

REPRESENTATIONS OF READERS AND READING
EXPERIENCES IN YOUNG ADULT FICTION

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Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
May, 2021

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EXPERIENCES IN YOUNG ADULT FICTION

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my professors who provided enlightenment and encouragement during my doctoral work: Dr. Virginia Worley, Dr. Denni Blum, Dr. Guoping Zhao. Thanks also go to Dr. Sue Parsons, who first introduced me to young adult literature.

I owe a special thanks to my dissertation committee for their patience and wisdom through all the starts and stops during my writing process. Thank you, Dr. Sarah Donovan, Dr. Lucy E. Bailey, Dr. Adam Crawley, and Dr. Jennifer Sanders.

I also want to thank my colleagues at Jenks Public Schools: the English department at the Freshman Academy; Tonya Morgan and Kristi Foreman, models of effective reading and writing instruction; Fielding Elseman and William Parham, expert freshman wranglers; and Donna Hickman, invaluable assistant and faithful supporter. Special thanks go to Eric Fox, my dear friend and the most inspirational educator I have ever known, and Dr. Lisa Muller, the best boss and mentor I could imagine.

To my darling sons, Christopher and Jacob, thank you for my sweetest memories and, of course, my precious grandchildren: Madeline, Paley, Beckett, and Jack. Your love and support mean everything to me.

Most of all, thank you, Jill, for being, not only my sister, but my best friend. You know exactly when I need tough love and when I need a soft place to land. I could not have finished this without you.

Acknowledgements reflect the views of the author and are not endorsed by committee members or Oklahoma State University.

Name: JUDI THORN

Date of Degree: MAY, 2021

Title of Study: REPRESENTATIONS OF READERS AND READING EXPERIENCES
IN YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Major Field: EDUCATION

Abstract: Much research exists about adolescent reading, particularly young adult literature (Allington, 2014; Gallagher & Kittle, 2018; Krashen, 2009). Within that body of research are explorations of nontraditional reading experiences among today's adolescents. This research includes gaming narratives (Ellison & Drew, 2019; Hall, 2011; Sylven & Sundquist, 2012), fanfiction (Garcia et al., 2016; Jenkins, 2015), audiobooks and e-books (Moyer, 2012; Moore & Cahill, 2016), and social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat Stories (Kelly, 2018; Nee, 2019; Serpagli, 2017). However, little research in adolescent reading investigates how readers and reading, whether traditional or nontraditional, are represented in young adult fiction. The aim of this study that uses qualitative content analysis is to understand how young adult authors portray readers and reading experiences in four young adult novels: *Booked* (Alexander, 2016), *Everything, Everything* (Yoon, 2015), *Fangirl* (Rowell, 2013), and *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012). The findings reveal several types of readers and recurring themes in reading experiences. I also explore implications for teaching and learning in the secondary language arts classroom

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: COMING TO AND JUSTIFYING MY DISSERTATION PROJECT

This study represented the confluence of my graduate studies, both master's and doctoral, and my personal experiences as educator, mother, grandmother, and voracious reader. During my master's degree program, I taught language arts at a large suburban high school in the United States Midwest. Throughout this program in curriculum studies, I engaged with several theorists, but I was particularly interested in Michel Foucault's (1979) theory of power. His well-known text, *Discipline and Punish*, explores the evolution of punishment from its roots as the public torture of the body in medieval times to the institutional discipline of the members of institutions such as prisons, schools, and hospitals in the post-industrial world. According to Foucault (1979) regimes of power create "docile bodies" that can be "subjected, used, transformed and improved" (p. 136). This work prompted a great deal of reflection on my part regarding the structures of my classroom, my school, and public schooling as a whole. I asked myself how my own practices were similarly woven into that web of power.

At the end of the master's degree program, I needed one more elective and, because of my passion for reading, I decided to enroll in a children's literature course. I had earned my bachelor's degree in English Education years before in 1981, and, at that time and at that Midwestern university, literature studies involved almost exclusively the

Western canon of so-called classic literature. However, my reading life had always been an eclectic mix of the classics, comedy, historical fiction and nonfiction, mystery, and even syrupy Harlequin romance.

Still, I had little experience with children's literature, so I was interested in wading into those unknown waters. During the children's literature course, I learned about young adult literature and immediately became a fan. I eagerly sought new young adult titles and shared them with my students and fellow teachers at any opportunity. I saw the potential this genre had to appeal to adolescents and affirm their developing personalities and identities. In "The Value of Young Adult Literature," Michael Cart (2016) describes young adults as "beings in evolution, in search of self and identity; beings who are constantly growing and changing, morphing from the condition of childhood to that of adulthood" (p. 2). Young adult literature had, in my estimation, the potential to resonate with teens as they experience these changes.

After completing my master's degree and a few years into my role as an assistant principal, I was still intrigued with the increased reading engagement I saw in our school. I was certain the increased interest in reading resulted, at least in part, from the growing popularity of young adult literature, so I began my own research about adolescent reading. Soon, I realized I wanted to formalize my research into a doctoral degree.

During my doctoral studies, I navigated the complexity of theorists like Michel Foucault, John Dewey, Jerome Bruner, bell hooks, Paulo Freire, and Mikhail Bakhtin at the same time I brooked the stormy waters of practical reality in my position as principal. I continued to model my love for reading young adult titles, frequently appearing as a guest speaker in our language arts classrooms or just informally asking students what

books, graphic novels, or blogs, they were reading and what they thought I should read next.

Early in my doctoral coursework, I read Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Freire and Macedo's (1987) published dialogue, *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*. In the latter work, Freire describes his memories of becoming a reader. He writes,

As I began writing about the importance of the act of reading, I felt myself drawn enthusiastically to rereading essential moments in my own practice of reading, the memory of which I retained from the most remote experiences of childhood, from adolescence, from young manhood, when a critical understanding of the act of reading took shape in me. . . first, reading the world, the tiny world in which I moved; afterward, reading the word. (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 29)

Upon reading *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (Freire & Macedo, 1987), I reflected critically on understanding the act of my own reading. Freire's words resonated with me, and I became intrigued with his phrase "rereading essential moments in my own practice of reading" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 29). I began to "reread my own reading." I asked myself these questions: What could my own reading experience tell me about myself and my world? How could my reading of the world inform my reading? Upon reflection, I found that I had no memory of not reading. My earliest memories included picture books with nursery rhymes and Golden Books about fairy princesses. I shared my childhood with *Stuart Little* (White, 1945) and *The Boxcar Children* (Warner, 1924) and

my adolescence with wonderfully cheap romantic drivel and the works of Stephen King, Jane Austen, and the Brontës.

While I was still pondering these questions about my own reading, a student suggested I read *The Book Thief* (Zusak, 2005). In this young adult novel, the protagonist's early struggles as a reader and her subsequent love for reading piqued my interest and stirred memories of other fictional readers I had encountered: Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* (Austen, 1817), Jo March in *Little Women* (Alcott, 1868/1869), Scout Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) and even Tyrion Lannister in *A Game of Thrones* (Martin, 1996). I then reflected on the fictional readers in young adult literature who had inspired me. I thought, for example, about the title character in *Nightjohn*, (Paulsen, 1995), a slave during the pre-Civil War years of the United States, who risked his freedom and even his life to read and share the gift of reading with others. The convergence of these wonderings (reading my own reading and reading fictional readers' reading) and one of my professor's suggestions led me to consider the potential of analyzing the reading lives of fictional characters. During the study, I borrowed from Freire (Freire & Macedo, 1987) and used the phrase *reading the reading* as I referred to analyzing how we read.

Therefore, I explored young adult fiction to understand how readers and reading experiences are represented in this increasingly popular genre (Cart, 2016). In a time of changing reading practices, from audiobooks (Moore & Cahill, 2016; Moyer, 2012) to fanfiction (Garcia et al., 2016; Jenkins, 2015) to social media (Kelly, 2018; Nee, 2019; Serpagli, 2017), it is important to note the potential young adult literature must speak to a wide audience of adolescents and a growing population of adults (Cart, 2016).

To “read the reading” or analyze the reading practices of young adult fictional readers, I used Freire (Freire & Macedo, 1987) as the inspiration for the study, but I turned to Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the novel to frame the analysis. Bakhtin’s (1981) essay “Discourse in the Novel” explains that the novel—and I extend this to the young adult novel—is the literature genre best suited to including all perspectives, all voices, as valid. These voices include the author’s, the narrator’s, and the characters’ voices. For this study’s purposes, Bakhtin can reveal much about the voices in the novels selected for the study and, in a meta-analytical twist, the voices in the texts the characters read.

Statement of the Problem

Much research exists about representations of social and cultural identities in children’s and young adult literature. Most of the research involves the (non)inclusion of cultures that have historically been ignored: African American, Latinx, and Native American (Cummins & Infante-Sheridan, 2018; Garcia, 2017; Garcia, 2018; Hughes-Hassel, 2013; Sheridan, 2018). A great deal of scholarship has been conducted regarding representations of LGBT issues in young adult literature (Crisp & Knezek, 2010; Glenn, 2017; Lewis, 2015; Stein, 2012; Wickens, 2011), and some studies involve the differently abled (Curwood & Curwood, 2013; Darragh, 2010). Every year, particularly since 2000, there has been a growing amount of research and a marked increase in the sales of young adult books that represent the diversity we see in the world (Cart, 2016).

These young adult titles go far toward adolescent readers’ opportunities to see someone whose background or issues reflect their own and/or illuminate the experiences of the “other.” Bishop (2009) writes about the importance of literature that serves as “windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange” (p.

1). However, the books young adults read, according to Bishop (2009), should also serve as “their mirrors” for

[w]hen children [or adolescents] cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part. (p. 1)

One organization that began in 2014, We Need Diverse Books (WNDB), has risen to meet the needs of text diversity. A non-profit organization, WNDB supports “literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people” (2000). This organization offers awards for writers of diverse children’s and young adult literature, as well as grants and mentorships to further the publication of more titles where students can see themselves in print. Unfortunately, the growth of diversity titles does not proportionately represent the demographic diversity that characterizes our nation (Cart, 2016). In the words of Walter Dean Myers (2014), “There is work to be done” (n.p.).

There is also a great deal of research about adolescent reading, particularly young adult literature, that explores nontraditional reading experiences among today’s adolescents (Allington, 2014; Gallagher & Kittle, 2018; Krashen, 2009). This research includes gaming narratives (Ellison & Drew, 2019; Hall, 2011; Sylven & Sundquist, 2012), fanfiction (Garcia et al., 2016; Jenkins, 2015), audiobooks and e-books (Moore & Cahill, 2016; Moyer, 2012) and social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat Stories (Kelly, 2018; Nee, 2019; Serpagli, 2017). The research indicates that nontraditional reading experiences such as audiobooks and e-books (which now often have text-to-speech, i.e., audio, options) seem to lead to increased reading comprehension

for groups of “disabled readers,” the researchers’ term, (Kelly, 2018; Nee, 2019; Serpagli, 2017) or English language learners. For Ellison and Drew (2019), gaming narratives led to greater creativity in writing for boys who had been reluctant readers. And research on social media platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram show the potential for individual expression and even for protest or social change (Serpagli, 2017).

However, in the research about adolescent reading, I found little that investigates how readers and reading, traditional or nontraditional, are represented in young adult literature. Barnhouse (1998) studied fictional readers in young adult historical fiction, but her focus was on the historical inaccuracy of reader ability and text availability, not the act of reading as such. Some research about fictional readers does exist in other forms of literature. Nelson (2006), for example, writes about the mis/representation of the reader in children’s literature. Other studies examine fictional readers in adult literature of 19th- and 20th-Century literature. My research study contains insight about many kinds of readers and reading experiences which I expound on in Chapter II.

An exploration of how young adult books represent readers is important because of the impact young adult literature continues to have on an increasing audience of readers. Not only have commercial sales of young adult literature increased dramatically (Storer, 2016), but schools are now including young adult literature in their libraries and even their curricula (Milliot, 2015; Storer, 2016). In their “Statement on Classroom Libraries,” the National Council of Teachers of English (2017) encourages administrators and teachers to create classroom libraries that

- 1) offer a wide range of materials to appeal to and support the needs of students with different interests and abilities;
- 2) provide access to multiple resources that

reflect diverse perspectives and social identities; and 3) open opportunities for students, teachers, and school librarians to collaborate on the selections available for student choice and reading. (n.p.)

Many schools, including my own, now use young adult literature as primary tools of instruction instead of traditional textbooks (Gallagher & Kittle, 2018). These texts provide exposure to fictional adolescent readers in a time of changes in reading practices. Because the characters in young adult literature are themselves teenagers, there is the potential for adolescent readers to see themselves and/or better understand others from gazing into the reading worlds of fictional characters.

In my own school district, the language arts classrooms, grades 7-12, use classroom libraries as curriculum. In fact, during the most recent textbook adoption cycle, the district did not purchase the traditional literature anthology for each level and instead ordered thousands of books, mostly young adult literature, to use as curriculum. Since then, the school and teachers continue to add to their libraries using grants, book drives, teacher wish lists, and teachers' own personal resources. One of the 9th-grade language arts teachers has 2,130 books in her classroom library. We have seen reading engagement increase dramatically, in part, because of students' having fingertip access to this kind of text variety.

Therefore, I assert representations of readers in young adult literature can model practices for adolescents to interrogate their own reading, asking themselves what reverberations reading has for understanding themselves and the world. Although Bishop's reference to "mirrors and windows" refers to matters of race and ethnicity, it is important for readers to see themselves and others in a variety of situations (suicidal

ideation, relationship violence, social injustice, etc.). Reading can also fuel practices for interrogating a student's own reading, for asking themselves how reading can help them think about themselves and their worlds.

Purpose of the Study

I conducted this study to explore how young adult novels represent in the increasingly popular literature (Cart, 2016). Toward that end, I examined the experiences fictional characters had with reading and how text experiences shaped their lives and helped them navigate the relationships and conflicts that dominated and informed their actions in fictional worlds.

Some research exists about the potential young adult literature has toward identity formation (Cook, 2016; Ivey & Johnston, 2015; Ripp, 2016). Young adult literature is uniquely positioned to help adolescents explore who they are and who they hope to be. Koss and Teale (2009) found that themes of finding oneself or finding identity were the most common areas of subject matter found in young adult books. Cook (2016) also stresses that young adult literature brings attention to “uncomfortable, troubling and unfair” (p. 19) issues to work through. Ivey and Johnston (2013) write, “Living inside a character's head provides the experience of a different self (subject), and of others, which many students find transforming” (p. 311). In *A History of Reading*, Alberto Manguel (2014) describes the transformative, self-creating magic found in text. He writes,

Reading has always been for me a sort of practical cartography. Like other readers, I have an absolute trust in the capability that reading must map my world. I know that on a page somewhere on my shelves, staring down at me now, is the question I'm struggling with today, put into words long

ago, perhaps, by someone who could not have known of my existence.

The relationship between a reader and a book is one that eliminates the barriers of time and space and allows for what Francisco de Quevedo, in the sixteenth century, called “conversations with the dead.” In those conversations I’m revealed. They shape me and lend me a certain magical power. (p. 12)

I wanted to study how readers and reading experiences are represented in contemporary realistic young adult fiction. I particularly wanted to explore what effects reading experiences have on identity formation for fictional readers, particularly fictional adolescent readers, and examine how reading helps characters “map their worlds.”

Because I was interested in how characters, especially adolescent characters, read all kinds of texts, I studied how readers and reading experiences are represented in contemporary realistic young adult fiction where I hoped to discover many kinds of reading, including both print and digital text. For the purposes of my study, I conceptualized the reader as any character who engages in the act of reading text. This includes, but is not limited to, silent reading of traditional text (eg.,: novel, nonfiction, poetry in written text), listening to audiobooks, reading electronic text either on an e-reader or online, or reading aloud to another character.

Research Questions

I approached the study from a constructionist epistemology and a hermeneutic theoretical perspective. From that stance, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of the selected novels using Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia as a framework for my study. I

explain the research design in detail in Chapter III. Two research questions drove this content analysis:

RQ 1: How are *readers* represented in contemporary young adult realistic fiction?

RQ 2: How are *reading experiences* represented in contemporary young adult realistic fiction?

For this study, I analyzed four books. They are *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green (2012), *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell (2013), *Everything, Everything* by Nicola Yoon (2015), and *Booked* by Kwame Alexander (2016). In Chapter III, I share more information about the selection process for these particular novels.

Significance

For this dissertation, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of how readers and reading experiences are represented in young adult fiction (novels) for the following reason: Little has been written about the way readers are represented in young adult literature. Particularly absent is research about the potential that exists for joining theory and praxis in studying the fictional reader using young adult fiction. In a YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association) white paper, Michael Cart (2016) asserts the importance of young adult literature and “its capacity to offer readers an opportunity to see themselves reflected in its pages” (p. 2). In this dissertation, I explored the theoretical implications of looking into the hearts, minds, and actions of fictional readers and the effects of reading for the real and imagined reader (Ivey & Johnston, 2013, Manguel, 2014).

This study also has the potential to open new ways of thinking about Bakhtin’s theory as it relates to a multi-voiced and socially embedded approach to analyzing how

fictional characters engage with text. On the reader's metacognitive journey to "read" the fictional reader's reading of the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987), young adult readers --or any reader-- can bring the polyphony of literary voices to the music of their own world. These theoretical wonderings have implications not only for studying the reader, but also studying any cultural understanding embedded in literature or visual text. There is value in expanding studies on the representation of readers to align with other studies of literary representation of characters. The authors may be incorporating readers in new fiction to speak to changes in reading practices.

This study also intends to inform ELA (English language arts) pedagogy in the secondary classroom. The secondary ELA teacher faces a daunting task: engaging the adolescent reader. The world offers an exponentially increasing number of distractions for today's teenager. Social media reigns supreme among them (Turkle, 2016). To access each student's inner reader within and beyond social media textual forms, educators need insight into how young adults perceive reading any kind of text, how they approach the reading process, and whether they benefit from reading experiences. Perhaps more importantly, students and teachers could benefit from new avenue of "reading their own reading" by reading the reading of fictional characters can open rich discussions about greater societal implications of reading. As adolescent readers in our classrooms read Hazel's reading life in *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) or Nick's world in *Booked* (2018), they can engage in discussions about the potential effects for readers and their worlds when certain books affirm or disrupt their previous thinking and feeling. These conversations can include matters of equity about who has access to reading and who controls that access and why. Reading about and engaging in conversations about such

issues can prove transformative for readers and their worlds. This research could provide the foundation for transformative conversations about literature and the world that need to happen in classrooms and other in-person and virtual communities.

Research Positionality

In any research project, researchers must consider their own positionality during their investigations. For the qualitative content analysis represented in this dissertation, I had to remain mindful of my own understandings, assumptions, and biases. In my qualitative research, I, as researcher, am the primary instrument of research (Patton, 2015). Being aware of my own subjectivity is even more important as I am the only reader of the texts in this research. Therefore, I include in this chapter a review of my background and matters of my own subjectivity, including the values that inform my objectives, research design decisions, novel selections, interpretations, and conclusions. To interrogate my positionality as researcher and to enjoy and explore the process of *reading my reading* of fictional characters, I examined my life experiences and the changes they have brought about in me.

I grew up in a so-called nuclear family in the Midwest. I attended the local public school, came home to a stay-at-home mother, and went to a Christian church on Sundays. When I graduated from high school, I earned a degree in English Education at the University of Tulsa, a nearby university. After college graduation, I taught English in the district where I attended high school. During my fifteen years of teaching, I taught both middle school and high school. In 2000, I took a position as a curriculum specialist while I earned a master's degree in Curriculum Supervision at Oklahoma State University. At the completion of that degree, I moved to a position as assistant principal of the high

school. Since 2015, I have served as the site principal of the ninth-grade center. During my research, I needed to remain mindful of the lack of geographic, racial, religious, and ethnic diversity of my experiences.

To a large extent, it was my life as a reader that helped broaden my perspectives about a world outside my lived experience. For me, there really was “no frigate like a book” (Dickinson, 1873, n.p.) to take me outside my decidedly provincial background. It was in books that I learned to see previously unknown places, people, and perspectives. I visited the past through the works of Austen, Bronte, and Dickens. I vicariously lived through “scandalous” yet exhilarating sexual experiences in Judy Blume’s works. I blanched at the inhumanity of humankind in Frankl’s (1946) *Man’s Search for Meaning* and Lee’s (1960) *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Later readings of these and other texts led to different understandings than those from my childhood. Interpretations as my experiences in life and education changed me. I began to interrogate, for example, the kinds of books I selected. I had tended toward a Western canon of literature with an emphasis on British and United States literature. I also began to realize that I was unfamiliar with authors from a variety of racial, gender, and ethnic backgrounds. I began to question for example, so-called classics such as *Huckleberry Finn* for its deeply troubling depictions of race and slavery. My understanding of all literature has changed as I have grown from young married woman with children, to single mother of two young boys, to empty nester of grown sons, to, now, grandmother. My experience is also informed by the world around me. Always an avid reader, these life experiences, my degree, and then, pursuing my curriculum master degree, altered my perspective.

One reason for the change was an introduction to young adult (YA) literature. During my graduate studies, I took a course in children's literature and developed an appreciation for this kind of literature. I particularly became interested in young adult literature. And I am apparently not alone. Kitchener (2019) writes that more than 55 percent of young adult readers are, in fact, adults. Once young adult literature grew in popularity in my school, I saw in the genre the potential to encourage more reading among our students. I still love the classics. I have what could reasonably be called a shrine to Jane Austen in my office. Still, I view young adult literature on its own merit and not merely a substitute, supplement, or gateway for the "classics." As a mother, I watched as my sons lost their love of books once they entered adolescence. Despite the statistics that tout the correlation of parents who read with children who read (Schwanenflugel & Knapp, 2016), my own children did not share my passion for reading. I now wonder if more access to young adult literature might have changed their reading lives.

In addition to my positionality as an educator, I also considered my personal stance as a *reader* as well as my *reading experiences*. Generations away from today's adolescent reader of young adult literature, Instagram, and TikTok, my experiences include childhood trips to the local library, adolescent sobbing over Heathcliff and Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, and shivering through the horrors created by Stephen King.

My perspective also includes my changing personal roles as mother of two grown sons who lost their love of reading when they entered adolescence and grandmother of three beautiful grandchildren (ages 9-12). For example, my biracial twelve-year-old

granddaughter loves to read, but I wonder how she will view transactions with the literature she reads. Will she have ample opportunities to see herself in the pages of literature? My nine-year-old (white) grandson eagerly reads a wide variety of books. What messages about white privilege will he receive? Will he one day abandon reading for pleasure as he enters adolescence?

But more has changed than my education, career choices and parenting stages. My school has also changed. An alumna of the high school where I now work, I have watched the school's make-up change dramatically. When I graduated in 1977, few people of color attended the school, probably less than one percent. The school is still mostly white (about 58%), but we have a growing population of students of color, a greater disparity in economic status, and over twenty home languages other than English. However, ours is a relatively affluent school district, so we have the resources to build collections in our school and classroom libraries. I tried to keep an awareness of my own white, middle-class privilege as I approached this research.

I also needed to address the importance of my own world views, cultural background, and knowledge of the question, my "fore-understanding" (Austgard, 1998, p. 831). These factors established the frame of my own understanding as I engaged with understandings of the texts. This process culminated in a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1989, pp. 378, 389, quoted in Crotty, 1998, p. 100) that I will report in the findings of this research.

I am a veteran educator of thirty-five years who taught language arts (grades 6-11 at one time or another) for sixteen years. During this time, I often despaired of the lack of reading engagement I saw in my classrooms. Once I became a principal and

supervised the language arts teachers at my school, we, as enthusiastic readers, commiserated with each other about our worries for teen readers. Because of my experiences, I read the world a certain way, and it created a research horizon I need to recognize. Finally, I have reflected on the profound upheavals in my community and the world. When I began this research, my thoughts about reading were contextualized within a school year not unlike many I have experienced before. So much has changed. During 2020-2021, our world responded to the COVID pandemic and racial unrest and protests such as we have rarely seen in recent memory. These world events and their effects on schooling and reading have been overwhelming and life-changing, and they have led me to question my assumptions anew. Who, for example, has access to the Internet and, therefore, to instruction and texts during the move to distance learning because of the pandemic? Has distance learning changed the nature of what and how students read? Has the recent political and racial unrest led teachers to be intentional about exposing students to instructional materials that represent perspectives that have traditionally been underrepresented? As the world changes and as I change, I strive to remain aware of my own positionality.

Throughout my career, I have heard the public outcry about the importance of reading, despair about low reading scores, and conflict regarding different ways to teach reading. Considering the importance we as educators and a society place on reading, it is important that we investigate the ways readers and reading activities are represented in what adolescents read. The messages, positive and negative, that their reading material sends can affect how they read, what they read, why they read, or even if they read. This study is designed to examine these representations.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explored research about how readers and reading experiences are represented in literature. I began with representations in fiction and nonfiction as reading evolved over the generations. I then introduced new kinds of readers and reading experiences growing in popularity today, including the growing popularity of young adult literature. During my search, I found less than I had hoped about representations of readers in fiction. I began, as I often do, by using the database Academic Search Premier and Literature Criticism Online, which I have found useful in the past. Then, I turned to other Oklahoma State University online library sources using several terms in various combinations: young adult literature, young adult fiction, literature, reader as character, readers in fiction, readers in literature. Finally, with the help of an OSU librarian, I found several articles using the term “books and reading in literature.” In this chapter, I have reviewed that research concerning representations of readers and reading experiences in fiction.

Evolution of Readers and Reading Experiences

According to Maryanne Wolf (2007), people “were never born to read” (p. 14). Our ability as a species to learn to read is the result of our brains’ “protean capacity to make new connections” (Wolf, 2007, p. 15). Without the plasticity of the human brain, readers

and reading would never have evolved. Reading, in fact, is a relatively new phenomenon in the history of human existence, dating back only a few thousand years (Manguel, 2014). The first acts of writing—and therefore reading—are believed to date back to approximately 4,000 B.C.E: two tablets representing, scientists believe, ten goats and ten sheep (Manguel, 2014). The very existence of writing implies reading as any text implies a reader for whom the text was created (Krippendorff, 2019).

Readers and Reading Experiences in Literature

Since ancient times, much has been written about readers and acts of reading in nonfiction writing. During the Roman Empire, Cicero asserted that we remember information better when we read it “than when we merely hear it” (Manguel, 2014, p. 48). Centuries later, Frederick Douglass (1845) wrote about risking his life to learn to read as an enslaved child in the Confederate South. Marcel Proust (1905, 2011) opined about the “treasures hidden in books” in his essay “On Reading” (p. 62).

Reading also appears frequently in fiction. In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare’s Prospero refers to his library as “volumes I prize above my dukedom” (Tempest 1.2.196-197). Jane Austen’s (1817) *Northanger Abbey* presents Catherine Moreland, a young reader enchanted by Gothic romance. And, in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960), Scout Finch refuses to return to school after her teacher disparages the reading she shares with her father at home. Recently, the young adult (YA) literature genre has contained numerous examples of fictional readers. They include Cath in *Fangirl* (Rowell, 2013), Hazel and Augustus in *The Fault in Our Stars* (Green, 2012), Madeline in *Everything, Everything* (Yoon, 2017), and Nick in *Booked* (Alexander, 2019). This young adult genre

models many kinds of readers and reading experiences, some of which have emerged only recently (e.g., audiobooks, gaming, fanfiction, etc.).

However, while fictional readers often appear in literature, there is little written about representations of fictional readers and reading in scholarly literature. What does exist seems to involve mostly 19th-Century and early 20th-Century novels. During this review, I found no research regarding readers in fiction after the mid-20th Century except for one example in young adult literature. That example, “Books and Reading in Young Adult Literature Set in the Middle Ages” (Barnhouse, 1998), examines reading practices of female protagonists in young adult fiction set in medieval Europe. The gist of the article, however, is not so much an analysis of the fictional reader than an examination about the reading practices being anachronistic to the time of the setting. Barnhouse (1998) writes:

In fourteenth-century France a complete Bible cost the same as half a house or forty sheep or a team of hired assassins – no small potatoes (Ladurie 37, 45). So what is the daughter of an apothecary in eleventh-century Cologne doing with her own book of herbs? (p. 364)

The *mis*representation of reading, then, is the point Barnhouse (1998) makes. She goes on to assert that this misrepresentation seeks to serve a pro-literacy message important to our modern sensibilities. However, Barnhouse (1998) warns that misrepresenting what books and reading meant in the Middle Ages, sells short the importance of other skills that were valued in those times like memory, liturgy, and apprenticeship. The anachronisms downplay what was important to another time and underestimate the ability of modern readers, even young adult readers, to discern the differences between medieval and

modern times and “ought to be respected enough to be given the truth” (Birdhouse, 1998, p. 369).

While my interest lay with representations of readers and reading experiences in young adult literature, the dearth of such scholarship led me instead to investigate representations of reading in other types of literature. That investigation took me through worlds as varied as Jane Austen’s society of manners to Edgar Rice Burroughs’s jungles of Africa and through concepts as varied as simple literary character development to explorations of the role fictional reading plays in social commentary, identity, and personal agency.

Kinds of Readers

Authors often create fictional reading experiences as a means of character development. These vary from the mildest comedic relief to the most poignant, sometimes fatal, tragic complication and climax. In this way, authors use reading characters to teach us how they believe we should read (Binhammer, 2003; Bollinger, 2002; Friedman, 1992; Hadley, 2005). Through careful analysis, I identified several kinds of readers represented in the research literature. For the most part, I developed my own labels for the types of readers based on my own interpretation of the research and the descriptions of readers in the identified novels. Patton (2015) terms this type of analytic approach as researcher-constructed analytic categories. I did, however, borrow some of the terms, namely “solitary,” “active,” and “passive,” from Binhammer (2003).

The Faux Reader

There are several examples of the faux reader, i.e., the character who pretends to be a reader to advance an image of themselves they want others to see. Yahav (2019)

claims that Jane Austen, in *Northanger Abbey*, contrasts enthusiastic readers like Catherine Moreland and Henry Tilney with Isabella Thorne and her brother John, who, according to Yahav (2019), are “skimmers and skippers,” i.e., people who use reading to gather just enough information “that might prove useful for Pump Room conversation” (p. 175). Shand (2019) describes fictional character, Dr. Madden, whose books “displayed in his library are supposed to be indispensable to a well-informed man, though very few men even make a pretense of reading them” (p. 59). In Jane Austen’s (1813) *Pride and Prejudice*, Chagas da Costa (2012) writes about Austen’s comedic character, Mr. Collins, as “falsely humble, but actually very pedantic, and extremely empty” as he reads aloud from Fordyce’s Sermons to an uninterested audience of young ladies (p. 130). In *The Golden Bowl* (1904) by Henry James, his character, Charlotte, makes sure to be seen “with a book under her arm” as a means of social performance (p. 234). These characters, usually nonreaders or poor readers, use books and reading to further their social and personal status.

The Solitary Reader

A recurring image is that of the solitary reader (Hadley, 2005; Shand, 2019; uhkanen, 2016). Binhammer (2003) marks the lone reader as a negative, remarking the “solitary scene of reading -- with its implicit suggestion of masturbation -- is one where the female reader wildly devours, rather than reflects, upon her reading” (p. 13). However, In *Tarzan of the Apes* by Edgar Rice Burroughs, the titular character is seen teaching himself to read, sitting for hours with the books left in the mysterious cabin. The books eventually lead him from the world of animals to the world of humans, specifically white humans. Hadley (2005) cites Jane Eyre as the “archetypal girl-child sequestered in

a reading space” (p. 229). In this novel, Jane sits behind a curtain, ostracized by an unloving family, and trapped by the window. In her confinement, it is her book reading which helps transport her to the outside world she is not allowed to explore. Ironically, it eventually is the knowledge she takes from reading, her education, that will allow her to break free from her uncaring family. Solitary reading, therefore, can confine but ironically free the reader to a greater world.

The Reading Mentor

Another reader represented in literature is the reading mentor. This character is usually older, more experienced in life and reading. In *The Voyage Out* (Woolf, 1915), Helen presents a healthy reading mentorship as she recommends reading to Rachel but also encourages her “initiation into “the book of the world’ as well as books off a shelf” (Friedman, 1992, p. 106). More common, however, is the controlling reading mentor who prescribes reading that encourages good conduct and proscribes reading that leads to what that society could see as poor conduct (Ashworth, 2000; Binhammer, 2003; Friedman, 1992; Shand, 2019). In Susan Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), Ellen, the protagonist, is first mentored by her mother who teaches her Bible verses and “conduct and domestic literature [that] detailed how and what and for how long and with what objective a True Woman should read” (Ashworth, 2000, p. 141). After her mother dies, the role of reading mentor passes seamlessly to Ellen’s father, and “her whole soul was given to the performance of what he wished her to do” (p. 153). Later, the role passes to Ellen’s husband John who controls her reading as a married woman. Although John surprises Ellen with a “private room” of her own, she can access it only through John’s study. In other words, Ellen’s access to reading must go through John’s approval. For

Binhammer (2003), male control dominates women's reading in a patriarchal society where a male, usually a father or husband, "enters the novel only to govern [women's] reading" (p. 8). The mentor, then, presents as both helpful guide to reading maturity and controlling gatekeeper to another reader's access to text and, therefore, knowledge.

The "Disobedient" Reader

The research examines the "disobedient" reader, the reader who crosses class constructions (Ashworth, 2000; Hadley, 2005; Tuhkanen, 2016; Yahov, 2019) and gender role expectations (Ashworth 2000; Friedman, 1992; Hadley, 2005; Shand, 2019).

Reading is typically presented as a white, middle class activity, one approved for women only under certain circumstances. The disobedient reader turns to "books from a bookstall" instead of sacred or secular classical literature, and these choices threaten to produce "middle class girls that ought to be working rather than reading" (Hadley, 2005, p. 231).

The representation of the disobedient female reader can even be seen "as an act of social protest" (Shand, 2019, p. 53). In *The Odd Women* by George Gissing, Shand (2019) presents three sisters who portray the evolution of the modern woman, who often eschews Victorian expectations of what women should read. The oldest sister, Alice, represents the older generation that conforms to so-called conduct literature appropriate for a modest woman. Monica, the youngest sister, ventures out to the "wasteful, self-indulgent, and quickly consumed" shilling shockers that represent her "combatic act through which she resists against shifting structures of traditional Victorian femininity" (p. 54). The middle sister is torn between the two worlds, eventually to her destruction.

Passive vs Active Readers

Binhammer (2003) categorizes fictional readers based less upon what they read and more upon how they read. For this categorization, she refers to *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, a 1796 work by Mary Hays and its “satiric rejoinder,” (p. 2) *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* published in 1800 by Elizabeth Hamilton. For Binhammer (2003), there are two kinds of readers: passive and active. Emma Courtney exemplifies characteristics of both as she grows as a reader. In her satire, Hamilton creates caricatures of readers in her fiction.

First, we see Julia who is a passive, or consuming, reader. Julia lives in fictional worlds and “defines herself mimetically through novels” (p. 13). Julia indiscriminately and passively consumes fiction with an “insatiable appetite” (Hamilton quoted in Binhammer, p. 85, 135). Because she is not a critical reader, Julia acts out scenes from the romantic novels she reads, unable to “read” her lover for the poor choice he turns out to be. Reading passively, consuming fiction, leads to Julia’s downfall, even her death, as she defines herself in terms of the texts she reads. Julia, for Binhammer, serves as a “female Quixote,” a common reading identity in 19th-Century literature (Bollinger, 2002; Wyett, 2015; Yahov, 2019). According to Yahov (2019), “Quixotes live their fictions rather than read them” (p. 169). Julia acts out the romantic novels she reads to her ultimate destruction.

In contrast, another character, Bridgetina, misreads novels by investing in them her preconceived ideas about herself. Binhammer (2003) writes,

If Julia reads the text as her self and Bridgetina reads the self as her text, the third protagonist -- the virtuous and unsatirized Harriet -- has no self at all and is, paradoxically, the protagonist most like the conventional heroine. p(16)

Harriet's reading contrasts to Julia's and Bridgetina's both in in how and what she reads. Harriet reads "conduct-book" literature that saves her from the dangers of fiction and prepares her for the domestic role she is destined to play (p. 17). Still, Harriet is a passive reader, who lives the societal role she reads.

In *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, Hays (1796) reveals both kinds of readers in the same character as Emma grows from a passive to active reader. As a young woman, Emma is enthralled by the fiction she reads and experience that "breeds her dangerous imagination and excessive sensibility" (Binhammer, 2003, p. 6). Like Julia in Hamilton's work, Emma "acts out fiction as if it were her world" (p. 7). Unlike Julia, Emma sometimes defies total miming and traditional interpretations of gender roles. As Emma claims, "I acted over what I had read: I was alternately the valiant knight--the gentle damsel--the adventurous mariner--the daring robber--the courteous lover--and the airy coquet [sic] (Hamilton quoted in Binhammer, 2003, p. 49, 7). Ultimately, Emma's active reading leads her to accept and enact some, but not all, of the roles she sees written in fictional worlds.

For other examples of characters who grow from passive to active reading, the research turns to Catherine in Jane Austen's (1817) *Northanger Abbey* and Rachel in Virginia Woolf's (1915) *The Voyage Out*. Wyatt (2015) presents Catherine Moreland as a female Quixote who is "a too susceptible reader of Gothic fictions" (p. 267). Still, Catherine grows as a reader, and I consider her quixotism "as not only harmless but also

perhaps even an important stage in a young person's development" (p. 270). For Friedman (1992), Rachel in *The Voyage Out* (Woof, 1915) grows from active to passive reader, as she moves from reading what others want her to read to an eclectic collection of what she chooses to read.

Reader/Reading Motifs

In the previous section, I addressed the types of readers explored in the research about books and reading. This choice was predicated on my own research questions having to do with readers (Research Question #1). In this section, I turn to recurring motifs I observed regarding reading experiences (Research Question #2). This order reinforced the research questions I had in mind and, I believe, reveal how the research in this chapter informed and maintains a certain symmetry with my own thinking.

Reading as Seduction: Appetite and Seduction

Reading is often presented as appetitive. Jo (2019) refers to "Dracula's voracious appetite for books and reading. Ellen, in *The Wide, Wide World* (Warner, 1850) is said to have "devoured every work" (Ashworth, 2000, p. 154) and sees her private room as a "delicious place for reading" (p. 158). In *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (Hays, 1796), Emma "frequently read, or rather devoured" books when her husband allowed her to read (Binhammer, 2003, p. 1). The appetite for reading is even likened to addiction (Jo, 2019; Shand, 2019; Yahov, 2019).

The texts also present these appetites as seduction, particularly sexual seduction. Binhammer (2003) asserts that many in Victorian society believed "novels corrupted, seduced, and poisoned the minds and bodies of young female readers" (p. 1). Ellen likens reading to sexual pleasure and abstains from reading she knows will displease her

husband. She is said to “exercise a fictional celibacy” (Ashworth, 2000, p. 153). Binhammer (2003) points to a fictional character who describes her enjoyment of reading in this manner, “[T]he pleasure I experienced approached the limits of pain” (p. 8). And Friedman (1992) points to her characters warning about the temptation of reading, saying “Beware of snakes,” and “red fruit” (p. 109), i.e., sin. Jo (2019) observes that, in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, reading is represented as an “erotic, even perverse” act where characters read texts “excessively, and deep into the night, as if they were in an uncontrollable desire to “penetrate’ textual bodies” (p. 226). For Jo (2019), reading in this novel becomes “a sharing of intimacy that can be transmitted from one person to another (p. 235). One character, Mina Harker, compares her diaries, which are read by the other characters, as “the original apple” (p. 233). And the reading of other characters’ journals amounts, for Jo (2019), is described as “penetrating their minds” (p. 230).

Reading as Community

In what Bollinger (2002) terms “acts of shared subjectivity,” fictional readers are often represented in community with other characters (Friedman, 1992; Shand, 2019) Jo (2019) explores shared reading in her analysis of *Dracula*, writing, “Books and documents circulate from character to character as often as blood seems to circulate from creature to creature in this novel” (p. 142). Their shared reading reveals the perspectives of all characters involved in combating the creature. It is only when they read each other’s texts that they can put together all the clues needed to defeat *Dracula*. It is, in fact, the “collective identity formed by shared reading” that leads to their success in conquering evil (Jo, 2019, p. 227).

Reading Text, Others and World

In the research about representations of reading in fiction, much exists about reading the word as opposed to and in conjunction with reading the world (Binhammer, 2003; Bollinger, 2002; Friedman, 1992; Jo, 2019). (Interestingly, none of the articles cite the works of Paulo Freire regarding this very Freirean concept.) The texts the characters read informs their perspectives about life, and their life experiences, in turn, inform their reading. For Bollinger (2002) Isabel and Ralph in *The Portrait of a Lady* by Henry James (1881) cannot “read” each other. As they do not share the texts they read--or fail to read--this should come as no surprise although Ralph “never quits trying to ‘read’ her (p. 159). Later, Isabel falls in love with Osmond based on the romantic novels she reads only to find that “she had not read him right” (James quoted in Bollinger, 2002, p. 158).

Reading toward Identity Formation

Reading in literature both advances and fails to advance identity formation in its characters (Ashworth, 2000; Bollinger, 2002; Friedman, 1992; Shand, 2019; Tuhkanen, 2016). For Tuhkanen (2016), Tarzan’s identity as human rather than animal is achieved through reading. In fact, he writes that “the ape-man’s becoming human begins with reading” (p. 31). It is only after Tarzan discovers the abandoned cabin and teaches himself to read that he even realizes he is human. The reading he enjoys ultimately leads to his identity as an English aristocrat, a gentleman. Ashworth (2000) writes about Ellen’s stunted identity formation because of the male control over her reading. Eventually, Ellen internalizes the control, and she herself “becomes a vehicle of her own self-surveillance and regulation”(p. 149).

From this research, it became clear that the nature of identity formation depends largely upon what characters read and, more importantly, how they read. In Warner's (1850) *The Wide, Wide World*, the mother and father figures in Ellen's world strictly limit her reading to texts designed to instill the social, class and gender conditioning necessary to make her what society would consider ideal or a woman of her station in life. Although Ellen does, on occasion, break tradition and read forbidden texts, she eventually conforms. When Ellen marries, her husband assumes the role of gatekeeper to her reading. Eventually, Ellen sacrifices the pleasures of reading for her wifely responsibilities, takes on the identity of an ideal wife, "and once ideality is achieved, the true woman relinquishes her books" (Ashworth, 2000, p. 17).

In the modern literature, female characters, particularly protagonists, tend to defy reading conventions to a greater degree. Isabel in *Portrait of a Lady* (James, 1881) and Rachel in *The Voyage Out* (Woolf, 1915) read widely. They read classics recommended by older, supposedly more mature readers; but they also read, sometimes in secret, texts considered inappropriate for young ladies. Both characters learn a great deal about themselves and their worlds through their reading and their discussions with others about their reading. Interestingly, however, they fare no better than Ellen in the end. Isabel is trapped in a disastrous marriage; Rachel becomes ill as she anticipates her own marriage and eventually passes away. The reading pleasures these characters experienced led to exciting new horizons in their identity formation, sometimes to their destruction.

The research about representations of reading, though limited, conveys much about a variety of readers and reading experiences. From Jane Austen to Edgar Rice Burroughs, authors' portrayals of reading range from transformational and inspirational

to the pernicious or even fatal. In reviewing the research, I noticed that social and cultural forces contextualized the spectrum of experiences with fiction. In my dissertation, I have remained mindful of such contexts.

Gap in the Research

As noted above, there was little scholarship about representations of reading in fiction, especially, contemporary fiction. I found almost no scholarship of this kind in the young adult category, my area of interest. In this section of the literature review, I will present a short history of young adult literature and present some new kinds of reading that now appear in young adult fiction: ebooks, audiobooks, gaming literature, and online reading, including fanfiction, and social media platforms.

Young Adult Literature

Part of motivating students to read is to provide access, not only to a wide variety of texts in the classroom and the school library, but to a careful selection of texts that appeal to the interests of adolescents and cover a large span of reading levels (Allington, 2002; Gambrell, 1996; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Johnson, 2003; Kittle, 2013; Krashen, 1997; Ripp, 2016; Worthy, 2002). According to some scholars, the more students are immersed in a variety of texts, the more motivated they become (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Francois, 2015; Gambrell, 1996; Gambrell, 2015; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Kittle, 2013; Mason, 1991). Young Adult Literature (YAL) appeals to adolescents' interests and interaction with YAL may lead to increased adolescent reading.

The beginnings of the YA novel can arguably trace to the release of *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and *The Outsiders* (1967) when readers first heard an authentic “teenage voice” (Hayn et al., p. 177). This literature often centered around serious

concerns facing adolescents (i.e., sexual identity, rape, incest, and other traumatic issues) and affirmed “that young adults are beings in evolution, in search of self and identity; beings who are constantly growing and changing, morphing from the condition of childhood to that of adulthood” (Cart, 2016, p. 273). It is through literature, particularly the YA novel that adolescents can engage “in an unceasing dialogue between text-generating knowers and voices from the texts” (Mills, 2010, p. 623).

Since 2000, much research has been done about matters of identity in YAL. Most of the research involves the inclusion of cultures that have historically been ignored, such as African American, Latinx, Native American peoples and cultures (Cummins, Garcia, 2017; Garcia 2018; Hughes-Hassel, 2013; Infante-Sheridan, 2018). A great deal of work has been done in gender identity issues (Bittner, 2012; Cart, 2016) and some with disabilities (Curwood & Curwood, 2013). This literature shows the importance for the adolescent reader to see someone whose background or issues reflect his or her own. Some research exists about the identity formation process itself (Cook, 2016; Ivey & Johnston, 2015; Ripp, 2016). Cook (2016) stresses that young adult literature brings attention to “uncomfortable, troubling and unfair” (p. 19) issues to work through. However, reading alone, according to Ivey and Johnston (2015), may not further this identity exploration. They stress that teachers and students can embed meaning-making in classroom discussion that is “relational and dialogic and provides opportunities for self- and other-construction” (p. 301).

Non-Traditional Readers and Reading

In addition to the young adult literature genre, adolescents are increasingly drawn to new kinds of reading: ebooks, audiobooks, and online reading including social media and fanfiction.

Although books in digital and audio format have existed for many years, their popularity has increased over the last decade for a few reasons. First, personal digital player devices like iPods and now cellular phones made reading and listening in this manner more convenient (Moyer, 2012; Nee, 2019). Second, school and public libraries have increased the availability of materials for check-out in the last two decades, and that availability continues to grow. This increase in availability includes young adult literature titles (Moore & Cahill, 2016). Not only do digital media tend to interest adolescents more than print (Nee, 2019), ebooks and particularly audiobooks prove extremely effective with students who struggle with traditional reading practices. These struggles include visual and other learning disabilities as well as language learners (Moyer, 2012). Sometimes referred to as “listenature,” engaging with audiobooks can improve reading skills as it “supports the development of all four language systems: phonological, semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic” (Moyer, 2012, p. 4).

Online reading figures largely in the literary world of today’s adolescent. According to Nee (2019), “post-Millennials [those born after 1997] have always been digitally connected through social media, mobile devices, and the web” (p. 172). In fact, sixty percent of teens in a recent study report that they use Snapchat or Instagram platforms daily (Villaespesa & Wowkowych, 2020, p. 3). In another study, “45% say they are online almost constantly” (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2020, p. 3). Students engage

in online reading and writing to document the events in their lives, share their experiences with others, to be creative, and to explore elements of their own identity (Villaespesa & Wowkowych, 2020).

Another form of literary online engagement is fanfiction. Jenkins (2015) defines fanfiction, or fanfic, as “the practice where fans write stories based on the characters and storyworlds of a single source text or ‘canon’ of works” (p. 370). Fanfiction typically revolves around published, even famous, works of literature such as the works of Jane Austen, Star Trek, and Harry Potter. Although this type of literature has been around since the 1920s and 1930s, the Internet has made sharing fanfiction convenient and accessible (Jenkins, 2015, p. 371). More than creative outlet, fanfiction can become a means for marginalized individuals and communities to have a voice to share thoughts and feelings (Jenkins, 2015). Pennington (2019) describes fanfiction as a means for exploring identity and suggests fanfictions’ usefulness as a “pedagogical opportunity” (p. 354).

Conclusion

This study sought to explore representations of readers and reading experiences in young adult fiction. Although much research exists about reading and young adult literature, that research rarely extends to representations of reading in the genre. For the purposes of this literature review, I presented literature about representations of readers and reading in fiction. This literature review revealed a gap that opens a new avenue of research, one I explored in this study.

Of particular interest were journeys that young readers take through text. Some journeys, like Julia’s in *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, end tragically, invoked by text

and acted out in folly. Other journeys, like Emma in the same novel, end with growth, understanding, and the ability to read actively. Emma learns to read what others suggest but also what she chooses for herself. She strives to be an eclectic reader who can weave fictional text into the fabric of life and the creation of identity. According to Koss and Teale (2009), young adult literature, particularly since 2000, has centered on themes of self-discovery and identity formation. the traditional kinds of reading reviewed in this chapter as well as new kinds of literature and reading present in the novels I chose for this dissertation also provide a space for identity exploration.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this study, I explored young adult fiction to understand how readers are represented in young adult contemporary fiction. Young adult literature, fiction and nonfiction, has experienced increasing popularity in the last two decades (Cart, 2016). Toward that end, I examined the reading experiences diverse characters had with a variety of reading experiences to contribute new insight to the research literature about representations of reading. Given the contemporary changes in reading practices, especially in digital literacies (Moyer, 2012), I am interested in how authors represent readers in young adult literature to today's readers. I drew conclusions that can add to the research on representation of racial, cultural, and religious diversity that has already been carried out. I conducted this research using a hermeneutic theoretical perspective, Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism in the novel as a theoretical framework, and a qualitative content analysis methodology (Krippendorff, 2019). Two research questions drove this qualitative content analysis:

RQ 1: How are *readers* represented in young adult contemporary realistic fiction?

RQ 2: How are *reading experiences* represented in young adult contemporary realistic fiction?

The four books of focus for this study were *The Fault in Our Stars* (Green, 2012), *Fangirl* (Rowell, 2013), *Everything, Everything* (Yoon, 2015), and *Booked* (Alexander, 2016).

Overview of Conceptualization of the Research Methodology

In this chapter, I outline my theoretical grounding and approach for how I conceptualized and conducted the study. I begin with a rationale for a constructionist research stance and a qualitative hermeneutic theoretical perspective. I then explain Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia in the novel as a theoretical framework and qualitative content analysis as methodology. Finally, I present the procedures I used to analyze the textual data, organize the findings, and present the significance and implications of the results.

I conducted a qualitative content analysis of young adult (YA) literature to explore ways authors represent characters who engage with reading. Krippendorff (2019) defines content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p. 24). Although “the range of procedures in content analysis is enormous” (White & Marsh, 2006, p. 23), I conducted a qualitative approach to content analysis, one that will seek to draw inferences about what is represented by the texts (Krippendorff, 2019).

Research Stance: Constructionism

In *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*, Michael Crotty (1998) demystifies the complex conceptual understandings that guide research. For Crotty (1998), “Different ways of viewing the world shape different ways of researching the world” (p. 66). In this chapter, I outline my epistemological and

theoretical views of the world and how those views inform my research. I arrive at this study from a constructionist world view embedded in realism. Instead of looking for one answer or system of understanding, a constructionist's knowledge is based on an understanding that the world has multiple interpretations and meanings, considered in concert with the contexts in which they are embedded (Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2015). Although an ontology of realism is often associated with positivism, Crotty (1998) asserts that realism and constructionism "turn out to be quite compatible" as things exist outside our minds but meaning exists only as a constructed reality (Crotty, 1998, p. 10-11). Crotty (1998) defines constructionism as "the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42). A constructionist viewpoint differs from the objectivist viewpoint that conceives of truth as the one Truth waiting to be discovered. Instead, from a constructionist stance, truth is constructed out of the "world and objects in the world" (Crotty, p. 44).

Although a constructionist epistemology can result in "diverse understandings and multiple realities about people's definitions and experiences" (Patton, 2015, p. 122) constructionism is also not completely subjective because meaning is *constructed*, not *created* [emphasis added] from the materials of the social world (Crotty, pp. 42-43). For Crotty, the construction of knowledge differs from the creation of knowledge in that construction necessitates human interaction with what already exists in the world. It is from this stance that I explored how fictional readers come to reading, construct meaning,

assign value to the act of reading, and choose whether to read again, in their fictional contexts.

Rationale for a Hermeneutic Theoretical Perspective

My approach for this research was grounded in a hermeneutic theoretical perspective. I sought to understand fictional readers and their reading experiences in the context of their fictional worlds. This approach, which “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67), served to frame my analyses of young adult novels in which fictional readers construct fictional realities from the texts they read and the worlds they inhabit. My understanding and analysis of their experiences were, in turn, constructed based upon the reality of my life as well as the context of the novels. In this process, I strove to engage in meaning-making that was rich and multi-layered.

Hermeneutics, according to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, traces its origins from the Greek *hermeneutikos*, meaning “to interpret,” and is the “study of the methodological principles of interpretation.” The word refers to Hermes from Greek mythology, the messenger of the gods, who brought the word of the gods to humankind. During the Middle Ages, hermeneutical inquiry became the basis for the interpretation of Biblical text, the word of God to humankind. The hermeneutical analysis of text, for centuries, dealt mostly with religious texts in the Western world. Gradually, hermeneutics continued to evolve into the modern system of inquiry researchers now use. Hermeneutics is a way of understanding the interpretation of texts, written or unwritten, that speak to human behaviors and lived experiences.

Crotty (1998) credits Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) as the father of modern hermeneutics. Schleiermacher, according to Crotty (1998), “strove to develop a general hermeneutics that would illuminate all human understanding and not just offer principles and rules for interpreting particular texts” (p. 92). However, it was German philosopher Martin Heidegger who developed a key approach to hermeneutics with the “hermeneutic circle.” This approach includes repeated encounters with the text--or whatever object is under study--and concentrates on the relationships between the whole to the parts as well as the parts to the whole.

An essential element of hermeneutic inquiry is the particular attention to the context in which words and actions are embedded. Because of the importance of context, I examined context from multiple standpoints: my own positionality as researcher, teacher, principal, reader; the authors’ cultural backgrounds as context for the novel’s creation; the historical/cultural contexts of the novels; and the contexts of the reading characters themselves. Zhao et al. (2020) describe the principles of the hermeneutic circle as arriving at understandings that are “informed and in interplay with the interpreter’s experience of everyday existence” (p. 19). I approached the young adult texts using these principles. Through multiple readings, I interpreted the whole of each text in relation to its parts and its parts in relation to its whole as well as comparing each text with the others.

In “Doing It the Gadamerian Way,” Kitt Austgard (2012) explains an important addition to Heidegger’s emphasis on text, claiming that Hans-Georg Gadamer, another German philosopher, and a student of Heidegger’s, expounded on Heidegger’s idea. Austgard (2012) asserts that, in addition to finding meaning in the text, interpretation

“involves the human being who does the interpreting and this person’s interaction with the world” (Austgard, 2012, p. 830). Austgard (2012) outlines key factors to keep in mind during hermeneutic inquiry that include making the text itself a priority, respecting the author’s intention, keeping the process transparent, and addressing the “fore-understanding” of the researcher. These factors guided my research.

Theoretical Framework: Dialogism and Heteroglossia

I used Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism as a theoretical framework to inform my study of readers and reading experiences in young adult fiction. This framework, in concert with the hermeneutical perspective or stance, provided a structure upon which I built my analysis. I turned to literary theory for this research because I analyzed text. Bakhtin’s work with his concept of heteroglossia, “multi-languagedness,” has been applied to literature (Day, 2010; Franken, 1997; Yaeger, 1984) as well as art (Haskins & Zappen, 2010; McCaw, 2014; Sullivan & McCarthy, 2009), pedagogy (Naot-Ofarim & Solomonic, 2016), linguistics (Roberts, 2004), and sociology (Renado et al., 2018). In this study, I applied his theory of dialogism to the analysis of young adult literature. The term, *heteroglossia* is used to conceptualize the many voices present in an observed phenomenon (novel, visual art, workplace dialogue, etc.) and the interaction of those voices in their specific contexts. Bakhtin emphasized the importance of social and cultural context he thought was neglected in structuralism, popular school of thought during the early 20th Century. I elaborate on Bakhtin’s work later in this section.

Although a New Criticism tradition of literary analysis remains popular in the secondary language arts classroom, that approach focuses on stylistic components of text with too little regard to the reader’s experience. New Criticism or its European

counterpart Formalism is, according to Bakhtin (1981), “too narrow and cramped, and cannot accommodate the artistic prose of novelistic discourse” (p. 266). I also considered reader response theory which focuses on the reader-to-text relationship, what Louise Rosenblatt (1938, 1978, 1990, 1995) calls “transactions” with text. I also considered Kristeva’s (2002) concept of intertextuality, but her work involves a foray into poststructuralism I did not choose to take. However, because my research deals with readers as *characters* within fictional worlds and the many languages and speech types they employ, Bakhtin’s theory of the novel is uniquely situated to use as a framework for the relationships characters have with each other and themselves within the text; his theory encompasses the many voices in a novel, including characters who happen to be readers. In essence, Bakhtin’s theory of the novel, particularly those concepts revealed in his essay “Discourse in the Novel,” work toward the study of fictional readers and text as well as between fictional readers and their world. Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia provides a lens through which to view the world of fictional readers.

The Novel’s Dialogical Potential

Originally written in the 1920s, Bakhtin’s (1981) “Discourse in the Novel,” presents a literary theory that remains salient for opening opportunities to view novels, particularly young adult novels, in a different light. The novel, for Bakhtin (1981), is “a structured artistic system” that “can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized” (p. 262). Bakhtin (1981), who lived and wrote in Stalinist Russia, personally experienced an oppressive, governmental voice looming over a silenced people. According to Nesari (2015),

His [Bakhtin's] solution for this perilous situation was to cherish the great characteristics of dialogue and dialogism since it had the capability for allowing different people to speak their minds and get out of the box in which they were trapped. (p. 643)

The multivoiced, dialogical nature of the novel lends itself to what Bakhtin calls heteroglossia. Literally “other” (hetero) “tongue” (glossia), heteroglossia functions in the novel to provide a constant struggle toward and against the unity of the novel itself. Bakhtin (1981) refers to these forces as centripetal (centralizing or unifying) and centrifugal (decentralizing). All the languages work toward the interrelationships of voices, the dialogue, that lead to dialogism, discourse where all voices are encouraged and valid (Bakhtin, 1981). Heteroglossia, then, is not a separate theory but a concept integrally tied to dialogical theory. On the essence of the multi-languaged, heteroglossic characteristic of the novel, Bakhtin (1981) writes, “Heteroglossia creates a rich experience for the readers who ‘hear’ the many voices of the novel, socially embedded in their own contexts” (p. 262). For Bakhtin (1981), it is only the novel that can honor the multiple voices of a work, where each voice functions as a fully independent and significant voice in concert with or in opposition to the centralized theme of the work.

Bakhtin's theory of the novel has been useful in the analysis of the young adult fictional reader in their own contexts. According to Bakhtin (1981), of all literary works, only the novel can fully represent dialogism. Dialogism and its corollary heteroglossia includes communication (speech, written text, and thought) which both reflects understandings of the past and anticipates ideas of the future. Meaning is implied and interpreted based upon the sociocultural contexts -- in this study, fictional contexts -- in

which meaning is embedded, and meaning changes constantly as people communicate. Dialogic communication holds as valid all voices participating in the dialogue. Monologic communication, on the other hand, holds one dominant voice as the “truth” or optimal conclusion. Bakhtin’s literary theory, particularly his work in the essay “Discourse in the Novel,” has been used before as a framework for studying communication within the structure of the novel (Franken, 1997; Yaeger, 1984) and even specifically the young adult novel (Day, 2010).

Heteroglossia and Dialogic Communication

In this section, I further explain the theory of dialogic communication and heteroglossia, the phenomenon that leads to dialogism, as these concepts provided a theoretical framework for studying young adult novels and the readers and reading experiences in them. The languages in a novel, according to Bakhtin, range from formal and authoritative to the everyday dialect of the worker and from generation to generation. The interaction of these voices is what Bakhtin (1981) calls heteroglossia, literally “other tongue.” Heteroglossia emerges in the interplay between and among all the languages in a societal or literary context. The result of this interplay is dialogism, the continual back-and-forth between meanings. In literature, according to Bakhtin (1981), dialogism “can fully unfold, achieve full complexity and depth and at the same time artistic closure, only under the conditions present in the genre of the novel” (p. 278). Bakhtin describes the language of the novel as “a system of languages” (p. 262). To illustrate the relationship between heteroglossia and dialogism, I Bakhtin used a music metaphor. Bakhtin often compares heteroglossia in the structure of the novel with polyphony in the structure of a musical work. Sometimes the harmonies are pleasingly consonant in that they seem to go

together. Other times, the harmonies are strikingly dissonant in that they clash. Still, the overall piece of music works thematically as a whole. Heteroglossia in the novel is analogous to the many harmonies of the musical piece. Heteroglossia refers to the different languages working for and against the unity of the novel's message. I continued music as metaphor to describe dialogism. For those of us who have sung in choirs, there is a phenomenon called overtone. The overtone happens when the voices/harmonies are so perfectly executed they produce a tone in the air above what any particular singer is singing. I compare the overtone in choral singing to the theory of dialogism. Dialogism is created by heteroglossia in the novel but is not the same as the heteroglossia.

To explain why dialogism and heteroglossia are important to this study of young adult novels, I turn again to metaphor. Bakhtin (1981) uses the concept of refraction to explain the constant interactions speech utterances have with each other. For Bakhtin (1981), it is the author who sets the creation of the novel as a whole, but "the intentions of the prose writer are refracted, and refracted at *different angles* depending on the degree to which the refracted, heteroglot languages he deals with are socio-ideologically alien" (p. 300). From the perspective of physics, refraction, as it pertains to light, happens to light waves when they encounter something that has a density differing from their own (Refraction of Light, n.d.). This conceptualization of the refraction of the multiple languages in the novel led to my using Bakhtin as a theoretical framework for this study. Dialogical theory opens possibilities about the spectrum of refracted meanings between and among author, narrator, and character and will include the refracted meanings between and among the authors, narrators, and characters in the texts they read as well. To mix the metaphors, I "listened" for heteroglossia, the refraction of the many voices in

the novels and the texts that characters read. My hope was to “hear” the overtone of dialogism reverberating at the conclusion.

I used Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism and the concept of heteroglossia to analyze the interrelationships between voices in young adult novels and extend that theory to study how readers and reading are represented in young adult literature. This study represented a meta-analysis of the young adult novel’s interrelated voices which, in turn, interact with the interrelated voices in the texts the characters read. Bakhtin’s heteroglossia parallels the multivoiced nature of young adult literature and the multivoiced nature of today’s adolescents as they navigate an increasingly multi-linguaged world where voices coexist in an ever-evolving dialogue. Representations of readers in literature, like Bakhtin’s concept of the novel, are always evolving. This makes Bakhtin’s theory of the novel perfectly suited to this research.

Research Method: Qualitative Content Analysis

I used qualitative content analysis for this study. The design of content analysis research depends upon the purpose of the research. Krippendorff (2019) describes what he calls “three points of entry” (p. 384) to content analysis: text-driven, problem-driven, and method-driven. The stated problem of my study was that, despite the growing popularity of young adult literature, there is little research about how readers and reading experiences are represented in those works. Such a representation has the potential to guide pedagogical research, classroom practice, and future young adult novels. A problem-centered approach necessitates the use of research questions to interrogate the texts. Krippendorff (2019) asserts the importance of research questions that are directly related to the stated problem or phenomenon and that they are open-ended, allowing for a

variety of answers. With these guidelines in mind, I have designed the following research questions:

RQ 1: How are *readers* represented in young adult contemporary realistic fiction?

RQ 2: How are *reading experiences* represented in young adult contemporary realistic fiction?

In the study, the process circled back again and again between text(s) and the research purpose, guided by these questions.

Krippendorff (2019) defines content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p. 24). According to Krippendorff (2019), the methods used in content analysis are “learnable” and researchers can therefore use them consistently between and among co-researchers who seek to understand the phenomenon they are studying. For Krippendorff (2019), *text* refers not only to written material but also to visual and auditory units if any type of unit “means something to someone, it is produced by someone to have meanings for someone else, and these meanings therefore must not be ignored and must not violate why the text exists in the first place” (pp. 24-25). Given the many new kinds of reading popular today (e-books, audiobooks, graphic novels, blogs, gaming, etc.), this broad definition proves useful.

Although content analysis as such was first mentioned in English text in the 1940s (Krippendorff, 2019), hermeneutic analysis can be traced back to the Middle Ages (Crotty, 1998) and text analysis to the 17th Century (Krippendorff, 2019). Early uses of text analysis involved examination of religious texts and periodicals. In the early years of

the 20th Century, the popularity of newspapers led to an increased interest in interrogating the influence of this growing medium. During the latter half of the century, researchers increasingly used content analysis in behavioral and social sciences such as psychology, political science, anthropology, and education (Krippendorff, 2019).

Krippendorff (2019) asserts that because of the “sometimes shallow results reported by the content analysts of 60 years ago” (p. 21), many researchers now identify their research methods as qualitative content analysis, relying less on quantifying or counting units of language and more on drawing inferences about them. Krippendorff (2019) however, refers to this distinction as “a mistaken dichotomy” (p. 91). He writes: “I question the validity and usefulness of the distinction between quantitative and qualitative content analyses. Ultimately, all reading of texts is qualitative, even certain characteristics of a text are later converted into numbers” (p. 91). In other words, any analysis of text relies, to some extent, on the inferences made by the researcher(s). Still, according to Krippendorff (2019), a qualitative approach requires adjustments to certain protocols to address issues of reliability (replicability) and validity.

Novel Selection

To make the text a priority, I made every effort to find texts best suited to the research questions of this study and teased out the explicit and implicit messages within them, “unmasking hidden meanings beneath apparent ones” (Crotty, 1998, p. 88). The most important characteristic for texts analyzed in this study is that they intrigue me as researcher and reader. According to Austgard (2012), “the researcher must be provoked by the text because it is the text that raises the questions to be answered” (p. 831). In addition, to conduct the search for young adult novels, I looked for novels with “literary

merit” which Cart (2016) admits is difficult to define. What all novels of literary merit have in common, however, are characters “who are fully formed, beautifully realized, [and] multidimensional” (Cart, 2016, p. 85). The novels selected for this research have fully developed, dynamic characters. I look for skilled characterization in my personal reading and looked for that in this research.

Most importantly, I looked for characters that “provoked” me, the researcher and reader. I searched for characters like Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* (Austen, 1817). Catherine’s engagement with *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Radcliff, 1794) moved her to create a similar Gothic reality in her own world, her own story. Similarly, I was such a character in my own neo-Gothic tale after reading Stephen King’s (1978) ‘*Salem’s Lot*. Weeks after I finished, I still almost believed vampires lurked behind the deli counter at the grocery store or on the driveway of my neighbor’s home. For this study, I searched also for characters who had established relationships with authors, real or imagined. I also tend to develop these relationships. I question their writing decisions as well as their motives. I worship them, and then I curse them. A case in point is the irrational frustration and fury I felt when I realized George R. R. Martin was not going to finish the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series in my lifetime. As a researcher and instrument for this inquiry, I analyzed novels that sparked my interest and lived with me far beyond the time it took to read the words on their pages.

To determine which YA novels to use in the study, I referred to my own extensive reading of YA literature. I also relied on suggestions from my colleagues who are YA teachers and fans themselves for suggestions. I mined the lists of award winners and honor books from the Michael Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature as

well as the Best of the Best lists from the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA). Because I wanted to examine new kinds of reading, including the use of digital reading texts, I limited the search to the past ten years. I also sought to find as much racial and gender diversity as possible. In the end, the books that intrigued me or “provoked” (Austgard, 2012) me as a researcher were the four novels I ultimately selected. Each selection intrigued me for its rich, compelling characters and interesting reading contexts. For example, *Madeline (Everything, Everything)* is a reader secluded from the rest of the world by her illness, almost a modern version of a princess locked in a tower. *Cath (Fangirl)* reads and writes obsessively in the world of fanfiction. I have placed retellings of the novels in Appendices A-D. Below I have provided a table of the novels selected and brief descriptions of the fictional readers in each.

Table 1:

Novels Selected and Main Reading Characters

Novel	Fictional Reader	Character Description
<i>Booked</i>	Nick	Nick is a thirteen-year-old who loves to move down the soccer field, trying not to get "booked," flagged for dangerous play. When forces off the field seem to start working against him, the last thing he wants to do is read a book.?
	Mr. Mac	Mr. Mac is the school librarian who never gives up tempting Nick with books that might interest him.
<i>Everything, Everything</i>	Madeline	Madeline has read a lot of books; she says so herself. She is confined to her house because of her illness, so she has a great deal of time to read. And she loves to read.
	Olly	When Olly moves in next door to Madeline, he soon begins to communicate with her online. Soon, they begin discussing books they love.

<i>Fangirl</i>	Cath	Cath is devoted to the Simon Snow books, a series that was read by millions of children, teenagers, and adults worldwide. She is also part of the Simon Snow fanfiction world, which she navigates with a confidence she seldom manages in real life.
	Wren	Cath's twin sister, Wren has decided the twins should live separately now they are in college. She is still a Simon Snow fan, but she now pursues other interests.
Novel	Fictional Reader	Character Description
	Levi	Levi says he is "not much of a book person," but he soon shows a great deal of interest in Cath's fanfiction--and in Cath.
<i>The Fault in Our Stars</i>	Hazel	Hazel is sixteen. She reads a great deal about life and death because she lives a daily life-and-death struggle with cancer.
	Augustus	When Augustus meets Hazel at a support group for cancer survivors, he experiences an immediate attraction. As they exchange their favorite books, they get to know and like each other even more.

The study of the fictional readers in these novels involved a recursive process of reading and rereading these four young adult novels, producing an analysis of fictional representations of readers and reading experiences, and concluding with the implications those understandings have for future curricular studies and pedagogical applications.

Analysis Procedure

Hsieh-Fang and Shannon (2009) outline a multi-step procedure for conducting a qualitative content analysis:

1. Repeated readings to get a sense of the text as a whole,
2. Close readings of the text to discern significant patterns related to the purpose of the study,

3. Notetaking about general impressions of the patterns and initial observations
4. Organizing and reorganizing patterns of information into themes, and
5. Reporting the findings of the analysis (p. 1279).

I merged the methods outlined by Sanders et al. (2010), Hsieh-Fang and Shannon (2009), and Krippendorff (2019) with Austgard's (2012) Gadamerian approach to hermeneutic inquiry to create a method for this study. Sanders et al. (2010) served as the inspiration for the analysis as it led me to identify reader archetypes and motifs. Krippendorff (2019) provided a much-needed foundation in the practice of content analysis, a research method with which I was previously unfamiliar. Austgard's (2012) step-by-step process worked as an organizational model that helped me establish order and clarity to my thinking.

I addressed the first two steps of Austgard's process (Establishing the Hermeneutic Situation and Identifying the "Fore-Understanding of the Study) in Chapters I and II, respectively. In Chapter I, I presented elements of my own positionality. In Chapter II, I explored the research that existed regarding fictional readers and reading experiences. In this chapter, I addressed the last two steps (Data Analysis and Reaching a "Fusion of Horizons").

Analysis of Selected Novels

I began the qualitative content analysis of text informed by a hermeneutic methodology and guided by Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. First, I read each novel without annotation, considering the work as a whole. During this first reading, the following guiding questions informed my thinking:

- What do characters say about text, books and/or reading, their own and others'?

- What do other characters say about the main characters' relationships with reading?
- How do characters physically respond to the written word?
- What do characters think about books or reading?
- What do characters read?
- How do characters apply their previous knowledge to what they read?
- How does reading shapes characters' thinking?

I conducted repeated readings, highlighting and annotating as I went along. During each layered reading I searched for any references to dialogue, thought, action, or narration that pertained to readers or reading experiences with any type of text. Through the readings, I noticed that some characters read books while others read e-books, Internet text, or other digital forms of text such as audiobooks. I decided to read using different modes as well. I read each book again as an e-book, digitally highlighting and annotating again to compare with the highlights I had found in previous reads. Then I listened to each book in audio format so that I could engage in that experience. The reflections about reading in different formats were recorded in my journaling.

I developed a spreadsheet to organize the highlighted portions of texts and notes I had taken for each book. Each entry indicated the character involved (narrator included), the excerpt from the text, the type of text (book, encyclopedia, letter, diary), the mode of text (print, digital, audio my notes on the entry, and possible categories of reader and/or reading.

To explore Research Question #1, I examined the spreadsheet information, looking for similarities and differences between and among the reading characters. I then

categorized some of the reading types I saw in the analysis. The names I gave these reading archetypes evolved from annotating the spreadsheet data and listing attributes I saw in the fictional readers. I brainstormed descriptive words about the fictional readers I encountered in the text and in my annotations. Then, I dived into the dictionary meanings, denotative and connotative, of each descriptor and investigated the etymology of the terms to determine if the descriptors I chose were the most apt.

Next, I turned to Research Question #2 and began to sort different types of reading experiences into like categories. From this analysis, I developed common motifs of behavior that appeared to perform important aspects of reading in each text. Then I categorized like reading experiences to interpret and explore. Throughout the analysis, I kept a mindset of hermeneutic inquiry and considered each book repeatedly through layered reading. I also applied Bakhtin’s concepts of heteroglossia and dialogism as lenses for analysis. Then, I reread using as a unit for analysis any reference to readers or reading experiences with any kind of text. I created a spreadsheet that documented types of texts (e.g., books, blogs, texting, emails, encyclopedias) and modes of text (e.g., print, digital, audio). That analysis resulted in different kinds of texts experienced by the fictional readers in the novels: See Table 2.

Table 2:

Kinds of Texts in the Novels

Character	Book	Audiobook	Email	Online Reading	Social Media	Texting	Letter	Poetry
Nick	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Mr. Mac	X							X
Madeline	X		X	X		X	X	X
Olly	X		X	X		X		X

Cath	X		X	X		X	
Wren	X		X	X		X	
Levi		X				X	
Reagan	X	X					
Hazel	X		X		X	X	X
Augustus	X		X	X		X	X

Because I wanted to examine a variety of reading experiences, I conducted most readings in paperback format, but I read each novel at least once on an e-reader and at least once by listening to the audiobook. In subsequent readings, I put the coded material in a spreadsheet for each novel and used the following categories: speaker (this could be the narrator), speech/text type, the direct quotation from the novel, and my annotation of the quotation. Later, I added categories for topics and finally, a category for themes and archetypal images.

Keeping in mind Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of heteroglossia, I looked for the many voices found in each work: narrator’s and characters’ voices. For Bakhtin (1981), all voices are dialogically significant in the novel, but understanding the context of each is of vital importance to constructing meaning from the text. As a researcher, I asked about which voices come from a position of power over others and which are silenced. I wondered about the social and cultural contexts that informed their reading experiences, and I searched for “living, tension-filled interaction” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 279) of the fictional voices and speech types.

Reaching a “Fusion of Horizons”

My interpretations of the novels can have no real ending point as each new interpretation alters my fore-knowledge and therefore any subsequent interpretations. I did, however, at some point, conclude the study and “synthesize a new understanding” (Sanders et al, 2010, p. 174) of key themes from the analysis of text. I revisited the coding spreadsheet and grouped like items into topics and then into themes. The reported research findings represent a “fusion of horizons” (Sanders et al., 2010, Austgard, 2012) between the world view of the authors and the researcher and included possible implications and applications for further theoretical and pedagogical studies and praxis. The resulting interpretation of the data is described by Sanders et al. (2010) as “a ‘fusion’ of both our horizons (as interpreters) and of the author’s horizon (or viewpoint), creating something new” (p. 174). As Crotty (1998) explains:

Out of the engagement comes something quite new. The insights that emerge were never in the mind of the author. They are not in the author’s text. They were not with us as we picked up the text to read it. They have come into being in and out of our engagement with it. (p. 109)

Looking at the way fictional adolescent readers engage with text can produce “something new” and exciting to add to existing research about adult fictional readers that I reviewed in Chapter II.

Quality in Qualitative Research

There is no strict recipe for qualitative research because contemporary qualitative inquiry takes so many diverse forms. A qualitative research design depends on the nature of the problem, the purpose of the research and the epistemologies and theoretical

frameworks guiding the researchers. However, there are certain elements of qualitative research design that, to paraphrase Patton (2015), put the quality in qualitative research. For the purposes of this study, I focused on the importance of a prolonged engagement with the young adult genre and the thick description of the selected novel sampling and my analysis of them.

Prolonged Engagement

First, my research was grounded on a prolonged engagement with adolescent readers in general and young adult literature in particular. My work as a middle school and high school language arts teacher began thirty-eight years ago. Since then, I have witnessed profound changes in our culture in general and in education. When my role in education moved from teacher to principal who supervised language arts teachers, my perspective shifted. In some ways, that perspective represented a more informed view of teaching, in some ways, a more limited view. Added to my ever-changing perspectives was the graduate work I have completed in curriculum studies and educational theory that continues to inform what I believe about education and how I act on those beliefs. In addition, my interest in young adult literature, which began during a master's level children's literature course, brings an extensive and eclectic background of reading in the genre. My professional background and prolonged engagement with language arts education and the young adult literature genre will add to my construction of meaning in this research.

Research Reading Journal

As I proceeded with this analysis, I kept a research journal to record the “interpretational movement back and forth with text” (Austgard, 2012). This journal

represented my dialogue with myself about my dialogue with text about the characters' dialogue with text. The possibilities abound. In this study, the research journal will be my traced the threads of my analytical and personal imaginings as I connected with the voices I found in text as well as my own "inner heteroglossia." I used the research journal to keep an audit trail of sorts. One purpose for this journal was to collect the notes and annotations I made, the "thick description" (Patton, 2015) of the culture of the study, in this case the culture of the novels themselves. The importance of this journal was to keep a record of theories and other artifacts that informed my approach to meaning-making, but also to document my own personal feelings and thoughts as I proceeded with the analysis. The journal was something to which I later returned to ensure that I kept my original research questions and theoretical framework in mind. Perhaps more importantly, the journal represented a well of information, thoughts, feelings, and musings from which I drank as I conducted the difficult work of research.

Austgard (2012) urges the researcher engaged in hermeneutic inquiry to maintain a transparent process. I kept the research journal and annotated texts to chart the observations and interpretations I made as I engaged with the novels. During this process, I mined the texts for literary gold and produced what Austgard (2012) calls "meaningful assumptions" (p. 832) made from direct quotations from the novels. This process was intended to show the transparency of what was originally in the text and the inferences I drew. The journal recorded the dialogue between researcher and text and make the process and findings more accessible to a reader.

Thick Description

Patton (2015) refers to thick description as “the bedrock of all qualitative reporting” (p. 534). Although my study differed from other qualitative traditions that use observations and interviews from the “real world,” I included as much description in my process. In this way, I worked toward credibility by using my prolonged experience with adolescents, reading instruction and young adult literature and provided rich, multi-layered descriptions in a research journal. I also engaged in writing what I have called a “retelling” of each novel, using significant details about the characters’ engagement with reading experiences. (Those items can be found in Appendices A-D.) With these elements of good qualitative research in mind, I constructed and synthesized new understandings about how fictional readers are represented in young adult contemporary realistic fiction.

Limitations of the Study

Although I do not make any claims to generalizability from the results of this research, I do recognize certain limitations in the study. First, the study was limited to only four YA novels out of a subset of YA contemporary realistic fiction. In addition, researcher biases exist that have informed the organization of the study, text selection, and/or discernment of findings. Since the researcher is the primary investigative tool for this analysis or any qualitative study, the researcher’s own positionality must continually be interrogated.

Perhaps the greatest limitation is my own biases toward readers and reading. My background in and love for the Western canon remains unchallenged although I also claim a deep appreciation for young adult literature and other contemporary literary

forms. However, I own a certain cynicism about digital reading, especially social media. I worry about its potential to discourage reading persistence and stamina—even transformation! However, I realize this is my own orientation toward reading and experiences of my generation. Despite the limitations, this study will add insight into how readers and reading experiences are represented in young adult literature.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS: READERS

The purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative content analysis of four young adult novels. In this chapter, I share the findings in response to Research Question 1: How are readers represented in young adult contemporary realistic fiction?

In a hermeneutic analysis, conclusions are drawn based upon context. In this study, I engaged in several readings. I first read through each text to get a sense of the novel as a whole. In subsequent readings, I read for specific references to the reading experiences of any character. In later readings, I used heteroglossia as a lens. I looked for varying text types, particularly narration, dialogue, or semi-literary text within the text that create the multivoiced nature of the novel (Bakhtin, 1981). Throughout the process, the context of my own meaning-making process informed each layered reading.

I considered my two research questions and created two sections: archetypes of readers and recurring motifs of reading experiences found in the novels. For the purposes of this chapter, I began by reading through the spreadsheet data looking for descriptors of readers in reference to Research Question #1. I dived into the meanings of the words used in the novels to describe reading characters. During this process, I considered the words used by authors and the words I had used in my annotations. I consolidated and sorted common and like terms. For example, several characters were passionate about

reading. In my notes, I characterized one character as “consumed by reading.” I referred to another as “immersed” in reading. The common thread was their devotion to reading. I had considered *fan* or *afficionado*, but, while those terms denoted an “appreciation” (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, n.p.) for a subject or activity, they did not connote the passion I wished to convey. *Devotee* denoted an “ardent” appreciation for something but also included connotative meanings aligned with artistic appreciation and religious fervor (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, n.p.). I used this process repeatedly with the like categories of readers I identified. The result was a list of reader archetypes gleaned from repeated readings of the four novels.

Reader Archetypes

From the analysis, I identified five reader archetypes: the Devotee, the Connector, the Mentor, the Denier, and the Differently-Abled Reader. The term *archetype* used in literary criticism denotes a useful or good example or representation of an idea or phenomenon (Merriam Webster online dictionary, n.p.). Examining representations of readers in archetype form was useful in thinking about the nature of readers, what they read, how they read, and how they think about themselves as readers. As indicated in Table 3, each character exemplifies at least one archetype; some characters exemplify more than one depending on the context of the reading situation and/or meaningful changes in the way they view reading experiences or their own identities as readers. Mr. Mac, for example is a Mentor for Nick’s reading in the novel, *Booked*; but he is also a Devotee, a dedicated reader to whom reading experiences are an integral part of his life. Nick is, early in the novel, a Denier; but he later becomes something of a Devotee with Mr. Mac’s and April’s influence.

Table 3:

Reader Archetypes

Book	Character	Devotee	Connector	Mentor	Denier	Differently-Abled Reader
<i>Booked</i>	Nick	X			X	
	Mr. Mac	X		X		
	April		X	X		
	Nick's father			X		
	Ms. Hardwick			X		
<i>Everything, Everything</i>	Madeline	X				
	Olly		X			
<i>Fangirl</i>	Cath	X				
	Levi		X			X
	Wren	X			X	
<i>The Fault in Our Stars</i>	Hazel	X				
	Augustus		X			
	Isaac					X
	Hazel's mother				X	

This chapter includes a summary of the characters and their archetypal categories. In Appendices A-D, I have included retellings of each novel that provide detailed

descriptions of characters and plot lines. The following is an explanation of each archetype and the characters who exemplify them.

The Devotee

The Devotee appears in all four novels: Mr. Mac in *Booked* (Alexander, 2016), Madeline in *Everything, Everything* (Yoon, 2015), Cath in *Fangirl* (Rowell, 2013), and Hazel in *The Fault in Our Stars* (Green, 2012). Devotees immerse themselves in text and reading experiences. Highly imaginative, they live in fictional worlds, often isolated from the world around them. They have relationships, real or imagined with the characters in books and sometimes the authors. They speak like readers, often engaging in word play, alluding to literary works, or even quoting them from memory. Although Devotees have a proprietary relationship with their reading material, they conversely feel compelled to share their reading experiences with others.

In *Booked* (Alexander, 2016), Mr. Mac is the school librarian at Nick's high school. Nick, the thirteen-year-old protagonist of the novel, is the object of Mr. Mac's frequent attempts to draw Nick into the world of reading. The antithesis of the demure, buttoned-up librarian prototype, Mr. Mac is a former rap artist who knows how to reach an audience. He does not hesitate to wear sweatshirts bearing his reading messages; nor does he shrink from playing to any audience as he book-talks his current reads or reads aloud to an appreciative audience. Alexander (2016) uses Mr. Mac's "stylistically individualized speech" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 262) as character development as the fictional librarian molds Nick's reading life. More importantly, Mr. Mac cares about his students and gets to know them. He knows what they do when they are not in school, and he

knows what is happening in their classes. His caring and exuberant personality enable him to persuade even reluctant readers.

Madeline in *Everything, Everything* (Yoon, 2015) lives immersed in text. She yearns to live outside her text-filled room, but her chronic illness has confined her to her home. She is never allowed to leave. Books and movies (visual text) have become her comfort, her companionship, and even instruction manual for living and maturing. She loves her books, and their covers represent a colorful component of her otherwise white and sterile bedroom. Now that Madeline is turning eighteen, she has begun to take lessons from the books she reads and rereads in her decision-making about what makes life worth living, even if that means risking death by leaving her safe environment. Her reading has freed her figuratively during her childhood, allowing her to visit other worlds through text. Now, the books and her digital reading have the potential to free her literally, providing her the means to escape her mother's watchful eye.

Hazel in *The Fault in Our Stars* (Green, 2012) is also confined to home because of her health, but not to the extent Madeline is. Hazel likes a variety of literature, but she remains almost exclusively devoted to her favorite book, *An Imperial Affliction*. (This novel is Green's fictional novel within his fictional novel.) In AIA, as Hazel refers to it, are all the answers to life and perhaps even life after death. These are particularly important to Hazel's understanding and immersion in multiple readings as she has been in a life-and-death struggle with cancer since she was a young girl. However, because the novel ends abruptly, Hazel is desperate to persuade the author to provide the rest of the story. Now, at 16, she wants answers about her favorite book from the author, whom she

thinks of as her best friend. Her readings of his novel have convinced Hazel that the author has the answers to life and death Hazel desperately needs.

Like Hazel, Cath, in *Fangirl* (Rowell, 2013), enjoys a variety of literature but is consumed with one book series. The Simon Snow series is a world in which Cath happily lives whenever she can. (Interestingly, this book series, like *An Imperial Affliction* in Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, is a fictional book series within Rowell's fictional novel.) When she and her twin sister Wren begin their freshman year at a state university, Cath struggles to live in the real world with real people. She is more comfortable with the characters in the Simon series, whom she has come to know and care about deeply. The series, which bears a striking resemblance to the Harry Potter novels, has a vast and intense following on the Internet in the form of blogs and fanfiction. Cath and Wren have alter egos who write fanfiction, and their work has resulted in a fan base of their own. Now that their college life has begun, Wren wants to spend less time in Simon's world, but Cath cannot let go. She immerses herself even more deeply into her fanfiction, avoiding Wren, her new roommate, and an interesting upperclassman named Levi. While Madeline, Mr. Mac, and Hazel manage the dance between real and fictional worlds, Cath is less adept at achieving that balance. Rowell's use "extra-artistic authorial speech" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 262) cloaked in the fictional texts within her novel heighten the tension between Cath and Hazel's real and fictional worlds.

Reading Often and Widely

Devotees read often and widely. Madeline (*Everything, Everything*) as narrator informs readers in the opening sentence, "I've read many more books than you" (p. 1). Hazel (*The Fault in Our Stars*) tells Augustus that she reads "[e]verything. From, like,

hideous romance to pretentious fiction to poetry. Whatever” (p. 33). Both Madeline and Hazel often read late into the night, reluctant to stop until they finish. Mr. Mac also is widely read. He is conversant in the “classics” like *The Three Musketeers* as well as nonfiction books about soccer and YA novels. While Devotees may have their favorite books, they are open to reading outside their comfort zones.

Living to Read and Owning the Texts

Literally and figuratively surrounded by text, the Devotee lives to read and reread, almost feeling they own the texts. In *Fangirl* (Rowell, 2013), the bedroom Cath shares with Wren is decorated with Simon Snow posters and memorabilia. When Cath moves into her dormitory room at the university, the first things she unpacks are pictures of her father and sister followed closely by posters and figurines relating to the Simon Snow series of books. The book characters seem part of her family. Like Cath, Mr. Mac (Alexander, 2016), the school librarian is surrounded by books and, like Cath, even wears clothing (t-shirts and sweatshirts) that make references to reading and to books. Similarly, Madeline (*Everything, Everything*) surrounds herself with her own personal library and refers lovingly to her books which she inscribes with “Property of Madeline.” She owns the books. They belong to her. Like other Devotees, she lives within and around text. Like other Devotees, Hazel (*The Fault in Our Stars*) has read her favorite book countless times and feels it belongs to her. For Hazel, this is one of those books “you can’t tell people about, books so special and rare and *yours* that advertising your affection feels like a betrayal” (p. 33). The Devotees’ proprietary relationship with books shows throughout the novels.

Living in Fictional Worlds

Devotees often live in fictional worlds and think about them with heightened emotional attachment. Cath often admits she is more comfortable in fictional worlds than the real world. She says, “When you fall in love with the world of Mages, you can just keep on living there” (p. 156). The real world is “something that happened in her peripheral vision” (p. 414). Cath continually relates life experiences to those she has read in fiction. When she sees Levi in her dorm room, she thinks to herself, “There was a boy in her room” (p. 4), a line that echoes the first line of the first Simon Snow book. Madeline also navigates the real world through the lens of the fiction she reads. She says, “You can find the meaning of life in a book” (p. 89). Later in the novel, when Madeline is feeling confused and alone, she thinks to herself, “I am OK, but, like Alice [in Wonderland], I’m just trying not to get lost (p. 83). Hazel describes her devotion to *An Imperial Affliction*, her favorite book, as “a weird, evangelical zeal”, ((Green, 2012, p. 33). She, in fact says the book is “as close a thing [she has] to a Bible” (p. 13). In *Booked* (Alexander, 2016), Mr. Mac tries to explain the emotional attachment to fiction: “I’m talking about a book that wows you. Just totally rips your heart out of your chest and then brutally stomps on it. That kind of book” (p. 124).

Relationships with Fictional Characters and Authors

Part of living in fictional worlds are the imagined relationships with characters or even authors that Devotees experience. Hazel refers to Peter Van Houten, the author of *An Imperial Affliction* as her “third best friend” (p. 12) although she admits that Van Houten does not know she exists. In *Fangirl*, Cath enrolls in a writing class taught by a published author and reads all the professor’s books before the term begins in an effort to

get to know her. Interestingly, both Hazel and Cath are disappointed when they actually meet the authors. Cath notices that her professor is “smaller than she looked in the photos on her book jackets” (p. 21). Perhaps the most extraordinary example of a Devotee who lives in relationship with fictional characters is Cath’s involvement with Simon and Baz. Cath tells Wren that “Baz is secure in our relationship” (p. 16). When Cath is talking about her high school boyfriend, Wren says, “You have stronger feelings about Baz and Simon” (p. 35). Later, when Cath feels worried about her ability to engage in sexual intimacy with Levi, Wren reminds her that she has written erotic scenes for Simon and Baz many times. She says, “You’re more comfortable with their parts than your own” (p. 388).

Talking Like a Reader

Devotees talk like readers, living the texts with the contexts of their lives. Mr. Mac, for example engages in word play in his many rap performances, trying to use humor to entice Nick into reading. Cath, Madeline, and Hazel often use literary terms in their everyday conversations: metaphor, onomatopoeia, hamartia. They often allude to works of literature to make observations about life. When Olly compares Madeline to a fairy tale princess, she begins a discussion about how the fairy tales most people refer to are not nearly as dark and tragic as the originals. In *Fangirl*, Cath’s writing partner turns out to betray her by taking her ideas and turning them in as his own. Cath thinks to herself, “He was an unreliable narrator, if ever she’d met one” (p. 212). The characters’ reading experiences transformed their thinking and their speaking into “stylistically individualized speech” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 262) portraying the transformational impact of the texts.

Sharing What They Read

Finally, Devotees feel compelled to share what they read. Obviously, Mr. Mac talks about books with his students; it is his job as the school librarian. But he also seems to take great pleasure in doing so. He shares his passion about books through his humorous t-shirt designs and his book talks. Madeline shares her reading experiences online through her Tumblr book reviews, for example,

FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON BY DANIEL KEYES

Spoiler alert: Algernon is a mouse. The mouse dies.

She also talks to Olly and Carla about how much she loves her two favorite books, *The Little Prince* and *Flowers for Algernon*. She tries to get them to read them and enjoy them with her. In *The Fault in Our Stars*, Hazel shares *An Imperial Affliction* with Augustus and is excited when Augustus shares her enthusiasm for the book. The most extreme example of the Devotee sharing what they have read occurs in *Fangirl*. Cath, a fan of Simon Snow, writes fanfiction for the series. She has shared her enthusiasm for Simon and his fictional friends through hundreds of pages with online fans of her own. Unfortunately, while her online sharing connects her to thousands of fans of her own, the fanfiction she writes tends to isolate her from real friends and family around her.

Dialogue about sharing books serves to develop plot and character. Devotees want their voices to be heard relative to their favorite reads. However, authorial choices about the texts within the texts prove a powerful voice as well. When Yoon (2015) moves Madeline to claim *Flowers for Algernon* and *The Little Prince* as her two favorite books, she gives voice not only to Madeline's inner thoughts, but to the voices in those texts as well. In other words, the voices (e.g., characters, narrators, semi-literary texts) in her

favorite books “speak” to Madeline. Those voices resonate with her own inner thinking embedded in her social and cultural experience. Then her newly created, socially contextualized inner voice inform subsequent readings of the novels and her world. This heteroglossic process creates a dialogical relationship between novel, reader, character, other texts, and life experiences. This is dialogism.

Escaping into Fiction

The ardent devotion of the Devotee often keeps them from enjoying the people they care about and the joys of the world around them. On the other hand, they seem to experience a great deal of comfort and even joy when they engage in fiction. In each novel, there seems to be an underlying message that the Devotee has many admirable qualities, but too much devotion can result in an intellectual hubris that keeps them from experiencing life to its fullest.

I noticed that, in my analysis, Devotees were almost always female. This presented further questions for me. Is this because of my own assumptions about girls being more likely to love reading? Does it stem from the authors’ assumptions of the same? Also interesting is that Devotees were often drawn out of their fictional worlds by a male love interest. What messages are the authors sending? Are these young men rescuing the “Devotees in Distress” and saving them from themselves? These rescuers make up the next archetype. I have eschewed the rescuer connotation, although I believe it is worth considering, and have labeled them as Connectors. They act as complement to the Devotees by helping them bridge the gap between real and fictional worlds.

The Connector

In my analysis, I identified connectors, one for each Devotee except for Nick (*Booked*): Olly, Levi, and Augustus. (Nick could be described as a Devotee-in-the-making, and, one could argue, not in need of a Connector.) Connectors' relationships with Devotees develop around and because of the Devotees' passion for books. Although other characters interacted with Devotees, Connectors develop close, mutually beneficial bonds. The relationship benefits the Connectors by introducing them to particular books that enrich their lives, but it also benefits the Devotees as it helps them maintain a book-life balance.

One Connector/Devotee alliance occurs in *Everything, Everything*. From her second-story window, Madeline observes and decides Olly has the life she desires. Olly has two parents, a sister, and freedom. He attends the local high school, skateboards recklessly around the neighborhood, and practices daredevil gymnastics in his upstairs loft. What Madeline cannot see is that Olly and his mother and sister live in fear of their abusive alcoholic father. Once Olly befriends Madeline, secretly so her mother does not discover their relationship, they explore each other's thoughts about books and make plans together to free themselves from the struggles they both face.

Levi (*Fangirl*) is a Connector for Cath. A senior in college, Levi is on scholarship to the university and works multiple jobs at a time to support himself. He says of himself he is not a "book person," but Cath finds out well into their relationship that Levi has trouble reading any kind of print. He does, however, love stories. He listens to recordings of books and lectures and remembers a surprising amount of detail. Although I discuss

Levi in another archetype section, he serves a dual role as Connector as he joins Cath in her magical worlds and entices her to join him in the real world.

Augustus (*The Fault in Our Stars*), has perhaps the most intense Devotee/Connector relationship with Hazel. Like most Connectors, Augustus enjoy literature, but he becomes overwhelmingly involved with reading only when he befriends Hazel. Together their relationship with books and each other leads to extensive research, heated discussions, and even international travel as they fly to Amsterdam to meet the author of their favorite book. Their relationship with each other and their frustrating relationship with the book and its author ultimately transform each of them. Hazel is devastated by the disappointment she experiences with the author and helps her deal with the reality of who Van Houten really is. Augustus draws her attention from the author and his story to writing their own story. He literally proceeds to do just that; he writes an ending to the book for them.

Enthusiasm for Reading

Connectors join Devotees in their enthusiasm for books and reading, but they also draw them out into the real world. Connectors are engaged readers, but do not immerse themselves in fictional worlds to the extent of the Devotees. Augustus, for example, is an avid reader of the Sgt. Max Mayhem book series, a novelization of his favorite video game. Olly is clearly a reader, an AP Literature student whose favorite book is *Lord of the Flies*. Levi, though not a reader in the typical sense, is enjoying the young adult literature assigned in his college course. As connectors, all three engage enthusiastically with the Devotees' books. For Olly, this presents in interesting discussions about Madeline's favorite books. Levi, already a fan of the Simon Snow series, becomes

intrigued with Cath's fanfiction and wants her to read it to him whenever they get an opportunity. He says, "So, if you didn't want the books to be over, you could just keep reading Simon Snow stories forever online" (p. 156). And, Augustus, becomes so emotionally involved with Hazel's favorite book, he joins her in her efforts to track down the author to ask him for the sequel they both desperately crave.

Balance of Fictional and Real Worlds

However, Connectors are not as immersed in fiction as Devotees; they spend most of their time in the real world and real relationships. Connectors and Devotees share a literary symbiosis, a metaphorical mutualism where both benefit from the other. Connectors experience the joys of fictional worlds in relationship with the Devotees, and Devotees are drawn, at least to some extent, from fiction to the real world. Cath's relationship with Levi leads her gradually to meet other people and even enjoy herself doing something as simple as bowling. Madeline's relationship with Olly gives her the courage to explore a world that is potentially dangerous for her, but she finally decides that the experience is worth it. Hazel's relationship with Augustus results in her traveling to Amsterdam to meet her "third best friend," author Peter Van Houten. In all three novels, the Devotees and Connectors engage in sexual experiences that Devotees have previously only experienced through reading about them. Connectors can share with Devotees the emotional vicissitudes of fictional worlds and the joys, even sexual awakenings, of the real world.

The Mentor

A Mentor is "a trusted counselor or guide," (Merriam Webster online dictionary, n.p.). The word itself is a literary reference to Mentor, a character in Homer's *Odyssey*.

Although Mr. Mac in *Booked* is not the only Mentor in this analysis, he is certainly the most effective. First, Mr. Mac exudes enthusiasm for books in every encounter with Nick or the other students. He wears his love for books on his shirts. One example is a play on words with the online platform Facebook; his hoodie reads “putyourFACEinaBOOK” (p. 224). Mr. Mac talks about books every chance he gets, and he has read widely enough to be conversant in a large variety of genres and topics. He gets to know his students; he knows what may interest them. He also fosters relationships among the students with his book club “Nerds and Words.” Mr. Mac entices, cajoles, and leads. He does not assign, demand, or push. Through most of the novel, Mr. Mac knows that Nick and Coby are in the library just to play cards, but he welcomes them. Eventually, he does get Nick to read. Mr. Mac’s guidance has led April to serve in the role of peer mentor for Nick’s reading. She recommends a book club book to him and, once he becomes a member of the club, she asks him to select the next book. Mentors, then, encourage others to read and, subsequently, to mentor.

I found it interesting that the mentor archetype was a major character in only one novel. This caused questions about whether helpful mentors are a rarity for readers. There are other figures who are older, more experienced readers who suggest or require books or reading. However, I do not include them wholeheartedly in this archetype. I might conclude they make up a subset of this archetype worth noting: the “misguided mentor,” exemplified by Nick’s father and Ms. Hardwick in *Booked*. Early in the novel, Nick complains that his father, a linguistics professor, forces him to read the dictionary. This is not just any dictionary, but *Weird and Wonderful Words* written by his father. This makes Nick feel as though he “lives in a prison of words” (p. 5). Although, for Nick, his father

thinks of the reading assignments as “the pursuit of excellence,” Nick thinks of it as “Shawshank” (p. 5). The unnamed misguided mentor exists in the other novels as teachers and professors who assign reading that does not interest their students. (I address the motif of assigned reading again in Chapter VI.) Ironically, Nick seems to love words. He uses many of the words from his father’s dictionary in his own dialogue, and Nick as narrator inserts faux dictionary entries throughout the novel complete with personal commentary. The difference between Mr. Mack and Nick’s father is the difference between encouragement and demand. For Bakhtin (1981) the difference represents the struggle between monologic communication, which brooks no dissention, and dialogic communication, which considers all voices valid. The effective Mentor engages the mentee in the dialogical process of collaborating with the mentee.

For the Mentor, a nonreader is an irresistible challenge. Mentors love to share their love for literature. Perhaps even more enticing a challenge is the person who does read but pretends not to: the Denier.

The Denier

The Denier is reader who denies or hides their reading. In *The Fault in Our Stars*, Hazel is unaware that her mother spends a great deal of time reading. Hazel believes her mother is engaged in the limitless medical paperwork involved in Hazel’s cancer diagnosis and ongoing treatment. Later, her mother tells her that she has been pursuing an online degree in counseling. Her mother kept the online reading secret because she did not want Hazel to know she was preparing for a career in the event Hazel passed away. Once the secret is out, Hazel assures her mother that she is pleased and excited for her.

The reason I included this archetype, however, rests with Nick's story. Nick is also a Denier. For most of the novel, Nick pretends no interest in words or reading although he obviously has a great deal of knowledge about both. Not only does he use many of the words he claims to dislike from his father's dictionary; he alludes to several books and poems. He talks about *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the "I Have a Dream" speech, and, as narrator, invokes the Langston Hughes poem "Harlem":

What happens to a dream destroyed?

Does it sink
like a wrecked ship in the sea?

Or wade in the water
like a boy overboard?

Maybe it just floats
around and around . . .

or does it drown?

Nick does not want others to see him as a reader because, for him, that identity does not/should not coexist with his identity as adolescent male or athlete. Once he does join the book club and even enjoys it, he still hides the reading and the club from his male friends. I included this archetype because of its importance in examining reasons for hiding one's reading, including gender stereotypes.

The Differently-Abled Reader

The Differently-Abled Reader archetype represents the reader who struggles to read print. Although only one character served as this stereotype, I included Levi's story because it was so compelling a testament to the power of reading in varied forms no matter the challenges. According to Dunn (2014), disability is not effectively addressed in young adult literature even though such representations "can affect the way real people are treated" (p. 1). Levi's character shows, however, that reading can result in joy, meaningful relationships, and self-examination. My first struggle with this archetype was the label itself. Uncomfortable with *struggling* or *disabled*, I considered *challenged* or even *neurodiverse*. I landed on *differently-abled*. Although this term seems too benign to do justice to the shame and frustration Levi has faced in his reading, that term seemed less offensive and presumptive than the others.

In *Fangirl*, Levi's reading frustrations are not revealed until halfway through the novel because he is so adept at hiding his (non)reading. Levi enjoys fictional worlds, but he is excluded from them to a certain extent because of his reading disability. When he first tries to explain his problems with reading, Cath cannot process the conversation. "She'd always thought that either people could read or they couldn't. Not this in-between thing that Levi had, where his brain could catch the words but couldn't hold onto them" (p. 186). He has tried to hint to her before by saying "I'm not really a book person" (p. 122). When she offered to send him a link to her fanfiction to read, he tells her, "I'm not much of an Internet person" (p. 146). But he is ashamed to admit to his reading difficulties except to his closest friends. Once Cath tells him that listening to audiobooks

“counts” as reading, he can open up to her about the barriers he faces and how he overcomes them.

The Differently-Abled Reader uses several coping mechanisms to compensate. Isaac (*The Fault in Our Stars*), whose cancer surgery has left him blind, relies on digital text-to-speech programs for books, emails and even video games. Levi (*Fangirl*) also has developed coping strategies. He relies a great deal on his uncanny memory, but he also seeks out friends and classmates to help. Reagan, for example, has helped him through high school and college. Sometimes she reads the books for him and shares the highlights; other times, she reads the books to him.

In the novels, reader archetypal figures work together as communities of readers, questioning and challenging, supporting and inspiring. Connectors, as I have previously noted offer reading partners who live in fictional worlds with Devotees but also serve as support for venturing back out to the world around them. Devotees can provide support and encouragement to the Differently-Abled reader. The Mentor can model pride and joy in reading for the Denier.

An overview of the fictional readers’ other characteristics bears noting. Toward this end, I examined how age, race, ethnicity, class, and gender may have affected their identities as readers.

Age of Reader

The main characters in the four novels ranged in age from thirteen to eighteen. This may explain why Hazel (sixteen), Madeline (eighteen), and Cath (eighteen) have strongly formed feelings and opinions about who they are as readers, for example, what

they are passionate about or when and with whom they share their reading worlds. Nick (thirteen) is still figuring out who he is as a person and a reader, struggling with authority figures like his parents and the school officials. It may be inferred that his age plays a role in the difference we see between Nick and the other three protagonists. On the other hand, Nick is also the only male. Therefore, his reticence to acknowledge himself as a reader, as opposed to athlete, may be a response to his beliefs that his male friends will frown upon his reading as a feminine activity. Once he does venture into the world of reading with other, he chooses a book club comprised only of girls and does not mention the activity to his male friends. His voice has been silenced by socially embedded gender expectations.

Reading and Race

The novels' main characters described in this chapter represent different racial identities. Nick, for example, is African American; Hazel and Cath are European American, and Madeline is biracial (Jamaican American and Asian American). Despite the differences, the book choices tend toward the so-called classics. Madeline, for example, reads and rereads *The Little Prince* and *Flowers for Algernon*. Cath and Hazel read books that do not actually exist, but the books are centered around white, Eurocentric upper-class families. And, although Mr. Mac suggests some young adult literature of a diverse nature, he also recommends *The Three Musketeers* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Reading and Class

Class does seem to play a role in the reading lives of the characters described in this chapter. All the characters have access to a wide variety of print and digital text. The library is mentioned in *Booked*, but Nick does not check out books. For him, the library is a place to meet his friends. The characters not only have access to books; they own them and have easy access to print material at home. The main characters also have easy access to the Internet and personal digital devices such as cell phones and/or iPods. What does this easy, fingertip access to text mean to the reading lives and identities of these readers? How would they have been changed if they had experienced a dearth of text throughout their lives? It seems that their class status does have a significant effect on their ability to develop their identities as readers.

The Reader, Heteroglossia, and Dialogism

During the analysis of the fictional reader, I turned again and again to Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, the multi-languagedness of the readers, the texts, and the world around them. At the root of heteroglossia is the stance that all voices are valid. For Bakhtin, heteroglossia in the novel includes the voices of all characters in the novel: the narrator, the reader, and all kinds of speech/texts presented (diaries, letters, legal documents, etc.). I examined heteroglossia at work as reading experiences led to the characters' positioning and repositioning their multiple selves.

First, readers were able to see themselves and O/others in texts. This was particularly true of the Devotee, perhaps because this archetypal character read more widely; or, perhaps because these readers were usually the main character and therefore more fully developed by the authors. Nick, for example, begins to see himself and some

of his personal conflicts when he reads about a boy who has experienced bullying. Hazel and Augustus identify with the young girl in *An Imperial Affliction* as they, like the young girl in their favorite book, know the painful journey of cancer diagnoses and treatment. Madeline reads about travel and adventure and repositions herself from reader/observer to a future self that actually experiences adventure and risk. The voices (text types) in the books the characters read and the voices of others around them change who these readers are in a continual and recursive process. Once they are changed and return to text or to others, they bring previous changes to the revisiting of text and/or conversation.

In addition, the multi-voiced nature of the readers and texts in the novels helps position the fictional readers as individuals in relation to others, as part of families, romantic relationships, and societal issues. Reading helps Nick (*Booked*) connect with his mentor Mr. Mac and his potential new girlfriend April. Through engagement with the voices in the novels and his discussions with Mr. Mac and the book club, he can reveal an interest in reading that he feels he has to deny when he is with his soccer teammates. Cath (*Fangirl*) positions and repositions herself as she balances the imagined world of Simon Snow to the risks of engaging with the world around her. The voices in the novels that characters read, the dialogue of other characters, and the messages from society (eg., “boys shouldn’t read.”) work in heteroglossic concert toward the growth of readers as individuals and community members.

For Bakhtin (1981), the heteroglossia between and among the voices of the readers in these four novels interact recursively with the voices of the other characters and the voices of the texts in which they engage. These “links and interrelationships

between utterances and languages” provides an orchestrated symphony of complex, even contradictory, messages that produce the overall effect of the work as a whole, i.e., dialogism.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyzed fictional readers in four young adult novels. The five reader archetypes represented in this study can provide insight to the authors’ views about readers, particularly adolescent readers. In each novel, mentors are represented as significant role models for readers. Ideally, but not usually, that model is a positive influence. The reader archetypes also shed light on the shame experienced by differently-abled readers and the barriers they face. The archetypes represented also reveal concerns about the role gender plays in whether being a reader is socially acceptable. While Nick felt ashamed of being a reader, the Devotees (all female) felt no such shame. Perhaps most importantly, all the authors celebrate readers who totally immerse themselves in fictional worlds. However, a common theme seems to be that connecting to the real world is also important.

In the analysis of how readers are represented in young adult fiction, I have focused on what characters read and how they read. The readers in these novels have read a variety of formats: books, audiobooks, online fanfiction, emails, IM’s, texts, and video games. They have read silently and alone; they have read to each other. Although the end of this chapter signifies a point of arrival for this part of the study, the analysis continues in my own thinking and, as it does for the fictional readers in the novels, the meaning changes every time I revisit the texts.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS: READING EXPERIENCES

The purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative content analysis of four young adult novels for the purposes of understanding how authors represented readers and reading experiences. In the previous chapter, I concentrated on Research Question #1 to examine fictional readers in the novels, the reading identities of the reading characters as archetypes. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the findings as they relate to Research Question 2: How are reading experiences represented in young adult contemporary realistic fiction?

In keeping with hermeneutic principles of text analysis, I read each novel several times. First, I read each novel once to get a general sense of the work. Then, I engaged in several readings examining first the readers themselves and then their reading experiences. In later readings, I read with a Bakhtinian lens, looking specifically at speech types within the novels. Toward this end, it was important that I look for the many voices in the novels. Not only did this include the voices of the characters, but also the narrators as well as other speech/text types. Of particular interest to me in this study were the texts within texts that were read--or not read--by characters in the novels. My own layered reading revealed much about the reading experiences in which characters

engaged. Common practices became apparent in the data. All the characters were in school and were assigned reading. (Madeline's assigned reading is not specifically mentioned in the text but can be assumed given that she was being homeschooled through an online program.) Nick often found himself at odds with his English teacher who assigned literature that did not interest him in the least. The older readers mentioned assigned reading, but those pieces of literature were mentioned only briefly. The characters spent far more reading time with books they had chosen themselves. I noticed other common threads in a similar manner. Those commonalities that appeared frequently and had a great deal of narration and/or dialogue devoted to them became the motifs I ultimately identified. From this layered analysis of reading experiences, six motifs emerged: Assigned Reading, Reading in Community, Reading Aloud, Digital Reading, Writing in Response to Reading, and Reading toward Identity.

Motifs in Reading Experiences

In literary analysis, a motif is a recurring symbol, action, or any element that furthers thematic development in the literary work. For the purposes of this analysis, I used motifs as indicators of the kinds of reading experiences represented and how those experiences functioned in the novel. Each motif included actions, images, statements, or other elements pertaining to a character or characters in the novels. Some characters engaged in multiple motifs throughout the works as shown in Table 4. The motifs I chose to explore in this study involved, with one exception, practices I saw with all four main characters (Nick, Madeline, Hazel, and Cath). However, there were some exceptions. Although the reading aloud motif did not appear in *Everything, Everything*, I was nevertheless intrigued by the effects the practice seemed to have on the characters who

did experience reading aloud. I speculated that that Madeline, given her confinement due to illness, did not have ample opportunities to read aloud to someone else or be read to. Given her strained relationship with her mother, the only other person she lives with, it was not surprising Madeline’s mother did not read to her Madeline. I suggest that her mother’s distant, even cold, parenting did not lend itself to the practice of reading to Madeline. Madeline also did not specifically mention assigned reading, but she did discuss Olly’s assigned reading with him. Therefore, I included both in this study.)

Table 4:

Motifs in Reading Experiences

Book	Character	Assigned Reading	Reading in Community	Reading Aloud	Digital Reading	Reading and Writing	Reading Toward Identity
<i>Booked</i>	Nick	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Mr. Mac		X	X		X	
<i>Everything, Everything</i>	Madeline		X		X	X	X
	Olly	X			X		X
<i>Fangirl</i>	Cath	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Levi	X	X	X			
<i>The Fault in Our Stars</i>	Hazel	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Augustus			X	X	X	X

Assigned Reading

Reading that a teacher or parent had assigned was present in some way in each novel. I included in this category any literature (fiction, nonfiction, poetry) that the fictional reader was required to read, whether the character chose to do so. In *Booked*, Nick's character often daydreams during class discussions about required reading in his Ms. Hardwick's language arts class. Cath and Hazel refer to "boring" literature assignments in their college classes. Olly shares his AP Literature reading list with Madeline in *Everything, Everything*. Without exception, assigned reading was described as boring, uninteresting, or irrelevant, so much white noise to the adolescents' environment. Even the powerful "I Have a Dream" speech is dismissed by Nick because it has been assigned "fifty eleven times" (p. 52). While most of the assigned reading would be considered part of the classic canon of literature, some was not. Ms. Hardwick, for example, assigned classics like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 1884) and the children's/young adult modern classic, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* (Curtis, 2005). Nick was uninterested in either book. He did, however, become interested in the books his peers chose for their book club, *All the Broken Pieces* (Berg, 2009) and the book he chose *Peace, Locomotion* (Woodson, 2009). One might argue that his interest in these books stems from their being stories about boys his age or the fact that these books are YA novels written for an adolescent audience. However, those factors would not explain Madeline's devotion to *Flowers for Algernon*. The main character of that novel is an intellectually challenged adult male. The difference in interest levels seems not to be the result of a particular kind of novel or topic of interest. Instead, the readers' interest

seems to be the result of the reader's participation or lack of participation in the process of selecting the novel.

Reading in Community

Participation in communities of readers was another important element of reading experiences. For this motif, I counted as "reading community" two or more characters who met in person or virtually with the expressed intention of discussing literature. Although the communities were sometimes official gatherings, they were not always. Sometimes the communities met in person. For example, Nick finally joins the librarian's Nerds and Words group, and they even end up meeting at Nick's home. The group is comprised of students Nick already knows. Most importantly, the group includes April, the girl he likes. In this group, Nick is exposed to books his peers are enjoying, and he finds that the books interest him as well. Eventually, the group asks Nick to choose the next book, and he takes the initiative to choose a book about a boy his age in a contemporary setting. In community with other readers, Nick has been able to share common interests and explore his own interests. Less formal in structure are the impromptu discussions, in person, or via text messaging and email, seen between Hazel and Augustus, Madeline and Olly, and Cath and Levi.

Some of the reading communities represented are virtual. Madeline, for example, has followers on her Tumblr books reviews. She enjoys sharing ideas about books with her online friends. However, it is Cath in *Fangirl* who has an expansive virtual community with her fanfiction. Her fan base is comprised of readers who have enjoyed the Simon Snow novels, so they all share their knowledge of and appreciation for the series. But they now enjoy Magicath's (Cath's online persona) re-imagining of the series,

commenting and questioning as they read. Cath feels a relationship with her fans. She feels she owes it to them to her fans to finish each installment quickly. When Cath refers to her fans as “friends,” Reagan says, “Internet friends don’t count” (p. 42). Still, they “count” to Cath. However, although Cath refers to her fans as friends, she resists engaging with them outside the digital world. At one point, Cath meets one of her online fans at the university library, but she does not reveal her identity as Magicath.

In both face-to-face and virtual communities, readers share what they think and feel about shared narratives. Sometimes they agree with each other about a story. One of Cath’s fans, for example, loves the fact that Simon and Baz are in love in the fanfiction even though they are not a couple in the original series. Sometimes the community members differ. In the Nerds and Words Book Club, Nick wants to change the next book selection to a novel he has found. Agree or disagree, the shared process is the important element. Listening and thinking together and independently about text is meaning-making that changes the hearts and minds of these fictional readers.

Reading Aloud

A particularly interesting phenomenon represented in the novels is Reading Aloud. This was somewhat surprising. When I think of reading aloud, I picture a mother or father reading to a toddler or elementary school teachers reading to their students. Although research exists about read alouds for high school students (Soken, 2021), I do not immediately think about reading aloud to teenagers. However, reading aloud appeared in three out of four of the novels of this study and the practice reflected the positive aspects of reading aloud.

In *Fangirl*, reading aloud leads to intimacy between Cath and Levi. What starts as a means to compensate for Levi's reading disability ends up being a means to break down barriers to emotional and physical intimacy. When Levi needs to read *The Outsiders* for a test, he struggles. Cath reads it to him in one exceptionally long sitting, and they end up kissing and falling asleep with the book sliding between their bodies, literally and figuratively touching them both. Reading aloud becomes a special routine for the couple. When she reads aloud, Cath can relax enough to allow their relationship to grow. Levi says, "You're like a tiger who loves Brahms--as long as you're reading, you let me touch you" (p. 377). This becomes a routine for the couple.

Reading aloud is also represented as care and concern, even comfort. In *Booked*, Mr. Mac visits Nick at the hospital after his surgery and reads aloud to him. Nick says that Mr. Mac "proceeds to read to [me] like we're in kindergarten" (p. 229). When Augustus becomes increasingly ill at the end of *The Fault in Our Stars*, Hazel reads aloud to him. It is intimate and soothing. Later, it becomes almost palliative care as his condition deteriorates.

Another interesting side of reading aloud is its performative nature. Cath realizes as she is reading to Levi that "she'd started doing Simon and Baz's voices" (p. 150). She is processing and reimagining the text with Levi as she performs her interpretation. In *Booked*, Mr. Mac's passionate reading aloud even draws an audience of hospital personnel. And, in *The Fault in Our Stars*, Hazel begins reading aloud "The Red Wheelbarrow" and continues by composing other stanzas from her own imagination. In this sense, reading aloud becomes sharing of text and herself. It becomes the

interpretation of existing text as well as “reading aloud” original compositions of her own.

Reading aloud involves a vast array of voices from the character reading aloud to the voices within the text being read to the inner voices of the listener. The interconnected web of voices involved in the reading aloud experiences creates layer upon layer of dialogical communication. Some of the voices represent the everyday language of characters; others, the stylized speech of the texts being read. All culminate in highly emotional, even poignant dialogical experiences.

Digital Reading

Because the action in these novels takes place within the last decade, digital communication is present in all four. For the purposes of this study, digital reading includes emails, instant messages (IM’s), and text messages. These are used by all four main characters and almost all the other characters as well, adolescents and adults.

Some of the digital communication benefits the characters. The Internet is used to quickly retrieve information. Nick, for example, finds out about the city of Dallas in preparation for the soccer tournament he plans to attend. Digital communication provides a means for differently-abled readers to experience text. After surgery, Isaac is completely blind, but he can check his emails and even play video games via text-to-speech applications. Levi records his professors’ lectures and listens to them again and again to prepare for tests, and he listens to audiobooks when he can find them.

Cath enjoys a wide and enthusiastic community of readers and writers through her fanfiction. And, for Madeline, her online friends and Tumblr book reviews provide a

community to which she would otherwise not have access. Eventually, it is the Internet that leads to her freedom. First, she applies for and receives a credit card—aptly named “Freedom Card,” the means of purchasing airline tickets and a hotel room for the Hawaii trip. Then, she receives a life-altering email from a doctor telling her that her life is a lie, as much a fiction as the novels she loves. After that email, Madeline frees herself from isolation.

However, the novels also represent a negative side to digital communication. Sometimes, the information is incorrect or misleading. When, for example, Hazel checks Caroline’s Facebook page, she gets the impression that Caroline lived her last days bravely fighting the cancer that was ending her life. The reality was that Caroline was a far more complicated person than that.

Digital communication also enables characters to avoid face-to-face interactions. The authors in the four novels represent virtual communication in juxtaposition to in-person communication. In *Fangirl*, Cath and Abel never call each other. They always text. This is how their relationship has lasted so long even though Wren tells Cath that Abel is not really a boyfriend. When Abel does call, it is to tell Cath that he is breaking up with her. He says, “What you and I have isn’t real” (p. 75). In *The Fault in Our Stars*, Hazel uses text messages instead of their usual phone calls to let Augustus know she wants their relationship to slow down. She is using digital distancing to engage in an uncomfortable conversation. Even the use of Google is avoidance of a kind. Nick, for example, Googles Mr. Mac’s birthday instead of just asking him. Cath tells her father that, because their mother abandoned them when they were young, they had to Google their menstrual periods. Their father points out that they could have come to him, but the

girls had chosen instead to avoid that in-person conversation. In addition, throughout *Fangirl*, Cath reads or pretends to read her fanfiction or emails to avoid eye contact or interaction with other people. When she meets one of her fans, Cath does not even reveal her identity as Magicath. Instead, she hides behind the digitized persona.

Writing in Response to Reading

Another interesting experience with reading that seemed to drive character behavior was their writing in response to their reading. I include in this category writing that seems to respond to or extend the the characters' reading. Writing is represented in the novels as something that flows naturally from the reading experience. Sometimes, the writing is to process what a character reads or experiences. Madeline, for example, claims she has learned everything about kissing through books and movies. She creates, as she often does, a graphic organizer that represents what she has learned about kissing and what she hopes to learn in the future with Olly. Nick, on the other hand, responds to reading with blackout poetry designed to entertain and to express his views about the boring assigned reading he must endure.

Cath has responded to reading the Simon Snow books by becoming a fanfiction author herself. As Magicath, she reinvents the world of Mages and the students' war with the Insidious Humdrum. In the worlds she creates, she can use what she has read and manipulate another author's setting and characters. Not only does fanfiction give voice to Cath's creativity, but she also gives a voice to the Simon Snow characters the original author never intended. In Gemma T. Leslie's Simon Snow books, Simon and Baz are bitter enemies vying for the Agatha's love. In Magicath's fanfiction, Baz "comes out" as

a vampire far earlier than in the original novels. And, as Magicath writes them, Simon and Baz are, in fact, in love with each other, not with Agatha.

Perhaps the most poignant example of writing to respond to reading comes from Hazel and Augustus in *The Fault in Our Stars*. Part of the couple's fascination with the book *An Imperial Affliction*, is its abrupt ending. The novel is the story of an adolescent girl's fight with cancer, and the action ends in mid-sentence, symbolizing the life that has ended abruptly in the middle of an ordinary day. After reading and rereading, Hazel and Augustus decide they must know what happens next. Despite numerous attempts to contact the author, Hazel has never received a reply. Augustus uses the Internet to track down the author's assistant, and he receives a reply almost immediately. The author refuses to answer their questions about the book in writing, but he says that he will answer their questions in person if they ever visit him in Amsterdam.

Hazel and Augustus fly to Amsterdam and meet with the author who clearly never had any intention of telling them about the story. They are devastated, but Augustus tells Hazel that he will write her a sequel. He then confides in Hazel that his cancer has returned and that the prognosis is grim. He asks Hazel and Isaac to write eulogies for him and deliver them while he is still alive to hear them. They do. What Hazel does not realize is that Augustus has been writing notes that he sends to Van Houten, asking the author to write Hazel a eulogy. After Augustus's funeral, Hazel finds the notes and realizes that Augustus has written the most beautiful eulogy she could have imagined. In the eulogy, Augustus takes the lessons they have learned from their favorite novels, mixes it with their experiences, and creates a heart-breakingly tender ending to his short life and a tribute to Hazel's.

Reading to Find Oneself Reading Within Text

The reading experience was also represented as an integral part of adolescents' learning more about themselves. Koss and Teale (2009) cite "finding oneself" as the most frequent theme of young adult literature. In the four novels, the main characters learn about themselves and grow as young adults through their reading experiences. The authors use texts within texts to further this theme.

In *Booked*, the reader finds out from the first page that Nick's world revolves around soccer. It is written in bold letters throughout the poetic narrative. Nick does not want to read the seemingly irrelevant texts his father and his language arts teacher want him to read. And, despite his genuine regard for Mr. Mack the librarian, Nick resists reading even a book about soccer. It is Nick's romantic interest in April that eventually entices Nick into the world of reading. Once he is a member of the book club, Nick realizes that he likes reading and that it can help him deal with the difficult issues he faces. He begins reading *All the Broken Pieces* (Berg, 2009), a novel about Matt, a Vietnamese immigrant whose teen years are spent enduring racism and bullying. Nick, who has also been bullied, identifies with Matt. After reading, Nick writes, "you're left wide awake/thinking of all your broken pieces" (p. 228). After that, Nick begins to connect with books. He writes about another book, "and even though the first 59 pages rain down hard on you/when you get to page 60/the monsoon comes/and the book is/unputdownable" (p. 237). Eventually, he actively searches for books that speak to him. He wants a book about a boy his age "[p]referably in this time period" (p. 251). His identity as reader has moved from passive denier to emerging devotee.

Reading Experiences Heteroglossia, and Dialogism

In Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, the many voices found in the novel make up a unified, though varied, symphony of ideas and beliefs. Some voices are unifying or centralizing (centripetal) to the unity of the novel's thematic structure; others, decentralizing (centrifugal). In the four novels of this study, as with many young adult novels (Koss & Teale, 2009), the main theme centers around the main characters "finding themselves." I assert that the characters' reading experiences led to and sometimes hindered self-discovery, thereby both furthering and problematizing the thematic movement of the novels.

Reading experiences often furthered the search for self for the characters of the four novels in this study. Nick, for example, matures not only as a reader but as a son, student, and friend/boyfriend. His early disdain for reading assigned to him by his father or Ms. Hardwick turns gradually to, if not enthusiasm, at least a cautious interest. Hazel and Augustus manage to turn their disappointment in their author/idol into an opportunity to assert their own voices instead of repeating the words of Van Houten. They decide to write their ending to Van Houten's story and, in fact, their own. The characters' reading experiences and relationships developed through the reading experiences help them mature and, listening/reading the voices around them, make their own choices and find their own voices.

However, reading experiences sometimes worked to keep characters in a readers' inertia where they avoided, even resisted, personal growth. Madeline, heart-broken after her trip to Hawaii, secludes herself in her room with her books. In fact, she reverts mainly to her two favorite books that she has read many times. She resists new ideas that could

lead to more heartbreak. Cath also uses reading experiences to resist change. Although she has made some progress with developing relationships with real people at the university, she continually seeks refuge in the comfort of the familiar, her online fanfiction writing and her own readers. As mentioned in Chapter IV, Cath frequently uses reading and the writing that stems from her reading as a means of avoiding relationships with the people in the real world.

The fact that the voices in the novels both furthered and hindered the main theme of maturing/finding oneself is, in terms of Bakhtin's work, a useful, though paradoxical, process for the ultimate thematic unity of the novels. For Bakhtin, the centrifugal forces that move away from the main theme are as integral to the power/force of the theme as the centripetal. All voices, including texts, dialogue, narration, work toward creating the polyphony of voices that make up the rich texture of the novel.

Conclusion

When I reviewed the data, I was, at first, surprised by the number of common reading experiences I noticed, given the differences in the characters (age, race, ethnicity, gender). Whether they lived in a large city, confined at home (Madeline) or a farm in the Midwest (Levi), the same reading experiences seemed to move them. However, perhaps it should not have surprised me. It may be further affirmation regarding the power of reading experiences in people's lives.

In this chapter, I analyzed fictional readers in four young adult novels. The five motifs of reading experiences explored in the novels can provide insight into how reading

is represented to a young adult literature audience. In this study, I have examined the following:

1. how characters approach or fail to approach reading experiences,
2. what they read and in what formats,
3. how they process what they read,
4. and how they share their experiences.

More important than recognizing the varied experiences characters have with reading is noting the interaction between and among reading experiences. Characters bring previous experiences with text and the world each time they select a book or poem, and they leave the reading experience with new perceptions and insights that they bring to the next text or the next relationship or the next new understanding of themselves. The layered readings I have completed are echoed by the layered reading and discernment I see in the four novels of this study.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this dissertation was to conduct a qualitative content analysis of representations of readers and reading experiences in four young adult novels: *Booked* (Alexander, 2016), *Everything, Everything* (Yoon, 2015), *Fangirl* (Rowell, 2013), and *The Fault in Our Stars* (Green, 2012). During the analysis, I have traveled between each fictional world and back to my own reality several times. My literary passport has been stamped with warm smiles, laughter, and tears. And I have often left my own heteroglossic footprint wherever I traveled.

In Chapter IV, I discussed my analysis of text based on Research Question #1: How are readers represented in young adult literature? In Chapter V, I discussed my analysis of text based on Research Questions #2: How are reading experiences represented in young adult literature? In this chapter, I have presented my conclusions about the findings in this study and what significance they may have for research and pedagogy.

Wolf (2007) argues that the human brain was not designed for reading. The long evolution of reading, then, is testament to the fact that humans do seem to be hardwired for story. Based on the analysis of these four novels, the need to read runs strong in many of the characters, particularly the four main characters. Despite the differences of age, race, and gender among the four protagonists, their love of reading

and their reading experiences share many common traits. First, they identify as readers. Madeline (*Everything, Everything*) begins the novel's narration with "I've read many more books than you. It doesn't matter how many you've read. I've read more. Believe me" (Yoon, 2015, p. 1). They think and talk about their reading experiences often. Even Nick, who is resistant to accepting himself as a reader, gives his reading a great deal of thought. In fact, the frequency of his acts of resistance seem to indicate that he does, in fact, want to be a reader. He "doth protest too much."

Second, the reading experiences of the four main characters are remarkably similar despite the differences in their backgrounds. They often think and talk about reading; they want to share their reading and their thoughts about reading with others; and they like to have agency in diverse reading choices. This indicates a personal and social relationship with reading that goes beyond the page into the hearts of readers.

Significance for Research

As I concluded my research, I looked back to the previous research about representations of readers. As I noted in Chapter II, little research about representations of readers exists. Within the existing research, most studies involved 19th-century and early 20th-century literature. I suggest that increased access to books and other reading materials of the era troubled some of the social and cultural norms of the times. It was during this era that lending libraries, novels serializations in popular magazines, and "penny dreadfuls" that became popular for the middle class. For example, much of the research addresses the elitism of reading as a white, middle- or upper-class activity (Chagas da Costa, 2012; Shand, 2019; Yahov, 2019). The research also examined the

patriarchal gate-keeping for women readers, and its sometimes tragic consequences (Ashworth, 2000; Binhammer, 2003; Friedman, 1992; Shand, 2019).

I posit that, in my research, I examine another turning point in access to reading materials. The growth of community, school, and classroom libraries represents but one area of greater access. The internet has opened an unprecedented access to the purchase and sharing of materials. Interestingly, however, the almost limitless access to information, books, social media, blogs, and other reading materials problematizes social and cultural norms as it did two centuries ago. I found, in the analysis of the four young adult novels of this study, that fictional readers both succumbed to and countered these racial, gender, and class norms. Although Bakhtin's (1981) work has been used a great deal in literary criticism and even in the analysis of young adult literature (Day, 2010, Stroph, 2011), usually that emphasis has been on polyphonic voices in novels, more specifically in multiple narrators. These analyses are interesting, but I believe there is work to be done in using Bakhtin's (1981) concept of heteroglossia more extensively to examine text of all kinds and in many contexts. Holquist (2002) asserts that Bakhtin believed his sense of "literaryness" or, in Bakhtin's words, "novelness" extended to utterances of any kind in art, in public discourse, or in popular culture (p. 138). Research into utterances that did not exist even a few decades ago (Snapchat, Instagram, texting, etc.) could, using the concept of heteroglossia, add to Bakhtin's analyses of speech types in novels (letters, diaries, periodical publications, etc.).

It could also prove interesting to extend the research in this dissertation to other kinds of reading mentioned in young adult literature. This could take the form of additional content analyses, or it could be embodied in a qualitative study of real-world

readers of fictional readers in our secondary classrooms. The analyses could involve, for example, a community of gamers and the related magazines, e-zines, and game novelizations in which they engage. Another study could examine Instagram “stories” and how visual text interfaces with the meaning of verbal text. Still another study could include other subgroups of young adult fiction (historical fiction, dystopian fiction). The point would be to go beyond thinking in polyphonic (multi-voiced) terms and into heteroglossic (socially and culturally intertwined multi-voiced utterances) in reading the word and the world.

The potential of studying language embedded in social and cultural contexts could lead to exploration into which readers were not present in these four novels. There is some diversity among the four novels. In *Everything, Everything* (Yoon, 2015), Madeline is biracial, but her racial background does not play a significant role in the thematic make-up of the novel. Nick, in *Booked* (Alexander, 2016) is African American, but racial issues are barely touched upon. There is one section where a character makes racial slurs toward Nick’s biracial friend, but that incident is relevant to Nick’s character arc primarily because of Nick’s shame over not standing up to the bullies who were overpowering his friend. He did not seem to reflect upon the injustice and inhumanity of the slur itself.

Also, in *Booked* (Alexander, 2016), Nick is given *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as assigned reading. As a reader, I had anticipated the introduction of this text would be significant to a greater theme about racism. Instead, the reading mentor, Mr. Mac, called the book a masterpiece. This was, in my opinion, an opportunity missed in the novel and a possible area of exploration in further study. According to Koss and Teale

(2009), the inclusion of diversity in young adult literature, whether it is regarding race, gender, sexual orientation, class, or ethnicity, is often not presented as a culturally relevant aspect of the works themselves. With the spate of research about representations of racial, ethnic, gender, and social issues, I found the authors' silences in the four novels of this study quite surprising.

In Chapter II, I reviewed the literature about representations of readers and reading in fiction. I observed that, despite a wealth of research about representations of race, culture, gender, sexual behavior, mental health in young adult literature, I could find very little about representations of readers and reading. The silence is puzzling. Representation matters in the books we read. That is why so much research in the area of representation exists. The dearth of such research troubles me, and I see need for further study in this direction.

Implications for Pedagogy

As I am an educator, I hope that this study can, in some way, benefit the art and science of teaching and learning. What follows are some implications I believe my research can contribute to pedagogical practices for reading instruction, particularly reading instruction for young adult readers.

Fictional Readers as Models for Readers and Nonreaders in the Classroom

In Chapter II, I included research asserting that authors use reading characters to teach us how they believe we should read (Binhammer, 2003; Bollinger, 2002; Friedman, 1992; Hadley, 2005; Jo, 2019). Based upon this research and the study in this dissertation, I suggest that educators can facilitate the authors' examples of fictional

readers by using fiction, particularly young adult fiction, with readers represented reading in our classrooms as mentor texts for teaching reading practices.

Much has been written about the use of mentor texts in writing instruction (Atwell, 1998; Kittle, 2008). I have taught high school students in this manner, using sentences or passages from mentor texts. Together, we would look at a passage in a text, evaluate its structure, and try to emulate the author's technique in our own writing. Then students tried it independently or in groups. Our journey through this process led to students' seeing themselves as writers.

In the same sense, novels with reading characters can be used as catalysts for reflecting on reading practices. Teachers and students could read about and discuss fictional readers to help them make decisions about who readers are, how readers engage with literature, and why readers enjoy engaging in text. Using fiction as mentor texts for reading can help students see themselves as readers. Analyzing fictional readers can help students decide what kinds of readers they are or hope to be. The mentor texts can help provide modeling for students to engage in reading and think about different kinds of readers, different kinds of text, and different reasons why reading is an activity worth participating in.

Who Reads—and Who Does Not

A study of novels like those in this study could open discussion of different kinds of readers present and not present. Teachers and students could question why most fictional readers and fictional characters, for that matter, are European American. It could and should also lead to a classroom and school culture of ensuring a large variety and

diversity of texts available to all students. To ensure that schools are not unconsciously advancing white, middle-class, heteronormative notions about who readers should be, teachers, students, and school librarians could conduct a thorough “diversity inventory” of classroom and school libraries. The results could be startling. However, the effort could begin the process of interrogating messaging sent to students about whose stories are valued and whose are not.

Another interesting discussion could follow the study of *Booked* (Alexander, 2016) regarding gendered attitudes about reading. As adolescents begin to appropriate gender identities, males often see reading as a feminine activity and begin to read less (McGeown et al., 2015). Nick is embarrassed to end up drinking tea and discussing books with a group of girls. He is extremely relieved that none of his male friends are there to witness the spectacle. Using this excerpt as a springboard for discussion and/or private reflection, the question could be asked, “Is reading for girls?” The results could reveal concerns and frustrations that need to be addressed. Characters like Nick and Mr. Mac (*Booked*) can model not only their emotional response to reading but also writing in response to their reading and identifying with fictional characters.

The use of such texts can lead students to celebrate readers in fiction. Fictional readers can show students that readers do not all look and act the same and that there is no significant hierarchy. Levi (*Fangirl*), for example, while not a proficient reader in what would probably be seen as a traditional sense, enjoys his way of reading and can model coping skills and his love for stories. He makes use of assistive technology by listening to audiobooks and taping his professors’ lectures. He also reaches out to other students for help. Through these mentor texts, students could learn to identify with Levi

and other fictional readers and think about the type of readers they are as well as the type of readers they hope to become.

What Do Readers Read?

Part of motivating students to read is providing access to texts that appeal to the interests of adolescents (Gambrell, 2015; Kittle, 2013). Young adult literature has met the need to pique the interests of teenagers. The novels in this study include several texts in the young adult category. Nick (*Booked*) reads young adult literature in his book club. Cath and Wren (*Fangirl*) read and are almost obsessed with Simon Snow, the main character of a fictional series, which could be regarded as children's if not young adult literature. The same is true for Hazel and Augustus (*The Fault in Our Stars*) and their interest in the novel about a young girl. Madeline's (*Everything, Everything*) interests go beyond young adult literature. Her two favorite books include *The Little Prince*, a classic of children's literature, and *Flowers for Algernon*, an adult classic. In addition, the characters in the four novels of this study read online text, cell phone texts, IM's (instant messages), emails, letters, and even medical reports. Fictional characters, then, can model reading not only young adult literature, but many kinds of texts.

Using fictional reading characters as reading models, teachers could also point out new kinds of reading and writing, for example, fanfiction, Instagram stories, or gaming novelizations. Sampling and working with different kinds of texts can introduce new reading experiences that could provide a catalyst for more reading engagement. Students, could, for example, engage with text as Nick does with blackout poetry from a page of current reading. Teachers could use examples of fanfiction in *Fangirl* or elsewhere as a springboard for students to experiment with that response to reading. In this way,

students can reflect about different reading identities and re/position themselves as readers through different kinds of reading experiences.

Why Do Readers Engage in Reading?

Young adult mentor texts can also model why readers read. Research reveals a great deal about social interaction and its impact on adolescents' reading experiences. Students need to engage in discussion and reflection with other people whether it is the teacher, a peer, or groups (Allington, 2002; Gallagher & Kittle, 2018; Ivey & Johnston, 2013). Allington (2002), however, cautions that this time must be "more conversational than interrogational" (p. 10). The social relationships involved with a reader's world establish reading as a "shared social habit" (Merga, 2017). According to Schwanenflugel and Knapp (2016), "Because we often experience emotions in response to the circumstances of fictional characters, it has been hypothesized that reading fiction allows us to mentally simulate, manipulate, and perhaps improve our social understanding of the emotional states of others in a way that translates into our own lives" (p. 213). Reading experiences, then, lead to greater social and psychological well-being. Through reading, one can establish identity in terms of and in concert with others in society. These social interactions matter.

In the four novels of this study, I noticed reading as a shared emotional and sometimes even physical experience. Nick (*Booked*) flourished as a reader only when he engaged with his mentor Mr. Mac and, eventually, with the girls in his book club. For Madeline and Olly (*Everything, Everything*) shared reading and conversations gave them the joint resolve to escape from the literal and figurative confines of their ordinary lives

to the idyllic shores of Hawaii. The emotional connection that began with reading each other's emails, IM's, and favorite books develops into an emotional and, eventually, physical intimacy. In much the same manner, Cath and Levi (Fangirl) share a love for the stories they read, especially the fanfiction Cath writes. I found the layers of their engagement interesting. Both enjoyed the Simon Snow series. Cath responded to her reading of the texts with her fanfiction writing. Levi responded to Cath's reading aloud her fanfiction. Both engaged in discussions of the texts, their responses, the events of their lives, and other texts they had read. The layers of meaning-making and shared intimacy developed again and again in a heteroglossic oeuvre.

Perhaps more importantly, the fictional readers in this study found, in their reading and shared engagement, answers to questions about themselves and their worlds. At first, Nick (*Booked*) does not see the relevance of anything he reads, even turning down a book about soccer, his greatest love. Eventually, he begins to see the connections between novels and his personal situations like the bullying he witnesses at school, but he also begins to see the larger issues surrounding his small community when he begins to contemplate racism in fiction and in the world. Madeline (*Everything, Everything*) grapples with her mother's betrayal and whether she can find some semblance of forgiveness. Hazel and Olly's (*The Fault in Our Stars*) reading engagement result in a sense of mission to have their favorite author answer their questions about life and death, only to find that he has no answers for them. Eventually, they write their own answers in response to their shared reading experience. They write their own story, complete with a poignant and heart-wrenching denouement.

Fiction as Mentor Text for the Reading Mentor

Fictional reading mentors can model practices that classroom teachers could emulate. Through the analysis of readers and reading experiences in this study, I saw assigned reading in a decidedly negative light. Therefore, the most important message for the reading mentor is to be encouraging and offer choice. The research supports the importance of student choice rather than teacher-assigned texts. Providing choice for adolescent readers leads to more reading and deeper reading (Deci & Ryan, 1987; Gambrell, 2011). According to Schwanenflugel and Knapp (2016), students are more motivated to read when they perceive they have *locus of control* or the ability to choose what they read. Self-selected texts lead to greater reading motivation (Gambrell, 2011).

This research study reflects the finding of this previous research about the importance of choice (Allington, 2002; Gambrell, 1996; Gambrell, 2015; Kittle, 2013). Reflected in all four novels were enthusiasm and engagement with novels the readers selected and disinterest or even active disdain for assigned reading. The power of student choice reflected in my study, affirms the practices of the language arts classrooms in my own school. Our teachers have developed extensive classroom libraries of, largely, young adult literature selections to ensure fingertip access to a variety of genres and topics. Although we use some assigned reading, those texts are generally used as mentor texts. The emphasis is on students' independent reading. We have seen a significant increase in reading engagement as a result.

Another important characteristic of the effective mentor is the personal relationship they form with students. Mr. Mac is an excellent example. First, he exudes enthusiasm for nonfiction, poetry, and novels. He talks animatedly and indefatigably

about them and wears shirts that advertise his passion for reading. Second, he makes opportunities for reading aloud to students and plays up the emotional appeal with his amazing performances. In addition, Mr. Mac reads frequently and widely, so he has an extensive repertoire of texts to recommend. Finally, he builds relationships with students. In this way, he becomes someone they trust. He knows his students well enough to recommend that “just right” read. This is important because teachers can play an important role in facilitating reading in their classrooms (Schwanenflugel & Knapp, 2016).

The Paradox of Digital versus Face-to-Face Communication

Perhaps the most intriguing insights I have experienced during this study have been the illuminating yet troubling possibilities of digital communication. In *Proust and the Squid: The Story of Science of the Reading Brain*, Wolf (2000) worries about the influence of digital communication and its impact on how students learn to read and appreciate text. Turkle (2011) has also expressed concern about digital communication (email, texting, social media platforms, online gaming communities, etc.). Her research indicates that adolescents and young adults who communicate primarily through digital applications show significantly less empathy than those who engage mostly in face-to-face communication. However, her studies also show that a reduction of empathy is reversible. When students disengage from electronics, even for a short time (a week), their empathy scores increase.

While digital technology does have the potential to interfere with reading and other communication, the discourse of these four novels suggests that digital texts can also provide benefits. Secondary language arts classrooms will face challenges as

students rely more on technology, but that reliance can be leveraged into positive experiences like engaging in online reading or even fanfiction opportunities. Technology can also help students who have trouble reading. New applications provide differently-abled readers with speech-to-text capabilities and English language learners with text and picture dictionaries. And these tools can be used quickly and easily without frustrating the reader. Balancing the benefits and dangers of an increasingly complex digital environment will be difficult, but it is a challenge that educators must face.

Because of the pandemic and the difficulties experienced in schools across our nation and our world, the balancing of in-person and virtual experiences becomes even more exigent. The pandemic has brought to the forefront the disparity of equity and access that exists in our communities. While some have the economic, digital, and familial supports in place to guide successful distance learning, many do not. The means of addressing these gaps has begun, but the success or lack thereof remain to be seen.

Message to Teachers

As part of this section about implications to pedagogy, I leave the following message to teachers in the secondary language arts classroom.

1. Sometimes students will read for others. That is ok. Their motives do not have to be pure. Augustus read *An Imperial Affliction* for Hazel. Nick read to impress April. If students are reading, that is a good thing. Who knows where it could lead?
2. Defer assumptions about the non-reader. In *Fangirl* (Rowell, 2013), Cath assumes Levi is too lazy to finish his assigned reading. In fact, he simply cannot

comprehend what he reads. In *Booked* (Alexander, 2016), Nick shows no interest in reading, but he eventually reads because there were people he cared about who continued to invite him into the practice.

3. Keep an open mind about, but a watchful eye on, technology. It can isolate as it does for Cath in *Fangirl* (Rowell, 2013). Cath would rather live in fictional/virtual worlds than the real one. However, it can also connect people as it does in *Everything, Everything* (Yoon, 2015). Madeline meets Olly in real life after their digital introduction, and it is with the help of Internet communication that she achieves the freedom she desires.

Conclusion

As I concluded my research, I experienced the same disappointment I often feel when I finish a novel. I am happy to reach the end, but I am loath to let go. Endings are hard. Author Rainbow Rowell writes about endings on her web site. She is often asked why she did not give her characters Eleanor and Park a happy ending. This is her answer:

I think I did give them a happy ending. I mean, I know it's not really an ending; there aren't wedding bells and sunsets. This isn't the end for these two people. It's just where we leave them. But they're 17 years old. And I don't believe that 17-year-olds get happy endings. They get beginnings. (n.p.)

I like to think this research also represents a beginning as well as an ending as the evolution of reading continues to unfold and those of us in the field continue to reflect on and imagine the challenges, frustrations, breakthroughs, and possibilities of readers and their reading experiences. Although I am far from seventeen years of age, I can live with

that sentiment and consider that the conclusion of this dissertation is both ending and beginning.

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APPENDIX A

Fangirl: A Retelling

Rainbow Rowell's (2013) novel *Fangirl* begins with the main character Cather Avery moving into her new dorm room, facing, for the first time, a separation from her father as well as her twin sister Wren. The three are particularly close considering Cather and Wren's mother left them when they were six years old on September 11, "the September 11th" as Cath refers to it (p. 143) and has not been in contact since. Wren, the more outgoing and confident twin, decides (?) decided? has decided that she and Cath need to take to forge new relationships on their own during their college years; she says "The whole point of college is meeting new people" (p. 6). Cath disagrees strenuously, reminding Wren, "The whole point of having a twin sister . . . is not having to worry about this sort of thing" (p. 6).

Since 2001, the same year their mother left, the twins' relationship has centered largely on the fantasy fiction character Simon Snow created by Gemma T. Leslie. This Harry Potteresque story line has consumed the girls. Their room represents a shrine to Simon's world, and they eventually wandered into Simon Snow fanfiction on the Internet. Once in the "fandom," the girls eventually began writing their own fanfiction under the names Magicath and Wrenegade. For some time, Cath has continued writing the fanfiction as Wren has gradually stopped contributing.

Ultimately, Cath has no choice but to move into her tiny room with two twin beds and two compact desks that she will share with someone named Reagan. When she opens the door, “there’s a boy in her room” (p. 4). As she wonders if this is Reagan, the boy introduces himself as Levi. Reagan turns out to be a decidedly taciturn upperclassman forced to live in the dorms as a condition of her scholarship and definitely does not want a roommate, especially a freshman. Fortunately, Reagan is a busy student with a full class load and two jobs, so she doesn’t have much time to spend in their room. So Cath and Reagan get along relatively well, both happy to coexist silently and go about their individual lives.

Cath rarely contacts the boyfriend she left behind in Omaha, and then only by text message. Wren tries to tell Cath that Abel is not a real boyfriend, but Cath insists their relationship is comfortable. One day, Abel calls and they actually talk, only to find that Abel is calling to tell her he’s met someone else. Finally, Wren, who until now has spent very little time with Cath and most of her time with her roommate Courtney, drinking and hanging out with guys. She does, however, answer Cath’s call about the breakup and comes to her room for the first real conversation they have had in long while.

Once Abel breaks up with her Cath begins to notice the young men around her. An English major, she soon becomes writing partners with Nick, an older student in her Fiction Writing class. They soon develop an easy writing rhythm and become favorites of their professor, a novelist in her own right. She is also attracted to Reagan’s boyfriend Levi and tries to avoid him, but his indefatigable good nature is hard to resist. He engages her in conversation, invites her to parties, and brings her specialty coffees, finally breaking down her barriers. Still, Cath does not really engage with either Nick or Levi in

a romantic relationship. She is comfortable only with the relationships in the fictional world of Simon Snow.

Early in the semester, Cath goes home to check on their father. Wren has made excuses to stay on campus. When Cath arrives, she notices their dad is a bit “twitchy,” a sign that he is about to experience a manic phase. For years, he has fought these episodes, the first one the girls remember happening shortly after their mother left. Cath worries about him and about her own mental health. She is afraid she also will develop this condition and already sees signs of her overwhelming anxiety keeping her from the world around her as she escapes to fictional worlds, Gemma T. Leslie’s and her own. While she is home, her father tells her that her mother has called and wants to be a part of the girls’ lives again. Cath vehemently refuses even to discuss it, but she finds out that Wren already knows and is considering contacting their mother. Cath leaves home worried about her dad but thinking he seems relatively all right.

Soon after Cath’s return to campus, Professor Piper, whom she respects--almost idolizes--asks her to stay after class. For the last assignment, students were supposed to have written a short story from the point of view of an unreliable narrator. Cath had written a story from a Simon Snow character’s point of view. Professor Piper hands back Cath’s paper with an F on the top for plagiarism. Cath tries to explain the world of fanfiction and that her stories are not stealing, just borrowing. Professor Piper tells Cath she needs to write something of her own, something real. Cath leaves devastated. She tries to call Wren but gets no response. She decides instead to turn to what she and Wren always called “Emergency Kanye Dance Party” where they danced on their beds and screamed out rap lyrics to a Kanye emergency playlist. Since she has no alternative, Cath

decides to go ahead on her own. She is lost in the music when Levi knocks on the door. She attempts an embarrassed explanation, and Levi laughs, jumps on Reagan's bed, and joins her in the emergency dance party. When Reagan comes in, shocked at the spectacle, and the dance party is over. At this point, Cath notices that she has received a 911 text from Wren, saying that she is at a local bar. Levi agrees to drive Cath to the bar.

Once they arrive at the bar, they realize that Wren meant to text her roommate because Courtney's boyfriend was at the bar. There was no emergency. Feeling worse than ever, Cath gets back in Levi's truck and they stop at a local diner where Cath explains why she needed an emergency dance party. She tells Levi about Professor Piper's accusing her of plagiarism and about her fanfiction, trying to make him understand why it is so important to her. "The whole point of fanfiction," she said, "is that you get to play inside somebody else's universe. Rewrite the rules. Or bend them. The story doesn't have to end when Gemma Leslie gets tired of it" (p. 123). Levi is intrigued. The next time he comes to their dorm room, he asks Cath to read aloud some of her fanfiction, and she does.

One day, Levi comes to see Reagan at the dorm room. When Cath tells him Reagan is out, Levi, in a panic, tells Cath that he needs Reagan to help him study for a test in his literature class. He eventually has to reveal to Cath that his reading disability keeps him from reading *The Outsiders* on his own, and that he relies on Reagan to help him study. Cath agrees to read the novel to him. While Cath reads, the two of them become sleepier and sleepier and let their guards down to the point they fall asleep kissing each other on Cath's twin bed.

In the morning, Reagan walks in on the two of them asleep, and Levi rushes out, saying he's late for his shift at Starbucks. As Cath sobs her apologies, Reagan tells her that it's all right; Levi hasn't been her boyfriend since freshman year. Then, Reagan decides to help Cath be a girlfriend, uncharted territory for Cath. They get dressed up a few days later for a party at Levi's house, but, when they get there, they walk into the kitchen to find Levi, beer in hand, kissing some unknown blonde. Cath makes Reagan promise not to discuss what they saw with Levi. Awkward meetings are kept to a minimum as Cath makes excuses to be at the library when she thinks Levi might be in their room.

Soon after, Cath finds out Nick, her writing partner, plans to turn in a short story they worked on together as his own. He tells her, after all, "You're always saying that you feel more like an editor than a cowriter" (p. 209). Thinking about the situation "made her feel ashamed. She'd been taken. Gifted. Had he planned to steal the story all along?" (p. 212).

Right before finals week and still hurt and confused by Levi's and Nick's betrayals, Cath receives a phone call from one of her father's work colleagues who tells her he had to take her dad to a hospital for his recurring mania issues. Cath immediately calls Wren who tells her that it has happened before and that they need to finish their finals and then go to their dad. She reminds Cath that he will be sedated for a few days anyway and won't know they are even there. Cath can't believe Wren's attitude and tells her she is not leaving their father in a hospital alone. Wren tells her that, if Cath really just has to go, their mom would probably offer to drive her. Cath flatly refuses. After she

tries unsuccessfully to reach Reagan, Cath decides she has no choice but to ask Levi to drive her.

Levi drops everything to drive Cath to her father and instinctively knows not to try to talk to her on the drive. Once they reach the hospital, Levi follows Cath inside to make sure she's all right. It turns out Wren was absolutely correct about their dad. He was being sedated and they weren't even allowed to see him yet. Levi finds them some coffee and sandwiches and then asks her if she's too worried about her dad to tell him why she's mad at him. She finally tells him that she went to his party and saw him in the kitchen kissing the blonde. He tells her how sorry he is, saying, "It was just a kiss" (p. 223). She asks him which kiss was "just a kiss," and he says, "*Both* of them" (p. 223). She answers, "I don't just kiss people. Kisses aren't . . . *just* with me" (p. 223). Cath thanks him for driving her to Omaha and asks him to please leave.

By the time Wren finishes her finals and returns to Omaha, their father is released from the hospital and their lives return to a uneasy normal for the holiday. When Cath tells them she does not want to return to college, her father insists that she live her own life and not stay home to take care of him. Cath reluctantly agrees to stay for just one more semester. Her professors from the fall semester have agreed to let her make up her work, so she still has Professor Piper's short story to complete, but she puts that out of her mind.

Levi shows up soon after her return to campus to tell her how sorry he was for what happened. He didn't think their kiss was "just a kiss," and he didn't know why he had said that. He just wanted to continue their relationship and see where it could lead.

Cath agreed, and they started seeing each other every chance they got. Their relationship becomes a happy part of the regular college routine until Cath receives an unexpected call from her mother.

The call was actually from Wren's phone, but it was her mother's voice that Cath heard. Wren had been taken to the hospital for alcohol poisoning, and the hospital staff had called her mother because they found that number in Wren's cell phone. Cath's father was out of town, but he was on his way. Levi had driven home for the weekend, so she texted him the situation. When Cath arrived at the hospital, she saw a stranger in the waiting room, Laura, a blonde woman she finally realized was her mother. After an awkward exchange, Laura left, telling Cath that her dad would be there any minute. Thankfully, he arrived soon after, and they waited for the doctors to release Wren to go home. Once they were home, Cath and Wren's father put his foot down about Wren's drinking and told her she would not return to school. He explained that he had been too lax and that this was a wake-up call for all of them. Eventually, Cath and Wren persuaded him to allow Wren to return with strict guidelines about her behavior (no more drinking, AA meetings).

Once they returned to school, Cath was happier than ever. Wren was back in her life. Levi was in her life, and their relationship was growing more intimate, emotionally and physically, every day. An important part of their relationship was Cath reading to him, sometimes Simon Snow and sometimes fanfic. When the last Simon Snow book is released, they meet at the local bookstore at midnight for the unveiling: Cath, Levi, Wren, Wren's boyfriend, and even Reagan. Cath begins immediately to read aloud to Levi every

time they got the chance. Their childhood reading has literally and figuratively come to an end.

Cath finally finishes the original short story. She begins with something real, the day her mom left, and she turns that into a story that is fictional, but real. The novel ends, then, with the beginning of Cath's learning to navigate both worlds, real and imagined, and to live meaningfully in both.

APPENDIX B

Everything, Everything: A Retelling

Yoon's (2015) *Everything, Everything* introduces readers to Madeline Whittier, a young woman trapped in her own home by Severe Combined Immunodeficiency, otherwise known as the "bubble baby disease." As Madeline observes, "Basically, I'm allergic to the world" (p. 3). Madeline lives a scrupulously sanitized existence with her mother, a doctor. Madeline's father and brother were killed in a car accident when Madeline was an infant. Besides Madeline's mother, the only other person allowed into the home is Carla, Madeline's nurse.

The only escape from her isolation is her reading life. Her favorites: *The Little Prince* (1943) and *Flowers for Algernon* (1966). For Madeline, books help her understand "the meaning of life . . . maybe not just a single book, but if you read enough you'll get there" (p. 89), and she rereads these two books in particular because the "meaning changes every time" (p. 200). She embeds her narrative with her "Life is Short: Spoiler Reviews by Madeline" that she publishes on Tumblr.

FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON BY DANIEL KEYES

Spoiler alert: Algernon is a mouse. The mouse dies.

Books, for Madeline, are a way of navigating her tightly-controlled life as well as the almost certainty of her untimely death.

When a moving van brings a new family next door, Carla and Madeline's mother are worried. They remember ten years ago when a family moved into the same house, and Madeline, then an eight-year-old, yearned to go outside and play with the family's children. Now, the new family has teenagers, and Madeline has become uncharacteristically interested in looking out the window. She begins what she calls her "surveillance" of the family and even keeps a log of their movements in her notebook.

One night, soon after they move in, brother and sister, Kara and Oliver (Olly), bring a Bundt cake to Madeline and her mother. While Madeline is confined to the dining room, her mother meets the teens in the sealed air-locked room by the front door, thanks them, and says, "I'm sorry, but I can't accept this" (p. 29). Although Olly and Kara are shocked, Olly takes the opportunity to ask their ungracious neighbor if her daughter is home. Madeline is thrilled to have the possibility of connection with the outside world, but she understands that her mother cannot allow the visitors to come inside.

That night, during surveillance, Madeline sees a family argument that becomes physically aggressive. Olly and Kara are arguing with their father, who throws the Bundt cake at Olly in anger. Madeline tries to look in on Olly later, but he draws his blinds so she cannot see him. However, a few days later, she hears a "ping" coming from outside while she is in her room reading. Then she hears another, and another. When she looks out, Madeline observes

Olly's window is wide open, the blinds are up, and the lights are off in his room. The indestructible Bundt is sitting on his windowsill wearing googly eyes that are staring right at me. The cake trembles and then tilts forward, as if contemplating the distance to the ground. It retreats and trembles some more. I'm trying to see Olly in his darkened room when the Bundt leaps from the sill and plunges to the

ground. I gasp. Did the cake just commit suicide? I crane my neck to see what's become of it, but it's too dark out. (p. 35)

Thus begins a nightly installment of the plight of the Bundt cake. After another supposed suicide attempt, the Bundt is then in a hospital bed and finally receiving last rites from Olly dressed as a priest. The wordless saga brings the two teenagers together, and Olly writes his email address on his window, so they can communicate more easily.

Their emailing and IM-ing become a nightly routine, and they get to know each other with Olly's "fast five favorites" game. "Book word color vice person" (p. 48). Olly discovers Madeline's love of books; Madeline, Olly's love of math and affinity for stealing silverware. The communication seems to falter only when the subjects of Madeline's homebound status or Olly's issues with this father are raised. Other than that, the exchanges become more personal and flirtatious as the evenings progress.

Ultimately, Madeline begs Carla until she is allowed to sneak Olly into the house while Madeline's mother is at work. After a series of disinfecting precautions, the teenagers finally meet in person and continue to get to know each other. Carla allows them a few minutes at a time alone, but she strongly prohibits any touching. The two are happy just to be in the same room--for a while. Eventually, they begin to touch each others hands, then arms. Eventually, they share their first kiss. Carla monitor's Madeline's health status, and there appear to be no danger signs of illness because of the contact. Madeline's mother does not seem to suspect anything until one night when Madeline inadvertently reveals the situation.

In another of a series of domestic abuse incidents at Olly's house, Olly's father has begun to assault his wife, and Olly steps in. Madeline and her mother witness the

scene from their living room window. When Olly's father punches him in the stomach, Madeline impulsively runs out to help. Madeline's mother runs after and brings her back into the house where she makes Madeline take a shower and washes her clothes.

Later, Madeline's mother asks her why she would take such a risk for a total stranger. Then, awareness dawns, and Madeline's mother is outraged to figure out that Madeline has been seeing Olly. Carla is fired for her part in the arrangement, and she and Madeline share a tearful goodbye, Madeline giving Carla her copy of *Flowers for Algernon* (1966). In addition, Madeline is grounded from the Internet. Once again, she is alone. Realizing that Madeline is depressed, her mother gives her a picture of their family Madeline has never seen. The photo was taken during a vacation in Hawaii, which, Madeline learns, was her father's favorite place. Madeline wishes she could remember that time before the loss of her father and brother and before the discovery of her illness.

Gradually, her Internet privileges are returned during the days--when Madeline's mother knows Olly is at school--and Maddy manages at least to email Olly. She realizes that her relationship with Olly has changed her. She no longer wants to be locked out of the world. She plans an escape. First, since she is eighteen, she applies for a credit card. Then she buys two tickets to Hawaii and reserves a hotel room. She begs Olly to accompany her. Initially, he tells her he will not be part of it, but he finally decides to go with her.

Once they land in Hawaii, they have the adventure of their lives. They shop for souvenirs, eat at interesting restaurants, and even go cliff diving although Maddy does not know how to swim. When they return to the hotel room, they realize that Maddy's

mother has found out where they are by hacking into Maddy's email account and that she is flying to pick up her daughter the next day. Knowing they have only one night left together, the two make love and go to sleep in each other's arms.

When they wake up, Maddy is suffering from a high fever and can't catch her breath. Olly calls an ambulance, and Maddy is taken to a local hospital. Once her mother arrives, she takes Maddy back home and sets up a hospital bed in her room for the duration of her recovery. Olly tries to email and IM Maddy, but she refuses to answer and deletes his emails without reading them. She has decided Olly is better off forgetting her. She wants to spare him any more worry or suffering. Madeline slowly recovers her strength, and she and her mother resume their previous routines. Madeline returns to her books and her homework; her mother returns to work.

One night, after a particularly violent fight next door, another moving van pulls up to take Olly, Kara, and their mother away. They have decided to leave the domestic abuse behind and start over somewhere else. Maddy wishes she could "undo the last few months of knowing him" (p. 256). She goes to her email delete file and reads Olly's emails. He tells her he loves her and that he has finally been able to convince his mother to leave.

Weeks go by and Maddy receives an email from the doctor who treated her in the hospital. Confused by Maddy's sudden departure from the hospital against medical advice, Dr. Francis has been reviewing her case. She writes that she does not believe that Maddy has SCID at all. In shock, Maddy searches the house for medical records her mother is certain to have kept but cannot find any that show a diagnosis of SCID. Maddy

confronts her mother who finally admits that she just wanted to protect Maddy because she was a sickly child and she could not bear the thought of losing her so soon after the death of her husband and son.

Maddy goes to another doctor for a second opinion, and he confirms that Maddy does not have SCID. Her illness in Hawaii had been just that, an illness. He does warn Maddy that, because she has been exposed to so few bacteria and viruses, it may be that she needs to continue to be very cautious.

Maddy is stunned. She returns home and tries to understand why her mother would have done this to her. In an attempt to make up with her, Madeline's mother asks Carla to visit. Carla is relieved that Maddy does not have SCID, and she encourages her to forgive her mother. As Maddy gradually goes out into the world more often, she also makes changes in her home. She paints the walls bright colors and brings in live plants for the first time. Her mother agrees to see a psychiatrist, but Maddy still struggles to forgive.

Eventually, Maddy decides she has lived with caution long enough. Her last book review sums up her resolve to follow her heart.

THE LITTLE PRINCE BY ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPERY

Spoiler alert: Love is worth everything. Everything. (p. 302)

She flies to New York, where Olly lives, and, without telling him she is on her way, she texts him directions to a local bookstore. Following the text's directions, Olly goes to the S-U aisle and sees Maddy's copy of *The Little Prince* (1943). When Maddy herself walks around the corner, he smiles and says, "Found your book" (p. 305).

APPENDIX C

The Fault in Our Stars: A Retelling

Green's (2012) *The Fault in Our Stars* is a novel about life and death and love and loss. Sixteen-year-old Hazel Grace Lancaster narrates her story about living/dying from cancer and begins with her begging her mother not to make her attend a support group for cancer survivors. Fortunately, she loses that battle with her mother because it is there that she meets Augustus Waters.

Unlike Hazel, Augustus is cancer-free, but he has a prosthetic leg because of his fight with what he refers to as "a little touch of osteosarcoma" (p. 11). Hazel still has tumors from the thyroid cancer that has spread to her lungs, but the growth of the cancer seems to be under control. Because of the lung damage, however, she uses oxygen all the time. She has named the oxygen tank, her constant companion, Phillip, "because it just kind of looked like a Philip" (p. 39).

Through their mutual friend, and fellow cancer survivor Isaac, Hazel and Augustus meet and are immediately drawn to each other. When Augustus invites Hazel to watch a movie with him at his house, she, surprisingly, agrees.

After the movie, they talk, and Augustus asks Hazel to tell him about her favorite book. Hazel hesitates because her favorite book is so personal to her. For some reason,

she decides to tell Augustus about it. AIA, as Hazel refers to it, is the story of a teenager who is dying from cancer and it, according to Hazel is “the closest thing [she] had to a Bible” (p. 13). Augustus is intrigued and suggests that he and Hazel trade each other’s favorite books.

Augustus’s favorite book turns out to be a novelization of his favorite video game series *The Price of Dawn*. Hazel agrees and, in fact, stays up all night reading the book whose “protagonist, Staff Sergeant Maxy Mayhem, was vaguely likeable despite killing . . . no fewer than 118 individuals in 284 pages (p. 38). She likes the book--and Augustus--enough to begin the second in the series while she waits for feedback from Augustus about her book. Finally, she begins to receive anguished texts from Augustus about the book:

Tell me my copy is missing the last twenty pages or something.

Hazel Grace, tell me I have not reached the end of this book.

OH MY GOD DO THEY GET MARRIED OR NOT OH MY GOD WHAT IS THIS?

I guess Anna died and so it just ends? CRUEL. Call me when you can. Hope all’s okay. (p. 53).

Once they discuss the book, Hazel and Augustus agree that the author ends the book in mid-sentence because that is how life and death are. It just ends in the middle of things. Hazel tells Augustus that the author of *An Imperial Affliction*, Peter Van Houten, is a recluse who lives in Amsterdam. Hazel has written to him many times but has never

received a reply. The two continue to commiserate about their desperate desire to know what happened to Anna's family. Did her mother marry the Dutch Tulip Man? Was the Dutch Tulip Man a con artist? Hazel wanted a sequel, but Van Houten never answers her letters.

When Augustus calls one night, he begins to read an email he has just received from none other than Peter Van Houten. It seems Augustus managed to scour the Internet for information about the author and finally found an email address for his assistant. Through this intermediary, he was able to receive an email response from Van Houten who writes that he does not have any intention of writing a sequel and that he can give no more information about what happens to the characters in *An Imperial Affliction*.

Hazel immediately sends her own email to Van Houten telling him how much the book has meant to her especially given the parallels between Anna's character and her own struggle with cancer. Again, Van Houten replies that he does not intend to write a sequel and, to explain in an email what happens to Anna's mother would, in effect, be writing a sequel. He therefore "could never answer such questions except in person" (p. 78). He closes the email writing that, should Hazel come to Amsterdam, he would be happy to tell her the ending.

Hazel tells her mother that she has to go to Amsterdam to meet Van Houten, but her mother explains that they simply cannot afford such a trip. Hazel is disappointed but understands the hardship her illness has placed on the family's financial state. After she shares with Augustus her excitement about potentially meeting Van Houten and her

disappointment that it cannot happen, they agree that the trip to Amsterdam would have been spectacular.

Soon after, August arrives at Hazel's home with a bouquet of tulips and invites her to join him in a picnic. There, he tells her that he has contacted the Genie Foundation, an organization that grants wishes to children with cancer. Hazel tells Augustus it's no use. She has already used her wish: a trip to Disney World when she was thirteen. Augustus tells her that he has not used his wish and that the foundation has agreed to finance their trip to Amsterdam. Hazel's parents agree on the condition that Hazel's mother, who "knew more about differentiated thyroid carcinoma in adolescents than most oncologists" (p. 92), goes with them.

Once they arrive, Hazel and Augustus are treated to a night on the town arranged by Van Houten's assistant. They eat a wonderful dinner and walk along the canal, enjoying the beauty of a city so different from their own. In contrast, the actual meeting with Peter Van Houten the next morning turns out to be a crushing disappointment.

Van Houten, "[a] potbellied man with thin hair, sagging jowls, and a week-old beard squinted into the sunlight" when he opened the door to them (p. 180). He is a bitter, aging alcoholic who obviously does not even remember his correspondence with the teens. He certainly never dreamed they would actually come to Amsterdam to see him. He tells them how foolish and pointless it is for them to place any significance in his book or in life itself. Still, Hazel continues to press him about what happens to the characters after the novel ends. They have this exchange:

"We are speaking of a novel, dear child, not some historical enterprise."

“Right, but surely you must have thoughts about what happens to them, I mean, as characters, I mean independent of their metaphorical meanings or whatever.”

“They’re fiction,” he said, tapping his glass again. “Nothing happens to them.” (p. 191)

Enraged. Hazel knocks the glass of Scotch from his hand, telling him he promised to tell her the rest of the story. Augustus realizes there is no point in their staying any longer and leads Hazel outside, still reeling from the disappointment and the realization that they have spent Augustus’s wish on this disaster. Augustus tries to comfort Hazel by telling her that he will write her a sequel.

Van Houten’s assistant, Ms. Lidewij, follows them outside, apologizing profusely for Van Houten’s behavior. She says she was hoping the teens’ interest in the book would help bring out the best in him, but she was obviously mistaken. She wants to give them something meaningful to experience in Amsterdam, so she takes them to the Anne Frank house. Although the visit is difficult for them because of the steep stairs, they both agree the trip was worth it. When they reach the top, Hazel looks up at Augustus, and they share their first kiss in the room where Anne had experienced hers.

They thank Ms. Lidewij and go to Augustus’s hotel room. At first, Augustus hesitates, and Hazel wonders if he is just not interested. It turns out he is just concerned about how she will view his stump. She reassures him, and they make love.

The next day, Augustus confesses a secret he has kept from her: His cancer has returned, and the prognosis is dismal. He tells Hazel about the recent PET scan, “I lit up like a Christmas tree, Hazel Grace. The lining of my chest, my left hip, my liver, everywhere” (p. 214). Hazel is, of course, devastated. During their relationship, she has worried about what she was doing to Augustus. She has feared the day that she would die

and he would be left suffering her loss. Now, unbelievably, it seems he has less time than she.

Hazel spends the rest of the time Augustus has left at his house as he quickly declines. They read to each other and play video games mostly as he is too tired to do anything else. He tells Hazel that he still wants to write her a sequel, but he's just too tired. After Augustus dies, Hazel and Isaac get together to talk, and he asks her if Augustus ever gave her the sequel he was writing. Hazel searches her emails and Augustus's bedroom, but she finds nothing.

At Augustus's funeral, Hazel is shocked to see Peter Van Houten seated behind her. Furious, she tries to avoid him, but he manages to get a ride in her parents' car to the grave site. He tries to talk to Hazel, but she does not want to listen. Van Houten breaks down, and Hazel suddenly realizes that the character of Anna represents his own daughter who died of cancer.

“You had a kid who died?”

“My daughter,” he said. “She was eight. Suffered beautifully. Will never be beatified.”

“She had leukemia?” I asked. He nodded. “Like Anna,” I said.

“Very much like her, yes.”

...

After a second, I said, “So it's like you gave her this second life where she got to be a teenager.” (pp. 285-286)

Hazel begins to understand Van Houten's behavior toward them but does not excuse it or forgive him. She feels he has no right to grieve over Augustus's death, and tells him to go away.

Time drags on and Hazel is convinced that Augustus wrote her sequel. She has looked everywhere. Suddenly, she realizes that he may have mailed them to Peter Van Houten. She immediately emails Ms. Lidewij to find out. Miraculously, she receives a reply that Augustus, did send what he'd written to Van Houten. Lidewij scans the written pages to Hazel.

In the hand-written pages, Augustus tells Van Houten he is not a good enough writer to write a eulogy for Hazel, and he wants Van Houten to write it. The pages describe his feelings for Hazel and chronicle the many characteristics about her that made him love her. The pages themselves bring this love story to a tragic, yet beautiful, close:

What else? She is so beautiful. You don't get tired of looking at her. You never worry if she is smarter than you: You know she is. She is funny without ever being mean. I love her. I am so lucky to love her, Van Houten. You don't get to choose if you get hurt in this world, old man, but you do have some say in who hurts you. I like my choices. I hope she likes hers. (p. 313)

Hazel's reply: "I do, Augustus. I do" (p. 313).

APPENDIX D

Booked: A Retelling

In Alexander's (2016), *Booked*, the protagonist/narrator, Nick Hall, loves soccer. When he is not on the playing field, he is playing a FIFA video game. Unfortunately for this thirteen-year-old, the adults in his life have other ideas for the way he needs to spend his time.

His father, "a linguistics professor with chronic verbomania" (p. 4) has written a dictionary called *Weird and Wonderful Words*, and Nick's parents expects him to spend some time each day reading it. Nick balks at the reading and tries to get out of it when he can, but he uses the words throughout the novel, applying them to in his own way to current circumstances. His mother has enrolled him in Miss Quattlebaum's School of Ballroom Dance & Etiquette, and Nick has reluctantly agreed to attend because April, the girl of his dreams, is in the class.

His English teacher, Mrs. Hardwich, expects him to read "one boring required read after another" (p. 11). Nick, however spends most of his time daydreaming about soccer or April, pretty much in that order. Mr. MacDonald, the school librarian, tries to entice Nick into the Nerds and Words book club, but so far Nick has been able to talk his way out. Although he really likes Mr. Mac, who was once a rap artist, Nick says, "I don't really do books" (p. 43). Nick is intrigued with Mr. Mac's dragonfly box and keeps

asking about its contents. Mr. Mac keeps the mystery but says that it has to do with freedom.

In Nick's world, things could not be better. His best friend Coby plays with him on the school team even though they are on opposing teams in club play. The club coaches just received letters of invitation to the Dr. Pepper Dallas Cup Tournament, and Nick cannot wait. Added to his soccer success is his budding relationship with April. Although Nick remains a bit tongue-tied when she is around, they are definitely talking, and he even gets to hold her hand occasionally at the dance class.

Then Nick's world begins to fall apart.

His mother and father have a talk with Nick to explain that they are separating. It seems Nick's mother, a horse trainer, has taken a job in Kentucky and will be at home only on weekends. Nick is crushed. He is unable to sleep, he fails a math test, and he doesn't even want to talk to April. He thinks, "it's like a bombshell/drops/right in the center/of your heart/and splatters/all across your life" (p. 58).

Still reeling from his parents' news, Nick finds out that the twins, Don and Dean Egelston, are back from alternative school. They "are pit-bull mean/eighth grade tyrants/with beards" (p. 34). Worse, they seem to be interested in April. When they see Nick talking to April in the school cafeteria, they start to pick a fight. Coby steps in to help, and the twins turn on him with racial slurs aimed at his being biracial (Asian and African-American). Coby and the twins fight, and Nick stands there frozen. The twins are sent back to the alternative school, Coby is suspended, and Nick is full of shame. Nick's father wants to step in to discuss the racism with the twins' parents and school officials.

Nick pleads with him not to, saying that the school already had an assembly on racism where they stated their zero tolerance policy and played Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream Speech" for the student body.

Nick is so upset by the stressors of his life, especially his parents' separation, he has a heated argument with his father where he wishes he were dead. Then, he posts some dark, disturbing comments on social media. His mother comes home, and she and Nick's father agree that he should see a therapist. Nick goes, reluctantly, but says very little to his parents or to the counselor, whom he refers to as Dr. Fraud.

Soccer keeps him going. He continues to make some of his best plays. Despite a few disappointing losses, he still has the Dallas tournament to look forward to. During an important game, however, Nick starts to feel nauseated. His dad is worried, but Nick assures him that he can play. During the game, his condition worsens, but Nick is determined to play through the pain. At the end of the game, Nick is accidentally cleated by his friend Coby and rushed to the hospital. The good news is that his ankle is not broken, only sprained. The bad news is that his stomach upset is actually a perforated appendix. He will need surgery right away.

The surgery means that Nick will not be able to go to the Dallas tournament after all. Instead, he is confined to a hospital bed and disgusting hospital food. Even worse, his father restricts his television time. Nick will now get five minutes of television time for every page he reads--any book. On the bright side, Nick's mother returns to help take care of him, and it seems that his mother and father might reconcile.

He has other visitors. Coby visits to apologize for hurting his ankle and promises to bring him a souvenir from the tournament. Mrs. Hardwick visits him, and brings him a book to read. And April visits him, even kisses him. It is just a forehead kiss, “but that’s not going to/stop [Nick] from never washing your head. Ever” (p. 220).

Nick begins to read the book *All the Broken Pieces* and enjoys it. He connects with some of what the protagonist is going through, especially the bullying. Mr. Mac visits Nick, and they discuss the book he is reading. Mr. Mac asks Nick what he would do if he were faced with bullying like Matt in *All the Broken Pieces*. Nick says he would stand up for himself. Nick thinks, “And then The Mac stops talking and/and you’re left/wide awake, thinking of/all your broken pieces” (p. 228). Mac reads aloud the rest of the book, and he is so expressive the hospital staff give Mac a standing ovation when he finishes.

Nick texts April to tell her he has finished the book and to explain how much he liked it. He asks her what she is reading next. April answers with a picture of the next book the book club is reading *Out of the Dust*. Nick realizes that he actually enjoys this book as much as the previous one and calls this one “unputdownable” (p. 237).

When he is discharged from the hospital, life looks better. Both his parents are home, and April has agreed to come to Nick’s house to discuss *Out of the Dust*. Nick is excited and even helps his mother clean the house to get ready for her visit. To his surprise, however, April brings the whole book club, and Nick finds himself discussing books with six girls. Nick thinks:

And that's when you realize you're in a book club
with all girls, which is insane.
April smiles at you. *What do you think, Nick?* she asks.

Just then, your mom comes out
of the kitchen
with a tray of cookies

and,

get this,

tea, and

now you're sipping tea
with a bunch of girls, and
so glad

that no guys
are here
to see you. (pp. 248-249)

Before April leaves, Nick's mother invites her to come back the next day to go horseback riding. After that, April and Nick go to the mall and see a movie. Nick is beyond excited that their relationship is moving along. He even agrees to select the next book for the group.

In a surprising development, it turns out that Mrs. Hardwick and Mr. Mac have been dating each other. Even more surprising, they plan to move to Texas to teach there.

Unfortunately, it turns out his mother is going to leave again. His parents have decided to get a divorce. Nick is upset and barely speaks to his parents, but he does not become as depressed as before. Eventually, he opens up to his parents, and they are able to talk (sometimes via text) about issues. He has a talk with his father about bullying. His dad tells Nick about a time when he confronted a bully. Nick is interested but somewhat disappointed to find that the story ends with his dad getting a black eye. Still, it is the longest conversation Nick and his father have had.

Added to Nick's issues is the return of the twins. They steal Nick's bicycle and begin to harass the students at Nick's school. Once a day, Nick sees them picking on a younger child, and he decides to step in. He thinks to himself that getting hit by the twins "can't hurt any more/than *appendicitis*" (p. 306). So he intervenes. And the twins hit him and knock him out. It seems, however, that the twins will now leave him alone.

The novel ends with Nick adjusting to his parents' divorce, his triumph over bullying, his new girlfriend, and a present from Mr. Mac, his precious dragonfly box, which contains . . .

The reader is left wondering.

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