# PREADOLESCENT BOYS' PATHS TO READING: BALANCING IDENTITY AND AGENCY 

by<br>Geneviève Brisson<br>B. Ed., Université Laval, 2004<br>A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

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#### Abstract

The major purpose of this qualitative study was to map particular preadolescent boys' paths to reading by taking a look at various elements that might have influenced their path to reading. Data were collected using five individual interviews with boys, ages 11 to 13 years old, and a group interview with all five of them. Questions for both interviews were designed to gather data in relation to my research sub-questions, which came from a preliminary review of the literature. This study explored how various factors - hobbies (e.g. video games, sports) and personal interests (e.g. swords, reptiles, cars), adults as reading mentors, school, perceptions of reading and readers, agency, peers and popular culture - influence five boys' reading paths. Analysis of this data provided the following findings. Hobbies and favourite activities seemed not to influence four of the boys when they chose books, but they were a major influence for the fifth boy. The five boys mentioned series that had an impact both on their attitude towards reading and on their choice of texts. School's influence, however, appeared to be "neutral", but two boys explained that literature circles were an interesting practice because they allowed for discussion with peers. This school literacy activity contributed to these boys' positive attitudes toward reading. Peer recommendations from other readers also influenced the choice of books made by the interviewees. The five pre-adolescent boys appeared to be resisting some cultural and social norms of their peer groups and of masculine discourses: they were reading despite the fact that this activity was not one of the most popular activities among their friends. However, if they did not view reading as a feminine


activity, they still perceived certain books as "girls' books", books that no boys would want to read. Finally, none of these elements has been found to have a predominant influence on all the boys: the participants spoke about more than one element that had an influence on their choices of texts as well as on their attitudes towards reading.

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## I INTRODUCTION

## The Boy Who Loved Snakes

A few years ago, I was a student teacher doing my last practicum. I was spending an hour with my group of grade 6 students at the library of an elementary school in Québec. Most of the students were chatting; some were browsing through the books and trying to find a good book to read. We were halfway through the month of October and I was beginning to know the kids better, at least I thought I knew them well. Looking around the room, my attention was caught by one of my "reluctant" readers. This boy had never actively participated during classroom activities involving literature. He usually just sat and looked bored. I could never get him involved, even when I used genres such as science fiction and adventure novels that were said to attract boys. Like most of the boys in my class, he showed no interest in reading, at least this was what I believed. On this particular day, however, this boy was sitting silently at a table, his nose buried in a huge book, oblivious to the chatter of his classmates surrounding him. I was surprised by his sudden involvement with a book, so I asked him what he was reading. It turned out the book was about snakes: it was a book full of coloured pictures and great facts about animals. My "reluctant" reader showed me dozen of photographs of his beloved cold-blooded animals and told me all about how poisonous they were, where they lived (sadly, he told me that none of the very poisonous ones lived in our region!), what they ate, and so on. He also showed me where the books about animals in our library were located, and he pointed out the ones he had already read, which were almost all the books about snakes. I was amazed
how different this boy was from the image I had of him: he was a motivated reader, something I had not considered. He did not lack interest in reading, he lacked interest in the reading materials I had been suggesting in class, which were only fictional works. Over the following weeks, I decided to pay a close attention to the male students in my class and to their reading habits. Every morning, the boy who loved snakes eagerly read huge informational books, another boy carried magazines about hockey everywhere and read whenever he had two minutes, another one always read Astérix, a popular French comic book, another one was reading a thick fantasy novel, and so on. Why had I missed the fact that many of the boys in my class were readers?

As far as I remember, I have always wanted to learn how to read. My mother read a lot of fiction, my father read newspapers and magazines, and my two older sisters, who learned how to read before me, read dozens of books. I wanted to be like the rest of my family and read! When, finally, I learned how to read in grade one, I became an eager and motivated reader. I read every novel I could get my hands on, from randomly chosen novels taken out of the school library to books recommended by friends or received as Christmas gifts. I also read magazines, but I really favoured novels. I loved to immerse myself in the wonderful worlds that lay behind the words on the pages. My childhood and adolescence were enriched by the extraordinary stories I read: they filled me with joy. In my own experience, being a reader meant reading novels. Before this conversation with the boy who loved snakes, I could not help thinking that my grade 6 boys were losing so much by not reading. I had been encouraged to think this way by articles in magazines and newspapers and by government reports, which clearly emphasized boys' negative attitudes towards
reading and the decrease in the number of books they were reading.
Following my encounter with my boy who loved snakes, I decided to change my approach and look at what boys were actually reading. To be able to accomplish this reorientation, it made sense to me to begin to distance myself from the more traditional view of boys as a static category and to go beyond the "boys will be boys" saying. Instead, I have adopted more fluid and inclusive definitions of boyhood, masculinity, and literacy where social and cultural influences are acknowledged.

I began as a faithful fiction reader believing everyone enjoyed the wonderful world of novels, boys and girls included. As a student teacher, I met boys who hated reading or simply hated reading novels. As a Masters student, I wanted to explore the world of boys as readers, what influenced them. Mostly I thought I would meet fervent non-fiction readers, fans of books about soccer, comic books and/ or magazines. It turned out, as you will discover in the following chapters, that the boys I met were devoted readers of fiction (fantasy and adventures). As a researcher, the research project on boys and their paths to reading showed me that researchers have to keep an open mind.

## Rationale and Significance

In the last decade, a great amount of attention has been devoted to the subject of boys and their reading, or non-reading, habits. The following statements are only a few examples of what has been written: Boys, especially in the middle elementary years, were far behind their feminine peers in reading (Sullivan, 2003); they were not well represented at the highest levels of achievement in English (Maynard, 2002); boys were lacking literacy skills (Smith \& Wilhelm, 2002), and remedial reading classes were mostly made of masculine students (Brozo, 2002). On a less dramatic note, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) argued that boys were not rejecting reading in general: they rejected the way it was used and valued in schools. These two researchers maintained that in their lives outside of school, a vast majority of boys were skilled readers engaged in reading activities, which challenged the traditional school definition of literacy. Blair and Sanford (2003) also argued that boys were redefining literacy, "morphing" it to adapt it to their out-of-school literacy activities.

Following Power (2001), I began with the assumption that boys do read. The fact that boys do read has been an important element in my research since I looked at what boys choose to read in their leisure time, and why, in order to map various paths to reading. My second assumption, following Smith and Wilhelm (2002), was that each and every boy is different and should be seen as an individual: each boy's path to reading and to literature is particular to him. Given these individual paths, my questions were: What may influence a boy's path to reading? What may influence their choices? Research suggests that various factors might play a role in the construction of readers. For some boys, personal interests or friends' interests are what
drive their choices. They read to know more on a subject, such as spacecrafts, in order to be able to talk about it with their friends. Previous research also suggests that some boys may be influenced by what their friends read: for instance, in some classrooms, Captain Underpants (Pilkey, 1997) books are passed around from boy to boy until they fall apart. In other research, boys are said to read books recommended by a thoughtful mentor - an adult such as a teacher, a parent, a grandparent, etc. - present at the right time with the right book close at hand. Some again... I could go on since boys may be influenced by numerous factors. The following pages present data that provide relevant information about boys and their reading paths.

## Purpose of the study

Given growing interests and concerns - among parents, teachers and researchers alike - about boys and their attitudes towards reading as well as their choices of texts, it is important to understand what may influence boys' paths to reading. The purpose of the study was to map particular preadolescent boys' paths to reading by taking a look at various elements that might have influenced their paths to reading, and to what extent they might have influenced it.

## Definition of reading paths

Within the context of this study, a definition of "reading path" includes the choices of texts the boys make as well as their general attitudes towards reading. When I talk about elements or factors influencing the boys' reading paths, it means
these elements have a certain influence on which texts the boys choose to read, on what motivates them to choose specific texts, or that these factors act upon the boys' general attitudes towards reading as an activity.

## Research Questions

The overarching question I am exploring in this research study is the following: What are the paths to reading taken by particular preadolescent boys? Information found while doing a review of the existing literature on the subject prompted more specific questions. In this study, I address the following questions:

1) Do general interests, reading preferences, and reading mentors influence these boys' choices of reading materials, and if so, how?
2) Does school, and the kinds of reading that are valued in school, influence what these boys choose to read outside of school? And if so, how?
3) What perceptions do these boys have of reading? Are these perceptions related to their reading paths?
4) Does these boys' agency influence their paths to reading? And if so, how? For the purpose of this study, I have used Baxter's (2003) definition of agency: she has defined this concept as one's ability to act for himself or herself, and "to adapt to, negotiate or resist dominant subject positions or, alternatively, take up subject positions within resistant discourse" (p.31). Within this study, boys' agency will therefore refer to their ability to navigate discourses of masculinity, peer culture, and parents' values, in order to think and choose for themselves.
5) Do peers and popular culture influence these boys' paths to reading? If so, how?
6) Which, if any, of the previously mentioned factors have the strongest influence and how are these factors correlated?

## Preview of Upcoming Chapters

Chapter 2 of this thesis is a review of the existing literature pertaining to boys and reading. It presents various approaches and theories explored to identify elements that may have an influence on boys' paths to reading.

Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the research methodology I have adopted to conduct the present study. It presents an overview of the data collection and analysis processes undertaken in this qualitative study of five preadolescent boys' reading paths. Limitations of the study, as well as issues of trustworthiness, are addressed at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 4 summarizes the findings of the study. A brief introduction of the interviewees - Cam, John, Xela, Joey, and Ryder - is followed by the findings, divided into six sections. Each section addresses findings related to a research subquestion: reading in relation to other interests, adults as reading mentors, school's influence on reading, perceptions of reading and readers, agency, and peers and popular culture. In the final section of chapter four, I present an in-depth description of Cam's and John's reading paths.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the main findings of this research and consists of eight sections: uniqueness of the sample, reading versus hobbies and
personal interest, influence of series books, literature circles as a social practice, peers and their recommendations, importance of being social, resistance to social and cultural norms, and gender preferences and agency. Limitations of the study as well as suggestions for future research are presented at the end of the chapter.

## II LITERATURE REVIEW

Boys and their relation to reading and literacy is a subject that has been addressed lengthily by both the popular press and scholarly journals. In both kinds of writing, it has been studied and presented using various approaches, which shed a different light on this important issue. I have explored the existing literature to find what is said to influence boys and their reading paths. I have found interesting information in research addressing the following issues: interest and preferences, mentors, school's influence, perceptions of reading and readers (social learning theory and poststructuralism), agency, and peers and popular culture.

## Interests and Preferences

During the 1970's and 1980's, much research examining children's and adolescent's reading preferences and interests was published. This research often treated gender as a variable among other variables such as age (Landy, 1977), social class by occupation of father (Landy, 1977), number of children in family (Landy, 1977), and minority versus nonminority (Wolfson, Manning and Manning, 1984). Differences in preferences of reading materials, in term of topics and genres, were found between boys of different grade levels, and between boys and girls. Some convergences, however, were also identified. Hall and Cole (1999) observed that $68.9 \%$ of the 10,12 , and 14 -year-old boys they surveyed read science fiction and fantasy, $82.1 \%$ liked sport-related books, and $74.1 \%$ enjoyed war and spy stories. Landy (1977) concluded that grade 7 boys read more books concerned with sports, whether fiction
or non-fiction, than did girls. Wolfson et al. (1984) stated that the grade 4 boys in their study were more attracted to books about adventure, machines and applied science, and animals, while girls showed more interest than boys in stories with multiethnic characters or stories picturing family life and children, as well as to fine and applied arts. Wolfson et al. (1984) also suggested that fantasy was the most popular category among the boys they studies, and the second most popular among the girls. BeyardTyler and Sullivan found that boys' preference for male protagonists increased during adolescence, from grade 7 to 11 (as cited in Galda, Ash \& Cullinan, 2000). According to Carlsen (1980), books chosen by boys either have a male protagonist or at least predominant features traditionally considered male-oriented: for instance, an outdoor setting and physical or external action.

Carlsen (1980) has suggested that boys are typically more rigid and limited than girls in their preferences, their likes and dislikes being clearer than those of girls. From his point of view, one could assume that it would be quite simple to predict what boys look for in fiction and find books for them. Hall and Cole (1999), however, found that, in their survey, both boys and girls aged 10,12, and 14, predominantly preferred fiction. Only $2.8 \%$ of children read only non-fiction but, from this small percentage who read exclusively non-fiction, $78 \%$ were boys. Hall and Cole (1999) added that all of the 12-year-old boys interviewed asserted that they enjoyed reading non-fiction. The boys in this study seemed to associate reading non-fiction with the pleasure and excitement of uncovering information about "the real world". Jobe and Dayton-Sakari (2002) have also suggested that most of who they called Info-Kids, these readers who seek information, prefer to "live in the "real world" around them" (p.16) and are not
attracted by fiction, are boys.
Boys' interests in reading often appear to be linked to their hobbies, according to Brozo (2002), or to inform their personal interests, according to Blair and Sanford (2003). For instance, books about their favourite sport may attract fervent sports amateurs; other boys may enjoy computer magazines with articles about how to win at the computer games. However Sullivan (2003) pointed out that boys, when they reach grade 4, become so deeply involved in many activities, especially sports, that they run out of time for reading. He also suggested that boys' interest in sports often coincides with an interest in "nonbook" types of reading such as sport cards, collector's manuals, newspapers and magazines. Sullivan (2003) has put forward the argument that "[if] libraries lose boys to sports at this point, then sports are a likely way to bring boys back into the library" (p. 29). Bringing boys back to the library may result in bringing them back on a reading path.

Differences in interests and preferences are found between boys and girls but also among and between groups of boys, such as those belonging to different economic, ethnic or social groups. Research has also suggested that hobbies and interests may influence boys in their choice of reading, and that their reading often helps inform their personal interests.

## Reading Mentors

During early years, parents and family members have a profound influence on every aspect of a child's life, and their influence impacts boys' paths to reading. These adults can be both mentors and role models. Some studies have considered these two roles as one when related to reading and literacy. For the purpose of this review, I will consider reading mentors and their influences on boys' paths to reading in a separate section from role models, even though they are closely related: a model may be a mentor and vice versa. Reading mentors work directly with the readers. According to Merina (1988), mentors help children to learn how to read or to improve their reading skills, or they may introduce or suggest books to read. Reading models could be described as more passive: they are themselves readers and as such project a certain image of reading, and they also talk about their own experience as readers or about their readings. The concept of role models being an important element in the socialisation framework, I will discuss it at greater length in the section Perceptions of reading and readers.

Millard (1997) has argued that parents are powerful role models for their children at the beginning of their life since they are the ones supplying the first books. I suggest that, when they are recommending, providing, and buying books, these adults should be qualified not only as role models but also as mentors. Steffe (2002) has provided an example of this influence when she concluded that a young adult's favourite childhood book often became so because a family member read it with them. In her study, mothers were the family member most often mentioned as being the ones who shared texts with their children. Millard (1997) and Power (2001) have also
stated that mothers are a key influence in children's early stage of reading and that they are associated with children's earliest reading, more than any other individual or family grouping. In Millard's study (1997) boys and girls who were already good readers referred to their mothers as the person who recommended and bought books.

People other than family members who share, recommend, or give books can be, if they have established a relationship with the reader they are advising, reading mentors. Teachers and teacher-librarians may become reading mentors when boys are in school. Boys spend many hours a day with their teacher, and these adults usually learn a lot about their students' interests and preferences. According to Chen (1999), teachers may be, for some students, the major reason for choosing books. Teacherlibrarians, on the other hand, do not spend all day with one group and they might not be as intimate with the students. However, they may have a deep and thorough knowledge of books. Through book talks and displays, activities and discussions, or simply through the books they choose to buy for the school library, teacher-librarians may impact boys' paths to reading. A recent Canadian study (Queen's University and People for Education, 2006) has shown a significant association between student's reading enjoyment and the presence in their school of a teacher-librarian, this presence being the single strongest predictor of reading enjoyment for grades 3 and 6 students. It was "the first Canadian study linking school libraries to student achievement" (Kalinowski, 2006, p. A17).

Previous research (Booth, 2002; Brozo, 2002) has shown that reading buddies can also play a significant role in building boy readers. Many programs have been put together in order to help struggling or reluctant readers enhance their literacy skills. In

Monaghan's study (2005), teachers and volunteers recorded "significant improvements in reading performance, attitude to reading, confidence and selfesteem, speech and language, motivation, and general achievement" (p. 9) after a child interacted with a reading buddy. Programs described by Booth (2002), Brozo (2002), Merina (2002) and Monaghan (2005) were not aimed directly at literature appreciation and book selection: they were usually set up to enhance decoding and reading skills. However, as reading buddies share books, they may become influential.

Reading mentors may influence boys' choices of reading materials. Mothers are often mentioned as the family members who share texts with their children, but teachers and teacher-librarians may also play a part in school-aged boys' reading paths.

## School's Influence on Reading

Millard (1997) has put forward the argument that actual curricular emphases, teachers' choices of text and topic, as well as a lack of availability of texts that match boys' needs and interests, position boys in a situation where they are disadvantaged in academic literacy. In her study, many boys explained that they desired to discuss the content of computer and hobby magazines and to read comic books, but this was not allowed during class time. Bintz has also argued that students' resistance to school reading is mainly caused by the fact that students are coerced into reading materials that they do not choose (as cited in Worthy, 1998). Worthy (1998) has suggested that students' perceived or real lack of control in classroom book talk may be an additional
motive for their resistance. According to McMahon, teacher-led discussions falling back to a pattern of the teacher asking questions and controlling the discussion and students looking for "the right" answers may prevent students, and boys among them, from wanting to read (as cited in Worthy, 1998).

Smith and Wilhelm (2002) explained that, in their lives outside of school, a vast majority of boys they studied were skilled readers engaged in literacy activities involving video games, magazines, newspapers, informational books that challenged the traditional school definition of literacy. Moreover, Hall and Cole (2001) have argued that "current, officially sanctioned, school definitions of literacy unintentionally undermine many young readers, but particularly boys, inhibiting their development towards the confidence and mastery that are necessary if a reading habit is going to be sustained" (p. 211). In Britain, for instance, the school reading curriculum has favoured fiction for children from the very first year of school, at 4 or 5 years old, until the end of compulsory schooling at 16 (Hall \& Cole, 2001). Since Hall and Cole (1999) have observed a general tendency to enjoy non-fiction among 12 yearold boys, this predominance of fiction in school may influence boys' paths to reading if they see what they read as not being as important or worthwhile.

Actual emphasis on fiction in schools may be short-changing boys as they cannot put to good use the skills they have acquired in their out-of-school literacy activities involving non-fiction texts. Students' resistance to school reading may be a consequence of the non-recognition by schools of these skills and the fact that boys are forced to read texts that they have not chosen.

## Perceptions of Reading and Readers

Social learning theory presents gender as being learned through individuals' interaction within their environment. According to Maynard (2002), children learn what it means to be a man or a woman through two main processes: reinforcement of appropriate behaviour and imitation of same-sex role model. Rowan, Knobel, Bigum \& Lankshear (2002) have suggested that, from an early age, boys and girls are socialized to think and act differently and to get pleasure from distinct activities and experiences. For instance, parents tend to dress their daughters and sons in different kinds of clothes, to give them different toys to play with, to encourage different activities and interests, to interpret their behaviours differently and to respond to these behaviours in different ways (Maynard, 2002). Furthermore, Maynard (2002) explained that, through reinforcements and rewards, parents encourage literacy activities for their daughters but not as much for their sons. Brozo (2002), in To be a boy, to be a reader, stated that boys in general are most often in contact with feminine models of readers: nearly every day at school, where teachers are primarily women, or at home, where the person who reads to them is, most of the time, a woman. As boys grow up, they become more aware of the habits of the people surrounding them. In Hartlage-Striby's study, boys appeared to identify with what their fathers read: these readings were mostly utilitarian, and non-linear (as cited in Sullivan, 2003). Sullivan (2003) has suggested that as boys get older, they mirror the archetypal fathers' reading: boys are then drawn toward trading cards, magazines, and newspapers, which are works that give brief information on specific topics and which they consider as utilitarian. If boys do read books, they gravitate toward non-fiction works, mainly
books that concern people's lives, sports, and natural phenomena. According to Booth (2002), even if more fathers these days show interest in the literacy lives of their children, literacy education is still mostly a feminine field. Thus, from a social-learning-theory point of view, boys learn that reading is a feminine activity and that it is not appropriate for them (Brozo, 2002; Maynard, 2002). Schools and families are institutions that help circulate understanding of "normal" masculinity, and being masculine seems not to include reading or literacy activities.

The socialization framework draws attention to the constructed nature of behaviour usually interpreted as normal. Social learning theorists have argued that to change boys' ways of acting, what needed to be done was to train them to respond differently, to enjoy and desire new ways of being (Rowan et al., 2002). For instance, to transform boys into devoted readers, to encourage them to read, they should be exposed to male role models, men who read and enjoy reading as part of their professional and personal life. Booth (2002) has suggested that boys who are not in touch with males within the reading cultures - "men who read and write in a variety of genres, interacting with each other and building cooperatively a deeper understanding of the issues they are reading about" (p. 18) - might lack essential role models to lead them on a positive and rich reading path. Brozo (2002) has expressed the opinion that bringing dedicated adult men readers - "who embody active literacy and honourable masculinity" (p. 97) - coming from all working circles into a classroom might positively impact boys since a lot of them rarely see fathers or any adult men reading. In Australia, according to Foster, Kimmel \& Skelton (2001), a popular solution to the problem of boys' underachievement in school in general, and in English
in particular, has been to increase the presence of more male teachers. Feminists such as Pepperell, Skelton and Smedley have challenged this solution and qualified it as oversimplified (as cited in Foster et al., 2001).

The socialization model, as we have seen, tends to portray children as passive beings, as sponges who take in anything their parents or teachers model for them. According to Maynard (2002), this model does not provide an explanation for the wide variation within genders: boys who have adopted the ways of being masculine displayed by the adults surrounding them and boys who have appropriated ways not related to the form of masculinity assumed by their parents or promoted in class by teachers. Bringing male readers in classroom or showing posters presenting male readers from various horizons (e.g. a mechanic, a lawyer, a business man, etc) may not be enough to positively impact boys' paths to reading.

What might explain boys' reluctance to adopt reading habits even after having seen them displayed by other boys and/or men? The fact that differential power is attached to various displays of acceptable behaviours for boys (Rowan et al., 2002) may be part of the answer. The concept of discourses is an important poststructuralist concept. It refers to:
forms of knowledge or powerful sets of assumptions, expectations and explanations, governing mainstream social and cultural practices, [which] are systematic ways of making sense of the world by inscribing and shaping power relations within all texts, including spoken interactions. (Baxter, 2003, p. 8)

Each discourse has an implied theory, which delineates the "normal" way for each
human being to speak, listen, act, value, think, read, write, feel, and dress. Young (2000) has postulated that human beings are part of many communities and learn the practices of their concomitant discourses as they participate in these discourses and adopt the rules and values of the "club" as their own. These discourses, according to Baxter (2003) and Young (2000), are embedded within institutions such as families, peer groups, and schools. Rowan et al. (2002) have suggested that these institutions help to produce what can be seen as dominant and normative models of masculinity and, according to Connell, it is in everyday actions within these institutions that masculine identities are actively constructed and accomplished (as cited in Young, 2000). These powerful institutions impose relative values of different versions of masculinity upon individuals. However, Johnson and Meinhof (1996) have stated that masculinity, as well as femininity, is not a social role acquired throughout childhood and adolescence, and fixed in adult life. Instead, masculinity is "an ongoing social process dependent upon systematic restatement" (Johnson \& Meinhof, 1996, p. 22). In Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli's study (2003), the boys interviewed "deployed, resisted, negotiated and interweaved a range of discourses in order to make sense of their experiences as certain kinds of boys" (p.9). Post-structuralist feminism has acknowledged the differential power attached to competing perceptions of what it means to be a boy or a man (Rowan et al., 2002). Boys may, therefore, be reluctant to engage in what is circulated, legitimated and "publicized" - through television, school, and family - as a feminine behaviour. Moffat (2003), in her study of grade 5 and 6 students, witnessed numerous discussions among kids concerning what constituted gender appropriate activities and behaviours: reading was seen as an inappropriate
activity for boys. In Martino's study (2001), $42 \%$ of the adolescent boys surveyed rejected reading because it was boring or a waste of time. They viewed reading in direct opposition to much more enjoyable activities such as playing sports or being with friends: it was devalued and seen as a passive activity, associated with sitting still and quietly. In short, the boys' in Martino's study (2001) perceived being masculine in opposition to being feminine: boys were active and played sports whereas girls sat and read. Millard has argued, "within such dualistic frames of reference, sport is designated as a sex-appropriate for boys in relation to more passive and feminized activities such as reading" (as cited in Martino, 2001, p.65).

According to poststructuralist research, male role models, as put forward by social learning theory, are insufficient influences against hegemonic discourses of masculinity. However, other ways of being male do exist, other discourses of masculinity might influence boys: some are only slightly different where others seem completely opposed to hegemonic masculinity. Could alternative discourses of masculinity have an influence on boys' paths to reading? Goffman has written that displaying gender is optional, a choice every human being has in his/her everyday life (as cited in Cherland, 1994), whereas Cherland (1994) and West and Zimmerman (1987) have argued that displaying gender is obligatory and that boys, as members of society, are forced to demonstrate their gender within every social activity: talking, dancing, eating, reading, etc. Cherland (1994) explained: "they [all members of society] are 'required' to do this because they are punished, with ridicule and social disruption, if they practice gender-inappropriate behaviour" (p. 12). The students in Moffatt's study (2003) did not only see reading as a feminine activity, they also
believed that there were serious "social consequences for boys who step[ped] outside of the boundaries of normative masculinity" (p. 82). Moffatt (2003) has stated that "boys' gender performances are closely policed and that the consequences of enacting a non-normative version of masculinity were ridicule and marginalization" (p. 82). Are boys "required" to react against reading? Does hegemonic discourse of masculinity, adults' and peers' influence leave boys with choices of how to demonstrate their masculinity, how to negotiate with various discourses and how to behave within social activities? Do boys exert their agency when it comes to reading?

Social learning theory claims the importance of role models in socializing boys, but it does not explain why boys appropriate different ways of being masculine, ways not always related to the masculinity adopted by their models. Poststructuralist approaches suggest that institutions such as schools, families, and peers produce discourses, and that differential powers are attached to different discourses of masculinity. Boys' paths to reading may be influenced since reading is often rejected by hegemonic discourses of masculinity.

Agency
Parents, teachers and peers influence boys, but boys (should) have the last word: they are the ones who (should) choose when and what they read. Boys' agency should be considered when paths to reading are discussed. Within this study, I have used Baxter's (2003) definition of agency, i.e. boys' ability to act for themselves and to adapt to, negotiate or resist dominant discourses or to take up subject positions within alternative discourses. Boys' agency refers therefore to their ability to navigate discourses such as discourses of peer culture, masculinity, and parents' values, in order to think and choose for themselves.

In Love's and Hamston's study (2004), schools and most families valued reading fiction, yet reluctant readers were mostly opposed to fiction as a leisure reading practice. Reluctant readers in this study engaged more independently in reading associated with male youth culture, such magazines and the Internet: they seemed to assert their agency by resisting fiction and by pursuing specific types of print and electronic-based reading that carry immediate pragmatic and social investment. Committed readers in Love's and Hamston's study (2004) asserted their own agency not by rejecting but by balancing three kinds of leisure reading. They read magazines and Internet websites for the same reasons as reluctant readers, to satisfy their interests in male youth culture. They also read pragmatically-oriented texts about hobbies, which they shared with family members (fathers in particular), and they chose fiction to conform with their parents' values about pleasure as well as the educational value of fiction as leisure reading. Boys, in general, may also assert their agency in reaction to peers. A major theme in Worthy's article (1998) was the ardent
personal and individualized preferences of the two boys she studied. The two grade- 6 boys stressed that, even if some books or genres are extremely popular, they were not universally liked by all kids. For instance, when Worthy (1998) conducted her interview, the Goosebumps' series (Stine) was hugely popular among elementary to middle school students. The two boys affirmed their agency by choosing not to read these books, which they characterized as being "childish horror".

Dominant discourses, such as discourses of gender and of masculinity, shape boys but, according to Young (2000), boys can by their actions, thoughts and beliefs, in turn shape or reshape the practices associated with these discourses. Baxter (2003) and Young (2000) have suggested that various discourses are embedded within institutions such as families, peer groups, and schools. These institutions, according to Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003), may either contribute or restrict boys' abilities to question the school practices of masculinity. While boys may identify certain practices as masculine, some boys may also challenge the same practices and attempt to transform them to legitimize their way of practicing masculinity (Young, 2000). Boys in Young's study (2000) admitted to crying sometimes, even if the hegemonic discourse of masculinity worked to sustain the belief that men do not cry. These boys also challenged the affirmation that all boys and men are brave, as well as bravery being an exclusively masculine attribute. They were trying to create a space where, even if they admitted the powerful presence of a hegemonic discourse of masculinity, they could choose how to act, how to be boys. This space could also be where boys could challenge the dissociation between reading practices and being masculine. Their own agency would therefore influence their path to reading.

Discourses of gender and of masculinity embedded within institutions such as families, peer groups, and schools, shape boys, but boys may assert their agency and refashion the norms associated with these discourses.

## Peers and Popular Culture

Adler, Kless and Adler (1992) and Best (1983) have argued that, as early as preschool and elementary school, boys and girls establish clear and independent peer cultures. According to these researchers, peer cultures constitute isolated microcosms where boys and girls break loose from well-meaning parents, teachers, and mentors trying to shape or individualize them. Boys and girls create their own norms and these norms decide who are the popular kids and who are the unpopular kids (Adler et al., 1992). Moloney (2000) has argued that, in his last years in elementary school, a boy probably spends increasing periods of time with his friends, and their interests largely influence his interests. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) have argued that, for the boys in their study, there was "[an] absolute centrality of social relations in the lives of male student" (p. 185). Being social and having friends hold such an important place in the life of boys that, norms defining popularity do, as a result, have an impact on what a boy will or will not participate in. From data gathered using participant observation, Adler et al. (1992) found that athletic ability, coolness, toughness, savoir-faire (which refers to finesse in social and interpersonal aptitudes and abilities), cross-gender relations, and academic performance were factors that impacted on the popularity of the boys they observed. In the case of boys' paths to reading, "academic performance"
seems the most relevant factor. Adler et al. (1992) have observed that, in the first years of elementary school, the boys in their study took pride in their work and loved school. However, sometime in the middle years, a shift occurred and the boys' collective attitude towards academic performance transformed. "The boys' shift in attitude involve[d] the introduction of a potential stigma associated with doing too well in school" (Adler et al., 1992, p. 77). Being smart, participating in class, achieving high scores and, by extension, showing interest in books and reading, had negative effects on the boys' popularity. According to Adler et al. (1992), some of the boys in their study consciously made the decision not to put too much effort in their academic work in order not to be ostracized.

Peer cultures vary from country to country, from city to city, from school to school, but also over time. Reading might therefore be seen as "cool" by some groups of kids and "uncool" by other groups. Ferguson (1998) has reported results from a survey examining children's and teenage book markets: it was found that teens, including teenage boys, thought reading was something that made them feel smarter than people who did not read. In Hall and Cole's survey (1999), more than half (57.5\%) of 10,12 , and 14 -year-old boys expressed a positive attitude to reading. Hall and Cole (1999) have also concluded that peers might have a positive influence on reading attitudes or habits and be a motivational factor to begin a book. For instance, Worthy (1998) reported a conversation about books between two grade 6 boys, described as reluctant readers by their teachers. The two boys stressed how peer recommendations had become increasingly important for them as they grew up. Millard (1997), however, has reported that boys are less likely than girls to share books with one
another. In her study, $70 \%$ of the boys stated they never shared books, whereas more than $50 \%$ of the girls shared books with friends and/or family members. The boys in her study explained, however, that they shared magazines with each other, mainly to be up to date with sports statistics or to complete a computer game.

Some special books may simply become the "coolest" thing in one school. Popular culture may have an impact on what is seen as cool or not among children, preteens and teens. The Harry Potter books (Rowling, 2000) are a great example of this influence. They have become a phenomenon in recent years: they have enjoyed and are still enjoying a tremendous popularity among preadolescents and adolescents. In many schools being a reader of the Harry Potter series (Rowling, 2000) is more than cool. Another example of popular culture's influences are R.L. Stine's series books such as the Goosebumps series (1992) that was, according to Worthy (1998), wildly popular among most grade 5 to grade 7 students a few years ago. These popular books became part of a peer culture and were, therefore, almost mandatory reading to be part of the group.

As for movies and video games, they occupy an important place in youth culture. The time kids spend in front of a screen and the impact of what they see while watching have been given a lot of attention by the popular press as well as by academics. Dorman (1997) has stated that video and computer-based games assume today a significant role in American children and adolescents' culture. In his study, the grade seven and eight students spent, on average, 4.2 hours per week playing these games. Moreover, according to Borja (2005), nearly $70 \%$ of children (6 to 14 years old) have a television in their bedrooms and almost $50 \%$ have video game systems as well.

But does playing video games displace time that could be spent reading? Research has not proven that a relationship of this sort exists (Dorman, 1997). Creasey and Myers (1986) have suggested that owning a video game did not alter a the activities of the children in their study (as cited in Dorman), and Hall and Cole (1999) concluded that no significant relationship existed between the reported use of computer by the children in their survey and whether or not they had been reading. As for watching television, Koolstra, van der hoot and van der kamp (1997) found that television viewing reduced, to some extent, book reading (the displacement hypothesis). In Children's Reading Choices (Hall and Cole, 1999), two-thirds of the children in the sample reported having done some reading the previous night but, in general, they reported spending considerably more time watching television than reading. The boys in this study were likely to watch more television than girls, and they also reported less time spent reading (Hall and Cole, 1999).

Being social is important to boys and their peer groups may influence their reading attitudes or habits. Some series books as well video games and movies also come into play and may enhance or decrease boys' interest in reading.

## Summary

To study how boys become readers and to map their reading paths involved looking at many variables in previous studies. This research in previous studies showed that interests and reading preferences impact boys' reading paths. Although boys share common interests and reading preferences, differences have also been identified among and between groups of boys. Influential adult figures, such as
parents, teachers, and teacher-librarians play a significant role in boys' development as readers through the acts of sharing and recommending. However, school, with its focus on fictional works, projects the idea that being a good reader is being good at reading stories. Therefore, even if a great number of boys who are skilled readers engage in reading activities outside of school - activities involving magazines, newspapers, informational books, graphic novels, etc. - some of them draw back from in-class reading activities, feeling their skills are not acknowledged. In school, peer cultures also play a role in the building of boys' reading paths. If their peer groups are not into reading, the odds are that boys' reading paths will be altered. Nevertheless, popular culture books, such as Harry Potter (Rowling, 2000), Goosebumps (Stine, 1992), and the Captain Underpants (Pilkey, 1997) series, have had a positive impact on peer culture. As such, reading became an attractive activity, something that a boy could do and still be "popular" among his peers. Boys' perceptions of reading as an activity could also modify their reading paths. Researchers adopting a social learning theory or poststructuralist point of view had a different approach in tackling and explaining society's influence on boys in general and on boys as readers in particular. Boys' agency, their ability to negotiate the different variables mentioned previously, should also considered when reading paths are discussed.

## III RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is qualitative: it explores a specific phenomenon (Best \& Kahn, 1998; Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1988), i.e. preadolescent boys' paths to reading, to "uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon" (Merriam, p. 10), the overarching question being: What are the paths to reading taken by particular preadolescent boys?

To gather data I used the in-depth interview method. This method, according to Merriam (1988), produces rich data that helps explain complicated phenomena. As preadolescent boys' paths to reading seemed to be influenced by various factors, I believed this method would be efficient to gather data on this topic. Moreover, as I wanted to know about boys' paths to reading from the inside, from the boys themselves, in-depth interviews served this purpose well.

I led five individual interviews with boys, ages 11 to 13 years old, and a group interview with all five of them. I chose to interview preadolescent boys in their last years of elementary school, since research indicates these years are critical in boys' paths to reading (Sullivan, 2003). During these years, boys are still close to their families and have good memories of their childhood, but they are also strongly influenced by their peers. They desire more independence, yet they still need their parents. Moreover, at this age, boys are able to express their opinions and talk about what they like and dislike. This competence was useful in my study since I was learning directly from the boys which paths they were taking to reading and what had influenced their self-construction as readers. I focused on print reading materials, such
as novels, informational books, graphic novels, comics, magazines, newspapers, (sports) cards, etc.

## Subjects

Five boys were selected to participate in the study. I decided not to include variables such as a range of socio-economic status, ethnicity or literacy ability when choosing the participants in the study. I simply used a "first come first served" convenience sample, and included the first five boys who showed interest in the study. The boys were identified through a public library, where I had placed posters. A school librarian from an elementary school, who had seen the posters at the public library, also talked about the project to some students at her school. On the poster [See Appendix II: Poster] I indicated that boys did not need to be book lovers, and that they only needed to be interested in talking about their reading habits and what they were reading at the moment. The five boys who showed interest in the study were, however, all readers of fiction. I will discuss how this fact influenced the results of this study in the last chapter.

## Data Collection

Interviews took place in a large metropolitan area in Western Canada. I chose a library setting, instead of a school setting, because I wanted to learn more about boys' reading in general, not just their school reading. I also wanted the boys to feel at ease when talking with me, and not to feel they were being tested, or that they had to find
the right answers to my questions. A classroom or school library might not have been appropriate, since schools might have been associated with tests and evaluations. I hoped that being in a library would relieve the boys from the stress of having to perform as if being tested. The results were positive: the five boys were relaxed, and they enjoyed both the individual and the group interview.

Data collection for this study happened in two phases, which took place within the month of May 2006. The first phase involved individual interviews with each participant separately. Interviews were conducted either right after school or after dinner, depending on the boys' and their parents' availability. I audio-recorded the interviews. The digital recorder intrigued the boys, so we tested it together, at the beginning of each interview, and I had them listen to their voice, to demystify the process for them.

Each interview lasted between 40 to 50 minutes. An interview script with a list of questions [See Appendix VI: Individual Interview Protocol] was the basis for these interviews. Questions were designed to bring information related to my research subquestions, which came from a review of the literature that revealed a range of factors related to boys' reading paths. My specific research questions, as mentioned in previous chapters, are:

1) Do general interests, reading preferences and reading mentors influence these boys' choices of reading materials, and if so, how?
2) Does school, and the kinds of reading that are valued in school, influence what these boys choose to read outside of school? And if so, how?
3) What perceptions do these boys have of reading? Are these perceptions
related to their reading paths?
4) Do these boys' agency influences their paths to reading? And if so, how?
5) Do peers and popular culture influence these boys' paths to reading? If so, how?
6) Which, if any, of the previously mentioned factors have the strongest influence and how are these factors correlated?

Interview questions were open-ended to allow participants to talk freely about their experiences, so that they could create "a response to the question without being forced into response possibilities" (Creswell, 2005, p. 215). The interview was semi-structured (Merriam, 1988; Williamson, 2002), in the sense that I did not follow the script rigidly. Interviewees were encouraged to talk about their experience, and questions were asked to follow the flow of the discussion. Some questions pertained directly to the boys' personal experiences, whereas others stated some "facts" and then asked the boys to express their opinions about these statements. I also used readers' narratives very short texts presenting different situations related to reading - to change the rhythm of the interview, to keep the boys interested and to trigger facts that direct questions about the boys' own experience might not have brought out. The use of this tool had produced very rich data in other studies (Smith \& Wilhelm, 2000). In the case of my study, they triggered some interesting data, but some of the boys' comments were not connected to reading or to literature. For instance, one interviewee commented on how the character in the narrative had to take the bus. The last part of the interview was a browsing session in the library. I asked the boys to explain to me how they choose a book, and to show me books they had taken out of the library, or
books they would like to read. This short segment of the interview provided me with insights on how they choose books and what kinds of books appeal to them and why.

The second phase was a group interview with the same five boys. It was quite a challenge to schedule this interview: parents, who had to drive their boys to the library, had various engagements; boys had track and field, soccer or scouts meeting, and I also had my own schedule. We finally found an evening where everyone could meet, but three of the boys also had a scout meeting on the same night, so I had to keep the interview short: it lasted 50 minutes instead of the 60-70 minutes I had originally planned for. To respect the time limit, I made a heartbreaking selection among the questions I wanted to ask the boys [See Appendix VII: Group Interview Protocol]. I tried to focus on themes such as perceptions of reading, influence of popular culture, friends, and school on reading, and asked follow-up questions whenever the boys came up with something relevant to their reading paths. Regardless of the short amount of time we had, the group interview took place in a relaxed atmosphere. The boys "warmed up" by making a poster on which they had to write or draw answers to the following questions: What do you like to read? Why? What has influenced you to start reading? [For specific instructions, see Appendix VII: Group Interview Protocol]. They presented their poster to the group before I started asking my questions. I had warned them that, due to the short amount of time we had together, we would have to stay really focused on the questions, and that I would warn them whenever they were off topic. Off topic exchanges happened a few times. For instance, a title of a book would start an exchange where boys where merely retelling the stories in details to each other. The fact that they like to retell stories to
each other is interesting, but retelling in itself is not relevant to the study. I gave the boys a few minutes before bringing them back to whatever question we were discussing. The boys laughed when I told them they were "off-topic", but they followed the lead and focused back on the question.

## Data Analysis

The first step in the analysis was to transcribe the interviews. I sat in front of my computer for many days, with headphones on, trying to be true to what the boys where saying. Although some researchers, such as Mishler (as cited in Seidman, 1998), have written that a transcript is an incomplete representation of the interview, it still has to reflect the interview to the greatest possible extent. The interviewees did not speak in paragraphs neither did they clearly indicate the end of their sentences by voice inflection. Punctuating had to be done thoughtfully: Kvale has said that it is "one of the beginning points of the process of analyzing and interpreting the material" (as cited in Seidman, 1998, p. 99). In a few instances I could not make out the exact words, so I used double parentheses to indicate a doubt about the accuracy of my transcription. When material was impossible to make out, I used the following symbols: ( xx ) (For details about transcript conventions, Appendix VIII: Transcript Conventions). The group interview was quite challenging to transcribe, as the boys often spoke at the same time, interrupted each other, etc. Moreover, two of the boys were twin brothers and they had similar voices. I often had to listen to their individual interviews and compare the voice to figure out which one of them was talking.

Fortunately, I used the boys' name quite a few times to ask their opinions, which helped during the transcription. I did, however, assign a few lines to "boys" or "boy" since I could not identify who was talking among the five interviewees. Following the transcription phase, I entered what Wellington (2000) named the immersion phase where I immersed myself in the data. I listened to parts of the recording, I read and reread my transcript, trying to hear, as suggested by Rilet and Rubin and Rubin "what [my] data have to say to [me]" (as cited in Wellington, 2000, p.135).

Following transcription and immersion, I entered the phase where I needed to create meaning out of what turned out to be over 70 pages of data material. I was faced with two ways to organize and analyze my data. I could approach the task manually, a method characteristically used by qualitative researchers (Opie, C., 2004) or I could use a qualitative data analysis software such as Nvivo. To code, I chose the latter, seeing it as an opportunity for professional development, knowing that a software could help in the process of sorting and coding but, as Tesch explains, it could not replace my own analysis and intuition (as cited in Wellington, 2000).

Keeping in mind my research questions, which formed initial categories, I read through my data. Initial categories were Reading in relation to other interests, Adults as reading mentors, Schools' influence on reading, Perceptions of reading, Agency, and Peers and popular culture. I brought these existing categories - a priori categories derived from previous literature - to the data and used them to make sense of it (Wellington, 2000). However, as Wellington suggests, pre-existing categories may not be enough to exhaust all the data, and new categories have to be created in order to make sense of the new data. A posteriori categories were added: Reading habits and Perceptions of books.

Categories were also broken into subcategories, reflecting themes and sub-themes I found in the boys' answers to my interview questions. For instance, for the a priori category "Perceptions of reading and readers" I created the following list: Perceptions of reading and readers

- Characteristics of readers/evolution over time
- Self as reader/ evolution of self as reader

Compare with readers/non-readers

- Who reads?
- Quality of activity or reading
- Reading as a non-active activity
- Reading and learning
- What one may gain from reading
- Other people's opinions on reading
(For complete list of categories and subcategories, see Appendices IX et X)
I read the five individual interviews at length to define sub-categories. I used Nvivo 7 to classify each segment or utterance within a sub-category, or node in Nvivo's jargon, "that accurately describes the meaning of the text segment" (Creswell, 2005, p. 238). I attempted to include all segments under these sub-categories. If segments did not fit, I developed new sub-categories in which they could fit. Wellington (2000) suggests that this process, which is part of the phase he named "Taking apart / Analysing data" is very similar to Piaget's processes of assimilation and accommodation by which children make sense of the world. With these readings, the categories and subcategories were refined: some were merged because they were too specific, others
were renamed to better reflect the meaning of segments. For instance, the category Perceptions of reading was renamed Perceptions of reading and readers.

As the categories developed - as segments of data found a place in their own category - I was working on a new stage in data analysis: Recombining / Synthesizing data (Wellington, 2000). The analysis stage literally involves cutting up the data and putting them out of their context, i.e. decontextualizing the data. The re-combining, or synthesis, stage involves recontextualizing it, finding the data a new home (Wellington, p. 136). In order to do so, I printed out a report for each node, or sub-category. A report brings together all materials gathered under this particular node. It showed me where each segment was from, to which interview it referred. I read the reports at length, numerous times, going back and forth between the original scripts of each interview and the reports. It allowed me to consider whether what I was reading in the reports fit in with the original context of the interview. From Bathmaker's point of view, contextual locating is crucial when it comes to interpreting qualitative data (as cited in Opie, C., 2004). She adds it is "important to be able to retain the original context in the analytic process and switch back and forth between analytic material and the original data" (as cited in Opie, C., 2004, p. 173).

In this manner - alternating between analytic material and my original data - I wrote down a first draft of results, keeping in mind my research sub-questions, an approach to analysis suggested by Wellington (2000). He stated that when data has been divided up into manageable units or categories, each "unit" could be associated with a research question. Matching units to questions, helps gradually shed light on those questions. I looked at the boys' answers from their individual interviews, as
well as from the group interview. In each category, I wrote what struck me as important either because more than one boy expressed a shared perception or a similar experience, or because one boy's comments were rather different from that of the other boys. I used the method of "constant comparison and contrast" as Delamont suggested in Fieldwork in Educational Settings (2002), and searched for irregularities, paradoxes and contrast as well as patterns, regularities and themes. After writing the results, I worked on the discussion, providing my interpretation of the five boys' comments.

After this first draft, I used the word search function of my software and replaced the boys' real name by pseudonyms. I had encouraged the boys to choose their own pseudonyms as I felt it was a good way to get them interested in the study. It was a little bonus for them and it solved the problem of having to choose plausible names (Delamont, 2002). From then on, I knew the five boys by their pseudonyms: Cam, John, Xela, Joey and Ryder.

## Summary

This research is a qualitative study focusing on five boys, ages 11 to 13 years old, and their reading paths. Data collection happened in two phases: the first phase involved individual interviews with each participant separately; the second one, a group interview with the same five boys. Questions for both interviews were designed to gather data in relation to my research sub-questions, which came from a preliminary review of the literature. Data analysis was comprised of overlapping phases: transcription of the interviews, immersion into the data, coding using a priori
and a posteriori categories (Wellington, 2000), and recombining / synthesizing data (Wellington, 2000). I then used the "constant comparison and contrast" method (Delamont, 2002) to write the results and the discussion.

## Limitations of the study

Given the small sample of boys I used in this study, and the way they were located, it is clear to me the data gathered cannot be generalized to other populations or settings (Morrow, 2005). Moreover, "boys", as a category, is problematic from postructuralist perspectives, as boys cannot be described as a monolithic or homogeneous group. I do not attempt to make dichotomous arguments where boys who are readers are opposed to boys who do not read. Instead I try to contribute to the understanding of the issue of gender and reading as a complex one.

## Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness does not simply occur: Padgett has suggested it was the result of "rigorous scholarship" (as cited in Lietz, Langer and Furman, 2006). In this research trustworthiness has been increased by the use of different strategies. I have' attempted, following Sturman's suggestions, to clearly explain the procedures I have used to gather data (as cited in Opie, C., 2004), including my interview protocol. I have given the five boys I interviewed an opportunity to speak to issues in a group format, establishing some triangulating data. I have described how I coded the data, offering a kind of transparency to the data analysis, and thus enabling readers to judge for themselves the validity of the findings. I have also attempted to be reflexive and "not
to waste time trying to eliminate 'investigator effects' [but] instead [concentrating] on understanding those effects" (Delamont, 2002, p. 8).

## Preview of the Following Chapter

The following chapter introduces briefly the five boys and presents the findings of the study in relation to each of the specific research questions, i.e. the influence of general interests and reading preferences, reading mentors, schools, perception of reading and readers, agency, and peers and popular culture. Following these findings, I tell the story of two of the boys, in order to fully address the overarching question I explored in this research study, in a recontextualized way: What are the paths taken by particular preadolescent boys to reading?

## IV RESULTS

The major purpose of this qualitative study was to explore particular preadolescent boys' paths to reading by using individual and group interviews with five boys, from grade 5 to grade 7 . Through a review of the existing literature, I had identified many factors that were said to influence boys' reading habits, attitudes and choices of reading, i.e. their path to reading. This chapter presents the results of this study, gathered from interviews done with the boys. It begins with a brief introduction of the five interviewees: Cam, Xela, John, Ryder and Joey. Results are then organized in six sections, each section addressing data related to a research subquestion: reading in relation to other interests, adult as reading mentors, school's influence on reading, perceptions of reading and readers, agency, and peers and popular culture. The last section of this chapter presents two stories: the first one focuses on Cam, the second focuses on John. I have decided to draw a detailed portrait of these two boys since I felt that, among the five interviewees, they were the most different from each other, providing another lens through which to examine their unique reading paths and influences.

The Boys
I designed the advertising poster [see Appendix II], asking for volunteers, using images of magazines, sports cards, and boys reading comics, etc. I was hoping it would attract different kinds of readers - including readers of novels, informational books, magazines, comics, etc. I also wrote on the poster that volunteers only needed to read "a little, sometimes, or a lot", to express clearly the idea that volunteers did not need to be reading day in and day out. It turned out that the five subjects who showed interest in the study read mainly fiction. The study did not attract boys who read magazines, informational books, or comics, as I had hoped. Did the library setting not attract them? Or maybe, these readers - ones who read magazines, informational books, or comics - did not see the poster because they do not attend the library as often as fiction readers? For instance, Cam, one of my interviewees, told me one of his classmates, who did not read novels, was encouraged by their school librarian to participate in the study, but he had no desire to take part in it. Readers who preferred materials other than novels might also have felt they did not meet the criteria for this study or that they had nothing to say because they were not "reading" (similar to the boys in Smith's \& Wilhelm's (2002) study). Therefore, the data I have gathered comes from boys who mainly read novels. Cam told me, during the group interview that they were not representative of all boys, and the other boys agreed with him.

Nevertheless, their opinions and experiences allow me to shed light on the question of what influences particular boys' reading paths, and to see clearly that each boy has his own and unique path. Before presenting the results from these interviews, let us meet
the boys.

## Cam

Cam, a 13-year-old seventh grader, was a talkative boy. The librarian at the public library knew him well as a member of the Red Cedar Award group, a very enthusiastic member. As a matter of fact, he was so talkative that during the group interview I sometimes had to ask him to wait before he talked for a second or third time about the same question, in order to give the others a chance to express their opinions. Cam absolutely loved fantasy and adventures novels: at the time of the interview, he was rereading The Edge Chronicles (Stewart, 1998) as well as the Harry Potter series (Rowling, 2000).

## Xela

Xela, a 13-year-old seventh grader, was a quiet boy, maybe even a little shy. He liked to read novels, especially fantasy, science fiction and crime/spy novels. Prior to the interview, he had just read several books by Norah McClintock, and he had really enjoyed them. During his individual interview, Xela's answers were often short, and I had to probe him to obtain details. During the group interview, he often played with a pen or drummed on the table, but he seemed to always know what the question was, even if, a few times, his answer was only, "I agree with Cam". The two boys were good friends: they were in the same group in school, they recommended books to each other, and referred to each other as "my friend" in their individual interviews.

## John

John, an 11-year-old fifth grader, was the youngest boy participating in the study. He was also the only boy attending a different school. John preferred to read novels, mainly adventure/action and military stories, but he also said he has read some non-fiction and sports books. He really liked video games, which he talked about a lot. As a matter of fact, the series he was reading at the time of the interview was Halo (Nylund, 2001), an eponymous series of an X-Box game he really liked.

## Ryder

Ryder, a 12-year-old sixth grader, was an eager reader who was really interested in fantasy and mythology. He was passionate about dragons and swords. During his individual interview, Ryder kept glancing at a puppet dragon that was right beside us in a basket. He had just read Eragon (Paolini, 2003) and Eldest (Paolini, 2005) and told me that I absolutely had to read these great books.

## Joey

Joey, a 12-year-old sixth grader, was an eager reader, like Ryder, his twin brother. He really liked to read magic and adventure books. At the time of the interview, he was reading Magyk, (Sage, 2005), The Penultimate Peril, (Snicket, 2005) and Artemis Fowl (Colfer, 2001). Joey often read three or four books simultaneously. He was "loyal" to some lower level series, such as The Guardians of Ga'Hoole (Lasky, 2003), that he liked as a "kid". As the publisher did not bring out the whole series when he was younger, he wanted to finish reading the series because he really liked it.

Here are the results taken from the five boys' interviews. A large portion of the results presented come from the individual interviews, which were a rich source of data. When results are from the group interview, I clearly state this fact.

## Reading in Relation to Other Interests

The five boys in my study are really busy: they have responsibilities, such as chores, taking care of younger siblings, etc. They also have many interests that they fulfill in their free time: they do sports, they have scout meetings, they play Lego, they watch television or play video games, and two of them even have a dog walking business. Despite being busy, Cam, Joey and John still mentioned reading as one of their leisure activities, but Joey recognized that he had been so busy lately that he had no time to read. Cam admitted that in the morning, he would cut his allotted reading time to train for track and field, but he would never cut his reading time at night. As Sullivan (2003) has pointed out, reading does have to compete for time with other activities and responsibilities, even in the hearts of eager readers. John, for instance, who also voiced an interest in reading, had a hard time deciding what he would choose between playing videogames and reading a series he enjoys, like Starcraft (Grubb, 2001). He said it was a difficult question because with:

Video games you can choose what you do (...) With the book/ you can like/ picture what is happening/ even though like you picture it sunny and then/ it says "in the white snow", oh like when you say "oh it's
snowing" then you change the sun to snow.
John's conclusion, however, was that he "would rather play videogames cause it's more interactive", which may be related to Smith's and Wilhelm's (2002) discussion of the importance boys grant to feedback in the activities they enjoy (p.38). Cam, Joey and Ryder also mentioned that video games were quite a popular hobby among their male friends: they said that some of their friends were "addicted" to video games. Like John, other boys may well be choosing to play video games over reading. John's interest in video games, however, had another effect, as it had an influence on his reading preference: he was the only boy in the group whose reading preferences were related to some of his personal interests.

It is interesting to note that, contrary to what my review of the literature had suggested (Brozo, 2002; Blair \& Sanford, 2003), personal interests did not appear to influence the four other interviewees' reading preferences. Xela, who likes to build Lego, had no interest in reading about Lego products. He said: "reading all the new products that they have just doesn't really interest me." Ryder and Joey recalled reading only one book about martial arts, which is one of the sports they practice, and it was only "kinda interesting" (Ryder). As for Cam, his statement was clear:

Cam: I don't really like sports books.
GB: Do you know why?
Cam: I just like to play sports/ I don't really like/ that interested in them/ It's just something I do for fun.

In these four boys' lives, reading preferences and personal interests are two independent spheres. As mentioned earlier, John is an exception in this group. He
stands out since he really likes to play video games, and he is drawn toward books inspired by the video games he knows, such as Halo (Nylund, 2001) and Starcraft (Grubb, 2001). During the group interview, when John expressed this liking, the other boys giggled and made faces, expressing a lack of interest in these books. Even if the four other boys played video games, they showed no interest in reading about them. Halo (Nylund, 2001) and Starcraft (Grubb, 2001) series did not fit their definition of interesting books. I would argue that the four boys were classifying Halo (Nylund, 2001) and Starcraft (Grubb, 2001) as easy, or even childish, books, and they have voiced their interest in thicker books.

As for reading preferences, the boys clearly acknowledged that various topics interested them: swords, dragons, magic, the military, and action. Ryder had a predilection for books about dragons and swords. On our browsing tour of the library, all the books he showed me, whether they were ones he had already read or ones he wanted to read, portrayed dragons and/or swords on the cover. Joey was really into magic: he was reading Magyk, (Sage, 2005), The Penultimate Peril, (Snicket, 2005) and Artemis Fowl (Colfer, 2001). On our browsing tour of the library, he pulled out books from the shelves about Merlin and many other books portraying magicians. As for Xela, he liked mystery and crime novels, and had read every Norah McClintock book, but during the browsing tour, he mainly pulled out fantasy novels such as Mister Monday (Nix, 2003) and Archer's Goon (Jones, 1984). For these four boys, like many others, fantasy was first choice (Wolfson et al., 1984). They read fantasy to learn about imaginary creatures and phenomena, but also because they enjoy being drawn into worlds different from their own and into incredible adventures. John is a bit of a loner
in the group, as he did not read fantasy: he preferred action and "military stuff". Books he pulled out during the browsing tour displayed words such as "prepare to fight", or were inspired by video games. These books' common characteristic was that they were full of action, which is what John enjoys.

When I asked about boys in general, two of the interviewees, John and Cam, stated that activities boys enjoy doing influence their reading preferences.

John: Ya cause like um, in grade 5/boys in my opinion boys are more daring than girls/ like if there were two rocks a boy would be more likely to jump across than a girl / in my opinion.

GB: Ok. They are more daring. Would that change what kind of books they would choose to read?

John: Well it wouldn't- it would sort of make it so they would have a more exciting lifestyle, so they would/ try and read more stuff like that/ and ya/ also people like to read/ um stuff that connects to themselves.

John uses his own experience, and extends it to boys in general, but he might also be relying on what he has seen around him. He and his male friends may be more active and more daring than girls he knows, and he likes books that are full of action; therefore, boys should like the same kinds of books. Cam, on the other hand, separates his own experience from that of other boys. His personal interests do not influence his reading preferences, as we have seen previously, but he believes that it does for some boys. He explained that "[i]f you like hockey, the chances are you're gonna like
hockey books more than people who / hate hockey and prefer soccer."
Another feature of books that seemed to have an effect on these boys' choices is the outside appearance of the books. Even if we often hear that one should not judge a book by its cover, these boys did so. When asked how boys in general choose books, the interviewees said they look for cool covers and illustrations that catch their attention. During the browsing tour of the library, the interviewees showed me covers that attracted them. These covers presented elements that relate in some ways to their reading preferences. Ryder showed me dragons and swords; Joey, magical objects and magicians; John, wolves, fire, and snakes. Words were also significant: John saw "prepare to fight", and he was definitely hooked. But there are also books that, from the first look, are rejected, also because of reading preferences and/or personal interests. For Xela, a cover illustration with snakes and ghosts was not appealing because he does not like these characters. However, he did not go as far as to generalise to all boys his lack of interest: Xela separated his own interests and preferences from that of other boys.

Authors also had an influence on book selection. Many series were a first choice when these boys were looking for something to read. Cam was impatiently waiting for the ninth book in The Edge Chronicles (Stewart, 1998); John was reading the last book of the Halo series (Nylund, 2001); Xela had read the Dive (Korman, 2003) and the Everest (Korman, 2002) series, and was reading the Island (Korman, 2001); Joey was reading two series at the time, The Guardian of Ga'hoole (Lasky, 2003) and A Series of Unfortunate Events (Snicket, 1999).

## Adult as Reading Mentors

The five boys interviewed talked about adults who recommend and offer books to them - adults who play the role of a mentor. First, they mentioned their parents who supplied them with books and stories (Millard, 1997). Ryder and Joey's mother had a great influence on their beginning as readers, and she was a key element in the development of their passion for fantasy.

Ryder: Cause when we were younger, my mom used to read a lot/I remember we did all the Harry Potter books before bed. When it came out we'd all go in the big bed, read a chapter and then bed time/ next night the same thing.

Joey: When my mom used to read to me Harry Potter or other books, we really- we always wanted to and we never wanted her to stop / we just always say "one more page".

They liked the Harry Potter series (Rowling, 2000) so much, that it persuaded them to read other books about magic. During the warm-up section of the group interview, both of them stated that they started to read because they wanted to be able to read by themselves, instead of being read to. Bedtime reading still holds a special glow for them, even if the twins now read by themselves: it is one of their favourite time to read, and Joey likes to "sometimes stay up late reading without permission". John's father also acted as a mentor: he read Indian stories to John and his brother. It did not, however, lead John to read more of these stories, even if he enjoyed those readings. John did not elaborate on how often and when these reading took place, like Ryder
and Joey did. He, however, remembers vividly the first book he read by himself: his mother had offered it to him.

John: She got me reading a book called like it was a one-day /like 30minutes book, like it's called the Ten Minutes till Bedtime / and it was the first book I ever read/ and it was actually really funny. I was like four even when I was like four / and sometimes I just / for the fun of it / pull it out of the shelf and read it.

John's parents' influence is not as striking as the twins' mother's influence, but it played a part in John's positive attitude toward reading.

The boys also explained that they had received books from parents and relatives - another mentoring act. Four of the five interviewees said that they had books at home and that they often read books from their own library. For instance, Cam discovered Silverwing (Oppel, 1997) because an aunt gave it to him. He stated that if he were given a book, he would read it. Cam has received good books as gifts and he thinks receiving books is great. When he receives another book, he is inclined to read it. For both the twins and Cam, positive experiences related to reading have helped establish an equally positive attitude toward reading.

The interviewees also made reference to their school librarian and their teacher as people who recommend books. Three of the boys (Xela, Cam, and Joey) described their librarian as someone who has read a lot of books and, best of all, as Xela explains: "she always recommends good books to everyone cause she knows what most people like". He said the librarian often initiated interests in a series or an author among his classmates:

The librarian will tell someone and shows it [a particular book] to them "this is a good book" / or "this is a good author" / and we'll read it and go "oh! This IS a good author" and we share with each other.

And the good news spreads. Xela's comment is coherent with recent findings of Kalinowski's research (2006) that has shown a significant association between pupils' (both boys and girls) enjoyment of reading and the presence of a librarian in their school. Xela also spoke of how his grade-one teacher got him into reading with her special systems of rewards. John talked about his teacher, of whom he has a high opinion, because he has a "five years like master degree in literature", and because he has recommended good books. Ryder, however, remembered a weird book about cavemen and paintings, which he disliked, and it was a teacher or a librarian who had recommended it. During the group interview, Ryder stated matter-of-factly that, "what teachers read do not influence what [he] chose to read."

Within this small sample of preteen boys, women's presence as model or mentor dominates men's presence. Boys mentioned more women - mothers, teachers, and teacher-librarians - than men who have had influence on their reading path. Boys also remark on men - fathers and one teacher - but their influence seems to have been less important, or at least the boys do not provide as many details about it.

The following section, which addresses the influence of schools on the interviewees' reading paths, is related to the previous discussion about teachers and teacher-librarians' influence. I will, however, focus on some examples of literary activities given by the boys, instead of the people initiating the activities.

## School's Influence on Reading

My review of the existing literature suggested that school's influence on boys was mostly negative and that a great number of boys were losing interest in reading because of the school definitions of literacy (Bintz, as cited in Worthy, 1998; Hall and Cole, 2001; Millard, 1997). From the way the five interviewees talked about school even if it was not a topic about which they were really loquacious - it appeared that school has some influence on their choice of reading, but it is not major. These boys' interest in reading did not falter, nor did it increase, because of school.

In some cases, new themes were introduced to the boys in school. For instance, John had read about types of government with his classmates in order to prepare for a field trip to the province capital. He really seemed to enjoy reading and discussing these topics at school.

It's sort of interesting to be exposed to new stuff/ like- like I know that Canada is free and democratic but like I can't- something I like to do with my class/ is imagine what it would be like to have an anarchy government/ well not really government but- and/ have a whole discussion about like what are the pros and cons about it.

These readings and discussions did not, however, modify what he was reading outside school. They had a positive impact because they increased John's general knowledge and interest toward politics, but they did not change his choice of reading materials in the short term. At school, John also learned some reading strategies he really enjoyed using with his classmates - such as predicting what will happen - and strategies to choose books, such reading the first page. He still uses the latter when he
chooses books by himself. Through this strategy, school has had a positive influence since John now knows how to select books that fit his reading level as well as his interests. Interestingly, John was the only one to remark on this positive influence of school, and he is the youngest in the group. The other boys mentioned the first-page (or random page) strategy, without acknowledging the origin of the strategy. They possibly learned it at school, but it is not as clear in their memories. It has become an integral part of their habits, it belongs to them, and is a tool they rely on to express a certain degree of independence, as I will discuss in the penultimate section of this chapter.

In class, books chosen by teachers for literature circles and reading aloud are usually books "where some things are true, some things are not" (Ryder), non-fiction articles (Xela), or realistic fiction (Cam). Chosen by teachers, these books are, in Joey's opinion:

Usually not very hard if you-it's kind of/ probably / they're not very long/ they're quite easy (...) but they're not nearly as hard as the ones that me and my brother like to read/like Eragon or Eldest or longer books.

For example, Xela said that on one occasion, Cam and he had already read all the books they could choose from for the literature circle. However, Cam admitted that "lit circle does that, even if the book is completely terrible / then it's still / better if you're discussing it with people and talking about it". And Xela supported Cam's opinion that literature circles were good. They did not perceive a lack of control in classroom book talk, as mentioned by Worthy (1998).

Silent reading is another activity that is present in the five boys' day-to-day school life. During the group interview, Xela boasted about having two-hour sessions of silent reading sometimes, provoking envious sighs from Joey. Joey's classmates do not like silent reading sessions and, because of this fact, they are often cut short. Both Joey and Xela perceived silent reading sessions as rewards. John noted that novels were mandatory in his class, and that he could not read comics. He was the only boy who mentioned that some genres were not allowed in school. For him, it was a source of disappointment since he was not allowed to read Garfield comic books (Davis, 1980).

## Perceptions of Reading and Readers

How boys view reading is a subject I was eager to discuss with the interviewees. My review of the existing literature left me with the impression that, for various reasons, many boys perceive reading as an undesirable activity, something you might do, but not claim out loud that you were doing it. Recent research (Brozo, 2002; Martino, 2001; Maynard, 2002; Millard, 1997; Moffatt, 2003) has shown that boys perceived reading as a feminine activity. The five boys I interviewed did not share this perception: broadly speaking, they had positive perceptions of reading and readers.

The boys' parents, who acted as reading mentors as mentioned in a previous section, acted also as reading models. The five boys noted that at least one of their parents read and/or talked about his or her readings with them. Cam's mother read mostly realistic fiction, John's parents read for their classes or work, and Xela's parents read "pretty big novels most of the time". Joey said his mother reads him bits of her
books. Ryder explained "she has a lot of books like usually about that thick/ and she reads like three at the time." Moreover, the twins are hoping to read The DaVinci Code (Brown, 2003) because their dad is reading it, and has told them a lot about it. The interviewees are in contact with feminine model of readers, as well as masculine model of readers. They do not seem, however, to identify more strongly with what their fathers read, as Hartlage-Striby had suggested (as cited in Sullivan, 2003). As we will see in the next paragraphs, the five boys did not perceive reading as a feminine activity per se.

The statement "reading is for girls or little kids" triggered interesting comments. All of the boys denied this statement.

Xela: It's not for girls or little kids / it's for boys and girls / but also little kids cause/ um / you- a little kid couldn't read huge novels like/ very very big but they could read easier ones.

Ryder: I strongly disagree with that one [the statement "reading is for girls or little kids"] because / um/ I know tonnes of people/ who are older than little kids who read/

Joey: Don't agree I think everybody can read if they want to.
Cam: Some people are of that opinion but I don't think- that's not true and, not to mention some girls don't like reading either.

John: No/ completely not/ like most- it's a true fact/ most people in the world are boys or men/ and (...) it's- so there would probably be a better chance of boys reading/ than girls/ well a bigger percent
of boys that read/ then girls that read/ cause there are more boys.
These boys use their surroundings, what they see around them, to support their belief in reading being an activity that everyone can enjoy.

The question following was: "Do boys read different 'stuff' than girls?" It led the boys to expand on the subject of girls' vs. boys' reading material. Three of the boys believed that many girls read books that are also read by boys.

Cam: The Edge Chronicles my sister introduced me to that/ and oh my sister is really really into Harry Potter/

Ryder: One of my friends she's in the series with me, a girl, and um/ we're reading the Spiderwick series.

Joey: I have a quite few girls in my class, we all like reading / but like just most of my friend and I we'll read magic and adventure again/ it's just I'm not sure, it's just we all like the same kind of stuff.

Four of the boys also believed, however, that some subjects and formats of books appealed to girls only, and that some books were written only for them.

Cam: They [girls] do read different stuff sometimes like girls might read their random/diary novel that I really would not read / I had to read one of those Dear Canada books for Red Cedar and I really did not like it. It was- I hate diary format books.

Series such as Heartland (Brooke, 2000) and Rainbow Magic (Meadows, 2003) are examples, given by Ryder, of books written "specifically" for a female readership. The boys did not know much about these books, and they showed no interest in learning
more about them. About Heartland (Brooke, 2000), Joey could only explain it was about "a girl and her pony". About Rainbow Magic (Meadows, 2003), Joey and Ryder provided no details. John said, "well, the saying - don't judge a book by its cover that actually does- is true, like you actually can". He added that no boys would read a book covered with hearts. During the group interview, John mentioned again this idea of pink books not being interesting for boys. Ryder agreed with him: pink books with little hearts all over the cover are not for boys, but "if dragons would eat pink hearts, that would be ok." Reading was not described or perceived as a strictly feminine activity by the five boys in this study, but some books were. The boys perceived some books as strictly for women because of their format, themes, or outer appearance, but Joey specified that the presence of a girl as main character did not mean a book was a girls' book.

The interviewees did not wish to be associated with girls' books. During the group interview, they actually tried to distance themselves from what they called girls' books. Giggling, Joey said that he doubted anyone would read "Heartlander or pretty princesses diary". Cam talked again about the Dear Canada book he had read. GB: Have you ever read a girls' book?

Cam: $\quad$ Technically / yes/I was being completely convinced by my librarian that it was NOT a girl book/ but it just happened/ to have a girl on the cover/ but it WAS a girl book!

Xela confessed he had read a girls' book when he was younger, but he did not remember it. The boys are distancing themselves from books that are perceived as belonging to the female domain: making fun of girls' books seemed to be a good way
for them to distance themselves from what they were seeing as feminine. In his individual interview, John talked about The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants (Brashares, 2001) which, in his opinion, was the utmost example of a girls' book, and he turned the storyline into ridicule:
[They] are best friends and they go off/ and like ok, like they go off for one summer/ so boys would probably say ok, they won't see each other for a summer, big deal! [But] they have to send pants to each other, like "eeehhh".

During the group interview, Cam expressed the opinion that "there is such a thing as a girl books, but for the most part, there is no such thing for the most part as a boy book". He added, "the stuff boys read are mostly the stuff that both groups read". Joey agreed with the two claims.

I actually agree with Cam because there are a lot of books that are more for girls because they are just like/ about themes boys don't really wanna read about/ adventures of the girl and her best friend the pony/ but then/ girls- there's no many- I read not really many boys' books/ because it's just- girls- most people just- what the majority of people like/ those kind of books not like the pony ones/ and diaries.

The two boys seem to be normalizing their own preferences, and possibly generalizing their interests to others, assuming that whatever they enjoy, others must also enjoy. However there is evidence, throughout the interviews, that both Cam and Joey have an awareness of the preference's of others:

Cam: Well there's lots of a wide group thing- like/ some boys like
sports books and / some like me like fantasy, some people like realistic / there's a whole ton.

Joey: Well first of all they're different person they may like different things to read.

Are girls reading boys' books? Or do some books target both girls and boys? Carlsen (1980) suggested that boys are typically more rigid and limited than girls in their preferences because their likes and dislikes are clearer than those of girls. In other words, girls, when it comes to choosing reading materials, do not "restrict" themselves as boys do. Cam's sister is a good example: she reads the same books as her brother, but also some diary format novels, and Cam interpreted this as "normal" behaviour. But a boy doing the same thing might be regarded as "weird". In the final section of this chapter - on peers and the influence of popular culture on boys' reading path - I will discuss at length the influence of friends.

None of the interviewees perceived reading as a passive activity (Millard, 1997) or as a boring activity, as did the boys in Martino's study (2001). The five boys, as readers of fiction, believe they could learn from reading novels: they learn about made-up adventures, and facts they never knew about imaginary animals such as dragons (Ryder). Cam voiced the idea that reading helps increase one's vocabulary: when you stumble across a new word, you look at the words around it, and you figure out the meaning of the new word. Even if they do not read informational books during their leisure time, the boys also declared that one can learn a lot from reading them. For instance, Xela said you can learn about scorpions, subjects you cannot learn from practice since, in his hometown, they do not have scorpions in their backyard.

However, Cam, Xela, Ryder and Joey clearly stated that reading should not make someone feel smarter than non-readers: they do not feel any smarter than others because they read. Some of their friends do not like to read and are not less intelligent because of it. Cam, for instance, knows a straight-A student who does not read. This indicates an association between being smarter and having better grades at school; therefore, only those acquiring school-related knowledge may be seen as gaining intelligence. John is an outsider on the subject of reading making one more intelligent. He equates it with a job:

If you take a kid who starts reading every/like a chapter everyday/ they have more chance of becoming a millionaire than a- someone who doesn't read/ cause like they would, like with some jobs you have to be able to read really well, like for a librarian.

Another positive view stated by the five boys, in both the individual and the group interview, is that reading is a "cool" activity. Cam explains that "reading in my opinion is not boring because you can go places, like you can read about something and you can kinda feel like you're there". Joey agreed with Cam:

I guess it's just I like to read because it's kind- it's like doing something/ except it's something that you can't do normally because, say, you're there fighting in a battle, you can't really do that/ or you're just riding a horseback cross land/ you can't do that very easily/ and it's just cool/ that you can do anything you want basically when you're reading.

The possibilities of adventure and discovery are endless. On the other hand, the five
boys are aware that some of their classmates have a different outlook on reading: some of them dislike reading, and some go even further and think that reading is stupid. The five boys agree that reading is not a lively activity, and Xela explained that "you wouldn't wanna read a book while your friends are going out playing and stuff having a lot of fun you'd probably be with them", since, as Joey clearly states "I really like to be with my friends". But taking a break and reading together with your friends is not boring. The boys did not seem to be deeply influenced by the fact that some of their friends perceive reading negatively: peers and their influences will be further discussed in the last section of this chapter.

During the individual interviews, I questioned the boys to see if they perceived themselves as readers or not. Xela and Cam reckoned they were readers. Xela stated: "I'm a pretty big reader". Later on he talked about the fact that he has been reading fantasy ever since he was young. As for Cam, he said:

I read books quite a lot, like I... like during silent reading at our class sometimes people aren't reading, they're just like [he looks at the ceiling] pretending to read, but I am reading all the time.

He also reserves specific time at night, at home, to read. Ryder and John made their status as reader conditional to finding good books, or else they do not easily get into reading. John also compared himself to other boys in his class to explain why he is a "halfway" reader: "compare to other people in my class, no, like I'm a bit slow [at reading]." As for Joey, he said he used to be a reader, but he got so busy a while ago, he could not read as much as he would like. But he wants to get back into reading because he really likes it.

During the group interview, John talked about two boys who could read a thick book in two days. According to him, they were perfect examples of readers. Joey, Xela and Cam all exclaimed: "that's me!" As the boys saw themselves as being readers up to some level, I was also interested in knowing if they had a more general definition of readers. I did not discover any major contradiction between what the boys said about themselves and how they defined readers in general. Xela explained that if someone said you are a big reader, it is "not usually used as a insult, it's just used as a comment." Joey defined a reader as someone who likes to read, while Xela, Joey and John felt that a reader is someone who chooses reading over other activities. For John, readers are those who "just rush to writing like a paper, they pull out a book and start reading, they [also] read during recess", and they can read a really thick book in two days. Accordingly to Joey, readers are the students who always read in class, with their book hidden under their desk and who will also "set aside time instead of going and watching TV to actually read a book." Others may also refer to someone as being a reader. Joey explained, for instance, that his teacher librarian calls his class the "readers class" because they always renew many good books from the school library. It is this belief in their status as readers that led the boys to participate in the study.

If the boys agreed on a general definition of readers, they disagreed about the kinds of readings a "reader" does. In this, they do not differ from researchers and educators who have been having ongoing discussions on the kind of readings that are valuable in and out of school (Blair \& Sanford, 2003; Hall \& Cole, 2001; Smith \& Wilhelm, 2002). Xela expressed the opinion that reading magazines and hockey cards was not "a whole lot of reading". For Joey and Ryder, it mattered not: someone who
reads magazines or newspapers is also a reader. Cam's comment was more abstract: according to him, a reader is "someone who likes to read books and not just text that's anywhere, just like you would say a writer is not just someone who writes down stuff, but someone who writes, likes to write." So reading a note from a friend does not make someone a reader, but does Cam consider articles in magazines "text that's anywhere"? As Cam used the word "books", he might agree with Xela that magazines and hockey cards are not "a whole lot of reading".


#### Abstract

Agency

The five interviewees, when talking about themselves, were really clear about their reading preferences: they knew what genres they were interested in, and what subjects they liked to read about. This awareness did not prevent them from listening to someone - adults, siblings or friends - giving them advice on which books to read. However, Cam said that his parents "sometime they have like different tastes and stuff"; therefore, when they give him a book, he might get something that he did not like. Ryder and Joey also agreed on this statement: because people have different tastes and interests, they cannot be absolutely sure from the start that they will enjoy the book that is recommended to them. Xela, Ryder and Joey use straightforward techniques to evaluate books that are recommended to them: Xela reads the first few pages, Ryder reads the back of the book and the first chapter, and Joey reads a few chapters. Using these techniques allows them to decide whether they want to read the book or not.


When it comes to reading a book nobody wants to read, however, Xela said he would probably not read it: he specified he usually "sticks with [his] friends' judgement". Xela does not challenge the choice of books that are rejected by his group of friends. On the other hand, the four other boys said they would deviate from the line drawn by their peers: they would read a book none of their friends wants to read. Ryder: I read/some books like/ like some of my friends think/dragons are stupid and/ I think/ like fascinated or like / I'm like superabout dragons and swords.

Cam: If like if I read "of this is suppose to be a good book" and my friends are like "I don't think it's that good" I'd still- I'd still probably try and read it but/yes / cause I usually just read whatever I feel like reading/especially when I have nothing to read.

John and Joey provided examples of series they love but that no one else is reading in their class: John is reading Halo (Nylund, 2001) and Joey, The Guardian of Ga'Hoole (Lasky, 2003). The boys are ready to challenge their friends tastes and interests to pursue their own. However, as I have discussed in the previous section, the five interviewees would not go as far as to read books that are labelled "girls' books".

On the subject of assertion of agency among boys in general, I collected interesting comments from the five interviewees. Cam, Joey, Ryder and John argued that boys have the choice to assert their agency when they are choosing reading material (Goffman as cited in Cherland, 1994).

Cam: There's no, like, limits saying, laws saying "boys cannot
read this book"/ or- or that "girls cannot read this book"/ It's- you're allowed to read whatever you want.

Joey: $\quad$ Ya, if they- if- if a boy wants to read a girl book or something/ just cause / or something that maybe doesn't look that - like- good, um, they can and if they wanna read something about/ something that maybe we thought of something that girls like to do/ that's fine, cause that's their opinion.

Ryder: [Boys] could read Heartland if they wanted / but they aren't interested in stories like that.

John: [It is not important that girls and boys read different books, but] people would do it/ but like if they had the choice to read something/ like what they like/ or The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants / they would choose what they like.

But the interviewees also made a few comments suggesting that boys might not always have the choice or the right to read whatever they want.

GB: Can boys read whatever they want?
Xela: $\quad$ Ya / but um / sometimes like / they're a bit pressured not to read pink covered books /

GB: Pressured?

Xela: Oh well / like being joked-they're joked at / "ha ha, you're reading a pink book, ha ha ha"/it makes him feel like "oh, I don't
really wanna read this anymore" / but most of the time / there's not really anything wrong about reading a pink book / just some people in their friend groups/ don't / their friends don't like them reading pink books / they sort of have a rep or something / it takes away sort of their reputation reading pink books cause pink/ most people think is a girl colour.

As for Ryder, he put forward the idea that some boys might be afraid or embarrassed to talk about some books, if they are "corny" books. Reading a specific book seemed not a question of choice anymore, but a question of what was "dictated" by society. Ryder and Xela have said that consequences of stepping outside of the boundaries of normative masculinity (Moffatt, 2003), of reading a girls' book, go from being joked at to being embarrassed. John went further. When asked what would happen if he read a book with little hearts on the cover, he first stated that he would not do it, and after probing he added: "I would/ I could/ overnight I grow long hair/ and like become a girl."

## Peers and Popular Culture

The five interviewees mingle with peers who are both readers and non-readers. The term "peers" here refers to friends, classmates and siblings of about the same age. During the group interview, when I asked if most of their friends were readers, Ryder answered right away "no, no, no". The others jumped right in to name the various other activities their peers favour over reading: they are addicted to video games, they like music, and they play sports. During the group interview, Cam stated that: "Lots of boys do not read anymore. They don't like it". Xela and Ryder agreed with him. Joey went further:

Well, actually I do agree cause a lot of my friends/ they will just basically/ pretend they're reading cause they just don't like reading/ I don't know but that's again they prefer to do other things. In spite of that, friends, classmates and siblings who do enjoy reading, who have recommended a good book before and/or who have similar reading interests, are more likely to influence the boys' choice of reading. Cam explained:

I- well sometimes they- like some of my friends who I trust their- like Ilike my friend who doesn't really like reading that much if he said like "oh I didn't like this book"/ I really wouldn't like really trust that much but / like Xela, if he said this isn't a good book I'd be- I might actually like stop and consider it.

Cam has also recommended many excellent books to Xela. As a result, in his individual interview, Xela said: "I'm pretty sure I'm gonna enjoy it [the recommended
book] because he [Cam] / me and him read the same sort of things / so if he likes the books / I'll probably like it." For these two boys, who are both devoted readers, friendship plays a positive role as it influences their path to reading. For the other boys, however, the influence is not as straightforward. Joey, for instance, said that "[his friends] don't really ever recommend books to me/ cause we kind of do our own things with books." In his case, peer recommendation is insufficient: he has to be personally excited about the book. Joey mentioned, however, that his twin brother has recommended Eragon and Eldest (Paolini, 2003, 2005) and "they sound really good cause [Ryder]/ like my dad/ he is good at explaining things." Joey is really looking forward to reading these books.

Recommendations by a friend or a sibling may go further and create a real network. Cam's sister found the first book of The Edge Chronicles (Stewart, 1998) series while browsing the library, and she told Cam about it. He read it, loved it, and recommended it to Xela and to another friend, who recommended it to other classmates, and so on. It got their entire grade reading the series. The same scenario was happening with Eragon and Eldest (Paolini, 2003, 2005) in Ryder's class: the books had been recommended to Ryder by a friend and, at the time of the interview, Ryder was spreading the good news, talking about the books and getting his brother and classmates to read them.

Discussing books is an activity in which four interviewees out of five take part. As I mentioned in the section about the influence of school on reading, Cam said that literature circles make books better, because at least one may discuss it with peers. But even outside the established setting of literature circles, the interviewees like to
discuss books.

Xela: [Cam and I] sort of discuss which parts of the same book that we've both read are good and which aren't good / which characters we like which we don't, that sort of stuff.

Joey: Like the first story [in the Series of Unfortunate Events series] we can talk about it/ cause we like to talk about the books and the characters and sometimes we even turn them into games. It [discussing a book] first well it builds friendship and also it's just interesting to talk about the story.

Cam: Like it [discussing a book] helps- it helps you understanding the book in my opinion cause like /if you're discussing something "Oh what do you think is going to happen next?"

John: Like some people phone me and say/ we start talking and then/ somehow we get into a conversation about like our favourite books.

During the group interview, whenever someone pronounced a title that others had read and liked, a tangent conversation was initiated about the book itself: the characters, the storyline, the qualities of the books, the adventures, etc.

A value that is expressed by every interviewee, concerning friends and reading, is respect. The boys believe real friends respect what you like and what you read; therefore, they do the same.

GB: What would you do or say, if anything, if one of your friends was reading something you don't like to read? For instance, if your friend was reading only magazines and you really didn't like magazines?

Xela: Well I would recommend couples of good books to him but if he doesn't really want to read them I'll just let him be/ cause he has his rights to read what he wants/so/

Joey: Well I'd be ok with it, um, just/ I'm/ not quite sure cause I'd be perfectly fine/ perfectly fine because that's their choice of reading/ I like what I'm reading, they like what they're reading as long as they're happy/ I'm ok.

Ryder: I wouldn't say anything really / I'm not rude.

John: I would just say ok that you wanna read it, fine/ I like what I like and you like what you like / as I said before it's a free and democratic country.

Cam: I know that everyone has their own choices of reading so I wouldn't say anything / cause if they like magazines that's good/ they like it- I try and encourage my friends to read but/ like as long as they're reading...

During the group interview, the boys reiterated their belief in respect. Ryder and Xela explained that if a boy has good friends, they will respect him and what he reads.

Cam and John agreed that good friends do not tell you to stop reading. Respect from friends, at a time in their lives when friends' opinions are highly regarded, allows boys
to fulfill their potential as readers, by reading whatever they want to read, or by not reading. Related to respect of other people's reading, I want to mention an event that happened during the group interview. John disclosed the following information: he is reading Halo (Nylund, 2001) and he loves it. Cam exclaimed "oh my god" and brought his palm to his forehead, shaking his head disapprovingly. Joey asked, with disbelief "they made a book?" Even among boys who valued respect, comments like this one happen. The boys were not rude, far from it, but Cam and Ryder showed a bit of snobbery toward a book they probably felt was not the high quality of their books.

As a part of youth popular culture, movies and video games also play a part in the boys' choice of reading material. John talked about how he knew Halo, the video game, before he started reading the books (Nylund, 2001). The video game is what got him into reading the books. Xela has heard about The DaVinci Code (Brown, 2003) because his father was reading it. He also wanted to see the movie and try to read the book. After seeing The Lord of the Rings film trilogy (Jackson, 2001, 2002, 2003) on the big screen, Joey tried to read the books, but they were "kind of drawing out, quite long." In the course of the group interview, the subject of movies/videos and books triggered quite a long exchange between the boys. Joey stated: "videos suck compare to the books." Cam and Ryder agreed, but they named a few exceptions. Cam explained that Shrek (Adamson \& Jenson, 2001) was an awesome movie, but the picture book from which the scenario was written was unconvincing. Joey stated that: "Occasionally like they make a movie that is better than the book like sometimes like for example with a book like Eragon." In the case of a series like Harry Potter (Rowling, 2000), Joey said:

Well, what I really like, if it's a series, then they make a movie like, say, Harry Potter, they made the first one/ after you saw the first movie, when you are reading all the rest of the books/ you could picture the characters and picture the voices, which is kind of neat.

With these comments, the boys appear to go against the popular theory that television might displace the time children spend reading (Koolstra et al., 1997). The interviewees portrayed television and video games as activities that can be done alongside reading.

## What Are the Paths to Reading Taken by Particular Preadolescent Boys? Two Recontextualized Examples

The following pages present the stories of two of the boys I have interviewed, Cam and John, and address the overarching question I explored in this research study: What are the paths to reading taken by particular preadolescent boys? The first story is about Cam, a 13-year-old, who is greatly influenced by his deep interest in fantasy as well as by book recommendations. The second story presents John, an 11-year-old, who had a lot to say about video games and pink books. I have chosen to tell Cam's and John's stories because what influenced their reading paths was very different. It was enlightening to write more in-depth about two reading paths of boys who were both interested readers of fiction.

## Cam: fantasy and book recommendations

Cam's reading path seemed not to be influenced by activities he liked to be involved in, in opposition with what Brozo (2002) and Sullivan (2003) have argued, which is that boys' reading preferences are generally linked to their hobbies and activities. Cam was involved in many activities: he liked to play sports as well as video games and often played on the computer. However, he clearly stated that he did not read sports books or books inspired by video games. What did influence Cam's choice of reading were his reading preferences. He absolutely loved fantasy, adventures novels, as well as series. At the time of the interview, he was rereading The Edge Chronicles series (Stewart, 1998), and had only praise for it. He was impatiently waiting for the next book in the series, the ninth one. Quite a few series seemed to greatly influence Cam's reading path: he had also read the Harry Potter series (Rowling, 2000) more than once, and the Redwall series (Jacques, 1986). If he liked the first book, he usually read the whole series, and he tried to find other books written by the same author.

It was Cam's sister who introduced him to The Edge Chronicles (Stewart, 1998) and the Harry Potter series (Rowling, 2000). She found both of these series while randomly browsing in the library. Cam's sister was his peer, as she was only a few years older. She impacted on Cam's reading path by introducing him to new and exciting books. The fact that she was a girl did not matter to Cam even if she also read "her random teen novels" that he would never read. Cam's brother was also a reader of fantasy and he had also been sharing his books with Cam for a while. Both of Cam's siblings, by having a positive attitude toward reading and by sharing books with him,
had an important influence on Cam's reading attitudes and habits (Hall \& Cole, 1999): they were part of what motivated Cam to read.

Recommendations from the teacher-librarian, in addition to recommendations from his siblings, seemed to have a strong influence on Cam's choice of reading materials, as the young man stated that he did not randomly pull books off the shelves at the library, like his sister did. Cam explained that his teacher-librarian knew what he liked to read, and often made him discover new and exciting books. For instance, while browsing the library, at the end of his individual interview, Cam found a book that his teacher-librarian had recommended months ago, and he was absolutely thrilled about the discovery. He repeated many times how his teacher-librarian had recommended it and told him how good it was and so on. The teacher-librarian clearly acted as a mentor by recommending books and by respecting Cam's reading preferences. This important role matched the findings of a recent study done in Ontario by Queen's University and People for Education (2006) that has shown a significant association between student's reading enjoyment and the presence in their school of a teacher-librarian.

Another element worth mentioning about Cam's reading path was his interest in literature circles. When literature circles are initiated in Cam's class, he is often assigned to a group since, most of the time, he has already read the books selected by his teacher. One time, he was assigned to a group reading a book he hated. According to Bintz, resistance to reading often happens because students are coerced into reading materials that they do not choose (as cited in Worthy, 1998). However, in Cam's case, literature circles were not off-putting, even if he was compelled to reread "boring"
books. What "saved" him from being drawn away from reading was that, in his own words: "lit circle does that even if the book is completely terrible/ then it's still / better then/ if you're discussing it with people and talking about it."

From a social learning theory perspective, a strong presence of female reading models and mentors - Cam's sister, his teacher librarian, his mother, and his aunt might lead a boy to perceive reading as a non-desirable, feminine activity (Brozo, 2002; Maynard, 2002). Poststructuralist theorists argue that hegemonic discourses of masculinity, circulated by institutions such as families, peer groups, and schools (Baxter, 2003; Young, 2000), tend to portray some activities, such as reading, as being passive and feminine (Millard, 1997; in Martino, 2001). However, Cam's perception of reading was a positive one. He just plainly loved reading. From his point of view, reading was cool and it was an activity everyone could enjoy; it was not a feminine activity. He had friends who were non-readers, but he also boys who were readers (his friend Xela, his brother) and he knew girls who were readers (his sister). However, Cam did not go as far as reading what he himself described as "girls' books". In his opinion, a diary format novel was the penultimate girls' book. This view influenced his reading path as he clearly distanced himself from these books. For instance, he stated that he had to read one diary novel for Red Cedar Award, a Dear Canada book. He hated it and would not read another one, never again. However, he did not go as far as labelling every book he did not like as "girls' book". During the group interview, John said his teacher read them a girl's book about a magic cupboard and a toy. Cam immediately jumped in, along with the three other boys: "Hey! That's not a girl book! That's The Indian in the Cupboard" (Reid Banks, 1980).

Cam's path to reading, by reason of his love for fantasy and because of book recommendations by his siblings and his teacher-librarian, was filled with much fiction reading. Cam had a positive perception of reading as an activity: he enjoyed talking about books with his classmates during literature circles and saw reading as something everyone, boys and girls, could enjoy.

## John: video games, school and pink books

John' reading path seemed to be influenced by some of the hobbies and activities he enjoyed (Brozo, 2002; Sullivan, 2003). He was into martial arts, and when he received pamphlets at a tournament, he would always read them, even if they were not his favourite readings. He also said he always read the back of the cereal box when he was trying a new kind. He played hockey and he had more than 500 hockey cards. But video games were the activity that had the most influence on John's choice of reading materials. He was a passionate player of Halo, an X-Box game, as well as of Starcraft. John spoke a lot about Halo: he knew the game before he started reading the series, as he had already "beaten" two videos. His older brother was also reading the series before him, but John said that his brother had not recommended the books to him. His brother had mentioned, however, some differences between the videos and the books, and it might have triggered John's interest in the series. At the time of the interview, John was reading the last book of the Halo (Nylund, 2001) series. He was so into this series that he had brushed aside another series, highly popular among his classmates, to focus on the Halo books (Nylund, 2001).

John spoke of school and reading in a positive way. He explained that his
"teacher has like a five years/like master degree in literature so/ he/ thinks- he recommends a lot of books to us." For instance, while working on a project on the Jewish Holocaust, his teacher had recommended a book to John and John said it was "pretty good". His teacher also brought his classmates and him to a park, and they ate little carrots and they read. John said it was fun. John's teacher seemed to have an influence on John's reading path, not directly on the choice of books, but on the perception of reading as a "fun" activity. At the time of the interview, John and his classmates were working on a unit on government, which was also "fun". He greatly enjoyed imagining with his classmates what an anarchy government would be like, as well at the pros and cons of such a government. These readings were parts of John's reading path: they were like extra stones, paving his path to reading. They did not, however, seem to have an impact on what John was reading outside of school, at least in the short term.

John liked to read and he stated that he did not perceive reading as a girl activity. He said that: "there would probably be a better chance of boys reading/ than girls/ well a bigger percent of boys that read/ then girls that read/ cause there are more boys." His statistics were not "scientifically proven", but they make his point clear: boys can and they do read. However, John was adamant about girls' books: there were such things as girls' books, The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants (Brashares, 2001) being a girls' book in its truest sense, and pink books were to be avoided at all cost.

John: It's not important [that boys and girls read different books] but/ like/ it is- people would do it/ but like if they had the choice to
read something/ like what they like/ or The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants/ they would choose what they like, cause most people/ most boys would not like that.
[During the browsing tour of the library]
GB: What about this one? Would you read it?
S: No/not whatsoever, no.
GB: Why wouldn't you read it?
S: um/ I can tell/ that the sides are pink.
GB: Oh, the sides are pink.
S: and/ ya/ it's more like girls more.

Reading a girls' book, i.e. stepping outside of the boundaries of normative masculinity (Moffatt, 2003), may have important consequences. When asked what would happen if he read a book with little hearts on the cover, John first said that he would never do such a thing. When I probed him, he added that reading such a book would cause him to grow long hair and become like a girl. Without actually undergoing a physical transformation, John seemed to suggest that he might be subjected to some kind of punishment (Cherland, 1994), such embarrassment and teasing. John's path to reading seemed greatly influenced by this need to display gender appropriate behaviours (Cherland; West \& Zimmerman, 1987) by not reading books that are deemed girls' books.

A factor that also seemed to influence greatly John's reading path was his deep interest for video games: it propelled him into readings that he was passionate about.

School had a positive influence on his attitude towards reading, but did not influence his choice of books. John strongly felt that books with pink covers, or with a "girl story" such as The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants (Brashares, 2001), were written only for girls, and that reading these books would have a negative outcome for him.

## Summary of Findings

Hobbies and activities, such as taekwondo, scouts, Lego, etc., had very little influence on the interviewees' choice of books, except for John who was strongly influenced by his interest in video games. The boys' own reading preferences, for instance in fantasy and series, had more influence than their hobbies. The interviewees mentioned school but its influence on their reading paths did not appear to be a strong influence. Worth mentioning were the literature circles, as four of the boys seemed to enjoy discussing books, even if the books were terribly boring. The five boys interviewed thought reading was a cool activity that one could learn a lot from, and they did not view reading as a feminine activity even if they were in contact with many women as reading models and mentors. Nevertheless, they viewed some books as being for boys and girls, and others as being for girls only, since no boys would be interested in reading them. Through discussions and recommendations, peers who were also readers had a notable influence on the some interviewees' reading choices. However, friends who did not read did not prevent the interviewees from enjoying this activity.

These findings provide information about various elements that influenced, to
some extent, five boys' reading paths. Some elements, such as reading preferences, influenced more than one of the boys; others, such as recommendations from a teacher-librarian, seemed greatly influential only to one particular boy. None of the explored factors - the influence of general interests and reading preferences, reading mentors, schools, perception of reading and readers, agency, and peers and popular culture - seemed to stand out as being a prominent influence on all the interviewees' reading paths. These findings bring valuable insights into how these boys are building their reading paths.

In the next chapter I begin the discussion with a consideration of the unique sample of boys I researched. I then discuss several key themes and issues raised by theses findings that are either supported by previous research or in contrast to it. These themes and issues include: the relationship between what the boys choose to read and their hobbies and activities, the role of series in the boys' reading choice, the influence of school literacy practice such as literature circles, the influence of peers, and the boys' perceptions of reading.

## V DISCUSSION

The major purpose of this study was to map particular preadolescent boys' paths to reading by taking a look at various elements that might have influenced them, and to what extent they might have been influenced. Data from this study suggest that no one factor explored predominately influenced the five boys' reading paths: the interplay of the various factors makes each path unique and distinct for each boy. The main findings of this research are as follow: (1) hobbies and favourite activities seemed not to be a major influence when these boys chose books - except for one boy - but (2) some series had an important impact; (3) school's influence appeared to be "neutral", but two of the boys viewed literature circles as a worthy social practice; (4) peer recommendations as well as (5) mentors' recommendations had a notable influence on some interviewees' reading choices; (6) the five boys appeared to resist some social and cultural norms and did not view reading as a feminine activity; (7) however, they did state that certain books were girls' books.

Before discussing these findings, I describe the sample of boys I used for the study, as I am aware that the group - five boys who enjoyed fiction - constitute an uncommon sample and may even be seen as a limitation of the study. However, its composition, I would argue, contributes to the interest and significance of the study.

## The Sample: Five Fiction Readers

## "This interview thing, in my opinion, didn't really appeal to people who were not very good readers." (Cam)

Much of the research on boys and literacy has presented the view that the large majority of boys are reluctant readers of fiction. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) stated that, in their out-of-school lives, a majority of boys engaged in literacy activities involving mainly video games, magazines, newspapers, and informational books. Hall and Cole (2001) suggested that boys, at all ages, read less fiction than girls did. Instead, they read more newspapers than did the girls and they chose magazines offering rich information, which was analytical rather than narrative in style. Other researchers have also discussed the amount of reading boys did: for instance, a little less than half of boys in Millard's study (1997) stated they did very little reading, and the readings they did were largely done for practical purposes and were from newspapers or magazines.

The five boys I interviewed do not fit the description of the majority of boys studied by these researchers. They are enthusiastic readers of fiction, hybrid readers situated between the "committed" and the "heavy" reader, two categories used by Millard (1997): she defined the committed reader as someone who read frequently, but for short periods of time and the heavy reader as someone who read all the time, at any time of the day. The five interviewees stand at a junction of the two categories: from what they told me, the boys read frequently, at any time of day and for long or short periods of time.

The boys provided me with rich data about what, as readers, influenced their choices of texts and their attitudes towards reading: each boy had his own set of influences. Moreover, during the group interview, the fact that all the boys read fiction created a very supportive atmosphere where the boys could chat about novels and how great they are, as well as talk about the fact that everyone should read because reading is really cool. No discordant voice was heard that could have counterbalanced the enthusiasm of these fiction readers and bring up, for instance, interesting aspects of magazines or just plainly stating a dislike for reading. The sample had a high degree of homogeneity in the sense that all the interviewees enjoyed fiction, which, as research has demonstrated, is not a typical situation. The information these boys shared, then, provided a unique lens through which to view the interests and habits of boys who were avid readers of fiction.

## Reading versus Hobbies and Personal Interests

GB: What do you prefer to read?
"Things about dragons and "mythologically" and everything like mystic things like swords or anything interesting like that I like adventure books too. " (Ryder)

Much of the literature suggests that boys are strongly influenced by their hobbies and activities when the time comes to choose materials to read (Brozo, 2002; Sullivan, 2003). Their choices of reading materials are motivated by finding more information about various subjects of interest (Blair \& Sanford, 2003). In this study, data analysis
shows that only one boy, John, is driven by an interest in an activity when he chooses reading materials. Among the interviewees, he is the only one who spoke with passion about a hobby - playing video games. The other boys, even though they mentioned hobbies and activities they enjoy, do not show the same fervour as he did. Playing hockey or going to taekwondo class seemed to be an end it itself: they appeared to feel no need to search for more information about these activities. Their activities did not seem to influence their reading interests. I would argue that the depth of their interest plays a considerable part in this interaction. If Cam, Ryder, Joey and Xela did not show fervour in an activity, they did demonstrate a great amount of passion when magic, dragons and/or adventures were involved. These boys could hardly contain their passion for these topics outside of books; hence, these personal interests became reading preferences, predominantly in fantasy. The five boys are clearly influenced in their choice of reading material by a deep interest: for John, it was an activity, but for the four others, it was a personal interest in magic and magical characters. This passion plays a role in defining their reading paths as they gravitate towards books which satisfy their interests, whether it is related to activities and/or hobbies they enjoy or reading preferences.

In the interviews, the boys talked mainly about readings that were not utilitarian (Blair \& Sanford, 2003). Finding specific and detailed information about subjects of interest seemed not to be a predominant purpose for these five boys: they appeared to prefer focusing on events, actions and characters in the novels they read. None of them clearly expressed that they took pleasure and excitement in uncovering
information about "the real world", as boys had done in Hall and Cole's study (1999). Results of this study suggest that these boys read because the themes addressed in the books they choose fascinate them. The boys "participate in the story, [they] identify with the characters, [they] share their conflicts and their feelings" (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 270). I would argue that the interviewees assume a reading stance that falls much closer, on the continuum, to the aesthetic than to the efferent stance (Rosenblatt). One assuming a predominantly efferent stance focuses on "building up the meaning, the ideas, the directions to be retained" (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 269); one assuming a predominantly aesthetic stance responds according to one own unique "lived-through experience or engagement with a text" (Beach, 1993, p. 50). The boys in the study read because they like adventure and magic, (or adventure and action in John's case), which fantasy provides them with. They choose texts that fit their already chosen purposes: to lose themselves in the adventures that bring them great pleasure and excitement. Rosenblatt (1982) has argued that "the reader stance inevitably affects what emerges from the reading." Following this view, I would argue that the stance assumed by readers may also affect their paths to reading, as the stance readers favour has a certain influence on their choices of reading materials. Any text may be read with an efferent or an aesthetic stance. Some texts, however, offer more potential when read from a particular stance (Rosenblatt, 1982). Fantasy novels seem to interest these boys because they offer more potential from an aesthetic stance.

Even if four of the five boys' reading choices were not related to their hobbies and/or activities, the boys explained that they were still engaging in various activities that kept them very busy. This description matches what Sullivan (2003) pointed out:
boys, when they reach grade 4, become deeply involved in many activities, especially sports, and the outcome is often that reading activities are down-graded to a secondrank activity because boys run out of time for reading. The boys I interviewed said they have less time to read than they want to, but in spite of that, they were all trying to create time to read. This competition for time may alter boys' reading paths. For those who are fervent readers, like the boys in my study, it results only in a short period of time in which they do not read, since they are eager to go back to it. For others, who do not miss reading, it may turn out to be quite a long "no-book diet" period.

Playing video games and watching television are among those activities with a bad reputation: they are said to displace time that could be spent reading (Hall and Cole, 1999; Koolstra et al., 1997). However, this study's findings suggest a positive outcome of video games and movies: they lead some the boys in the study to fiction reading. The influence was bi-directional. The boys were interested in seeing a movie made from a book they had already read and enjoyed (e.g. Eragon), and if the book was from a series, it was even more interesting as it gave them an idea of what characters looked and sounded like. They could read the sequel with a sense of "safety", knowing more about the characters. Second, the boys would also read, or try to read, a book written after the production of a video game or movie they liked (e.g. Halo, Lord of the Rings). I would argue that, as the interviewees are good readers, books and movies might complement each other in their case, instead of existing in competition. For instance, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) have found that some boys get an exciting visual experience with media texts such as movies and video games. I would
argue that the boys who participated in my study might get a similar experience from their reading, an experience that stimulates them.

## Influence of Series

"I've been busy with the Halo series." (John)
Data analysis shows that some series, an element that I closely link to reading preferences, may have an important influence on boys' readings. Previous research had provided information on how series, as part of youth culture and through friends' recommendations (Worthy, 1998), could influence boys' reading paths. However, in the case of this study, certain series were found to influence boys, not because of their popularity within their peer group - or at least not solely because of it - but because they corresponded with boys' reading preferences. Books in a series usually capitalize on the same themes - most of the time predictable ones - and characters (Pritchard, 2004). When the boys in the study liked the characters and the themes addressed in the first book of a series, they also enjoyed the following books. Doubts have been expressed, both from parents and schools, about the value of series books (Pritchard, 2004); however, along with Smith and Wilhelm (2002), I argue that the boys enjoy series because they "scaffold". their engagement: "For readers, imagining the character, situation, and so forth in one book supports the next envisionment and, as such, provides quicker competences"(Smith \& Wilhelm, p. 153). Series books provide a sense of security, as the reader is already familiar with the style of the author and the characters. Moreover, the outcomes of reading series appear to act in a positive way on
the interviewees' paths to reading. Series books create excitement: for instance, the mere mention of The Edge Chronicles (Stewart, 1998) or Harry Potter (Rowling, 2000) started exuberant conversations during the group interviews. The Edge Chronicles (Stewart, 1998), Halo (Nylund, 2001) and Harry Potter (Rowling, 2000), were respectively mentioned many times by the interviewees in their individual interviews and the boys were waiting impatiently for the next book in the series. Meanwhile, they were re-reading the series. Reading a series also led some interviewees to other books by the same authors: Xela, for instance, had read a series by Gordon Korman and it led him to read more of Korman's books.

## Literature Circle as a Social Practice

"I notice that lit circle does that, even if the book is completely terrible then it's still better if you're discussing it with people and talking about it." (Cam)

Concerning school, the analysis of the data gathered from these interviews implies that the influence on boys' reading paths is "neutral". The boys were neither appalled nor enthralled by the texts they were reading in school: they stated some textbooks were kind of interesting, the books for literature circles were not wellchosen, read-alouds were not bad, but they much preferred their own books. The boys seem not to feel disadvantaged by the choice of texts and topics, as suggested by Millard (1997): if they are coerced to read materials, feelings they did not express, it apparently did not result in resistance to school readings, as Bintz had stated (as cited
in Worthy, 1998). This may be explained in part by the fact that participants in the study are interested and skilled readers of fiction, and fictional narratives are the readings currently valued and sanctioned by schools (Hall and Cole, 2001). These boys can probably put to good use in class the skills they develop during their leisure reading.

Interestingly, Cam and Xela had a positive opinion of literature circles, even after stating that the books chosen by teachers for this activity were often boring. I would argue that the reason explaining the positive attitude is that they perceive this practice as social. It is a place for them to engage in discussions about what happened or what will happen in a book, what they liked or disliked, etc. This finding is in accordance with Smith and Wilhelm's (2002) statement that that there is "[an] absolute centrality of social relations" (p. 185) in the lives of male students. Their positive attitudes towards literature circles correlate with a more general positive attitude towards reading (Ruddel as cited in Powell-Brown, 2006). This practice of discussing books also extends to some of the boys' lives outside of school.

## Peers and Recommendation: Importance of Being Social

"And also my brother, mainly because he reads the same type of books, he's recommended that I read the Eragon-Eldest series and they sound really good cause he, like my dad, he is good at explaining things." (Joey)

Hall and Cole (1999) have suggested that peers may have a positive influence on reading attitudes and habits as well as on motivation to read. Besides, during the last years of elementary school, Moloney (2000) concluded that most boys spent increasing periods of time with their friends, and friends' interests influenced their own: being social was central in boys' lives (Smith \& Wilhelm, 2002). Results from this study are in accordance with these findings: book recommendations from peers friends or siblings - have an influence on some of the interviewees' reading paths. Some of the interviewees also impacted other boys' paths to reading. For instance, Cam's sister recommended The Edge Chronicles (Stewart, 1998), then Cam recommended it to Xela and to other friends, influencing their choices of reading materials. Ryder did the same with Eragon and Eldest (Paolini, 2003, 2005). As these series, or single books, become popular among friends and classmates, a "reading community" is created, providing readers with opportunities to talk about books, an activity in which four of the interviewees took part. I witnessed a few of these conversations during the group interview, but the boys also admitted to discussing books in and out of school (for instance, during literature circles, conversations on the phone, games inspired by books, etc.). Adler et al., (1992) have put forward the idea
that boys create their own norms and that these norms decide who is popular. I add that these norms most probably influence which books are popular. These networks may affect boys' reading paths, as they are a way by which a book or a series may enter boys' norms and become popular. If "everyone" is reading a book, the appeal to read it may appear greater. The tremendous impact the Harry Potter series (Rowling, 2000) had over thousands of readers and non-readers is the best example of this appeal. This "network", which transformed Harry Potter into a famous character, is much more elaborate than the ones initiated by Cam and Ryder; however, the latter also have a potential to create positive effects on a smaller scale, for instance on the readings of the two boys' friends and classmates.

## Mothers and Teacher-Librarians as Reading Mentors

"Cause when we were younger, my mom used to read a lot. I remember we did all the Harry Potter books before bed. When it came out we'd all go in the big bed, read a chapter and then bed time. Next night the same thing." (Ryder)

Reading mentors work directly with the readers: they might help children learn to read or improve their reading skills (Merina, 1988), and they might also introduce and recommend books. The boys I have interviewed mentioned a few adults who fit this description of mentors, but Joey and Ryder, who spoke about their mother, and Xela and Cam, who spoke about their teacher-librarian, provided the two most striking examples.

Steffes (2002) has argued that mothers are most often mentioned as being the ones sharing texts with their children. Power (2001) has written that mothers are, more than any other family members, associated with children's earliest reading. Joey and Ryder had vivid memories of reading the Harry Potter books (Rowling, 2000) in bed with their mother: she was a key influence in their early stages of reading (Millard, 1997). Today, both twins are greatly interested in reading in general, and more specifically, in fantasy. As a mentor, their mother introduced them to books, but also to the pleasure of reading by creating special moments for them to read together. I would argue that these "reading moments" with their mother are as important and influential as the reading activity itself and have an influence on the boys' choice of reading and their attitudes towards reading. John's father also acted as a mentor: he read stories from India to John and his older brother. This did not, however, lead John to read more of these stories, even if he said he enjoyed those readings. John did not elaborate on how often and when the activity took place, like Ryder and Joey had done. The pleasure the twins took in reading came not only from the book, but also from the repetition of the activity, and the fact that they were left wanting more every night. These factors seemed absent from John's experience with Indian stories. He, however, remembers the first book he read by himself: his mother had offered it to him. He still has the book and reads it "just for fun". The influence of John's parents is not as striking as the influence of the twins' mother, but I would argue it has played a part in John's positive attitude towards reading.

According to a recent Canadian study by Queen's University and People for Education (2006), a significant association exists between student's reading enjoyment
and the presence in their school of a teacher-librarian. Results from my study accord, in part, with this finding: two of the five boys, Cam and Xela, seemed to be influenced by their teacher-librarian. She often recommended good books, and because she knew what they liked to read, she had an impact on their choices of reading material. A notable example of her influence is Cam's reaction when he found a book in the library, during the browsing tour. His teacher-librarian had been recommending it for quite a while before the interview. He was thrilled and could not keep his eyes off the cover.

## Resistance to Social and Cultural Norms

"I think everybody can read if they want to, -um, I don't think that anybody should be afraid of reading." (Joey)

According to Baxter (2003) and Young (2000), boys are shaped by various discourses embedded within institutions such as families, peer groups, and schools and discourses govern social and cultural practices or norms (Baxter). As they are "members" of various institutions, more than one discourse influence the five interviewees. One discourse the boys in this study seem aware of is the dominant discourse among their male friends. They stated that their friends were mostly nonreaders, favouring activities such playing video games, listening to music, and playing sports over reading. Young (2000) found that discourses shape boys, but boys in turn could, by their actions, thoughts and beliefs, shape or reshape the practices associated with these discourses. Love and Hamston (2004) have suggested that boys may assert
their agency by rejecting norms established by a discourse which influenced them, but also by looking for a balance between these norms and alternative norms, which fitted their own desires and interests. The five boys in this study appeared to be working on balancing activities popular among their male friends (a norm of their discourse of peers) and reading (an activity they enjoy). They appeared to be doing so by taking part in sports (e.g. taekwondo, track and field) designated as sex-appropriate for boys (Millard, 1997) and by still reading fantasy, adventures or action novels (i.e. books they enjoyed).

Balancing norms may also be seen as an attempt to reshape discourses, in this case the discourse of peers as well as hegemonic discourses of masculinity, which designate reading as a feminine activity (Martino, 2001; Millard, 1997; Rowan et al., 2002). Both in words and acts, the boys demonstrated that they think reading is a cool activity anyone can enjoy: they are themselves readers, they recommended books to friends, they talked about books, etc. If hegemonic discourses of masculinity exclude reading, as Cherland (1994), Millard and West and Zimmerman (1987) have argued, and displaying gender means rejecting reading (Cherland, 1994), then these boys may be trying to assert their agency by reading. Moffat (2003) and Cherland (1994) have argued that there were serious social consequences for boys who practiced genderinappropriate behaviour and stepped outside of the boundaries of normative masculinity. However, the choice to read, despite the fact that many of their friends were non-readers, did not appear to have any serious consequence for the interviewees. Only Ryder mentioned that some of his friends thought that dragons were stupid. Generally, the boys talked about the fact that their friends, readers and
non-readers, respected their choice to read.

Hartlage-Striby (2001) has suggested that as boys grow up, they become more aware of the habits of the people around them (as cited in Sullivan, 2003). Brozo (2002) has found that, as boys are surrounded mainly by feminine role models of readers, they often choose to mirror their father's readings (Sullivan), which are likely to be utilitarian and not to include fiction. Thus, from a social-learning-theory point of view, researchers, such as Brozo and Maynard (2002) have argued that, because of the predominance of female role models as readers, boys learn that reading is not an appropriate activity for them, since it belongs to a women's realm. Findings from this study suggest otherwise: the five boys interviewed stated that reading is not an activity exclusively for women. They do so despite naming many feminine role models of readers: Joey and Ryder talked at length of the influence of their mother and how she got them interested in fantasy; Cam mentioned his teacher-librarian, a woman, as someone who had made great book recommendations, John still remembered the first book he read and it had been recommended by his mother. The socialization model tends to present children as passive beings, taking in anything their parents or teachers model for them. However, as Maynard (2002) have written, models do not account for boys appropriating ways of being masculine not displayed by their parents or teachers.

## Gender Preferences and Agency

"Their friends don't like them reading pink books, they sort of have a rep or something, it takes away sort of their reputation reading pink books cause pink, most people think is a girl colour." (Xela)

If the interviewees view reading itself not as a feminine activity, they still speak of gendered reading preferences: they consider some books as being girls' books, books that only girls would want to read. Carlsen (1980) has suggested that boys are typically more rigid and limited than girls in their preferences: their likes and dislikes are clearer than those of girls. Segel (1986) has found that, from the start (the 1740s) girls have been avid readers of boys' books, but the universal opinion is that boys do not read girls' books. The boys I interviewed did not provide a clear definition of girls' books, but they named a few titles (e.g. The Dear Canada books, The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants). From their comments emerge some themes (e.g. a girl and her adventures with her pony) and format (e.g. the diary) that attract only girls. During the group interview, the five boys distanced themselves from what they called girls' books, but two of the boys also commented that what boys' read is what everyone enjoys reading. Cam, Joey, Ryder and John said that boys could do whatever they wanted to do since there was no law prohibiting boys to read girls' books: boys were simply not interested in girls' books. From the interviewees' point of view, it seems that boys themselves restrict their choices because of interests, and that girls, when it comes to choosing reading materials, read any book.

When they talked about reading, the boys mentioned no major consequences of being a reader despite the fact that many of their friends do not engage in this activity; however, the interviewees disclosed potential consequences when it came to reading girls' books. Xela, John and Ryder explained that boys may be joked about, pressured, or embarrassed because they read girls' books. In that, they mirror Moffat (2003) and Cherland's (1994) conclusions that there are social consequences for boys stepping outside of the boundaries of normative masculinity. Segel (1986) has also written, "people who work with children can testify to the sad fact that reading a book about a girl is still cause for embarrassment for many young male readers" (p. 182). The three boys' comments, in opposition with what they had said before, suggest that refusing to read girls' books is not a question of choice: they feel boys are restricted by norms and that boys must act in certain ways in order to be accepted by their peers, to be part of the group. None of the interviewees wished to be associated with girls' books.

The boys I interviewed challenged some practices or norms to pursue their interests: they read even if reading is not the most common activity in their groups of peers. However, as I have discussed in the previous paragraph, the five interviewees do not go as far as to read books that are labelled girls' books. Some of them stated that boys experience pressure to assume gender-appropriate preferences (Cherland, 1994; Lee and Gropper as cited in Segel, 1986; Moffat, 2003) in order to be accepted by their (male) peers.

## Summary

This study has shed light on particular preadolescent boys' paths to reading. It has looked at how interests (for instance, video games, sports, personal interests in magic, etc), adults as reading mentors, school, perceptions of reading and readers, agency, peers and popular culture influence five boys' reading paths, and the extent of this influence. No single factor had a predominant influence on the five boys: the participants spoke about more than one element that had an influence on their choices of texts as well as on their attitudes towards reading.

Interviews with Cam, John, Xela, Joey and Ryder created a wealth of data. Analysis of this data has led me to the following findings. To begin with, hobbies and favourite activities were a major influence only for one boy: they seemed not to affect significantly the four others when they chose books. The five boys, however, spoke of series which had an important impact both on their choice of texts and their attitude towards reading. If school's influence appeared to be "neutral", two interviewees still mentioned literature circles as being an interesting practice because it allowed for discussion. This school activity contributed to the boys' positive attitudes toward reading. Some of the boys were also influenced by peer recommendations of books. The five preadolescents appeared to resist some cultural and social norms of their peer group and of masculine discourses: they chose to read despite reading not being the most popular activity among their friends. Finally, they did not view reading as a feminine activity, but they perceived certain books as girls' books that no boys would want to read.

## Limitations of the Study

My research objective was to map particular preadolescent boys' paths to reading. It was not intended as a systematic research study but rather as a qualitative exploratory study of five specific boys and their unique paths.

As I have previously discussed, the reading interests of the five boys who participated in the study differed from my assumptions prior to conducting the study in the sense that they were all fervent fiction readers, which is quite an improbable sample when one looks at actual issues concerning boys and their reading habits and attitudes. The library setting has probably played an important part in the making of this unique sample. I acknowledge that the data gathered represents solely these boys' points of view and that the data would have been completely different with a mixed sample of non-fiction readers and fiction readers or if less motivated readers had decided to take part in the interviews. However, among greatly valuable research focusing on boys as reluctant readers or skilled non-fiction readers, we should not forget these preadolescent boys who do enjoy fiction. Hopefully, this study provides interesting and useful information about them.

Studying boys' paths to reading from the boys' points of view may be seen as a limitation. A more comprehensive study could include interviews with parents, siblings, peers and teachers, as well as by observation of the boys in action, in their classroom and at home. It would certainly provide more extensive triangulating data.

## Implications for Teachers, Teacher-Librarians and Parents

One of the key components that was identified in the present study - and in some previous studies such as the ones done by Hall and Cole (1999), Moloney (2000) and Smith and Wilhelm (2002) - is how being social is important to boys. The interviewees took great pleasure in talking about the books they read: they recommended them to each other, they discussed their favourite characters as well as the events taking place in the stories they were reading, and they even turned some of the stories into games. One of the implications for teachers' and teacher-librarians' practice in relation with this component is how a prominent place devoted to talking about books could enhance boys' interest in reading. Literature circles, a practice common in classrooms, could be viewed and defined as a literacy practice but also as a social practice where boys, and girls as well, could engage in meaningful discussions. It would allow boys to establish relationships with each other, to create "reading communities" that may positively influence boys' reading paths.

Another implication of this study for teachers and teacher-librarians is to view each of their male students as a unique reader. Each participant in this study, and probably each and every boy, was influenced to different degree by the various factors studied - the two recontextualised examples served to demonstrate this fact. Following this view, I do not believe there exists a book that every boy enjoys. Teachers and teacher-librarians migth therefore get to know the boys they are working with in oder to become more aware of they like to read. This knowledge would allow them to suggest readings that emanate from or correlate to their interests (general interests such as hoobies or activities or reading preferences such as genre or type of
characters). It would be a good way become an influence on their reading paths.
For parents, an important point that came out of this present study is that taking time regularly to be with their children and to read with them may leave indelible memories. I believe it is important to make these moments special and different from other time spent as a family.

## Suggestions for Future Research

This study has shown, through interviews, how preadolescent boys' reading paths are built from the interplay of many factors. One factor that was not considered was time and age and how these factors act on the evolution and the changing of boys' paths to reading. Additional research, in a longitudinal study, needs to be conducted to explore how paths evolve. This would allow for exploration of how, through time, various elements influence boys' choices of texts and their attitude towards reading, as well as the possible influence of major life events.

Future research should also include samples of mixed reader groups, fiction vs. non-fiction, reluctant vs. passionate, to explore how each type of reader may influence others in a group interview setting. It could also include interviews with two groups, both formed by mixed types of readers. The first group would be composed of boys who are friends; the other, of boys who do not know each other. It would allow for an exploration of peer influence on attitudes towards reading, as peers and socializing have been found to have an important influence on some of the boys in this study.

I would also suggest that further research be done on boys' perceptions that
their reading interests are common to both genders - girls read the same books as boys, but boys would never read girls' books - as well as their perceptions of book covers (of "male" books vs "female" books). The boys in my study provided some ideas and opinions on these two subjects, but these topics would benefit from in-depth study.

## Concluding Thoughts

Ages ago, or at least it seems like ages to me, I was a student teacher, in a grade 6 class, wondering why the boys in my group were not participating during classroom activities involving literature. Then came along the boy who loved snakes, and he triggered my curiosity because against all odds, in contrast to what I thought I had seen, he was a devoted reader. This boy opened a door, which led me on a new path, a researcher path.

As a Masters student, I wanted to explore boys' attitudes towards reading as well as their choices of reading. When I started my research project, I still had in mind the grade-6 boys from my practicum in Québec, and the fact that many of them were passionate readers of non-fiction. I read much research that suggested likewise: a majority of boys prefer magazines, informational books, stories of famous hockey players, etc. I was so sure, when I started looking for participants for my study, that I would find fervent non-fiction readers, that I was unsettled when the five interviewees turned out to be fiction readers. Exploring their world helped me discover again the importance of observing individual boys in their particular contexts. It showed me how, as a researcher, one must keep an open mind at every stage of the research
process to avoid the danger of generalizations.
If nothing more, this research reveals that there are preadolescent boys who read - as I wrote in the introduction following Power (2001) - and some of them are passionate readers who believe that reading activities are "cool". It was fascinating to explore how these boys described themselves as readers: within this clearly defined identity, the five boys asserted their agency by reading, even if it was not the most popular activity among their friends. However, there was a limit to their agency, and this limit was pink: there seemed to be an unspoken "law" that prohibited these boys from reading pink books. They explained boys might loose their reputation or grow long hair and become a girl after reading one of these books.

In addition, this research indicates that not one of the studied factors predominately influenced the five boys' reading paths: the interaction of the diverse factors makes the path unique for each boy. Because of the importance of the interplay of factors, one of my conclusions is that a lesser impact of a factor, or its absence in a particular boy's life, will not automatically turn him into a reluctant reader, and vice versa. Many factors and influences come into play and may lead a boy to become a reader. Boys may be readers to different degrees, and focusing on what they are reading and why they are reading it has revealed a plethora of information.

This study has also provided a lens through which reading mentors' and models' influence are acknowledged; however, that influence should not be limited to an issue of gender. The five boys spoke of parents, teachers and/or teacher-librarians who recommended and shared books with them and participated in shaping their positive attitudes towards reading. However, in contrast to the social-learning-theory
point of view, mentors' and models' gender did not seem to matter to the boys. Many of their mentors and models were women, and the boys did not define or view reading as a feminine activity. For women who are educators in elementary schools, and they are a majority, this is a reaffirmation of the potentially important role they may play, as mentors, even to boys.

Studying these five readers' paths also contributed to shedding a positive light on literature circles as a worthwhile social practice. The fact that they could share their ideas and opinions with peers greatly contributed to the positive perception some of the boys had of this practice. Lastly, I believe this research brings forward data showing the importance of series books and how they may form a solid foundation for boys' reading interests. As the boys liked to discuss these books, they offered them possibilities similar to those provided by literature circles. The boys could participate in something central to their life: being social.

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## Appendix II: Poster

Title of the project: Preadolescent Boys' Paths to Reading This project is for a graduate thesis.

## Becoming Readers: Do All Boys Take the Same Path????



## Toparicinate in his suduy younust

* Be a boy in grade 6 or 7
* Read: a little, sometimes, or a lot!
* Read stuff printed on paper: novels, informational books, graphic novels, comics, magazines, newspapers, (sports) cards, game instructions, cereal boxes,
 etc.



## Appendix III: Introductory Letter

## Title of the Project: Preadolescent Boys' Paths to Reading

## Introductory Letter

Dear Parent or Guardian, Dear Study Participant,

Thank you for your interest in this project. My name is Geneviève Brisson and I am a student in the Master of Arts in Children's Literature at the University of British Columbia. I am asking your voluntary participation in my study, which concerns grade-six/seven boys and their reading. In this study, to read is defined as reading novels, informational books, graphic novels, comics, magazines, newspapers, and (sports) cards, and any other print materials, even cereals boxes! This project is part of my research for my thesis, which is supervised by Theresa Rogers, Associate Professor at the Language and Literacy Department and principal investigator, University of British Columbia.

Participation in this study involves taking part in an individual interview and a group interview with other boys of the same age. There will be between 5 and 7 boys in the group interview. Both interviews will be recorded onto audiotape. The one-on-one interview will last between 30 and 45 minutes; the group interview will last between 45 and 60 minutes. Information gathered during these interviews will be used to write a master thesis, and may also be used in articles for journals or magazines. During both interviews, boys will be asked questions about reading and will talk about their opinions. Here are two examples of questions which could be asked:

Do you read the same thing for school and at home? Why?
Do you have a friend who gives you suggestion of books to read?

At the time of the group interview, you will have the chance to share snacks and drinks with the other boys. You will also receive a book, a magazine or a comic book to thank you for your participation in the study.

Your identity will of course be kept confidential. That is, we will not use your real name in any published papers or reports. For the group interview, we will encourage all participants not to talk about what have been said during the discussion; however, we cannot control what other participants do with the information discussed.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. Your signature on the next page indicates that you agree to participate in the study.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

I assent / I do not assent (circle one) to participate in this study.

I consent / I do not consent (circle one) to my child's participation in this study.

Printed name of the child

Parent or Guardian Signature
Date

Printed name of the Parent or Guardian signing above

## Appendix VI: Individual Interview Protocol

## Title of the project: Preadolescent Boys' Paths to Reading Individual Interview Protocol

Welcome. Thank you for coming to this interview. I greatly appreciate your contribution to this project. This interview is not a test and it is not a series of questions with right and wrong answers. Remember that I am very interested in what you think and in your experience. I want to know your opinions on these different questions. (Vaughn et al. p41-42)

The interview will be audiotaped.
I am going to ask you questions about reading: what you read, what you think of reading, etc.

## Definitions of To read or reading:

When I say, "to read" or "reading", I mean reading novels, informational books, graphic novels, comics, magazines, newspapers, and (sports) cards, and any other print materials, even cereals boxes! If I ask, for instance, "What kind of text do you read?», text also includes novels, informational books, graphic novels, comics, magazines, newspapers, and (sports) cards.

Do you have questions before we begin? Okay then, lets start.

Non-content probes: Can you tell me more about this? Can you explain this a bit more? I am not sure I understand your last answer, could you explain it to me again?

## Questions

Identification: Name, age, grade.
1- What do you like to do in your free time?

2-Do you read about this (or these) activity (ies)?
3-Can you give me some examples of texts you have read about this (or these) activity (ies)?
4- What do you prefer to read? What are you reading now?
5- Can you tell me about your family and their reading habits? For instance, what do your mom, dad, siblings read? Does what your family reads influences what you read?

6- Have you ever heard someone use the term "reader" as in "that person is a reader" or "that person is a real reader"?
7- Would you say you are a reader?
8 - What do boys prefer to read?
9- Do grade- $2 / 3$ boys and grade- $6 / 7$ boys prefer to read the same kind of things? Do you know why?

10- What kinds of things to you have to read for school?
11- Do you like to read for school? Why?
12- Do you read the same things for school and at home? Why?
13- What about the library at your school? Do you like to choose stuff to read there? 14- Michael is in grade 7. Today, his teacher has introduced a new unit to the class. In this unit, students will read at least two novels. Michael is thrilled; he loves novels! That very first night, he reads five chapters in one of the novels before going to bed. In the morning, on the bus, he talks about the book with his friend Rahim. They talk about their favourite characters, and try to guess what will happen next in the story. What, if anything, do you admire about Michael?
What, if anything, don't you admire about Michael?
Where, if anywhere, do you see yourself in Michael?
15- Do you know an adult who recommends you good stuff to read?
16- When s/he recommends stuff to read, are you sure you are going to like it? Why?
17- Do you have a friend who gives you suggestions of things to read?
18- When $\mathrm{s} /$ he recommends something to read, are you sure you are going to like it? Why?

19- Would you read a book none of your friends wants to read? Can you explain why? 20- What would you do or say, if anything, if one of your friend was reading something you don't like to read? For instance, if you did not like magazines, and your friend only read magazines?

21- At 13 years old, Brian is the best hockey player in his team. He loves to play hockey, and talks about it all the time with his friends. He knows everything about it because he reads the sports section in the paper and sports magazines everyday. He buys hockey magazines every month and exchanges them with his friend, Greg, who also buys some. Both of them have a great amount of hockey cards. With a bunch of other guys, they spend endless hours looking at the cards and magazines, discussing players' statistics and creating hockey pools.
What, if anything, do you admire about Brian?
What, if anything, don't you admire about Brian?
Where, if anywhere, do you see yourself in Brian?
22- Have you read Harry Potter? Or Captain Underpants? Is there a really popular book or series in your group of friends? Have you read it? Why?
23- Imagine that all your friends are reading a series of books. You have read the first one and you didn't like it. What do you do?
24- I am going to tell you four things some people say about reading. Tell me what you think of them.
Reading is a cool activity. It makes me feel smarter than people who don't read.
Reading is boring because you just sit around and you are not with your friends.
Reading helps you discover a whole bunch of really cool things.
Reading is for girls or little kids.
25 - Have you ever heard people say something else like that about reading? Can you tell me what they were saying and what you thought about it?

26- Do boys read different "stuff" than girls? Why is that? Is it important for boys to read different "stuff" than girls?

27- From what you see around you, how would you describe boys' way of choosing stuff to read? Can boys read whatever they want?

28- Is there something or someone that influences you the most when you choose something to read? Can you tell me about it?

I have asked you all my questions. Thank you very much! It will really help me for my research. I have one last thing to ask of you. Would walk around the library and tell me how you choose things to read or show some stuff you've taken out of the library in the past or stuff you like, etc. It doesn't have to be long, just a few minutes.

## Appendix VII: Group Interview Protocol

## Title of the project: Preadolescent Boys' Paths to Reading Group Interview Protocol

Welcome. Thank you for coming to this group interview. I greatly appreciate your contribution to this project. I know you are very busy and I greatly appreciate your contribution to this project. This interview is not a test and it is not a series of questions with right and wrong answers. I want to know your opinions on different questions. Remember that I am very interested in what you think and in your experience (Vaughn et al. p41-42). No one is under pressure to talk if they don't feel comfortable.
"There are few guidelines I would like to ask you to follow during the interview. First, you do not need to speak in any particular order. When you have something to say, you may say it. Second, please do not speak while someone else is talking (Vaughn et al. p42)". When I will transcribe our conversation from the tape, it will be hard for me if you guys speak at the same time. So please leave time for everyone to finish talking before jumping in. "Third, remember there are other people in the group and that it is important that we hear everybody else point of view. Fourth, you do not need to agree with what everyone or anyone in the group says, but you do need to state your point of view without making negative comments. (...) because we have limited time together, I may need to stop you and to redirect our discussion. (Vaughn et al. p42)". Finally, I want you to remember that what you will say and hear during this interview is confidential which means that none of you should talk about what others have said.

The interview will be audiotaped. We'll use your real name during the interview, but when I will write my research I will use a "fake name", because researchers never use people's real name in research. It would be great if you could help me and choose your own "fake name", and I will use in my papers.

The interview will last 40 to 45 minutes. After the interview, you can some juice/pop and cookies/fruits/crackers, etc, and stay here a while to chat. I will also have a surprise for each of you.

## Definitions of To read or reading:

When I say, "to read" or "reading", I mean reading novels, informational books, graphic novels, comics, magazines, newspapers, and (sports) cards, and any other print materials, even cereals boxes! If I ask, for instance, "What kind of text do you read?», text also includes novels, informational books, graphic novels, comics, magazines, newspapers, and (sports) cards.

Any questions before we begin? Okay then, lets start.
Introduce yourself first, saying your name clearly, so that I can recognize your voice on the tape.

## Warm-up:

On the poster, I would like you to draw a road. Why draw a road? Because after talking to you during your individual interview, I felt that each of you had a different path to reading. You are all readers but different factors influence your choice of reading.

On your poster, I would like you to answer, with words or drawings, these three questions:

What do you like to read? Why?
What has influenced you to start reading?
What influence your choice of reading materials?
And you may add anything else you want to say about reading. You may use these markers and draw or write answers to these questions. You have about 5 minutes. When you are done, you will tell us about you and what you read using your poster.

1- Think about your friends. Would you say most of them are readers? Why?

2- Is there a thing such as "girls' book" or "boys' book"? What are they like? Have you ever read "girls' book"? Would you read one? Why?
3- Does popular culture (Harry Potter, magazines, videos, TV shows) influences what you choose to read?

4- What about schools? What kind of reading is promoted by schools and teachers?
Does it influence your choices of reading at home?
5- What would happen in a group of friends, if anything, if a boy was a really motivated reader but all his friends were non-readers?

6- I am going to tell you things some people say about reading. Tell me what you think of them.

Reading sucks: you just sit around and do nothing and you are not with your friends.
Girls read more than boys and they are better reader.
7- In newspapers, magazines and many books, some teachers, parents, researchers, etc. are worrying about boys and their reading habits. They say boys don't read, that they don't read good books, etc. From your experience and what you see around you, what do you think about this?

## Appendix VIII: Transcript Conventions

/
(()) indicate that there is doubt about the accuracy of the transcription
(xx) material that is impossible to make out
(text) additional information
TEXT used for word/syllables said with emphasis
[ turn onset overlaps previous turn
[] turn is completely contained within another speaker turn incomplete word or utterance

## Appendix IX: Categories for Analysis of the Data from the Individual Interviews

## General Interests/Activities, Reading Preferences

Interest/activities
Of the interviewees/reading related to these interests/activities What they say boys are interested in and how interests/activities affect choice of reading
Choosing to read or to do other activities
How reading can be better than other activities
Genres
What they like
What they say boys like in general
Heterogeneity of reading preferences
Preferences evolve over time/ more choice of reading material when older

## Reading Habits, Reading Strategies

Habits: Rereading books or magazines
Reading more than one book at the time
Bedtime reading / Staying up late to read
Strategies for reading difficult books

## Adults and their influence on reading

Adults/family members as mentors
They talk about/give books
What they think or say of a book
Read books with the boy
Adults as models
Are interested in reading/read books for themselves
School librarian/teacher/ and their reputation as "recommender"

## Schools' influence on reading

Literature circle
Strategies to read/choose books are taught/modeled
Genres imposed or promoted/ some kinds of reading forbidden
Relationship between school and home reading
Books read at school are not challenging enough
Foster interest/Expose to new themes through activities/field trips
Textbooks
School library

## Perceptions/definitions of reading/ readers

Characteristics of readers/evolution over time
Self as reader/ evolution of self as reader
Compare with readers/non-readers

Who reads?
Quality of activity or reading
Reading as a non-active activity
Reading and learning
What one may gain from reading
Other people's opinions on reading

## Perceptions/types of books

Books' characteristics
What boys read is what everyone reads
Good book/ Bad book
Girls' book / Boys' book
Themes that appeal more to boys or girls
A girl character $\neq$ a girl book
Boys distance themselves from girls' books
Do judge a book by its cover and its back
Books' characters as friends
Series/or books by the same author

## Agency

Awareness of their own reading preferences
Different reading interests/tastes motivate choice of book
Using their own techniques to choose/evaluate a book
Won't automatically read a book simply because someone has recommended it Choosing to read a book despite what people say, even if nobody is reading it vs. will stick with friends if they are not reading a book
Boys can read whatever they want
But they choose not to read / they are not interested in girls books
Pressured not to read girls' book
May be embarrassed if you are caught reading some books
What happens if you read girls' books
Recommending books to friends and adults
Attitude toward reading

## Peers and Popular Culture

Friends recommend books
Discussing books with friends/peers
Networking
Friends have more influence if they are readers themselves/if they have shared preferences
Respecting people's interests/ reading preferences (friends and others)
Encouraging friends to read
Popular books/why they are popular/where they have heard of them and their opinion on these books
Books written after a video game

Giving a shot to a book or a second book in a series, even if not really interested, if friends are reading/talking about it

## Other/Miscellaneous

Influence of Red Cedar Award
Having books at home
Narration of a story
Relationship between reading and writing
Good memories of books from their younger age
Reading with younger students/siblings
Sections in the public library
Working hard on school projects
Good to have more than one interest/boring to talk about the same activities all the time

Appendix X: Categories for Analysis of the Data from the Group Interview

## General Interests, Reading Preferences

Choosing to read or to do other activities
Genres
What they like

## Reading Habits, Reading Strategies

Strategies to choose a book
Habits: Bedtime reading / Staying up late to read
Allotted time to read at home

## Adults and their influence on reading

Started reading because his parents read to him when he was younger
School librarian/teacher/ and their reputation as "recommender"

## Schools' influence on reading

Reading aloud by the teacher/ literature circle
Allows for time to read
Some boys don't like silent reading
Offers special reading time
Reading at school is not challenging enough/boring

## Perceptions/definitions of reading/readers

Self as reader
Girls as readers/ Boys as readers
Reading as an important skill
Readers plan ahead to have/or take time to read

## Perceptions of non-readers

Jealous of readers
Not good at reading

## Perceptions/descriptions/types of books

Books' characteristics
What boys read is what everyone reads
Girls' book / Boys' book
Boys distance themselves from girls' books
Read more if the book is interesting
Books' characters as friends

## Agency

Awareness of the different opinions about reading and how they are influence by interest and preferences
Choosing to read a book despite what people say/even if nobody is reading it They express opinions regarding what adults have said/ makes suggestions on what adult should do/critics adult ways of doing things

## Peers and Popular Culture

Friends recommend books
Good friends respect friends' interests/ reading preferences
Movies/Videos games made from a book/books made from a video/movie How seeing the movie helps (or not) picturing the characters
Books written after a video game
Books that are a lot like movies

## Other/Miscellaneous

Influence of Red Cedar Award

