match what are perceived to be traditional girl-preferred text types (stories with female protagonists, mermaid-themed fiction, books with pink covers and/or pink illustrations, horse-themed fiction, realistic fiction, non-fiction in narrative form, romance, and princess-themed fiction). The number of examples listed below totals more than 67 because some examples fit two or more categories.

The text types can be divided as follows:

- Female protagonists (23)
- Mermaid-themed fiction (13) (note: this includes some examples of perceived interest)
- Pink covers or illustrations (13) (note: this includes some examples of perceived interest)
- Horse-themed fiction (10) (note: this includes some examples of perceived interest)
- Realistic fiction (10)
- Non-fiction in narrative form (2)
- Romance (2)
- Princess (2) (note: this section discusses only examples which refer to girls' expressed interests; other examples which refer to perceived preferences for these texts are discussed in the section on Claim 1 (gendered literacy

preferences, in terms of educators' perceptions of boys' reading preferences and labeling of "boy" and "girl" books).

6.2.1.1 Female protagonists. (23) Most of the posts and/or comments mentioning girls' favoring stories with female protagonists are authored by children and young adults (16) because the main purpose of two of the blogs from which data are sampled – B3 and B8 – is to publish reviews written by young people. The male public librarians (youth services) who are the main authors of those blogs frequently post children's reviews of reading materials sent to them by e-mail. The other posts and comments represent the perspectives of parents (2), teachers (1), librarians (2), an author, and an editor. All of the posts and comments, even if not written by children or young adults, represent the perspectives of girls in relation to their reading preferences (for example, a daughter's reading preference described by her mother). Overall, the main theme of the comments is girls' preference for fictional female protagonists.

Among the 23 comments relating to girls' interest in stories with female protagonists and the 10 comments referring to realistic fiction, 6 are reviews of a series called *Dork Diaries* (Rachel Renee Russell) incorporating female protagonists and realistic fiction. Two girl readers liken the series to the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series (Jeff Kinney) but with a female protagonist, as in:

I really like *Dork Diaries*. It's a GREAT BOOK! [emphasis in original] I like it because it's like *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and I like that. It's about a girl named Nikki Maxwell who goes to a new school. There is a mean girl named Makenzie, the most popular girl in the school. She has to be at three places at once because she promised everyone she would be there. She meets two friends, Chole [sic] and Zoe. (B3, 2011)

Dork Diaries, with a female protagonist, cast of female characters and plots involving popularity contests, conflicts between friends, and social intrigue, is a girl-favored series,

as there were no reviews of this series written by boys in the data collected from 2 librarian blogs (B3 and B8) soliciting reviews from young people. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, in contrast, garners three reviews by girls (on B3) as well as by boys (although still many more written by boys). The notion that girls are less reluctant to read a book featuring a male protagonist than boys to read a book featuring a female protagonist is upheld, at least in the sample data for these two series, *Dork Diaries* and *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, from two blogs featuring young people's book reviews.

Four of the 23 comments relating to girls' preference for female protagonists refer to the *Junie B. Jones* (Barbara Park) series, early readers with a female protagonist, following Junie's life from kindergarten through first grade. This popular series, like *Dork Diaries*, also does not have any reviews by boys in the data collected from B3, a blog soliciting reviews from young people (data collected from B8, the other blog posting reviews by young people, contains no reviews of *Junie B. Jones*).

A reference to *Junie B. Jones* written by a mother and posted on B4 depicts the series as an iconic girl-preferred text in the context of a school-based book club:

I volunteer in my kids' school and am leading a book group this year....There is a mixture of girls and boys and a variety of opinions about what makes a book great. All the kids are proficient readers who are able to read a chapter or 2 on their own during the week and come to group ready to discuss what they read. The problem is that we don't know what to read next. The girls want *Junie B. Jones*, the boys want *Diary of A Wimpy Kid*, and the teachers want something that will interest and challenge the kids but that isn't something they would normally read in their free time. (B4, 2010)

In this excerpt, the mother's description of the quest for a suitable reading choice for the book club clearly differentiates the girls' reading preferences from the boys', characterizing the girls as asking for the *Junie B. Jones* series (mentioned above as a girl-preferred series) and the boys as asking for *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (also discussed in

educators' perceptions of children's literacy preferences as an "iconic boy-preferred" series) to be chosen.

6.2.1.2 Mermaid-themed fiction. (13) Comments relating to books about mermaids appealing to girls, including both perceptions and expressed interest, are found in three of the twenty-three blogs. The perception that mermaid books are most appropriate for girls is apparent in the data, as in this female librarian blogger's review of a book from B22: "A beautiful, summery read for girls is the *Emily Windsnap* series by Liz Kessler. Emily is an average English girl who one day discovers that she is half mermaid! This leads to gorgeous undersea discoveries and adventures along with a fair bit of drama with her family and friends" (B22, 2010). The review specifies that this is a book "for girls."

The introduction to an interview with the female author/illustrator of B16, describing her children's book about the annual artists' mermaid parade in Brooklyn, New York City (the interview is posted on her blog), presents the perception that mermaids appeal to girls as universal:

What little girl doesn't love mermaids!...Every year thousands of spectators watch this art parade in Coney Island. This book turns the spectacle into a dreamy backdrop for a little girl's fantasy. The award-winning book is stuffed with colorful gouache illustrations and sure to delight fanciful girls. (B16, 2009)

The interviewer uses the word "girl" three times in this short excerpt, emphasizing that girls are the appropriate, and possibly, only, audience for the author/illustrator's new book. Later, in the actual interview, when asked, "why do you think little girls love mermaids?" the author/illustrator replies, "Mermaids are magical, shiny and beautiful. They spark the imagination. They stretch the boundaries of reality which children do quite naturally....I think mermaids help little girls feel their gorgeous femaleness, as well

as feel smart and strong (B16, 2009). The author/illustrator (B16 blogger) introduces a feminist perspective in her assertion that mermaids “spark imagination” and help girls “feel smart and strong,” but still echoes the interviewer’s perception that the key audience for her illustrated book is “little girls.”

The young adult blogger of B2 describes a trilogy about mermaids she loved as a child and her determined quest to find it as an adult, when she had forgotten the title. Although she remembered the name of the main character and the ending, the librarians were unable to help her. Her quest finally ends when she is sent one of the books she loved as the reward in a contest held by an author of young adult literature. In reflecting on the experience of reading the book, she notes that, as the first book about mermaids that she had ever read, it led to a lifelong obsession with books about mermaids (B2, 2010).

The comments posted to B2 in response to the blogger’s story of the first book about mermaids she ever read indicate that mermaids are also loved by many of the female readers of her blog. Eight comments refer to enjoying books about mermaids. Some of the comments include recommendations for further reading. In one response, the commenter indicates a willingness to read the books recommended by B2 blogger, confirms her shared interest in books about mermaids, and ends by recommending other books about mermaids. In this sense, the recommendation process reinforces the perception that mermaids are a girl-preferred theme in fiction (B2, 2010).

6.2.1.3 Pink covers or illustrations. (13) Data categorized according to this code are from nine of the twenty-three blogs, and the perspectives of librarians (4 comments) and parents (3 comments) are best represented among these statements relating to the

perception that books with pink covers or illustrations appeal to girls. A sub-theme of these comments is expression of resigned disgust with the idea that girls are attracted to the pink. Three comments refer to girls' expressed preference for pink books.

B7 blogger, a female librarian (youth collection specialist for a major Northeastern public library), in reviewing the *Fancy Nancy* (Jane O'Connor and Robin Preiss Glasser) series, takes up the sub-theme of resigned disgust toward pink covers. She says that as a librarian, her initial reaction to the pink covers is that, like similar pink books of little substance, they're designed simply to trick girls into reading them. However, upon actually reading the series, B7 blogger realizes the books are somewhat good (B7, 2013). Although she half-heartedly recommends *Fancy Nancy*, she also expresses dismay that the series' pink covers will attract girls' attention and that many books with pink covers are of low quality. She thereby resists the association of the pink covers with girls but also assumes that girls will want to read the *Fancy Nancy* books because of the pink covers.

In a similar vein, a mother explores her dissatisfaction with the pink, glittery covers of the books in the fairy series her son wanted to read as a five-year-old but then hid after realizing that he might be made fun of for reading them. She expresses frustration that the books' pink packaging may entice only girls to read the books (B21, 2012). She resists the idea that only girls should want to read a book with a pink cover; however, she also assumes, despite her son's preference for the book as evidence to the contrary, that the pink will only appeal to girls. A comment by B7 blogger, the female public librarian just mentioned, in an interview, also supports the idea that some boys will indeed read this type of book: "... I had a boy come up once and he was like I want all

your fairy books....So that's the thing. You make all these assumptions and a kid just walks up and blows them all to pieces” (Interview 1 transcript, 2013).

Another mother, a commenter on B4, describes her daughter’s affinity for pink books and her parenting strategy for steering her daughter away from them:

I try to let her love pink glitter and purple (drowning victim) lipstick and everything covered in Princesses and have faith that my smart, savvy little girl will grow out of it just like I did. But I also try to expose her to anything I can that will speed that growing out of it process up some. (B4, 2009)

This mother treats her daughter’s infatuation with pink princess books (this excerpt is thereby counted as a reference to both “pink” and “princess”) as a phase soon to be grown “out of,” while at the same time aggressively providing her with other reading materials to encourage distance from what she refers to as “that miserable pink mess” (B4, 2009).

A less resistant attitude is taken by a blogger who works as a librarian (though she does not have the MLS), as she reviews the *Babymouse* series: “*Babymouse*, by Jennifer Holm, is almost irresistible to girls, with its cute – but not cutesy - black and white and pink art” (B22, 2012). Comments by teachers that fit this code reiterate the perception that pink book covers and illustrations appeal to girls, for example, when B6 blogger labels a book displaying the title in pink letters as most appropriate for tween girls, adding that he suspects boys will not want to be seen with a book with pink (B6, 2011).

B12 blogger, an author/illustrator and homeschooling dad, also perceives the *Babymouse* series as appropriate for girls but faces resistance from his older son. He asks his children “Who likes the *Babymouse* series?” and all of the children reply that they like it, but the father does not hear his son’s answer, so he asks him specifically. His son replies, and the father, son, and one of the daughters continue the dialogue as follows:

Son (age 10): I said "me." You just couldn't hear me over them.
 Dad: So it's okay with you that Babymouse is a girl. And that the books are pink?
 Son: I don't care about that.
 Dad: You're still cool? You're still macho?
 Daughter: There IS one that is not pink. It's a Halloween *Babymouse*. *Babymouse*, *Monstermash*. It's ORANGE! If you want to get a boy started on the series, read *Monstermash* to him first. Get him started on the orange one and then move to pink. Next read *Babymouse*, *Puppy Love* because that's hilarious. (B12, 2009)

In this example, the father's expectation that the series is more suitable for girls because the protagonist is female and the covers are pink is quickly resisted by his son who, in response to his father's heckling, states: "I don't care about that." This example is also coded as "children's expressed resistant reading preferences" because in this case, the son defies the father's expectation that he should dislike the series because the main character, Babymouse, is a girl. Moreover, the sister supports her brother by suggesting that boys might indeed be interested in the series. However, she does suggest that boys start with the Halloween-themed book in the series with an orange, rather than pink, cover. Moreover, when her father (B12 blogger) asks her why the *Babymouse* series is her favorite, she replies, "Because she's hilarious. And she's pink. And she's cute. And her books are really, really good," (B12, 2009) thereby declaring her own preference for the pink cover. B12 blogger also color-codes the text for his children's names (the terms "daughter" and "son" were substituted for their names in the excerpt above) on the blog according to gendered norms, highlighting the names of his daughters with pink and orange and his son's name in blue.

An interview with B7 blogger indicates that the son of B12 blogger is not alone, among boys, in his enjoyment of the *Babymouse* series. As part of her response to a question about which themes in children's literature "would be considered more appropriate for girls and which ones would be considered more appropriate for boys" she

describes the *Babymouse* series, saying: "...Jenny Holm does the *Babymouse* books, which are universally pink. Some of them are orange and slightly other colors, but um mostly they're pink and she has a lot of boy fans and she talks about that" (Interview 1 transcript, 2013). Moreover, B7 blogger mentions the series as a counter-example to demonstrate how absurd (in her opinion) it is that not one of the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* books (earlier described in the findings as an "iconic boy" series) has been published with a pink cover. She laments that, despite her "rallying for pink," the Valentine's Day theme of the most recent book in the series, and her reassurances to people she knows in publishing that "it's the latest *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. The boys are going to pick up a pink book. They're going to be walking around with a pink book," (Interview 1 transcript, 2013), it was decided to make the cover brown because the people she talked to felt that "no boy will pick up a pink book" (Interview 1 transcript, 2013). The publisher thereby, ignoring the advice of a children's literature expert that the popularity of the series will cancel out the taboo represented by a pink cover, produces the book with a brown cover. In doing so, the publisher reinforces the normative perception that boys will not read a book with a pink cover.

6.2.1.4 Horse-themed fiction. (10) References to books about horses appealing to girls span four of the twenty-three blogs from which data are sampled and include both perceptions and expressed interest. Seven comments are written by mothers in response to B4 blogger's blog post entitled, "We Recommend: Horse Books for Girls" (2011) requesting suggestions for books about horses and refer to either the mothers' childhood love of horse books or their own daughters' love of horse books. For example, "I can't

remember if *King of the Wind* has any outright cruelty or death in it, but I do remember loving this book when I was a girl,” (B4, 2011) and,

My 9 yo daughter is horse crazy and loved all of the *Misty of Chincoteague* books as well. There is also a historical fiction series called *Horse Diaries* (by various authors...the first title is *Horse Diaries #1: Elska*) that are written in the voice of the horse and are set in different time periods. The protagonists are young girls and the girls and horses are quite heroic. (B4, 2011)

Here, the mother mentions two horse-themed series that her “horse crazy” daughter has enjoyed reading and describes why she perceives the *Horse Diaries* series to be so appealing: the stories, narrated by horses, are about “heroic” girls and horses.

Other comments for this code are written by a teacher, a school librarian, and an author. The comment by the male teacher clearly defines the assumed audience for a horse book he reviews on the blog as 10-12-year-old girls (B6, 2011). Another comment by a male school librarian defines a reviewed book’s audience in the same way. He suggests the *Breyer Stablemates* series as a high interest series that will appeal to girls and circulate well. The review is included as part of a post describing the top ten circulated books for his school library for the 2010-2011 school year (B10, 2011). The comments by a female author, excerpted from an interview with her by B2 blogger, discuss her childhood obsession with horseback riding. Since she was from a large family and her parents did not have extra money for riding lessons, she saved up her own gift money to pay for riding lessons. However, she did not learn to ride well until the age of fifty, when her husband gave her the birthday present of riding lessons. She took lessons alongside little girls, feeling clumsy and inadequate at first, but gradually gaining skill. She also describes how her husband began horseback riding because she spent so much

time riding and he wanted to spend time with her. Her novel about centaurs was inspired by her love of horses (B2, 2012).

6.2.1.5 Realistic fiction. (10) Of the ten examples referring to realistic fiction, one is by a mother, one is by an editor, one is by an author, one is by a librarian, and six are by girls. Six of the ten refer to the series *Dork Diaries* (as mentioned above), and two refer to Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's *Alice* series. One of the comments relating to the *Alice* series is written by a girl reader of the series and the other is written by the author herself reflecting on letters she has received from readers – letters which she claims guide her writing of the series. The girl reader's enthusiastic review of one of the books in the series reads, "I wrote a review on this book because it is my favorite book. I love this book because it is reality, adventure, and mystery all in one" (B3, 2012). She describes the book as her favorite and pinpoints the representations of "reality" as one of the most important aspects. The other comment on the *Alice* series is excerpted from a *Washington Post* interview with the author (posted by B9 blogger), Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, and talks about how fan mail (about 20 – 30 letters per day) guides her writing of the series in that it helps her know what her young readers are worried about and interested in reading about. She describes how these fans, the girls who have read the *Alice* books, identify with or otherwise respond to the realism of the series by divulging personal (relationship-focused) secrets in the letters they write to her (B9, 2006).

6.2.1.6 Non-fiction in narrative form. (2) Two comments (categorized under girls' reading preferences matching traditionally girl-preferred text types) refer to a preference for non-fiction in the form of narrative. B5 blogger, a female teacher recounts her childhood reading preferences: "I have to confess to having been a narrative girl — be it

Helen Keller's autobiography, a book on Albert Schweitzer, or one of those *Childhood of Famous Americans* (don't worry, I know they are fiction) — I liked my facts presented as story." B5 blogger's statement is similar to the following comment from B4:

I spent most of my life convinced that I hated nonfiction--because all it was, was pages and pages of diagrams or dates or drawings of airplanes, right? No, that's just what the kid in front of my [*sic*] in all my classes...read. He was a totally stereotypical boy reader, and I saw what he read and wanted no part of it. I still don't like things that read like textbooks, but memoirs, histories, those kinds of things, I love. (B4, 2010)

B4 commenter, a female, shares B5 blogger's preference for narrative forms of non-fiction. Moreover, she labels the non-fiction reference-type reading choices of the boy whose desk was in front of hers in grade school "stereotypical."

6.2.1.7 Romance. (2) Only two specific references to romance were found in the data. One of the two references to romance is by an editorial intern for a major literary magazine consulted by librarians and teachers for reviews of literature for young people, who, in a post on B21, recalls her reading preferences of chick lit and realistic coming-of-age novels. Her recollections focus on the angst of teenage love depicted in the novels she read and the way in which she could connect to the female protagonists of the stories (B21, 2011).

The other comment referring to romance is by a female teacher, commenting on B6 in response to the blogger's (a male teacher) review of the young adult series, *I'd Tell You I Love You, But Then I'd Have to Kill You* (Ally Carter), which features a female protagonist and other female characters from an all-girls prep school (actually a school for CIA spy training), and romance. The teacher states that the girls at the junior high where she works always have the books in the series, which she describes as light in tone but smart, checked out of the library (B6, 2010). The teacher's comment thereby

confirms the male teacher's assessment of the appropriate audience for the eloquent and engaging series as 12-year-old girls (B6, 2010).

6.2.1.8 Princess-themed fiction. (1) The other references to princess-themed texts found in the data sampled are discussed in the section on Claim 1: Gendered reading preferences, in terms of educators' perceptions of boys' reading preferences and labeling of "boy" and "girl" books. The one reference to a princess-themed text describing a girl's expressed interest is the following comment by a mother describing her daughter's preference for princess-themed texts: "For my girly-girl daughter, sometimes that means a slew of pink princess chapter books that give me migraines. I don't relate to them, but she does" (B4, 2012). In this example, the mother pinpoints "pink princess chapter books" as her daughter's, whom she describes as stereotypically "girly," preference. Moreover, the hyperbolic "girly-girl" label reinforces the notion of feminine identity forming in childhood and the way in which that identity is associated with "pink" and "princess."

6.2.2 Sub-Claim 2: Boys' expressed reading preferences matching traditional perceptions. In fifty-six examples, boys' reading preferences match what are perceived to be traditional boy-preferred text types (including stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines).

In this section, examples mentioning "iconic boy" texts (*Captain Underpants*, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, and *Percy Jackson*) are included only if they also mention other text types (of those listed above), and some of the examples fit into more than one category. Of the examples referring to boys' reading preferences matching traditional boy-preferred text types, the greatest number (28) refer to a preference for male

protagonists (i.e., mentioning reading books with male protagonists, or, in the case of one blog, depict a boy reader's drawings of male protagonists). A typical review written by a boy reader (posted on B3) reads:

A boy finds that he has a super power. He can run so fast that you can hardly see him. But when the government and several companies all owned by the same villain find out about his powers, the family shuts themselves in. But that won't stop the villain from getting his way. When he captures the parents, the boy must rescue them from the villain's evil clutches. The villain figures out how to take his powers away and use them for a super-powered army. Can the boy get his powers back, rescue his parents, and defeat the villain? (B3, 2012)

In this example, the boy reader focuses on the male protagonist's superpowers and heroic actions, including saving his parents from and defeating a dictator/mogul villain (owns the government and businesses), throughout the review.

Also included in the data are comments by parents referring to their sons' preference for stories with male protagonists. For instance, a mother here credits a series with a male protagonist (along with gross humor) with helping her son develop an interest in reading: "My eight year old loves the series *Horrid Henry* which I believe I discovered on this blog. Amazing breakthroughs with that!" (B4, 2010).

In terms of boys' reading preferences, the second most commonly mentioned preference is for comics. For instance, B22 blogger (public librarian/mother) here describes her sons' reading preferences: "They are also huge fans of the Marvel comics *Genext* and *Runaways*. Also *Axe Cop*" (B22, 2012). In another example, B20 blogger, a male book designer/editor, describes his own preference for comics as a teen and his connecting that preference to an editorial project: "*Sidekicks*, here is a project that I thought would be easy. After all its [*sic*] comics related and I spent a good portion of my high school career face down in them (nerd!)....Wrong" (B20, 2011). In a similar

example, a male public librarian (youth services) recalls purchasing superhero comics as a boy: “When I was a kid comics cost 25 cents and one of the comics I bought every month was called *World's Finest* and it stared [sic] Batman and Superman” (B8, 2011). As comics were once quite inexpensive, it makes sense that they were a popular reading material for young people; as to why boys particularly enjoyed them is less clear, except to say that the subject matter – superheroes, fighting villains and saving the innocent with the help of superpowers – has been constructed as masculine. Although the cost of comics has risen substantially over the years, it remains a favored text type. B3 blogger, also a male public librarian (youth services), while interviewing a male author (and former writer for Cartoon Network and Disney) for the blog, asks the author about his reading of comics as a child:

Who was your favorite comic character when you were a boy? Do you have a favorite character now?

Who was my favorite comix [sic] character as a boy - Hmmm. Truth is I was never really a super-hero kind of comics reader (though that would be the cool answer!). I did love *Peanuts* and reading the Sunday Comics pages was a ritual for me. These days I really like *Pearls Before Swine* because the characters are so great... and because my son, who also likes to make cartoons is a big fan. (B3, 2008)

The exchange between the librarian and the author demonstrates the following: the librarian's presumption that the male author would have enjoyed reading comics as a child; the author's expressed preference for newspaper comics (including *Peanuts*) as a boy and simultaneous acknowledgement that he “should” have enjoyed superhero comics (in replying, “that would be the cool answer!”); and, the author's own son's preference for comics, including both reading them and drawing them.

Expressed preference for other traditionally boy-preferred text types are mentioned in the data in this order: graphic novels (7), science fiction (6), adventure (5),

non-fiction (5), sports (5), fantasy (2), gross humor (2 – both refer to *Horrid Henry*, one to both *Horrid Henry* and *Captain Underpants*), vehicles (2), and magazines (1). Some of the examples counted among these referenced more than one category.

A concept introduced in the section on educators' perceptions of children's reading preferences –institutional and social biases against non-fiction – is also evident in comments referring to preferences for non-fiction. In the following example, a mother's comment recognizes the bias against non-fiction (coupled with the elevation of story), saying, "My 5 year old boy loves the Roald Dahl stories for kids, as well as anything factual (book about volcanoes, animals, etc... I know these are not story books, but anything a kid likes reading is good, no?)" (B4, 2010). Her questioning at the end is also resistant, implying that her son's reading of non-fiction is fine by her, although he is not reading the preferred narrative fiction.

In contrast, in another case, a mother's personal bias matches the institutional bias against non-fiction: "My son (7 – about to be 8) was not interested in reading. What books he brought home from the library were non-fiction – generally about animals. He has always loved "fact" books" (B4, 2012). The mother does not count her son's reading of non-fiction as reading.

6.2.3 Counter claim A: Children's resistant reading preferences. Children's expressions of resistant – that is, not conforming to what would be considered gender-normative preferences (as described in the sub-claims above) – reading preferences are evident (43). Of the resistant examples, 24 reference resistant preferences expressed by males, 17 reference resistant preferences expressed by females, and 2 refer to both females and males. Eight of the 43 total examples refer to adults reflecting on their

resistant reading choices as children. Six of the 43 examples are parents describing their daughters' resistant reading preferences. Of those, three are by mothers, one is by a father, and for two, there is no definite indication as to whether the parent is a mother or father. Eleven of the 43 examples are parents describing their sons' resistant reading preferences, and all eleven are written by mothers. Nine of the 43 examples are written by children (one is a dialogue among a father, son, and two daughters, but the resistant perspective is that of the son), and of those, five are written by males and four by females.

An example of a parent writing about a daughter who prefers traditionally “boy” books reads:

We have a 6-yo girl who is just as interested in books on football, soccer, the vessels and characters of *Star Wars* and space in general than anything else. Other favorites are *Amelia Bedelia* and *Knuffle Bunny*. So, in particular in our house the concept that there are 'girl' books and 'boy' books is well, simply not true. (B4, 2010)

The mother comments on her daughter's resistant preference for books about sports and science fiction – themes that are perceived to be boy-preferred. An example of a mother writing about her 7-year-old son who enjoys reading traditionally “girl” books focuses on his enjoyment of books and series with female protagonists, including *Anne of Green Gables*, *Betsy-Tacy*, *A Little Princess*, and *The Secret Garden* (B21, 2012).

Some examples, like two by educators, a librarian and teacher, focus on a specific text in order to illustrate children's resistant reading preferences. A female teacher here refers to her experiences of using *Alice in Wonderland* as a curricular text: “Having taught Alice for a billion years I can say with assurance that it is definitely not a girl book in the sense...suggested. In my experience, boys tend to like it as much and even more than girls in my classroom” (B5, 2009). Her commentary focuses on the notion that

although *Alice in Wonderland* features a female protagonist, many of her male students enjoy the story as much or more than the female students.

A male public librarian (youth services), writing about boys' reading choices, mentions boys' reading *Nancy Drew* graphic novels as an example of a resistant reading choice:

Another big myth is that guys won't read books with girls as main characters. I know for a fact that's not true because some of you have written reviews and said that you liked the book even though the main character was a girl. (I saw a couple of guys today curl up in the library with *Nancy Drew* graphic novels!) What guys want is a GOOD STORY [emphasis in original]. Give us that and we'll like it. (B3, 2009)

This example uses the *Nancy Drew* books in order to de-bunk the myth of boys' refusal to read books with female protagonists, and it emphasizes the notion of "good" stories superseding perceived gender-appropriateness of a book, a theme to be further discussed below.

The two examples in this section referring to both boys and girls share a focus on the notion that children respond best to books that are "good" rather than based on a perception of which sex is the appropriate audience for the book. For example, a mother, writing about her experiences reading with her two sons and with other children, writes that no child has ever told her that they did not like a book she had read with them based on the fact that it was more appropriate for the opposite sex, and she claims that the most important thing is that the book is "good" (B21, 2012).

Similarly, in reference to this post, a teacher/mother/grandmother writer comments that her children and students enjoyed "good" books, and she chose "good" books to read with them. Some of their favorite books had female protagonists, others had male protagonists, and the sex of the protagonists did not much relate to whether

books were deemed favorites (B21, 2012). This example reiterates the idea introduced in the first example of “good” books as accessible to children of either sex. It is also clear that in this teacher’s estimation, normative perceptions of whether a book is for girls or for boys is based primarily on the sex of the protagonist(s). In all of the examples mentioned, the definition of a “good” book is ambiguous. It could refer to the quality of the writing or to whether the story is sufficiently interesting. However, it is an important descriptive umbrella term in that it is presented as a textual quality that supersedes gender-appropriateness in terms of relevance to children.

Of the nine resistant examples representing children’s actual voices, all nine are book reviews. Four of the examples are coded as resistant because they represent preferences for protagonists that are the opposite of the sex of the child reader. Of those four examples, one is coded as resistant because it represents a girl expressing a preference for a book with a male protagonist, while the other three are coded as resistant because they represent boys’ expressing a preference for a book with a female protagonist. For example, a boy reader writes of a book in the *Sardine in Outer Space* series (Emmanuel Guibert): “Don't turn this book away Just because the main character is a girl, [*sic*] this series is full of missing brains to scamcorders. when [*sic*] I read this book, I was laughing all night” (B3, 2008). Here, the male reader acknowledges the perception that boys would not read the book because the protagonist is female and asks fellow male readers to overlook that fact.

Four of the nine resistant examples representing children’s actual voices are coded as resistant because they represent resistant choices in terms of genre. Two of

those examples are girls reviewing non-fiction. For instance, in the following example, a female reader reviews a work of non-fiction about pirates:

This book is awesome! It tells you all about the history of pirates. Discover the unseen world of Pirates. The Punishments are listed too. There is a treasure map where people think treasure is hidden. There [sic] weapons are listed. Here are some weapons: Greanade [sic], ax, cutlass and pistol. (B3, 2011)

In this example, the female reader, a prolific reader and contributor of reviews to B3 (a blog maintained by male public librarians focusing on boy readers but also accepting reviews by girl readers) expresses high praise for a work of non-fiction and also discusses the pirates' weapons.

6.2.4 Counter claim: Gender-neutral children's books and series. (29)

Specific books and series are reported to appeal to both boys and girls; among the 29 examples, 14, although mostly written (or in one case, transcribed) by adults, represent the perspectives of children. Of these 14, 12 are written by mothers giving the perspectives of their own children or of other children with whom they have interacted.

For instance, one is written by a mother who volunteers at her children's school, advising a book club:

There are 6 members of the group, all in second grade. There is a mixture of girls and boys and a variety of opinions about what makes a book great....We will be finishing our first book selection, *The Boxcar Children*, this month. None of the kids would have chosen this book because they thought it looked "boring," but 3 chapters into it, they were all hooked. (B4, 2010)

This example is noteworthy in its mention of a book club as a potential space in which gender barriers regarding reading preferences may be overcome. The other two examples of the 14 representing children's perspectives (although written by adults) are by a female school librarian and a female teacher.

Four of the 29 examples represent mothers' perspectives; three are written by adult females of undetermined roles; two are by B10 blogger, a male school librarian; two are by B6 blogger, a male teacher; and two represent the perspectives of female public librarians. The examples representing the perspectives of adults are speculative, for example, projecting that a book will be popular with both girls and boys, as when B10 blogger, a male school librarian, predicts that a particular title will attract the attention of many children – both boys and girls (B10, 2012).

Other examples reflect on the popularity of certain titles in terms of their appeal for both males and females. For instance, a mother states: "This must be one reason (among many others) why *Harry Potter* was so popular: boys and girls could relate to it" (B4, 2010). One other example is by B2 blogger, a female young adult, who mentions a novel that she and her younger brother had trouble sharing, each wanting to be the first to read it (B2, 2007).

In terms of titles specifically referred to among the 29 examples, one mention was made of the author Maurice Sendak (B4, 2010); additionally, one of his books, *In the Night Kitchen* (B4, 2010), was mentioned in another comment. Both of these posts are written by mothers describing their children's preferences. Two comments from B4, one by a mother and another by a female of undetermined role, refer to the works of Judy Blume, especially to the *Fudge* series (B4, 2010).

From B4 also comes a post about the *Warriors* (Erin Hunter) fantasy series; B4 blogger, after describing her daughter and other children's love of the series along with her own distaste of the series, concludes that she should simply accept them "because if they can reach through all the miles and pounds of bullshit that separate 10 year old boys

and girls from each other, then they are a power to be respected” (B4, 2010). A commenter responds, “Having worked in the kids room of a library till very recently, I could find my way to the *Warriors* shelf with my eyes closed” (B4, 2010), supporting B4 blogger’s claim of the series’ popularity.

Brian Jacques’ *Redwall* series is mentioned on two blogs. B9 blogger, a female school librarian, notes children of both sexes in her description of the series. She says that boys enjoy the books if they enjoy reading but the length of the books can scare off boys who do not enjoy reading. She also notes that girls enjoy the books, and she was acquainted with one girl who would not buy a purse unless the large hardcover version of the book would fit in the purse (B9, 2006). B9 blogger, in this description, typifies boys as reluctant readers, but describes the series as appealing to both male and female readers. A mother commenting on B4 echoes, “My own now adult daughter LOVED *Redwall*...” (B4, 2010).

Other series that are mentioned twice or more include the following:

- *Judy Moody* (Megan McDonald, illus. Peter H. Reynolds), mentioned twice (B4, 2010; B21, 2012)
- *The Hunger Games* (B21, 2012; B4, 2010)
- Beverly Cleary’s *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* (B4, 2010; B4, 2010), along with one other title by Beverly Cleary, *Beezus and Ramona* (B21, 2012)
- Judi Barrett’s *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (B4, 2010), along with a reference to Judi Barrett (B4, 2010)

Between the two counter claims explored in this section, the examples of resistance number 72 altogether, and so represent a significant counterpoint to the 123 examples in which children's gendered reading preferences are evident.

6.3 Summary/Connection to Research Questions

6.3.1 Response to RQ1. What are the conceptions of gendered literacy among literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers); creators of texts for children (published authors, editors, and published illustrators); and, children/young adults, as represented in their blogging activities? To answer RQ1, gendered reading preferences, in terms of girls' (Section 6.2.1) and boys' (Section 6.2.2) gendered reading preferences, are the third most prominent among all the conceptions of gendered literacy evident in the data. Of those reading preferences, girls' expressed reading preferences matching what are perceived to be traditional girl-preferred text types (stories with female protagonists, mermaid-themed fiction, books with pink covers and/or pink illustrations, horse-themed fiction, realistic fiction, non-fiction in narrative form, romance, and princess-themed fiction) (67 examples) are most evident, followed by boys' expressed reading preferences matching what are perceived to be traditional boy-preferred text types (including stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines) (56 examples).

6.3.2 Responses to RQ2 and RQ4. RQ2: How do the conceptions of gendered literacy identified through the blogging activities of literacy educators, creators of texts for children, and children/young adults compare to the theoretical conceptions identified in the literature review? The examples of gendered reading preferences as expressed by

boys and girls fit with the first part of the literature-based conceptual model – 1) gendered literacy as performed by multiple actors, including children and young adults, literacy educators, and those in the publishing industry – and also align with the girls and boys displaying differing reading preferences aspect of that concept discussed in the literature review. The literature review (i.e. Topping & Renaissance Learning, 2012; Moss, 2007; McKechnie, 2006; Merisuo-Strom, 2006) particularly documents boys' expressed preference for comics, non-fiction, science fiction, and sports. The findings for the dissertation add to the knowledge base about boys' and girls' expressed reading preferences by qualitatively examining a large body of data in depth, adding to the categories of both expressed and perceived interests, including, for girls, princess themed fiction, chick lit, horse-themed fiction, mermaid-themed fiction, and books with pink covers and/or pink illustrations; and, for boys, stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines.

However, in answer to RQ4 (What patterns, if any, of resistance to the dominant conceptions of gendered literacy may be found among the blog posts analyzed?), the findings for this section also include 43 examples of resistant reading preferences (preferences that would not be considered gender-normative). The resistant examples are so numerous that it could be argued that these expressed reading preferences constitute a norm, rather than a minority. Of the “resistant” examples (as discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.5 – Claim 1: Educators' perceptions of children's reading preferences and labeling of “boy” and “girl” books; Sub-Claim 4, addressing educators' expectations of children's gendered preferences for story protagonists based on whether they are female

or male), in defiance of the belief that girls are more likely to cross gender boundaries when it comes to reading preferences, 24 of the referenced resistant preferences are expressed by males, while 17 referenced resistant preferences expressed by females, and 2 referred to both females and males.

6.3.3 Response to RQ3. What similarities and differences, if any, are represented in conceptions of gendered literacy among literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers); creators of texts for children (published authors, editors, and published illustrators); and, children/young adults, as represented in their blogging activities? In response to RQ3, the findings for this section discussing gendered reading preferences, in terms of boys' and girls' expressed differing reading preferences, are compared with the findings for the most prominent among the conceptions of gendered literacy: educators' perceptions of children's reading preferences and labeling of "boy" and "girl" books (Chapter 4).

One sub-claim of Claim 1, perceptions of children's reading preferences and labeling of "boy" and "girl" books, is the following: educators align boys' reading preferences with the following: stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3). The number of examples (53) is roughly the same as the number of examples (56) of boys' expressed reading preferences matching what are perceived to be traditional boy-preferred text types (including stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines).

Claim 1, Sub-Claim 4 (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.5): Educators expect boys to prefer male protagonists and girls to prefer female protagonists. They also assume that girls are more likely than boys to read a story featuring a protagonist of the opposite sex. (22) – is also evident in terms of Claim 3 (gendered reading preferences), in 23 examples of girls' preferences for stories with female protagonists (which accounted for the greatest number of examples for girls' preferred text types, Section 6.2.1.1) and in 28 examples of boys' preferences for male protagonists (which accounted for the greatest number of examples for boys' preferred text types, Section 6.2.2).

Nonetheless, there are also significant differences between educators' perceptions of young people's reading preferences and children's/young adults' expressions of their reading preferences. Such differences include the influence of childhood and parenting experience on parents, which they perceive as determinative of their ability to judge the reading preferences of children of the opposite sex. (14 incidences, Chapter 4, Section 4.2.7), and in educators' disparagement of "boy" (14) and "girl" (10) books according to qualities marking those texts as traditionally "boy" or "girl" (Chapter 4, Sections 4.2.8 and 4.2.9).

CHAPTER 7 GENDERED LITERACY IN THE U.S. CHILDREN'S PUBLISHING

7.1 Claim 4: Perceptions of the Predominance of Whites and Females in the U.S. Children's Publishing

This section discusses examples from the data sampled in which bloggers and commenters describe the children's publishing industry in the United States as female- and white (Caucasian)-dominated (35 total incidences). Compared to the three other claims, the examples for this section represent the smallest number of incidences among the data sampled. Specifically, the two sub-claims support the main claim that the children's publishing industry in the United States is perceived as female- and white (Caucasian)-dominated. There are also many examples to the contrary, so in terms of the data sampled, resistant examples are not in the minority. However, the large number of resistant examples may be because one of the blogs (B7) from which data are sampled focuses on diversity in children's literature.

Table 10

Claim 4, Perceptions of the Predominance of Whites and Females in Children's Publishing – Sub-Claims and Counter Claims

| Sub-Claim/Counter Claim | Incidences |
|--|------------------------|
| 1. Thirteen references are to women in the children's publishing industry in the United States, versus five to men in the publishing industry. (authors – 11, librarians – 3, children/young adults – 1, editors– 1, parents – 1, publishing representatives– 1) | 13 (women), 5 (men) |
| 2. Bloggers and commenters perceive white Caucasian bias in character representation and cover art, especially in terms of a lack of African-American males, in children's books published in the United States. (authors/illustrators – 6, librarians – 6, editors – 3, adults of undetermined role – 1, parents – 1) | 17 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counter Claim A: References to portrayals of characters of color in children's books published in the U.S. are evident. (librarians – 10, editors – 2, authors/illustrators – 1, parents – 1) | 14 |

| | |
|--|----|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counter Claim B: Book characters who challenge gender stereotypes and/or sexual norms are mentioned. (parents – 8, librarians – 6, adults of undetermined role – 2, children/young adults – 1) | 17 |
|--|----|

7.2 Discussion of Sub-Claims and Counter Claims

7.2.1 Sub-claim 1: References to women versus men in publishing. Among the data sampled, 13 references are to women, versus 5 to men, in the children's U.S. publishing industry. Ten examples are actual mentions of women in publishing, and, in analyzing the data, authors, illustrators, editors, literary agents, marketers, and anyone directly involved in book production are included. Two other examples are comments that presume the children's publishing industry to be female-dominated, and one example looks at gendered patterns in relation to historical debates over the winners of the Newbery Medal, given each year by the Association for Library Service to Children (American Library Association) to the American author of a book for children voted best by an elected committee of librarians.

On two occasions, African-American illustrator/author of B17 comments on his minority status – as a male among many female authors and illustrators. For example, when attending a local writer's workshop, he comments that, to his knowledge, he was the only male author/artist in attendance, but really appreciated the help he received at the workshop (B17, 2009). B17 blogger also refers to his literary agent and editor, both of whom are women. On one occasion, commenting on his recent lack of writing inspiration, he says, that in order to hold onto the female literary agent he has recently found, he needs to produce work that will sell (B17, 2008). Two of the ten examples of women in publishing mention women in positions of leadership. For instance, a female editor

describes a project she is directing for her editor-in-chief, who is on maternity leave (B19, 2009).

Two examples represent the presumption of the predominance of women among those who produce books for young people. One is a comment by a school librarian made on B3, a librarian-run blog aimed at boy readers, in response to the posting of an interview with a boy reader/writer. In the course of the interview, the boy describes his distaste for romance; in response, the female school librarian writes, “most books out there are written by adult GIRLS, so the romance is a bit mushy” (B3, 2010). This example also labels romance as a perceived girl-preferred genre. A frequent commenter to B4, a mother, similarly presumes youth literature to be a female-dominated field, commenting on a discussion of the perception that there are not enough suitable books for young boy readers, “I’m pretty sure that YA and kid fiction has been girl-dominated because it’s a field women have always been welcome to publish in, not being “real” literature and all” (B4, 2010). This comment not only presumes that the field of youth publishing is female-dominated but also that the reason behind that is that youth publishing is not perceived to be worthy of serious consideration.

An example from B21, the blog of a prominent literary magazine pertaining to youth literature, presents the historical debate over selection criteria for the Newbery award, noting that the Newbery medal, the winner of which is chosen by librarians, was initially opposed by authors of popular series fiction for boys, who complained about librarians, whom they claimed did not understand boys’ reading preferences (B21, 2012). The blogger surmises that in response, the initial winners were works written by male authors. A decade later, a shift to female winners occurred, and the Newbery winning-

books were all by female authors – books that were considered “girl” books (B21, 2012). This discussion of the shift from “boy books” to “girl books” as winners of the Newbery medal and ensuing responses may explain, in part, the perception of children’s literature as female-dominated.

Such attitudes are echoed in two comments made by a male author of non-fiction in the course of an interview. At one point, discussing what he perceives as a bias against non-fiction among educators, he states, “I’m pretty sure that the female world in America is the set of people who write, edit, publish, and purchase books for elementary school kids. By purchase I mean, the moms in the bookstore, the school librarians, the public librarians” (Interview 3 transcript, 2013). At another point in the discussion, noting that he has been visiting schools due to the increased interest in non-fiction brought about by Common Core Standards, he says that most of the schools he visits have never before invited an author of non-fiction to visit. He comments, “previously when they’ve had an author visit it was a picture book author, how she writes a story, or a novelist, and where do you get your ideas from, etc.” (Interview 3 transcript, 2013). Here, his own assumption of children’s literature as female-dominated is evident in reference to the visiting picture book author as “she.”

Although there are more references to women in publishing in the data – including 10 examples actually mentioning women in publishing, 2 examples expressing the assumption that the children’s publishing industry is female-dominated, and 1 analyzing gendered patterns in relation to historical debates over the winners of the Newbery Medal – 5 references to men in publishing are also evident. One refers to an editor, two refer to literary agents, and two references are to author/illustrators. However,

B17, as he is one of the author/illustrators, expresses amusement over the fact that he, along with one other male attendee, were acknowledged with special prizes at an African American Children's Book Writers and Illustrators conference he attended (B17, 2009). Two other examples are from B3, a blog by public male librarians intended for an audience of boy readers. And, three examples are from B17, the blog of an African-American male author/illustrator.

In an interview with B7 blogger, a white female public librarian who specializes in materials for youth, she notes,

There are a lot of women, in the librarian world as well as the publishing world.... Traditionally, women were allowed to work in these areas so that is where they went....the weird thing about the publishing world is that when you do run across a guy he tends to be the head of something, so there are a couple of male editors that are just editors like everything else but boy they seem to move up pretty fast in the publishing world. And to a certain extent it has to do with being remembered. I mean there are a billion women with long brown hair, just graduated from Brown, and now they're assistant editors, and I can't keep them apart, I seriously can't keep them apart....So, when you can distinguish somebody from the pack you kind of cling to that, so I think that to a certain extent is why the guys seem to do as well as they do. (Interview 1 transcript, 2013)

B7 blogger, as a materials selector for a library system and also a published author, has frequent contact with publishing representatives, so her commentary on the predominance of women in publishing, but with men in the positions of power, is based on real experience.

7.2.2 Sub-claim 2: Bloggers' and commenters' perception of white Caucasian bias in children's books. Bloggers and commenters perceive white Caucasian bias in character representation and cover art, especially in terms of a lack of African-American males, in children's books published in the United States (17). Seven of the seventeen comments are from B7, the blog of a white female public children's librarian in charge of

materials selection for a large U.S. public library system, who often blogs about diversity issues in terms of children's literature. The posts from which data are collected feature reviews of books with African-American protagonists, while at the same time commenting that these books are rare among youth literature as a whole. For instance, in reviewing one such novel, she notes that upon first glance she mistook the book for something else altogether. As both apology and explanation, she says that it was because of all the middle grade fiction published (in the U.S.) that year, the majority of which she had looked at, it was one of the few showing a young African-American male on the book jacket, and one of the few with an African-American protagonist at all (B7, 2012). This statement speaks to her familiarity, as a materials selector for the library, with the newly published works in 2012 and her concern that very few African-American males are the focus of such works. She notes that even when they are the story's focus, they usually are not shown on the book cover. Similarly, she comments that the face of the African-American protagonist is obscured by that of his dog (B7, 2012).

A commenter responds by thanking B7 blogger for her attention to diversity, saying that more reviews of books featuring African-American protagonists could help broaden the market for such books, at the same time arguing that the reason there are not more such titles is that they are perceived to garner fewer sales (B7, 2012). This perception may underlie the white bias in publishing.

In terms of African-American female protagonists in middle grade fiction, B7 blogger concludes that there may be more representations than of African-American males, describing how the covers of those books featuring girls depict the protagonists' actual faces (B7, 2012). In contrast, however, B19 blogger, a female editor, describes

controversy surrounding the cover art, originally featuring a white girl, of a young adult novel featuring a biracial female protagonist. Moreover, speaking as an editor and reflecting on the practices of the company she works for, she is committed to change regarding the issue of characters of color on book covers and at the same time suggests that the reason companies might not show characters of color on book covers is that it could potentially limit book sales (B19, 2009). She later describes the work of one author published by her company, whose first and second novels featured *hapa* (a Hawaiian slang term meaning a person of mixed ethnicity, usually half Asian and half white) and Asian protagonists on the cover, respectively, and then speculates as to why the author's third novel, featuring a white girl on the cover, was the most successful. Although she surmises that the success of the third novel rests on a chain of successes started with the first two novels, she also wonders if featuring a white character on the book jacket played any part in its selling even better than the first two novels (B19, 2009).

B11 blogger, a mother, in an example for this code, also comments on the controversial title mentioned by B19 that originally featured a white girl on the cover but was later changed to feature a biracial girl, suggesting the title as a good book for mother/daughter discussion. B11 blogger believes that, even beyond the diversity issue, the depiction of a white character on the cover of a book about a biracial character, undermines the perceived reliability of the story's main narrator (B11, 2009).

Six examples relating to white Caucasian bias in character representation and cover art in children's books are from B17, the blog of an African-American illustrator/author, who comments on his perspective as a minority among authors. In one example, he describes how although representation is still small, it has grown

substantially over the past twenty years (B17, 2009). However, B17 blogger still defends the need for opportunities, organizations, and events specifically for African-American authors and illustrators. For example, reviewing debates over the Coretta Scott King Awards, he says that he is wary that if the guidelines changed to include writers of other colors as potential recipients, African-American authors would be ignored (B17, 2009). Similarly, discussing the need for the organization, African-American Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (AACBWI), he indicates that the youth book publishing industry, in comparison to other industries, is particularly biased in favor of whites, noting specifically that, from his own experience, in comparison to the other industries for which he has produced illustrations, children's book publishing has proved the most difficult (B17, 2009). He also argues that African-American authors and illustrators face unique challenges in terms of getting books published and so need the support of organizations and conferences geared toward their specific goals. B17 blogger also contributes to another blog that features publishing news, discussion, and debates by various African-American authors and illustrators of books for young people. White bias may extend to booksellers as well, as one male commenter to B17, referring to one such conference for African-American authors, states that he had difficulty locating books written by the authors featured at the conference (B17, 2010).

In yet another post, B17 blogger reflects on an author's metaphor of the comfortable "box" of children's books by African-American authors geared toward African-American readers, a box which contains historical stories or stories of overcoming adversity. He suggests that African-American authors need both to break into

this “box” which tends to exclude them and to write about things which don’t fit into the traditional “box” of what African-American authors generally write about (B17, 2007).

This section has discussed examples describing the perception of white (Caucasian) bias in character representation and cover art in children's books published in the United States. The following section will discuss examples of resistance identified among the data sampled in terms of references to characters of color. Although not directly related to the sub-claim regarding white bias, this section also deals with examples in which book characters who challenge gender stereotypes and/or sexual norms are mentioned.

7.2.3 Counter claim: References to portrayals of characters of color in children’s books. Among the data sampled, there are fourteen examples referring to portrayals of characters of color in children’s books published in the U.S. Ten of the 14 examples are from B7, a blog maintained by a white female public librarian who is responsible for the selection of materials for a large Northeastern U.S. library system. B7 blogger frequently focuses on diversity issues on her blog, so it is not surprising that the majority of the examples come from her blog. Three of the examples are from B19, the blog of a female Asian-American editor, who also frequently discusses diversity issues. One example is from B17, the blog of a male African-American author/illustrator.

Eight of the 14 examples refer to examples of books with African-American male protagonists, including showing them on the book covers. The examples from B19 both reference Ezra Jack Keats’ *The Snowy Day* as a childhood favorite. B19 blogger, an Asian-American female, sees the fact that *The Snowy Day*, featuring a black protagonist, was her favorite as a child, as proof that, at least in terms of reading preference, gender

and race need not be relevant (B19, 2009). In response, a white mother comments that *The Snowy Day* is one of her favorite books and also a favorite of her Chinese daughter, adding that as a mother in a diverse family, she agrees that cultural diversity should be celebrated (B19, 2009).

Two of the 14 examples refer to books featuring African-American female protagonists, including a non-fiction example describing two biographies published the same year about Alice Coachman, an African-American woman who won an Olympic gold medal in high jump (B7, 2012). Two examples are of books featuring Latino protagonists. One example describes an anthology of writings by Native American youth. The examples comment on the notion that other books of the type reviewed are few in number (B7, 2013). For example, B7 blogger highly recommends a humorous book with a male Latino protagonist as an example among the few books published featuring Latino boys that a child would choose without being encouraged to read it (B7, 2012).

7.2.4 Counter claim: Book characters who challenge gender stereotypes and/or sexual norms. Among the data sampled, 17 examples are found in which book characters who challenge gender stereotypes and/or sexual norms are mentioned. Some of the examples reference more than one theme. Five of the 17 examples are references to girl protagonists' challenging feminine norms. As part of a post on children's novels about sports, B11 blogger, a mother, includes two reviews of sports novels featuring female protagonists. The more positive of the two reviews describes the female protagonist's initial happiness at the opportunity for her softball team to train harder to compete at a higher level, followed by her displeasure as the training becomes too intense and some girls leave the team. B11 blogger emphasizes that softball is the true focus of

the novel and will appeal to fans of the sport (B11, 2006). Similarly, B7 blogger reviews a girls' sports series, highlighting the hi-lo" (high interest, low readability) series as fulfilling the need for more sports fiction for girls.

Among the 17 examples, 6 refer to portrayals of boy characters who challenge norms of masculinity. Four of those six are part of a thread on B7 discussing B7 blogger's suggestion for the need for a re-illustration of Charlotte Zolotow's *William's Doll*, which features a boy who wants a doll, is ridiculed by his father and older brother for wanting one, and is eventually given one by his grandmother. B7 blogger argues the case for re-illustration based on the book's outdated illustrations in conjunction with its widespread use of the book on school reading lists. One female commenter responds that she favors a re-illustrated version based on her perception that books featuring strong female protagonists are abundant but books with "nurturing" male protagonists are lacking (B7, 2012). However, another commenter argues that the goal should be to encourage authors and illustrators to produce more books like *William's Doll* that resist gender norms, not just to push for re-illustrated versions of existing books (B7, 2012).

An example from B4 also refers to *William's Doll*, calling it an "excellent picture book" and recommends another similar title, "*Oliver Button is a Sissy* by the awesome Tomie de Paola about a little boy who loves to dance and gets flak from his peers about it" (B4, 2010). Similarly, an example from B7 blogger recommends *Alex Ko: From Iowa to Broadway, My Billy Elliot Story*, a non-fiction title, featuring a boy who, despite his father's disapproval, dreams of dancing on Broadway and eventually realizes his dream (B7, 2012). This example, as in the work of fiction, *William's Doll*, also refers to a father who disapproves of a son who challenges gender norms in terms of masculinity.

B7 blogger, in describing a book she feels is resistant in its embrace of sparkles and other feminine symbols in the form of a male unicorn protagonist, clarifies her belief that adults can help bring about more open-mindedness in their influence of impressionable young children, stating: “There's enough room in the world for books that have unicorns and sparkles and cupcakes on the cover and that a boy would read. You just got to get 'em young. That's true” (Interview 1 transcript, 2013).

Five of the 17 examples refer to books in which homosexuality is a theme. In one such example, B2 blogger, a young adult female, writes about a book that has been challenged, stating that although homosexuality is a theme, the real meaning of the book is the changing nature of relationships and also saying that challengers’ claims that the book is sexually explicit are wrong (B2, 2009). In another example, a parent comments on enjoying reading a novel with a boy/boy romance with his/her son (B23, 2011).

Three of the 17 examples refer to books treating transgender themes. One of the examples is a recommendation for a book featuring a trans protagonist, in which a father writes that he approves of the positive portrayal of the character and the interesting plot, adding that his five-year-old also enjoys the book (B21, 2012). This example illustrates a parent’s resistance to the portrayal of traditional gender and sexual norms in books for children.

7.3 Summary/Connection to Research Questions

7.3.1 Response to RQ1. What are the conceptions of gendered literacy among literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers); creators of texts for children (published authors, editors, and published illustrators); and, children/young adults, as represented in their blogging activities? In response to RQ1,

data coded according to the claim discussed in this Chapter – the children’s publishing industry in the United States as female- and white (Caucasian)-dominated – are the fewest of all the categories (35). White bias is considered along with the gendered aspect of perceptions of the publishing industry because some aspects of white bias are also gendered; for example, very few African-American and Latino boys are featured in youth literature, according to the data sampled.

7.3.2 Response to RQ2. How do the conceptions of gendered literacy identified through the blogging activities of literacy educators, creators of texts for children, and children/young adults compare to the theoretical conceptions identified in the literature review? To answer RQ2, the overall claim that the children’s publishing industry in the United States is described as female- and white (Caucasian)-dominated explored in this Chapter corresponds to the first aspect of the literature-review based conceptual model – gendered literacy as performed by multiple actors, including children and young adults, literacy educators, and those in the publishing industry. More specifically, according to the data sampled, it is enacted through 1) 13 references to women in the children’s publishing industry, in contrast to 5 references to men, and 2) perceptions of white Caucasian bias in character representation and cover art, especially in terms of a lack of African-American males, in children’s books published in the United States. However, it is also connected to the fourth aspect of the literature-based conceptual model – gendered literacy as the remnant of a historically gendered educational system (in the U.S.) – in terms of the field of youth librarianship, as predominantly female. This is demonstrated by the example from B21, describing the historical debates between public youth services librarians, who were mostly female, and male authors of children’s fiction – debates

which may have influenced the male/female balance in terms of winners of the Newbery Award.

7.3.3 Response to RQ3. RQ3 asks: What similarities and differences, if any, are represented in conceptions of gendered literacy among literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers); creators of texts for children (published authors, editors, and published illustrators); and, children/young adults, as represented in their blogging activities? In response, the perspectives of those who actually work in youth publishing are represented among the data sampled, including a female editor, referencing her female editor-in-chief; an African-American male author/illustrator, referencing his minority status both as an African-American and as a male within the publishing world, and also referring to his editor and literary agent, both of whom are female; a female author of young adult literature who previously worked in marketing for a major publisher; a female commenter who works for a major publisher (whose role is unable to be determined); a female author of children's literature who references her female editor; and a female editor referenced by a female public librarian. Posts and comments relating to perceptions of a predominance of females in publishing are by a female school librarian, a female public librarian, and a male author of children's non-fiction.

In terms of references to white bias, perspectives represented include a white female public librarian, an Asian-American female editor, and an African-American male author/illustrator. Seven of the 17 examples are from the blog (B7) of a white female public librarian who, as youth materials selector for the library, is attuned to issues of diversity in youth literature and therefore comments specifically on the lack of African-

American males featured as protagonists in children's literature and/or depicted on the covers of books for children. Six of the 17 examples are from B17 (the African-American male author/illustrator's blog), including posts by the blogger and a comment posted to the blog discussing African-American authors and illustrators in children's publishing, awards for children's books written by African-Americans, the challenges they face as a result, and ways in which they can work collectively and creatively to be better represented.

B19 blogger, an Asian-American female editor, similarly comments on diversity issues, and presents a positive but also critical stance in terms of her own work and the publisher for whom she works, stating, in reference to a case she describes in which a biracial character was depicted as white on the cover of a book, that her publishing house would never do that; however, she can imagine that it might refrain from including the face of a character of color on a book jacket. She thereby suggests that white bias might also take the form of absence, even in the case of a publisher that prides itself on its diversity (B19, 2009).

7.3.4 Response to RQ4. What patterns, if any, of resistance to the dominant conceptions of gendered literacy may be found among the blog posts analyzed? Among the data described in this Chapter, resistant examples are more numerous than examples coded according to the main claims. In terms of the data, then, the resistant examples cannot be considered the minority. However, as previously stated, this may be because the blogs from which data are sampled make a point of highlighting resistance. The forms of resistance to the main claim that the children's publishing industry in the United States is perceived to be female- and white (Caucasian)-dominated include the following:

- References to portrayals of characters of color in children's books published in the U.S. are evident. (Librarian – 10, Editor – 2, Illustrator – 1, Parent – 1) (14)
- Book characters who challenge gender stereotypes and/or sexual norms are mentioned. (parent – 8, librarian – 6, adult of undetermined role – 2, child/young adult – 1) (17)

Examples mentioning books featuring characters of color and those who challenge gender stereotypes and/or sexual norms are abundant among the data sampled. However, evidence from the data supports the perception of youth publishing as a female-dominated field, as there are very few mentions of men in the industry.

CHAPTER 8 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Introduction

The evidence from the data sampled and collected for this qualitative study supports and adds to, but also contradicts, the literature-based claims made about gendered literacy. Gendered literacy is a reflection of the larger gender divisions in U.S. society and evident from as early as toddlerhood both in terms of children's reading choices and choices encouraged by educators, publishers, and creators of children's reading materials. For some literacy educators, gender divisions represent a safe, protective worldview – one neatly divided into “girl” reading and “boy” reading – by which to raise and educate children, and to produce marketable reading materials for children. These gender divisions are therefore enacted through gender-segregation of young people's reading choices and perceptions of those reading choices, as well as through other gendered behaviors in relation to reading and literacy.

How are notions of gendered literacy disseminated and reproduced? Parents' emotional reactions to their children's reading choices play a role, as in the father telling his three-year-old son while browsing in the library that *Olivia*, a book featuring a female pig protagonist, is a “girl” book (B7). Texts are shared physically, as in parents and siblings taking turns reading a book, older siblings handing down a book to a younger sibling, or parents' recommending books from their childhood. Books are also recommended virtually, through blogs such as those linked through the KidLitosphere, descriptions provided by online booksellers, and by comments posted by purchasers of materials. Examples from the data sampled illustrate how institutions, including schools and libraries, have privileged certain text types and certain forms of reading and

knowledge over others, especially through the disparagement of “boy” books (including non-fiction, comics, graphic novels, and gross humor) as less literary than other reading materials and considered acceptable reading only as a bridge for “reluctant readers” before moving to narrative fiction, which is considered of higher quality. Comics and graphic novels are perceived to be of lesser quality than traditional, linear narrative, thereby elevating print over image. By disparaging non-fiction, reading for factual knowledge is considered less important than reading for story. Crass humor is also considered of lesser quality. In that the text types just mentioned are, among the data sampled, both perceived to be “boy”-preferred (52) and reported to be preferred by boys (56), educators’ disparagement of those texts may create a societal boys’ reading problem, as boys see that the texts they enjoy reading are not valued.

On the other hand, children’s reading choices and choices encouraged by educators, publishers, and creators of children’s reading materials are also a means by which notions of gendered literacy are disrupted. Resistance involves the refusal to label texts as “boy” or “girl,” adjusting expectations regarding what girls and boys may prefer to read, and, more generally, separating the notion of whether a child is male or female from reading preference.

Through this study’s findings describing data sampled from blogs focusing on literature for young people and young people’s reading practices that are included on a U.S.-based website, a picture of gendered literacy is apparent. This picture of gendered literacy is one in which literacy educators (including parents, librarians, and teachers) label books for young people according to “girl”- and “boy”-preferred, perceive boys and girls as having differing reading preferences, perceive boys to be reluctant and less

advanced readers, and one in which young people express gendered reading preferences. However, it is also a picture in which young people express resistant reading preferences – that is, not conforming to what would be considered gender-normative preferences, and one filled with examples of books, series, and genres that are reported to appeal to both boys and girls, along with approximately equal numbers of examples referring to boys’ and girls’ love of reading and/or advanced reading level.

8.2 Responding to the Research Questions Based on the Data Overall

8.2.1 Response to RQ1. RQ1: What are the conceptions of gendered literacy among literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers); creators of texts for children (published authors, editors, and published illustrators); and, children/young adults, as represented in their blogging activities?

The most prominent conception of gendered literacy in terms of the data sampled is literacy educators’ labeling of books for young people according to “girl” and “boy”-preferred (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.1). This labeling is supported through young people’s conceptions of gendered literacy – boys’ and girls’ expressed preferences for text types that educators would label as appropriate for them, which are the next two most prominent findings. This may represent an internalization of the labels by young people. In the following example discussed earlier, a mother describes her distaste for her daughter’s taste for pink, glitter, and princesses:

I try to let her love pink glitter and purple (drowning victim) lipstick and everything covered in Princesses and have faith that my smart, savvy little girl will grow out of it just like I did. But I also try to expose her to anything I can that will speed that growing out of it process up some. (B4, 2009)

In this example, the daughter gravitates toward colors and themes that are perceived to be “girl” preferred in spite of the fact that her mother claims to dislike them and discourages

her daughter from choosing them. Therefore, the process by which young people internalize impressions relating to gendered literacy remains unclear. Moreover, there is evidence that children can readily identify reading preferences that would be considered gender-normative even when they themselves do not share the preference that would be considered normative for their sex (Chapman, Filipenko, McTavish, & Shapiro, 2007).

Boys' reading, including educators' expectations of boys' reading preferences (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3), along with the mention of certain book series as boy favorites, both by educators and boy readers (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.4), stands out as important among the data sampled. On the other hand, resistance is also prominent, in terms of 43 incidences in which children express resistant – that is, not conforming to what would be considered gender-normative reading preferences (Chapter 6, Section 6.2.3).

In terms of creators' of materials for children conceptions of gendered literacy, in that there are 29 incidences in which specific books, series, and genres are reported to appeal to both boys and girls (Chapter 6, Section 6.2.4), and that there are 17 incidences of book characters who challenge gender stereotypes and/or sexual norms (Chapter 7, Section 7.2.4), there is movement toward a more gender-neutral approach. However, there are also 17 incidences in which bloggers and commenters express perceptions of white Caucasian bias in character representation and cover art, especially in terms of a lack of African-American males, in children's books published in the United States (Chapter 7, Section 7.2.2).

In this dissertation study, in some cases the data were approached with expectations, which were not met in the data sampled. For example, in the comparison between mothers and fathers as encouragers of children's reading (Chapter 5, Section

5.2.1), the underlying expectation, based on a review of the literature, was that mothers would be primary, and while they are primary in this case (42 examples involving mothers versus 32 involving fathers), there is not a large difference between mothers and fathers. Similarly, in the comparison of girl and boy readers (Chapter 5, Section 5.2.2), it was expected that mentions of girls who love reading would outnumber those of boys who love reading, and yet, the number of incidences mentioning boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading level (27) are approximately equal to those mentioning girls' (24) among the data sampled. On the other hand, there is evidence that educators perceive that boys are both "reluctant" and less advanced readers (29 incidences) (Chapter 5, Section 5.2.3).

8.2.2 Response to RQ2. RQ2 How do the conceptions of gendered literacy identified through the blogging activities of literacy educators, creators of texts for children, and children/young adults compare to the theoretical conceptions identified in the literature review?

Prominent conceptions of gendered literacy identified in the literature review include:

- Gendered literacy as enacted, or performed, by multiple actors:
 - * Children/young adults:
 - a) through boys' dislike of formal, school-based literacy in comparison to girls' more enthusiastic adoption of formal literacy practice in terms of reading, writing, and classroom comportment and,
 - b) through girls' and boys' displaying differing literacy preferences in terms of reading and writing.

* Literacy educators, including parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers:

a) through parents' perceptions of their daughters' and sons' literacy preferences and mothers' and fathers' differing support of children's reading behaviors

b) through teachers' perceptions and expectations of male and female students' literacy preferences and performance

c) through librarians' expectations of children's (particularly boys') literacy preferences and programmatic responses

* Creators of reading materials for children – the children's publishing industry

These conceptions are supported through evidence in the data. However, as stated earlier, there are also surprises. For example, although boys' dislike of formal, school-based literacy was important in the literature, in the sampled data, in contrast, mentions of boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading level (27) are slightly more than those of girls' love of reading and/or advanced reading level (24). Girls' and boys' differing reading preferences was important in the literature; among the data sampled, there was evidence of girls' (67) and boys' (56) expressions of reading preferences that would be considered aligning with gender-appropriate reading preferences. However, there was also evidence of children's expressions of resistant – that is, not conforming to what would be considered gender-normative – reading preferences (43).

Similar to the reviewed literature, literacy educators' perceptions of girls' and boys' gendered reading preferences are prominent among the data sampled. This includes a greater number of themes relating to perceptions of boys' reading preferences than to

perceptions of girls' reading preferences, including: educators' alignment of boys' reading preferences with stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines (53) (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3); educators' perceptions that boys are both "reluctant" and less advanced readers (29); perceptions that books and reading are unwelcoming to boys (14) (Chapter 5, Section 5.2.4); and parents' perception that there are not enough "boy books" available (13) (Chapter 5, Section 5.2.5). It also includes several themes relating to the direct labeling of boys' books – a theme which was not as evident in the literature review, including educators (librarians, parents) and children consistently mentioning certain book series, coded "iconic boy books," in reference to boys' reading (43) (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.4); educators' labeling of "boy" books (31) (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.1); and, educators' expectations that boys prefer male protagonists while girls are more likely than boys to read a story featuring a protagonist of the opposite sex (22) (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.5).

Examples relating to girls' reading preferences are also prominent. Twenty-five examples refer to labeling of "girl" books; other examples refer to educators' expectation that girls prefer female protagonists and that girls are more likely than boys to read a story featuring a protagonist of the opposite sex.

Based on the literature review, it was expected that more examples would be found of mothers' reading with or otherwise encouraging their children's reading (through purchasing, borrowing books, or seeking reading suggestions) than of fathers'. Although this is supported in the data sampled, with forty-two examples of mothers' reading with their children or encouraging their children's reading, compared with thirty-

two examples of fathers' reading with their children or encouraging their children's reading, the difference between mothers and fathers is not great. The way in which parents perceive that their childhood identity as either a boy or girl, or experience with children of only one sex, determines their qualifications to judge the reading preferences of children of the opposite sex (14 examples) was also an unanticipated and new conception of gendered literacy identified.

Another conception of gendered literacy identified in the literature review is:

- Gendered literacy as a quantifiable achievement gap

Based on the literature review, it was expected that this theme of girls achieving better verbal test results, or achieving better grades than boys, particularly in terms of reading and writing, would be prominent in the data sampled, but it was not. However, as mentioned prior, educators' perception that boys are both "reluctant" and less advanced readers (29) is an important theme among the data sampled. In this sense, the gap in achievement between boys and girls may in part be the result of lowered expectations for boys and a related lack of practice reading and writing for boys. However, it should be reiterated that among the data sampled the number of examples discussing boys' love of reading and/or advanced reading level is on par with that of girls (27 for boys, 24 for girls). So, a lack of literacy practice for boys is not evident in the data sampled.

The expectation was that the following theme would be important in the data sampled:

- Gendered literacy as a biological phenomenon, the result of essential, cognitive differences between males and females

It is a minor theme among the data sampled, with twelve examples in which educators, particularly parents, express the perception that gendered literacy is a biological phenomenon, the result of essential, cognitive differences between males and females. Within this larger category, sub-themes include: the perception that boys learn to read later than girls; the perception that girls and boys have innate differing reading preferences and that girls are wired to enjoy reading while boys are not; and, the perception that boys are more active than girls and so are less inclined to enjoy school-appropriate behaviors, including reading.

This last conception of gendered literacy was a prominent theme among the literature reviewed for the dissertation:

- Gendered literacy as the remnant of a historically gendered educational system, including the feminization of the teaching profession in the U.S. and a legacy of underachieving boys

However, among the data sampled, it is absent except for a couple of incidences which could be linked to the overall theme, although they are not specifically named as such. One comment from B4 (categorized according to Claim 2, Gendered Literacy Behaviors and Perceptions of Gendered Literacy Behaviors, Sub-claim 4: Educators perceive that books and reading are unwelcoming to boys – Chapter 5, Section 5.2.4) refers to the perception of school as a feminine domain and the “feminine” behaviors the school environment supposedly fosters, like sitting still and behaving well. This perception of school as a “feminine” environment may stem from the historical predominance of women in elementary education in the U.S.

Counting youth services librarians among educators of children in the U.S., a comment from B21, categorized according to Claim 4: Perceptions of the Predominance of Whites and Females in Children’s Publishing, Sub-claim 1: Thirteen references are to women in the children’s publishing industry in the United States, versus five to men in the publishing industry, also speaks to this theme. The comment refers to a predominance of women in the field of youth librarianship in connection with historical conflicts between public youth services librarians, who were mostly female, and male authors of children’s fiction, over which authors were most deserving of the Newbery Award and who was best qualified to judge.

The following table presents conceptual model based on the empirical results of the study:

Table 11

Conceptual Model of Gendered Reading Based on the Study’s Main Findings

| Main Concept | Main Actors |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Gendered reading preferences, including perceptions of boys’ reading preferences and labeling of “boy” and “girl” books | Librarians, parents, teachers |
| Mothers and fathers as equal encouragers of children’s reading | Parents |
| Boys and girls as equally avid readers | Children |
| Perceptions of boys as boys are both “reluctant” and less advanced readers. | Librarians, parents, teachers |
| Perceptions of the children’s publishing industry in the United States as female- and white -dominated | Authors/illustrators, parents |

8.2.3 Response to RQ3. RQ3 What similarities and differences, if any, are represented in conceptions of gendered literacy among literacy educators (parents, public

librarians, school librarians, and teachers); creators of texts for children (published authors, editors, and published illustrators); and, children/young adults, as represented in their blogging activities?

In terms of incidences categorized according to the sub-claims associated with Claim 1, Educators' gendered perceptions of children's reading preferences and labeling of "boy" and "girl" books (226 total incidences), the perspectives of librarians are represented the most (90), with parents (88) next, followed by teachers (22), children/young adults (16), authors/illustrators (7), and adults of undetermined roles (3). Among the claims countering Claim 1, which include those expressing resistance against gendered perceptions and labeling of children's books, the perspectives of parents are best represented (25), followed by adults of undetermined role (8), children (6), teachers (4), and librarians (4). Among the data sampled, therefore, there is less resistance expressed by employees of the formal educational system, including teachers and librarians.

Claim 2 refers to gendered literacy behaviors and perceptions of these behaviors, including comparison of mothers' and fathers' encouragement of their children's reading; comparison of mentions of girls' and boys' love of reading; specific perceptions relating to boys as "reluctant readers" and fewer options for boys in terms of appropriate reading materials; the perception of gendered literacy as the result of biologically-based sex differences; and debate over female authors' ability to write a "male" voice. Among the perspectives represented in relation to Claim 2, parents (111) are best represented, with children/young adults also well represented (52). To a much lesser extent, the

perspectives of librarians (23), authors (8), teachers (7), 1 adult of undetermined role, and 1 educator of undetermined type are also represented.

Claim 3, Gendered reading preferences, in terms of boys' and girls' expressions of differing reading preferences, focuses exclusively on children's perspectives. However, these examples representing children expressions of gender-normative reading preferences (girls: 67; boys: 56) may be compared to claims about data referring to educators' expectations of children's reading preferences. These include Claim 1, Subclaim 2, in which educators align boys' reading preferences with the following: stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines (librarians – 39, parents – 11, teachers – 3); the number of incidences – 53 – is approximately equal to that of the perspectives of boys themselves relating to their gender-normative preferences – 56. In contrast, only eight examples illustrating educators' perceptions of girls' literacy preferences matching the following traditional categories: realistic fiction, romance, princess themed fiction, stories with female protagonists, coming of age stories, chick lit, books with pink covers, were identified among the data sampled. Examples relating to educators' expectations that boys prefer male protagonists, girls prefer female protagonists, and that girls are more likely than boys to read a story featuring a protagonist of the opposite sex (parents – 16, librarians – 4, teachers – 2) include 22 incidences, and as such, also represent a prominent theme.

On the other hand, there is significant resistance represented among the data sampled in terms of children's expressions of resistant – that is, not conforming to what would be considered gender-normative – reading preferences (43 examples). To a lesser

degree, bloggers and commenters (including parents – 7, children and young adults – 5, adults of undetermined role – 2, illustrator – 1) express the belief that a child’s sex should not influence their reading preferences (15). For this sub-claim, the number of perspectives of adults (10) and children (5) represented, are similar. In terms of educators’ resistant perspectives in relation to children’s reading preferences – not expecting girls to prefer what are commonly perceived to be “girl”-preferred texts, or boys to prefer “boy”-preferred texts, parents’ perspectives (8) are similar to the sub-claim just mentioned referring to the belief that a child’s sex should not influence their reading preferences (in which 7 parent perspectives were represented), with the perspectives of librarians (3), and teachers (2) represented to a much lesser degree (13 incidences total). In terms of another resistant theme – that of the mention of specific books, series, and genres as appealing to both boys and girls – the perspectives of children/young adults (14) are also better represented than those of librarians (5), parents (5), adults of undetermined roles (3), and teachers (3). As in Claims 1 and 2 discussed prior, children and parents overall, rather than librarians and teachers, are leaders in terms of resistance to notions of children’s gender-normative reading preferences.

Examples in the data categorized according to Claim 4 are examples in which bloggers and commenters describe the children’s publishing industry in the United States as female- and white (Caucasian)-dominated. Sub-claims relate to comparisons of mentions of women versus mentions of men in the children’s publishing industry in the U.S. and perceptions of white Caucasian bias in character representation and cover art, especially in terms of a lack of African-American males, in children's books published in the U.S. The perspectives represented among claim 4 sub-claims include authors (17),

librarians (9), editors (4), parents (2), 1 young adult, 1 adult of undetermined role, and 1 publishing representative/marketing. People directly involved in the creation and publication of reading materials for youth are better represented here than for other claims. Along with educators, they turn a critical eye toward publishing houses in terms of racial bias in reading materials produced for children.

Resistance focuses on examples in which bloggers and commenters write about characters of color and characters who challenge gender stereotypes and/or sexual norms featured in children's books published in the U.S. Among these examples, librarians (16) are best represented, followed by parents (9), editors (2), adults of undetermined role (2), 1 illustrator and 1 child. However, 13 of the 16 librarian examples are written by B7 blogger, a youth services librarian and materials specialist for a large library system, who is particularly attuned to issues of diversity among materials for children. If data sampled from her blog not been included in the analysis, librarians would not have been as well represented in terms of this category.

8.2.4 Response to RQ4. RQ4 What patterns, if any, of resistance to the dominant conceptions of gendered literacy may be found among the blog posts analyzed?

The counter claims identified in reference to the data are the following:

- Claim 1, Counter claim A: Bloggers and commenters resist the labeling of books as “girl”- or “boy”- preferred. (parents – 10, adults of undetermined role – 6, teachers – 2, librarian – 1, child – 1, author – 1) (21 incidences) (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2)
- Claim 1, Counter claim B: Bloggers and commenters express the belief that a child's sex should not influence their reading preferences. (parents – 7, children and

young adults – 5, adults of undetermined role – 2, illustrator – 1) (15 incidences)
(Chapter 4, Section 4.2.6)

- Claim 1, Counter claim C: Educators do not expect girls to prefer what are commonly perceived to be “girl”-preferred texts, or boys to prefer “boy”-preferred texts. (parents – 8, librarians – 3, teachers – 2) (13 incidences) (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.6)
- Claim 3, Counter claim A: Children’s expressions of resistant – that is, not conforming to what would be considered gender-normative – reading preferences are evident. (43 incidences) (Chapter 6, Section 6.2.3)
- Claim 3, Counter claim B: Specific books, series, and genres are reported to appeal to both boys and girls. (29 incidences) (Chapter 6, Section 6.2.4)
- Claim 4, Counter claim A: References to portrayals of characters of color in children’s books published in the U.S. are evident. (14 incidences) (Chapter 7, Section 7.2.3)
- Claim 4, Counter claim B: Book characters who challenge gender stereotypes and/or sexual norms are mentioned. (17 incidences) (Chapter 7, Section 7.2.4)

Major themes among the counter claims include: resistance in terms of reading choices and expectations of reading preferences; resistance in terms of the labeling of books for young people; and resistance in terms of the subject matter of books for young people.

Forty-three examples are illustrative of incidences in which children indicate resistance to the perceptions of the adults’ perceptions of what they should be reading based on whether they are male or female. Based on the data sampled, therefore, children are a major force in terms of resistance to gendered reading. However, thirteen examples also refer to incidences in which educators do not expect girls to prefer what are

commonly perceived to be “girl”-preferred texts, or boys to prefer “boy”-preferred texts. Moreover, in fifteen incidences, bloggers and commenters, including parents, children and young adults, adults of undetermined role, and a children’s book illustrator, express the belief that a child’s sex should not influence their reading preferences.

Twenty-one examples deal directly with resistance to the labeling of books for young people as “girl”- or “boy”- preferred. These examples include expressions of resistance by parents, adults of undetermined role, teachers, a librarian, a child, and a children’s book author.

Finally, several counter claims refer to resistance in terms of the content in books for young people. These include books that are reported to be gender-neutral, that is, appealing to both boys and girls (29 examples), books that portray characters of color (14 examples), and books that portray characters who challenge gender stereotypes and/or sexual norms (17 examples).

8.3 Limitations

The qualitative study described in this dissertation provides a particular view of gendered literacy based on examples sampled from blogs included in the KidLitosphere. Although a focus on the KidLitosphere has many advantages, in that the KidLitosphere is a key site in which various aspects of young people’s reading and literature are discussed and it represents an unobtrusive way in which to study aspects of gendered literacy, it also presents a major limitation of this study. Bloggers are not representative of the general population, nor are they necessarily representative of the groups of interest. Bloggers are self-selected commentators, who often write out of a desire to advocate for or change their workplace (library or school, for example), their profession, or society as a whole. Internet access and technological proficiency likely skew the class, age, and

other aspects of the bloggers' demographics. Moreover, the nature of blogging is such that things like the platform chosen, social connections, and the desire for anonymity (or not) influence ranking and thus inclusion in this study. Blogs also represent an indirect look at gendered literacy. For example, except for interviews with selected bloggers and one author of children's literature, the study does not directly query the bloggers regarding gendered literacy. In most cases, the bloggers initiated their blogs in order to reflect on and review children's and young adult literature rather than as a direct means for them to comment on literacy as gendered.

Because the study was conducted in a naturalistic setting, and the primary investigator served as the research instrument, the perspective is biased in terms of conclusions made about the data. Moreover, the data sampled represents only a thin slice of the blogs overall. Therefore, inferences made about gendered literacy based on the data sampled are limited in scope.

8.4 Recommendations for Practice

8.4.1 Recommendations based on Claim 1. Conclusions and recommendations for practice based on Claim 1 (Gendered reading preferences, in terms of educators' perceptions of boys' reading preferences and labeling of "boy" and "girl" books, were important – 226 examples) and related sub- and counter claims are discussed in the following sections.

Due to the large number of examples that were coded according to educators' labeling of children's books as boy- and girl-preferred (Claim1, Sub-claim 1, 72 examples) and educators' disparagement of children's books using gender labeling (Claim 1, Sub-claims 6 and 7), it is recommended that educators avoid all labeling of

books according to boy/girl, in reading lists and in talking about books with children and young adults. When choosing books to be included in the curriculum, teachers can choose materials that are more gender-neutral in terms of their appeal.

As there are a large number of examples relating to educators' perceptions of boys' reading preferences according to certain categories that are considered traditionally male-preferred: stories with male protagonists, comics, graphic novels, science fiction, adventure, non-fiction, sports, fantasy, gross humor, stories featuring vehicles, and magazines (Claim 1, Sub-claim 2, 53 examples) and "iconic boy books," (Claim 1, Sub-claim 3, 43 examples), it is recommended that educators adjust their assumptions about what boys will enjoy reading, especially due to the large number of examples in which children express resistant, that is, not conforming to gender-normative reading preferences (Claim 3, Counter claim A, 43 examples). Of those 43 examples, many refer to instances of children's preferences for protagonists who are of the opposite sex, including three examples of book reviews written by boys. For this reason, Claim 1, Sub-claim 4: educators' expectations that boys prefer male protagonists and girls prefer female protagonists, as well as their assumption that girls are more likely than boys to read a story featuring a protagonist of the opposite sex, were evident (22), should also be questioned.

Along with this, educators who work closely with children in terms of fostering their literacy development may recognize that they are uniquely positioned to be change agents in regard to encouraging both children and educators to read more broadly and to cross gender barriers. They can do this through blogging; writing reviews of materials for children and young adults; compiling reading lists; serving on book award committees;

organizing both virtual and physical displays; selecting and purchasing materials; developing curricula and programs; and influencing those who produce materials for young people. B7 blogger provides models of how to do this. She is materials selector for the youth services department of a major library, blogs about youth literature, reviews materials for youth for major publications, and is the author of an illustrated children's book. She has many acquaintances in the publishing world and attempts to wield influence, as when she pushes for a re-illustrated version of *William's Doll* or a pink cover for a book in the series, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. In another case, a female librarian commenting on B7 demonstrates how educators may challenge parents' preconceived notions of which materials are suitable for girls versus boys, recounting how, after hearing a father scolding his son for selecting "girl" books, she went over to them and assured the father that *Olivia* is a book that everyone likes (B7, 2012).

The data suggest that childhood reading is gendered. However, rather than educators' limiting their own reading tastes or assuming that one's own sex is limiting in terms of what one can recommend (as suggested by Claim 1, Sub-claim 5, which discusses parents' perception that their childhood identity as either a boy or girl, or experience with children of only one sex, determines their qualifications to judge the reading preferences of children of the opposite sex – 14), educators can branch out and read things they would not normally read to equip themselves better to advise readers. Moreover, they can encourage the forms of resistance identified in the data, including: a refusal to label books as "girl" and "boy" books (Claim 1, Counter claim A, 21 examples); the belief that a child's sex does not and/or should not influence their reading preferences (Claim 1, Counter claim B, 15 examples); and a refusal to expect that children should like

texts that are considered normative in terms of boy and girl-preferred texts) (Claim 1, Counter claim C, 13 examples).

8.4.2 Recommendations based on Claim 2. Conclusions and recommendations for practice based on Claim 2 – gendered literacy behaviors (other than reading preferences, as described separately) and perceptions of these behaviors – will be described in this section.

Based on the following sub-claims: educators perceive that boys are both “reluctant” and less advanced readers (29); educators perceive that books and reading are unwelcoming to boys (14); and, parents perceive that there are not enough “boy books” available (13); working to change perceptions of boys’ reading is a priority. Although, for example, the tendency based on perceptions may be to want to have exclusive boys-only book clubs, activities, etc. the more appropriate response is to choose themes that will be gender-neutral in terms of their appeal. Such themes could include books and series recommended by educators as appealing to both boys and girls. Then, once there is a broad participation base, educators can challenge children to try reading materials they would not normally choose to read. For example, B6 blogger, a male teacher who uses his blog primarily as a space in which to review books for children, in most cases does not label books as gendered, but in other cases (4 total, among the data sampled) in which he feels that boys will not even try a book because of the cover, title, or female protagonist, he will specifically recommend that boys give a book a try. For instance, concluding one review, he states that girls should definitely read the book and boys should not be scared off by the “princess” aspects and give it a try (B6, 2010).

8.4.3 Recommendations based on Claim 3. In response to Claim 3 – the prominence of gendered reading preferences, in terms of boys’ and girls’ expressed differing reading preferences (123 examples) and related sub-claims – girls’ reading preferences often matched what are perceived to be traditional girl-preferred text types (67 examples); and, boys’ reading preferences often matched what are perceived to be traditional boy-preferred text types (56 examples), recommendations focus on educators encouraging resistance in terms of reading preferences. This includes encouraging boys to try reading books that may be perceived as “girl” books and vice versa. Parents likewise can purchase, borrow, and read books together with their children that challenge gender boundaries.

8.4.4 Recommendations based on Claim 4. Claim 4 – bloggers and commenters describe the children’s publishing industry in the United States as female- and white - dominated (35 examples), and related sub-claims – references to women (13) versus men (5) in the children’s book publishing industry; and, mentions of white Caucasian bias in character representation and cover art, especially in terms of a lack of African-American males, in children's books published in the United States (17) lead to two recommendations for practice. First, authors should produce more materials for young people that challenge gender boundaries, and educators can encourage them to do so. Secondly, publishers could publish more materials for young people that challenge gender boundaries. Many bestsellers, like *Harry Potter*, have been works that have broad appeal; for example, a mother comments on B4, “This must be one reason (among many others) why *Harry Potter* was so popular: boys and girls could relate to it” (B4, 2010). Therefore, there is no need to segment the reading audience into “boys” and “girls.”

Moreover, based on Claim 3, Counter claim A – children’s expressions of resistant literacy preferences (43 examples), and Claim 4, Counter claim B – mentions of specific books, series, and genres that appear to appeal to both boys and girls (29 examples), a captive audience awaits the publication of materials that are more gender-neutral in appeal. Materials could also be marketed in a non-gendered way, as in not using the color pink or depicting girls or boys on the cover.

The overall picture from the data sampled for this study is that of educators who perceive literacy as a gendered phenomenon, dichotomized as “boy”/“girl,” but also of many who are resistant toward these perceptions and serving as change agents in relation to gendered literacy. The portrayal of children is even more inspiring, as boys’ love of reading is evident in the data, and children review and express preferences for a broad range of reading materials (including those that would be expected to be preferred by the opposite sex). A mother comments on B4, “I see my independently reading son, my son who loves to be read to, and my daughter who is just developing the attention span for a story, and I want to give them all things they’ll love” (B4, 2010). Combined with the specific recommendations for practice discussed above, the statement encapsulates the main outcome of this study: recognition of the need to encourage children’s reading and literacy in a way that focuses on gender as little as possible.

8.5 Future Directions

Future study of gendered literacy would take both a macro and micro approach. One study would focus on confirming the aspects of gendered literacy identified in the study on a larger scale, using a survey-based methodology. Another study could examine whether the conceptions of gendered literacy identified in the West (and specifically in

the U.S., in this study) hold in other countries and cultures. For example, the National Library Board of Singapore in 2007 began the ongoing “10,000 & More Fathers Reading!” program with the goal “to increase fathers’ involvement in their children’s literacy development and to improve the quality of father-child relationships” (National Library Board Singapore, 2014). Such a program implies that parent-child reading in Singapore is perceived to be mother- rather than father-initiated. Are there similar programs in other places, and how do the assumptions/goals of such programs differ? The data sampled for this U.S. – based study showed slightly more examples of mothers reading with their children or encouraging their children’s reading than fathers but did not reveal much in the way of perceptions about mothers versus fathers reading.

In terms of a micro approach to gendered literacy, further study is also needed in order to better understand how people form perceptions of gender and reading and how young people internalize these impressions. Such a study could include observation of the reading practices of children and interviews with children in schools, in libraries, and in homes.

Together these macro and micro approaches to research on gendered literacy would help explain how and why gender and literacy are so closely connected and also how they may be disentangled.

Appendix A

Pilot Study Data Analysis Table

| | The Boy Reader theboyreader.blogspot.com | Frenetic Reader: YA book reviews and such www.freneticreader.com | Books for My Boy and Yours: A blog about books that boys will enjoy hearing and reading http://booksformyboy.blogspot.com/ |
|--|--|---|--|
| <i>Blogger characteristics</i> How were they determined? From names, “About” statement, first post, blogger profile, photos | Male 3 rd grade teacher | Female teen – she says she will be a junior in high school “but a young one.” So, she may have skipped a grade? | Female school librarian/mother of young son (and her husband, although all the posts I’ve read so far have been by her) |
| Average # of words per post (based on 3 consecutive most recent posts, as of Sept. 28, 2010, including post title) | 450 | 314 | 561 |
| What is the blog’s main purpose? Blogger’s motives for starting the blog? How were these determined? Read “About” statement and/or first post. | Review books for boys Motives: Introduce boys to “books besides Captain Underpants.” (01/03/2008, first entry). Inspired by other blogs to start his own blog | Review books Motive: her “extreme and frenetic (hence the blog title) love of reading” | Review books, encourage others who want to raise sons who read Motives: wants to raise her son “to be a reader” Also, hopes “blog helps others encourage boys to read.” (from top right hand corner of blog, with a title of “WHY BOOKS?”). |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| <p>What concepts of gendered literacy do the blogs express or embody?</p> <p>How determined?</p> <p>Read “About” statement and/or first post. I will give coders a list of concepts to choose from, i.e. “Girls and Boys have Differing Literacy Interests.” These concepts will be those identified in the research literature as well as any new and/or resistant concepts identified in analyzing the data).</p> <p>Look at images in posts and in blog frame.</p> | <p>From About statement/1st post: Girls and Boys have Differing Literacy Interests, Boys resist literacy</p> <p>From images: Girls and Boys have Differing Literacy Interests – 1 post displays a boy-friendly book cover; 1 post displays photo of three men wearing fly fishing gear (vests, boots, one wearing shorts) – presumably this is the blogger with his dad and brother (as he states), photo of mountain scenery and blue sky at end of post (presumably Rocky Mts.)</p> | <p>From About statement/1st post: Girls embrace literacy – both school and out of school (in reading, writing). New concept – the extreme girl reader & extreme blogger – she posts book reviews on her blog on a daily basis!</p> | <p>From About statement/1st post & from top right hand corner of blog, with a title of “WHY BOOKS?”:</p> <p>Girls and Boys have Differing Literacy Interests (in reading).</p> <p>Boys resist literacy</p> |
| <p>What are the blogger’s experiences of children’s/young adults’ reading/literacy?</p> <p>How determined?</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. He reads & reviews children’s books. 2. He reads at home in the evening. 3. He enjoys reading children’s books. 4. He finds reading children’s books takes time. 5. He reads on | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. She reads & reviews YA books. 2. She posts a review daily. 3. She enjoys reading YA books. 4. She enjoys suspense in reading a book. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reading with her son at bedtime is a daily practice. 2. They record what they have read in a reading log. 3. They read together at night even when tired. 4. They read phonics readers & short chapter books together at bedtime. |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| <p>-- Based on qualitative analysis of sentences containing the words "read" (and variants, i.e. reads, reading), in the blogs' posts.</p> <p>-- Look at images in posts and in blog frame.</p> | <p>vacation.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. He reads reviews of children's books. 7. He reads aloud to his students. 8. He compares books. 9. He notes leveling of children's books? 10. He enjoys suspense in reading a book. 11. He seeks recommendations of children's books. 12. He thinks finding good children's books requires time & money. 13. He believes the "perfect" book will draw in a reluctant reader. 14. He teaches reading. 15. He finds encouraging reluctant readers to read takes time. 16. He finds encouraging reluctant readers to read pleasurable. 17. He thinks short text requiring less time to read is desirable (both for him and for reluctant readers). 18. He runs a boys' book club. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. She predicts whether other readers will like the YA books she has read & reviewed. 6. In blogging about books, she references other blogs, Barnes & Noble book descriptions, and Goodreads. 7. She plans what she will read next. 8. She compares books. 9. On her blog, she informs an imagined audience of publishers & authors about what types of books she would like to read more of. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. She finds teaching the mechanics of reading frustrating. 6. Her son has a sense of accomplishment when he has read all the words. 7. She is pleased that her son stays focused while reading at bedtime even though he is tired. 8. She mentions the Junie B. Jones (her son is being read these at school) & Superman series (he is reading these with Mom at home). 9. Their home reading builds on school reading. 10. Her son finds reading pleasurable. 11. She believes reading chapter books over multiple nights helps him develop a sense of story and memory for plot. 12. She wants to work up to reading longer books with her son. 13. Part of her son's homework is to read for 15 minutes each day & record one book read in a log. 14. She does not think reading should be called homework. 15. She has read to her son daily, starting when he was an infant. 16. She is judgmental of the other parents who she imagines would not read to their child unless it is required as homework. 17. She fears that school-based reading will become something her son resists. 18. She takes her son to the library weekly. |
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| | | | <p>19. She recommends a book that “celebrates boys’ imaginations.”</p> <p>20. Her son memorizes words from narrative as they read, and by the second reading can recite words.</p> <p>21. In order to build on school reading, they read short chapter books together at home.</p> <p>22. She describes that they come home from the library with “a nice pile of books to read.”</p> <p>23. She often takes her son to the library after taekwondo practice.</p> <p>24. She chooses a “...bag full of books...” for her son to read during the week.</p> <p>25. They read some “simple and repetitive books.”</p> <p>26. Reading “early readers” is important for children in terms of developing as independent readers.</p> <p>27. The burgeoning number of early readers is unfortunate.</p> <p>28. She feels early readers vary considerably in terms of quality.</p> <p>29. Publishers often level early readers incorrectly.</p> <p>30. She feels early reader illustrations are often inferior to those in “traditional picture books.”</p> <p>31. She recommends the National Geographic non-fiction early readers.</p> <p>32. “...these books are packed with facts.”</p> <p>33. These books don’t need to be read from beginning to end, and they are “beautiful” books.</p> |
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| | | | <p>34. Time for Kids is another good early reader series.</p> <p>35. She feels that many boys, like her son, enjoy reading about animals.</p> <p>36. She anticipates that her son will soon be an independent reader.</p> |
| <p>Concepts – combined and redacted from the sentences taken from the blog’s posts</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading children’s/YA books as pleasurable daily practice (reading at home in the evenings & while on vacation) • Suspense as a pleasurable aspect of reading • Reading children’s books & finding good children’s books (especially ones suited to reluctant readers) requiring time & money • Belief that reluctant readers (especially boys) prefer short texts that require less time spent reading • Reading reviews & seeking recommendations of good children’s books • Planning what to read next, (books for reluctant readers) • Teaching reading – Specific aspects include read-alouds, organizing a boys’ book club, & encouraging reluctant readers (especially by providing them with the “perfect” book) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading YA books as pleasurable daily practice • Suspense as a pleasurable aspect of reading • Planning what to read next (pleasure reading) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading children’s books as pleasurable daily practice (reading with child at home in the evenings) • Reading as homework -- does not think reading should be called homework.—judges other parents for not reading to their children unless required to do so – her fear that school-based reading will become something her son resists. • Teaching reading – Specific aspects include reading to her child (from his infancy), reading together with her child, choosing books for him to read, taking him to the library weekly, teaching the mechanics of reading as frustrating. • Planning what to read next (as part of her son’s development as a reader, i.e. working up to longer books) • Belief that there are boy-oriented books (i.e. She recommends a book that “celebrates boys’ imaginations” & non-fiction early readers about animals – she feels that many boys, like her son, enjoy reading about animals and books that don’t need to be read from beginning to end). • Focus on the quantity read, i.e books (“a nice pile of books,” “a bag full of books” from the library); words (her son feels accomplished when “he has |

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| | | | read all of the words); facts (“...these books are packed with facts.”); reading books multiple times. |
| Summary of Blog (based on the posts analyzed) | <p>This blogger reads children’s books in his leisure time, both in the evening at home and while on vacation. He specifically looks for books that reluctant readers, & especially boys, will enjoy reading. He actively seeks recommendations of such books, reading book reviews & reviewing books himself. He is a teacher and specifically views himself as a teacher of reading. He both reads aloud to his students & leads a boys’ book club. Although he enjoys reading children’s books, he also finds that it takes time. He enjoys reading short texts that require less time to read. Though he enjoys encouraging reluctant readers to read, he also finds that this takes time. He also feels that finding good children’s books requires time & money. He believes that finding the “perfect” book is key to drawing in reluctant readers.</p> | <p>This blogger reads & reviews YA books. She finds reading YA books pleasurable. In blogging about books, she does the following: predicts whether other readers will like the YA books she has read & reviewed; references other blogs, Barnes & Noble book descriptions, and Goodreads; and, she compares books. She also plans what she will read next and informs an(imagined?) audience of publishers & authors about what types of books she would like to read more of.</p> | <p>This blogger reads & reviews children’s books, in the context of reading with her young son in the evenings before he goes to bed. They read together every night even if they are tired. They read a variety of print texts, including phonics readers, short chapter books, & non-fiction early readers. She also takes her son to the library weekly and selects books for them to check out. Her son’s school homework is to read for 15 minutes each day and record the books he has read in a reading log. This blogger does not think reading should be assigned as homework (she implies that reading together should already be a home practice and is judgmental of other parents who she imagines would not read to their child unless it is required as homework). She notes that she has read to her son daily since he was an infant. At the same time, she notes that she often finds reading with her son (as he works to become an independent reader) frustrating. However, she is pleased that her son stays focused while reading at bedtime even though he is tired. She notes that he enjoys reading and feels a sense of accomplishment when he is able to read all the words in a book. He often memorizes words from a story’s narrative as they read, and by the second reading can recite words. However, she fears that school-based reading will become something her son resists.</p> |

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| <p>How do these experiences connect, or not, to concepts of gendered literacy?</p> | <p>Overall: This teacher's hard work toward converting the reluctant readers (most are boys) to a love of reading</p> <p>Specific concepts:</p> <p>Converting the reluctant reader as hard work, requiring significant outputs of time and money to find good books.</p> <p>Short text requiring less time to read is desirable (both for him and for reluctant readers).</p> <p>2 of books reviewed are boy-oriented. 1 is more neutral (rationale?)</p> | <p>Overall: This teenage girl's passionate love of reading & blogging.</p> <p>Specific concepts:</p> <p>Prolific reading of YA fiction</p> <p>Prolific blogging, in which she references other blogs, Barnes & Noble book descriptions, and Goodreads, about YA fiction. She also informs an imagined audience of publishers & authors about what types of books she would like to read more of, including science fiction. However, all the books she reviews in these posts are girl-oriented.</p> | <p>Overall: This mother's (she is also a school librarian) hard work to make her son love reading.</p> <p>Specific concepts:</p> <p>She reads with her son at bedtime daily even when they are tired.</p> <p>It is important that he stay focused, read phonics reader, read all the words, read a text more than once, develop a sense of story and memory for plot, work up to reading longer books, & become an independent reader.</p> <p>She also takes him to the library on a weekly basis. She chooses books for him to read.</p> <p>Her son enjoys reading (although she fears he will come to dislike it).</p> <p>She specifically refers to books as more boy-oriented.</p> |
| <p>What is the scope of the blog's influence? See measures below.</p> | | | |
| <p>How many people follow the blog? (from "followers" section, if</p> | <p>70</p> | <p>787</p> | <p>0</p> |

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| available) | | | |
| How many comments (from readers) does each sample post have? | 3 (2 females, 1 male); 1 (male); 6 (5 females, 1 male) | 3 (females); 1 (female); 3 (females) | 0 |
| Who is the intended audience (as stated in the “About” section or first post)? | Elementary school-aged boys – he states, “my boy readers” Also, Captain Underpants (published by Scholastic) is suggested (by Scholastic, on Scholastic website) for readers ages 7-10 | not explicitly stated | Others in a position to “encourage boys to read.” Specifically mentions “parents.” |
| Who comprises the actual audience (as reflected in the comments)? Comment authors’ characteristics will be identified through names, stated occupation, photos, linked blogger profile, etc. | teachers, parents, school librarians, and children’s lit. authors and illustrators | All female readers! high school/college/early 20s – all avid readers, other avid readers of YA, aspiring writer of YA, aspiring YA librarian | n/a 0 comments |
| How can the comments be characterized? | expressions of gratitude for book recommendations (2), extraneous friendly comments (4), affirmation of blogger’s description of reluctant but proficient readers (1), reflection on own experience with reluctant reader son (2), suggestions of website or blog to visit (2), affirmation | expressions of gratitude for book recommendations (4), affirmations of the blogger’s book reviews (3) | n/a |

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| | of blogger's description of teacher's role in relation to reluctant readers (5), expression of gratitude to blogger for visiting commenter's own blog (1) | | |
| Does the blogger belong to a community of other bloggers? | <p># of blogs in blogroll: 12</p> <p># of references to other blogs in the posts analyzed: 0</p> <p># of comments posted by other bloggers listed in the blog author's blogroll: 4</p> <p>Title & Subject of most commented upon post (of the 3 analyzed): "The Reluctant Trout and the Reluctant Reader" – reeling in the reluctant reader with the "perfect" book/fishing metaphor</p> | <p># of blogs in blogroll: 24</p> <p># of references to other blogs in the posts analyzed: 2</p> <p># of comments posted by other bloggers listed in the blog author's blogroll: 0</p> <p>Title & Subject of most commented upon post (of the 3 analyzed): "The Ivy by Lauren Kunze with Rina Onur" – book review, & "In My Mailbox" – descriptions of books she is planning to read</p> | <p># of blogs in blogroll: 0</p> <p># of references to other blogs in the posts analyzed: 0</p> <p># of comments posted by other bloggers listed in the blog author's blogroll: 0</p> <p>Title & Subject of most commented upon post (of the 3 analyzed): n/a</p> |
| Concepts of children's/YA reading/literacy shared across the blogs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading children's/YA books as pleasurable daily practice (reading at home in the evenings & while on vacation) • Suspense as a pleasurable aspect of reading • Planning what to read next, as looking for books for reluctant readers • Belief that | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading YA books as pleasurable daily practice • Suspense as a pleasurable aspect of reading • Planning what to read next, as pleasure reading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading children's books as pleasurable daily practice (reading with child at home in the evenings) • Teaching reading – Specific aspects include reading to her child (from his infancy) • Planning what to read next, as part of her son's development as a reader (i.e. working up to longer books) • Belief that there are boy-oriented books (i.e. She recommends a book that |

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| | <p>reluctant readers (especially boy) prefer short texts that require less time spent reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching reading – read-alouds | | <p>“celebrates boys’ imaginations” & non-fiction early readers about animals – she feels that many boys, like her son, enjoy reading about animals and books that don’t need to be read from beginning to end).</p> |
| <p>Unique concepts of children’s/YA reading/literacy – from Above -- Concepts (combined and redacted)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading children’s books & finding good children’s books (especially ones suited to reluctant readers) requiring time & money • Reading reviews & seeking recommendations of good children’s books • Teaching reading – organizing a boys’ book club, & encouraging reluctant readers (especially by providing them with the “perfect” book) | <p>none</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading as homework -- does not think reading should be called homework.—judges other parents for not reading to their children unless required to do so – her fear that school-based reading will become something her son resists. • Teaching reading – Specific aspects include reading to her child (from his infancy), reading together with her child, choosing books for him to read, taking him to the library weekly, teaching the mechanics of reading as frustrating. • Focus on the quantity read, i.e books (“a nice pile of books,” “a bag full of books” from the library); words (her son feels accomplished when “ he has read all of the words); facts (“...these books are packed with facts.”); reading books multiple times. |

Appendix B

Interview Consent Form

Title of Study:

Gendered Literacy and Social Media: A Study of the KidLitosphere Blogs

Principal Investigator:

Emily Seitz
School of Communication & Information
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
4 Huntington Street
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Emily Seitz, a doctoral student in the Library and Information Science department of the School of Communication and Information (SC&I) at Rutgers University. The overall goal of the study is to develop an integrated conceptual model of gender in relation to literacy (gendered literacy). More specifically, the study aims to articulate patterns and resistances in the ways in which literacy educators (parents, public librarians, school librarians, and teachers), literacy learners (children and young adults), and creators of reading materials for young people (published authors, editors, and published illustrators), understand the connection between gender and literacy in U.S. culture.

You, in addition to three other bloggers, are being asked to participate in this study because of the nature of your blog about children's and/or young adult literature. Participation in this study will involve an interview (either face-to-face, by phone, or via Skype) lasting approximately 30-60 minutes. Any follow-up questions after the interview will be sent to you by email.

No risks to you are anticipated as a result of your participation in this study. Participation in this study is at no cost to you other than your time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study without penalty. Moreover, you may choose not to answer any questions you find uncomfortable.

The data gathered during this study will be kept confidential. The research records will include some identifying information, such as your name, the title of your blog, and your job title. However, the research records will be kept confidential; access to them will be limited to the principal investigator and they will be kept in a secure location. The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, your name will not be associated with your responses, nor will your blog be referred to by title.

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Emily Seitz at eseitz@eden.rutgers.edu (or at 513-821-0019). If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Sponsored Programs Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 848-932-0150
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

(see next page)

Page 1, Subject Initials _____

Please sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Name (Print) _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Please sign below if you agree to be audiotaped during the interview:

Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator _____ *Date* _____

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