

READING PREFERENCES OF ELEMENTARY MALES AND FEMALES

by

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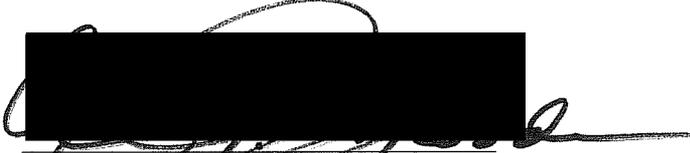
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Abstract

This descriptive study explored the reading preferences of six fifth grade students. The purpose of the study was to explain possible reasons that elementary male students are performing so much lower than elementary female students on reading assessments. Methods of data collection consisted of a) observation of students' book selection and reading behaviors during sustained silent reading, b) audio-recorded interviews, and c) completion of the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey. The study was designed to examine the differences and similarities in reading preferences, reading behaviors, and reading attitudes of elementary males and females. The data were organized by common trends found within each data source. Many common trends regarding reading preferences were found within and across genders. Results suggest that male participants most prefer to read books that fall in the genre of graphic novels and books with male main characters. The female participants generally prefer to read chapter books that are part in a series. The only similarity the male and female participants expressed was that both genders prefer to read chapter books that are part of a series. The observations of students' reading behaviors indicated that female participants thought more critically about what they were reading than the male participants. On the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, the female participants indicated that they had more positive attitudes about reading compared to the male participants. Although more comprehensive research needs to be conducted, the study showed what texts the male participants were most interested in and indicated implications for reading instruction.

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Chapter 1

Background

As I sat and watched Michael read, I could see the opposition and boredom in his eyes. He looked up at me after almost every page in his reading book and asked “Why do I have to read this?” Michael hated the story about the girl who rode horses at her uncle’s ranch, and he was not alone. There were ten males in that class, and although Michael was by far the most vocal in his dislike for the story, at least eight of his male classmates shared that same look in their eyes. Over half of them were not reading at all but were simply staring at the page. I could not blame them. When Michael asked me repeatedly why the story had to be read, I had no explanation for him except for that his teacher wrote down that she wanted everyone to read the story on their own. I experienced this scene while substitute teaching in a fourth grade classroom. It is a scene that occurs every day in classrooms throughout the United States. Elementary school males are unmotivated and uninterested in texts being used in classrooms throughout the United States. Because of their disliking for these texts, males are not reading, which is leading to males quickly falling behind their female classmates in all areas of academics.

Background

I chose to examine the differences in reading preferences of elementary males and females for several reasons. Since the 1930’s, educators have studied a substantial gap between the achievement levels of males and females on reading assessments (Young & Brozo, 2001). Brozo (2006) explains that a possible reason that males are achieving so much lower than girls on reading assessments, is that their literary needs are not being met by educators. Males have become disinterested and unmotivated to read texts that are being utilized in classrooms throughout the United States.

Other researchers go beyond what Brozo has explained. Watson, Kehler, and Martino (2010) believe that schools throughout the United States are failing males. These authors use the term

feminization to describe why schools throughout the United States are failing males. The authors explain that males have masculine needs to read books that appeal to their culture as males. Topics such as sports, action, or technology are three topics that are found to be most interesting to males, yet males spend little time reading about any of these topics. Why? Watson, et. al. explain that it may be because these topics do not appeal to the female teacher who is likely instructing elementary males.

Skelton (2003) discusses the feminization of elementary schools that has taken place throughout the United States. She explains that the predominance of women teachers in elementary schools has led to elementary schools utilizing learning materials that appeal more to females, and instructional methods that appeal more to the learning styles of females rather than males. The instructional materials that are used in elementary schools favor females so much that males are finding it unmasculine to engage in them. When males are finding instructional materials to be in conflict with their culture as males, then there is a problem with educational materials being used in elementary schools. Skelton continues to explain that increasing the number of males that are working in elementary schools could help male students to become more engaged in the curriculum. Male teachers could show male students that it is masculine to read, and male educators can also modify their instruction to meet the needs of males who may have more complex literary needs.

As a male, I can recall wanting to read texts that were based more around sports and often times feeling very unengaged with texts that were being read. I can also recall having only one male teacher from grades kindergarten through sixth grade. I am not positing that male teachers are more effective teachers than female teachers. I believe that if elementary males saw more male educators implementing the curriculum, then they could see that the learning materials are not completely feminine and that males do partake in school work.

I chose to examine the different reading preferences between males and females. This topic was chosen for any elementary males that may have felt the way I did, that they were not interested in the reading selection being implemented. Several possible explanations are being researched to explain why

males are performing so much lower than females. The most prominent of these explanations is that reading materials being utilized in elementary classrooms do not meet the interests of elementary males.

Examining what texts male elementary students are interested in is a very important and highly debated topic throughout the United States. Elementary males are falling behind elementary females at a rapid rate (Brozo, 2006). The poor performance on reading assessments exhibited by elementary males has shown that males are much more likely to be placed in remedial or special education programs and are much more likely to drop out of school. The issue of males falling behind females has become a controversial topic in the past ten years. The gender gap, or difference between male and female achievement scores, continues to widen, and elementary males are recently being referred to as the new disadvantaged (Watson, Kehler, & Martino, 2010). Examining the reading preferences of elementary male and female readers, can help educators to explain possible reasons males are performing lower than females.

What can teachers do to help males keep pace with their female classmates? Watson, et. al. (2010) discuss how males will not be motivated to read if they are not interested in the texts that they are reading. If the texts being utilized are thought of as irrelevant to the lives of the male students, they will refuse to read. If teachers can find what reading materials interest elementary males, then they can help males become motivated to read, and in turn help them to excel not only in reading, but in all academic areas. The reading preferences of female students will also be investigated to see the clear differences and similarities between male and female students. Differences in reading preferences between male and female students will be closely examined to show how different some of the preferred texts can be. Examining the differences in the types of texts that males and females prefer will demonstrate that both genders need texts that cater to their interests.

Theoretical Stance

A child is at the library in their elementary school. The child must decide on a book to bring back to their classroom to read during sustained silent reading that will take place later that day. When deciding on a book to choose, the child will examine titles, the cover of the books, pictures within the books, and possibly a summary that is included on the back or front cover of the books. The child will decide if each book is appealing or not based on these characteristics of the book. What factors determine whether a child will be interested in a book or not? Gee (1991) explains that sociocultural factors make up almost all of what a child will or will not find appealing in reading materials. Gee demonstrates that the social groups people belong to shape the way people view things and their values. Just as males belong to the social group of being a male, they commonly view fairy tales and romantic stories as unappealing. Their views are shaped by the male social group that they belong to. I decided to take a sociocultural stance when examining the reading preferences of elementary males and females because the social and cultural groups students belong to, will determine what books students will find appealing.

Finn (1999) discusses how males often feel that school materials are irrelevant to their lives. Many reading and learning materials do not relate to the lives of males; males feel that school cannot offer any important information. Finn explains that when males become disengaged with school, they feel that their culture as males is different from the culture of school, and that engaging in many of the learning materials is unethical to their culture as males, and even a threat to their masculine identity. When males begin to oppose irrelevant educational materials, literature is among the first subjects that males will view with disdain. Reading books that are predominately feminine is a perfect example of how to cause a male to view school with opposition and disdain. Teachers need to find texts that appeal to males as a social group or male students will likely become defiant towards school at a very young age.

A way that teachers can help find texts that appeal to their male students is to do their research on their students, to find out what their students' interests are outside of school. Once teachers can

identify student interests, then they can begin to connect texts to students' culture outside of school (Voss, 1996). McCarthy (2000) discusses that literacy programs should be designed around a range of activities that have to do with students' lives. The role of the teacher is to connect students' lives outside of school to the classroom. When teachers select texts that are not only unappealing to male students but also differ with their views as males, then students will become disinterested and create a negative view towards reading. The culture of male students has a history of being thought of as less intelligent than their female counterparts. Skelton (2003) explains that males are often viewed as having lower intellectual capabilities compared to their female classmates. This perception is referred to as the deficit perspective. (Tracey & Morrow, 2003). An alternative to the deficit perspective is to value the knowledge that students enter the classroom with, connecting learning materials to that knowledge.

One social group that will be examined is African American males. African American males make up the highest percentage of students in special education programs, the highest high school drop-out rate, highest percentage of people who are unemployed, and the highest number of juvenile incarcerations. How can one social group dominate all of these different categories? Haddix (2009) explains that teachers see African American males, and immediately view them with lower expectations. African American males are often inappropriately placed in intervention or special education programs simply because of their race and gender. Teachers have low expectations for them, but what kind of expectations do African American males have for themselves? The social group of African American males has shaped them to not expect to be able to learn anything from school that is relevant or authentic to their lives. How many texts that are used in elementary schools are relevant to the lives of African Americans? Haddix explains that the answer is simple, not very many at all. It is reasons such as this that African American males and all males are falling behind their female classmates.

Research Questions

The following questions were used to guide my research when examining the similarities and differences in the reading preferences of male and female elementary students.

- What are the differences between elementary males' and females' reading preferences?
- How can classroom teachers change their instruction to better meet the literary needs of males?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In order to gain background knowledge on the reading preferences of elementary males and females and why males are falling behind females, I read a large quantity of academic sources. These sources were used to examine several aspects of reading preferences, including sociocultural factors, gender factors, information regarding the gender gap, and school texts. This literature review is arranged by the research questions that were developed to guide my research.

What are the differences between elementary males' and females' reading preferences?

When examining the differences in reading preferences of elementary males and females, one must examine what males prefer to read. Zehr (2010) discusses that males are more interested in non-fiction texts than female students. Zehr continues that most elementary text collections are dominated by fictional texts, a possible explanation for why males are falling behind. Males prefer texts about sports, wars, and technology, which are all non-fiction topics. Topics such as sports, action, and technology meet the needs that males have to show their masculinity and testosterone to society, an action that has existed since man has walked the earth (Watson et. al., 2010). Below (2010) has a similar view to Zehr, in that elementary males prefer to read non-fiction, and elementary classrooms do not contain nearly enough non-fiction texts. Below explains that most non-fiction texts that are present in elementary classrooms are textbooks, which are one of the primary reasons that males are uninterested in the texts they are reading. When males read only textbooks, they are not reading non-fiction stories, but only non-fiction facts. Males need to be surrounded by non-fiction stories such as stories about war, which are an all-time favorite among elementary males.

Sargent, Mwavita, and Smith (2009) support the belief that students in elementary schools prefer to read informational texts, especially the male students. The authors explain that several studies have proven that males prefer to read non-fiction. Newspapers are not just non-fiction but are reading beyond fiction. Educators that use newspapers as reading materials on a regular basis have noticed that the majority of their students of both genders enjoy reading. One reason that males enjoy reading newspapers so much is that newspapers contain little narrative and contain facts, but are still written in a story format. Males are naturally more curious about the world and have a desire to know more about the world around them. Males also are naturally attempting to mature faster than females, a desire that an adult text such as newspapers can fulfill (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). Another possible explanation that males enjoy reading newspapers so much is, newspapers contain a large variety of topics that the reader can skip to. Any form of text that can help males to get excited about reading and continue to enjoy reading is priceless in elementary schools.

Sargent, et al. conducted a study on the effect newspapers have on elementary students' reading attitudes. The study consisted of 217 students in grades third through fifth including 121 females and 96 males. Forty-five percent of students (99) read newspapers in their classroom at least once a week as their classroom reading material for one academic year. This group became the treatment group. The remaining 55% of students (118) did not read newspapers at all. The larger group was to be treated as the control group for the study. Before the study took place the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna & Kear, 1990) was administered and the mean of each group was found to establish a baseline of students' reading attitudes. After one academic year all students again completed the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey and the mean of each group was found. The results showed that the group of students who read newspapers scored higher numbers on the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey than the control group, indicating that the treatment group enjoyed a higher reading attitude than the control group. The findings of this study showed that students who read newspapers as reading materials in elementary classrooms, had more positive attitudes about reading in general. Although this study included elementary students of

both genders, the investigators paid close attention to the male participants, and noted that the majority of males seemed to enjoy reading newspapers significantly more than reading texts from basal readers.

Zambo (2007) discusses other genres that elementary males prefer. The author explains that elementary males do enjoy reading some fictional texts, but they prefer books that have a male hero or as she refers to as a male archetype. Zambo explains that the challenge with males is that they need to find entry points into literacy while in the elementary grades, preferably while in the primary elementary grades. Books that include a male hero do just that. Male heroes are engaging to elementary males and most importantly help them to become interested in reading. Books about male archetypes capture their attention and meet their literary needs. Archetypes show young males what it means to be an honorable man. Superheroes such as Superman and Batman always do the right thing. Using books with male archetypes illustrates to elementary males what it means to be a man. The characteristics of heroes are consistent between cultures, so books with archetypes can be used in classroom with ethnic diversity (Brozo, 2005). Zambo (2009) describes elementary males as people who are trying to understand how honorable men think, act, and feel. Books that have male archetypes offer a picture of what an honorable man looks like. Zambo offers a list of qualities that are of interest to males and are part of what society refers to as an honorable man. These qualities consist of respect, responsibility, honesty, and courage among others. These are all important traits that teachers attempt to teach in the classroom. Using books that possess these qualities reinforces teachers' instruction and also meets elementary males' interests.

Authors Farris, Werderich, Nelson, and Fuhler (2009) conducted a study to examine the reading topics that elementary males prefer. The study consisted of 16 fifth grade students from an urban area in the Midwestern United States. Out of these 16 students, 54% of them were Caucasian, 19% were Hispanic, and 17% were African American. The principle investigators provided the males with a collection of both fiction and non-fiction texts. The students were asked to select one text at a time which they would then read. All books were novels and were approximately the same length, so length would

not be a factor in the students' decision making process. Once the students had completed reading a book, they would make comments on each book with one of the principle investigators via e-mail.

The investigators found that the males often selected books based on the books' cover. Books that had interesting covers usually involved the main character engaging in dangerous or life-threatening activities. Observations by the principle investigators also showed that the lower performing students typically would look through books to see if they contained pictures. If the books did contain pictures, then they were selected more often than not selected. If the books did not contain pictures, then they were usually not chosen. Books that had color pictures were more popular than books with black and white pictures, and books that contained photographs were the most popular. Young and Brozo (2001) also have found that elementary males prefer books with elaborate pictures. The authors discuss how males need pictures to help guide them through books. Certain studies have shown that males have never had the imagination that females do. Males' lack of imagination also offers an explanation as to why they prefer non-fiction. Males are not able to visualize parts of story as easy as females, so they enjoy having stories with pictures that can help them make these visualizations.

Young and Brozo also described studies that have taken place about the amount of time elementary males spend looking at pictures as opposed to females. The study proved that males look at pictures on average up to twice as long as females. Why? Young and Brozo offer several explanations. Their most prominent is that males enjoy making connections between the pictures and the text, something that can take several minutes for an elementary school student. Zambo (2009) explains that illustrations or photographs in books contain important information that is read the same way print is read. Students reading pictures is called visual literacy. Reading pictures helps males to gain a further understanding and deeper meaning to what is going on in the story. Teaching elementary students to read pictures helps them to move beyond the concrete meanings of a text and find the deeper meanings or lessons that a text may contain. Zehr (2010) discusses that illustrations are very important to elementary-aged males. Illustrations help males to make connections from their own visuals to the text and to the

story. Elementary males are generally reluctant to discuss or share their feelings. Reading can offer a venue where males can read about feelings. According to Zehr, illustrations are meaningful to elementary readers if they contain some emotion. These help the readers to see the emotions of the story. The emotions are especially important to males because of their lack of visualization and imagination. When males read about characters with feelings, they can recognize their own feelings they have. This is a large reason that males prefer detailed illustrations in the books they read.

Looking back at the study conducted by Farris et. al., (2009) the investigators also found that males selected books based on the author, and books that were part of a series. If the males had read a book in a series they wanted to read other books that belonged to that series. In some cases the males enjoyed following a character through a number of situations or sequels of books such as the *Harry Potter* series (Rowling, 1997) or the *Dive* series (Korman, 2003). The same can be said about males choosing books based on the author. If males had read a book they enjoyed by an author, they often selected books of the same author even if the books were not in the same series. An example of a favorite author is Gary Paulsen, author of *Hatchet* (1987) and *Tucket's Home* (2001). Although these books are not related at all, students chose them because they remember enjoying a book by Gary Paulsen. Farris et. al. found it encouraging that males were choosing books based on the author. Although the students were choosing books based solely on the pictures or cover of the book, the students were taking the time to read the author of the books. Greenlee, Monson, and Taylor (1996) explain that children very much enjoy books that are in a series, especially male students. For decades series books dominated book sales, the most popular being the *Harry Potter* series, the *Goosebumps* series, (Stine, 1995) and most recently, the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* Series (Kinney, 2003). Although these books often receive harsh reviews by critics, they are favorites among elementary males. Greenlee et. al. explain that series books help elementary students to follow the character from one book to the next. Series books help elementary students to develop several literacy skills such as making connections from text to text, help students to make predictions and inferences, and develop recall skills among many others.

One last finding from the study conducted by Farris, Werderich, Nelson, and Fuhler (2009), is that elementary males chose books that their teacher had done read-alouds of. If the classroom teacher had done a read-aloud of a book, the males generally wanted to read that same book, a book in the same series, a book of the same topic, or a book by the same author. The authors discuss how the males wanted to read books similar to the books the teachers had read-aloud to the class, because they are familiar with the topic. The males have some background knowledge that they can apply while reading. Lack of background knowledge is very commonly cited as a reason that elementary males do not enjoy reading. The authors also explained that the lower level reading students only selected books that teacher had read-aloud to the class. The struggling readers may feel more confident reading a story that they have already heard and have some prior knowledge on.

What can classroom teachers change to better meet the literary needs of males?

After examining the literary preferences of elementary males, one needs to look into what classroom teachers can change to help meet the literary needs of elementary males. Brozo (2005) explains that texts need to be implemented in elementary classrooms that are relevant and interesting to males' lives. So many texts in elementary schools do not relate to students' lives outside of school, so students cannot and do not want to make any sort of connection with these texts. The key to helping all students, especially the stubborn males, is to design literacy programs that revolve around activities that students are involved in outside of school. Texts that are used in classrooms need to be connected to students' daily lives. The primary role of the teacher is to connect what happens inside the classroom to the outside world (McCarthy, 2000). Finn (1999) explains that males feel that reading materials in classrooms today are completely irrelevant to their lives. The author discusses that when students begin to feel that school is not relating to their lives it can be very dangerous for educators and students. Once students feel that one subject is irrelevant to their lives, they feel that school as a whole has nothing to offer them. This is the

attitude of the majority of students that do not graduate from high school. These students feel that school is unnecessary in their life. This happens much more with male students because so many learning materials are irrelevant to their lives. This also explains why the male drop-out rate is so much higher than females.

What can teachers do to keep their students interested in learning materials being utilized in classrooms? According to Voss (1996) teachers need to take the initiative to learn about their students. Voss states that it is not enough to merely know the students' names and their parents' names. What are their interests and equally important, what are they not interested in. Find out what activities they engage in after school whether it is a school sport or something completely unrelated to school such as working on cars. Voss describes students' skills in and out of school as multiple literacies. Students may be involved in school sports. The terminology of each sport and the skills of that sport are the literacies of that sport. School literacy is students writing academically and reading academic texts for school-based purposes. Teachers' goals should be, to incorporate students' multiple literacies in the classroom. Only when a teacher has found out the activities and interests of their students, can they begin to design their instructional plans. Too many teachers do not take the time to learn about their students before creating their instructional plans and getting students who are not engaged in learning is the direct result. Teachers must find ways to find connections between texts and students' lives outside of school. (Luke, 1992) Once teachers have been able to make these connections, students will also be able to connect texts to their lives.

Brozo (2006) describes literacy programs in schools, created by teachers that have gone out of their way to meet the literary needs of their male students. Brozo describes one teacher in an urban school district that allowed her male students to complete word study exercises with lyrics to rap music. These students, who generally were not motivated to complete word study activities, thoroughly enjoyed this activity. Another example Brozo illustrated was a student who had been in trouble with the law and had been incarcerated. The student had felt that he had not had an opportunity to properly defend himself at a

court trial. The teacher found books that explain the judicial system in the United States. The student became very interested and wrote several research papers on this topic. Brozo's examples showed educators who found texts that met their students' needs. The result was their students becoming interested and motivated in the literacy activities and excelling because of their interest in the topics (Brozo, 2006)

How can teachers learn about their students? McKenna and Kear (1990) developed the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey to help teachers learn about their student feelings towards reading, their literary behaviors, and their interests, both in school and out of school. At the end of a survey a scoring guide is included that helps the teachers to interpret the survey's results. This survey has been very commonly used in a wide array of different studies and has been published by the International Reading Association. McKenna and Kear explain that the survey is helpful for elementary teachers because reading attitudes and achievement are closely linked. When students are enjoying reading, they generally score higher on reading assessments and in all subjects. Inversely students that do not enjoy reading, are typically lower performing students in all areas.

The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey can provide teachers with the opportunity to gain insight on their students' feelings about reading and make adjustments according to the surveys. Teachers can conference with students who do not enjoy reading and try to find texts that better meet their interests. The teacher must look at the data that students include in the survey and make instructional modifications based on this data. If teachers fail to make these modifications, students who do not enjoy reading will continue to not read, and usually will be further left behind their classmates. Motivation is largely dependent on a student's ability to complete a task. If the student is confident they can complete a task and they are generally going to be motivated to do so. If students do not think they can complete a task, they generally will not make an attempt at all. Engagement is another aspect of motivation. If students are engaged in a text then they will be more motivated to read. Teachers need to find texts that students will be interested in and are at students' current reading level. Ongoing assessments are the best way to

determine reading levels and interests (Noll, Oswald, & Newton, 2010). Teachers need to assess students often to find out about their students. If teachers can motivate their students to read then they are more likely to have students who are higher achieving readers.

Jones (2006) has similar views to Voss. Jones writes, teachers must become more empathetic to students in order to find texts that are engaging to them. Educators must consider the different social groups within a classroom and how they will view a text. Jones says that teachers must consider the following questions of a text before implementing it, whose interests does this text serve? How might this text read differently to the different students within the classroom? Jones offers several questions like this. The goal of each question is to understand how each student in a teacher's classroom will feel when reading each text. If the answers to these questions are bored or disinterested, then that text is not meant for every student. Jones discusses the large role culture plays on how students perceive texts. Social class plays a role on students' lives in an enormous way (Young & Brozo, 2001). The social groups or discourses students belong to shape the way students perceive anything, especially texts. The discourse that students belong to shape the way they think, act, dress, and talk.

Gee (1991) elaborates on the topic of social groups or discourses. The discourse that students belong to shape the way they feel about learning materials. According to Gee, everyone belongs to an infinite number of social groups. The social group being examined in this case is males. Society has shaped males to think and feel masculine. It is because of the male discourse that elementary males do not want to read fantasy novels or romantic fairy tales. These stories do not fit society's version of masculinity (Skelton, 2003). Teachers need to consider what social discourses their students fall into and select texts that appeal to that discourse (Gee, 1991). When texts are read by elementary students, the texts are put into the students' social context. (Cho, 2006) If the texts being read are not relevant to that social group, then the students will have little knowledge to apply to that text and will not become engaged in that text.

Being a member of a social group shapes the way people act and feel (Skelton, 2003). Belonging to the social group of males shapes males to act masculine and unfeminine. Schools across the United States are using reading materials that are in conflict with the social group of males and as a result males are not taking part in reading. Too many texts being utilized in elementary schools favor the interests and learning styles of females. Skelton refers to the shift towards female attitudes and interests as feminization. According to the Skelton, feminization is the most prominent in elementary schools throughout the United States. Examples of feminization include the dominance of female teachers in elementary schools, and the abundance of texts that have female characters or female attitudes. Reading in elementary schools is thought to be a feminine act or unmanly. This is because of the feminization of elementary schools, but it is also because so many texts are centered on the reading interests of female students. To make male students more disengaged with these texts, female teachers are assigning these texts. Many texts are in conflict with society's view of males and how males feel they should view themselves. These views of self-image all deal with the discourse that males belong to.

What can be done to solve these problems of feminization in elementary schools? The most obvious and easiest solution is to assign texts that include male characters or appeal more to males (Young & Brozo, 2001). Books that appeal to the male discourse should be utilized so males can feel masculine and comfortable in school instead of feeling conflicted with their values as males. A more complicated solution is to include more males in primary elementary schools. Many studies have shown that if instructional materials are assigned by male teachers, then male students will be more motivated to complete them. Male teachers know how to appeal to the society's view of males. They can show their unmotivated students entry points to texts and how texts apply to their lives. Something that is much more meaningful coming from a male teacher rather than a female. For students who live in urban areas or areas with high crime rates, males provide a positive role model. Seeing a male teacher can show males that it is not feminine to be educated and that men can also become involved in education.

Males in general are falling quickly behind their female classmates (Brozo, 2006). When examining ethnicity and gender since the 1980's, the ethnic group of African American males is the lowest performing group throughout the United States. A large reason for this is the marginalization of African American males or the belief that they are not as intelligent as their classmates. Teachers view African American males with very low expectations, even before they have been assessed at all. Is it possible that all males may be viewed in this same way? Possibly, but there are still many other reasons that lead to African American males underachieving so greatly in America's schools. Out of school factors such as students who come from single-parent homes, peer pressure, and crime all play a role in the underachievement of African American males. What can teachers do to help African American males? Just like all males, African American males need to have texts that meet their interests. African American males are the most unmotivated students because so many of these texts are irrelevant to their lives (Haddix, 2009). Too many stories in elementary schools revolve around farms and ranches because of the idea to incorporate geography in literacy. These stories do not appeal to African Americans in urban areas in the slightest. Many African American males have never been to a farm nor have they seen a horse. These texts are not important to them and no connection will be made to that story. Books that seem to be successful with African American males include texts about their history. Many of these students do not know much about their history due to the lack of parental involvement. Stories about slavery, the Civil War, and civil rights, are all areas of interest for African American males (Young & Brozo, 2001). It all goes back to appealing to the lives of students no matter what their ethnicity may be.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Background

To better understand the reading preferences of elementary males and females, a research study was conducted to investigate what texts fifth grade males and females prefer to read. Empirical research was used in a fifth grade classroom at a middle school in Western New York. This school was selected because of the ethnic and economic diversity included in the school. The school included African American males as well as males that speak English as their second language, two ethnic groups that are finishing last on standardized tests nationwide. A fifth grade classroom was used because it includes students at the elementary level, who are mature enough to be able to identify their interests and their reading preferences. I conducted a study to analyze and learn more about the reading preferences of elementary males and females.

Participants

The participants included six fifth graders who will be chosen at random. The participants attended an urban school that consists of 485 students, with 13% of the population being African American and 12% being Hispanic. Five percent of the school's population is English Language Learners and 56% of the school qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch. (New York State Education Department, 2010)

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. Each female student was assigned a female pseudonym while males were assigned male pseudonyms.

Mary was a ten year old Caucasian girl who ranked among the highest achieving students in her class in all subjects. She commonly answered questions and volunteered for activities. She came from a middle class family and had many friends in the school. Mary was often talking and often had to be asked to be quiet when the teacher was talking. She was viewed as a leader by her classmates not only because of her outgoing actions, but also because of her likeable personality.

Elizabeth was an eleven year old Caucasian student who was viewed as quiet and reserved but also was one of the higher achieving students in the class. She rarely raised her hand but if called on always had the correct answer. She was a diligent worker and never had to be reprimanded for misbehavior. She came from a middle class family but had friends in her class including Mary. This school year marked Elizabeth's first year in public school. Grades kindergarten through fourth grade, were completed at a local parochial school that had considerably smaller class sizes. .

Christine was a ten year old student who was part Caucasian and part Hispanic. She came from a lower middle class family and her grades were at the lower end of the class. She reported to a reading specialist during the class's English Language Arts block for remedial instruction. Christine could often be found out of her seat at inappropriate times, and was constantly reprimanded for talking out of turn. Despite her misbehavior and low grades, she was often found laughing and displayed a great deal of self-confidence. She seemed genuinely happy to be at school and had friends in her class.

Larry was an eleven year old Caucasian student and was the highest achieving of all the male students. He often raised his hand to volunteer for classroom activities and was always on task. He came from a middle class family and had several friends within the classroom. Larry rarely was spoken to regarding his behavior and seemed to enjoy school very much.

Timothy was an eleven year old African American student whose grades ranked in the middle of his classmates. He came from a middle class family and often acted out in class. Timothy had friends in

the classroom and was very social with them. He was very confident in himself but seemed eager to leave school when dismissal occurred. He was active in sports outside of school and often talked about sports.

Jared was a ten year old Caucasian student whose grades ranked among the middle of his classmates. He was very talkative and was often off task. His homework and classwork were rarely finished and relied on the help of his friends to complete his homework. He rarely paid attention, and had to be told to focus on the teacher several times per day. Jared exhibited a great deal of self-confidence and had many friends in the classroom. He was very humorous and was referred to as the class clown.

Data Collection

In my first week of data collection, I observed each participant individually, while they engaged in Silent Sustained Reading. I made anecdotal notes in a journal on the texts the students chose to read and any unique literary behaviors that occurred during reading. During the second week, I began to conduct audio-recorded interviews with each participant. The interviews were based on what texts students prefer to read and why, and what texts students do not prefer to read and why. The tape-recorded interviews continued throughout out my third week of data collection. During each interview, a variety of genres of books were provided for students. Students were asked if they had the opportunity to choose any books from the books provided, which books they would choose. Some of the more popular books present during the interviews included, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Ugly Truth*, *The Amazing World of Sports*, *Hoot*, and *The Surrender Tree*. (For a complete list of all the books provided during the interviews see Appendix A)

In the fourth week, every participant completed the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna & Kear, 1990). The survey was completed during sustained silent reading time. The survey contained 20 total questions which asked students how they feel about reading in different situations.

Each question receives one to four points. Four points represents the students feeling happiest while one point represents the students feeling very upset. The survey uses drawings of the cartoon cat Garfield, so students can match their attitude on a particular reading scenario. As the survey administrator, I followed the survey's scoring guide. Each participant was scored on a scale from one to four for each scenario. The students receive a total score after all 20 questions had been completed. The maximum score a student can receive is an 80.

Once all of the participants completed the survey, I observed each participant individually one last time as they read silently. Again I made anecdotal notes in a journal recording the texts students chose to read and their literary behaviors while reading. The data I collected from the participants' interviews were analyzed and categorized to gain further insight into the differences in reading preferences between elementary males and females. The information included in the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey will also be analyzed and categorized to examine the role gender plays on reading attitudes.

Data Analysis

During the initial observation of students' book selections during sustained silent reading; I identified the most popular genres and attributes of books. All of the books identified in this study are categorized based on these genres and attributes. Books were coded by their genre and particular attributes they may possess (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Some books may fall into multiple categories because of their genres and attributes they may have.

Chapter 4

Findings

The chapter has been organized by each data source. When examining the data collected in each data source, common trends were examined. These trends were found within and across genders. I also examined differences found between males and females for each data source.

First Observation of Students' Book Selections

Each student had gone to the library throughout the week the initial observations took place. While at the library each student was required to sign out or re-sign out one or more books. After each student returned from the library the class engaged in sustained silent reading. I found several common trends while observing the female participants read.

1. All of the female participants selected books that were fiction. These included one realistic fiction novel, one adventure fiction novel, and one historical fiction novel.
2. Every female participant selected books that were in a series of books. Each book selected was not the first book in that series. After discussion with each student, they told me that they had read the previous books in the series and had enjoyed them, so they continued to read the other books in that series.
3. Every female participant selected chapter books that contained no pictures within the text. All of these chapter books contained over 300 pages with close to 20 different chapters.
4. Every female participant selected books that contained characters that were near their age group.

5. Each female participant only selected one text to read at a time. The school rules allow students to sign out up to three books from the library at a time, but each female participant only selected one.

Two out of three of the female participants selected books that had one female or a group of females as the main character of the story. One female participant selected a text that had a male main character. The male character was in the age group of the participant. Commonalities could also be seen in each female participant when observing their literary behaviors while reading.

1. Each female participant seemed to thoroughly enjoy the story they were reading. I determined this by the facial expressions of the participants and their body language. Each student showed excitement or surprise on their face by their eyes widening, their eyebrows rising, or their faces getting closer to the book while reading. Since two of the females selected texts that contained suspenseful plots, they were likely drawn into the book through action scenes.
2. All of the female participants took time to reflect on the book they were reading. I determined students were reflecting on the story and not simply daydreaming or losing focus, by their facial expressions and body language. When students were reflecting on the story, their eyes were pointed upwards and their head often tilted. I also found it common that students would reread a passage from the text after reflecting. When students were losing focus, they were more likely to look around the classroom or at their classmates.

The male participants also showed common trends in their book selections.

1. All of the male participants selected books that contained male main characters. One student did select a book that contained female supporting characters, but the other two participants selected books that contained only male characters.

2. Each male student selected texts that contained either an illustration or a photograph of one or more males on the cover of the book. Three out of the five books selected by the male participants included photographs of males' faces on the cover.
3. Two out of three male participants selected texts that included main characters that were in the same age group as the students. Timothy selected books on sports so his books could not be included in this category. The books he did select were written for students in his age group.
4. Two out of the three male participants signed two books out of the library at one time.

Out of the five books selected by the male participants, three of them were books that were part of a series. One student had selected a book that was part of a saga which was part of a larger series of books. He had read books in this series before, but this was the first book he had read that was part of this particular saga. Three out of the five books chosen were chapter books. One male participant did select a graphic novel that was unique in comparison to the books chosen by his classmates. The book contained illustrations on every page and word bubbles from characters' mouths that helped the reader to understand the story. The male participants showed common trends in their literary behaviors and also provided some of the most unique reading behaviors.

1. Like their female classmates, each male seemed to enjoy the book they were reading. Students chose books from the library, as a class, on a weekly basis.

The most unique reading behavior observed, came from Timothy, who had selected picture books. When completing an initial observation of the Timothy, I noticed that he omitted pages that did not contain pictures. When reading pages with photographs that were took up less than half of the page or black and white photographs, he read part of the page. When reading pages with color photographs or photographs that took up half the page or more, the student read the entire page. I observed the student again while he read a similar book. This time the book contained only color photographs on every page. While reading this particular text, the student read every page in the book. He examined each photograph

carefully and read each caption that was included with each photograph. The student read the text very slowly because of the careful attention he paid to the details in the photographs. In Timothy's case, the more color photographs and larger photographs included in a text, the more likely the he was to read.

Another unique reading behavior shown by a male participant was exhibited when Jared was reading a graphic novel. He read a book out of the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series. I observed the student enjoying the text very much, which included laughing out loud at some points, and telling his classmates about the humorous parts of the book. He also showed his classmates pages from the book. The student read every word bubble that was included in the book, often aloud. Jared was observed reading a science fiction novel in a second observation. Observational notes indicated that he read very slowly as the book was above his reading level (difficult) and he often took breaks. These breaks lasted 30 seconds and included the student letting out a large breath and looking upwards. After 30 seconds Jared would continue reading which was remarkable considering his usual behavior in the classroom.

The following code shown in table 4.1 was used to analyze the student's reading selections. The table below provides a key for the code as well as an example of each genre listed. The genres selected are the most popular types of genres based on the students' reading selections during sustained silent reading. Attributes of books are also listed in the lower portion of table 4.1. Examples are not given for the attributes because they are not genres but attributes of a genre and are self-explanatory

Table 4.1
Codes and Examples of Books for Students' Reading Selections

Code	Categories	Examples of Books
AF	Adventure Fiction	<i>Grim Tuesday</i>
HF	Historical Fiction	<i>Distant Waves</i>
NF	Non-Fiction	<i>Eleanor Roosevelt</i>
NFF	Non-Fiction Fact	<i>Football Top 10</i>
SF	Science Fiction	<i>Halo</i>
RF	Realistic Fiction	<i>12 Finally</i>
GN	Graphic Novel	<i>Diary of a Wimpy Kid</i>
CPH	Contains Color Photos	
C	Chapter Book	
S	Book in a Series	
M	Male main Character	
F	Female Main Character	

An adventure fiction novel is a genre that has events that occur outside of the character's actual life. Adventure fiction is based on unreal events and usually includes a large amount of action or danger. A historical fiction novel is a genre that is not factual but is based on real events or a real time period that occurred. Non-fiction novels are a genre of books that are factual. A non-fiction fact book is a book that contains little narrative and is mainly composed of different facts or statistics. Science fiction novels are purely imaginary and are typically set in the future or outer space, and include paranormal themes and futuristic technology. Realistic fiction is a genre that includes events that are untrue but could physically happen. A graphic novel is a genre in which the story is told to the reader through dialogue and sequential pictures in a traditional comic format. Graphic novels for children typically are humorous in nature.

The table below illustrates the common trends in students’ reading selections. The male and female participants are divided by the bold black line in the center of the table. This line allows the reader to see common trends within and across genders.

Table 4.2
Students Reading Selections During Sustained Silent Reading

Genres												
Student Names	AF	HF	NF	NFF	SF	RF	GN	CPH	C	S	M	F
Elizabeth	✓								✓	✓	✓	
Christine		✓							✓	✓		✓
Mary						✓			✓	✓		✓
Larry	✓					✓			✓	✓	✓	
Jared					✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Timothy			✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

The table clearly illustrates common trends between genders. Both males and females prefer to read chapter books. Every participant in the initial observation selected a chapter book. All of the chapter books the participants selected were in a series. Another common trend seen across genders was that a majority of the students had selected books with a male main character. This trend is significant because it shows that females will choose books that have a main character of the opposite gender, but males will not. All of the male participants chose books with male main characters. The only vast difference shown in the reading selections of the male and female participants was seen with graphic novels. Males were more likely than females to choose graphic novels to read during sustained silent reading. Two out of the three male participants chose to read graphic novels, while no female participants selected graphic novels.

Interviews

I spread out 30 books on a table located in the rear of the classroom. These books included a variety of different genres. I began conducting the interviews by allowing the participants to individually observe all of the books provided at random. I then asked each participant if they had the opportunity to choose any of these books, which ones would you choose. For every book the students chose, I asked why they would read that book. I then asked students to name other books titles or genres they prefer to read. I continued the interview by asking students, what books do you see here that you would not like to read. I again asked each student why they would not like to read each book. I ended the interview by asking the students if there were any books or any genres that are not present that they do not enjoy reading. (for interview questions see appendix B)

Many common trends were found within and across genders. The following trends were seen with the female participants.

1. Every female participant stated they prefer to read chapter books. One female participant even explained, "This book looks too short with too many pictures." Out of the three female participants, only one picture book was selected.
2. All of the female participants selected books that were part of a series. I began to notice this trend during the interviews and asked Mary if she prefers to read books that were part of a series. Mary said, "Yes. I like to read books in a series because if I liked the first book I will probably like the rest of the books."
3. Two out of the three female participants preferred to read non-fiction books. When Mary had shown that she preferred to read non-fiction texts, she explained, "I like non-fiction because I like history and I like learning about how different things were made."

4. The last genre that was frequently chosen by the female participants was realistic fiction. Two out of the three female participants explained that they prefer realistic fiction as their favorite type of genre. Elizabeth selected several realistic fiction titles. When I asked her about realistic fiction she said, "I like realistic fiction the best. I do not like science fiction or books that are very fantasy fiction." When I asked Elizabeth to name some titles of books she did not enjoy reading she said, "I do not like the *Chronicles of Narnia* books or *Lord of the Rings* books. They have too many difficult words in them and they are too hard to follow."

While observing the female students during the interviews, I observed many unique behaviors and answers. Mary selected the book *Hoot* as one of the books that she would most like to read. When I asked her why, she explained that she had seen the movie and had enjoyed it. Mary was the only student to say that she would prefer to read a book because she enjoyed the movie, even though several titles were present that were the basis for movies. Mary and Elizabeth both gave similar answers for why they would not prefer to read some texts. Both participants stated that they would not want to read the books *Extreme Scientists* or the *Tarantula Scientist* because they do not enjoy science class. Mary and Elizabeth were the only students that referred back to their classroom subjects, to explain why they would or would not want to read a particular book.

Elizabeth's interview was by far the most unique of all of the participants' interviews. When I asked Elizabeth to identify the texts she would most like to read, she began to look at each book as the other participants had. She flipped the books over and read the summary included on the back cover of each book. She also skimmed through several books and read excerpts of books that looked interesting to her. She was the only participant to examine books this way. Every other participant besides Elizabeth simply chose books by their interest level in the book's cover, or prior knowledge they had on the books. Elizabeth said in her interview that she would like to read the book *Tiger Rising*. When I asked her why she selected *Tiger Rising*, she said, "I think it would be a good book to read because it is a Newberry

Medal Winner.” Out of all of the participants, Elizabeth was the only student that said she would like to read a book because of the awards it had won and the quality of the book.

Common trends could also be seen when interviewing the male students.

1. The most noticeable trend seen in the male participants was their interest in graphic novels. Every male participant chose at least one graphic novel; the most popular books being from the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series. When I asked Timothy why he liked graphic novels, he responded by saying, “they are funny and entertaining.”
2. Like the female participants, all of the male participants stated they prefer to read chapter books. Two out of the three male participants preferred to read chapter books that were in a series. When I asked Jared if he preferred to read books that were in a series, he said, “Yes. I like to know what the books are about.”
3. Two out of three male participants chose non-fiction books. Most of these non-fiction titles were sports books. Jared explained, “I play sports so I like to read about sports. I do not like reading books on stuff I am not interested in.” Science fiction was another popular genre among the male participants. Larry stated that “I like science fiction because the books are weird and they make you think about stuff that is not real.”
4. Books that contain color photographs were popular among the male participants. Two out of the three males chose books that had color photographs. Timothy stated, “I like books that have color pictures, because it helps me to understand the books more and the pictures are cool to look at.”

Answers that offer insight into how male students select books to read, could be seen during the interviews. Timothy said that he most liked to read books about sports over any other books. When I asked why he replied, “I already have some background knowledge on the book so I would like to read

that book more.” I asked Timothy if he did not like to read books that he had little background knowledge on. Timothy said, “Yeah. I don’t like to read books I don’t know about.” Timothy and Larry both stated that they would not like to read the book *Tiger Rising* or *Becoming Billie Holliday*. When I asked the students why they would not like to read these books, they both said that the books look sad and they do not like reading sad books. Larry said, “When I read sad books, they make me sad and I hate that.” Jared said that he only likes to read boy books. When I asked him what types of books he does not like to read he said, “I don’t like to read girly books.” I asked Jared what girly books were. He said, “Books with girls in it, like Junie B. Jones or fairy tales and stuff like that.”

Table 4.3 below shows students’ book selections during the interviews.

Table 4.3
Students’ Book Selections During Interviews

Student Names	Genre												
	AF	HF	NF	NFF	SF	RF	GN	CPH	C	S	M	F	
Elizabeth	✓	✓				✓				✓	✓	✓	
Christine			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mary			✓				✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Larry					✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	
Jared			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Terry			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Common trends between genders are shown in table 4.3 above. Both male and female students showed that they prefer to read graphic novels. Five out of the six participants selected graphic novels. Like the students’ book selections during sustained silent reading, all of the students chose to read chapter books, with all of the participants except one choosing chapter books that were part of a series. All but one of the participants selected books that had male main characters in them. Only one female participant did not select a book with a male main character. Four out of the six participants selected non-fiction books. Four out of six participants also selected books that contained color photographs.

The differences between the male and female participants could be seen in two categories. The male participants preferred to read science fiction books much more than the female participants. Two out of the three male participants selected science fiction books while none of the female participants selected science fiction books. While almost all of the participants selected books with male main characters, no males selected books with female main characters. However, two out of the three female participants selected books with female main characters.

Surveys

When analyzing the data from the surveys, I compared the participants’ total scores by gender to find similarities and differences. I then looked at the answers to each question to find common trends or differences between and across genders. Table 4.4 below displays the results of the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey. The table is arranged in descending order.

Table 4.4

Results of Elementary Reading Attitude Survey

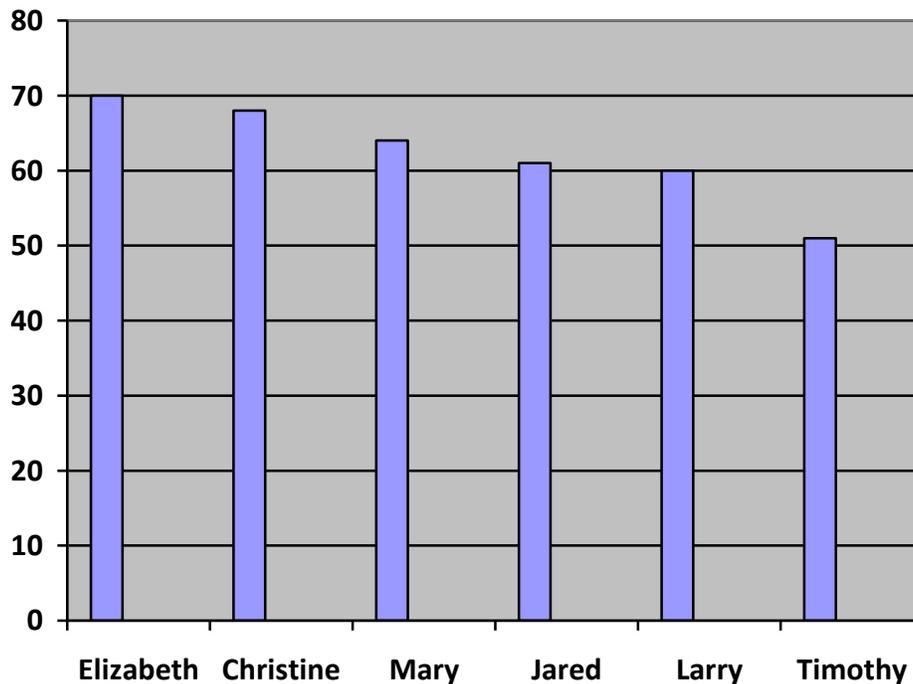


Table 4.4 above shows how the male participants compare to the female participants on the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey. When analyzing the results of the female participants' surveys, the following trends were found.

1. The female participants all stated that they most enjoy reading at home for fun and starting a new book.
2. The female participants all stated that they least enjoy reading when they are reading aloud in class and completing workbook pages.

When analyzing the results of the male participants' surveys, the following trends were found.

1. All of the male participants stated that they most enjoy reading at home for fun and starting new books.
2. All of the male participants' stated that they least enjoy reading when using a dictionary and when a teacher asks them questions about what they have read.

The following similarities were found when analyzing all of the participants' answers to the survey.

1. All of the female participants scored higher than the male participants. The range of scores from the highest score to the lowest score was 19 points.
2. Every participant stated in the survey that they prefer recreational reading as opposed to academic reading. In the survey, every participant answered that they most like reading when they are reading for fun at home and starting new books.

All of the participants indicated, they would much rather read for recreation than read in school. Three participants showed a range of eight points from reading at home to reading in school. All of the participants most enjoyed reading when they were reading for fun at home and when they were starting

new books. The male and female participants had similar answers to each question. The female participants scored higher because they were more enthusiastic about reading than the male participants. The male participants were also more upset than the female participants about some of the reading situations presented on the survey. All of the female participants had more four answers than any of the male participants. Inversely, all of the male participants had more one answers than any of the female participants.

Second Observation of Students' Book Selections

Like the first observation of students' reading selections, students had gone to the library earlier that day to select books to read during sustained silent reading. The following common trends were evident when observing the female participants' book selections.

1. As seen in the initial observation of students' book selections, each of the female participants chose to read chapter books. No picture books or short stories were selected by the female participants. Two out of the three female participants chose chapter books that were part of a series.
2. Two out of the three female participants chose adventure fiction books.
3. Two out of the three female participants chose books that had a female as the main character.

The following common reading behaviors were observed while observing the female participants' reading behaviors

1. All of the female participants were very focused on the books they had chosen. They read diligently without being distracted by their classmates. They seemed to be enjoying the books

they had chosen. I determined their level of enjoyment by their focused reading and any body language displayed, such as their eyes widening or rising of the eyebrows.

2. The female participants all showed that they were reflecting on the books they were reading. They would take a break every two to four pages to stop and think about what they were reading. Often, the female students were seen looking up at the ceiling and then back at the book. I interpreted this behavior as the students attempting to visualize or analyze what they had just read. When I asked Elizabeth who was reading the book, *The Chronicles of Kane: Throne of Fire*, why she stopped sometimes when she was reading, she explained, "I have to stop to make sense of what I am reading since it is an adventure book and not non-fiction. I try to picture what is happening in the book, in my head."

Common trends could also be seen when observing book selections and reading behaviors with the male participants.

1. The most common trend among the male participants was seen with the main characters of the male students' book selections. Every book the male participants chose had male main characters.
2. Two out of three male participants chose chapter books. Only one male student chose a picture book which was a sports book with color photographs.

When observing the male students' behaviors while reading, I noticed some commonalities.

1. All of the male participants seemed to enjoy the book they were reading. Each male student read the same book throughout the entire sustained silent reading period, and was focused on their book.

As seen in the initial observation of the male participants reading behaviors, Timothy selected a picture book with color photographs. Again Timothy read only the pages with photographs that covered the entire page or half of the page. Pages that did not contain color photographs were omitted. Timothy

studied each picture carefully and paid special attention to the captions that went with the photographs.

The more photographs lead to more reading.

Table 4.5 shows the common trends that were observed in students’ reading selections during sustained silent reading time.

Table 4.5
Second Observation of Students’ Reading Selections During Silent Sustained Reading

Genres												
Student Names	AF	HF	NF	NFF	SF	RF	GN	CPH	C	S	M	F
Elizabeth	✓								✓	✓	✓	
Christine	✓								✓			✓
Mary						✓			✓	✓		✓
Larry	✓								✓		✓	
Jared						✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Timothy			✓	✓				✓			✓	

The table shows how the female participants were more likely to choose books with female main characters, books that were in a series, chapter books, and adventure fictions books. The male participants were more likely to choose non-fiction books, non-fiction fact books, graphic novels, books that contain color photos, and books that contain male main characters.

Analysis of Reading Preferences

I analyzed the common trends found in each of the four methods of data collection within and across genders. I looked to find the similarities and differences that the male and female participants shared. I compared all of the similarities and differences in each method of data collection, and identified

the most prominent. The categories that included all three participants were identified as the most significant in each data source. Categories that only included one or two participants were not included because they were not prominent enough.

The reading behaviors and the results of the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey were not included in the analysis section, but were included in data collection, to provide insight into the similarities and differences on the literary behaviors of male and female readers. The survey and the reading behaviors do not offer any insight into what elementary males and females prefer to read.

Table 4.6 shows the similarities and differences of students’ reading preferences. The table includes the genres that were chosen by all of the male or female participants for each method of data collection. The genres included in the table are only the genres that were chosen at least once by all of the male or female participants. If a genre has an F in the box underneath it, then all of the female participants selected that genre for that method of data collection. If there is an M in a box underneath a genre, then all of the male participants selected that genre for that method of data collection. If there is an FM in a box underneath a genre, then all of the male and female participants selected that genre for that method of data collection.

Table 4.6
Genres Selected by all of the Male or Female Participants

Genre				
Methods of Data Collection	S	C	M	GN
Initial Observation	FM	FM	M	
Interview	F	FM	M	M
Second Observation		F	M	

Only two trends were identified as the most common among the female students. These were chapter books and books that were in a series. In all three of the methods of data collection that dealt with reading preferences, chapter books were chosen by all three female participants. In the initial observation and the interviews, all of the female participants identified chapter books that were in a series to be their preferred genre.

When analyzing the information from the male participants, four common trends were identified. Books that had male main characters were chosen by all three male participants in all three methods of data collection that dealt with reading preferences. Chapter books were chosen by all three male participants in the initial observation of students' reading preferences, during sustained silent reading, and the interviews. Books that were in a series were chosen by all three male participants in the initial observation only. Graphic novels were chosen by all three male participants in the interviews only.

The similarities in reading preferences between the male and female participants were shown in the choosing of chapter books and books in a series. In the initial observation of students' book selections, during sustained silent reading, and the interviews, all six participants chose chapter books as their preferred category of reading. During the initial observation of students' book selections and during sustained silent reading, all six participants chose to read books in a series.

The differences between the male and female participants could be seen in two categories of books; books that have a male main character and graphic novels. All of the male participants chose books that contained a male main character in each of the methods of data collection while all of the female participants did not choose books with a male main character in any of the methods of data collection. During the interviews, all of the male participants chose graphic novels as books they most preferred to read, while all the female participants did not choose graphic novels in any of the methods of data collection.

Analysis of Reading Behaviors

When analyzing the reading behaviors of the male and female participants, I looked for common trends between and across genders. I looked for behaviors, made by all of the male or female participants, in the initial and second observations. In both observations of students' reading preferences during sustained silent reading, all of the female students seemed to enjoy the books they had selected. They all read diligently and focused on the books they were reading. They were not distracted by their classmates or other noise within the classroom. The female participants all seemed to be very interested in the books by their facial expressions and body language. I noticed that some of the female participants' eyes would widen at times and their eyebrows would rise. They would also turn the page very quickly at times as opposed to a slow page turn. This indicated to me that the participants were interested in the books they were reading and were reading quickly to keep pace with the action of the story.

During both observations during sustained silent reading, all of the female participants stopped to reflect on what they were reading at least one time. I noticed the participants were reflecting because they would stop reading and their eyes were looking upwards. This was a possible indication that the participants were thinking about something. I did not consider it a reflection if the students were looking around the room. If students were looking around the room, I considered that a break or a distraction, not a time when the participants were thinking about what had just been read.

The male participants also showed common trends in their reading behaviors. In both observations, the male participants seemed to be enjoying the books they were reading. Like their female classmates, all of the males read diligently and focused on the texts they were reading. The male students were not distracted by their classmates, and read the same book throughout the entire sustained silent reading period. In both observations, the male participants could be seen taking breaks from the books they were reading. They would often set their books down and take a deep breath for approximately 30 seconds, before proceeding to read.

Both the male and female students seemed to be enjoying the books they were reading during sustained silent reading time. They all read the same book the entire sustained silent reading period, and were not distracted by their classmates or other noise within the classroom. The female participants showed much more excitement about what they were reading through their facial expressions and body language. The male participants did not display the facial expressions that the females did. All of the female participants took time to reflect on the books they were reading. Only one male participant displayed signs of reflection one time in both observations.

The most unique reading behaviors came from two of the male participants. In both observations Timothy chose to read picture books. When reading these picture books, Timothy chose to only read the pages that had color photographs that covered half of the page or the whole page. Timothy did not read pages that did not have color photographs or photographs that were smaller than half of the page. In the initial observation, Jared chose to read a graphic novel. He often could be heard laughing out loud and showing humorous pages to his classmates.

Although all of the students focused while reading, the female participants showed signs that they were much more focused on the books they had selected. This was shown with their body language and facial expressions. The male participants did not display the same body language to indicate they were focused on their books as much as the female participants. The female students also took time to reflect on the books they were reading. This is an action that was not seen from the male participants. The male participants took more breaks than the female students. During neither of the observations, did all the female participants take a break from reading. In both observations, the male participants all took breaks from what they were reading.

I concluded from both observations, that the female participants were more focused than the male participants. The male students may have had an equal level of interest in the books they were reading, but had different ways of displaying that interest, such as the careful studying of pictures by Timothy, or

Jared's laughing out loud. The female participants reflected on what they were reading which indicated to me that they were critically thinking about the books they were reading. The male students did not show this action, which indicated to me that they did not think about what they were reading as critically as the female participants.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

Overview of Findings

The data collected coincided with the internet and textbook research conducted and included in the literature review in chapter two. Zehr (2010) explained that elementary male readers prefer to read books that focus on sports, wars, technology, and books with large amounts of action. In my observations of students' book selections, one male student chose three books about sports. Two of the three male participants chose books that include many actions scenes. Adventure fiction books and science fiction books are two of the genres that the male participants chose that included a large amount of action scenes. In the interviews, all of the male participants chose to read books about sports or sports figures, two out of the three male participants chose multiple sports books. When the students were asked why they chose so many sports books they both gave similar answers. They like to read about sports because they play sports and know a lot about sports.

Zambo (2009) says that male readers most enjoy reading books with male archetypes or heroes. In my observations of students' book selections, all of the male participants chose books with male main characters, with many of these books having that main characters playing a hero role. In the interviews, all of the male participants again chose books with male main characters, and no male participants chose books with female main characters. One male participant was even quoted as saying, that he does not enjoy reading girly books, or books that have females as the main character.

In a study conducted in 2009, researchers observed how males select book to read. The study concluded that males select books almost exclusively by the books' covers (Ferris, Werderihc, Nelson, & Fuller, 2009). In the interviews I conducted, I found this to be true. All of the male participants judged

books purely on the cover of the book and what they thought the book would be about. Two out of the three female participants also judged each book only by the appearance of the books' covers. Only one female participant opened books up and turned them over to read the back cover of the books.

The same research study conducted in 2009 stated that males prefer books that have photographs, and prefer books with color photographs over books with black and white photographs. My research showed very similar findings for one student in particular. During sustained silent reading, Timothy only selected books that had photographs. While reading, Timothy only read pages that contained color photographs that took up half of the page or more. Pages that had black and white photographs, or photographs that took up less than half of the page, were omitted by Timothy. Zehr (2010) discusses that males choose books with illustrations and photographs because the images help male readers to connect to the text and help male students to visualize. The author explains that male students often struggle with visualization. Pictures help male students to visualize what they are reading. I found this to be very true with Timothy. He studied each picture with great detail, and I observed that the photographs and illustrations were a tool to help Timothy with comprehension. Males examine images longer than females do and read photographs the same way they read words. Reading pictures is called visual literacy and is very important for elementary readers (Young & Brozo, 2001). Timothy was observed reading over each picture very carefully and reading the captions for each picture. The visual literacy that Timothy displayed was one of the most unique reading behaviors shown by any of the participants.

One last finding from the research study conducted by Ferris et al. is the finding that male students prefer to read books in a series. In my observations of students' book selections and interviews, all of the male and female participants chose to read at least one book that was in a series.

Significance of Findings

These findings are significant in many ways for teachers and professionals that are involved in curriculum development. The findings show what fifth grade students are and are not interested in reading. With the data collected, educators can modify their instruction to utilize reading materials that meet students' reading interests. Research has been cited illustrating that the more interested students are in a subject, the more motivated they will be in learning that subject, especially the male students. This study found what types of texts students were interested in. Teachers and professionals that are involved in curriculum development can learn what types of texts students prefer to read, and incorporate similar titles and books of the same genre in the classroom.

The findings indicate that it is possible to close the achievement gap between male and female students. The data indicates that the achievement gap can be closed by teachers being more aware of males' reading preferences. Using texts that appeal to males can help males become motivated to read and can lead to an increase in males performance on reading assessments.

Limitations of the Findings

There were two major limitations to my findings, time and sample size. Data collection took place over a period of one month. Students reading preferences and interests often change when at the ages of ten and eleven years old. My data could be more comprehensive if I had a longer period of time to observe each student's reading preferences and interview each participant more thoroughly. A longer time period would allow me to observe students book selections to see if students read different genres or if they consistently select the same genres. Different factors play into students' book selections such as new book releases, books that have been made into movies becoming released, and other trends in popular culture that affect the decisions of elementary school readers. Some of these trends in popular culture were mentioned during the interviews. Jared stated that he had seen the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* movies,

and said they were so funny he wanted to read all of the books in the series. Mary also said in her interview that she had seen the movie, *Hoot*, and would be interested in reading the book, because she enjoyed the movie. Similar trends in popular culture most likely would arise during a longer period of time, and could be observed if I had a longer period of time.

Another limitation I faced was a limited selection of students. My data are only a sample of six students in fifth grade. A more comprehensive study would allow me to use a larger number of students to acquire more data about the reading preferences of males and females. If given more time and participants, I could use students in every grade, one through six. This would allow me to find and establish consistencies and common trends over a wide range of ages. With the larger range in ages, I could find similarities and differences within and across genders of different age groups. My data could include how elementary males and females reading preferences differ or stay the same within certain grades, and I could observe how age plays a role in reading preferences. Examining different ages could be especially interesting because of the shift in reading materials around third and fourth grade, from narrative texts to expository texts. Including a variety of ages could help me to determine what role a shift from narrative texts to expository texts plays in students' reading preferences.

Recommendations for Future Research

Possible future research could include investigating the reading preferences of a larger number of participants. This study only used participants from fifth grade. A more comprehensive study could include participants from a variety of age ranges to see what role age and gender has on reading preferences.

The participants in this study attended an urban school in Western New York. Future research could include participants that attend schools in suburban and rural districts. Using participants from different cultures could determine what role culture has on reading preferences. Also participants from

different regions of the United States could be included. Participants from different regions could indicate what role geography plays on students' reading preferences.

Conclusion

When I began my research, my goal was to find the differences in the reading preferences of elementary males and females and how classroom teachers can meet the literary needs of their male students. Through my research, I was able to answer these questions. Teachers need to use assessments to take the opportunity to get to know their students and their reading interests. Using interest assessments can help teachers to use texts that motivate males to read and increase their performance on reading assessments.

When thinking about Michael, who was forced to read a story far out of his reading interests, I think about how often that same scene occurs in every school across the country. My message to educators is, when developing an instructional plan or choosing books to read in class, think about all of the students in your classroom. Choosing books to read in class goes far beyond selecting classic literature, but it should be based around what will help your students to be motivated to read. If an educator is truly going to differentiate instruction, then each student's strengths, needs, and interests should be considered and met. Meeting the literary interests of students can help students like Michael become motivated and enjoy reading.

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Appendix A**List of Books**

1. The Surrender Tree
2. How to Speak Dragonese
3. Salt in his Shoes, Michael Jordan
4. Luckiest Man, Lou Gehrig
5. We are the Ship
6. Billie Holliday
7. Nelson Mandela's folktales
8. 101 Places to see before you are 12
9. Birmingham 1963
10. Out of Sight
11. Castle
12. Cathedral
13. Our Wet World
14. Amazing World of Sports
15. Extreme Scientists
16. The Tarantula Scientist
17. Lemony Snickets
18. Dracula's
19. Hoot
20. The Bug Scientist
21. Toys
22. Worst Case
23. Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Ugly Truth

24. Presidents

25. Where the Sidewalk Ends

26. Tiger Rising

Appendix B**Reading Preferences of Elementary Males and Females Interview Protocol**

The following questions will guide the audio-recorded interviews that will be conducted with each participant.

1. If you had the opportunity to read any of these books, which ones might you choose?
2. Can you tell me why?
3. Tell me more about _____.
4. Are there any books here that you would not read?
5. Can you tell me why?
6. Are there any books you enjoy reading that are not here?
7. Can you tell me why?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about what you prefer to read?