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Buy the Book: Social Reproduction and the Middle-Class Family Outing to the Big-Box Bookstore

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a qualitative ethnography of a big-box bookstore that considers the relationship between book consumption, status, and social reproduction. The study draws from five years of fieldwork starting with three years of participant observation at 45 sessions of the weekly Story Time, where I observed 297 mothers or caregivers and 411 children. In the first three years of this research I also conducted informal interviews with 48 families at the store. Also in this phase of the study I conducted in-depth interviews at the store with nine bookstore workers and three managers. In the last two years of the study, drawing from data collected from participant observation and informal interviews, I conducted in-depth interviews and follow-up interviews with six families.

The project analyzes what informants see as the bookstore's role as an educative site, a site of consumption, and a site of leisure work. The term "leisure work" reflects how middle-class parents structure family time at the bookstore for the purpose of pleasure associated with pursuing both collective and individualized interests, and for the education of their children. The big-box bookstore is an informal educative site, where children learn literacies associated with reading, spending money, and socializing. Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field; social, cultural, and economic capital; and social reproduction provide a theoretical framework for interpreting these perspectives to see how ideas around books come from both subjective and objective influences that are naturalized in ways that reproduce middle-class culture.

The dissertation considers how workers, parents, and children's relationships with books inform the *habitus*, how informants see books as signs of *distinction*, and how literacy and books become forms of *cultural capital*. These relationships affect the processes of identity formation and social reproduction. This project argues that, for workers and middle-class families, book consumption at the big-box bookstore is informed by middle-class desire as interpreted through a systemic corporate structure and fueled by dispositions around middle-class acts of consumption. Workers perform low-status, low-wage jobs that they enjoy for the most part. They struggle for middle-class status when their work is disrespected or they cannot exercise their expertise due to the store's corporate structure. At the same time they sometimes misrecognize their roles because of the status they associate with book work. These dispositions and experiences reproduce middle-class orientations, as they influence meaning around cultural capital and books, and as they reflect and inform what represents status for workers, parents, and children in this study.

**BUY THE BOOK:
SOCIAL REPRODUCTION
and the
MIDDLE-CLASS FAMILY OUTING
TO THE BIG-BOX BOOKSTORE**

By

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Cultural Foundations of Education
in the Graduate School of Syracuse University

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Benette Whitmore, 1961

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The story of my relationship with books began with those I read, or those read to me, as a child. Although I do not recall visiting bookstores, a new book arrived by mail every month from a book club, something my mother arranged. From the rollicking rhymes of Dr. Seuss to the thrilling prospects of *You Will Go to the Moon* and the nail-biting mysteries of Nancy Drew, they still hold a special place in my heart and on my bookshelves. What does it mean, and where does it come from, this relationship to books? More than providing engaging stories with enchanting illustrations, children's books offer new ways of thinking and knowing, of understanding what is or isn't, what can, or cannot, be in one's social world. Feelings for books are powerful, and my own relationship to books continued into my adulthood, when it inspired me to become a children's author. Early in my writing career, I often visited bookstores to see what was being published, and as a young mother, I enjoyed browsing through the selections with my own children, who became my best critics through the "taste" they developed. Now my children are grown, but I still visit bookstores to see which books children pick up, which ones they put back down, and which ones they beg their parents to buy. The difference is that the site for these activities and conversations has changed. I now travel several miles to the big-box bookstore in a strip mall, instead of a few blocks to the small, independent bookstore that no longer exists in our neighborhood. The transformation of the site of book consumption has both frustrated and fascinated me, which has raised several critical questions, and led to the writing of this dissertation.

My project explores the relationship between book consumption, pleasure, and status in the children's book department of a big-box bookseller I call Owl Books as a way of understanding the struggles and complications associated with the social reproduction of class. The store is located near an upper middle-class suburb just outside a mid-sized city in the Northeast U.S., which I call Centertown. It is a one-story structure situated next to a big-box furniture store in a strip mall on a

busy four-lane road lined with other strip malls and gas stations. It is impossible to access the store safely without a car, even by bus, because the bus stop is across the busy highway. It is important to emphasize that this work is specific to this particular store, and that while they are similar in terms of their layout and inventory, other stores in the chain, such as those in larger metropolitan areas, provide easier access to more socially, racially, and economically diverse customers. Another significant clarification is that the term “book consumption” for this project refers to the multiple ways in which informants engage in relationships with books, from reading and talking about books, to borrowing and buying books. This project, which involves participant observation and in-depth interviews, uses a symbolic interactionist approach (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934); that is, it looks for meaning made around books and reading to provide insights into the social constructions of family, childhood, leisure, and education. The theoretical framework draws from Pierre Bourdieu’s interrelated concepts of habitus and field; social, cultural, and economic capital; and social reproduction, which together provide a structure for interpreting informants’ discourse¹ around literacy and books. From this perspective, my dissertation considers how workers, parents, and children’s relationships to books inform the *habitus*, how informants see books as signs of *distinction* (Bourdieu, 1977), how literacy and books become forms of *cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1979), and how all of the above affect processes of identity formation and social reproduction.

I have organized data chapters to explore perspectives of my informant groups: workers, parents, and children. I chose to include the children’s chapter last because I hope to emphasize and frame their perspectives in relation to discussions of workers and parents. This introduction begins

¹ I use the term “discourse” in two ways throughout this dissertation. Sometimes “discourse” refers to the literal “talk” and word choices of my informants, from which I draw meaning. “Discourse” at other times in this project refers to shared and structured ways of using language to convey meaning and interpretations about social worlds, drawing from James Gee (1996) definition of discourse as “communicative, expressive, and transformative tools for shaping... social worlds.”

by creating a theoretical basis for the dissertation, which, as noted earlier, draws from the Bourdieusian² concepts of habitus, capital, and social reproduction. Next, I explore the notion of class and suggest ways in which class is understood for this work, followed by discussions of sociological frameworks for how this project understands “family” and the family outing. A discussion of the complications inherent in defining the concept of “literacy” follows. The study is then described in terms of the settings, as well as major themes to be discussed in relation to my informant groups. Last in this introduction is an outline of the chapters and brief discussions of their content.

Bourdieu as a Theoretical Lens

This project relies on the work of Pierre Bourdieu as a theoretical frame for understanding the relationship between book consumption and social reproduction. I am drawn to his work primarily because I have found that his theoretical approach interrogates the construction and meaning of social class in insightful and substantive ways that make sense for this dissertation. Furthermore, I appreciate how Bourdieu challenges us to question the status quo by interrogating the meaning and implications of the typically unexamined experiences of everyday life. Bourdieu argues in multiple ways through an extensive body of work that the struggle for social distinction is a fundamental dimension of all social life. While Thorstein Veblen (1899) coined the term “conspicuous consumption” to describe how outward symbols of consumer goods and activities reflect particular tastes associated with social status, Bourdieu extends Veblen’s work by introducing ways of thinking about distinction in relation to power. In this way, Bourdieu’s work provides a

² *Some scholars use the term Bourdieusian, while others use the term Bourdieusian, which is my choice here.*

framework for understanding the social effects of the institutionalization and commodification of literacy at Owl Books, and also at school. Using this framework I examine the power struggles that workers, parents, and children encounter over book consumption in relation to class, capital, and status, and I examine these experiences across fields. For example, Tracey, an informant from a working-class background who formed a book club with her friends, finds the club gives her cultural capital among the other book club members outside of school, while it puts her at social risk with other peers at school who criticize the book club as being “lame.” (06/02/09) As she negotiates a middle-class identity from a working-class family background, Tracey sees books as simultaneously giving and taking away her social power. There is a lot going on in Tracey’s social world, as explored further in Chapter 6, and her relationship with books complicates things even more. Such stories of struggles for identity and power as embedded within social class distinctions are examined in this study.

When Bourdieu writes, “The relation to what is possible is a relation to power” (1984: 64), he suggests that symbolic forms of capital perpetuate and maintain hierarchies of power and domination through the process of social reproduction, which became evident through my interviews and observations at the bookstore. The middle-class children in this study expressed social power in the form of assumptions about education and privilege; for example, they did not question the idea of someday going to college and eventually having a professional career. College as a future endeavor was a given. Embedded within middle-class assumptions about the future are attitudes and values around literacy. Parents and workers emphasized repeatedly to me, and to children in our presence, the value of literacy skills, including academic literacies, consumer literacies, and social literacies, as explained in more depth in Chapter 6. Parents and workers suggest they work to ensure that their children gain these skills and, furthermore, that they gain other

middle-class dispositions around those skills. In this regard, I found that parents and workers often take on an informal educative role, and in so doing, extend values about literacy as taught in schools.

Habitus

In Bourdieu's words, the habitus is a set of "durable and transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures..." (1977: 72), which refers neither to its complete determination by social factors nor to individual autonomy; rather, habitus is informed by both the objectivity of social structures (e.g., family, school, class) and the subjectivity of actors. This perspective assigns agency to social actors. By "durable," he means that dispositions are inculcated as part of the "self," and by "transposable," he means that actors carry dispositions from one field to another (see explanation of *field* below). Bourdieu uses the term "disposition" to reflect as a kind of "internal law" involving "a present past that tends to perpetuate itself into the future by reactivation in similarly structured practices" (1990a, p. 54). All of this suggests that the habitus is a dynamic system of dispositions that adapt and change over time and through experience. Bourdieu asserts:

The agent engaged in practice knows the world... too well, without objectifying distance, takes it for granted, precisely because he is caught up in it, bound up with it; he inhabits it like a garment... he feels at home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of the habitus. (2000: 142-3).

Reflecting resistance to the subjectivist/objectivist theoretical duality, Bourdieu's concept of habitus theorizes the space where individual agency overlaps with larger structural and social influences.

The notion of habitus explains how agents in this study—from workers, to parents, to children--acquire particular attitudes, values, and dispositions evident in practices that reflect those perspectives. Habitus is not only about *knowing*; it is also about *doing* or *not doing*, as it is "a system

of acquired dispositions functioning on the practical level as categories of perception and assessment... as well as being the organizing principles of action” (1990: 13). This study explores how, beginning in childhood, middle-class children negotiate this process of inculcation around particular tastes and dispositions (e.g., manners, rules of conduct, feelings about possibilities) related to book consumption, with workers, parents, and peers participating in the process.

Bourdieu’s concept of habitus reflects an individual’s “naturalized” understanding of what is possible, or not, within his/her social world. In this way, the habitus reflects what is taken for granted in terms of how the world works, and, consequently, how an individual knows and enacts particular social conventions and rules in unconscious ways. These dispositions become habituated through the repetition of social messages, with action or inaction following accordingly. This work shows how dispositions that inform the habitus are reinforced and reproduced through institutional structures, such as sites of consumption (e.g., Owl Books) and schools. Furthermore, this study explores how values and dispositions around the cultural capital associated with literacy and book consumption are part of middle-class parents’ and children’s habitus. Understanding the habitus of workers also helps us to appreciate how they come to think about their work by negotiating tensions associated with literacy and consumption. Although they understand through their habitus that their role is to sell books, they indicate struggles between being a sale clerk and their desire to be seen, valued, and treated respectfully as professionals who help children develop a love of reading.

Field

Bourdieu provides a context for habitus by understanding “field” as the structure and interaction of social rules, practices, and power within which the agent’s habitus operates. He defines field as the setting where social practices and activities take place, and where individual agents take on social positions based on the dynamic relationship between values and rules established for the

field, the agent's habitus, and the agent's capital (see explanation of various forms of capital below). Fields are neither static nor mutually exclusive, as they intersect and interact in dynamic ways. They are part of what Bourdieu sees as an objective hierarchy distinguished by particular structures (i.e., institutions, rules, categories), discourses, and activities. These structures are produced and authorized by the dominant culture, and they operate in relation to the larger field of social class. Examples of the multiple and sometimes competing fields considered for this project are the fields of education, literature, family, consumption, and leisure work. Other fields relevant here are the bookstore and school. According to Bourdieu:

The relation between habitus and field operates in two ways. On one side it is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the habitus, which is the product of the embodiment of the immanent necessity of the field (or a hierarchy of intersecting fields). On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or cognitive construction: habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense or with value, in which it is worth investing one's energy (Bourdieu, in Wacquant, 1989, p. 44).

The concept of field as a system of social positions (e.g., the field of book consumption) provides a conceptual basis and language for understanding the context of workers' and children's habitus. For example, the field of Owl Books is structured through relationships of power (e.g., Home Office/District Manager/Store Manager/Department Manager/Bookseller), which inform the ways that workers understand themselves in relation to their jobs. I asked book worker, Madeline, to describe her ideal bookstore, and she described a very different environment from Owl Books. For example, in her "ideal bookstore," she would have more power, freedom, and input into book selections, displays, and activities offered through the store, with the emphasis being on more "classic" books. The institutional structure of Owl Books prohibits her from making these kinds of decisions, yet she values her identity as a bookseller because she is helping children develop a love of

reading, so she accepts her limited power. These dispositions inform Madeline's habitus, which reflects all that she takes for granted as being "normal" in her world. Another field that frames literacy and book consumption in ways that inform children's habitus is school. All of the children I interviewed were aware of the level of their assigned reading group at school, and had knowledge of the kinds of books valued by schools. I try to understand in this dissertation where children fit into hierarchies of power within those fields and to theorize about implications for their social positions.

The struggle for power within fields is an area of study Bourdieu takes up. He argues that the existence of fields by nature fosters competition and struggles for power due to the unequal distribution of resources. According to Bourdieu, a field is a "space in which a game takes place, a field of objective relations between individuals or institutions who are competing for the same stake" (Bourdieu, quoted in Moi 1991: 1021). In considering how these struggles across fields occur, I explore how messages around literacy and consumption operate from field to field, as Bourdieu suggests that an agent's social life does not consist of only one field; rather, the habitus resides within a confluence of fields, which are embedded in systems of power, where resources are produced, assigned value, and regulated. Some of the struggles explored in this project relate to what constitutes capital (e.g., books, literacy skills), how capital is distributed (i.e., access to resources related to books and literacy), and how children occupy positions and exert social control according to the capital they hold within particular fields (e.g., classroom, family, peer groups). The idea of pleasure associated with books and reading further complicates these areas, with the fields of leisure and education clashing, as well as complementing, each other, which is another theme explored in this dissertation.

Capital

For Bourdieu, the notion of capital provides a critical vocabulary for talking about social inequality in terms of the availability, or not, of resources available to agents in a field. Bourdieu sees three forms of capital at play: economic, cultural, and social, which he contends are connected to value systems associated with power and legitimacy. He describes capital as the “set of actual usable resources and powers- economic, cultural and social- that distinguish the major classes of the conditions of existence” (p. 114). From this perspective, social class is connected to ideals of power, which are dependent on resources that are not equally distributed in society; rather, resources are inherited socially, and those with greater resources have greater social power. For this project, I draw primarily from the concept of cultural capital, while economic and social capital enter into the discussion to lesser degrees.

Economic capital refers to money, property, and assets, which in this context refers to the resources needed to make purchases at Owl Books, and to have access to transportation to get to the store in the first place. The middle-class children I spoke with were learning how economic capital works through their experiences at Owl Books, while also learning that literacy skills are important to securing middle-class opportunities for themselves. In this study, economic capital is the money used to buy books for middle-class children, which may come in the form of cash, gift cards, and parents’ credit cards. Economic capital provides middle-class children with the opportunity to participate in the experience of Owl Books. That is, economic capital allows middle-class families to buy a vehicle to get them to Owl Books; to have the resources to purchase books, refreshments, and other products at the store; and to participate comfortably in the social activities offered there. In short, economic capital allows middle-class families to feel welcome and “at home” in the field of Owl Books.

Cultural capital for Bourdieu (1984) refers to the broad cultural knowledge associated with social prestige as defined by dominant culture (e.g., taste in art and music, literary knowledge, understanding of technology), and whose legitimacy comes from institutions (e.g., educational and artistic institutions). For example, in the field of education, cultural capital refers to having the ability to navigate educational systems, such as applying for college or accessing financial aid resources. Bourdieu argues that the unequal distribution of cultural capital reproduces social inequities within a given field. For instance, from this perspective, success in school “is better explained by the amount and type of cultural capital inherited from the family milieu- not ‘natural’ abilities” (Schwartz, p. 75). In this respect, the notion of cultural capital explains how cultural reproduction takes place, since agents’ knowledge and experience provide opportunities for social success, while those lacking in cultural capital have diminished opportunities. However, cultural capital may be valued differently from field to field, putting different forms of cultural capital in competition with each other. For instance, Tracey frames her book club as a form of cultural capital when it comes to the recognition and respect of her close friends, while the book club puts her at social risk when it is degraded by the so-called “popular” peers. This dissertation describes other instances of children who negotiate competing struggles associated with the cultural capital around books.

Social capital, according to Bourdieu, is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 248). Social capital is about networking, or a person’s access to networks of power, and it explains how agents use social connections as a resource to garner power and status. One bookseller, Justine, suggested she “got the job” because she has associated with a former bookseller through a network of librarians. Other Owl Book workers were eager to talk about the social capital they have and that their work provides. For

instance, they were quick to mention their academic and professional credentials, as well as the credentials of other Owl Book workers, in ways that enhanced their status. Book workers (i.e., clerks) at Owl Books characterized themselves and their co-workers as “professionals,” who were trained as lawyers, librarians, and teachers, yet when I probed further, it turned out that these workers were actually paralegals, library assistants, and teaching assistants. Claims such as these are explored in Chapter 4 to show how individuals doing non-professional work struggle to negotiate middle-class prestige for themselves around their occupations.

Misrecognition

While for the most part, Owl Books workers appeared to enjoy and take pride in their work, they sometimes struggle for high status while performing a low-status job. They want to be seen as “professionals” even though they perform a sales service to “customers,” not a professional service to “clients.” Workers suggest that their connection to the high culture of books makes their role more prestigious, and they should be recognized for having knowledge, passion, and expertise. However, the corporate office and customers stand in the way by reinforcing workers’ status as “clerks” (even though the Home Office assigns them the more prestigious title of “booksellers”). Chapter 4 considers how the Home Office and customers in some ways benefit from workers’ low status because workers dutifully follow corporate orders, and sometimes act as babysitters for customers who leave children in their care. Although they desire to attain higher status, workers accept their position through a process of *misrecognition* (Bourdieu, 1977), where their roles become naturalized through the acceptance of institutionalized structures of power as being “the way it is,” as explained more fully in Chapter 4.

Social Reproduction

Bourdieu uses the term “reproduction” to signify how fields perpetuate the dominant class through hierarchies of control that sustain social inequalities over time, and from generation to generation. Bourdieu writes: “Those who talk of equality of opportunity forget that social games... are not ‘fair games’. Without being, strictly speaking, rigged, the competition resembles a handicap race that has lasted for generations” (2000: 214-15). From a structuralist perspective, Bourdieu explains how reproduction occurs by suggesting that culturally-assigned markers of taste, from food and drink; to art, music, and fashion; to religion, science, and philosophy, accentuate social differences and strengthen class distinctions over time. Struggles for distinction are struggles for power associated with individuals, groups, and institutions, which lie at the heart of social life. For Bourdieu, social practice is connected to habitus as the result of passive socialization and internalization of social rules and values, while it also comes from the ways in which agents see themselves within their social world and act in relation to what they view as opportunities and constraints. This project considers how middle-class values are reproduced at the big-box bookstore and at school through discourses and actions around literacy, particularly with respect to value systems associated with the cultural capital of literacy and books.

Limitations of Bourdieu’s Work

While Bourdieu informs this project in significant ways, there were times when his concepts seemed less applicable. When reading his work, I took into account his position as a sociologist whose thinking is situated within a hierarchical, clearly delineated class system in 20th century France. I found myself questioning the relevance of Bourdieu’s approach with respect to American society, where there is a high frequency of people who identify as middle-class, and where it is sometimes difficult to clearly assign individuals to one distinct class. As an example, I wondered how Bourdieu

would think about Tracey, who as described later in this dissertation found herself negotiating an identity between the working class world of her immediate family with the upper-class world of her extended family and the middle-class world of her peers and schools. As is the case with an analysis of Tracey's class position, it is possible to still make use of Bourdieu while acknowledging areas with less clearly defined connections, mainly by seeing how his work poses interesting questions about class. While he did not encounter in France the kinds of tensions Tracey experiences on a daily basis, and the ways in which his concepts of capital must be applied differently in the context of 21st century American culture, his work still provokes important questions around power and social reproduction.

In struggling with Bourdieu, I found it useful to consider how in their article “Cultural Capital: Allusions, Gaps, and Glissandos in the Recent Literature,” Lamont and Lareau (1988) aimed to “decouple cultural capital from the French context in which it was originally conceived to take into consideration the distinctive features of American culture” as a way of understanding social reproduction and inequality (153). However, rather than dismissing Bourdieu’s perspective altogether, Lareau expands upon his concepts when drawing from his work for her book, *Home Advantage* (1989), a study that examines how middle-class and working-class parents interact with schools. Lareau articulates why I am using Bourdieu’s concept of capital by seeing it as taking various forms, akin to a hand of cards that can be played when needed, which informs her interpretation of habitus. Lareau suggests the value in studying agents’ cultural capital, as well as the skills agents draw from their habitus, as a way of accessing their capital within particular structural and institutional contexts, which is why the contexts of Owl Books and school settings are so important to understanding the meaning of social class and reproduction for this work. Both Lareau and Michèle Lamont (2010) argue that cultural capital extends beyond familiarity with high culture and knowledge of school system values, suggesting that good research must consider individual

agents' perspectives on social values and status. Furthermore, Lamont asserts the need to see “pleasure, curiosity, and a need for community and recognition... [as] powerful engines for human action, certainly as powerful as the quest for power and maximization of one's position in fields of power that are privileged by Bourdieu.” These perspectives extend the Bourdieusian framework in useful ways for this dissertation.

Considering Class

The definition of class for this project is based on the assertion that, in the United States, we live in a class-based society that has a profound effect on individuals' life chances. Class is understood here as a group of individuals with similar access to economic, educational, social, occupational, and cultural opportunities related to degrees of wealth, prestige, and power. I am interested in the practices, values, and attitudes connected to class, including class-associated patterns of advantages and disadvantages, which have significant effects on individuals' experiences and opportunities. Langston (1988) argues that Americans “experience class at every level of [their] lives” (90), through daily life, including educationally, culturally, visually, and linguistically. Class is carved into the soul and written on the body, and yet, as stated earlier, it is not as hierarchical or delineated as it was in Bourdieu's 20th century France. According to Langston, “As a result of the class you were born into, and raised in, class is your understanding of the world and where you fit in; it's composed of ideas, behavior, attitudes, values, and language; class is how you think, feel, act, look, dress, talk, move, walk; class is what stores you shop at, restaurants you eat in; class is the schools you attend, the education you attain; class is the very jobs you will work at through your adult life” (90). This interpretation reflects the difficulties of pinning down class, or simply defining it according to income level or assets. For instance, an adjunct professor may earn little money, while having a middle-class orientation because of particular educational and cultural advantages.

The interpretation of class for this project takes into account the greater social influences and indicators that inform the way a person thinks of herself, and the way people think of one another.

This project acknowledges that social class is situated in American culture and operates within a system of social institutions and social relationships, where class intersects with gender and race, and where "... class position [is] due to structural, systematic, institutionalized economic and political power relations. These power relations are based firmly on dynamics such as race, gender, and class" (Langston, 1988). Although I argue that an intersectional approach is critically important whenever considering the construction and implications of class, the limitations of this study have made it impossible to give gender and race the full attention they deserve. Issues around gender and race are addressed to a degree; however, the primary focus here has centered on the social reproduction of class. This is problematized further in the Methods chapter.

Framing Family and Family Time

Childhood socialization within the social institution of family has profound effects on attitudes and values related to class, with the social location of parents having significant influence over the socialization experience (see Kohn and Schooler 1983; Coleman 1988; Lareau, 1989). This is primarily because parents' social class affects access to resources they provide to their children. Resources are more than just explicit material goods; they include the kind of implicit, taken-for-granted knowledge associated with social class, resulting in "knowing" how to be middle-class. As noted earlier, Bourdieu (1984, 1986) thinks of family resources in terms of capital; that is, family resources influence a child's access to economic capital (i.e., wealth, money, material goods), cultural capital (i.e., knowledge about one's social world), and social capital (i.e., social connections). The middle-class families in this study provide an array of resources to their children, including money and knowledge around how to spend or save it; access to opportunities around schooling; and family

outing experiences that provide opportunities for leisure as well as education. This study considers how these family resources are thought about and distributed in ways that promote a middle-class future for middle-class children and reproduces the lifestyle they have grown accustomed to, and have come to accept as “normal” and expected for themselves.

In her book *Feeding the Family*, Marjorie L. DeVault (1995) considers negotiations between individuality and family in her project exploring women’s work around meal making, observing that, “Feeding the individuals who live in a household makes them a group... by reconciling their different activities in order to produce a common life; but feeding is also done so as to produce a particular kind of group, one that is intimate and personal. The work involves special attention to the individuality of each family member” (85). She points out that individual family members, especially children, often have their own eating preferences, which a mother may accommodate along with other individual preferences, but using her own discretion in doing so, which sometimes involves boundary setting. Further, DeVault notes, “The family is a place where people expect to be treated in a unique, personally specific way instead of anonymously, as they are often treated on the outside. Part of the work of feeding is to give this kind of individual attention, and doing so constitutes a particular household group as the kind of place we expect a ‘family’ to be” (85). Middle-class parents I spoke with expressed a desire to have a “group experience,” while having some time to themselves at the bookstore, which is something they say is a luxury within their family’s busy, highly-scheduled lives.

The ways that middle-class families in this study understand and engage in “family time” at the big-box bookstore reflects what is important and accessible to them individually and collectively. I discovered through my interviews with middle-class families who take family outings to Owl Books that, although these outings are considered to be “family time,” individual family members desire and expect to have some individual experiences at the store, meaning that parents want to

look at particular books, enjoy some coffee, or listen to music that they enjoy—alone, all the while knowing their children are not too far away. This suggests a desire for middle-class families to be together in their separateness. To a degree, the age of the children affects the character of this “separation”; however, booksellers told me that parents leave very young children in their care, as was the case I observed involving a two-year-old toddler whose mother shopped elsewhere in the store as her young daughter looked at books while sucking on a pacifier in the children’s section of Owl Books. As I observed this and other events, I found that the big-box bookstore as a site of inquiry raised questions related to individuality within the context of the middle-class family outing. Being together for middle-class families means agreeing upon a destination, driving together in the same vehicle, being physically in the same general location, and checking in with each other at agreed-upon time intervals, which ensures a degree of “family togetherness” while simultaneously providing what feels like precious opportunity for individual time.

To further complicate the construction of family time, I considered how middle-class parents also chose Owl Books as a destination for family outings because they say it provides an educative experience for their children. The notion of the middle-class family outing as an educational in nature raises a number of questions, such as, how do middle-class parents and children think about leisure? And, how does the middle-class family understand leisure as work around education? I discovered that middle-class parents, who suggest they are pressured when it comes to keeping up with family members’ full-schedule lives, combine leisure with work as a way of multi-tasking. Furthermore, the middle-class parents I spoke with indicated they are responsible for extending the work of schools, and the family outing to Owl Books provides the opportunity to do this, while offering an environment where family members are able to pursue their own interests. I call this phenomenon “leisure work,” which reflects what appears to be a paradoxical experience,

but in fact, is structured and operates in ways that sustain the busy lifestyles expected of today's middle-class American families.

Defining Literacy

Deborah Brandt in *Literacy in American Lives* writes: “Literacy is a resource in the way that electricity is a resource: its circulation keeps lights on. Literacy is also a productive resource, a means of production and reproduction, including a means by which legacies of human experience move from the past to the future and by which, for many, identities are made and sustained” (p. 6). I draw from Brandt’s definition because its metaphorical usefulness for this project, where literacies inform and reproduce middle-class identities. The term “literacy” for this project is also based on an interpretation by The New London Group (1996), which resisted the traditional, exclusively school-based definition of literacy (“teaching and learning to read and write in page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language” [1]). By introducing the concept of multiliteracies, the group argued that the traditional definition failed to accommodate the world’s social, cultural, and linguistic diversity. They asserted that the term multiliteracies “overcomes the limitations of traditional approaches by emphasizing how negotiating the multiple linguistic and cultural differences in our society is central to the pragmatics of the working, civic, and private lives of students” (1). My study is built around the idea that broader interpretations of literacy are critically important if one is to understand how various literacies become cultural capital that reproduces middle-class culture. From Bourdieu’s perspective, those with cultural capital associated with academic literacy, such as knowledge, tastes, and resources privileged by the school environment, have an advantage over those who lack cultural capital and who, consequently, have less opportunity. Along these lines, Marc Lamont Hill (2008) argues that “schools commit acts of symbolic violence and reproduce inequality by imposing and privileging arbitrary cultural forms

reflective of class interests. Those with little or no formally recognized cultural capital associated with literacy encounter great difficulty because of the undesirable exchange rate between home and school capital” (138). Bourdieu (1991) argues that power and privilege that derive from possessing capital and the amount of recognition that the capital receives within a particular field of social relations are directly proportionate. From this perspective, literacy provides a degree of social power, which is a theme threaded throughout this dissertation.

The Setting and Participants

As will be explained more fully in the *Methods* chapter, I attempted to include families from lower socio-economic backgrounds who take family outings to Owl Books, but had trouble locating them, despite my attempt to make connections both inside and outside the store. Why was this so? I argue that, for a number of reasons, more economically disadvantaged families are not welcome at this location of Owl Books. First, there is no safe access to the store through public transportation, with the nearest bus stop across a busy, four-lane highway, which would be dangerous to cross with young children in tow. Furthermore, if a working-class or low-income family was able to get to the store, the environment itself is somewhat exclusionary due to its limited types of children's book selections (i.e., it primarily carries books with white, middle-class characters). This exclusive atmosphere at Owl Books appeared to be influenced in part by some booksellers' attitudes at particular moments. For example, a sales associate in the children's book department expressed to me several stereotypical views of "poor" people, asserting that she can identify "poor" people by their clothing (i.e., tidy clothes for middle-class people; rumpled clothes for “poor” people) and cleanliness (i.e., middle-class people are clean, while "poor" people are dirty). I imagine that "poor" people would pick up on, and feel uncomfortable with, this perspective. Finally, I learned why some families do not go to Owl Books through phone conversations I had with three mothers whose

children were identified as strong readers by their school librarian. The librarian identified these families as “low income” and “poor.” Each mother was extremely proud of her child’s reading achievements, but they said they did not go to the bookstore because they did not have the time or resources to do so. One mother was caring for a gravely ill spouse and aging parents in her home, as well as dealing with her own health issues while mothering four children. Another mother mentioned she worked one full-time and two part-time jobs. The last mother I talked with spoke little English and had never heard of Owl Books. Although each of these mothers was clearly supportive and proud of her child’s reading skills, the idea of a family outing to a bookstore was not a possibility for them. These mothers did not have the access to resources that would make this experience something they might remotely imagine for themselves and their families.

In contrast to what I found to be an absence of working class or economically disadvantaged people at Owl Books, I found an abundance of middle-class families who go there and are eager to share their thoughts about reading. I became interested in their discourse. It appeared as though they were proud of their role in promoting their children's literacy skills, which they assumed represented good parenting on their part, and they wanted to talk about it. I found that middle-class identities were informed by parents’ connections to reading and books, as they described their children as “good readers” or “bookworms.” For all of these reasons, while at the outset I was primarily interested in learning more about the bookstore experience for all, my research became focused on middle-class families and the bookstore setting.

Of the six families I interviewed, only one (Tracey's) identified as working class, as suggested earlier; however, Tracey's experiences say something about the complications around constructing and defining "class" for a child. The complication is that Tracey attends a middle-class middle school, associates daily with middle-class children, and has an extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins) that is exclusively middle and upper middle-class, so her story represents how a

child from a working class family can be exposed to and influenced by middle-class associations. The confidence Tracey showed when talking with me about books reflects the self-assured style of middle-class children Lareau writes about. This project shows examples of Tracey's speaking philosophically about the meaning of "success." Perhaps this degree of introspection comes from her daily toggling between the working class world of home life and a middle-class milieu at school. As a working class child in a middle-class world, Tracey must confront and consider these class distinctions each and every day, because they inform her own life so profoundly.

Outline of the Chapters

Workers

Chapter 4 considers status and work within the context of Owl Books, drawing from interviews with workers and participant observation to understand how they make sense of their work. Relying on Bourdieu, the chapter examines how booksellers in the children's department in many ways love their work and see it as "important" because they are helping children learn to love reading and books. While they have pride in aspects of their work, they often struggle for professional status by viewing their connection to books as high culture. In this way, books become signs of distinction that inform Owl Books workers' habitus. This project discusses the idea that booksellers want to use their expertise while interacting with and influencing children directly. The chapter explains how booksellers indicate that parents treat them like babysitters and stand in their way of exercising their expertise. Booksellers suggest they experience pleasure and pride around their work, and while they are, by definition, clerks and not professionals, they do not want to be read as clerks. As a result, this project considers how booksellers sometimes *misrecognize* their positions while negotiating their status when bookstore and customers read them as clerks, rather than as professionals. That is, booksellers at times negotiate and accept their roles through a process of misrecognition, where

their roles become naturalized through acceptance of institutionalized structures of power.

Parents

Complications around middle-class parents' perspectives on family time, consumption, and status are also brought to light in Chapter 5 by considering how parents construct family time at Owl Books. The chapter considers how parents see the bookstore as a place where all family members can, and should, relax and enjoy themselves. At the same time children learn literacy skills related to academic, consumer, and social experiences that provide cultural capital and status associated with books and literacy. The chapter explores how middle-class parents in this study see Owl Books as an informal site of education where they can teach their children literacy skills they say will provide middle-class opportunities. As noted earlier, family members are physically apart in the store "doing their own thing," while maintaining a sense of "togetherness." The term "leisure work" reflects how parents frame family time at the bookstore as a multi-purposed experience, where the fields of leisure and work combine and conflict, which the chapter investigates from a Bourdieusian perspective.

Children

Chapter 6 examines how children seek middle-class status by connecting to other children through sharing common interests in books, which sometimes provides prestige, while in other contexts puts them at social risk. The chapter explores how children negotiate these relationships in ways that reflect a thoughtful association with books, where they indicate that books reflect who they are to themselves and to others. While children suggested to me that their association with books may make them more connected to friends who share a similar love of reading (even when

they disagree on the quality of particular books), they say that the “popular kids” would ostracize them for the same. Children in this study appear to seek and enjoy praise from teachers and parents for "reading well." They indicate an assumption that reading is important to their future opportunities and middle-class success. At the same time, they want books to provide a level of engagement and a chance to connect with friends, as well as an opportunity to gain knowledge about things they care about.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter turns to the academic literature to establish a context for understanding how people struggle for middle-class status through their association with literacy and books. The literature on social reproduction is considered from a Bourdieusian perspective with respect to consumption, literacy, and family time. The chapter looks at how scholars discuss social reproduction in relation to everyday life, which for this project is the middle-class family outing to the big-box bookstore. Finally, the chapter draws from these perspectives as it examines several ethnographic studies that rely on Bourdieu to show how social reproduction theory applies to practice.

Social Reproduction and Consumption

A wealth of contemporary literature on consumption focuses on adults living in the U.S., which is useful to my work in terms of understanding some history and politics of consumption, although it does not look at book consumption in particular. Work on shopping and ethnicity (See Halter, 2000; Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; Mansvelt, 2005; and Miller, et. al., 1998) demonstrates how consumption practices are culturally based, which has some applicability for studying social life in a bookstore. A significant work on children and consumption is Juliet B. Schor's *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (2005), which includes important research on the effects of commercialization on children. Drawing from interviews with children and advertising executives, she focuses on the ubiquity and power of marketing strategies aimed at “branding” children (Also see Klein, 2002) into becoming lifelong customers. Schor's other works (1993, 1996) are useful to situating my project within the areas of leisure and work. Eighteen years ago, in *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (1993), she called attention to what she viewed as an out-of-balance condition whereby people were working more hours than ever due to the

seduction of conspicuous consumption and debt, leaving less than 16 hours a week for leisure. She predicted this unhealthy state would worsen significantly by the year 2000. Her book *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* (1993) argues that excesses such as extreme desires for material goods and the overscheduled lives of children are consequences of a competitive global economy. Schor suggests that parents are connected to consumption through their desire to provide children with costly material goods and social opportunities, such as involvement in extracurricular activities (e.g., piano lessons, martial arts classes, dance lessons, soccer leagues-- all of which cost money). From this perspective, middle-class parents at Owl Books are buying books for children because they hope to instill a love of reading connected to middle-class desire for academic and professional success. In this way, book consumption becomes both a material and symbolic representation of middle-class status. Interview data for this project indicates that middle-class parents who encourage their children to consume books say they are being “good” parents, and booksellers who sell children’s books say they are doing “good” work. “Good” is a discourse that sometimes suggests an identification with “middle-class” values. Along these lines, Robert Bocoock (1993) argues that consumption has a great deal of social significance in contemporary society with respect to identity formation:

Consumption... implies a move away from productive work roles being central to people’s lives, to their sense of identity, or who they are. In place of work roles, it is roles in various kinds of family formations, in sexual partnerships of various kinds, in leisure-time pursuits, in consumption in general, which have come to be seen as more and more significant to people. (p. 4).

This speaks to the “leisure-time pursuit” of the middle-class family outing to the bookstore, which, as I have learned through my research, helps middle-class parents and children identify with, prepare for, and participate in, middle-class culture.

An abundance of literature, though not connected directly to consumption and books, or consumption and families, provides useful perspectives on how meaning is made around shopping as an everyday activity. In her work around childhood culture and consumption, Zelizer (2005) defines consumption as an economic process informed by culture consisting of “continuously negotiated meaning-drenched social relations” (p. 349). In other words, consumption becomes a way of connecting to others, whether it is between workers and families, parents and children, or children and children. Pugh (2009) extends Zelizer’s work by suggesting that “people create and experience meaning in groups via particular rituals, interactions, and institutions, which serve to shape and communicate norms and expectations. The personal, local interpretations of commodities and events that comprise contemporary childhoods are not simply idiosyncratic, but rather grounded in social locations and fraught with social implications” (p. 16). She suggests that matters of “taste” for adults and children have social consequences, which she interprets from a Bourdieusian perspective, arguing that “parents socialize children into having “good” taste, though at times unconscious cultural practices of investing certain goods—or a certain approach to goods, such as a knowing connoisseurship—with the power to establish group boundaries” (p. 17). Pugh notes that the majority of research in the area of children and consumption “considers children as if they lived only in families, and not in communities of their own, with cultures of their own” (p. 17). Ideas of cultural capital do not solely come to children through the family; the process is more complex than that, as it takes into account influences of peers and school environments, as well as the media. This means that conflicts can arise within families in terms of what constitutes “value” when it comes to cultural capital, which means the process of building knowledge around cultural capital is “not quite as seamless as some researchers might suggest, because of the dynamic influence of children’s own cultural imperatives” (p. 17). Adler & Adler (1998) write that children do not “perceive, interpret, form opinions about, or act on the world as unconnected individuals.

Rather, they do all these things in concert with their peers, as they collectively experience the world” (p. 206). My study found that middle-class children must continually negotiate the meaning of cultural capital among and between the contexts of family, school, and peers. For example, they know that the kinds of books valued in one context are sometimes devalued in others, so they struggle over what they stand to gain or lose through associations with books. The children I spoke with see books as expressions of who they are, which in some ways complicates their lives, as they need to juggle their sense of self with expectations that come from membership in groups whose opinions they value, but whose opinions may conflict, not only with each other, but with themselves.

Another contemporary look at the social aspects of consumption comes from Naomi Klein’s *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs* (1999). She suggests that her book “is not another account of the power of the select group of corporate Goliaths that have gathered to form our de facto global government. Rather, it is an attempt to analyze and document the forces opposing corporate rule, and to lay out the particular set of cultural and economic conditions that made the emergence of that opposition inevitable” (p. xxiii). Klein argues that branded images are ever-present influences in our everyday lives through the media and through their infiltration in such sanctified spaces as schools where corporate sponsorship and advertisements in bathrooms and cafeterias are commonplace. These examples promote “corporate multiculturalism” where corporate promises of promoting multiculturalism and diversity are reduced to providing consumers with more buying choices. Klein refers to the power of image in our society as connected to our worship of brand names, connected to the selling of “images” rather than “brands” (p. 4). She positions consumers not as robotic entities controlled by powerful corporate advertising and marketing schemes, but rather as active participants who come from their own significant power base, as they are ready, willing, and able to take an active role in resisting, reigning in, and reshaping corporate influence.

Sharon Zukin's *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture*, addresses the powerful role consumerism has in Americans' daily social lives. Zukin defines shopping as:

... a complex system for integrating people into the world of goods... We shop in corporate-owned chain stores where we don't know the salespeople, cashiers, security guards, or owners. Just as in a simple marketplace, however, the very activity of coming into immediate contact with goods—smelling the strong aroma of coffee or fresh bread, squeezing the tomatoes, or even, with less sensual gratification, reading the labels on the frozen food or compact disc—excites us. We want to be around these things; often, we want to have them on our bodies and in our homes (p. 13).

Practices of consumerism are understood as a means for establishing an identity that translates to higher social status within particular groups. The more that one shops (depending on the places where one shops), the higher level of prestige one achieves, but the ultimate achievement of self-satisfaction through shopping practices is elusive, despite implicit and explicit promises of consumer culture. Zukin's perspective is reminiscent of Bourdieu's work around the struggle for social distinction as she writes:

It's not enough—and not even right—to trace the pervasiveness of shopping in our time to an excess of greed, “luxury fever,” or the “urge to splurge.” To understand where, and why, I shop, you have to look at both big structures of the economy and culture and little structures of feeling and desire. You have to look at the institutions that form the supply side of consumption: business organizations dedicated to selling us things, financial consultants with an appetite for corporate growth, and repeated demonstrations that, in a market economy, social status and distinction can be bought. You also have to read the magazines and consumer guides that create the very idea of lifestyle. And you will only understand what the public has become if you examine the branded stores, boutiques,

discount chains, and websites where we shop. For this is where we form our dreams about a perfect society... and about a perfect self (p. 10).

Zukin illuminates the process through which institutional sites of consumption reproduce social class. The culture of shopping teaches us that things we buy represent who we are, both individually and collectively, while making promises about our potential for achieving status associated with social class through our purchases. The desire to “buy” comes from the larger consumer culture, as well as from the more local need to “become” someone who measures up and can, therefore, “belong” to a particular lifestyle.

Reflecting its role as a site for book consumption, Owl Books has a “themed” environment, with its colorful murals featuring larger-than-life bohemian writers; its literary posters; its fireplace and overstuffed chairs; its dark wooden tables and bookshelves; its displays of literary book bags and coffee mugs; and its inviting Winnie the Pooh stage in the children’s section. Everywhere you look, you see books, or representations of books, displayed as symbols of middle-class status and achievement. The concept of the “themed” environment is explored by Gottdiener (2001), who argues that:

The forms of a symbol-ridden environment pervade everyday life... Shopping increasingly occurs in large suburban malls or special central city districts that define themes purposefully to entice consumers. Architecture and decor artfully play out distinctive symbolic appeals that connect the mall shopping experience with the media world of television and popular culture... [O]ur daily life occurs within a material environment that is dependent on and organized around overarching motifs. (p. 3)

Gottdiener understands themed environments as “the material products of two social processes” including existing as “containers for commodified human interaction (for example, malls)” and as “products of a cultural process aimed at investing constructed spaces with symbolic meaning motifs

[which] take on a range of meanings according to the interpretations of the individuals exposed to them" (p. 5). Another symbolic site of consumption is the fast-food industry, which is examined from a sociological perspective in Ritzer's *The McDonaldization of Society*, calling McDonald's "one of the most influential developments in modern society (p. 1)," highlighting its powerful corporate influence on lifestyles throughout the world. Ritzer claims that McDonald's has an iconic presence, symbolizing American culture not only in the U.S., but also abroad (p. 6). Rizer notes that Starbucks, one of the newer additions to the fast-food industry and also a standard fixture in Owl Books stores, has grown exponentially since the 1980s, with more than "6,000 company-owned shops (there are no franchises) by 2003, more than ten times the number of shops in 1994 (3)." As Ritzer views the act of eating fast food at McDonald's as a sign that one is participating in contemporary lifestyle (p. 12), this project views participating in the big-box bookstore experience as being a sign of worthwhile participation in fostering literacy experiences for middle-class children. While the big-box bookstore sells books to middle-class families, it also sells ideas about cultural and social values around reading and literacy. In this respect, books become forms of cultural capital and signs of distinction accessible through, and associated with, middle-class life. Similarly, schools sell ideas about literacy in ways that reproduce middle-class orientations, which is a perspective addressed in the literature described next.

Social Reproduction and Literacy

This section begins by defining and situating the term "literacy" as a way to foreground the subsequent argument claiming that literacy practices in American culture, particularly as framed by schools, lead to social reproduction. Historical perspectives presented in the literature demonstrate how definitions of literacy are influenced by social and political contexts, and they mark shifts in attitudes toward reading and writing. From its ancient beginnings, "literature" carried with it

connotations of class and status. “Literate” derives from the Latin term “literature,” which originally meant a learned person, or someone who held higher status in ancient society. A “litteratus” was someone who could read (but not necessarily write) Latin in the Middle Ages. However, after 1300, “litteratus” came to mean having a minimal ability to read Latin, mainly because of the breakdown of learning that occurred during the Middle Ages (Clanchy 1979). Current definitions of literate/illiterate date back to the later 18th century when Lord Chesterfield wrote that an “illiterate” was someone who was “ignorant of Greek and Latin” (Clanchy, 1979), a definition where I argue that the subtext of “ignorant” suggests “lower class.” In the mid-1950s, Gray and Unesco defined literacy as a “continuum of skills” which included both reading and writing, but had a social context. Also at that time, reading levels (e.g., minimal, functional) were established. The phrase “functional literacy” was popularized and suggested the existence of a “nonfunctional literacy.” Webster’s Dictionary defined “literate” in 1954 as being “able to read and write,” while it defined “illiterate” as “unable to read.” According to Lankshear and Knobel (2003):

..in no way was ‘literacy’ identified as a formal educational *ideal* prior to the 1970s. At most, within formal educational settings, reading and writing were seen as essential tools for learning to occur, and for vehicles for accessing and communicating meanings via printed texts. They were a *means* for learning, not an end—let alone *the* end. Functional mastery of reading and writing was effectively taken for granted as bottom line outcomes of classroom learning for all students... [S]o far as curriculum and pedagogy within formal education were concerned, what was talked about, debated and so on was not *literacy*, but reading and to a lesser extent, *writing*. The situation changed considerably during the 1970s in the US... All of a sudden a focus on ‘literacy’ was projected into the centre of the formal educational stage (pp. 5-6).

It was no longer enough to think about “literacy” solely in terms of reading and writing skills, as it took on, and was informed by, political and social meaning.

Barton and Hamilton (2000) explain that “literacy is a social practice” that takes the form of the following six propositions:

- Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.
- There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.
- Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others.
- Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
- Literacy is historically situated.
- Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making. (p. 8).

Contemporary scholars of literacy differentiate between *literacy events* and *literacy practices*. *Literacy events* are “observable episodes” while *literacy practices* are abstractions, as they exist in “the relations between people, within groups and communities” and they reflect “values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships” (p. 8). For example, a *literary event* is the observation of a man sitting at a café reading the *The Wall Street Journal*. A *literacy practice* is more analytical and contextual than observational, for example, theorizing that the man reading the *The Wall Street Journal* has high status because of what he is reading. Therefore, the concept of “literacy practices offers a powerful way of conceptualizing the link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help shape” (p. 7). Although “habitus” and “cultural capital” are not terms used often in literacy scholarship, I argue that the perspective outlined above

supports the notion that certain literacy practices are a form of cultural capital and a sign of distinction that reproduce middle-class culture within contemporary American society.

A major influence on the contemporary framing of literacy came about when The New London Group (1996) introduced the term “multiliteracies” as a way to acknowledge shifting patterns of literacy, which brought such areas as visual literacy and critical literacy into the conversation. Cook-Gumpert (1986) claims that “literacy needs to be seen as providing not just technical skills but also a set of prescriptions about using knowledge. In this sense literacy is a socially constructed phenomenon, not simply the ability to read and write” (p. 1). The introduction of “new literacies” (See Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu, 2008), such as technological literacy, into the discussion reflects the ever-evolving nature of literacy and literacy practices as social constructions. Such complicating discussions of multiliteracies has paralleled larger questions about what gets to count as education, and where education takes place. This multiliteracy perspective expands the definition of “literacy” beyond reading and writing words, which allows for consideration of social and cultural inequities that reproduce social class in relation to both formal and informal educational practices, including the family outing to Owl Books. Further, my definition and analysis of three types of literacy (academic, social, and consumer) that children learn at the bookstore reflect and broaden this multiliteracy perspective, as elaborated upon in Chapter 6.

Cole and Pullen (2010) assert that “Multiliteracies is... a platform for the multiple elements that converge in educational practice as it is performed in formal and informal situations” (p. 2). This perspective is reflected in the work of Hager & Smith (2004), who argue that research on multiliteracies considers the social aspects of the literacy experience, suggesting the need to value informal learning that happens within groups, such as informal learning that occurs during the family outing to Owl Books. Walsh (1991) writes:

... perspectives of and approaches to literacy are shaped by theoretical and ideological

concerns which extend beyond the classroom walls. These concerns are related to beliefs and assumptions about the nature of knowledge, of people (i.e., teachers and students), of experience, and to the relations of power and of social and cultural control which these beliefs and assumptions both construct and incorporate (p. 9).

Ideas about literacy have great implications for the educational system, as noted by Lankshear & Knobel, who argue, “Literacy has become absolutely central to educational policy, curriculum development, and our everyday thinking about educational practice” (p. 1). This concern becomes more critical when literacy practices and policies are viewed as contributing to social reproduction, as it suggests that the educational system as a field is complicit in perpetuating the status quo.

Bourdieu (1993) uses “field” as a fundamental concept in his theory, writing that “an independent social universe with its own laws of functioning, its specific relations of force, its dominants and its dominated” (p. 164). He further explains this concept in relation to the literary field in his essay, “Field of Power”:

The field is neither a vague social background nor even a *milieu artistique* like a universe of personal relations between artist and writers... It is a veritable social universe where, in accordance with particular laws, there accumulates a particular form of capital and where relations of force of a particular type are exerted. This universe is the place of entirely specific struggles, notably concerning the question of knowing who is part of the universe, who is a real writer and who is not. The important fact, for the interpretation of works, is that this autonomous social universe functions somewhat like a prism which refracts every external determination: demographic, economic or political events are always retranslated according to the specific logic of the field, and it is by this intermediary that they act on the logic of the development of works (p. 163-64).

In relation to books and the bookstore, Bourdieu's concept of "the autonomous social universe" reflects my observation that the institution of Owl Books limits access to those individuals without the financial means to purchase books and the transportation to get to the store. Furthermore, the culture of the store favors middle-class customers, and I discerned from a bookseller's discourse (referring to some customers as "dirty" or "shady") that low-income people, and people of color, disrupt booksellers' sense of comfort they associated with homogeneity. I interpreted this choice of words as coded language that intended to mask the race and class implications of their talk, implications that I argue in this dissertation foster and perpetuate an environment that privileges middle-class whiteness. From this perspective, there is not equal opportunity and access to cultural capital associated with the Owl Books store in this study, because the social and institutional "prism" refracts "undesirables" away. Becoming "literate" will not erase the boundaries associated with race, gender, and class.

While establishing the literary field as a site of struggle, the work of Bourdieu challenges us to consider socioeconomic disparity in relation to cultural capital and literacy practices. Albright and Luke (2008) suggest that Bourdieu's work is more relevant than ever, as matters of inequality connected to literacy practices exist within a "complex system of generational and intergenerational exchanges of capital, the ongoing interplay of positions and position-taking in relation to the structuring fields of school, workplace, civic, and media cultures" (p. 3). This is particularly visible in the family outing to Owl Books, where middle-class parents teach their children what counts as cultural capital. Cook-Gumperz (1986) suggests that "looking at [literacy] from a global position we become aware that reading, writing, and speaking in everyday life and in formal instructional situations require us to ask how literacy affects people's everyday use of language; not how people are judged literate but how they use or negotiate literate resources" (p. 1). Variances in the distribution of resources become evident in a socially stratified society such as the US (Bourdieu and

Passeron 1977), where educational experiences around literacy are a kind of cultural capital that reproduces class distinctions (1991). This perspective is reiterated by Gee (1996), Eckert (2000), Hanks (1996), and Heath (1983), among others.

Bourdieu's (1980) definition of power as being imposed by a class-based system of social domination suggests the need to interrogate what gets to count as literacy, and who has the power to make such distinctions. Along those lines, Elizabeth B. Moje (2000) complicates the definition of literacy in her article, "'To Be Part of the Story': The Literacy Practices of Gangsta Adolescents." Moje studied how gang-connected youth use many "unsanctioned" literacy practices as they behave as active meaning makers who use graffiti writing as "communicative, expressive, and transformative tools for shaping their social worlds." Moje argues that teachers and researchers would benefit from studying these literacy practices. She situates her work within a sociocultural definition of literacy, as noted by Vygotsky (1978), suggesting that "language and literacy are socially, culturally, and historically situated tools for exploring, claiming, or transforming thought or experience" (p. 653). She uses cultural theory and literacy theory as underpinnings to her theory that marginalized youth use literacy "not only to resist, but also to make meaning about the events in their everyday lives" (p. 654). Gee (1996), Luke (1995, 1996), and Street (1994) of the New London School concur that "who people are, and who they are allowed to be, is shaped in part by the ways they use literacy" (Moje, p. 653). This also suggests that society controls which literacies are "allowed" to be expressed and counted. Literacy theory provides a way of understanding how an individual identifies himself as a member of a disenfranchised social group.

Michael W. Apple (1982) contends that schools legitimate the social order. Although Apple is considered more of a neo-Marxist than a follower of Bourdieu, I argue that his work reflects Bourdieu's perspective on social reproduction and habitus here: "[S]chools have a profound impact on students' life chances and can illuminate the tie schools have to the surrounding social order"

(Apple, p. 2). Further, Apple suggests that the normalization of what appear to be benign middle-class experiences create a fertile cultural landscape for the reproduction of a hegemonic social class structure, writing that, “Hegemony is not found in one’s head... but [it is] made up of our everyday-to-day cultural, political, and economic (ideological) practice, a set of practices which help create it” (p. 3). Clearly, to each of the scholars mentioned in this section, literacy is inextricably linked to the multi-layered process of social reproduction, which is also tied to the ways that meaning is made around family time spent at the bookstore, as explored next.

Social Reproduction and Family Time

Since this project looks at the experience of families at the bookstore, I will review in this section literature on families and family time. Because I found no ethnographic work focusing specifically on the family outing in relation to social reproduction, I turned to the literature that focuses on “family” and on “time,” specifically the scholarship of Marjorie L. DeVault (1994, 2000, 2003), whose ethnography, which I discuss later on in this section, provides important foundational knowledge on the family outing. Gillis (1996) notes that ritualized family activities were connected to the emergence of middle-class families in the late 1800s in North American and Europe, which related to industrialized society where “quality time” gained relevance as families spread apart geographically. Similarly, Coontz (1992) points out that the ideology of family as a primary source of enjoyment and fulfillment was not popularized until the 18th and 19th centuries.

Today the literature on “family” and on “time” includes hundreds of popular books aimed at helping to organize harried middle-class families running from one activity to the next. The existence of these books indicates that middle-class families struggle with family time. Some scholarly work has been done on the overscheduled child and family [See Schor, 1993; Nippert-Eng, 1995/1996; Hochschild, 1983, 1989], and while this work provides useful insights, for the most part,

families who are not “middle-class” are noticeably absent from those works. Kerry J. Daly (2001) notes other shortcomings of research on family time, writing: “Family time does not typically include portrayals of nontraditional families, the negative aspects of family activities or the different meanings and entitlements associated with family time for each family member” (p. 284). Along those lines, Davies (1994) suggests that the concept of time itself has not been fully explored and problematized, arguing that “greater conceptual clarity” would lead to greater understanding of such issues as care-work. In light of these concerns, this section introduces sources on family, parenting, and time in order to define and problematize “family time.” In this way, “family time” is seen as a social construct involving middle-class family rituals, such as going to the bookstore, which I argue is connected to the process of social reproduction.

The question, “What is family?” has been problematized in the literature by feminist scholars since the 1960s (See Friedan, 1963; Lopata & Thorne, 1978; Connell, 1987). These scholars have pushed against assertions by functional theorists (See Parsons & Bales, 1955; Malinowski, 1913) on the universal inevitability and functionalism of the nuclear family. While this project’s limitations do not permit a full explanation of the history of these debates, it draws to an extent from feminist scholarship. From this perspective, DeVault’s (2000) definition of family as “a distinctive social configuration that is continually brought into being through people’s activities, interactions, and interpretations, situated within powerful discourses of family life” (p. 487) is useful to my work. My project’s understanding of “family” is also reflective of Stacey (1996) and Collier, Rolsado, and Yanagisako (1992) who assert that the meaning of “family” is a symbolic, dynamic construct rooted in the social world and defined by its historical, political, religious, and economic contexts. As a result of its dependency on these fluid social constructs, the notion of “family” may be viewed as a concept that is continually being negotiated and redefined. Ritualized activities such as the family meal are “part of a larger story, about the changing character of middle- and working-class family

life” (DeVault, “Producing Family Time,” p. 485). She argues that there is much to gain from analyzing how families spend leisure time, saying that these understandings “are signals of a larger social transformation in the organization of work and family life—arising in large part from the establishment of middle-class wives and mothers as relatively permanent members of the labor force” (485). Further, DeVault (2000) asserts that family time is defined with respect to its greater social context, including the construction of public spaces and discourse that occurs within those spaces:

The research I report on here is concerned with some of the things that parents do with the “family time” they have with children, and—in a very preliminary way—with how their practices are shaped by larger social structures—not only by work hours, schedules, and pressures, but also by the organization of the public spaces that family members might inhabit together and a discourse of family life that swirls around those spaces... The family outing... is constituted not only by its central actors—parents, children, and other participants such as relatives and friends—but also by those who produce its context: the social workers, educators, journalists, and others who write about family life, and also the planners, administrators, and entrepreneurs who create and maintain sites for family recreation.” (p. 486- 487)

DeVault asserts that the idea of a “family outing” inherently has “class and cultural bias built into it” (486). It is not that only middle-class families visit the zoo; in fact, her research showed that families from all social classes made outings there. However, family outings in general represent “an image that minimizes collective economic support and emphasizes a terrain of consciously constructed emotional expression (and discipline)—the ‘modern’ view of marriage and family life” (p. 486).

Drawing from DeVault, Hallman & Benbow (2007) conducted a study that looks at family leisure in relation to photographs taken at the zoo. They argue that zoos are “culturally laden places

for leisure full of stages for ‘practicing family’, and then capturing and memorializing the behavior through family photographs... [providing] a tangible object declaring ‘*here* we are, a good family.’” (p. 872). The idea of “practicing family” applies to the family outing to Owl Books, where middle-class parents frame the experience as worthwhile because it helps them instill in their children middle-class orientations and values related to book consumption. Rather than “*here* we are, a good zoo family,” at the bookstore it is “*here* we are, a good literary family.” Further, Hallman & Benbow see zoo visits as “a purposeful act in the emotional lives of families” (p. 884). Gillis (1996) suggests that:

Family time presents itself to us as a neutral cultural practice when in fact it is an ideologically constituted form of prescription, with a power to convince us of even that which is contradicted by our everyday experience. [It is] deeply implicated in the formation and continuation of age, class, and gender relations that it simultaneously conceals and mystifies. (p. 17)

The contemporary discourse around the importance of spending “quality time” with one’s family reflects, and is likely in response to, the busy schedules of today’s middle-class families, where two parents are often working, or where the family is led by a single, typically female, parent who works outside the home.

Although the concept is not fully explored, Daly (1996) mentions the relationship between time and social class, stating: “... there is diversity with respect to the meaning of time with age, gender, social class, ethnicity, and location all having a bearing on how time is experienced and defined” (p. 32). He suggests that the understanding of time within a family is “an ongoing project of changing meanings and negotiations” (p. 63). Family members negotiate time with social worlds outside the family (e.g., work places, schools, friends), while they also negotiate time within the family unit itself. Therefore, “the coordination of schedules, finding time to be alone and together or finding alignments in terms of the pace of their lives, involve a continuing process of defining for

themselves and each other their meanings and expectations around time” (p. 64). Daily schedules and rituals are regimented; however, they are still part of a negotiated process among family members. He suggests that while family activities themselves inform the definition of “family,” time itself also affects family identity, as noted here: “If we think of families as having a collective identity, then that identity at any moment can be understood with reference to both the composite or their individual and shared recollections and with reference to their anticipated future together” (Daly 52). “Collective memories” are formed within social groups, including families, and they provide an “interpretive framework” for making meaning around particular events (See Halbwachs, 1992). Within that framework, Halbwachs argues that the process of making memories helps to construct and perpetuate classed identities for individuals and families.

Daly (1996) contends that “family time” has more recently become part of the common vocabulary of Western culture, referring to romanticism around such experiences as the “family vacation, meals together, the family working together, attendance at religious functions, or time together on special occasions, feasts or holidays” while other images “reflect an escalated pace of life in families: time together in the car on the way to dropping off members for their individual activities, discussions around the microwave as individual dinners are being warmed up, or a serial discussion that occurs during the commercials” (p. 66). Sociocultural meanings of time are primarily passed on through families, where children learn how to tell time, how to schedule their responsibilities, and how to “abide by temporal norms and rules” (p. 64). Indeed, time “plays a central role in the socialization of children to be social beings” (p. 64). Children learn that certain markers as defined in time become social milestones (birthdays, holidays, graduations). Family identity is also connected to time markers. “Families have a ‘memorial function’ that arises through their capacity to store information over time about their history, their myths, values, secrets, and hopes for the future. Through these accumulations and shared meanings, families formulate a set of

beliefs about who they are” (p. 65). Collective family memories are symbolic and open to interpretation and meaning.

In the next section I discuss several ethnographies that draw from Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital and social reproduction, to further lay the theoretical groundwork for this dissertation.

Bourdieuian Ethnographies

This section looks at a selection of ethnographies that connect to my project because they draw from Bourdieu in order to understand the themes of book consumption, shopping, status, and youth in relation to cultural capital and social reproduction. First to be examined is Janice Radway’s *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (1977), an ethnography that considers women’s experiences of social class and status in the context of book consumption. Coming from a Bourdieusian perspective, it offers insight into book consumption as an activity where social class is negotiated and reproduced. Situated in the late 1980s, Radway’s work argues that The Book-of-the-Month Club was "a highly specific response to massive economic and social change [which] was intricately bound up with the refashioning of forms of work in the United States and with the reorganization of class in a consumer society" (p. 15). She argues that middlebrow culture defined itself in opposition to highbrow culture rather than trying to imitate it, with its central intent aimed at reading "good books" that met the club's high literary standards. Using an autobiographical approach, Radway combines personal interviews with Book-of-the-Month Club employees and content analyses of documents from the organization. She draws from Bourdieu “to understand the origins, the substance, the particular promise, and the multiple efforts of what has been called middle-brow culture in the twentieth-century United States. That culture was aimed at people... who wanted desperately to present themselves as educated, sophisticated,

and aesthetically articulate” (p. 5). Radway relies on Bourdieu to understand how taste in books become a way of establishing class-based social distinctions, as explained here:

To practice or to display one’s taste, [Bourdieu] observes, is to position oneself in a complex social hierarchy. As such, taste is deeply bound up with both social location and social trajectory, which is to say, it is intricately tied to the phenomenon of class in twentieth-century society. In constructing their own canon of recommended books, the Book-of-the-Month Club editors and judges, like literary professors, were involved in the practice of making both literary and social discriminations” (p. 362).

Radway uses Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, as he presents it in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, to understand and explain “the shape and feel of the ‘sentimental education’ offered by the Book-of-the-Month Club to its many thousands of middlebrow subscribers” (p. 263). From a Bourdieusian perspective, she writes that dispositions are structures of organizing action...

...exhibited partly as subsequent patterns of cultural consumption, appreciation, and appropriation. Bourdieu’s point is that in gaining access to the world through language learning and early behavioral tutoring, the human subject takes up a particular stance to the world as an already meaningfully structured environment and that that stance is thereafter generalized in subsequent acts of perceptions and behavior (p. 398).

While she asserts that Bourdieu’s concept of habitus helps to explain how dispositions inform the habitus of women in the book club, she suggests that the definition of habitus must be more complicated in order to fully explain this experience, because “as a quintessential middlebrow cultural institution, the Book-of-the-Month Club exhibited and recommended a distinctive habitus, characterized by a specific cognitive logic as well as by a particular affective style” (p. 389).

Radway uses the concept of habitus to understand how activities associated with books—such as, writing, producing, purchasing, and reading (and even talking about books)-- are social experiences

that provide cultural capital that reproduce social class.

Some scholars have criticized Bourdieu's work for being incomplete and vague (See Negus, 2002; Nixon and du Gay 2002); however, others draw from it to understand how low-wage, low-status workers relate to their work. Featherstone (1991) explains how workers, such as bookstore clerks, come to understand their low status work as having high prestige, and, therefore, they misrecognize their roles in ways that perpetuate their low-status. Drawing from Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital, David Wright (2005) conducted ethnographic research involving 30 bookshop workers from three major bookstore chains, examining implications of how they mediate the production and consumption of cultural goods (i.e., books), through a study of retail book work in the United Kingdom. The study asks, what is the difference between consuming culture and simply consuming, and what tensions emerge from those differences? He argues that books as cultural products are "conceptualized in particular ways. It is this distinctiveness... that allows for the emergence of a specific type of worker engaged... in the pursuit of both economic and symbolic profit" (p. 106). Wright suggests that Bourdieu would claim that cultural goods, such as books, are "expressive of social differences" (p. 107) because, in Bourdieu's words, "the relationship of distinction is objectively inscribed within it, and is reactivated, intentionally or not, in each act of consumption" (Bourdieu 1984, p. 227). Wright's study found that "bookshop workers envisaged themselves as different from other types of retail workers. The difference was articulated in a number of ways but can be theorized using the concept of cultural capital... as a reflection of attempts by workers to shore up their insecure position as cultural workers" (Wright, p. 113).

Wright notes in the following excerpt how Bourdieu comes to understand the dynamics at play:

Bourdieu (1996) argues for the existence of two logics at work in the trade for symbolic goods. The first is governed by a quest for short-term profits, where success is measured by such criteria as number of sales or length of a print-run... The second logic resonates more

with the established values of the creative worker in which material success in itself is rejected in favour of the deferred accumulation of cultural capital (Wright, p. 113).

I found this to be the case with Owl Book booksellers who recognized their low-level retail status as something “better than” retail workers at other corporate-run chain stores earning the same amount of money, which was around \$8 for starting book seller positions at the location where I conducted my research. Most booksellers said they held another full-time job, to supplement their earnings at Owl Books, or they had partners who financially sustained their household. Nina, the Storyteller, suggested she was officially “retired,” but maintained her position at the bookstore because she felt she was doing “good work.” Reflecting Nina’s perspective, Wright argues that the bookstore “might not be a place in which literature or books more generally are produced but it is certainly a place in which *meanings about* books and literature are produced” with the bookstore viewed more as “a place to *be* rather than simply a place to shop” (p. 113-14). When bookstores, such as Owl Books, offer access to experiences such as book signings, musical performances, public lectures, and upscale refreshments in the café, the line is blurred between the bookstore as an activity of consumption and the bookstore as an activity of leisure, even though cash registers at the front of the store reflect its fundamental purpose: to turn a profit. This approach suggests that bookstores offer a particular kind of culturally revered goods, so that the events the store offers produce particular meanings associated with books and middle-class status. Booksellers associate with the prestige around these experiences as they struggle to maintain middle-class status for themselves.

Reflecting a similar interest in the relationship between low-wage work and status connect to Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital and social reproduction is a study by Rachel Sherman (2005) involving participant observation of workers at two luxury hotels. She frequently observed workers making statements about guests that seemed contradictory, noting that “Workers told disbelieving stories of their extravagance, occasionally commenting that ‘people have too much money’; but they

also laughed at guests who acted cheap” (p. 132). Her interpretation of this observation was that she “came to see that workers’ paradoxical comments about guests actually served a consistent purpose: that of reframing and limiting workers’ own subordination and unequal entitlement. In explicit comparative talk about both their clients and their colleagues, workers presented themselves as superior rather than subordinate... Asserting capacities and advantages that others lacked allowed workers to resituate themselves as powerful; paradoxically, however, this also allowed them to constitute guests’ entitlement as legitimate” (p. 132). I saw a similar ambivalence when talking with Owl Books workers, who on one hand criticized parents for interfering with booksellers’ interactions with children, while on the other hand venerating parents who bring their children to the store. Sherman found that luxury hotel workers create hierarchies of competence and privilege, which is similar to Owl Book booksellers in children’s books, who sought status through a process of identifying a hierarchy of relations between workers, which appeared to be an unwritten code, privileging their work over others in the store. That is, Owl Book booksellers indicated they were superior to other workers in the store because they are doing the important work of promoting children’s literacy. Among the children’s book booksellers, Nina, the Storyteller appeared to have the highest prestige, while others are ranked according to their length of employment, the knowledge they have of books, and the work they have done, or are doing, outside the store. For instance, booksellers suggested that a former librarian or teacher is regarded more highly than someone without some professional experience working with children, especially if the job involved responsibilities associated with reading and books. However, when encouraged to explain further, this “professional experience” was actually related to the positions of “librarian’s assistant” and “teaching assistant.” This kind of discourse around work reflected booksellers’ struggle for status in a low-status job, as explained in more depth in Chapter 4.

While the ethnographic work of Radway, Wright, and Sherman looks at adults and status from a Bourdieusian perspective, the ethnographies examined next draw from Bourdieu when looking at youth and social class. Works to be discussed include *Inside Toyland: Working, Shopping, and Social Inequality* (Williams, 2006); *Purchasing Power: Black Kids and American Consumer Culture* (Chin, 2001); *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (Lareau, 2003); *Women Without Class: Girls, Race, and Identity* (Bettie, 2002); and *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity* (Ferguson, 2001). The work of Lareau and Chin is of particular interest since they consider the consumption practices of youth, while Williams' project looks at the ways in which consumer culture aimed at youth reproduces ideas around gender, race, and class. As I put these ethnographies in conversation with each other and with my work, the intent is to identify strengths, possibilities, and limitations of using Bourdieu's models of social class to understand how children's book consumption practices at Owl Books are forms of cultural capital that inform status, class, and middle-class reproduction.

Christine L. Williams' (2006) account of a research project involving her work as a sales clerk for a big-box toy store, and for an upscale toy store, is documented in *Inside Toyland: Working, Shopping, and Social Inequality*. Bourdieu informs her experience at the toy stores, where she argues gender, race, and class inequalities are reproduced through the consumer culture around toys. She writes:

The connection between shopping and inequality begins with the decision of *where* to buy. Consumers make choices to enter one store and not another based in part on the images projected in advertisements. Corporate retail executives develop marketing plans, store designs, and labor policies to appeal to a certain kind of customer, or at least to a certain kind of customer desire, such as the desire for status or for low prices. Gender, race, and class distinctions all enter into the formation of this corporate image (p. 3).

Williams discovered in her study that boundaries established at the toy stores' corporate levels cause inequalities for workers:

Inside the store, corporate agendas are implemented in ways that favor certain groups over others. Workers are sorted into an organizational hierarchy and assigned specific duties according to their race, gender, and class. These internal practices shape how we buy: they determine with whom customers interact inside the store, which customers receive attentive service, and who ultimately benefits from the social norms that guide these interactions (p. 4).

She further argues that social inequalities are reproduced at the toy store through children's interactions with adults at the store, asserting that "in the style of interacting and in the decisions about *what* to buy, adults instruct children on the values and meanings of consumerism, which contain lessons about race, class, and gender" (p. 4). This kind of social learning is evident in my work, as I found that middle-class family outings to Owl Books provide opportunities for parents to teach children what it means to be a "good" reader, a "good" consumer, and a "good" member of society, all in middle-class terms. Embedded in these experiences are lessons about what middle-class children are entitled to, in terms of their present and future opportunities. This social knowledge around class becomes naturalized as part of their habitus formed through the everyday outing to the bookstore. Furthermore, since the particular site of Owl Books I studied is a place that appears to be exclusively middle-class, it becomes a site where middle-class parents and middle-class workers can directly and indirectly cultivate middle-class orientations for children within a context that makes "middle class" seem natural and "normal." Williams notes similar middle-class orientations in the toy store, as she draws from Bourdieu's theories of culture in order to understand the "cultural norms and practices that legitimize inequality" (p. 138) associated with shopping, asserting that:

[Bourdieu] argues that culture is the key to understanding inequality: cultural resources, processes, and institutions hold individuals and groups in competitive hierarchies of domination. All cultural forms—including styles of dress, eating habits, religion, science, philosophy, and even toys—embody interests and function to enhance social distinctions, and thus social inequalities (p. 139).

Furthermore, she refers to a process Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) name “symbolic violence” to understand the process of “cultural legitimation” (p. 139), where dominated individuals and groups relinquish power because they assign status to those who have access to cultural capital. In this way, they “misrecognize” the way power works and accept it as the status quo, thereby “reproducing inequality and domination—even [their] own domination by others—without knowing it” (p. 140). In the context of the toy store and other consumer spaces, such as Owl Books, economic capital (i.e., money) is converted to cultural capital (i.e., “good” taste) through the process of purchasing material books (i.e., toys or books). In this way, Bourdieu suggests that economic power translates to social status and power. The store itself is marked by status; that is, someone who is more “refined” or “sophisticated,” “hip” or “cool,” will shop in certain stores, while avoiding or downplaying the shopping they do at other stores. We identify ourselves, and our place in the social world, by where we shop and what we buy. Williams examines Bourdieu’s influence on her interpretations of distinction associated with the two toy stores (one upscale, the other “big-box”) where she worked:

Buying at Diamond Toys offered proof of one’s cultural refinement. Many shoppers requested extra shopping bags displaying the company logo. Shopping at the Toy Warehouse, in contrast, conveyed no such superior status. Bourdieu would argue that this status distinction both obscures and legitimizes economic inequality. It obscures inequality by making it seem that shoppers at Diamond Toys simply have better “taste” than shoppers

at the Toy Warehouse, when really they have more privilege (due to class and race inequality). It furthermore legitimizes the belief that those with highly cultivated tastes ought to be rewarded with superior service and merchandise. In this way, wealth disparity in our society is transformed into a matter of “choice” and “taste,” not domination and inequality (p. 140).

Williams found that adults took charge of purchasing decisions at the toy store, especially for younger children, mentioning her observation of parents who wanted to purchase a toy truck for their three-year-old son, asking him to decide between a red truck and a blue truck. The son seemed bored by the process and lethargic in his response to their excitement about it, and the mother remarked that his grandparents had spoiled the boy. Ultimately, the mother decided on the blue truck, threw in an animal-shaped backpack, and paid for the purchase: \$60. Williams writes:

Purchases at Diamond Toys often had this “top-down” quality: adults would select the toy (or toys), and the child would be encouraged to appreciate its superior properties. In the vast majority of instances they were successful; children would gratefully or greedily accept the gift. In the Bourdieuan frame, these adults could be seen as trying to cultivate sophisticated tastes in their children, providing them with all-important cultural capital they need to succeed in a class-stratified society (p. 150).

Like Williams, Elizabeth Chin (2001) views shopping as an activity that reproduces social inequalities, particularly with respect to race and class. In *Purchasing Power: Black Kids and American Consumer Culture*, Chin uses Bourdieu as theoretical grounding for her ethnographic study of the consumer habits of less affluent black youth, drawing especially from the notions of habitus and cultural capital. Although my study does not involve economically disadvantaged Black youth, I am including Chin’s work here because it draws from Bourdieu as she considers relationships between children and consumption practices, which is a theme in my dissertation. Chin understands

consumption practices as social acts that begin “well outside of the store” and continue “well after a given purchase has been made” (p. 175). The habitus is the cumulative knowledge that children acquire over time through social interactions and everyday experiences, which tells them what is possible, or not, in their social world. “This knowledge and experience accrues to what Bourdieu calls ‘cultural capital,’ a term chosen expressly to communicate the fact that class is not just clothes or education or accent but the result of a tremendous, lifelong acquisition process” (p. 32).

Bourdieu’s notions of habitus and cultural capital inform Chin’s discussion of the role society plays in the consumption practices of Black youth:

Differences in consumption are not simply differences of style determined largely by economic factors or preferences that may be acted upon freely within... economic limits.

American society has, for more than two centuries, shaped and limited the consumption of black communities through a combination of structural factors, everyday social practices, and symbolic means (p. 33).

Unlike the plethora of market research that has been widely performed on consumers, Chin sees consumer activities as deeply meaningful and revealing, providing “a snapshot—taken at the confluence of complex social, political, and historical streams” (p. 175). In thinking about the implications of economic barriers that enter into the consumer practices of economically disadvantaged Black children, she draws from Bourdieu, stating that “consumption under capitalism is largely mediated by culture” (p. 33). She writes, “in basing this ethnography on children while engaging questions of political economy, social justice, and social inequality, my belief is that the relevance of children’s lives to these important arenas—and the ways in which we think about them—is made clear” (p. x). Her engagement with these arenas in relation to consumption is done through a Bourdieusian framework, as she indicates here:

Bourdieu examines consumption not as a relatively consensual process, but as one from which some people are actively barred. According to Bourdieu, consumption is partly based in special forms of knowledge and experience that are often acquired through inarticulate, quotidian happenings he terms *habitus*. (p. 32)

The concept of habitus allows Chin to understand the process of social reproduction in relation to consumption practices and marginalized youth. She points to Bourdieu's specific reference to children in relation to habitus formation, writing that he "pays special attention to children: in the habitus the child is socialized to the small gestures and bits of knowledge that allow a person to operate as a member of one's culture or class: how to eat, where to sit, inflection of the voice, what to wear" (p. 32). Furthermore, Chin problematizes the racial biases that come from generalizations around consumption practices of marginalized groups. Her study rejects the stereotyped image of "poor" and working-class Black youth who spend money carelessly in order to acquire materials goods that serve as status symbols. On the contrary, Chin found that consumption activities for Black youth to be "deeply social, emphasizing sharing, reciprocity, and mutual obligation" (p. 5). She found that children were encouraged "to participate actively in complex social and kinship networks through their various consumption activities, whether eating, making purchases, asking for clothes, school supplies, toys, or treats" (p. 5). However, these children had agency in these negotiations and were active and smart as they participated in consumer behaviors, as suggested here:

[The children in this study's] engagements with the consumer world, at the material, ideological, personal, and communal levels, are continually restrained by family, friends, neighborhood, and large social entities of city, state, and nation and the global economy. Children's consumer lives not only speak of these connections between themselves and the world at large but also embody them (p. 6).

Although the middle-class children in my study do not face the same constraints as the economically disadvantaged Black youth in Chin's work, I argue that the middle-class children I interviewed and observed engage in acts of consumption that reflect and reinforce their social positions.

There appears to be in middle-class American culture a sense of endless choices in the world of consumption; however, Bourdieu argues that the issue of *potentiality* as controlled through social mechanisms must be taken into account. This means that the idea that the world of consumption provides equal access to all is, in fact, an illusion, which follows the lines of work by Ewen (1976, 1988) and Willis (1991). Chin suggests that Bourdieu makes an assumption that “given the choice, everyone would choose the same things— ultimately what members of a given society want is more or less the same” (p. 33). Although this perspective is widely present in the literature I examined on consumption, Carrier and Heyman (1997) bring forth this view: “We do not think it is safe to assume that people would consume the same things if they had the money. We can neither neglect the question of whether people have the money, nor the question of how people enact distinctive life trajectories with the money they do have” (p. 22). Contrary to popular discourse expressing the notion that “poor” black youth are obsessed with acquiring material goods, even to the extent of killing for sneakers or gold chains, Chin found that children in her study make careful, deliberate decisions about how to spend their money, often to please their parents, and the desire to please in this way is situated within a social context. She discovered that children were often concerned with sharing purchases with their brothers and sisters, and with purchasing gifts that would be enjoyed by their recipients. Further, Chin bridges her research on the consumer activities of economically disadvantaged Black youth with larger social issues and constraints faced by these children in their daily lives:

In recognizing that these children's consumer lives are shaped by the same forces of social inequality evident in their neighborhood, educations, and even their life chances, my aim has

been to highlight consumer culture as a terrain in which questions of social injustice loom large. The deprivations experienced by children like those in Newhallville are deep and lasting and perhaps all the more poignant because they take place in such close proximity to wealth and comfort. More than a depoliticized cultural space in which people may choose to purchase or try on identities, fantasies, and styles, consumer culture is a medium through which multiple oppressions are brought to bear on people's lives in enduring and intimate ways (p. 175).

Oppression is both material and symbolic in this world of consumption, and her study points to the no-win politics of inequality, which dictate that economically disadvantaged people may be viewed as either not wanting enough, or of wanting too much (p. 177). The problem with these racist and classist perspectives is that the condition/existence of poverty in society is blamed on those victimized by social inequalities. Chin points out that "these stories are tales mostly told by the privileged about the poor and working class" (p. 177), excluding the perspective and stories of economically disadvantaged people themselves.

Like Chin, Annette Lareau draws from Bourdieu as a context for examining class differences in children. Her work, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*, describes her ethnographic study of families from a range of social backgrounds. Through this work, she identified a class-based distinction in parenting styles that occurs regardless of race. That is, she discovered that middle-class families engage in a process she calls "concerted cultivation," meaning middle-class parents are very involved in their children's lives in terms of scheduling, directing, and sometimes participating in their children's activities. At the same time she found that working-class and low-income families engage in a process she named "the accomplishment of natural growth," where children receive basic care, but are expected to occupy themselves with little to no parental involvement. As a result, middle-class children learn to ask questions and interact comfortably with

adults, while parents of working-class children are expected to occupy themselves outside their parents' purview. These distinct, class-based parenting styles exemplify Bourdieu's notion of reproduction, since middle-class children acquire the skills necessary for social success, while working-class children are socialized to follow expectations that would garner less power in a middle-class world, therefore reproducing for them the status quo. In comparing the two approaches, Lareau asserts that the natural-growth method has its advantages, as working-class and economically disadvantaged children "learn how to be members of informal peer groups. They learn how to manage their own time. They learn how to strategize" (p. 67). In contrast, concerted cultivation "places intense labor demands on busy parents... Middle-class children argue with their parents, complain about their parents' incompetence and disparage parents' decisions" (p. 13). On the other hand, she argues that when children move outside the family, into school environments and in their future adult lives, the qualities middle-class children have developed, such as confidence and assertiveness, are valued more highly than those working-class children develop. In short, unequal childhoods lead to unequal adulthoods.

Lareau uses Bourdieu's work as a context for understanding the social construction and implications of class, arguing that his model "draws attention to conflict, change, and systemic inequality, and it highlights the fluid nature of the relationship between structure and agency" (p. 275). Like the other ethnographers in this literature review, Lareau draws from Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, suggesting that people from different classes are socialized in different ways, which from childhood provides individuals with a sense of what is natural or "the way things are." She draws further from Bourdieu by noting that a person's background is influenced by class position, which affects the degree to which s/he has access to resources (the Bourdieusian "*capital*") to be used as available and needed within various *fields*, or institutional and social structures, found throughout society. *Fields* that significantly affected informants in this study were the corporate bookstore and

schools, which provided fertile ground for developing the habitus of middle-class children in a manner that groomed them for middle-class life. When individuals accept the status quo as the norm, power and privilege are transmitted through a process of *misrecognition*, which occurs when social arrangements are legitimized, resulting in inequalities related to the distribution of power.

In the following excerpt, Lareau writes about the applicability of Bourdieu's notion of habitus to her work:

The focus of *Unequal Childhoods* is [narrow], looking primarily at time use for children's leisure activities, language use in the home, and interventions of adults in children's institutional lives. Still, it is reasonable to assert that the elements...taken together, do constitute a set of dispositions that children learn, or habitus. Concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of nature growth are aspects of the habitus of families discussed in [this project] (p. 276).

Lareau notes that Bourdieu speaks of social stratification in terms of elite opportunities available on a limited basis to those in more powerful class positions. This suggests that problems associated with class distinctions cannot be solved simply by adopting or more widely distributing elite practices, since another elite practice would be substituted for the one that was more broadly available across classes. Lareau argues that this model "suggests that inequality is a perpetual characteristic of social groups" (p. 277). Cultural capital assumes a set of knowledges that allow individuals to use the capital in ways that are socially effective. Without this knowledge, and depending on the context, the capital loses its value. Lareau uses Bourdieu to explain this concept in this way:

... Bourdieu's work provides a dynamic model of structural inequality; it enables researchers to capture "moments" of cultural and social reproduction. To understand the character of these moments, researchers need to look at the *contexts* in which capital is situated, the efforts

by individuals to activate their capital, the skill with which they do so, and the institutional response to the activation of resources (p. 277).

Lareau shows how middle-class parents provide their children with access to cultural capital through the habitus within the home environment, which may or may not be activated in other settings, such as schools, due to gate-keeping mechanisms that may prevent it from being activated. She presents the example of a mother, Ms. Marshall, who taught her daughter, Stacey, to question adults in authority, where dispositions (habitus) learned in the home translated to cultural capital in the school setting. When Stacey was rejected from the gifted program, Ms. Marshall drew from the habitus, activated cultural capital, and in the end secured Stacey a position in the program. Lareau argues that “moments of interaction between parents and key actors in institutions are the life blood of the stratification process... Parents appear to have an uneven ability to customize their interactions with... institutions” (p. 278). To summarize, parents from privileged classes “facilitate their children’s progress through key social settings” (p. 278).

In her ethnography *Women Without Class: Girls, Race, and Identity*, Julie Bettie (2003) conducted research at a high school in California’s Central Valley to better understand working-class white and Mexican-American girls in their senior year. Her intent was to “conduct a comparative study of girls from different class and racial/ethnic locations” (p. 1). Bettie wanted to understand how girls think about identity and class “by documenting and analyzing the ‘common sense’ categories they used and created to describe and explain class-based differences among themselves” (p. 7). She also aimed to look at the kinds of “boundary work” that occurred during typical social encounters, as a way of understanding “the kinds of interaction that reveal symbolic class distinctions and differences in ‘cultural capital’ between working-class and middle-class girls” (p. 7). Her primary intent was to look at how the concept/understanding/definition of “woman” related to identity is informed by intersections of race/ethnicity and class, rather than operating in a socially isolated or independent

way. She responds to a question posed by Foley (1990, p. 167) that asks whether or not a working class culture must have a class consciousness in order to be a class culture. Bettie identifies a relationship between class identity/class culture and class consciousness in relation to consumption practices, saying that “the expressive cultural styles, and... their manifestations in the performances of youth subcultures, have their source in and are reflections of class... realities, regardless of whether they are articulated as such. The expression of self through one’s relationship to and creative use of commodities (both artifacts and the discourses of popular culture) is a central practice in capitalistic society” (p. 44). At Owl Books, I found that the middle-class children I interviewed sometimes expressed themselves through the cultural capital associated with books. As they spoke about their relationship to books, and their relationships to peers around books, I saw they were talking about themselves in ways that created an association with middle-class identity.

Although children identify with books in ways that mark themselves as middle-class, Bettie notes that individual values and personalities cannot alone shape class position. She points to Bourdieu’s notion of social practices, defined as “socially-shaped skills, habits, and styles that inform action” (Swidler, 1986, p. 275), as determining social class position and informing the process of class reproduction. She suggests that values may be the same across the classes; however, the access to resources is not equal, meaning those from working-class or economically disadvantaged backgrounds have limited opportunity to acquire the resources needed for social mobility, while the middle-class can reproduce itself through easy engagement with those opportunities. Drawing further from Bourdieu, the idea is that middle-class parents convey to their children “dispositions” toward opportunities with respect to schooling and the future that function for children as cultural capital, which Bettie defines as “class-based knowledge, skills, linguistic and cultural competencies, and a worldview that is passed on via family and is related more to educational attainment than to

occupation” (p. 208). Bettie views acts of resistance that girls take against institutional and/or societal pressures as being reflective of seeking power, rather than falling victim:

The context of these young women’s lives includes a deindustrializing economy; the growth of service-sector occupations held largely by men and women of color and by white women; the related family revolutions of the twentieth century; the elimination of affirmative action; a rise in anti-immigrant sentiment; and changing cultural representations and iconographies of class, race, and gender meanings (p. 7).

Bettie understands the girls’ expression of their resistance through Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, as she explains here:

... social actors largely display the cultural capital that is the consequence of the material and cultural resources to which they have had access. Cultural performances most often reflect one’s *habitus*—that is, our unconsciously enacted, socially learned dispositions, which are not natural or inherent or prior to the social organization of class inequality, but are in fact produced by it... in [this] sense class as cultural identity is an *effect* of social structure (p. 51).

One’s cultural identity informs one’s habitus, which at Owl Books means that simply being, and being seen, at Owl Books as part of an everyday experience for middle-class families, becomes connected to “self” in relation to middle-class identity. Furthermore, Bettie examines her own identity and subject position from a Bourdieusian perspective, reflecting that:

[Waretown] had the look and feel of my own Midwestern farming town... I shared this ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu 1984): the intangible dimension of culture such as smells, sounds, and the rhythm of the voices of rural white people. The difference I felt from Mexican American girls challenged me in many ways, while the commonalities I shared with all Waretown girls informed my analysis in ‘insider’ ways that might have been missing if I were located in another (more urban) context. I was well aware of and could easily relate to the

stigma students felt as a consequence of being from a small rural town, from nowhere that matters (p. 9).

The connection between structure and agency with respect to identity formation is one that Ann Arnett Ferguson examines in her ethnography, *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*. This study looks at identity issues related to the problems young black males, ages 11 to 12, encounter in relation to schools, where they are labeled as “bound for jail.” This process of labeling reproduces class-based power differentials. She writes: “I found it rewarding to utilize both approaches to demonstrate the interplay between the determining effects of social structure and the creative response of individuals in everyday life that usually reproduces a status quo, but that sometimes produces change. Punishment is an especially fruitful site for this demonstration, as it is a space where educational structures clash with the resistance strategies of individual students” (p. 22). Her project looks at the “interaction between institutional and individual forces” by examining the relationship between the institution of school and the perspectives of youths who spend time there. Ferguson found that educational institutions are reflective of dominant ideologies, and that “the function of school is to reproduce the current inequities of our social, political, and economic system” (p. 50). Ferguson is reflective of Bourdieu as she suggests, “This hidden curriculum reflects the ‘cultural hegemony’ of the dominant class and works to reinforce and reproduce that dominance by exacerbating and multiplying—rather than diminishing or eliminating—the ‘inequalities’ children bring from home and neighborhood to school” (p. 50). In his theory of social reproduction, Bourdieu contends that schools reproduce the dominant class by privileging “cultural capital” (e.g., knowledges, views, standards) associated with the dominant class, thereby reinforcing dominant class distinctions and particular tastes as superior. Bourdieu suggests that this process results in symbolic violence, which Ferguson understands as “the painful, damaging, mortal wounds inflicted by the wielding of words, symbols, standards” (p. 51). Symbolic violence, which occurs through the

hegemonic structure of school systems, is directed at students at the bottom of the social ladder, including the “bad boys” in her study. Ferguson observes that the “bad boys” (African American boys) who lack social power in school “distance themselves from the school’s agenda to avoid capitulating to its strategies for fashioning a self for upward mobility—strategies requiring black youth to distance themselves from family and neighborhood, to reject the language, the style of social interaction, and connections in which identities are grounded” (pp. 228-29).

Ferguson’s use of Bourdieu extends to his concept of “symbolic violence,” which she argues is a “politics of politeness” (p. 51) that in Bourdieu’s words “contains a politics, a practical immediate recognition of social classifications and of hierarchies between the sexes, the generations, the classes, etc.” (Bourdieu, p. 646). Ferguson found that “manners, style, body language, and oral expressiveness influence the application of school rules and ultimately come to define and label African American students and condemn them to the bottom rung of the social order” (p. 51). Ferguson’s perspective here has relevance to my project, as it reminds me of how middle-class children at Owl Books are learning social literacies, mainly from their parents, but also from booksellers. Toddlers are taught to sit quietly, raise their hands, and listen attentively during Story Time, and middle-class parents often reward children with a book for good behavior. The instruction and reinforcement of manners through book consumption teaches children to be middle-class, and in the process, reproduces class distinctions and reinforces the hegemonic social hierarchy.

While Ferguson understands social reproduction from the perspective of the dominated, my work at Owl Books looks at that which dominates: the middle-class, arguing that an institutional site of consumption, a corporate chain store, reinforces and reproduces middle-class life. This project argues that the family outing to Owl Books contributes to reproducing middle-class culture. From booksellers to children and parents, my informants often remarked about the value of reading and

books that suggested a status around books. Barbara Jensen draws from Bourdieu's notion of "cultural capital" when arguing that "Professional middle class social style, language, and knowledge constitute a kind of social currency," which creates cultural barriers that by nature exclude working class and economically disadvantaged people (p. 177). In this way, to "include" through cultural capital is to simultaneously "exclude" those without capital. And those without access to cultural capital do not hold the power to decide what constitutes capital in the first place. This sustains the cycle of social reproduction.

Apple, Lamont and Lareau (1988) note Bourdieu's perspective on social reproduction, arguing that although the process of social mobility would allow children from a working-class background to "acquire the social, linguistic, and cultural competencies which characterize the upper-middle and middle class, they can never achieve the 'natural' familiarity of those born to these classes and are academically penalized on this basis" (p. 156). In my study, I interviewed Tracey, a 13-year-old girl from a working-class background who attends a middle-class school. Bourdieu's concept of social reproduction explains the existence and consequences of Tracey's discomfort around being in the highest reading group, something she felt was a "mistake." She did not entertain the possibility that the school, which is populated by primarily middle-class students, would afford her this privilege. Further, my impression that she would accept less for herself, without questioning, shows how she has internalized a feeling of inferiority that comes from her working class habitus. Bourdieu argues that schools embody ideologies associated with the dominant class, which privileges its perspectives and standards as "cultural capital," deeming them as most important and valuable. In this way, as Ferguson notes, the dominant class "systematically enforce[s] the social distinctions of its own lifestyle and tastes as superior standards to be universally aspired to" (51).

This dissertation is based on ethnographic research that tries to understand what experiences around book consumption, in the context of the family outing to a big-box bookstore, reveal about the construction of social class, as understood through the work of Pierre Bourdieu. When middle-class families go to the bookstore together, they experience “time” and “family” in ways that are informed and sanctioned by middle-class culture. Further, middle-class families consume books in ways that reflect a middle-class orientation, meaning that they see their engagement with books and literacy as a sign of distinction that reflects and maintains middle-class status for parents and children. The preceding examination of ethnographies that look at social class from a Bourdieusian perspective underscore the value of Bourdieu to my project in multiple ways, including helping me to consider how social reproduction occurs in relation to consumption and literacy practices. My intent was to explore in this literature review the relevant literature in order to imagine how my project can contribute to, and possibly join together, these conversations in a manner that creates a new and relevant story of cultural capital and social reproduction as related to family time, literacy, education, and consumption in American culture.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS & PROCEDURES

If I have told you these details about the asteroid, and made a note of its number for you, it is an account of the grown-ups and their ways. Grown-ups love figures. When you tell them you have made a new friend, they never ask you any questions about essential matters. They never say to you, "What does his voice sound like? What games does he love best? Does he collect butterflies?" Instead they demand: "How old is he? How many brothers has he? How much does he weigh? How much money does his father make?" Only from these figures do they think they have learned anything about him.

from *The Little Prince*
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1945)

As described earlier, this project looks at the children's book department of a big-box bookstore, which I am calling Owl Books, located in a suburban strip mall on a four-lane highway just outside a mid-sized city in the Northeast U.S., which I am calling Centertown. A qualitative ethnography, this study draws from participant observation in the children's book department (which the store calls "Owl Books Junior," signifying that they are grooming children to be future customers), as well as in-depth interviews with workers, parents, and children, in order to understand the relationship between book consumption and middle-class reproduction. My approach to thinking about this research stems from Herbert Blumer's definition of symbolic interactionism, which argues that:

This world is the actual group life of human beings. It consists of what they experience and do, individually and collectively, as they engage in their respective forms of living; it covers the large complexes of interlaced activities that grow up as the action of some spread out to affect the actions of others; and it embodies the large variety of relations between the participants... The empirical world, in short, is the world of everyday experience, the top layers of which we see in our lives and recognize in the lives of others (Blumer 1969, p. 35).

This perspective suggests that people's behaviors are "based on the meanings [that] physical things, ideas, relationships, and other processes and engagements have for them and that these meanings have been constructed through social interaction" (p. 2). The guiding principles of grounded theory encouraged me to remember that the analysis of my research should be "inductive and that any theory or categories that came from this work needed to emerge from the data" (Glaser & Strauss,

1967, p. 1). Through my research design and ethnographic method, I was able to dig beneath "the top layers" of people's lives in order to understand the deeper meanings that come from the "everyday experience" of workers, parents, and children who spend time at Owl Books. I viewed trips to the bookstore, and work that takes place within the bookstore, as examples of "everyday experience." That is, I found that trips to the bookstore are often part of a "to do" list that middle-class families follow when they are out doing other everyday activities, such as food shopping and running errands. Family time in a bookstore is seen as educational in nature, while it is at the same time a destination viewed as a leisure activity that provides pleasure. Middle-class parents told me they go to Owl Books because it is an environment where they can nurture their children's interest in books, yet they also explore their own individual interests. Middle-class children negotiate their experience of books in relation to literacy practices and skills (academic, consumer, and social) associated with middle-class life. Booksellers find ways to facilitate middle-class families' educational and leisure experiences, while they struggle with their roles and the status they say they deserve, but often do not always achieve, in the process. In order to explore in depth the meaning that bookstores have for my informants, I relied on a qualitative research approach, for the reasons Bogdan & Biklen (2007) suggest here:

The qualitative researchers' goal is to better understand human behavior and experience. They seek to grasp the process by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are... it is with concrete incidents of human behavior that investigators can think more clearly and deeply about the human condition (p. 43).

From the outset of this project, this study drew from what Bogdan & Biklen define as the five characteristics of qualitative research (2007, p. 4- 8): a naturalistic setting (spending time collecting data within my research site: the bookstore); descriptive data (using "words... rather than numbers" [p. 5] as a way of collecting, recording, and interpreting data); a concern with process (placing the

focus on the ways in which meaning is made, rather than focusing purely on outcomes); an inductive approach (allowing interpretations to emerge from the data, rather than seeking to support pre-conceived notions); and meaning making (a focus on “participant perspectives,” or the ways in which individuals “make sense of their lives” [p. 7]). Instinctually and ideologically, this approach was appropriate for my research, and it was comfortable to me, in large part because of my undergraduate education where I majored in sociology, a field that has long captivated my interest. For all of the reasons explained above, I relied on the qualitative approach throughout this project, as I gathered and interpreted data from personal interviews and from participant observation, as explored more fully throughout this chapter.

Methods and Methodology

I intended at the outset to use intersectionality as a theoretical lens for interpreting my data. However, after the first two years of my field work, where I observed 297 mothers or caregivers and 411 children during 45 sessions of the weekly children’s Story Time, I realized that because of the middle-class whiteness of Owl Books, an intersectional approach would not work with my data. This is when I adopted Bourdieu’s social reproduction theory as my lens, seeing the possibilities of analysis from the perspective of class as more relevant and generative in terms of the data I was gathering. While Bourdieu has provided a foundation for theorizing my data, his perspective has also deeply informed my thinking around this project’s research methods. Bourdieu sees the social scientist’s role as identifying and understanding systems that create power inequalities as defined and perpetuated by cultural practices of legitimation. This includes understanding how cultural capital informs and reproduces class distinctions. Christina L. Williams (2006) in the context of her study of social reproduction as associated with the toy store remarks:

Bourdieu maintains that there is no such thing as a superior, pure, or innocent vantage point in a system based on domination. Everyone participates in the struggle for distinction and

status: in every arena of life, we all take part in defining what is a valued characteristic, and we all attempt to achieve distinction. In other words, we all participate in defining what is and is not valuable and worth struggling for, and then we compete for these things. In this sense, we are all caught in the web of domination and subordination (p. 144).

As in Williams' work, this study understands from a Bourdieusian perspective how social class is reproduced through the everyday family outing to the big-box bookstore, Owl Books. In the beginning, I chose this site because of my interest in children's books that comes from being a children's author, and because I enjoy talking and spending time with children. Furthermore, as a college-level writing instructor, I theorize a great deal about education as related to reading and writing. A qualitative approach to this research gave me the opportunity to spend a great deal of time in this setting, where my observations and conversations with workers, parents, and children exposed possibilities for naming broader themes and research problems. This project relies on the practices and approaches of qualitative research because it presents a way to engage in a process of discovering how people engage in, and make sense of, their everyday experiences. From data collection to analysis, the qualitative method has provided opportunities for understanding the ways in which people think and behave in deliberate, yet sometimes unconscious, ways.

Ethnographic work challenges the researcher to think and behave qualitatively through each step of the research process. The process is recursive and dynamic. I learned that if I were to gain insight into my informants' lives, I needed to take nothing they said "for granted" or as "trivial" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 5). Furthermore, I realized that listening to my informants' "common-sense understandings" about their everyday lives would provide insights into how they viewed themselves and their place in the world (p. 30). Another outgrowth of this research process was one of self-reflection. I found that as I learned more about my informants, I learned more about myself, and as I learned more about myself, I learned more about my informants. As I listened to their

stories, and to their ideas about reading and books, I thought back on myself as a parent, a worker, a teacher, and a child. I wondered how I would answer my own questions, while being aware of, and resisting, the danger of becoming the “norm.” This reflexive approach took into account the “multiple realities” (p. 45) inherent in a social setting, and I found that knowing my own “reality” affected the ways in which I viewed and understood the realities of others.

Because this project is about children, I found myself reflecting back often on my own childhood as a way of understanding what I was learning from my informants. Sari K. Biklen (2004) problematizes this position in her article, “Trouble on Memory Lane: Adults and Self-Retrospection in Researching Youth,” arguing that while self-reflection can accentuate the writer’s authority and voice with respect to research on youth, it presents the danger of shifting the research focus from the youth to the researcher. Although as a self-reflective researcher I continually asked questions of myself, I did so while keeping in mind Biklen’s perspective that values the idea of giving youth authority over their perspectives and not overshadowing them with mine. Questions I posed to myself were: How would I have answered the questions I was asking? How would I have felt if I was listening to my parents say the things these parents were saying? To extend this internal dialogue, I also wondered what motivated me to do this work, and whether or not I could have possibly predicted engaging in this project and its process. How did I come to this place of ethnographic researcher? At times it has seemed completely unpredictable, but as I have dug deeper into my own history and personal motivations, I realized that this outcome was not so surprising after all.

The research project that seemed so small at the outset became very large, yet in the end, and to my surprise, it seemed small again, as it became more focused and thematized. The qualitative approach gave me the opportunity to engage in the process of listening to and observing my informants, transcribing our conversations, and reflecting deeply on the meaning they offered.

In *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000, 2005) define the approach to qualitative research in this way:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

I have found that this multi-dimensional, reflexive process of qualitative inquiry sometimes works in unpredictable ways, like the jazz musician (researcher) who discovers patterns among the chaos of dissonant chords (field notes), which, through a combination of deliberate thought, experience, and instinct, come together to create a funky jazz tune (the dissertation).

As is often the case with qualitative research, my research began with an examination of philosophical assumptions, which in this context meant I needed to understand the social constructions of family, childhood, social class, consumption, and literacy to create foundational knowledge for my work. To do that, I read broadly and wrote extensively on each of these areas before engaging in my fieldwork, and significant readings from that process were discussed more fully in Chapter 2. As I read and wrote, I began to engage in participant observation during the weekly Story Time at Owl Books because it was the natural setting associated with this study. The time I spent at the bookstore led to informal and formal interviews with workers, parents, and children, and by the end of the first year of this project, I began noticing some emerging themes, which allowed me to develop a theoretical approach to the research I was undertaking. This

approach reflects John W. Creswell's (2007) perspective, which claims "qualitative research today involves closer attention to the interpretive nature of inquiry and situating the study within the political, social, and cultural context of the researchers, the participants, and the readers of a study" (p. 37). As Creswell points out, one of the characteristics of qualitative research is that it allows for "emergent design" (p. 39), meaning that the research process for this study was not established early on; rather, the research design emerged from the research itself. This inductive approach allowed my informants to help define the research problem, instead of conforming, or not, to a prescribed plan.

Creswell also mentions the possibility for the qualitative researcher to present a "holistic account" of the research problem, as she attempts to "develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study. This involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges" (p. 39). To emphasize these "multiple perspectives," this dissertation is organized thematically around my informants. While strongly tethered to Bourdieusian theory, it reflects multiple viewpoints on the consumption of books in relation to social class. The qualitative method allowed me to look for patterns around experiences, while understanding perspectives that seemed divergent, which at times were evident even from one individual's paradoxical point of view. My approach to this qualitative research project involved in-depth interviews and participant observation, as described in detail below.

A. Background on the Research

This research project took place primarily on a part-time basis over a span of seven years, with a two-year break three years into the process due to the end of my marriage and my adjustment to single parenthood, for a total of five years of research altogether. The study draws from five years

of fieldwork starting with three years of participant observation at 45 sessions of the weekly Story Time, where I observed 297 mothers or caregivers and 411 children. In the first three years of this research I also conducted informal interviews with 48 families at the store. Also in this phase of the study I conducted in-depth interviews at the store with nine bookstore workers and three managers. In the last two years of the study, drawing from data collected from participant observation and informal interviews, I conducted in-depth interviews and follow-up interviews with six families. For the majority of time, this was a part-time endeavor because I needed to work full-time while conducting this research. However, I was granted a sabbatical leave in fall, 2008, which gave me a semester to research and write full-time. I knew I had enough data for this dissertation when after coding 500 pages of data I recognized strong themes and realized I could richly support those themes with evidence from my data. I also felt confident about the breadth and depth of my data when I could see the complexities of my informants' perspectives. Over time, I recognized that workers, parents, and children had revealed the complicated ways in which they struggle to make meaning around book consumption and social class.

Although this was neither a longitudinal study nor a case study, the longevity of this project gave me ample time to collect, organize, and interpret the data, while continuing to develop a trusting rapport with the workers; however, there were times I sensed I had worn out my welcome, especially at the end of the project. I used a naturalist approach because it offered the advantage of "actual settings [being] a direct source of data" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 4), which allowed me to understand everyday experiences as significant. I adopted the perspective that in qualitative research, informants' actions are never taken for granted or trivialized; rather, as Bogdan & Biklen note, observations of these experiences first-hand can provide important insight into how people construct their lives.

Ai. Participant Observation

I engaged in most of my participant observation in the first three years of the study. The participant observations took two forms. For the first approach, I conducted formal, scheduled observations by attending 45 sessions of the weekly children's Story Time on Thursdays at 11 am. For the second approach, I made an average of 15 observations per year at random times and for varied amounts of time, from 30 minutes to one hour each. I observed 297 mothers or caregivers and 411 children (I tabulated every observation of a child into this number, even when the same child was present more than once) over this time period. The combination of scheduled visits with random visits provided insights into how structured time compared to unstructured time in the bookstore, as described in terms of informal educational experiences in the data chapters.

Aii. Worker Interviews

I interviewed six booksellers (clerks in the children's book department), the children's book department manager, the store manager, and the district manager, with most of these interviews taking place in the first three years of the study. The only exception was interviews with two newer sales associates, which extended to the end of the project. The sales associates staff was consistent, meaning that three core booksellers were employed over the entire period, two booksellers left, and three new booksellers were hired. Booksellers spoke minimally with me at the outset because they felt it important that I get permission from their manager to talk to them. This meant I needed to secure permission early on from the district manager, who gave approval to the store manager, who gave approval to the children's book department manager, who gave approval to children's book workers. The significance of this hierarchy in terms of the effects of corporate power on booksellers' access to information will be discussed further in Chapter 4. Although my interviews were met initially with some skepticism and suspicion, once the district manager approved my

project and interview questions, the other managers and booksellers were amenable to interviews. However, I was forbidden to use a recording device within the store because of a problem the home office had encountered with a disgruntled customer who tape-recorded some incident at a store in another city, causing the store embarrassment. Therefore, I did not record in the store and instead took notes and typed them up myself immediately after each encounter, while the experience was still fresh in my mind.

On average, formal interviews with individual sales associates and managers were around 60 minutes to ninety minutes each, and they all took place in the children's book department, except for the interview with the district manager, which took place in the café. I was able to schedule interviews with sales associates only when there was another associate in the children's section who could run the department during the interview time. Usually this was not an issue because typically there were two people working in the children's book department at the same time. In addition to the formal interviews, I spoke with booksellers informally, sometimes in pairs who were working together, around five times each. Other informal interviews, which occurred when I stopped by the store as a participant observer, ranged in length, from just a few minutes to 30 minutes. The interviews were designed to understand how Owl Book workers negotiate tensions around their work. I wanted to see how workers saw their work in relation to how the company and customers saw their work. Through a series of questions-- some planned out and others more spontaneous-- I asked booksellers to tell me how they understand "professionalism" and "expertise" in relation to "prestige" and "class." For instance, I asked booksellers to share perspectives on differences between "literature" and "mass market" books, and to consider how they may, or may not, associate those categories with status. In order to understand how they thought about their work, I asked booksellers about their relationship to parents and children, so I could learn how they negotiate situations where workers, parents, and children have divergent ideas about book choices.

Aiii. Family Interviews

Although I spoke informally at the store with members of 48 families, I formally interviewed six families, including parents and children, to gain an understanding of their views of workers, family time, and book consumption. These interviews took place during the last two years of this study, and questions were shaped by what I learned through my participant observation. I tape-recorded these interviews while jotting down key points in my notebook. Although I made a first contact with two families at the store, the store manager made it clear to me that I could not conduct family interviews at the store because it would be disruptive to families' experiences there. When I interviewed families outside the store, I asked them for permission to record the interviews, which was always granted.

With respect to the six families I interviewed formally, I made initial contact with two families while at the store, and the other four families through my associations at the university where I teach. The Drew family, whose parents work in professional positions at the university, self-identified as middle-class African American. Four families (Gales, Potters, Mulligans, and Hardys) appeared to be white and identified as middle-class, while the Finch family identified as working-class white. All of the families in this study had two biological parents, a male father and a female mother, living at home. I hoped to extend my sample to include families from less privileged backgrounds, but I was unable to find them. I displayed a poster at a grocery store in a lower income neighborhood in the city near Owl Books, and offered a \$25 gift certificate to Owl Books for participants, but had no responses. A librarian at an urban school with more than 70% of its students qualifying for the free lunch program provided names and phone numbers of mothers of book-loving students; however, these parents (whom the librarian suggested were working-class or low-income) told me they never went to the bookstore, not because they do not appreciate books, but because they did not have access to do so (one worked two jobs, and all were caring for small

children and extended family members). They also indicated they had no disposable income to spend on books. Furthermore, Owl Books is not easily accessible to those without a car. The nearest bus stop is across a four-lane highway, which would be a treacherous journey for parents and young children on foot. In addition to lacking diversity in terms of social class, another drawback to the study is that it includes only one family of color and no single-parent families or families with same-sex parents. Most families came to me through personal contacts and referrals, and through relationships I developed at the store. As my work continues beyond this dissertation, I will more actively recruit a more diverse set of informants, since this will provide richer insight into themes explored in this project.

Two of the six families (the Gales and the Mulligans) had two parents (mother and father) and their child present for the entire 90-minute family interview. I left the location of the interviews up to the informants to make it more convenient for them, and because I wanted them to be comfortable in the setting. I interviewed the Gales at a seafood restaurant across the street from Owl Books, and I interviewed the Mulligans and the Potters in the children's section of Owl Books before the manager told me I could not interview families there. Two families (the Hardys and the Drews) were interviewed at their homes, and for each one, a mother and child were present for the majority of the interview, with a father entering the interview for the last 15 minutes. An interview that took place at my home with the Finch family included a father and his daughter. The site of these interviews was influential. Interviews that took place in the family home seemed comfortable for my informants, although there were some apologies for unfolded laundry and phone call interruptions. Also relaxed in nature, the interview at the restaurant did not have those kinds of distractions, but the ambient noise made the recordings hard to hear, with distractions like crab legs needing to be cracked and catsup needing to be poured. I interviewed the Finch family at my home because it was their choice to do so. The dad, Dan, had been to my house before to clean my rugs,

which is his part-time business, so he was familiar with the environment, although his daughter, Tracey, seemed to need some time to warm up. My two small dogs helped to break the ice. Conducting an interview at the dining room in my home allowed me to set myself up in a comfortable way before they arrived. I was also able to offer them iced tea, which they said they enjoyed. More informal conversations at Owl Books were effective in terms of triggering memories of experiences in the store, and it seemed to be a neutral location. That is, no one had to prepare their home for my entry, or worry I might make judgments about them based on their living situation. However, Owl Books is a public space, with customers wandering around, so it was sometimes difficult to focus, especially for children.

Typically children were present during my conversations with parents, which I imagine influenced what was said. At times, I interpreted the discourse of parents as representing their use of the interview situation as a teachable moment with their children. Sometimes a child would voice his/her thoughts, but usually this happened only when prompted by a parent. The interview with parents typically lasted for around 30 to 40 minutes, at which point I usually sensed that the child was feeling more comfortable with me and with the interview situation, so I began to direct most questions to him/her. With the two families I interviewed at home, the parents left the room once I began interviewing the child. Sometimes parents appeared to need a break from the interview questions, or they went off to take care of something in the house, or they made a phone call. In each of these cases, they were comfortable leaving their child with me, and I was happy to have the chance to speak with the child alone. The experience of having me listen one-on-one seemed to allow children to open up. I realized that children like to be listened to and respected for their insights. Questions for children were designed to get at their perspectives on their family's experience at Owl Books, including who makes the decision about going to the bookstore; what, if any, are general patterns for spending time at the store (i.e., who goes where and for how long);

what books and the bookstore mean to them; how the experience compares to going to the library; how they value books; and what, if anything, they learn from books. As themes emerged and gained clarity, I asked children how they felt about the booksellers, and what the experience of book and book buying meant to their friends and for their friendships.

B. Interviews: What Do Workers, Parents, & Children Have to Say?

This study relies primarily on interviews with workers, parents, and children to understand their thoughts about books, consumption, work, and status in order to learn how each of these areas relates to their experience of the bookstore and to their lives. Throughout this research project, I made a commitment to listen carefully and openly to informants' ideas—whether they came from workers, children, or parents. It was always my intent to take each of their perspectives seriously, which all of the informants appeared to appreciate. They sometimes paused after a question and I could tell they were giving their answers serious thought. Although I was interested in hearing how adults thought about children's relationships with books, I would have been unable, or at least unwilling, to pursue this project without including children's voices, as explained in greater detail earlier in this chapter. Part of my approach, though not always conscious and deliberate, was to empower my informants by letting them know that their ideas mattered to me. I found parents were sometimes surprised to hear their children's perspectives. More than once, parents said, "I didn't know that" in response to their child's answer. This gave more import to my work because the process itself was opening dialogue not only between my informants and me, but also between children and their parents.

The interview questions were loosely structured. As Taylor & Bogdan (1998) suggest, interviews are used for qualitative research not only to find answers, but to discover which questions should be asked. One good question leads to another good question. With that in mind, I began by

asking the general question about how the family comes to the choice of going to Owl Books. Then I asked what happens when they arrive at the store and how their time is usually spent, individually and together. I posed these questions so respondents could visualize their experience, because I noticed that as they visualized a typical trip to the bookstore, their memories became more specific and their descriptions more vivid. It was my experience that the parent(s) did most of the talking at the beginning of the interview. I asked them general questions about their family (e.g., names, ages, genders). Then, I inquired about the frequency of their trips to Owl Books, which led to questions about how the decision to visit the bookstore came about, who typically went to the bookstore, and how/where individual family members spent time in the store. My next set of questions was designed to get at what the bookstore experience means to them as a family. I asked them how the experience compares to other kinds of family outings they take. I then posed questions around literacy, e.g., how they defined it, how they valued it (or not), and how they saw the role of literacy in terms of their children's lives (past, present, future). Other questions dealt with issues around the relationship between "reading" and "success," and between "books" and "status." I was interested in learning how and why parents and children categorize books as "mass market" or "literature" in order to understand the consequences of such categories. Furthermore, I was interested in learning from parents and children their perspectives on booksellers at the store. Connected to this were questions to discern how parents and children compare Owl Book booksellers to other book workers, including workers at independent bookstores and librarians.

I found that one good question will generate a great deal of information. For instance, one question I asked of booksellers, parents, and children was, "What is a good book?" When the question was posed, several respondents started their answer with, "That's a great question." Then they paused to consider their response carefully, as if their answer was a reflection on who they are or who they wish to be. This made me realize early on that people's ideas about reading and books

are personal and sensitive in nature, and their expressions around books provide insight into how they think about and construct their identity. This question opened up the discussion to other generative topics, such as literacy, status, and consumption, which ultimately was the direction I discovered this research project would take. I learned that one question has the power to shape the trajectory of an entire qualitative study.

Bi. Reading Between the Lines: Informants' Discourse around Books

I was sensitive to booksellers' language when talking about customers, which brought forth another line of questioning related to issues of class and accessibility. When a bookseller described her perspective on customers, she used words such as "clean" (suggesting to me a privileged sense of "whiteness" at Owl Books); "white" (suggesting to me whiteness that excluded people of color from the bookstore), and "middle-class" (suggesting that the bookstore was a space designed for the comfort of middle-class families, and where working class and economically disadvantaged families were not welcome and, consequently, would not be made to feel welcome). I did not want to alienate my bookseller informant, but I was able to gain a clearer understanding of her perspective by expressing my interest in understanding, not judging, her perspective. This was difficult for me, since on one level I found her word choices to be offensive, but I kept reminding myself that the aim of a qualitative researcher is to understand, not to suspend judgment as much as it is humanly possible to do so. I was also interested in learning about booksellers' relationship to other workers in the store, to the Home Office, and to other levels of management. I investigated these perspectives by asking such questions as, "What is it like to work at Owl Books?"; "How do you feel you are treated?"; and "How are your ideas about books and the children's book area considered?" Other questions were designed to draw out booksellers' perspectives on the difference between big-box booksellers, independent bookstores, and libraries in terms of "quality" and workers' expertise.

As I identified emerging themes in the areas of status and class, I posed questions that investigated connections between those themes and workers' ideas around expertise and status.

C. Participant Observation: What Can We Learn from Story Time?

I engaged in a total of around 75 hours of participant observation at Owl Books over three years during the weekly Story Time, held at 11 am on Thursday mornings, since I would arrive early and stay late. Typically, around 8 to 12 toddler-aged girls and boys attended each week with their mothers or female caregivers, with the exception of an occasional grandfather or father I saw at Story Time over the period. Each week, Nina, the Story Teller, sat on a stage decorated like the Hundred Acre Wood from *Winnie-the-Pooh*. She read three books to the group, followed by a 20- to 30-minute activity, which was typically a coloring exercise or simple craft activity where she provided the necessary materials. My intent was to observe social interactions between Nina and children, between Nina and caregivers, between caregivers and children, among children, and among caregivers. I jotted down notes during Story Time, trying not to become a distraction, then I filled in details after leaving the store and typed out my notes. I found that caregivers used this time to socialize with one another, leaving a frenetic atmosphere of childcare to Nina, which gave me insight into the ways that caregivers think about workers and caregivers think about parents. Among other things, I found from my observations that Story Time teaches middle-class children that reading and literacy are important, and good manners must be learned and followed. Caregivers often offer the reward of a book to children who abide by the rules. Story Time is an opportunity for social learning, within a structure that allows caregivers to seek pleasure and leisure for themselves.

Reading the Researcher: My Place in this Work

As a qualitative researcher, my understanding that I have a “view from somewhere” (Haraway, 1988) was significant and important as I collected and interpreted data. This perspective challenged me to consider how my subject position affected what I was doing, seeing, and interpreting. Qualitative research in the ethnographic tradition challenges the researcher to consider in an on-going way her place in the study, and to understand how her subject position informs the work she is doing (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; DeVault, 1990; Taylor, 1998). The reflexivity of qualitative research includes not only thinking deeply about data; it also requires profound considerations of oneself and one’s place in the work. This self-reflective approach is essential to the epistemological process, as it calls for “engaging in a process which allows one to refer back to oneself and to acknowledge and examine one’s participation in social life, namely, in this instance, participation in data collection and interviewing” (Johnson, 1995, p. 255). Aside from experiences that together, and over time, have shaped my ways of seeing the world, the major influences on my place in this work have come from my background as a middle-class white woman and mother, my formal educational training in communication and journalism, and my experience of being a children’s book author. My “view from somewhere” is considered next.

a. How My Childhood Informs My Research

When I was little, growing up in a white, middle-class suburb in Central New York, my dream job was crime scene investigator. Perhaps this came from reading all the Nancy Drew mysteries I could get my hands on. I realize now that I connected to these books because I could relate to Nancy’s white, middle-class persona. I could imagine being Nancy because it was not so far-fetched to do so. At the time, I never thought about those children who could not relate, and those who were excluded from the experience. Nancy Drew’s possibilities were my possibilities. To

me, it was exciting to imagine getting to the bottom of an unsolved “whodunit” through the process of looking for evidence, asking tough questions, and listening to, while unraveling, complicated answers. The “crimes” of my middle-class youth involved such banal tasks as searching for a lost cat, or figuring out who ate the last chocolate chip cookie; but, reflecting back, the real “crime” was the way in which I—a middle-class white child from the suburbs—was cut off from the lives of people who were working-class and low-income, and people of color and diverse ethnicities. My consciousness was limited to my middle-class environment, and I had little exposure to anything beyond it. Perhaps I could not know what I did not know. When I entered high school in 1970, my worldview quickly became informed by social and political activism around the Vietnam War, the feminist movement, and civil rights. My access to the media seemed to open the world to me. For the first time, I learned how to become more aware of experiences outside my white, middle-class environment, to begin to appreciate the struggles of marginalized groups, and to express myself through experiences around music and art. This awareness of, and concern for, oppressed people continued to grow throughout my adulthood and opened possibilities for my teaching and scholarship. As a college writing instructor at an environmental college and as a scholar in cultural studies, I knew I could open dialogues with others about the ideologies around social justice that started to form in my young adulthood.

Although I awoke from my dream of becoming a crime scene investigator, I realize now that some of the skills associated with this dream have carried on, as I embarked on a dream of discovery around human interaction and social behaviors. I learned back as a young girl that I had a knack for asking questions, for listening carefully, for taking notes, for interpreting information, and for making connections between all of the above in order to make sense of the world around me. As Bogdan & Biklen (2007) explain, “The qualitative researchers’ goal is to better understand human behavior and experience. They seek to grasp the process by which people construct meaning and to

describe what those meanings are... it is with concrete incidents of human behavior that investigators can think more clearly and deeply about the human condition” (p. 43). The toolbox of skills associated with qualitative research methods has provided me with the research instruments I needed to pursue this work of scholarship, namely, understanding how social class is reproduced through everyday family experiences, such as interactions that take place at a big-box bookseller. The theory and methods of qualitative research have provided the framework through which I construct a meaningful story about human experience, which on a broader scale is to understand how middle-class reproduction takes place through everyday experiences in American society today.

b. How Motherhood Informs My Research

When I started this project, my daughter was 10 years old, so I often brought her with me to Owl Books when I was doing my research. This was partly because of childcare issues, but mainly because she loves books and the bookstore. Like the middle-class families I studied, I was pursuing my individual interest while my daughter browsed through the children’s books. At the end of my fieldwork, my daughter was off to college, so I found myself going alone to Owl Books. Without my own child in tow, I began to feel awkward about sitting in on the weekly Story Time. I no longer felt legitimized because I no longer had a child with me. This kind of alienation showed me that there are certain qualities of public spaces that help a person feel comfortable, or not, at Owl Books. In short, I saw for myself that Owl Books does not provide an identical welcoming experience to everyone. Finally, I have been a mother for 24 years. I am comfortable being around children and enjoy talking with them. As a parent myself, I am sensitive to parents’ concerns, and I am interested in hearing their stories about families and parenting. All of this made the research experience at times both joyful and fun.

c. How My Education Informs My Research

I realized early on that my background in journalism could seriously hinder my approach to qualitative research. I felt compelled to approach my analysis of research projects, as well as my own project, as an investigative journalist. In other words, I always tried to find the loopholes and contradictions in what people were telling me, as if I were a reporter for *20/20* or *60 Minutes*. Instead of listening and trying to understand their subject positions, I was trying instead to uncover what they could possibly be hiding. In learning about qualitative research methods, I discovered the importance of respecting informants in a way that valued their perspectives and avoided a critical critique. With that in mind, I remember working hard to suspend judgment when talking with the district manager of Owl Books, a person who initially rubbed me the wrong way. I was compelled to label him as superficial when he told me that when he used to work for the GAP, no one would talk to him at parties, but as soon as he started working for Owl Books, he became the life of the party. It would have been easy for me to see him as egotistical, but instead I kept in mind that there is nothing wrong with taking pleasure in being able to stimulate good conversation associated with one's job. In fact, I remembered from my own experience that ice-breaker conversations often center on jobs. As a qualitative researcher, I began to understand the relationship between the district manager's self-perception and the social structures that surrounded him, which was a much more generative approach. When I pushed myself toward suspending judgment, I was able to better understand the complicated personal perspective and get to the social meaning.

Aside from the informal lessons I learned in my research courses, my communication skills are enhanced by my experience teaching writing in the Syracuse University and the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry's (SUNY ESF) writing programs for 17 years, and by my experience teaching public speaking at SUNY ESF for six years. Furthermore, I have written seven published children's books since 1995, from a board book for babies, to picture

books for young children, to a young adult novel for adolescents. I wrote 35 episodes of an award-winning children's television show, and composed an ecological children's play performed in 2009 in Boston. In writing books and scripts for children, I need to know what young people are interested in, how they think about things, and what is important to them. These insights are critical to my research.

Struggles of the Participant-Observer

Among a number of other realizations, this ethnographic project has made me aware of my ability to alter public space. I was interested in talking with booksellers and parents, and I knew I would need to build trust with parents in order to have permission to talk with their children. I knew that the discourse around "stranger danger" (Ahmed, 2000, p. 3) meant that I might be "recognized as posing danger" (p. 32), which could be exacerbated since I was interested in knowing more about children. I made a conscious decision to avoid talking directly to children, without acquiring permission from their caregivers. From the beginning, to break the ice, I identified myself to potential informants (workers and parents) as a researcher who was a doctoral student at the nearby university. I quickly identified myself as a children's author, which seemed to chisel away more ice, and it felt as though this information caused my informants to hold me in higher esteem. They seemed to want to get to know me better. It helped that I am a middle-aged, middle-class white woman, which seems to be the least threatening profile for ethnographic researchers. Once these understandings around my identity were established, parents were interested in sharing their thoughts with me, and they had no qualms about letting their children talk with me, as well. It felt as though they were talking about themselves while talking about their children. When they described their children's connections to reading and books, they seemed proud of themselves, as though as parents, they were doing good work. The same was true of booksellers. For the most

part, toward the beginning of my research, booksellers were skeptical of me at first, often pushing me to talk with the manager. It seemed as though they felt vulnerable about expressing themselves, as if they worried they might get in trouble for talking with me, especially if they said the “wrong” thing, translated as revealing something that went against company policy. However, after building some trust with me through more casual conversation, the booksellers were forthcoming in sharing their perspectives. Although sometimes I would not visit the bookstore for weeks at a time, after years of doing participant observation at Owl Books, booksellers finally grew tired of seeing me there and answering my questions. This was one of the signals that told me I was reaching the final chapter of my fieldwork.

Why Children?

I could not write about the relationship between children, books, and class without talking with children. But where and how would they fit in? How would I talk with them? Would they trust me? Would they like me? Would I have trouble interpreting their ideas? My intention from the beginning was to give children the opportunity to be represented. I would accomplish this by listening to them, by responding to them, by respecting them, and by including their voices in this research. I realized I could not and would not do research about children and books without asking them to share their ideas with me. Although it may seem to be a logical part of qualitative research, the idea of including children’s perspectives was not always a given, and it is still not a given today. James & Prout (1997, 2002) argue that “[t]he history of childhood in the social sciences has been marked not by an absence of interest in children... but by their silence” (p. 7). Some transformation occurred when the sociology of childhood emerged as a distinct discipline in the 1990s, and I was committed to following that direction.

This emerging field of study had the power to transform the ways in which children were

being marginalized in research conducted about them (See Valentine, 1996; James, 1993; Reynolds, 1996; Torren, 1993; Steedman, 1995). According to James & Prout (1997, 2002), the “traditional consignment of childhood to the margins of the social sciences or its primary location within the fields of developmental psychology and education” was problematic because children were seen as objects, rather than as “social actors” with agency (viii). This ideological shift led to a movement that in part aimed to address long-standing concerns that children were being “muted” in research projects within education and the social sciences. Such concerns had been articulated decades earlier by Hardman (1971, p. 85), who argued that “children are people to be studied in their own right, and not just as receptacles of learning” (87). Due to this paradigm shift, some significant strides have been made in terms of allowing children to participate in conversations that adult researchers have about them; however, there is still more work to be done. This dissertation is part of that effort, as it privileges children’s voices and allows them to participate in the way they are represented around and within this research project.

As I considered the symbolic place of children in this project, I struggled with the materiality of children’s presence, as well. The three data chapters would be organized around my informants: workers, parents, and children. This begged the question, where should I place the chapter that contains children’s voices? The children’s chapter would need to come either first or last since booksellers should neither literally nor metaphorically come between children and parents. Should children come first? This might signal to readers the importance of their presence in this work, yet their perspectives might take on greater meaning if they came later on in the discussion. In the end, I chose to place the children’s chapter last, as a way of giving children the final word.

Data Coding and Analysis

In keeping with traditional approaches to qualitative research, the analysis of my data was part

of an on-going reflective approach to this work. I took notes during each interview, even though I used a tape recorder when not in the store, to make sure I captured the nuances of the experiences that would not be present on audiotape. This included notes such as my participants' physical appearance, questions that were raised, connections to other interviews, and general key words or phrases that seemed particularly significant at the time. Within a day or two after the interviews, I transcribed the field notes myself, which gave me an opportunity to revisit the conversations with my informants, and to begin interpreting their meaning. I wrote a paper from my preliminary analysis and prepared it for publication in an academic journal. Each of these forms of writing became important to my analytical process.

After I conducted my final interview, I began looking at my 500 pages of field notes and interview data as a body of information rather than as discrete data. With that in mind, I looked for themes and patterns, following the approach suggested by Bogdan & Biklen (2007), searching for "certain words, phrases, patterns of behavior, subjects' ways of thinking, and events that [stood] out" (p. 173). I used an open coding process, where I was able to organize my data without limiting possibilities for interpretation. After weeks devoted exclusively to scrutinizing my field notes, I identified 43 codes that reflected terms, phrases, and sentiments expressed by my informants in ways that emerged as patterns due to their repetition. (See Appendix A for the list: Coding Categories.) Examples of themes that became apparent were "class," "status/prestige," "family time," "work," "education/schooling," "manners," "consumption," "literacy," and "safety." Once I identified these areas, I discovered patterns emerging; for example, under "work," I could find patterns such as "relationship of children's book workers to Home Office," "relationship to children's book workers to other workers in the department," and "relationship of children's book workers to other workers in the store." As I identified the sub-themes, it presented possibilities for making sense of the data I had collected. This open coding approach provided a theoretical ecology that allowed me to

conceptualize the dissertation as a whole made up of interconnecting parts. Though it may have taken more time in the long run than using a computer program designed for coding, I chose to use Microsoft Word's search feature to locate and organize the codes. I relied on this approach in conjunction with hand coding, where I used colored markers and paper tabs to identify codes on a hard copy of my notes. This approach draws from Bogdan & Biklen's metaphor that likens the process of coding data with the task of organizing thousands of toys scattered around a gymnasium (p. 173). This strategy allowed me to visualize the relative amount of data available in each code, which helped me to identify stronger themes that presented opportunities for analysis. The major themes revealed through this approach showed me that my informant groups (workers, parents, and children) provided a sound structure for organizing the dissertation, because I could address those themes with respect to each group. For example, a major theme was middle-class reproduction, which I address in each chapter with respect to the perspectives of those informant groups. Furthermore, this approach brought to light significant contradictions and complications made by my informants; for example, booksellers at times expressed frustrations with their lack of agency due to the store's corporate hierarchy, while at other times they praised the corporate office for establishing strict guidelines for taking charge of inventory and displays. These complications presented rich opportunities for analysis.

In some respects, the longevity of my research project, and conversations with my advisor and colleagues over a seven-year period (not including the two-year break), gave me time and opportunity to reflect often on the themes and patterns I was noticing. Over time, some themes were rejected permanently, while others were accepted for the duration; and some themes went away, only to come back again. The process was organic and dynamic. The data chapters that follow consider how this coding process allowed me to make meaning around this work in a way that reflects a clear and thoughtful representation of my informants and the ways in which they see

and understand the world of reading and books.

Limitations of the Study

This work has limitations related to its informants and its research site, which I will address in that order. One significant limitation that restricts the discussion is that while I observed and talked informally with more than 45 families at the store, only six families participated in the in-depth formal interviews, and the families I interviewed constituted a sample with very limited diversity in terms of race, socioeconomic class, and family structures. The sample is also limited because of the six families interviewed, four families had at least one parent who was an educator. Educators have access to particular vocabulary and language through their experiences and involvements with educational systems, which are particular to those in this field. Of the six families I interviewed formally, five either identified as, or appeared to be, white, and one family identified as African-American. Five families identified as middle-class with at least one parent working in a professional job, and one family identified as working class. All families included married heterosexual parents who were the biological parents of all children living at home. Only one family, the Gales, had a father who had been married previously, with one adult daughter living away.

Although I had hoped to include a larger and more diverse sample, I encountered problems when it came to finding families to interview. Some of this was an effect of the project's longevity. In conceptualizing my research approach, I envisioned three phases: 1.) participant observation, 2.) formal interviews with booksellers and managers, and 3.) formal interviews with families. Phases 1 and 2 overlapped in the first three years, and Phase 3 occurred in the last two years of the study. I imagined at the outset that I would make contact with families in the store as I did participant observation, and that I would schedule in-depth interviews with them at a later date and in another

location. However, this plan was thwarted. As noted earlier, during the first three years of this study I engaged in participant observation during the weekly Story Time, and I conducted the majority of my interviews with booksellers and managers. I also talked informally with children and parents in the store, and reflected on those conversations through field notes and memos, but I did not conduct formal family interviews until the last two years of the study. By then, my presence at the store had become more obvious, and I sensed I was beginning to wear out my welcome.

Although the booksellers were generally cordial, they were less friendly than before, appearing reticent about talking with me. A new bookseller treated me suspiciously and gave curt answers to my questions after I introduced myself. Though this may have reflected a particular personality, I wondered at that time if other booksellers had expressed some annoyance and warned her about me. All of this occurred at the point when I wanted to begin making connections that would lead to the formal family interviews. In light of the discomfort I was feeling in the children's book section, I decided I should engage in the process "by the book," meaning I approached the store manager to ask permission to talk with families to see if they would like to participate in my study. I did not anticipate resistance from him, and saw this approach as mainly a formality and a sign of my respect for him and for the booksellers. However, to my surprise, the manager was adamant in saying I could not talk to families because it would be disruptive to the store and bothersome to customers. I knew then that I needed to come up with a new strategy for finding families to interview. To that end, I found five families through connections at the university where I teach; I had already made one family connection at the store about six months before the store manager told me not to talk to customers.

I was initially concerned with social reproduction in general, then narrowed my research to middle-class reproduction when I was unable to find working class or low-income families who spent time together at Owl Books. As explained earlier in this chapter, to do this I placed posters in

a grocery store, laundromat, and library in an under-resourced neighborhood in Centertown with a large population of African-American families. The poster gave a brief headline of my study and offered a \$25 gift certificate to participate. However, I received no responses, so I needed to think of new strategies for generating informants. I have relationships with three children's librarians; two work in public libraries in economically disadvantaged Centertown City neighborhoods, and one works in a school library located in a low-income district. The two public librarians approached parents and children to see if any of them spend time at Owl Books, focusing on children who had shown a strong interest in reading and books. To their surprise and mine, all but one of the children had never been to a bookstore. The child who had gone to Owl Books had been there only once. The school librarian who works at a Centertown elementary school with a largely low-income, African-American student population put me in touch with three mothers she thought would be excited about my study. I called each of them, but they were all unavailable to meet for interviews, due to responsibilities related to work, childcare, and/or care of elderly or ill family members. Also, all three mothers said they had never been to Owl Books, so it would have been impossible for them to comment on family experiences in the store. The difficulty of finding people of color and working or economically disadvantaged families suggested that this store has an exclusive quality, which is a theme I explore in this dissertation. While this study falls short due to its lack of diversity, which certainly limits the discussion, at the same time it raises possibilities for other studies to look at family literacy experiences in diverse communities. Future work to extend this project would question the lack of diverse informants in greater depth. Related questions may include: How do low-income families connect with books, and how do they make meaning of family literacy?

The research site itself led to the lack of diverse sampling of informants. Owl Books in Centertown is hard to reach by public transportation, so people need a car in order to gain access. However, it is important to emphasize that I studied only one of nearly 800 stores operating in this

bookstore chain throughout the United States. My study did not intend to represent the experience at other Owl Books stores, which may offer a divergent perspective. I have visited Owl Books stores in large metropolitan areas on the East and West Coasts of the U.S. and found they do not have the same limited access issues associated with the store I studied, so they may tell a different story than mine. In many large cities, people walk to bookstores, and public transportation is more accessible. When a store has greater physical access, it opens itself to possibilities for a more diverse clientele. Future research conducted at an urban store would enrich the discussion presented here.

Though the sample of six family interviews was small and did not reflect a diverse representation of informants, and I looked at only one bookstore without a diverse customer base, my research methodology allowed me to draw meaning from a variety of sources, which in the end shaped my understanding of the middle-class family outing to the big-box bookstore. The family interviews were conducted toward the end of the study after I had gathered significant background data to inform and guide my interview approach. As suggested earlier, the participant observation aspect of this study and worker interviews spanned the first three years of the five-year study. By the time I entered the family interview phase, I had interviewed all of the booksellers and managers, spoken informally with nearly 50 families while in the store, and observed 297 mothers or caregivers and 411 children during 45 sessions of Story Time. I realized from my participant observation that I wanted to have a more intimate experience with families, so this is why I chose to extend the study by conducting family interviews, which took place in the last two years of the study. The in-depth family interviews were significant because they were drawn from, and seen in relation to, informal interviews and participant observation. Furthermore, while the length of the study interfered with the opportunity to connect with families at the store, the understandings I had gained from participant observation experiences, and from my interviews with booksellers, informed and enriched the questions I posed to families during interviews, which made them more focused and

generative.

The Informants

This project tries to understand how middle-class reproduction takes place in the everyday experience of the family outing to the big-box bookstore by looking at the experience through participant observation and through interviews with workers, parents, and children. In keeping with my decision to organize chapters according to these informant groups, and in order to help the reader keep the names of my informants straight, this section provides a list of participants and their descriptions/profiles. Workers are described in their own section, while parents and children are organized according to their families for reasons of clarity.

Workers (in alphabetical order, by pseudonym)

Dianne, sales associate in children's books, was a newer worker, having been employed for just three months at the time I first interviewed her. A white female around 5' 6" tall with a slim build, she had long wavy brown hair, brown glasses, and told me she was 26 years old and came from a small town around three hours away from the store. A part-time worker who averaged 20 hours a week at the store, Dianne was a first-year graduate student in Library Science at the local private university in Centertown. She appeared serious about her role and somewhat shy, or possibly mistrustful of me, or reluctant to be viewed as not doing her job, as she made little eye contact with me when we spoke.

Francine, sales associate in children's books, appeared to be a white woman in her mid 40s, with short bobbed graying hair that looked permed. She wore oval wire-rimmed glasses and had a friendly smile with a round face. Francine has worked at Owl Books for five years. She started as a front-end cashier for three months, went to the music department after three months, and finally transferred to the children's section, which she said was her ultimate goal. She was part-time and

worked around 24 to 30 hours a week. She said she is married to a high school gym teacher and has a two-year degree in nutrition. They have two college-aged children who live away from home.

Justine, bookseller in children's books, looked to be around 5' 2" with brown hair she typically pulled back into a fuzzy ponytail. Full of energy and enthusiasm, she said she was 35 years old, single, and lived with two roommates near the local private university. Justine said she got the job nine years ago because of her connections to a network of local school librarians, which included a former Owl Books worker. She graduated from a private university with a bachelor's degree in art education, but has been unable to land a teaching job. She worked at Owl Books for around 25 hours a week and also worked as a nanny for a faculty family. To add to her income, she created hand-painted furniture sold on line and through local gift shops.

Karen, bookseller in children's books, was a 30-year-old part-time worker who was also a half-time teaching assistant at a local elementary school. A tall, slender brunette with shoulder-length hair, she had fair skin and appeared to be white. Employed at Owl Books for four years, she had a two-year-old son and was married to a man who had his own home repair/carpentry business. She had a two-year degree in psychology from a community college. On average, she worked 20 hours a week, and had no second job outside the home, but took on more hours over the holidays or filled in for coworkers who were sick or on vacation. Her demeanor was friendly and chatty.

Madeline, children's book department manager, appeared to be in her mid 30s and had worked for Owl Books for six years. Around 5' 5" tall, she had big brown eyes; thick, straight brown hair; and appeared to be white. She had a warm and welcoming disposition. She mentioned she was newly married to an engineer at a local environmental firm. She earned a paralegal certificate on-line, but after working in the field for three years, she realized she did not enjoy the work and decided to pursue other options. Since she said she loves reading and books, she applied for a position at Owl Books. She started as a worker in children's books, and was promoted to

manager after three years. Madeline said she worked 40 hours a week and this was her only job, although she said she would like to become a certified yoga instructor.

Mary, Owl Books Manager, was 41 years old and around 5' 7" with blonde curly hair, light skin, and a professional air about her. In contrast to book workers who wore casual pants or long skirts and flat walking shoes, Mary usually wore a suit jacket with matching pants and pumps with tall heels. She was unmarried and lived with her two cats. She had a business degree from the local university and said she would like to study for an MBA if she could find the funding she needs in the future. She worked up to 50 hours a week, depending on the store's needs. Before coming to Owl Books she worked as a sales associate, then manager, for a women's retail clothing store in her hometown, a mid-sized city two hours away. She seemed enthusiastic and upbeat when talking about Owl Books.

Nina, bookseller in children's books and Story Teller who lead the weekly Story Time, is a 5' 4", plump, middle-aged woman with short, tightly-curved gray hair and glasses on a string. She appeared to be white. She had worked at Owl Books for an average of 12 hours a week for eight years and was the only worker who participated in Story Time. Her energy was high and she indicates she was a leader in the book department because of her position as Story Teller, her long-term experience, and her knowledge of children and caregivers who attend Story Time. Identifying herself as a former librarian, she was in fact a part-time librarian's assistant at an elementary school for seven years when her three children were in middle and high school. She did not work outside the home when her children were in elementary school because she said she wanted to be at home with them, since her husband was away a lot as a long-distance truck driver. Her educational history included taking several courses at a community college toward a degree in Early Childhood Education, which she said she was not planning to complete.

Richard, Owl Books District Manager, appeared to be in his early 40s. Around 5' 10" tall, he was balding, thin, and hyper. He drank two large cups of black coffee during our one-hour formal interview session. Divorced with three children who live with their mother in another state, Richard said he was on the road a lot for his job. It was not unusual for him to put 500 to 700 miles on his car a week, and he typically worked more than 60 hours a week, including travel. He was hired by Owl Books ten years ago as District Manager and covered a region that included three mid-sized cities to the east and west, and two smaller cities to the north and south, comprising 14 stores. Prior to working for Owl Books, he was a store manager for 10 years then district manager for five years at the Gap with a similar regional scope to his current territory. He has a bachelor's degree in business management from a state university.

Stephanie, bookseller in children's books, described herself as "semi-retired," as she worked four-hour shifts equaling out to 20 hours a week on average and filled in for other workers when she was needed and available. A small, dark-haired woman around 5 feet tall, she was in her early 50s and appeared white. She wore brightly-colored blouses and long flouncy skirts. Stephanie had an outgoing demeanor with a dry sense of humor. Married to a retired family restaurant owner, she said she worked for the health benefits more than for the hourly wage. She had two grown daughters and three grandchildren who lived in the area. She did not attend college but had taken adult education courses connected to her interests in wine tasting, poetry, and watercolor painting.

Families (in alphabetical order, by pseudonym) ¹

The Drew Family

Class: Middle-class

Mother: Keisha, mid-30s.

Race: African-American

Occupation: Assistant Professor at Centertown University.

Highest level of education: PhD

Father: William, mid-30s.

Race: African-American

Occupation: Executive Director of a youth program at Centertown University.

Highest level of education: Master's Degree

Son: Stefan, 1st grade, age 7.

Schooling: Attends 1st grade at a parochial school

Interview took place: At their home in an older, upscale Centertown neighborhood

The Finch Family

Class: Working-class

Father: Dave, mid-40s

Race: White

Occupation: Janitor & is a part-time rug cleaner

Highest level of education: High School diploma

Mother: Doreen, mid-40s

Race: White

Occupation: Part-time house cleaner

Highest level of education: High School diploma

Daughter: Tracey, age 13.

Schooling: Attends 8th grade at suburban Centertown school, a middle-class district.

Interview took place: At my home, at Dave's request. Dave and Tracey were present. Doreen was not.

The Gale Family

Class: Middle-class

Mother: Audrey, age 41

Race: White

Occupation: 3rd grade city school teacher in Centertown City School District.

Highest level of education: Master's degree

Father: Art, age 57

Race: White

Occupation: College writing instructor (adjunct)

Highest level of education: Master's degree

Son: Robby, age 8

Schooling: Attends 3rd grade at an alternative school. Identified as learning disabled.

Interview took place: During lunch at a local Red Lobster, at their request.

The Hardy Family

Class: Middle-class

Mother: Sandy, late 40s

Race: White

Occupation: Assistant Professor at local state university

Highest level of education: PhD

Father: Tim, late 40s

Race: White

Occupation: Director of outdoor education center

¹ While this "list" approach belies the interesting and complex nature of each of these families, and I understand categories such as "race" are more complicated and contested than a list may suggest, I include it here as a reference guide for readers.

Highest level of education: High School, some college courses

Son: Jack, age 11

Schooling: 5th grade, first year in a suburban school after K-4 in a Centertown City elementary school. Identified as learning disabled in areas of reading and writing.

Interview took place: At the Hardy's home, located in a middle-class neighborhood on the outskirts of Centertown.

The Mulligan Family

Class: Middle-class

Father: Scott, late 30s

Race: White

Occupation: Laborer. On disability, due to leg injury.

Highest level of education: High School

Mother: Jean, late 30s

Race: White

Occupation: Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN)

Highest level of education: Two-year nursing program at local community college

Daughter: Morgan, age 9

Schooling: 4th grade at suburban elementary school. Identified as learning disabled in areas of reading and writing.

Son: Jordan, age 5

Schooling: Kindergarten at suburban elementary school

Interview took place: In the children's book section of Owl Books.

The Potter Family

Class: Middle-class

Mother: Dana, late 40s

Race: White

Occupation: Stay-at-home mother

Highest level of education: Bachelor's degree from small private college (same as Tom)

Father: Tom, late 40s

Race: White

Occupation: Pharmaceutical Sales

Highest level of education: Bachelor's degree from small private college (same as Dana)

Son: Tommy, age 14

Schooling: 9th grade at suburban high school outside Centertown.

Daughter: Kara, age 11

Schooling: 6th grade at suburban middle school outside Centertown.

Daughter: Jenny, age 9

Schooling: 4th grade at suburban elementary school outside Centertown.

Son: Alex, age 7

Schooling: 2nd grade at suburban elementary school outside Centertown.

Interview took place: At Owl Books, with follow-up phone interview with Tommy.

Conclusion

This ethnographic study was designed to illuminate how children's book consumption is connected to status; how ideas about literacy, status, and consumption are connected; and how these perspectives lead to middle-class reproduction. It provides insight into how the institutionalization/corporatization of literacy through consumption spaces such as Owl Books affects the way people think about literacy and books. The study understands the big-box bookseller as a cultural field where children learn that status is important, reading and books are a form of cultural capital, and that reading skills will lead to a "successful" future. This work will add to research on children, class, and consumption by such scholars as Chin (2001), Schor (2005), and Pugh (2009), and it will further research on the social experience of books conducted by Radway and Miller (2006). Furthermore, it will extend the work of Marjorie L. DeVault (2000, 2003) on family outings by providing further understanding about informal learning that takes place within middle-class families, an area where little work has been done. I argue that this work is significant because it gives voice to children's perspectives on literacy, consumption, and status. I hope it will encourage families to think more deeply about the experience of their family outings and the meaning of doing "family work." They may be more aware of positive aspects of their relationships and experiences with other family members, as well as more appreciative of the time they spend together. On a grander scale, society stands to gain from this research through gaining a greater understanding of the meaning and social significance of family time. This project may also benefit society by showing how significant learning experiences (including acquiring various literacies) occur outside the classroom, and how, instead of providing opportunities for social mobility, many of those experiences reproduce the *status quo* when it comes to social class.

CHAPTER 4

Negotiating Middle-Class Status Around Book Work

Heigh ho! Heigh ho!
It's off to work we go!
So keep on singing all day long!
Heigh ho! Heigh ho heigh ho
Heigh ho! Heigh ho!
For if you're feelin' low,
You positively can't go wrong with a high
Heigh ho, heigh ho, heigh ho, heigh ho, heigh ho...

We dig up diamonds by the score!
A thousand rubies, sometimes more!
But we don't know what we dig 'em for!
We dig, dig, dig-a-dig, dig!

From *Snow White & the Seven Dwarfs*
 Music by Frank Churchill, Lyrics by Larry Morey (1937)

This chapter considers how workers (called “booksellers”) in the children’s book department of Owl Books struggle to negotiate middle-class status for themselves through the ways in which they approach and carry out their work. In order to situate workers’ perspectives, the chapter begins by providing history on the corporate structure of Owl Books, including its mission statement. It then provides background on the company’s organizational structure, and presents some of its policies and practices concerning employee wages and benefits. From there, drawing from Bourdieu’s concepts of capital, habitus, and misrecognition, the chapter examines how workers negotiate their positions and relationships within the corporate hierarchy, within the store, and within the children’s book department, to arrive at a sense of themselves. The chapter then considers how booksellers struggle for middle-class status while doing a low-status job selling what they consider to be the high-prestige product of children’s books. By exploring complexities and tensions associated with bookstore workers’ perceptions about status and relationship to books, this chapter explores the struggles and contradictions associated with middle-class reproduction and work.

Negotiating Status Inside Owl Books' Corporate Structure

Before discussing how booksellers see themselves in relation to the corporate structure of Owl Books, I will provide a context for this big-box bookstore by presenting a brief overview of the company's history, followed by a summary of its organizational structure.¹ Owl Books began by selling college textbooks in the 1970s from its flagship store located in a major metropolitan Northeast city. The store expanded by the mid-1970s into the deep discount trade book business at the flagship store, followed in the 1980s by acquiring nearly 800 retail bookstores and becoming one of the largest U.S. booksellers. The big-box stores came about in the early 1990s, and the company was traded publicly for the first time a few years later. Its big-box retail stores average 25,000 square feet in size, housing up to 200,000 books per store. They offer membership cards for an annual fee, which enables discounts. Educators who acquire a teacher membership card receive reduced prices on classroom books. By the mid-1990s, Owl Books launched its on-line store, which the company claims is its largest undertaking, offering more than 1 million titles. In late 2009, the company began selling ebooks, as well as a digital text reading device, although the big-box stores account for 96% of their retail sales. By May 2010, the company operated 777 big-box stores and employed some 40,000 full-time and part-time booksellers. Owl Books claims to offer some 200,000 community events annually.

In its mission statement, Owl Books asserts its “distinction” by reporting its ideals around selling books. The mission also states the company's commitment to communities where its stores are located, and pledges never to be intimidated by other stores with different “pedigrees.” It offers grants to literacy, arts, and educational organizations for children. Owl Books' top central

¹ *Although I include specific details here, my intent is to talk about the corporate structure as generally as possible to provide a meaningful context, while attempting to conceal the true identity of Owl Books. This means that although I am including details on the company's history and present corporate structure that I found on the Owl Books website, I do not name the actual source in the References.*

management team is comprised of 80% white men and 20% white women. The women have stereotypical female positions managing Human Resources and Public Relations. Like most of the other top executives, the CEO's on-line biography emphasizes associations with philanthropic organizations and receipt of honorary degrees. According to several on-line salary-related websites, booksellers at Owl Books earn on average \$8.35/hour. Average annual incomes for managers are as follows: department managers- \$35,333; store managers- \$61,889; and district managers- \$112,500. I discovered a consistency among the sites that supported Owl Books' claim that their benefits package is "unparalleled in the retail industry." Benefits offered to both full- and part-time employees include medical (major medical and hospitalization), vision care, preventative care, well baby care, and dental care, and these benefits extend to booksellers' spouses, domestic partners, and children. Other benefits include a 401(k) plan, tuition assistance to full-time workers for job-related courses, and a 30% book discount. They have in place a sick day policy, short- and long-term disability plans, and life insurance. Full- and part-time workers are eligible for personal days, and one week's vacation time, after six months; however, part-time workers must work at least 20 hours per week in order to receive benefits. An article in *Health Care* (Aug., 2010) a leading health care policy journal, states: "Employing millions of low-wage workers, the retail sector is the largest employer of uninsured workers in the [U.S.] economy" (Maxwell, Temin & Zaman). The wages workers in the children's book department earn are slightly above minimum wage, which puts them on par with other big-box retail workers, although the benefits they receive are unusual for retail work.

Now that the corporate structure and worker wages/benefits have been described in general terms, this chapter will explore Owl Books workers' perspectives on their work as related to status and middle-class reproduction. Although Bourdieu would make a distinction between status and income level (e.g., a musician may earn little money, but still have high status), I found that Owl

Books workers I spoke with did not want to reveal specific details on their income. This did not come as a surprise, since in my experience, even close friends and siblings are uncomfortable revealing their incomes to one another. I argue that people keep that information private because it is closely tied to their identity, yet I have found they would generally talk more freely about job-related benefits. I was aware of the potential sensitivity of this topic, so I approached this line of questioning in a general way, asking for the salary range for booksellers at the store. Still, whenever the topic of salary came up, booksellers I interviewed diverted the conversation to another subject, as evident in this conversation with Stephanie:

Stephanie: I only work four hours a shift, then I go home.

Interviewer: Oh?

Stephanie: I am semi-retired. My husband and I like to have time off together to putter around, that kind of thing. I have the best of both worlds.

Interviewer: When you say that, what do you mean?

Stephanie: A little work and a little play. I get to be around books and then I get to do things for myself. And it gives me some extra money for traveling or other things if I feel like splurging.

Interviewer: Do you mind if I ask, how do you feel about the salary here?

Stephanie: That's not why I'm here. Not for the money. I wouldn't be here for the money.

Interviewer: Do workers qualify for any benefits from Owl Books?

Stephanie: You'll have to talk to a manager about those things. I am here because of the books. And the kids. Mainly I'm here because of the kids. (6/20/2003)

As I found with other booksellers, Stephanie became uncomfortable with the topic of salary. She wanted to focus on the prestige of the work, not the low hourly wage, because the former gave her higher status, while the latter downgraded it. When Stephanie referred me to her manager, she was avoiding my questions, while participating in the hierarchical power structure of a corporate culture that says booksellers defer to superiors, especially on sensitive matters. On several occasions,

booksellers told me I should ask their managers to respond to questions they were not comfortable with, or did not want to answer. Speaking in general terms, Stephanie suggested that she does not “need” the money from this job; however, she indicated later that it allows her to splurge on travel and purchases for herself, which are middle-class pleasures that she could not experience otherwise. In so doing, she classified herself as aspiring to maintain middle-class status. Furthermore, like other booksellers, she emphasized her connection to the children—not the money she earns—as her main reason for working at Owl Books, an observation I will address more fully later in this chapter.

Due to my talk with Stephanie, and similar conversations with other booksellers who were reluctant to talk about job wages and benefits, I visited jobvent.com², a blog where people post anonymous comments on jobs to see what bloggers had to say about Owl Books. I found dozens of entries, including this post from an Owl Books bookseller in Beaumont, Texas, who expressed frustration not about the hourly wage, but about what “upper management” expected from those performing the store’s low-wage job:

I'm a 5-year veteran of [Owl Books]; got my pin the other day. It's a good place to work but don't stake your future on it... The main problem is that lower level workers are genuinely nice guys and gals. It's the officers (upper management) who seem to be the root of the problem. I mean, there's only *so* much you can ask someone to do for \$8-9 hour, yet booksellers are forced to be salespeople (often overbearingly so), tech experts, professors, child care workers, psychiatrists, baristas (even if not strictly a cafe server), janitors, workhorses. Add it up. It's fuzzy math. I'm not sad to be moving on, yet I will miss the camaraderie. That was the best part of all-like old war buddies in the same unit, really.
(07/22/2010)

While on the one hand the blogger was frustrated about her perception that management had high and unrealistic expectations beyond the realm of human possibility (using the term “workhorses” to

² I use blog entries here because of some resistance I encountered when approaching topics of salary and benefits with my worker informants. MSNBC and ABC's *Good Morning America* reference this blog on their websites, which gives the blog some credibility, although the data is still skewed. The dates in parentheses following each blog entry represent posting dates.

describe workers' roles), this can also be read as her ³ way of characterizing herself as someone who was able to perform this range of work—from high skilled to low skilled—and who managed to do it successfully for five years. Therefore, though it was couched in a complaint about management's high expectations, this way of framing her work as challenging raised the prestige around her job, in spite of the low wage. At the same time, because she was successful at meeting these expectations, she stayed at the job for five years. She ended the blog by stating she was “not sad to move on” (rather than writing she was “happy” to move on, which could indicate a stronger opposition to what she says are management's unrealistic expectations). She indicated she will “miss the camaraderie,” which reflected her strong connection to other booksellers. The use of military metaphors, e.g., calling management “officers” and referring to her coworkers as “old war buddies in the same unit” further suggested her perspective that booksellers were connected to each other because of their shared experiences and common lowly position (in the trenches) within the store's hierarchical structure.

In contrast to the poster from Beaumont, TX, a blogger from Arizona, who formerly worked for another big-box store, expressed positive sentiments about her manager and about Owl Books' pay and benefits package:

I came from the "other" bookselling company, and there is a world of difference. I am appreciated for my skills and knowledge about books here. I have now worked in three [Owl Book] stores, and had great experiences in all of them. The downsides are that there are no primary care doctors in my area that take the insurance and it is difficult to move non-productive employees out, because our manager is hugely forgiving. The pay is commesurate (sic) with carrying low-profit margin items. Don't work here to get rich, work here only if you love books and can share that with others. Overall, I'm loving it here.
(07/04/2010)

This blogger's statement indicates problems associated with the company's insurance coverage, yet

³ I use the female pronouns “her” and “she” when referring to anonymous bloggers based on my observation that only females work in the children's book department of the Owl Books store where I conducted my research.

her ability to have a work identity associated with her knowledge about books overshadowed this benefit's shortcomings. It was unclear whether or not she needed to rely exclusively on this insurance plan; that is, perhaps she had a partner with a better plan, so in her case, access to doctors honoring Owl Books' health plan was less important. She acknowledged the job was low paying, and criticized the "hugely forgiving" management for keeping on "non-productive employees"; yet she put all of that aside because of her love of books and the opportunity to share that love with customers.

While the last blogger complained about her manager being too soft on employees, the following blogger suggested that the corporate office set down policies that made it difficult for them to perform their part-time job. The following post indicated a North Carolina worker's perspective on what she indicated are the store manager's unfair expectations around work schedules, which were connected to workers' eligibility for benefits:

Has any other store gone to primarily 3-4 hour shifts for part-timers? This sucks on many levels. The home office says that anyone who needs benefits must work more days a week (like 6) so they put in enough hours to qualify for them. We have several people who drive 30-45 minutes each way so now they have to spend the gas money to do it more often. On a more petty note it means that we have to dress nice, do the hair, and put on makeup for a 4 hour job. This is a second job for lots of us. Coming in to work 7 pm to close means that we have to go home between jobs but we have to stay cleaned up instead of being able to clean, garden, or whatever. No one likes it including the assistant manager but the store manager has decided it has to be this way. It seems inconsiderate and unnecessary. Do they do this other places? (8/2/10)

This bookseller mentioned that this was her second job, as most of the worker informants in my study indicated was also the case for them, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Even though this was a second job, the blogger expressed concern about maintaining the job's health benefits, which required a minimum of 20 hours of work per week. She said that this is difficult for booksellers who must juggle other jobs and home responsibilities, and who live a long distance from the store, requiring more commuting time. Further, she noted that this policy is handed down from the home office, yet the store manager dictated part-time work schedules,

contrary to the assistant manager's wishes. All of this indicated a perception that the job of bookseller has low-status, with booksellers having little power over decisions affecting their everyday work situations. This raised the question about why individuals would choose to work at a low-status job, and the answer is that booksellers in this study indicated that they need the money and benefits to maintain a middle-class lifestyle. Workers' struggle for high status was associated with what they said was the essence of book work: helping children to develop a life-long love of reading. As noted earlier, I found that the vast majority of families who go to Owl Books are middle-class, which suggests that booksellers participate in a corporate system that fosters a social setting that is comfortable and inviting to middle-class families. This means that booksellers struggle to maintain a middle-class existence for themselves by taking on this part-time job, or at least this is what they suggest they are doing. Throughout this negotiation, they perpetuated middle-class ideals around reading and books that sustained their struggle. Booksellers negotiated all of these perspectives within a corporate hierarchy where they indicated that the Home Office disregarded their needs and their managers sometimes did not display the leadership qualities they wanted in a manager.

While booksellers indicated some frustration with the corporate office, I found managers were also frustrated by the Home Office, as suggested by an Owl Books department manager from Illinois. She presented the following perspective that reflects the corporate control she saw as informing the store's work culture:

The company itself has gone through a major overhaul in the few years since I've joined the company. I am seeing things from a different perspective as I am a departmental manager. The difficulties that the floor employees don't see are really coming directly down from the top. Corporate's secrecy on developmental programs and revisions to systems has been vague. When something new debuts, it's brand new and unfortunately, nobody knows what is going on because there was no information until it happened. Additionally, store budgets, payroll reports, etc. take their time coming down the line. Without these guidelines, the stores are left to guess and attempt to manage their locations blindly. With more and more pressure on management teams to drive sales, eliminate payroll, and somehow maintain good morale, this is a difficult task. My specific gripe is in regards to our district management. There is a complete lack of positivity and a constant drive for results. There is never a positive comment, only criticism. This diminishes pride and causes anxiety within the

store manager and other managers alike. (06/08/2010)

The lack of information, poor communication, and impossible demands created frustrations for this manager. The stores have their own management structures, but all stores ultimately report to the Home Office, which sets policies, practices, and procedures. Managers and booksellers told me that the Home Office directed their work efforts in ways that would make a profit. This blogger contended that while the corporate office kept important policies and practices secret, stores were expected to have strong sales figures while cutting jobs and pushing booksellers to sell, sell, sell. The post suggested that the corporate office demoralized booksellers through their policies. At the same time, booksellers I spoke with indicated they understood and accepted the idea that the bookstore is a commercial enterprise run by the Home Office, and that working for the company meant they must sell books, as Owl Books bookseller Justine suggests here:

Interviewer: How would you describe Owl Books?

Justine: I'd say it's a great place in many ways. It's special, really. We are here for the community, that's what makes us special. The community would be lost without us. But it's foolish to ignore the fact we need to sell books. I don't like thinking of it that way, but that's the reality.

Interviewer: Why don't you like thinking of it that way?

Justine: It's not my favorite part, the selling. I won't push a book just to push a book. I have to believe in the book if I'm going to sell it. But let's face it, we have to sell things if we're going to keep our doors open. I can't sell things I don't believe in. (11/11/2002)

Workers distinguished between “pushing” a book and “selling” a book, suggesting they were okay with selling books, but not pushing them. Like Justine, on one level, other booksellers said they understood that Owl Books is a store and, like any store, it must make a profit. At the same time, they said they viewed the store as a cultural center providing valuable resources to the community, and they were proud to be a part of its mission. Justine wanted to make books she loves available to others, and Owl Books made this possible for her, but at the same time, she resisted the idea of

selling books she did not believe in, even though it may have been necessary to do this at times if the store were to stay open. I found that booksellers negotiated these kinds of tensions often as they engaged in a struggle for a middle-class identity by seeking prestige around their work at Owl Books, even though the pursuit was at times elusive. First and foremost, booksellers I talked with said they wanted to be regarded as professionals contributing to the betterment of society by inspiring children and providing opportunities that improved children's literacy. This bookseller perspective came up again and again. However, even though booksellers said they appreciated the Home Office, they indicated that the corporate structure restricted booksellers' power to make decisions and inhibited their ability to display expertise and professionalism. Although booksellers had passionate ideas about books and bookstores, they suggested they could not enact the vast majority of their ideas. Furthermore, they indicated they were monitored and controlled in ways that stifled the expertise they said they wanted to express. Through it all, my informants continued to say that they loved their work. It occurred to me early on that the Home Office's control protected booksellers from needing to display particular skills and knowledge they did not actually have. An illusion of expertise could be maintained and sustained because booksellers' inability to express expertise could be blamed on the Home Office's restrictions and control.

The Home Office dictates the inventory and displays in Children's Books, and these mandates are carried out through a hierarchical management system, as the Store Manager, Mary, explained:

Mary: We get a monthly planner when a book comes out featuring, say, a Sesame Street character. We had one for July. Everything is required to be up on the first of the month. We have a district manager whose territory runs across the state; he oversees 13 stores to make sure everything is according to the wishes of the Home Office. He comes here with a checklist. He checks the end caps [displays at the ends of shelves], the octagon [a central display], and picture book displays. Everything changes every month.

Interviewer: So the Home Office makes all these decisions?

Mary: We have to adhere to all decisions the Home Office makes.

Interviewer: How do you feel about that?

Mary: It's just the way it is. That's how I think about it. (8/19/2002)

I would have expected Mary to be more critical of the district manager's close monitoring of the workplace; however, she accepted this aspect of the job as "the way it is." She appeared to accept this as part of the reality of the job. Other booksellers I spoke with said they wanted to carry "more high quality books" and less "commercial" products, which reflected their desire to improve their status through association with high culture or, a desire to do good work (10/2/2002).

There appeared to be in workers' minds a "commercial" aspect to some children's books, as opposed to a more "high quality" aspect to other books. Workers indicated that "commercial" or "lowbrow" books were those associated with broadly circulated television cartoons or children's movies, while the more "highbrow" books were those that had won prestigious literary awards or were considered "classics" by schools. Like Mary, workers negotiated feelings around the quality of books, and they relinquished control, or a sense of agency, to the Home Office, as the following conversation with sales associate, Justine, revealed:

Interviewer: Mary [Store Manager] talked a little about the Home Office.

Justine [Sales Associate]: Yes, they make all the decisions.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Justine: Books, displays, character visits. Everything. Anything you see around here is because of the Home Office. Even in the café. The coffee and the pastries. It's all because of the Home Office.

Interviewer: How do you feel about that?

Justine: I don't care. It's not my business. The Home Office is in charge of making decisions about what we carry and how things are displayed. It's fine with me. They seem to do a good job at it. They know what they're doing. (11/11/2002)

In terms of the power of the Home Office to make all decisions about merchandise and layout, Justine stated that she was happy with the status quo at Owl Books. However, in so doing, I argue

that she relinquished her own creative desire through what Bourdieu calls *misrecognition*; that is, she actively accepted her low-status position because of her perspective that the Home Office "knows what it's doing." At the same time, a contradiction existed for Justine. Her support of the Home Office's control of displays and merchandise conflicted with her criticisms of the more commercial products in children's books. This struggle was evident when I encouraged Justine to describe the "ideal" bookstore:

Justine [sales associate]: It would be just like this, like it is here. We have a good balance of stock. It's pretty decent overall. The space and the layout work well. I may get rid of the Pokemon stuff and some of the commercial stuff. Let them go someplace else for the commercial stuff. I would keep most of the other things here. I'm not sure about the Captain Underpants books. They have kind of that bathroom humor. (11/11/2002)

While on one hand Justine said her ideal bookstore would be just like Owl Books, when my questions positioned her as someone with knowledge and expertise about bookstores, she distanced herself from the Home Office by questioning its decisions on inventory. In so doing, she was able to offer alternatives, for example saying she would shift the focus of merchandise to minimize the availability of more "commercial" or "lowbrow" items, as defined earlier. As she offered her perspectives on the store, she marked herself as someone who knew what she was doing. Furthermore, her rejection of the "lowbrow" merchandise (and a rejection of the Home Office by association) distanced her from the lowbrow world and brought her into the world where she wanted to belong: one where books, and booksellers, were respected for having expertise associated with middle-class distinction. The construction of an environment where books are cultural products, and where literacy is commodified, presented a struggle for children's book workers who indicated they accepted low-wage work and had little control over their work environment. They performed this work because they needed the money and benefits, but they also performed this work because they said they were doing the "good work"—that is, experiencing the "pride" associated with the prestige of books. They also enjoyed the relationships they had with coworkers.

Next, I will interrogate the notion of middle-class prestige and books as a way to further understand how Owl Book workers struggle for middle-class status in an occupation that provides some pleasure, yet at the same time is generally not highly regarded.

Negotiating Status through a Relationship to Books

Booksellers in the children's book department of Owl Books were passionate about children's books, a sentiment they repeatedly emphasized in relation to their roles, and in many respects they enjoyed aspects of their work. Of the five non-management booksellers I interviewed, four were long-term employees. While Dianne was new to the job, the others had more longevity: Francine- 5 years; Justine- 9 years; Karen- 4 years; and Madeline- 6 years. When they mentioned their employment history, rather than seeming resentful, bitter, or trapped by their jobs, they seemed proud of the number of years they had worked for Owl Books. At the same time, they indicated at times some frustrations around some of the perceptions around their work and around the work itself. My overall impression was that they all wanted to be seen as book experts and educators rather than book sellers. This was suggested in my conversation with bookseller Karen, a 30-year-old part-time bookseller who is married to a self-employed carpenter, has a two-year-old son, and also works as a part-time teaching assistant at a local elementary school:

Interviewer: What do you think about your work?

Karen: The selling part, it isn't my favorite. The talking to kids and getting them interested in reading, that's the beauty of this job. That's what gets me in the door.

Interviewer: How do you feel about the selling part?

Karen: If I'm okay with the book they want to buy, that works for me. But some of the stuff in here, well, I'm not proud of it. It brings people in the store but it isn't why I'm here, personally. (5/5/2004)

I found that employees of the children's section of Owl Books worked at the big-box bookstore for

four reasons overlapping with Karen's: one, because they had an appreciation for children's books; two, because they needed the money in order to maintain middle-class status for themselves and their families; three, because they felt some status and pride around their work; and four, because they enjoyed the sense of community and mutual support they had with their co-workers, as explained later. I argue that booksellers experienced conflict between their desire for cultural capital and their need for economic capital within the field of the big-box bookstore. When the emphasis was on "selling" books in order to maintain their jobs, booksellers emphasized the more intrinsic value of books as a way of establishing prestige around their work. Karen's struggle for a middle-class financial and social position was evident here:

Interviewer: What brought you to Owl Books?

Karen: I love books, and I love getting children to love books. I'm all about kids' books and kids.

Interviewer: Oh?

Karen: When I get home from school, I'm usually tired out, that's a rough day, but when I come here, I can get pumped up. You never know what kids you might get to turn on to books. That's what it's all about.

Interviewer: How many hours a week do you work here?

Karen: Usually around 20 a week. That's what I shoot for if I can. I get more around the holidays. And I ask for more hours in the summer when school is out. I try to get more hours in the summer and if I'm lucky I get them, even though things slow down.

Interviewer: What's it like, having two jobs?

Karen: I'm not going to lie. It's not easy, and I have a two-year-old at home. My husband takes care of him when I come here. It gives them time together, so maybe it's good. And it gives me time for myself, to do something for me.

Interviewer: For you?

Karen: Getting out and being with people I like. My friends are here. The women I work with and the customers. Some of the customers.

Interviewer: Some of the customers?

Karen: The ones who come in a lot. Most of them I like to see and talk to. You bond with them after awhile. I like the kids. I especially like the kids. I like showing them books and getting them into reading. Their future is reading.

Interviewer: How's that?

Karen: You can't get away from reading. Kids are better off in school and all the way around. If they love to read, they can do anything. They can be anything they want to be.

Interviewer: It sounds like you are making the best of it.

Karen: [pauses, gathering thoughts] If we didn't need the extra money, I might not have two jobs, but that's the reality. I just accept it. I don't think about it too much. You've got to pay the bills, right? That's life. (5/5/2004)

The expression that booksellers “just accept it” (where “it” is the physical and emotional work it takes to be middle-class) became a running theme in my research. The aspiration to be middle-class through an association with books, and through the effort to earn money that would help them do things that middle-class people do (e.g., travel, buy things with disposable income), was a powerful influence on my bookseller informants, and they spoke about their desire in ways that showed when it comes to work, they “don't think about it too much.” There was a strong assumption that appeared to be naturalized: the idea that middle-class life was the best life they can lead, and they must do whatever it takes to be middle-class, including working a part-time, low-prestige job at the bookstore for close-to-minimum wage so they could pay their bills. The prevalence of these attitudes and values, and the assumptions around them, reflected the sense that everyone must be, or strive to be, middle-class. Despite these struggles, Karen, and other booksellers, experienced pleasure from their work, as she suggested when saying she enjoyed work because she could be with her friends-- the other booksellers and some special customers. In some ways, the community among booksellers was a comfort zone of shared struggles and joys among women they cared about and enjoyed.

Like Karen, other booksellers in the children's book department of Owl Books expressed their passion for books, and they conveyed a commitment to passing on their love of books to

children. They said that books and reading were valuable, and, therefore, so was their job. This was another way they negotiated status in a context where they indicated they were sometimes (but not always) disrespected. Madeline, Manager of Children's Books, noted her reason for working a second job at Owl Books, while she was a paralegal by day:

Interviewer: Can you tell me why you're doing this job here in the children's book department?

Madeline: Well, actually I have a law degree. I'm a paralegal during the day. But I love books and I love helping people read books, so that's why I'm at Owl Books. (3/10/2002).

As a way of marking her status, Madeline said she had a “law degree,” when in fact she was trained as a paralegal, not as an attorney. Booksellers often characterized themselves and their co-workers as “professionals” who worked at Owl Books mainly because they wanted to “help” children. Like Madeline, other booksellers talked about their jobs at the bookstore in terms of performing benevolent and “helping” work, which reminded me of the ways that volunteers talk about the community work they do. To do “helping” work is to do “good work,” which is discourse for work that is defined, valued, and rewarded by middle-class culture.

Nina, the Story Teller for the store’s weekly Story Time, was seeking status when she described herself as a former librarian and explained her work in this way:

Interviewer: Why do you do Story Time?

Nina: I want to expose children to literature. I want to get them interested in reading, to get them to like books so they'll like them in the future. It all starts here. That's why I was a librarian. That's why I'm a sales associate.

Interviewer: Can you talk about your work as a librarian?

Nina: I read to the kids and did the other things librarians do, like cataloguing books and all.

Interviewer: Did you go to college for Library Science?

Nina: I went to [Madison Community College] for Early Childhood [Education], but I didn't finish because I had to raise my kids. I learned everything about being a librarian on the job. That's how you really learn anyway. (9/1/2002)

Nina established status around her job at Owl Books by seeing herself as someone who was a “librarian,” when, in fact, she told me later as I asked more questions that she was a librarian’s assistant. Booksellers in children’s books indicated in similar ways a desire to be perceived as “professionals,” respected not only in the context of the store, but also outside the store. This was suggested in the following conversation I had with Richard, Owl Books district manager:

Interviewer: How do you feel about the work you do?

Richard: I feel good about my work. It has some prestige attached to it. I worked for the Gap for 15 years before working for Owl Books, and I’ve been at Owl Books for 10 years now. When I worked for the Gap, people at a party would hear where I worked and the conversation would end there. Now, when I go to a party and people hear I work for Owl Books, they gravitate to me. They like being around me and ask me if I’ve met famous authors. It’s really different from working for the Gap. It’s not like working at K-Mart.

Interviewer: I see.

Richard: Not to say anything bad about K-Mart. (4/4/2003).

Richard was proud to be doing what he considered to be a prestigious job that gave him pleasure when it spurred conversations at parties. While there may have been some arrogance in his statement, I read it as someone who was proud of his work and appreciated the idea that other people found it interesting. Through his comments, he showed his perspective that working for Owl Books carried a higher status than working for other big-box stores. Unlike his past employment, the identity he acquired through employment at Owl Books provided him with access to social groups he held in high regard. While elevating his status through his work life, he was careful to qualify his statement so he would not be perceived as elitist (by stating that he did not want to “say anything bad about K-Mart”). In so doing, Richard negotiated the tension between wanting to be associated with a higher class, while at the same time resisting the notion that social class is associated with employment at all.

Other booksellers in children’s books often blurred boundaries between professional work and retail work in order to elevate their job status according to middle-class standards. From these

perspectives, book work appeared to be in a class of its own. As workers built up the status of their co-workers, through association, they elevated their own status. This was true for Mary, the Store Manager, who noted, "We have doctors, lawyers, professors who work here. They love books. They're qualified." (3/10/2002). Through this statement, she positioned herself as the manager of "professionals," which I found through conversations with workers was an exaggeration, since "lawyers" were paralegals, "professors" were part-time graduate students, and "doctors" were EMTs. Workers indicated they felt prestige around their jobs when they "professionalized" themselves and their co-workers. Furthermore, Mary made an assumption that "professionals" in the fields of medicine, law, and education were naturally "qualified" to work in the field of book sales. Mary said that employing "professionals" of any kind added to the bookstore's status, and by association, improved her status as well.

The enthusiasm Mary expressed for Owl Books was common among workers. However, workers' positive tone about the bookstore shifted to one of discomfort when the topic of independent bookstores came up. Workers held independents in high esteem, associating them with high-status terms such as "uniqueness," "individuality," "one-of-a-kind," and "high quality." (3/10/2002). While they said they held Owl Books in high regard, I noticed booksellers appreciated independent bookstores for everything Owl Books was not. For instance, booksellers admired that a person could find more obscure titles at an independent, that the atmosphere was less "planned out," and that they were not required to carry commercial products (3/10/2002). Although booksellers spoke about independents in relation to the big-box bookstore, they were careful to make no direct criticism of Owl Books. Workers seemed to understand that a slight against Owl Books was a slight against themselves, and since the status of their work was already in a precarious state, they resisted being resistant. Too much criticism of Owl Books also posed a danger to their employment.

Madeline, Manager of Children's Books, shared her impressions of differences between Owl Books and independents, in a way that displayed her status:

Interviewer: How does working for the superstore bookseller compare to working for an independent bookstore? How would you like working for an independent?

Madeline: It would be cool. You'd get more face-to-face with people. Here it's such a volume. It's fast and furious. You'd get to know people a little better [at an independent bookstore].

Interviewer: How does the experience of children's books compare between independents and superstores?

Madeline: We're trying to reach a wider audience. Independent stores specialize; they find a niche.

Interviewer: What would be your ideal children's bookstore?

Madeline: It would be a place that really knew its stuff. There would be a good amount of room to move around in. There would be space for people to sit and look at books. There would be freedom to arrange things the way I like them. I'd cut out the games. They're not "bookstore" to me. I'd cut out fad stuff-- Pokemon, Barbie. No crazes. I'd go with the classics. More high quality books. I'd have Story Times to give kids a positive introduction to books. I would not have the character visits-- no Curious George-- I'm not thrilled with those. I would not have a café. It takes up too much room, and I wouldn't want to encourage "studiers" who come in to drink coffee and read all day long.

Interviewer: Why don't you like the character visits?

Madeline: Too cheesy for my taste. Bookstores are better than that. (3/10/2002).

Madeline's commentary on the "ideal bookstore" represented her vision of what would entail a complete makeover of Owl Books. Still, she negotiated her current status by speaking highly of Owl Books, while distancing herself from the decisions she said were "cheesy," and by saying she would prefer offering "high quality" books and products as opposed to "crazes."

Booksellers who on one hand expressed concern over putting independents out of business, on the other hand said the store had higher status and credibility because of its contributions to the local community. Madeline worked as a sales associate in other departments at Owl Books before transferring to the children's section. She indicated that the Children's Book department had higher

status than other departments in the store because of its community programs:

Interviewer: Can you remember back to when you worked elsewhere in the store? How did you think about the children's section?

Madeline: I thought it was extremely important. It draws people into the store. It's a big part of the store, physically. It draws people in through special events for schools, like poetry readings, and through mentoring/partnership programs. The children's department is held in high esteem. (3/10/2002).

Madeline suggested that as the store gained status for its free community offerings, workers, including herself, gained status as well. Other booksellers said they were proud that Owl Books is a site for author signings, book club meetings, children's Story Time, writers' groups, and musical performances, and they made the point that there was never an admission charge. Workers characterized these activities as benevolent and enriching for the community, which appeared to offset and obscure Owl Books' profit motive. The store profits from its community activities, even when the events are free-of-charge. When people attend events at the store, they are likely to purchase a book, a magazine, stationery, a CD or DVD, or something from the café. Therefore, the community is served while the store makes its profit. Workers never brought out these points in our conversations.

The Store Manager, Mary, negotiated her discomfort about being an employee of Owl Books because she said it put an independent bookstore out of business:

Mary: We think of ourselves as a local bookstore that is doing good things for its community. We give a lot back to the community. We give a 20% discount to educators. We do charity work. We gave a percentage of our sales to the local PBS station. I felt bad when Village Books closed in Clifton. I know it was because of Owl Books in Dunford. Village Books just couldn't compete. Owl Books is a jack-of-all trades. We can't give you what was. We can only give you what's current. An independent can present an old style, hometown feel. They can provide out-of-print books, old titles, and first editions. I love going to places like that. (8/19/2002).

Like booksellers I interviewed from the children's books department, Mary expressed a sentimental view of independent bookstores, but knew that Owl Books caused them to shut their doors. She

negotiated her discomfort by emphasizing the value of Owl Books as making an important contribution to the community, something that she suggested has improved the store's status and, in turn, raised the status of its workers. Mary said that Owl Books gives back to the community, yet in her next breath, she said she regrets they drove an independent bookstore out of business. This realization appeared to trouble her. She further understood her association with Owl Books by saying they employed booksellers who had knowledge and commitment around books:

Mary [Store Manager]: We only hire qualified people. That's another reason why I don't feel guilty. We're not just fly-by-night. We have committed employees who know what they're doing. (8/19/2002).

Like Mary, other workers seemed uncomfortable when talking about independent bookstores. Mary looked down when saying that these stores are valuable because they are "genuine bookstores," while expressing concern that Owl Books had forced many of them out of business. Stephanie, a sales associate, made the following observations when asked to consider how big-box booksellers compare to independent bookstores:

Interviewer: How do you feel about independent bookstores?

Stephanie: Have you seen *You've Got Mail*? I sank down in my seat during that movie. I love books. I have two degrees in literature and poetry. People complain about Owl Books, they think it's too corporate, but we try to keep a grounded attitude. A place like the Enchanted Crystal [a local independent bookstore] is unique. We can get all the books they have, but we can't sell the crystals, the fountains, the jewelry, the incense. That's what makes that store special. (1/12/2003).

I noted Stephanie's comment that "People complain about Owl Books" even though the store aimed to have a "grounded attitude." Workers feared that the public viewed Owl Books as "corporate," because there was a public perception that if something was "corporate," it was impersonal and distant, meaning that it did not connect to its community. Workers wanted the community to hold them in high regard, but they negotiated the perspective that big-box booksellers were driving independents out of business, meaning that they were taking away something

significant from the community, rather than being the community-minded store they hoped to be.

Negotiating Status through Relationships to Co-Workers & Customers

This section explores how workers in the children's book department of Owl Books struggle for status through their relationships to other workers and to customers. Workers I interviewed indicated in multiple ways that they wanted their work to be prestigious. While I appreciated their passion and wanted to support them in gaining respect around their work, I needed to continually remind myself that these booksellers were "clerks" who serve "customers," not "professionals" who serve "clients," and that there was nothing inherently bad or disappointing about that. I realized that my middle-class biases were coming into play here. Furthermore, I understood that it was still possible for me to "respect" work that did not have "professional status," as all work has value, despite the power of a pervasive middle-class value system that says otherwise.

Francine positioned her status as a children's bookseller in relation to other workers in the store. She described what she saw as a status hierarchy at Owl Books, indicating that booksellers in the children's book department had the highest prestige among all workers:

Francine: I started out in the front [check-out registers] which wasn't such a great job.

Interviewer: Why not?

Francine: You are running the registers and taking money and trying to push the membership cards. You get sick of that real fast. It gets really old. Most of us start there, though, that's the way it goes. You have to pay your dues. Then after about six months, I went to Music. That was okay, but I really wanted to get into the children's department.

Interviewer: How did that finally happen?

Francine: I expressed an interest to [the children's book department manager]. I had to sell myself and show I knew something about the books there. I got to know the other workers and like them, they seemed to like me. That's important that we all get along. There isn't much turnover in kids' books, but over the holidays they had me fill in, then one thing led to another. I like it here. It's the best place to work in the store.

Interviewer: Really?

Francine: Well, maybe that's a personal opinion, but it isn't easy to get into children's books. Not just anyone can do the job, like the people on the floor, or even in the café. Some café workers have to know how to work the machines, but you can learn it. You have to know children's books to work there. We have lots of books. It's not something you can learn overnight. (5/26/09)

When Francine talked about the specialized knowledge required for booksellers in children's books, and about the department being a highly desirable place to work, she was talking about prestige, and she was proud to say she works in "the best place in the store." Francine claimed that the process for becoming a bookseller in children's book was challenging, in that a bookseller needed to prove herself as worthy and qualified. While a professional degree in library science was not required, Francine indicated that some knowledge of children's books was expected. She also mentioned that acceptance into the community of the other children's booksellers called for an informal initiation into the position. When talking about the job in these terms, Francine showed that she understood the work culture and how to operate within it. She viewed the position as desirable within the context of the store, yet suggested it was difficult to attain, which may or may not be the case. That is, perhaps other workers would never want to work in the children's book department and felt that the music department was most desirable. The point here is that Francine was working to associate prestige with her job by characterizing it as a desirable and elite position at Owl Books that was difficult to obtain.

While children's booksellers I interviewed mentioned a status hierarchy in the store built around commonalities within individual departments, they also suggested that a hierarchical community exists within the children's books department itself, as suggested in the following exchange:

Nina [Story Teller]: We're our own little world in Children's Books.

Justine [Sales associate]: We like to think of it as a kingdom here.

[Nina and I laugh.]

Nina: Madeline [Children's Book Manager] is King, and we're the knights.

Justine: Yes, we're the soldiers.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Justine: We all know our places. Madeline knows what to do and we do it. She lets us do it the way it needs to be done. It works when everyone does what they're supposed to do, when we all work together. Luckily we all get along. (11/11/2002).

Perceptions around Owl Books' hierarchical work structure was evident in Nina and Justine's talk, and the topic was one they negotiated through the use of humor. They indicated an acceptance of their low status through the bond they had with their co-workers. Although they positioned themselves as being powerless conformists (e.g., "soldiers"), they negotiated their role as important because they said that children's books were important to society, and as booksellers at Owl Books, they were forming relationships that made books available to children. This militaristic and gendered, male-centered metaphor focused seem incongruous to the children's book department, which exclusively employed women.

Booksellers and managers told me that on a daily basis parents leave their very young children (under age 5) in the children's book department and go elsewhere in the store, or left the store altogether, entrusting their children's care to the workers. While this could be questioned and seen as an overstatement, I took it seriously because it was repeated multiple times by workers and managers. Children's bookseller, Karen, pointed out the potential dangers and problems this causes for booksellers:

Interviewer: How often are kids left here?

Karen: Daily. Kids who are two, three, four, are left here for at least an hour. Sometimes the parent puts the oldest one in charge. If they come back, and the kids aren't there or have moved around, they yell at the kids, saying, "Why didn't you stay where you were supposed to stay?" Parents would never leave their kids at a store in the mall. I don't see why they do it here. Parents feel that only good people come to the bookstore. It's a false perception. Anyone can come in here. We don't have guards at the door or anything like that. It's not different from a department store in terms of access, and people wouldn't drop their kids off there.

Interviewer: I see.

Karen: Lots of parents don't want to stick around in the kids' department, so they go someplace else in the store. A male customer brought back one little girl he found wandering around the parking lot. She was only three or four years old at the most. Her parents left her here and she wandered outside. It's frustrating. It's nice that they think it's a safe place, but it's not really. We have to be careful about paging parents of a lost child.

Interviewer: How do you handle it?

Karen: We try to get the child to tell us her parents' names, but that isn't always easy because they can be upset and they're really young, so often they can't tell us their last name. If we find out the name, we'll page by saying something like, "Could Mr. So-and-so please come to the front desk?" We don't use the words "parent" or "lost child." We don't want to set up a negative scenario where somebody will claim a kid who's not theirs. Usually we have the child near the desk and see if she goes toward the person when they come.

Interviewer: Do you get training on how to handle these situations?

Karen: No. It's not part of the training. We just talk to coworkers about it and figure out approaches for safety and discipline issues. It would be nice if they mentioned it during our training. (7/10/2004).

Again, while it is possible that the suggestion that parents drop off their children and leave the store may be exaggerated, I give it some merit because I heard this concern from every worker and manager I interviewed. When parents leave their children in the children's book department, booksellers, such as Karen, said that they are burdened by a feeling of great responsibility, and understandably so. There was no store policy against leaving children unattended, so workers said they accepted this as something they needed to deal with. Rather than complain about being treated as a babysitter, she shifted the focus to the safety issue, which may have masked a resistance to babysitting work. My sense was that Karen did not like, and would not complain, about taking on the role of a "babysitter" because to do so would mark her as a low-status worker. When she presented herself as someone concerned about children's safety (as she sincerely appeared to be), she elevated the importance of her role, while also avoiding having a disrespectful tone toward parents. Booksellers resisted the role of babysitter because they indicated they want the higher status

associated with being book experts, which was a comment on how work traditionally associated with women, mothers, and childcare has low status in American society.

Aside from the status piece, workers worried about safety issues. Mary, the store manager, expressed safety concerns that arise when parents dropped off their children and left the store:

Mary: It's great that people feel comfortable here, but parents should use discretion.

Interviewer: How do you feel about parents leaving their children here?

Mary: We're concerned about child safety. Parents get upset at us because their kids are running, jumping, climbing up the bookshelves. Sometimes it's troublesome and we get concerned about the store's protection. Parents have dropped off kids here.

Interviewer: While they go to the café, you mean?

Mary: No, I mean they drop their kids off here. They leave their kids and go someplace else. Maybe to the mall or food shopping. Who knows where.

Interviewer: What?

Mary: It's true. It's a concern because this is a public place. Parents may think it's safe here, but we don't have anyone posted at the door to watch who comes in and out. Anyone can come in here. Crying kids go out the door all the time. We can't be sure why they're crying, if there's a serious problem, or not.

Interviewer: Why do you think parents feel this is a safe place?

Mary: It's how we present ourselves to the public. We have soft lighting, so it's not like a K-Mart that has the fluorescent lights. It seems more comfortable. It's a cozy atmosphere. Our general presentation makes it that way. We have music. It's a well-presented store. We do a lot of research into how we present ourselves. (8/19/2002).

When children were left in booksellers' care, booksellers told me that children made messes by pulling books off the shelves and scattering them about the department. Mary valued the comfortable atmosphere because it said something about her high standards that she could create and maintain it. She used the plural possessive pronoun "we" to describe the research that was done around the "well-presented store," which gave her more status. "Research" in this case became part of her work identity, rather than something conducted solely by the Home Office and dictated to

booksellers. This perspective gave her more agency around her work as she took pride in the overall condition of the store. Still, there was a struggle around "keeping up" the children's book section.

Workers said that parents who return to pick up their children do not help by putting the books back, nor do they insist that their children help with the clean-up, as Justine described here:

Justine: It's a library setting here. It's a bookstore. Maybe [parents] think that bad people don't come to bookstores. It's awkward to deal with these parents because we can't really reprimand customers for making bad choices. It's a delicate situation. We're not a daycare center. We can't be responsible for what happens to [kids]. Discipline is also a fine line. Some kids run around the department and get wild. I used to have trouble telling them to stop, but I do that now. Kids pull books off the shelves, maybe twelve or fifteen books, then leave them all over the place. It's a mess. The parents don't ask them to reshelve the books. So we have to do it. That's how they act at libraries so they act the same way here. (11/11/2002).

Justine offered a complication when talking about the bookstore in relation to the library. Libraries usually ask patrons not to reshelve books, so they can put them in their proper places to maintain the library's shelving system. Justine's perception here was that reshelving books was "clean up" work. Workers, such as the Story Teller Nina, appeared to seek prestige for her former work as a "librarian," yet resisted the "clean up" duties of library workers. Mary, the store manager, used the library comparison to describe frustrations similar to Justine's:

Mary: Some customers act like this is a library. It's frustrating. They don't put books away, like they're in a library where the librarians prefer you don't put them away. (3/10/2002).

Her statement that customers acted as though they were in a library while at Owl Books reflected her frustration over how booksellers are treated and assumptions around their work, as well as her lack of control over customers' behaviors. At libraries, shelving books gives librarians control in terms of ensuring books are put in their proper places, while at Owl Books, booksellers viewed shelving books as a chore that undermined booksellers' power by making them seem more like maids than professionals.

Booksellers suggested that customers' expectations that they perform roles of "maid" and

"babysitter" interfered with more prestigious and satisfying job duties they said they enjoyed most, and were more prestigious, such as getting to know new books. Instead of learning more about the books and interacting with customers as they would like, booksellers said they were too busy "babysitting" and "picking up." At the same time, as Nina expressed, booksellers were proud about the tidiness of the department:

Nina: I like having things in order. I love it when my department [Children's Books] is perfect, when everything is in its place. I get upset when people mess with it. My house isn't as neat as a pin so it's funny I'm this way when I'm here. When I get everything perfect, I'd like to spray it with hairspray to keep it that way. (9/1/2002).

Nina's expectations for the physical condition of the workplace were connected to a sense of ownership, as reflected by her use of the phrase "*my* department" when talking about Children's Books. She took pride in the condition of the store as if it said something about herself. If she made the environment neat, professional, and upscale, her role took on greater prestige.

How did booksellers continue to feel positive about their work, in light of the struggles they experienced? I found that booksellers helped each other negotiate a sense of prestige around their work in the store by reinforcing the aspects of the job they felt were most worthwhile—exposing children to the pleasures and middle-class benefits (academically, professionally, and socially) around books. When it came to less pleasurable aspects of their work, I heard them talk to each other in ways that reflected mutual support around their pleasures and struggles. They reinforced to each other that their jobs were important and worthwhile, as shown here:

Justine: We know what we're doing here, at least we know it.

Interviewer: What do you mean by "at least we know it"?

Karen (speaking for Justine): She means that we don't have to let it get to us when parents leave off their kids here and expect us to watch them all day long, then don't help us pick up the strays [books taken off the shelves and left on the floor]. It gives us a chance to be alone with the kids and show them some new books. That's called looking at the bright side.

Justine: That's us. Always looking on the bright side.

(Karen and Justine laugh.) (7/2/2002).

The camaraderie Karen and Justine showed here indicated how they negotiate a perspective on their work through supportive talk and humor around their experiences. They seemed to better tolerate the downside of their work when they knew their coworkers could relate to them and shared their experience. It also helped when they could laugh together about things they could not control. While on one level this might have seemed troubling because it suggested that things will never change and that booksellers were shortchanging themselves and their potential, the mood among the booksellers was generally upbeat and they indicated that they like, and at times even love, what they do. At the same time, booksellers' perspectives that this is "as good as it gets" exists because they know they are not qualified to obtain more professional positions elsewhere.

Booksellers' mutual support was brought out a number of times in ways that showed how their relationships to each other made work more rewarding and enjoyable. They indicated that they could not object directly to the actions of parents or children because the higher-ups at Owl Books enculturated workers into the economics of consumerism, asserting that the customer is "always right." Therefore, booksellers relied on each other for support the Home Office did not provide, even though they indicated they understood that the bookstore may be implicated legally if a child were hurt in the store. The lack of information on these issues from the Home Office created an alliance among booksellers as together they developed tactics for addressing this problem, as Justine says here:

Interviewer: Do you have a sense of Owl Books' perspective on the issues you've mentioned?

Justine: Not much. We [children's book workers] figure it out on our own. We have each other's backs. We pitch in and pick up together. Or when a girl was crying for her mother, I stayed with her while Francine went looking for her. What more can you do?

Interviewer: I see what you mean.

Justine: You just have to make the best of it. (11/11/2002).

Booksellers bonded together to “make the best of it.” They suggested they understood they must keep customers happy in order to keep their jobs, even though their status was in some respects compromised in the process.

Other examples of booksellers’ struggles to elevate their status occurred when they used particular language to convey perspectives about customers, as was the case with a newer worker,

Karen:

Karen: We have those high-achieving parents, but we have other parents who seem illiterate who come into the store. The illiterate parents are also desperate to have their children reading books.

Interviewer: What gives you the impression they’re illiterate?

Karen: Some come out and say it. Maybe not that they’re illiterate, but that they don’t read much or they can’t read. I can also tell by the level of help they need when they’re here. They’re needy. They look kind of lost. Like they feel they don’t belong in a bookstore.

Interviewer: What do you do in that case?

Karen: I do what I can, which might not be much, but at least I try to answer their questions and help them out. I can't teach them to read but I can give them ideas about books. (7/10/2004).

When Karen spoke about customers being literate or illiterate, she was presenting herself as someone who was sensitive to making such distinctions by observing the degree to which people needed “help.” When she was depicted as someone who could make these judgments, she was identified as having expertise. Further, she saw her job as being responsible for making people of all classes feel comfortable at the store. When making judgments about customers’ illiteracy, I suspect that it was more than simply noticing that someone looks “lost.” I imagine her judgments were mainly about class, where people who appeared “poor” were more likely to be marked as “illiterate.” Regardless, Karen reported she was eager and able to help the customer, regardless of class or literacy level, although she indicated she would “help” them in different ways.

Another children's book department bookseller, Dianne, showed her struggles around understanding and speaking about social class during my final visit to Owl Books:

Interviewer: One of the things I've been curious about more recently has to do with how people feel while they're in the store. I am wondering if you feel that all kinds of people come here, or if you find that there are some groups of people you might see here more often than others.

Dianne: We get all kinds of people here. Everyone is welcome, and we have something for everyone.

Interviewer: How so?

Dianne: We get people from all classes here, from rich to poor.

Interviewer: How might you know if someone is rich or poor? What tells you that?

Dianne: It has to do with cleanliness and dress. The way they seem in general. And the way they talk.

Interviewer: Like how?

Dianne: Like some people who have money will say to their kids, "Get whatever you want," while people who are from a lower class say, "You have \$5 to spend." They put limits on spending, the poorer people.

Interviewer: Why do you think people come here?

Dianne: They like the atmosphere. It's good. It's quiet.

Interviewer: "Good"? What do you mean by "good"?

Dianne: It's safe and quiet and not much goes on here. It's good for their kids to be around books. We have a variety of books, too. There is something for everyone. We are not just focused on one ethnic group. We have something that anyone would like. (5/27/09)

In some respects, Dianne spoke proudly of the atmosphere that Owl Books provided. As a bookseller, she suggested she made the store a place that families chose to visit because they enjoyed it and felt comfortable there. She emphasized her perspective that the store welcomed everyone and, in that way, was not exclusive in its intent or structure. Yet her perceptions when differentiating between people who go to the store showed the struggle she experienced when referring to class. She saw the store as available to all, which reflected the notion that middle-class

experiences, such as family trips to the bookstore, are accessible to all who desire them. When Dianne described customers using such terms as “clean” (as opposed to “dirty”) it appeared she was really talking about “white” and “middle-class” (as opposed to “Black, Hispanic, or other people of color” and “poor”). I got the sense that she struggled when talking about race and class when she hesitated or did not make eye contact as the topics came up. When she said, “We are not just focused on one ethnic group,” this appeared to be coded language for saying, “We are not exclusively white here.” This coded discourse elevated the status of the store, while identifying her as a bookseller who appreciated a liberal-minded and open environment. At the same time, the structure of Owl Books is most welcoming to middle-class white customers, which was evident from the discourse of workers to the book displays in the children’s book section, where I found the most prominently displayed books featured white, middle-class characters. When she talked about the pride she took in her work, Dianne mentioned features of the store associated with a clientele behaving according to middle-class etiquette and behavioral standards. She took pride in helping to construct and sustain such an environment, while maintaining that the store was open to all.

As some of the previous examples have shown, many of the status-related problems in this study related to gender biases around women’s work, which is negotiated through the “talk” between female booksellers. In this study, children’s book work was gendered work. Every worker in the children’s section at Owl Books was a white female, including its staff of five sales associates (with one or two working per shift), the department manager, and the store manager. The highest ranking manager I interviewed—the District Manager—was the only male employee in this study. Although females comprised around 70% of this store's overall workforce, the gender of workers in other areas of the store (especially music) was more balanced than in children's books. The homogeneity of booksellers in children's books created an environment where female booksellers came together around the joys and frustrations associated with the role of "mother" or "grandmother." The

connection between bookseller and mother figure was underscored during a visit to Story Time:

Nina (the Story Teller) is a plump, middle-aged white woman with gray hair. She sits on a chair in the center of the stage in the children's section, bobbing a baby on her right knee and holding a small stack of books on the other knee. She is overseeing four toddlers who are lying about on the stage coloring sheets she has provided along with Crayons, while women I assume are mothers of the children on the stage sit in chairs nearby, talking with each other. Nina reminds me of a frazzled Mother Goose, matronly, grandmotherly, [note: this shows my own bias] but overwhelmed due to fussing children who are whining for her attention. She is trying to attend to all of the children's requests and comments, but it is impossible, so she does her best by maintaining a cheerful disposition. The mothers are focused mainly on their conversations and only occasionally interact with their children, leaving the majority of the childcare to Nina. (6/4/2002)

Story Time became leisure time for caregivers. Booksellers took care of the children together, while caregivers, whom workers characterized for the most part as privileged, stay-at-home moms, socialized with each other. Nina reflects on the experience here:

Interviewer: What does Story Time mean to parents?

Nina: It's mainly mothers who come here. They're the only ones in my core group, no fathers. Occasionally a dad will bring someone, but it's rare and usually a one shot deal. For mothers, Story Time is a chance to socialize. Mothers meet and make play dates. They form a little clique of friends and mothers.

Interviewer: How do you feel about what you do?

Nina: It's a grandmotherly thing. They come and you send them away. Story Time hasn't made anyone a genius, but it gives kids an interest in books. Reading is a happier activity here because it becomes more social with all the kids around. It's a nice atmosphere. It gives kids and mothers a break. Parents do so many things for their kids. Here it's casual. They don't have to pay for it. Mothers just bring them, they enjoy it, and they go home. We workers try to work together to make it all happen, so it works the way they want it to. (6/4/2002).

Nina was pleased that she took on a "grandmother" role and expressed no complaints. She inspired in children a love of reading, while she and the other booksellers together gave moms a break. She was in charge of Story Time and said she chose the books she read and the activities she lead. My sense was that she was the most highly respected bookseller in the department, as the person who was able to exercise and display more of her "expertise" around books than other booksellers.

Nina said she viewed the Story Time children as a family who came together each week to share an experience. Referring to herself as a former librarian, which turned out to be a librarian's assistant, Nina had a history with many of the children. She genuinely cared about their well-being, once expressing concern about a child who had missed a week because she was ill. She developed long-term relationships with those who attended Story Time for two years or more, and talked proudly about siblings who came before them. For Nina, there was a legacy to the Story Time experience. These connections were relished by Nina and added to the pride and prestige she felt around her work. Nina told me why she was selected to be Story Teller:

Nina: I think it's because I'm maternal. They thought I'd be good at it. They felt little kids would like me and get along with me. I was a little nervous. I thought mothers might say, "I hate her," or something. I love all little kids. (9/1/2002).

Nina understood it was important to be seen as "maternal" because this quality helped make her good at her job and brought families back to the store. This gendered and racialized perception was common at Owl Books, where booksellers suggested that customers saw them all as having motherly characteristics. Aside from Nina, booksellers said they sometimes resented being treated as babysitter and maid. They indicated a tension between wanting to be nurturing as well as professional, and knowing the consequences of being perceived as motherly, which required them to continually negotiate their roles.

My conversation with Madeline, Manager of Children's Books, provided further insight into Story Time and her relationship to parents who build middle-class status for their children through this experience:

Interviewer: Why do people come here?

Madeline: Story Time is very popular. A lot of parents desperately want their children to read.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

Madeline: People are perceiving reading as essential, more so now than ever before. They

don't want their kids to wind up working at McDonald's. They start their kids on reading pretty young. There are standardized tests kids must pass. Lots of parents seem desperate when they come here.

Interviewer: How is that?

Madeline: Kids feel like they're being forced into reading by their parents. Things don't always go the way they should. When they're forced like that, kids shut down. (3/10/2002)

Madeline recognized that middle-class parents were "desperate" about getting their children to read so they would maintain middle-class status, rather than being relegated to the low status of working at a fast food restaurant. In this respect, reading was perceived as cultural capital to provide middle-class opportunity. This is not to suggest that economically disadvantaged and working-class parents do not equally value reading skills; on the contrary, I imagine that parents across class categories view reading as an important skill. However, I suggest that middle-class parents have the cultural and economic capital it takes to provide their children with experiences that engage and prepare them for middle-class life.

Owl Books workers indicated a passion for helping children develop a love of reading, and they said they enjoyed helping children choose books, most of all. However, they said they were frustrated by parents who restricted opportunities for them to advise children on book selections. Some booksellers said they had a better handle than parents about what children should be reading; that is, booksellers indicated they were more "in tune" with what children want and enjoy, but parents stood in their way. Booksellers realized that parents had power and control over decision-making because they paid for their children's books. This presented a challenge that booksellers struggled to get around. Stephanie expressed here how she preferred working directly with children when it came to book choices, but encountered resistance from parents:

Stephanie: One father and his son were in here because the son needed a science-fiction book for school. The father had a narrow idea of what science-fiction is. He didn't want fantasy. Today we blended together the idea of science-fiction and fantasy, but he wanted something based on science. It was really tough to come up with that. And the whole time,

his son didn't say a thing. We're always working to please parents.

Interviewer: How would it work better?

Stephanie: If the parents just backed off and gave us space to work with the kids. A parent might want to start a kid off on something like historical fiction. It's really hard to get a kid interested in that. A lot of boys are into science-fiction and fantasy, but parents don't want to go there.

Interviewer: Why not?

Stephanie: They think it's too light. Not intellectual enough. It's like PBS vs. cartoons. But in the end, I think it's better to let kids read at least something, instead of turning them off with a book they're not interested in. It would be better if parents gave kids more space instead of imposing their views and preferences. (1/12/2003).

Stephanie said that her job was to get children interested in reading, but she was frustrated when parents interfered with her work. The value of her work escalated when she positioned herself as more capable than parents of reading children's expressions, and as more knowledgeable than parents about children's books selections. While she criticized parents for "imposing their views and preferences," essentially, she proposed to do the same thing when saying she would like to share her own suggestions with children. Workers never acknowledged that parents might see their efforts to be helpful as being intrusive, and as interfering with family time. It appeared that workers assumed their expertise was valuable and should be accommodated.

Workers' pursuit of status and power was revealed through their definitions of a "good book." Justine, a bookseller, defined a "good book" as one that was "well written," and like her colleagues, she used the term "literature" to qualify certain books as being more prestigious in a literary sense and, therefore, most desirable from workers' perspectives. The term "literature" has a highbrow connotation, and booksellers used the word frequently when talking about their work. When I asked Justine to explain what she meant by "literature," she stumbled for a definition that would allow her to connect books to highbrow status, while acknowledging that children prefer more lowbrow, popularized books connected to movies or television shows:

Interviewer: How do you feel about working here?

Justine: I love it. I only work four hours a day. It's a great place to work.

Interviewer: What do you love about it?

Justine: I love to expose children to literature.

Interviewer: What do you think is literature?

Justine: (silent). I'm not really sure, exactly. It's hard to explain.

Interviewer: Do you think everything here is literature?

Justine: Yes, well, no, not everything. Well, maybe. The Spot books are literature, too, because they get kids interested in reading. But not everything here is literature. I like to get kids appreciating stories at a young age. (11/11/2002)

Workers valued "literature," but seemed uncomfortable or uncertain when defining what it is. For instance, the Spot series is mass market, yet Justine categorized it as "literature" because it drew children to reading. The contradiction was that mass market books often "get children interested in reading" because they are "fun," yet at the same time, they are excluded from being grouped with highbrow literature. Justine struggled with the definition of "literature" because while it would add to the prestige of her job, she understood that most of the inventory at the store was mass market. She tries to understand all of the books as "literature," so her work seemed more important.

Other booksellers struggled when talking about mass market books, saying they would rather not carry them in the store, but at the same time, they felt that a "good book" must have "kid appeal" (3/10/2002). An example of a book series popular with children is *Pokemon*, which has ancillary products including toys, videogames, trading cards, DVDs, and a television show. These books, films, and toys were mentioned several times during my interviews with children. Booksellers had a love-hate relationship with such titles. They were committed to respecting what children liked, but at the same time, they said that books like *Pokemon* were lower quality because, as Stephanie told me, their stories were "superficial" and "trite" (1/12/2003). If they ran their own

independent bookstore, booksellers said they would exclude *Pokemon* books from their inventory. They did not want to discourage children by excluding books they liked, but at the same time, they wanted to expose children to books they said have literary value, such as the “classics.” Booksellers’ talk about the “classics” struck me as their attempt to display expertise. This is the area where booksellers said they could express their expertise, but in order to express it, they sometimes needed to “dumb down” their book choices to appease children.

While booksellers negotiated their status in relation to the ways they see customers, booksellers also negotiated their status in relation to the ways in which customers saw them. Parents I spoke with had little confidence in the expertise of Owl Books workers. William and Keisha, an African-American couple in their mid-30s with a six-year-old son named Stefan, were employed respectively as a program director and an assistant professor at the local university in Centertown. Their doubts about the Owl Books workers’ expertise emerged as they expressed their respect for workers at independent stores:

William: Even our comic book store, the guy who owns, I forget the name of it, it's on East Boulevard, the guy here, you ask him just something about a graphic novel, he can tell you something about the author and what other books they've written.

Keisha: You know what else... I went into a store on 8th Street, across from the Newsome Theater, it's a used bookstore. I've gone in there a few times, it's always the same guy who's working there, I go in there with what I'm looking for, and he's very knowledgeable. He's able to tell you stuff. That's not Owl Books, but it's a bookstore. I think Owl Books just seems so much more like mass market. It's not the same.

William: I go into that independent video store in the strip mall on East because that guy, the Sky City guy there who owns it, is very knowledgeable. There's also a videogame shop that also is new video games and systems all the way back to, like, the Atari 2600. You have three independent stores right there who all are masters of their trade.

Keisha: You get a feeling of passion for their work. I think it's rare. Um, generally I feel like Owl Books employees, they don't appear to me to be good references. They might ask me, "Is there anything I can help you with?" But I've never had much confidence that they would be able to make significant recommendations. It's more or less, if you know what you're looking for, and you ask, "Do you have...?", then they can point you in the direction that you need to go. I remember asking, "Where is the young adult literature section?" They kind of know that kind of thing. But if I say, "Can you point me to books on African

American figures, important people, in history?" I wouldn't rely on an Owl Books employee to know that. (10/05/08)

Parents I spoke with in this study assigned higher status to independent bookstore workers than to Owl Book workers, regardless of the booksellers' educational background. Parents said that workers at independent bookstores "know their books" and "have great passion" for what they do, while they had little confidence in the expertise of Owl Book workers. Although some workers at independents are also "clerks," and therefore one would expect parents to have similar feelings about both, they never directed such praise toward booksellers at Owl Books. Instead, parents suggested that booksellers at Owl Books were not professionals. Keisha downgraded Owl Books workers in comparison to librarians, whom she held in high regard because they "probably hold advanced degrees in library science." She explained her perspective here:

Keisha: I think I have a greater expectation [for librarians than for Owl Books workers] because librarians should have master's degrees or some type of degree in library science. Like people at independent bookstores, they seem knowledgeable. The ones at Owl Books seem more like employees. Like, for instance, I was looking for a graphic novel of Malcolm X. I wanted a copy of it. It doesn't seem that the workers know or say something about other possibilities, like, "Oh, have you heard about this, or...?" They mainly want to know the ISBN. It really is just, they're doing what they're trained to do. I would say, in general, you look at the workers at Owl Books like workers at a K-Mart or something. The people are there, but they're not really specializing. (10/05/08)

Keisha suggested Owl Books workers lack knowledge when it came to books about people of color, while she would have greater confidence in the librarians' expertise and breadth of knowledge. She assigned a low status to Owl Books workers by comparing them to K-Mart workers. I wondered if as an African-American woman, Keisha assumed that the exclusively white staff had little knowledge about minority literature, which may or may not be the case. Her comments may also reflect that parents are seeking a special family time experience, rather than a consultation with an outsider, as Keisha suggested here in a follow-up question to her comments above:

Interviewer: I'm hearing you say that you would rather not interact with the workers at Owl Books because you may not trust their expertise. Is that right?

Keisha: It is some of that, but it's also because we want some time for just us. We can do fine on our own. (10/05/08)

While middle-class parents' lack of confidence for Owl Books workers emerged through conversations with other mothers and fathers, I discovered that middle-class children shared a similar view. One such child was Jack, a tall, lanky, red-headed 11-year-old in 5th grade at a suburban middle school, who was diagnosed in first grade with what his mother told me were significant learning disabilities in math and reading. Despite having been labeled a "special needs" child, he characterized himself as an avid reader with a passion for fantasy and Greek mythology, genres he called "astounding." When I asked him which areas he enjoyed most at Owl Bookstore, he said that "it's pretty much Heaven all over the place." While Jack loved the bookstore, he held booksellers in low regard because of their lack of knowledge. He expressed here his palpable frustration and anger about their inability to make "good" book recommendations:

Interviewer: When you go to Owl Books, do you ever talk to the workers?

Jack: Well, I usually only say, "Do you have this book or that book?" One I already know about.

Interviewer: Do you ever ask them to recommend a book? Do you ever ask the workers to do that?

Jack: Sometimes.

Interviewer: How good are they at helping you?

Jack: Um, oh... well, not for recommendations, no. But for helping me find a book I know about, they're great. I wouldn't trust them to recommend a book. Not for that.

Interviewer: Why not?

Jack: I don't trust them because I tried them a few times and this person said, "Geez, I don't really know because I don't read all that much." It's a real rip-off.

Interviewer: Oh?

Jack: Sometimes librarians are more helpful, sometimes they're not. But workers at Owl

Books, they're all pretty darn stupid.

Interviewer [sounding surprised at the comment]: Workers are pretty darn stupid?

Jack: Yeah, at Owl Books, those workers are pretty darn stupid.

Interviewer: Why do you say that?

Jack: Because they don't read all that much. I've talked to a lot of them about recommendations for books, and they say, like, "I don't really read all that much, so I don't have that many recommendations for you." And I'm like, [raises voice] WHAT???

Interviewer: Holy tamoli.

Jack: I know!!! I think they should know the books [sounding frustrated]. I mean, if you work in the stupid place, you gotta know what book is good or not. I mean, I'm not going to work at Owl Books unless I read the books and have good recommendations for books.

Interviewer: Wow.

Jack: And that's a personal statement about me, the way I feel about it. (09/28/08)

Jack's strong opinion about booksellers' lack of expertise showed he had clear expectations for those who sell books. He said they should know the books well so they can make recommendations, and he will accept nothing less. This perspective reflected the high status books hold in Jack's world. It also suggested he learned this perspective from his parents, since they expressed a similar view. Jack said that books are valuable and need to be respected. The idea of wanting to be able to "trust" booksellers further reflects the reverence he holds for books. The implication was that books are treasured possessions, and booksellers should show their respect by knowing them intimately. According to Jack, booksellers should read books, think about books, and talk about books. Jack has learned to have, and to express, explicit expectations of Owl Books workers that are aligned with his parents' more implicit expectations. In this way, Jack was learning to be middle-class through his relationship to books and booksellers. This suggests that besides contending with what they view as middle-class parents' demands, booksellers at Owl Books must also contend with demands of middle-class children. Booksellers said they wanted to nurture a love of books in children, yet

middle-class parents and children resisted it. Booksellers may not have known the books as well as they should because they were so busy catering to middle-class parents' expectations, meaning they were watching customers' children and picking up after them. In this way, middle-class families kept workers in a place of clerk status, which is, by definition, where they belong. Though parents and children were frustrated by clerks' lack of expertise, the structure of the work situation suggests that things will not change.

If the job pays so little (slightly above minimum wage for part-time work), if many employees work this job in addition to a second job, if workers are not allowed to contribute to decisions affecting policy, procedure, or inventory in the bookstore, and if the job garners little respect from customers and the employer, what attracts and keeps workers there? How do they continue to see their work as important and of high status? And what are the implications of doing so? As noted earlier in this chapter, conversations with booksellers showed that they work at Owl Books because they need the money in order to maintain a middle-class lifestyle, which includes paying the monthly bills, as well as buying the "extras" they want, such as engaging in leisure activities and going on trips. But that is only part of the story. Booksellers in this study could be clerks at other big-box stores, like K-Mart or Wal-Mart, and earn the same amount of money for the "extras" they desire. However, they suggest they are drawn to work at Owl Books, for reasons of prestige and status, but also because they enjoy what they do and feel a sense of community with their co-workers. My sense is that workers at Owl Books *do* have more status than workers at big-box retail stores, but at the same time, they negotiate their roles in ways that further their status through a process Bourdieu calls *misrecognition*. Bourdieu defines *misrecognition* as "the process whereby power relations are perceived not for what they objectively are but in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder" (Bourdieu & Passeron, p. xxii). From this perspective, booksellers come to accept the status quo as naturalized, or simply "the way it is." Through this social process, booksellers

accept the status quo when they do not acknowledge that these relationships are, in fact, not natural, but are socially constructed. Workers create a status around their work that obscures the feelings of disrespect they say they encounter, which reproduces their perceptions, and the perceptions of others, around their roles.

Conclusion

Booksellers in the children's book department of Owl Books take pride in their work, yet they also struggle for status as clerks performing a low-status job selling the high-prestige product of children's books. This chapter provided insight into workers' struggles in order to understand how they think about, negotiate, and continue doing this work. In the field of the big-box bookstore, workers suggest that an association with books provides cultural capital for workers and for middle-class families who spend time in the store. They talked about their love of literacy in ways they indicated make them more professional. Owl Books stores provides an environment where they can be around books. At the same time, booksellers suggested they cannot perform their roles in ways they would like, saying their expertise is stifled by the corporate structure of the store, and by the middle-class customers they serve. While acknowledging these frustrations, they negotiate their status by seeing their work as significant in ways that support and reproduce middle-class life through promoting children's literacy.

Owl Books workers strive to exercise and be recognized for their expertise in children's books; however, this desire often meets with opposition from parents, from children, from the corporate office, and from consumer culture at large. Regardless of how others view them, they understand their work as important and see their role as prestigious because they are helping children to gain cultural capital through literacy skills. As this chapter suggests, middle-class parents and children see booksellers as "clerks" who serve customers rather than "professionals" who have the kind of book knowledge a professional librarian would have. Parents also want to protect their "family time" at

the bookstore without having booksellers disrupt it. Middle-class families in this study rely on booksellers to find specific books, but rarely, if ever, seek their advice in choosing a book because of a lack of regard for booksellers' expertise. Workers suggest they resent parents who put children in their care while Mom and/or Dad go to the café, browse around the store, or even leave the store altogether. Booksellers are adamant that babysitting should not be part of their job, and they are concerned about the responsibility placed upon them. They say the home office does not support booksellers by telling them how to handle this situation, so they rely on strategies they come up with on their own. Aside from safety issues, booksellers resent the time it takes to pick up after children who leave stray books on the floor takes booksellers away from the job they really want to do: making book recommendations, a role which ironically, parents and children are not interested in having booksellers do.

Booksellers said they enjoy selling high quality children's books because they associate reading skills with present and future achievements that provide middle-class status. They indicated that children's love of reading and strong reading skills lead to "success." Booksellers define "success" in terms of middle-class standards: doing well in school, going to a good college, and landing a professional job. Workers' desire to achieve "distinction" (Bourdieu 1984) is reflected in their comments about their connection to the high status of books and their contributions to promoting children's literacy. Although they work for a big-box bookseller where they say they truly enjoy working and appreciate the sense of camaraderie with their coworkers, Owl Book workers greatly admire independent bookstores, and they suggest that independent bookstores are a "dream job" because they give workers more control than booksellers have at Owl Books. Booksellers offset the dissatisfaction with a lack of control by misrecognizing their roles. For example, some booksellers characterized the big-box bookstore as a cultural center committed to enriching the community, not a store aimed at making a profit. This perspective raised the store's status, as well

as the status of booksellers. The prestige booksellers indicated they have around working in the children's section of a bookstore appeals to them, as they suggested it gives them greater status than part-time work at other retail stores. The prestige and cultural capital around books and literacy fosters an environment where booksellers feel proud of their work and like what they do. At the same time, they sometimes misrecognize their roles and accept their low wages, lack of power to make decisions, and customers' disregard for them, because of the prestige and pleasure they associate with book work. In this way, I argue that booksellers' romanticism around books and values around children's literacy, as well as their desire to inspire children to associate books with middle-class possibilities for themselves, leads to the misrecognition of their roles and the acceptance of the aspects of a low-status job that they do not particularly like, all in the name of books.

CHAPTER 5

Leisure Work: Parents, Pleasure, and Informal Education at the Bookstore

“Daddy,” she said, “do you think you could buy me a book?”

“A book?” he said.

“What d’you want a flaming book for?”

“To read, Daddy.”

“What’s wrong with the telly, for heaven’s sake? We’ve got a lovely telly and now you come asking for a book! You’re getting spoiled, my girl!”

From *Matilda* by Roald Dahl (1988)

This chapter focuses on parents—how they see themselves and how their children see them—to understand how their perspectives and actions make the middle-class family outing to the big-box bookstore a social experience that reproduces middle-class orientations. Parents I interviewed indicated that family outings to the bookstore can (and, ostensibly, *should*) be fun, but, whenever possible, they should also involve learning. I name this multi-tasked approach to family time “leisure work” to reflect its dual purpose—pleasure and informal education. The need and desire for leisure work reflects the busy lifestyles many middle-class parents describe, where they say there is not enough time in the day to accomplish all they need to do for themselves and their family, and when some of what “needs to be done” includes the education and enrichment of their children. If several purposes can be accomplished within one limited timeframe, and in a single convenient location, middle-class parents in this study said they appreciate the opportunity, and Owl Books is a site that provides this opportunity.

I found a consistent pattern when it came to the families’ approaches to leisure work. Of the 47 families I observed and interviewed informally, 11 had two parents (mother and father) present in the store, 6 had only the father present, and 30 had only the mother present. I identified these adults as “mothers” and “fathers” because I discovered this through talking to them, or heard their children referring to them as such. Not including those who were there for Story Time, families typically entered the store together, and those with children younger than 10 usually headed

directly to the children's book section. Parent(s) and children spent on average 15 to 20 minutes browsing together, noticing books, sharing excitement about books, and sometimes arguing about books. I noticed a great deal of enthusiasm and "pushing" of books, either with parents trying to interest their child in a book, or children trying to get their parent to buy a book for them. The degree of "pushing" seemed to vary with personality types and the mood of the day, but the interactions around books were often filled with passion and excitement. On occasion, parents or children appeared fatigued or stressed out, so there was some impatience that resulted in conflict.

Workers usually appeared mindful of the goings-on, but typically did not approach parents and children and waited until they were called upon to get involved in answering questions or providing insights. Around two-thirds of the families who entered the children's book section together physically separated after browsing together for 15 to 20 minutes. This meant that the parent(s) left the children's book section, while children stayed there. I sometimes "followed" them to see what their destination was, and found they explored books or music CDs, or went to get something to drink in the café. Parents did not typically leave the children's section until they knew their child was feeling comfortable and occupied with a book. In most instances I observed, the parent(s) left an older child (usually appearing around 9 to 12 years old) in charge of looking out for a younger sibling. When two parents were part of an outing, they sometimes tag-teamed, taking turns pursuing their individualized interests while the other parent stayed with the child. Sometimes a parent sat and read a magazine or book in the children's section while the kid(s) browsed the books or played with toys on display. In most cases, parents returned to the children's section within around 10 to 15 minutes, although as noted later in this chapter, parents sometimes left the store completely for more than an hour at a time, according to workers.

These general observations raised a number of questions, including: How do families make meaning around the family outing to the bookstore? How does individuality play into this family

experience? How do families think of family time? What is the relationship between books, the big-box bookstore, and perceptions around safety and public space? What happens when middle-class parents view Owl Books as an environment where they become informal educators in a site of book consumption? Answers to these questions and others will be explored through the data presented and analyzed in this chapter.

Parents as Educators

When a parent takes on the role of teacher, Owl Books becomes an educative space, as well as a place for a family's collective as well as individualized enjoyment. At the bookstore, middle-class parents teach children various skills, such as academic, consumer, and social literacies, including the ideologies and values around those skills. Parents also seek pleasure for themselves and their families through this experience, so they are teaching children that learning can be connected to leisure. When middle-class parents choose (or agree) to take their children to Owl Books for a family outing, they do it for the pleasure it provides, but they also do it because they are teaching their children that reading is important and books are worthwhile. These values are informed by middle-class ideals, which come with the promise of middle-class opportunities in the areas of education and professional life.

Parents I interviewed were passionate when talking about the value of reading and books. They frequently stressed the practical applications of reading, as was the case with Art and Audrey Gale, middle-class parents of third-grader Robby. Their perspectives became evident when I met with the Gale family for lunch at a Red Lobster restaurant across the street from Owl Books. I conducted the interview as a casual conversation before, during, and after the meal. Both of Robby's parents are teachers. Art is an adjunct writing instructor at several area colleges, while

Audrey is a Centertown City elementary school teacher. Art and Audrey shared perspectives with me about their outings to Owl Books:

Art: Going to Owl Books is about being purposeful, when we need a certain book or present or something. I'm a book geek, so you can't keep me out of bookstores.

Audrey: When we're looking for a present for somebody, or if I need something for school, or a present for someone... Every now and then, if there's something he's (Robby) really been asking for a lot, and it seems like we need a little motivation, I can, I mean if I have time to kill, I can be talked into going.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewer (to Audrey): How do you feel about the value of reading?

Audrey: You can learn anything you want to learn if you read. I think that you have to keep learning, it's not like when you get isolated on learning. Life changes so fast, you keep on learning. Like I got my phone today and I had to read to figure out how the stuff works on this phone and what I have to change. That's not like reading a novel, but it's like, there are things like that all the time in your life.

Interviewer: The practical aspect?

Audrey: There's a very practical aspect. Plus there's also the new things you can learn, which is what I'm interested in. The science stuff. I like reading about...

Robby (interrupts): New kinds of things.

Audrey: New things they've discovered. You can understand what's going on more.
(09/28/08)

According to both Art and Audrey, the family outing to the bookstore had an explicit purpose, where they go when looking for a gift, when needing to purchase a particular book, or as Art indicated, when he simply wanted to be around books. It is important to note that Robby was present during this interview, and appeared attentive to, as well as influenced by, the conversation. For example, when Robby finished his mother's sentence with the phrase "new kinds of things," it showed how he had understood and affirmed her perspective. Art called himself a "book geek" who could not stay away from the bookstore, which suggested that he experienced pleasure from being in the presence of books. At several points during the interview, Art and Audrey distinguished each

other's taste in books, stating that Art liked "literature," while Audrey enjoyed books on "science." Audrey mentioned that books provided practical information to a reader, and in particular, she enjoyed learning new information. These statements around "taste" in books established individual identities within a shared value around books. Audrey's perspective in relation to Art's was evident here:

Interviewer: When you're saying you see a connection between reading skills and writing, what do you mean?

Art: For me happiness. I mean, for me, I love writing, I love reading.

Audrey: And just being able to function... in the world.

Art: If you time travel back to the Stone Age, you're still going to be able to read, Robby.

Robby: (makes dinosaur sounds)

Audrey (to Interviewer): Think about all the contracts you have to read in a lifetime. And the dog. When you (to Art) started printing off stuff, looking up stuff, about dog injuries and why she can't lift her leg. You know what I mean? There's just so much.

Art: Isn't it wonderful to find out there's something named canine wobbly syndrome?

Audrey: Well, think about it, otherwise, you take the dog to the doctor and you are only stuck with what information they say to you, you don't have any more information than that. We took him (Robby) to the eye doctor, right?, we took him to two eye doctors that said "no problem," "no problem," right? And it was after a year of studying what they told us and researching on-line and reading stuff about it that we went to a third doctor.

Interviewer: Wow.

Art: Yeah, it was looking on the web that got me to take Crystal (the dog) to a chiropractor. They're either going to treat it either with drugs, which Beagles have side effects from, or they're going to do surgery.

Audrey: And reading information, then you can go into talk to your professional, you can have time to think about things. There are just so many different ways that reading is helpful. (09/28/08)

While Art emphasized his love of reading for pleasure, Audrey stressed the value of reading in terms of the information it provides. For instance, she emphasized that reading increased her ability to

make sound judgments. In an informal way, through this discourse around books, Art and Audrey were teaching Robby that reading and books are cultural capital, and that reading serves the dual purpose of pleasure and education. Furthermore, Robby was learning about his own identity by learning about the identities of his parents. As Audrey and Art talked about the kinds of books they liked, they were identifying themselves as educators and parents who had particular tastes and who valued books and reading.

Robby's parents continually emphasized their love of books from their perspective as educators. Both Audrey and Art stressed a number of times in Robby's presence their belief in the value of reading in relation to Robby's future job opportunities. With all this talk about books during the interview, I noticed that Robby's discourse at times reflected a push back against his parents, and possibly against me, as he expressed a limit to his connection to reading and books, as shown here:

Interviewer: What do you want to do when you grow up? Do you know what you want to be?

Robby: Ummmmmm, well definitely not a librarian or someone like that. But... maybe a paleontologist. I don't really know.

Interviewer: Do you think reading would be important to that?

Robby: Well... well... well... I would kind of think that because I found books about fossils. That could help me if I'm a paleontologist, I think it would for sure.

Interviewer: How would you become that?

Robby: Go to college, I think, and learn how to be one.

Art (Robby's father): You'd probably need a master's degree for that one at least.

Interviewer: How do you think reading might help you?

Robby: Like, if you found a fossil, you could read about it in a book. Anything like that. If I didn't know about it, I could look in a book to find the answer. (09/28/08)

Robby imagined for himself a professional career, which was a middle-class assumption reinforced

by his father. He considered particular knowledges and achievements associated with professional careers as possibilities for himself, and he understood reading to be essential for acquiring expertise associated with paleontology. However, regardless of whether or not Robby becomes a paleontologist, there was an assumption that he will go to college and land a good job, which were expectations put forth by Art and Audrey, and presented to Robby as a given. This was reflected in his father's advice about Robby's needing to secure a master's degree in order to pursue his dream career. Conversations like these between parents and children around the cultural capital of education, and especially around reading and books, teach children what it means to be middle-class, as well as how to be middle-class. Robby was learning from his parents that he can dream, and that if he works hard in school, his dreams will come true. These ideologies appeared naturalized for Robby. At the same time, I understood Robby's statement about not wanting to be a librarian as his way of pushing back against his parents' enthusiasm around books. It appeared he was trying to take back some of the power in the conversation. Art's and Audrey's excitement around reading and books at certain moments went from enthusiastic to somewhat controlling, and Robby struggled for his own identity by asserting his individual taste in books and by making it clear that library science was not in his future. In this way, for Robby, a relationship to books reflected an identity for himself that was apart from his parents, while still being acceptable to them.

Sometimes, but not always, Robby viewed reading as a chore, as seen here:

Interviewer: So how do your parents feel when you read?

Robby: They like it pretty much. Especially this one [points to his mother, Audrey].

Interviewer: What about that?

Robby: Probably at my school it is, too, because, well, they're giving me a lot of reading things.

Interviewer: At school?

Robby: Yeah. [Sighing, exasperated tone]

Interviewer: What's that sigh about?

Robby: Reading can be hard when your teachers or those guys [points to parents] make you do it. I like books of my own better.

Interviewer: Books of your own?

Robby: The ones I pick. Those are better.

Art [correcting tone]: You pick your books. We let you do that all the time.

Robby: Sometimes. But not at school. (09/28/08)

Robby struggled for agency over his reading choices, which created a tension for his parents. Robby picked up on Art's struggle with being directive, and he used it to get what he wanted. At the end of my interview with the Gale family, Audrey mentioned that she and Robby needed to leave so he could attend a birthday party. Art suggested that he and I leave the restaurant and go across the street for coffee at Owl Books. When Robby overheard our plan, he demonstrated some of his negotiation skills, as he pushed his father to buy him a book:

Art (to me): Maybe you and I can go over to Owl Books and finish up the interview. We can grab some coffee or something.

Interviewer: Sounds good.

Robby: Dad.

Art: What?

Robby: If you're gonna get a book for me--

Art [interrupts forcefully]: No! No!!!

Robby [ignoring Art's "no"]: If you're gonna get me a book, I want the *Wandmakers Craft*, if you're going to get something for me.

Art: [rolls eyes] *Wandmakers Craft*.

Robby: Remember that name. And if you don't see that--

Art: Robby, I love you, No!!! Don't expect any books today.

Robby: Okay, maybe a little---

Art: You might be able to talk me into, you know, the library this week.

Robby: Not the library. I hate the library.

Interviewer: What library do you usually go to?

Art: Well there is one in Centertown, but since we're all over the place in our lives, I really like that branch, especially the children's collection. The librarian is great, she'll order whatever you want, she's great, she's great.

Robby: Can you hear me, Dad? Did you hear what I said?

Art: Yes I did. We'll discuss it later. (9/28/08)

Through his persistence in expressing his desire for his father to buy him a book, Robby showed that he has learned to get what he wants by playing on Art's tensions between being a strict "say no" parent, with Art's desire to be supportive of Robby's reading interest by buying him a book. Further, it appeared that Robby was reading this situation and thought he would have a better chance of having Art buy him a book if he asked for it in my presence. Robby showed he knows how to read social situations and cues in a way that benefitted him and prepared him for a future where he could negotiate and get what he wants. His parents have participated in this informal mode of social education, as I observed that day.

Art was in his late 50s at the time of the interview. He told me he was actively engaged in the counterculture movement of the early 1970s, attending protest rallies, rejecting materialistic lifestyles, and, along the way, becoming addicted to drugs and alcohol. He said the marriage to his first wife ended because of those addictions. Situating Art in this period of liberal values and a "psychedelized" youth where individuality and self-realization were accepted and expected created tensions when raising his own child. When Art corrected Robby, and when he attempted to control Robby's reading choices, he directed Robby's responses in ways that undermined Robby's

individuality. In the next breath, Art performed as a progressive parent who encouraged Robby to make his own choices. Art appeared to struggle with what kind of parent he wanted to be in that moment. This kind of negotiation is one addressed in Margaret K. Nelson's (2010), *Parenting Out of Control: Anxious Parents in Uncertain Times*, a study of ninety-three American parents and their parenting styles. Nelson writes that "the attentive hovering of the professional middle-class parents both requires and builds on a vast array of material resources... simultaneously, the attentive hovering has roots and dynamics that emerge from, and are sustained by, cultural and social practices" (p. 177).

Robby's assertiveness seemed at times a source of pride for his parents, while at other times, it was a source of frustration, as Art revealed during a subsequent informal conversation:

Robby: I'm Mr. Arguer!

Art (to me, so Robby could not hear): He's right—he is Mr. Arguer. He challenges everything I say. But he is a good kid. (8/31/10).

Art appeared less focused and self-assured than Audrey, and he negotiated his parenting role in a way that showed he struggled with it at times. He seemed a bit frustrated by Robby's argumentative side, but dismissed it by characterizing him as a "good kid." Again, I had the sense that Art wanted me to see him a particular way as a "good parent" who respected his son's individuality, but who also expected Robby to meet standards of behavior. My sense was the Art was a bit lost at times in terms of how to do both. On the other hand, Robby's mother, Audrey, age 41, did not seem to struggle to the same degree and was comfortable being more directive with Robby. She came from a different generation than Art, which may have accounted in part for their differences in parenting styles, although it might also be interpreted as personality differences. She and Art agreed that she was the "strict" parent and set boundaries more easily, even though she addressed here how Robby was able to "talk her into" going to the bookstore:

Audrey: Books can get expensive. He can talk me into going to the bookstore before he can talk me into going to the toy store.

Interviewer: Okay. And why's that?

Audrey: Why's that?

Interviewer: Yes.

Audrey: Because the toy store isn't that important to me, while the motivator of books is important. Books can make your life better, teach you something useful for now and give you more opportunities in the future, like college or jobs, where toys are just for some fun that happens now. (9/28/08)

Audrey recognized the value of bookstore outings because she connected the experience with practices she suggested would provide Robby with greater life chances. Education was a value she emphasized to him and, as a teacher, the message was especially important because it also created value around her job. She differentiated between toys as providing short-term pleasure, while saying that books had long-lasting social value, as defined according to middle-class standards. Art's and Audrey's perspectives, along with trips to the bookstore, gave Robby the cultural and economic capital to develop a middle-class orientation.

Robby's parents said in a joking manner that they felt pressure around their son's academic accomplishments because his performance in school reflects on their identity as parents, as well as their effectiveness as educators. I felt some seriousness embedded in their humor. Their own struggles for identity played out in their parenting styles in ways that influenced Robby. The concern for Robby was further ramped up because, as noted earlier, his school identified him as having a learning disability in the areas of reading and writing. Audrey talked about working with him regularly, one-on-one, to develop these skills, even though it was at the end of the day when she was tired after a day of teaching third-graders. Robby indicated he knew how to balance his parents' sometimes subtle, and other times overt, pressures to become a good reader with his own desire to

pursue interests that sometimes did not include reading. For example, Robby demonstrated here how he negotiated a situation where he would rather play with Legos than read:

Interviewer: I get the feeling it's not really your favorite thing at school, reading.

Robby: Not really my favorite. I like playing with Legos but sometimes I don't know what to do with the Legos, so I was thinking maybe sometimes I should sometimes buy a book to get ideas about what to do with the Legos. A book on Legos.

Interviewer: Oh, that's an idea.

Robby: Yeah.

Audrey: See, you can read and play. You figured it out. (09/28/08)

While Robby came up with a creative solution as to how he might successfully negotiate his own desires (having fun with Legos) with his parents' expectations for reading, Audrey reinforced the "reading" part in relation to the "play" part. By doing this, Audrey was encouraging Robby to read, while she pushed him to think creatively to arrive at a solution that satisfied them both. In so doing, Audrey was teaching Robby negotiation skills, a kind of cultural capital that would help him navigate future situations confidently and strategically. Whether it is encounters with teachers or other adults, he will be prepared, and will have an edge in terms of getting what he wants. These skills are important tools for successfully navigating the middle-class world. Audrey gave Robby additional encouragement about reading and books here, by prompting him to remember his experience with a book:

Audrey: Sometimes you like reading and you don't want to stop. Remember in the summer?

Robby: Oh, yeaahhhhhh. (09/28/08)

Audrey encouraged Robby and, through her enthusiasm, showed him that books were important to her, and that she wanted them to be important to Robby. She exerted this kind of influence several other times, as well, including here:

Audrey: You always say you like books better than movies.

Robby: Yeah, the books have details. (09/28/08)

By prompting him to answer, and by jumping in with comments to guide his thinking, Audrey was teaching Robby to express a particular perspective or taste that she valued as a middle-class parent. Aside from teaching Robby how to read and talk about books, Audrey was teaching Robby how to read social cues. Further, she was teaching him how to behave in front of her and in the presence of another adult. In this way, Robby was seeing how his mother wanted to elicit certain responses that marked her as a responsible parent and good teacher in my presence. His discourse indicated that he understood that his connection to books said something positive about him, and that books also said something positive about his mother. All of this knowledge was cultural capital for Robby, meaning that he was learning to be middle-class.

Like Art and Audrey Gale, the Hardy parents emphasized reading as a ticket to securing a middle-class future. Jack was a tall, lanky fifth grader with a freckled face, a wide, toothy smile, and thick, chestnut-colored, wavy hair. His mother, Sandy, told me she wanted Jack to like school and to succeed academically, because it would help him feel "more comfortable" as a student, while providing him with greater academic and career opportunities in the future. I noted that whenever she talked about Jack's recent successes in school, she appeared proud. She said she felt so strongly about providing Jack with opportunities for academic success that she and her husband, Tim, moved the family from a house they loved in the city of Centertown to a smaller home in a suburban school district. They both believed that Jack was doing poorly in his former school because he was not getting the support he needed to address a reading and writing learning disability identified by testing conducted at his school, and to make matters worse, he was being bullied by some of his peers. Sandy is an assistant professor at a state college, while his father, Tim, is director of a non-profit environmental agency, a position Sandy said he earned by "working his way up

through the ranks” (11/09/08). She met Tim when he was a janitor at the college where she did her graduate work, and they had been married for 13 years. Tim graduated from high school and had a few college credits, but never earned a college degree. However, despite his lack of a degree, he has always been an enthusiastic reader, owning a collection of more than 2,000 science fiction books. Tim shared many of these books with Jack, an experience that Sandy said was enormously influential in terms of Jack's interest in science fiction, as reflected here:

Jack: My dad likes the kind of books I like which is mainly science fiction. Usually my dad, he has this huge box of old books from his childhood, and he'll hand me one and say, "You know, this is a really good book, I recommend you read it."

Interviewer: And what do you think?

Jack: I would love them.

Interviewer: So you and your dad have similar taste in books?

Jack: Yeah.

Sandy: Those books are treasures to Tim. That's a special way they connect to each other. Some dads only play baseball with their boys. Tim plays baseball and shares books. (11/09/08)

Like the Gales, in the case of the Hardy family, parents were doing the work of passing down middle-class ideals and values around reading and books. However, unlike the Gales who both had master's degrees, the Hardy parents took on a “Do as we say, not as your father has done” perspective, since Tim's highest degree was a high school diploma. Sandy mentioned that she hoped Jack had opportunities that Tim was not readily afforded because he lacked a college degree. Both parents said they would encourage Jack to go to college so he would have greater career options and would not have to “work his way up,” as his father had to do.

It came as a surprise to me that, as noted earlier, Jack had a learning disability associated with writing and reading, since I found his vocabulary and expressions of complex thoughts to be sophisticated for an eleven-year-old. Though he identified as an avid reader, Jack expressed some

frustration with his reading experiences at school, which his mother, Sandy, read from a middle-class perspective:

Interviewer: What do you think about reading?

Jack: If it's a book I like, it's great. But if it's a book that I don't like from school, then it makes me tired. Especially if it's something I don't want to read. It gets me tuckered out. I think, "Hold on, this is a book I really don't like. So we have to do something about this."

Interviewer: So what do you do when that happens? If you know you have to read it, how do you handle that?

Jack: I just have to go back to it, I just have to go for it. But I don't enjoy it. I don't really learn anything. Sometimes I wish I could learn a few things and it wasn't so hard. Sometimes it doesn't seem worth it. Other times I know it's good for me.

Interviewer: Good for you?

Jack: It will give me more chances when I get older. For school and work and stuff like that. For now it's just a pain sometimes.

Sandy (to Jack): It's good that you stick with it. (to Interviewer): It's good that he sticks with it.

Interviewer: How so?

Sandy: If you want to make something of yourself, you need to read, even if it's things you don't like. It all helps you because reading makes you a better thinker. And good thinkers have more possibilities in life.

Interviewer: Like what?

Sandy: Doing well in school. Getting into a good college. Escaping through a good book when you're stressed out. It's all good when it comes to reading. (11/09/08)

Jack suggested that reading in an academic setting has often been a struggle for him. Like Sandy, he indicated the need to read as a way of accomplishing middle-class achievements (i.e., his references to school and work), so he developed a strategy for working through his "tiredness" and a general dislike for most of the books assigned in school. Sandy encouraged him in this pursuit by talking to him directly, and by emphasizing the value of reading to me while he was present. In this way,

Sandy performed the work of a “good” parent by teaching Jack that books and reading skills are cultural capital. She continued to display her insights into Jack’s reading skills here:

Interviewer [to Jack]: So, what do your teachers say to you about reading?

Jack: Like, they might say, like, okay, um, here's this book, we're going to give you this worksheet that tells you how many pages you should read and, um, when it has a whole bunch of questions, and you share answers.

Interviewer: Do they let you pick any book in the world you want? How does it work?

Jack: Usually they make us get an assignment book, like all of the kids in the whole class will go pick out their own book to read.

Interviewer: Do they say you need to get a specific kind of book, like science fiction, or historical fiction, or do you choose anything you want?

Jack: Well, if it's for Dawson Elementary, then it's for any book.

Sandy: That's one of those second, third, fourth grade things, just getting kids to read anything. Like, "read, just read." Now they're getting more targeted. They're working on building the reading skills.

Interviewer: Gotcha.

Sandy: Jack really got it, unlike some kids, he's more like the kid who's going to be in the bathroom, takes a book in the bathroom reading, and walks out reading. Right, Jack?

Jack: I guess. (11/08/09)

Like other middle-class parents in this study, Sandy was aware of the school curriculum around academics and seemed proud when she emphasized Jack's interest in books, to the point of jumping in when I asked Jack questions about his reading interests. She was teaching Jack what is expected of him by directing his discourse in this way. Sandy had resources of time, educational background, and comfort level that provided the cultural capital needed to connect to what was going on in Jack’s school. She gave me several examples of assertive measures she took to express her dissatisfaction with a lack of support in the Centertown City School District for Jack’s disability, including calling a number of meetings with teachers and support staff, and writing letters to key

administrators including the district superintendent. Her class position gave her the cultural capital to advocate for her child, even though in the end Jack did not receive the accommodations Sandy said he needed. But again, Sandy and Tim had the cultural and economic capital to change school districts. Their habitus allowed them to consider possibilities and follow through with alternatives for their family. Sandy said she was willing to do whatever it took to address issues around Jack's learning disability. By example, Sandy was teaching Jack how to advocate for himself in ways that positioned and prepared him for a middle-class future.

I found that middle-class parents in this study exerted influence over their children's perspectives on reading and books when their children were very young, with many parents saying they started reading to their children as infants. My youngest informant was seven-year-old Stefan, an African-American first grader who recently moved to Centertown with his mother, Keisha, and father, William, after living since birth in a large metropolitan city on the East Coast United States. Stefan attended a parochial school because his parents felt he would receive a better education there, after being disappointed by a number of visits to public schools in the area. Keisha is an assistant professor and William is a program administrator at the local private university. I began my interview with Stefan at his home in this way, with his mother sitting with us in the kitchen and his father coming and going from the room:

Interviewer (to Stefan): What do you think of reading?

Keisha (jumps in, asks Stefan): Why do you like reading? Why is it important?

Stefan: Because there could be some information about things that really happen in the world. So you could be ready for whatever's gonna happen. Like hurricanes. The best reading does help you. Some reading has real things, real things that would happen in the world. I like those kinds of reading. They're good. So you know what's going on. I can get information about things that really happen in the world. So you know what to do. I have a book about hurricanes.

Interviewer: What does it say?

Stefan: If there's a hurricane coming, pack cans, things that won't get rotten on the airplane, bring lots and lots and lots of water and types of juice, and bring blankets. And you shouldn't worry about bringing all your action figures.

Interviewer: Just some of them?

Stefan: Yes, just bring some of them. (10/05/08)

Keisha jumped in to focus Stefan's attention in a way that loaded my question. "Why do you like reading?" assumed that Stefan likes reading, and, more fundamentally, assumed that reading is something that must be liked by him. Furthermore, "Why is it important?" assumed that Stefan thought reading was important, and again, more fundamentally, made the assumption that reading was important. In other words, she used this opportunity as a "teachable moment." Middle-class notions about the value of reading became naturalized as Keisha communicated these values to Stefan through a number of exchanges I observed. Keisha's subtle and consistent ways of questioning and commenting were teaching Stefan that reading is cultural capital. As a beginning reader in the first grade, Stefan showed that he had already made meaning around the purpose of reading, expecting that the "best" books would provide useful information that he could apply to "real life." In this case, he said that reading helped to ensure his personal safety because it taught him what to do in the event of a hurricane. He looked at his mother when responding, which indicated he wanted to please her, and knew that his comments would make her proud of him.

Another informant, 12-year-old Tracey, had working-class parents (father, Dave; mother, Doreen). However, her extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins) was upper middle-class and she attended a school with a primarily middle-class student population, so most of her friends had middle-class backgrounds. Doreen had a high school diploma and worked as a part-time house cleaner for her cousin. Dave was a janitor at a local college where he worked for nearly 30 years, and ran a part-time rug-cleaning business on the side that he said was failing. He was raised in a

middle-class family along with four siblings who all attended college for at least one year, and who all had professional jobs, as Dave explained here:

Dave: My brother is an accountant. He works for Bill Gates. For his non-profits.

Interviewer: Really? Wow... That's impressive.

Dave: I know.

Interviewer: How many of your siblings went to college?

Dave: Most of them went to college except for me. They didn't all finish, but they all went for a little while, at least a year or so. One has a psychology degree and a music degree. Now he sells houses.

Interviewer: Really?

Dave: He says he uses psychology where he sells houses. (06/02/09)

Dave was quick to highlight his siblings' accomplishments in a positive manner, yet at the same time there appeared to be some regret and disappointment in his voice when he reflected on his own working-class life. I found that Dave's situation made me question the meaning of class. Although he was now working class because of his job, middle-class values still informed his perspective, since he was raised in a middle-class household. This showed me that class is more complicated than simply economics. Dave said that his lack of a college degree limited his opportunities in relation to his brothers and sisters, and he said he wanted "more" for his daughter. He dreamed of a better life for Tracey, while she expressed doubts about the feasibility of some of Dave's dreams:

Interviewer: When you go to Owl Books, who takes you?

Tracey: Usually my dad.

Interviewer: What happens when you get there?

Tracey: I head for, like, sometimes I go to, like, more children's books to see if they have an adult-ish book that I might like.

Interviewer: Where does your dad go?

Dave: I go to see the books on landscaping and stuff. I'm trying to figure out what to do with our yard.

Tracey: Make a porch. Before I go to college.

Dave: When we have enough money.

Tracey: By the time we get enough money, we're going to be dead. (06/02/09)

I learned something about Dave's and Tracey's working-class struggles from that conversation about the bookstore. First, while Dave was now working class but had a middle-class upbringing, like the middle-class parents I interviewed, he appreciated an individualized experience at the bookstore. Instead of reflecting his need for carving out "me time," this may have reflected his lack of disposable income where he looked at books on home improvement, but did not buy them. In that way, he used the bookstore as a way to educate himself so he could fix up his yard. He showed his resourcefulness and creativity in accomplishing projects that were important to him. Tracey's remark about being "dead" by the time Dave had enough money to build the porch she wanted reflected more realism than sarcasm. Dave had told me himself that they could barely pay their bills. Tracey knew this reality. Furthermore, she suggested to me in a number of ways that her wealthier classmates had more money than she had to spend on the "extras." The tension between respecting her father and understanding that because of his low income she could not participate in many activities she said her peers took for granted was something Tracey negotiated. While she viewed her father as someone who made little money at his job, she repeatedly acknowledged what a hard worker he was and appeared respectful toward him during the interview. She listened to him patiently, supported most of his comments, and smiled when he expressed pride about her accomplishments. Several times, he expressed his thoughts to Tracey and me about the opportunities he said could be available to her through a college education. Dave and Doreen never considered college as a possibility for themselves, because he mentioned they did not have the

money or the grades. They wanted Tracey to have opportunities they did not, as revealed in the following excerpt:

Interviewer: When you envision your future, what do you see?

Tracey: I'll probably go to college.

Dave: I want her to go to college.

Interviewer: Why's that?

Dave: I didn't go to college. Doreen [Tracey's mother & Dave's wife] never went to college. [to Tracey]: I want... I want you to... [struggling to find the words]

Tracey: Not be a janitor? [a direct, matter-of-fact tone]

Dave: I'm trying to think of the way to say it.

Interviewer: Take your time.

Dave: [to Interviewer] Um... I want her to have more of an experience in the world than what we've had. I think it would be beneficial to her. She'll find out about the world and what's out there. That's something we couldn't really do. We only had what we could have. Nothing more. (06/02/09)

Tracey's direct comment, "Not be a janitor" did not come across as critical or harsh, but instead seemed to indicate a genuine acceptance of his working-class job, and a simple desire for Dave to accept his position, too, rather than making it into something it was not. This negotiation showed that Tracey acknowledged, but was not resentful, about constraints from her father's working-class position. Conversely, she appeared confident about her opportunities for the future, including getting into a good college and eventually entering a professional occupation, which Dave fully supported and encouraged. As a working class parent, he was teaching his daughter middle-class values, which he knew well due to his own middle-class childhood. It struck me that she downplayed her dreams because, although they would make Dave proud, they could potentially make him feel inferior. Tracey listened as he reflected on what he perceived to be shortcomings associated with his low reading skills below:

Dave: If I was more into reading, I would've been better off.

Interviewer: In what way?

Dave: I probably would have known more. I'm very glad that Tracey is such a great reader. I wasn't a good reader. Tracey always has a book with her, even in the car.
(06/02/09)

Dave did not see himself as a "reader," and reading was not a significant part of his past, present, or future. At the same time, he understood reading to be a skill that could have changed his life by giving him greater opportunities. While Dave suggested it was too late for him, reading was part of this working class father's middle-class dreams for his daughter.

Dave mentioned that his wife, Doreen, requested a book for her birthday, an encyclopedia of WWF wrestlers, which he said was the first book she ever requested for a gift:

Dave: Last time we were there, we went shopping for her mother's birthday. There was a book she wanted.

Interviewer: What was it?

Tracey: It was like an encyclopedia. Like, my mom and I like to watch wrestling.

Interviewer: Oh, wrestling? Like pro-wrestling?

Tracey: Yeah, and my mom likes it, and the book was coming out and she said she wanted it. It had an encyclopedia of all the pro wrestlers

Interviewer: Oh, wow.

Dave: It's entertainment mostly.

Tracey (upbeat): My mom really liked it. (06/02/09)

Dave's comment that this book on pro-wrestling is "entertainment" was his way of indicating to me and to Tracey that he knew the difference between low-prestige books and high-prestige books. He knew that I taught writing courses at the local university, so he may have wanted to show me he knew "good from bad" when it came to books, which appeared to be the same as knowing "right

from wrong.” Further, this conversation suggested to Tracey that Dave wanted her to associate with books that had more literary than entertainment value. In this way, Dave was encouraging Tracey to set high academic standards for herself, as reflected in her reading choices. Dave suggested that this perspective would provide Tracey with upward mobility to the middle-class-- an achievement he said he would never achieve. From his perspective, it was too late for him and Doreen, but not too late for Tracey.

Dave suggested he had neither the time nor disposable income to facilitate opportunities for travel or the pursuit of leisure activities because all of his salary was needed to barely meet monthly expenses. While reflecting on his own life, he told Tracey and me that a better paying, professional job would have allowed him to work fewer hours, to travel, and to pursue other interests that "you don't get for free." Dave said he would like to see Tracey have more social and professional opportunities than he had, which was another way of saying he hoped she would be middle class. Dave wanted Tracey to transition from a working-class life to a middle-class life, and he suggested that literacy was the key to this transition. He spoke proudly of her academic successes and encouraged her potential successes, which he connected to reading and writing skills, as shown here:

Dave: Tracey did a report on Chile.

Tracey (impatient tone): That was in fourth grade.

Dave: Yeah. In it she mentioned her uncle and cousins who live in Chile. One of my biggest things is, if I can get the money, is that she could go on a vacation or a trip, or an exchange during the school year, if she can get a block of time, and go to school in Chile.

Tracey: I think they have exchange programs in high school.

Dave: I would do it separate from school. Growing up I was not the greatest reader. It was tough for me, reading. I might read magazines, but I was not a book reader. But Tracey is. She can go to another country and have a good experience. (06/02/09)

Dave expressed his desire to set up an opportunity for Tracey to study in Chile, apart from an organized program sanctified by the school. His reasons appeared partly economic (i.e., it would be

more affordable to arrange something outside an organized study abroad program), but they also reflected Dave's desire to be the architect of her experience. He continually compared himself and his limited opportunities to Tracey's impressive academic achievements and her potential for a world of opportunities. Tracey downplayed her father's desire to be too closely involved with any future plans to study in Chile, although she was enthused about studying abroad, here:

Interviewer: What do you think about what your dad is saying [about living with relatives in Chile]?

Tracey: The high school has something like that. It's already set up so I could do that one. I think they have scholarships.

While Tracey indicated she would prefer participating in a school-sponsored program, Dave would like to facilitate Tracey's connection to the opportunity to study in Chile because it would give him satisfaction to feel he helped make the dream possible. He saw his role in Tracey's experience as a chance for him to do something significant for her. Tracey's skepticism appeared to be based on her past experiences and observations, which created a tension for her and for Dave who wanted her to have the middle-class opportunities he had not achieved for himself. Due to his lack of economic capital and cultural capital, he worked at drawing from his social capital (connections to his affluent brother in Chile). Still, without economical and cultural capital, his credibility was low with Tracey, even though his sincerity was high. I realized that Tracey was the only child in this study whose parents' access to capital was called into question. With the other children I interviewed, their access to economic, cultural, and social capital was an unexamined and comfortable assumption. Tracey's experiences as a working-class student at a middle-class school provided a perspective that accentuated the divide between middle-class and working-class worlds, a terrain she continually negotiated, as discussed further in Chapter 6.

Like Tracey, middle-class children in this study appeared keenly aware of, and influenced by, their parents' perspectives on the value of reading. Another example was the Mulligan family,

comprised of father, Scott; mother, Jean; their kindergartener son, Jordan; and their fourth grade daughter, Morgan. The Mulligan parents told me they consider themselves to be middle-class, and they appeared to be white. Jean was an LPN, while Scott had been on disability for one year due to a leg injury. Scott revealed that their family had been struggling financially as a result, but Jean's work as a nurse allowed them to hold on to a middle-class lifestyle, even though it was difficult to make ends meet. Scott and Jean shared their thoughts on the importance of reading, using the term "reading level" to refer to a school's assessment of their children's reading ability. They said they encouraged their children's reading skills through their experience of the family outing at Owl Books. The following dialogue reflected how perceptions of their role as parents were connected to values around reading:

Interviewer (to parents): What kind of books do you like to see your kids reading?

Jean: We don't have a preference. Whatever they enjoy. You know, we have tons of different books at home. Whatever they pick out is good if they enjoy it.

Interviewer: I've found that some parents are pretty directive about what kinds of books they want their kids to read.

Scott: Sometimes Morgan will go up to a book that she can't read, like adult books...

Jean: A higher level of reading.

Scott: So we'll say "no." It's not so much the content as it is the level of reading.

Jean: If she wanted something below her level of reading, again, we'd encourage her to pick out something at her level. And we have a lot of younger kids' books at home already.

Interviewer: So you'd encourage her to choose a book at her level?

Jean: Yes, for her, because, you know, right now, you know, there's a little difficulty with reading, stuff like that. So we encourage it, you know, directly at her level. The level they have her at in school. We just want to get her reading at her level. That's why, for a while, she got discouraged. She didn't want anything to do with it. That's why we're trying to keep up her interest at her level. So we tell them, if you want a book, okay, you can pick it out. (10/17/01)

Morgan's parents had a clear notion of her reading level as determined by her school. They said they had a handle on the school's academic literacy standards as associated with Morgan's reading level. At first, the parents said they would support any books their children wanted, because their main objective was to find books their children enjoyed. As the conversation continued, Jean qualified her statement, saying their children could choose any book they liked as long as it was "good." Implicit in that statement was idea that parents have the ability and responsibility to determine what a "good" book is. The parents' definition of a "good" book also came from trusting in the school's assessment that Morgan had a learning disability associated with language skills, and consequently a "good" book in this context was one she found interesting and not too difficult. Morgan's parents were supportive of her and wanted her to develop a love for books through encouraging her to make her own book choices. At the same time, they were present in the process of book choices in a way they hoped would encourage Morgan's appreciation of books, while improving her chances of improving her reading skills. This type and degree of involvement with children's reading lives exemplified a middle-class parenting style, where parents had an awareness of their children's reading levels in school, and they engaged in informal educational experiences outside of school to enhance their children's reading practices.

Middle-class parents told me time and time again that they believe reading skills are imperative for "making it" in today's society. One such woman, Dana, a white, stay-at-home mother of four children ranging in age from 7 to 14, noted the value of academic literacy in the context of her children's "success," as we discussed her eighth grade son:

Dana: My son Tommy is a voracious reader. He scored a 680 on the verbal part of his PSAT. He's the top reader in his middle school. He reads 1,000 pages a week. He can do anything. I tell him if you can read, you can learn anything, you can do anything.
(10/02/01)

Dana said, "My children are my life," a perspective that reflected a confluence of middle-class parenting styles, middle-class privilege, and middle-class values. In her recent study on American parenting styles, Margaret K. Nelson (2010) noted that "[p]rivileged parents... put child rearing front and center: even in the midst of extremely busy lives, they highlight the significance and meaning they find in this activity" (p. 6). Working-class mothers must have jobs that earn an income, while middle-class, stay-at-home mothers, like Dana, claimed that "motherhood" was their full-time job. "Mothering" is a role both revered and undervalued in society. While middle-class stay-at-home mothers are respected on a surface level, some are viewed as not having a "real" job. Dana pushed against this by calling herself a "professional mom" (10/02/01). She said she devoted a great deal of time and effort to tracking her children's activities, accomplishments, and failures, inside and outside of school. Her children were more than her "job"; they were her "profession."

Dana told me that she encouraged her children's academic literacy skills by emphasizing to them the importance of reading, and by praising them for doing well in school, sometimes offering rewards for academic success (i.e., high grades), such as movie passes or money, material prizes that may not be available to working class or low-income families because they do not have disposable income. She viewed test scores, and the number of pages he read on a weekly basis, as a marker of her son's ability to "do anything." This reflected a middle-class assumption informed by meritocracy and white privilege that if a person works hard, s/he will "succeed" by middle-class standards (e.g., getting into a well-respected college, landing a professional job after graduation, ultimately sustaining a middle-class position). The competitive nature of her comment that he was the "top reader" at his school showed how this perspective is relational; that is, rather than being an interpretation based on the individual, her son's "success" was measured in relation to the accomplishments of other students his age, as she perceived them to be. It also appeared to say something about her identity as a mother. If her children were successful, she was successful. Preparing her child to compete

within an institutional setting was another way of preparing him for the competitive, corporate workplace associated with middle-class life, reflecting the “professional mom” she said she is.

I found other instances at Owl Books where middle-class parents became extensions of a formal educational system by teaching their children reading skills, as well as dispositions around reading. Some children, like Morgan, appeared to enjoy it when her dad stepped into the role of "teacher" as he encouraged her to improve her reading proficiency. She described here the perspective she had about the teacherly role her father assumed when her family visited the bookstore:

Interviewer: When you come here, what do you like to do?

Morgan: Normally, when my dad’s reading my [younger] brother a book, I sit down next to him and I listen to the story.

Interviewer: How do you feel then?

Morgan: I feel really comfortable because sometimes there’s these really, really big words that I might not know and he may point those out to me. Sometimes when he says, like, “technology,” and, like, I ask him what is that?, and he explains. After recess in school, we have ten minutes in between and before we go to math, my teacher reads to us. If he reads the story before my dad did, I would raise my hand and ask him what does that mean. He would describe it, but not as much as my dad would. (10/17/01)

Morgan said she appreciated having her father take on an educative role. He taught her vocabulary words and modeled reading behaviors by reading aloud. The things Morgan’s father taught her were exciting. She saw her father's role as more worthwhile than a recent school experience, where she indicated that reading time was too limited (ten minutes between recess and Math). The structure of time in school may have restricted reading time, and a busy daily agenda might explain her teacher's abbreviated response to her questions. In contrast, at Owl Books, when Morgan’s father took on the role of an informal teacher, he had the time and desire to elaborate on his responses, and he could individualize his instruction. Also, she could sit next to her dad and she did not need to raise

her hand when she asked a question. Morgan suggested that the learning environment at Owl Books was more desirable than the one at school.

While middle-class parents I interviewed used approaches aimed to encourage their children's reading skills and interests, and while it was often parents who had the money to purchase books for their children, middle-class children in this study developed and relied on strategies of their own to gain power to negotiate with parents over books. Parents in this study taught children from an early age that an engagement with books was important to pleasing their mother and fathers, who saw academic literacy as a value that set up their children for middle-class futures.

Parents and Lessons about Money

In addition to teaching their children about the value of reading and books, I found that middle-class parents educated their children on consumer literacy, or how to spend money wisely, during their outings to Owl Books. Parents in this study suggested they viewed financial management as another important skill for middle-class life, and children indicated they were learning this lesson well. Tommy, age 14, explained how his mother taught him to value books, but also how to spend money, from a very young age:

Interviewer: You say you purchase books here, and I'm wondering how you make your choices.

Tommy: Sometimes I have some gift certificates. If I'm over my limit, I just pick up the stuff I really want the most, and maybe I'll try to reserve other stuff at the library. When I go over my limit, if I'm just a few bucks over, my mom will usually spot me or something, and I'll pay her back later... She won't give me, like fifty bucks or anything, but if it's just a few dollars, she'll do it because I think she really wants to encourage reading in our family.

Interviewer: It sure seems like it.

Tommy: My sister, you know, she goes through books all the time. She has to keep buying new ones. We're really into it. We learned how to spend money by buying books.

Interviewer: Oh?

Tommy: We've been learning how to budget our money here since we were old enough to

spend it. And that's a long time ago.

Interviewer: Who taught you how?

Tommy: My parents and my friends. My mom, mostly. She likes to get involved with anything about books. (11/9/2001)

Tommy saw his mother's financial support of his book purchases as representing her endorsement of the value of reading, for both him and his siblings. Through these experiences, his mother taught him the value of books, the value of money, and the value of being middle-class. He knew she would provide the funds he needed to purchase books, but understood the limits. Furthermore, Tommy made a middle-class assumption that he and his siblings had the resources to purchase books. For instance, he said his sister "goes through books all the time," and "she has to keep buying new ones." This was a class-based notion that reflected the knowledge that middle-class parents value books, and that disposable income was available for book purchases. Furthermore, this reflected how middle-class parents and children value books and value the ownership of books. It did not appear to be a hard sell for most children in this study to convince their parents to spend money on books.

Introduced earlier in this chapter, Dave was a janitor and the father of 12-year-old Tracey, who straddled a working-class home life with a middle-class extended family and a middle-class school environment. Again, it is important to remember that he was raised in a middle-class household, which continued to inform his values. Dave suggested that Tracey was a good consumer and made wise choices when it came to book purchases:

Interviewer: (to Tracey) When you go to Owl Books, how do you decide what to buy? How does that happen?

Dave: (jumping in to answer) She does good, money-wise. She figures out what she has with gift cards and money, and she uses it to buy something good. (06/02/09)

Tracey used her own money and gift cards to buy books, rather than expecting her father to pay for them, as was the case with the middle-class children I interviewed. This was a reflection of their working-class position, where disposable income for "extras," such as books, was simply not available. Tracey had grown up without the monetary privileges of her middle-class peers, so she used strategies for purchasing books that did not rely on her parents.

In the following interview, third grader Robby and his father Art negotiated perspectives on owning books as they discussed the differences between a bookstore (where you buy books) and the library (where you borrow books):

Interviewer: How often do you and your family to go to the bookstore?

Robby: Well, not really, sometimes, but not a lot.

Art [father]: Not as much as Robby would like.

Interviewer [to Robby]: How often would you want to go there if you could?

Robby: I think maybe about twice a week. I don't know.

Interviewer: What do you like about it there?

Robby: Oh... what I like about it there is that there's... um, well, it's not like the library where the books, you just have to bring them back. At the stores you can just buy them and just have them. I found something that goes with *Wizardology* at the store but my mom wouldn't buy it. [irritation in his voice while looking at his mom]

Art laughs at Robby's voice. (9/28/08)

Robby recognized a value in owning books, which would require him to enter into negotiations with his parents so he could get to the bookstore, and so he would have money to buy the books he wanted. As a middle-class negotiation strategy where children are entitled to express their opinions, he expressed irritation about the time his mother would not buy him a book he wanted (she told me later the book costs \$25). Art's laughter seemed to reflect a discomfort around his position as a middle-class parent. It appeared he needed to command respect from Robby toward his mother,

while encouraging Robby to be assertive, while upholding the value of books, and while wanting to help Robby develop an appreciation for the value of money. This was a lot to juggle. With his mother Audrey's help, Robby chose a book as a gift for his friend's birthday. Although Audrey had a different book in mind, Robby was able to convince her that his choice was more appropriate. He explained what happened in this way:

Interviewer [to Robby]: How did you decide that the book you picked was better?

Robby: Well, the one with the CD, he [Robby's friend] is not very good with computers, and he also likes stuff to do. He's not really used to computer games. And he likes asteroids and stars and fossils, and stuff they do about it, so I was thinking that maybe instead of the computer thing, I was thinking maybe, well that would be better. (09/28/08)

Robby expressed his opinion to his mother because he needed to convince her to purchase the book. Audrey's way of inviting Robby's opinion, taking it into account, and letting it influence the purchase reflected a middle-class parenting style that taught Robby how to negotiate financial decisions. Robby's parents' influence on his book buying opportunities was brought into sharper focus here:

Interviewer [to Robby]: When you get to pick a book at the store, how do you know what you want? How do you make your choice?

Robby: Well, there is this book *Wizardology*. I am trying to get my mom to get the book *Wandmakers*.

Interviewer: Is it about magic tricks?

Robby: No, not really, it's about how to be a wizard.

Art: It usually starts with something he wants, usually he knows what he wants, or he figures out what he wants.

Interviewer: Do you usually get to buy a book when you go to the bookstore?

Robby: Not always.

Art: Is Mommy more likely to get you something? Or am I more likely to get you something?

Robby: You.

Art: [to Robby]: I'm more likely to get you something. If you behave.

Interviewer [to Robby]: Do you like the way it works in terms of getting a book? Does it work for you?

Robby: Mostly.

Art: The system is fair. Sometimes you're angry when you want to get a book and we don't get you a book, so you get angry.

Robby: I know that they mostly will get me things because I have to get into my reading.

Interviewer: How do your parents feel about books?

Robby: They think books are important for me to remember. (09/28/08)

Robby understood and was influenced by his parents' perspectives on reading and on particular books. Taking this into account, he knew how to get his father to spend money on him. I expected he would get the *Wizardology* book he was lobbying for, and as it turns out, Art told me he bought it for him the next day. This showed the effectiveness of Robby's skills of negotiation, and how his parents reinforced those skills. Aside from learning the value of reading and books, he was learning the art of negotiation, and like other middle-class children, was developing the social skills he needs to get what he wants in a middle-class world. Robby was permitted to challenge the "system" his parents put in place for promising books as a reward for "good behavior"; however, in the end, Art declared, "The system is fair," which Robby did not debate. Robby was learning that "the system" is to be respected. However, Robby was aware that his parents were likely to buy him a book because they want him to read, they appreciate books, and they value his connection to books. This knowledge gave Robby hope that they will give in to his demands, and it led to his assertive and successful pursuit to get the books he wanted. This example illustrates how these middle-class parents taught Robby to engage in negotiations involving money, to know which parent would be

more likely to acquiesce to his wishes, and to persist with desires and demands until he achieved his goal: in this case, a sticker book.

Audrey and Art made their reading preferences known to Robby, sometimes through spirited debate around books and book purchases. They listened to Robby and engaged him in lively book discussions, even though there was sometimes conflict, as seen in the following excerpt where the topic of the sticker book came up again:

Audrey: We don't usually go to the bookstore unless we really need to get something.

Art: Yeah, I mean the Renaissance School [where Robby goes to school] is really near Owl Books. So if we want to get something

Robby (interrupts): Yeah, if I want to get something, we go there.

Art: If he wants to get something that I think is of value, then we'll go there. How long was it...

Robby: I think it was about... I know...

Art: I think it had to do with a Pokemon sticker book he wanted.

Robby: No, no, no, that was this year's birthday. That was your and my mom's birthday present for this birthday, and, um...

Art: Okay. That was a fight. That was like... (to Robby): Remember how long you fought about getting that book?

Interviewer (To Robby): Why was it so hard to get that book?

Robby: I don't know. They really argued with me.

Interviewer: Why's that? Why was it hard to get it?

Robby: Well, um, well, 'cuz, uh, they think that, uh, books that are reading books are better than sticker books. And sticker books aren't really reading books.

Interviewer: They're not a reading book?

Robby: I know, but the sticker book does have some, um, words in it, and it tells about different kinds of Pokemon.

Interviewer: So some books your parents might think are better books than others, in a certain way?

Robby: Yeah, kind of.

Me: They base that on what?

Robby: Mostly reading.

Interviewer: So more reading means it's a better book?

Robby: For me, yes, that's what they think.

Interviewer: What do you think?

Robby: For me, I think both is the best.

Interviewer: A combination in the same book?

Robby: Yes.

Art: I think he's saying sticker books are good, too. You gotta get 'em all, the Pokemon. Boy, do they [Pokemon marketers] know what they're doing. (laughs)

Robby: bahhhhhh.

Art (to Robby): Do Mommy and Daddy, are we different about the kind of reading...

Robby: Well, yes. (to Art): You are a comic book person and Mommy is like kind of a science-y historian person. Sometimes I have to make her, sometimes I try to make her, read the other things.

Interviewer: Sometimes you try to get your mommy to read comics?

Robby: Not so successful. (Everyone laughs.)

Art (to Audrey): You were reading a Spiderman the other night, weren't you? But it was a book.

Audrey: It had a part about spiders in it, it was talking about spiders.

Interviewer (to Robby): Robby, when you were talking about how your parents think about reading... what do you think about reading?

Robby: Well, ummm, when I think about reading, I think reading should be mostly fun instead of like, borrrrrring.... It should be, like, you should get the picture in your head or when you're stuck on science, it's kind of like that, it's not just the facts. It's kinda neat.
(09/28/08)

Art's reference to taking Robby to the bookstore in order to get something of "value" suggested that books are potentially "valuable," although he complicated this when he devalued the Pokemon books Robby desired and enjoyed. Art talked about the "fight" Robby put up over a period of time in order to get the book. This taught Robby that being assertive and relentless with expressions of desire over book consumption would ultimately get him what he wanted, which it eventually did. On many occasions, I observed debates between middle-class parents and their children around book consumption that escalated to angry encounters. I observed a woman who appeared to be in her early 30s, with her daughter, Rose, who appeared to be around 7 or 8 years old. This was their tense and disturbing conversation around a potential book purchase:

Mother (speaking quickly and impatiently): Pick a book!

Rose: I don't know which one to pick.

Mother: I told you, just pick one. [Rose picks up a board game called "Animal Match" instead of a book.]

Mother: That's for little kids. Pick out something you can read to me. You got markers and you said you'd get a cheap book, not something that's \$14.99. Now hurry up!

Rose (anxious): I don't know which one to pick.

Mother (angry voice): Come on, let's go! I can buy you a book you can write in. [The mother grabs Rose's hand, then pulls her firmly behind her, exiting the children's book department. About two minutes later, Rose comes back by herself and begins looking at *Pokemon* calendars.]

Mother: Rose, come on! Come on! Come on!

Rose (whiney): Mommy, I want my book!

Mother: Come on over here and pick a book!

Rose: I'm trying! I like this book. I like the picture.

Mother: I am not buying you a book because you like the pictures. Let's go! I am too hot! (very angry now) I want to go!

Rose (whiney voice): I like the dinosaur book.

Mother: It's too much money. You keep getting higher and higher. These are cheaper. Get the butterfly one. Then you can learn how to catch them. The dinosaur book is too expensive. You've had all this time to pick! We have to go right now! [Rose starts to cry. The mother moves over to the "Young Readers" section, which has more inexpensive paperback books on a rotating rack.]

Mother: Come over here like I asked you to! (very angry)

Rose (still in the non-fiction section, whining): I like this book on crystals.

Mother: Okay, fine! Now I would like to go. Let's go. (10/11/01)

Though this encounter was upsetting to the participants and observer, and perhaps the mom was just having a bad day, she was unwittingly teaching Rose the art of negotiation, a skill that prepared Rose to participate effectively in middle-class culture. From Annette Lareau's (2003) perspective, this type of interaction is rooted in middle-class culture and socialization. She argues that "whining" is something middle-class children learn to do in response to a middle-class parenting style, where "parents use language as the key mechanism of discipline. This approach often leads to extensive negotiation, bargaining, and whining in the course of daily family life. But it also leads [a child] to acquire a large vocabulary and to be adroit at verbal interaction" (p. 107). Rose expressed her preferences as her mother directed her to do, yet it became clear that Mom had her own ideas about which book was acceptable, so Rose tried to adapt. Even at her young age, she realized that her mother held the purse strings, which meant Mom had the power to make the final decision about which book Rose would get. While Rose entertained several possibilities for her selection, mainly based on what she liked, her mother conveyed multiple criteria to Rose that restricted the purchase. Specifically, Rose was limited to one book, and the book needed to be something she could read aloud to her mother, a book she could write in, and most of all, was relatively inexpensive. At times it felt as though Rose was trying to please an unreasonable boss. Despite the unpleasantness of the situation, Rose was learning to be a consumer who must take into account various competing limitations, while still getting what she wants. In the end, she was able to accomplish this, while

meeting her mother's standards. These skills of negotiation around consumption were preparing her to operate successfully in a middle-class world.

It was significant that while Rose's mother had the economic capital to purchase something that would quiet her daughter's whining, she chastised Rose for wanting the more expensive book. First, this suggested that more affluent middle-class parents may use the bookstore as a place where they can influence their children's behaviors or attitudes by buying a book. Other more affluent middle-class mothers told me that they frequently stop at the bookstore to reward a child who has been behaving well according to middle-class etiquette, for instance, a child who has remained patient through an afternoon of errands. One mother, Mary, who is married to a physician, suggested that she resisted buying her son, Sawyer, toys as a reward under those circumstances, but would not hesitate to buy him a book because, "Books are gold in my mind, so I never say no." (8/2/2004). This metaphor speaks to the riches she suggests that books offer intellectually, as well as to the material and financial rewards literacy skills promise her son later on in life.

Parents and Lessons about Social Class

As noted in the previous section, middle-class families in this study chose Owl Books as a destination for family outings because it provided opportunities for them to experience pleasure while children gained particular skills that parents said would improve their chances for "success" as defined by middle-class culture. While parents taught their children the value of reading, money, and manners at the store, they used discourses that sometimes involved coded language around class in ways that reproduced middle-class values in relation to the "other." Middle-class parents in this study remarked that Owl Books was a "safe space," where they were comfortable leaving their young children in children's book department, under the loose supervision of workers, while out of parents' sight for often 10- to 15-minutes, and sometimes up to an hour or more. Workers said that

at least once a week, a parent left the store while their children stayed behind in the children's section. Such observations are explored in the other data chapters of this dissertation, and ideologies around "safety" and "strangers" also raised important questions in relation to the experience of parents at Owl Books. Questions are, *What do parents mean by "safe space?"* and *Why do they consider Owl Books to be safe?*, with the complicating question, *Why do parents feel comfortable being separated from their children at Owl Books, yet they are uncomfortable doing the same at the nearby Sparrow Books?* Owl Books has an environment where middle-class parents and children said they are comfortable and safe. When I asked the Store Manager, Mary, for her perspective on parents' attitudes toward the bookstore, she characterized them in this way:

Mary: Parents feel good here when it comes to their kids' safety. It's a nice place. They trust us, and they trust the environment. Which is good and bad.

Interviewer: How so?

Mary: We draw in a different type of people. We have people with disposable income. People who know that reading is a privilege.

Interviewer: What do you mean by "a different type of people"?

Mary: People need money to buy our books, so people who have money, they're the ones who come to the store.

Interviewer: What are your thoughts on that?

Mary: You know, anyone can come in here. Parents shouldn't assume that there won't be any trouble. We cannot possibly guarantee it. (4/6/01)

Mary acknowledged the tension between offering a pleasant, open bookstore environment where people were welcome and felt comfortable and the safety issues that came about when anyone who could get to the store was allowed inside. It made sense that she was concerned that some parents were overly relaxed about the store because, like herself, they viewed the clientele as affluent, which implied they were trustworthy. She followed up by suggesting that other people (those without money) could still come into the store, and said that parents should be aware of the problems that

might bring. There was a sense that Mary was using coded language that masked a subtext associated with class and race. For instance, by saying, “We draw in a different type of people,” she appeared to be saying, “Our customers are white, middle-class, and respectable.” When someone says “different,” a researcher always has to ask, different from whom? So her comment here raises the question of who she considers the norm. By saying that “People need money to buy our books,” she appeared to suggest that “Poor people cannot participate here in the same way that middle-class people do.” By saying, “We have people with disposable income,” she seemed to be saying, “Our customers are primarily middle-class.” By saying the customers “know that reading is a privilege,” she seemed to be saying, “We appeal to those who appreciate education.” When she pointed out that parents “shouldn’t assume there won’t be any trouble,” she appeared to suggest that “trouble” is “poor.” This kind of coded discourse around the clientele of Owl Books reflected an exclusivity that came from access to, and the status around, books. I argue that when children hear this discourse, they acquire orientations that privilege and preserve middle-class life. Parents in this study passed along these values to their children in explicit, as well as implicit, ways. For instance, fourteen-year-old informant, Tommy, indicated here how his mother had influenced his way of thinking about class:

Tommy: It’s pretty peaceful, you know. Uh, there’s a lot of nice people there. It’s quiet. It’s pretty good. The workers are always nice and friendly and they always try to help you out the best they can, and the people who shop there are nice, too, you know, nobody really gives each other problems or anything. It’s a nice place overall... It’s a clean store and there’s never any trash on the floor or anything.

Interviewer: What else makes the store a "nice place" as you said it is?

Tommy: My mother brought us here from the time we were little. She thinks it’s a nice place, and so do I. There’s not any marks on the wall. It gives you a nice feeling when you walk around. The cafe and the music sections make you kind of enjoy it more than if it was just plain and boring. (11/9/2001)

Tommy and his siblings had been going to Owl Books from a very young age because his mother thought it was “nice.” This was important to him because he appreciated, and possibly expected, a retail environment that was tidy and pleasant, and where he felt comfortable and inspired (a place that was not “boring”). At the same time, his discourse suggested multiple meanings and interpretations around his choice of coded language. Words such as “peaceful,” “nice,” “friendly,” and “clean” appeared to reflect an expectation for a bookstore where primarily “nice” middle-class people gather. These descriptors reflected assumptions that middle-class parents and children made about customers in the store. Furthermore, the context of these assumptions (a bookstore comprised primarily of middle-class workers and clientele) contributed to notions around safety and strangers.

Dana, who self-identified as a middle-class mother of four (Tommy, 14; Kara, 11; Jenny, 9; and Alex, 7) characterized the clientele of Owl Books by comparing it to K-Mart, and by describing the kinds of people she said are likely to spend time there:

Dana: It’s more upper scale at Owl Books than at K-Mart. Um, probably it’s because of the cost of the books, and that it’s exclusively books. Bookstores absolutely draw in different kinds of people. Typically, they walk in, they look well-dressed, you don’t see a lot of people hanging out. It’s very clean. They have nice looking displays... The atmosphere makes it feel safe, and so do the workers. [11/2/01]

Dana's use of the term “upper scale” accentuated her position that Owl Books holds a higher class position than K-Mart. “Upscale” may be the word she was aiming for, but her use of “upper scale” reflects class-based notions of “upper class,” “upper crust,” or “upper echelon.” Her perspective on differences between K-Mart and Owl Books was linked to ideas about the “cost of the books,” meaning she suggested that only people who can afford to purchase books go to the bookstore. It followed that Owl Books excludes low-income or working-class people, which appeared to make her more at ease in the store. There is another layer of interpretation here, since along with offering a generous selection of books, K-Mart carries a great deal of expensive merchandise, from

refrigerators to flat-screen televisions and computers, even though those products often come at a discount. Despite these commonalities, Dana understood K-Mart as a place that caters to lower income families, while Owl Books appeals to middle-class families. Another inference she made was that lower income families are not interested in reading, while middle-class families value it highly. While she connected the idea of customers being "well-dressed" and "clean" at Owl Books, it would follow that those who go to K-Mart are "poorly dressed" and "dirty." The perception of people "hanging out," a phrase that suggested a gang-like, or a group of people without direction, purpose, or jobs, would not be found at Owl Books. Finally, she said that the atmosphere at Owl Books was "safe," suggesting that the atmosphere at K-Mart was "unsafe" for her. Dana acknowledged that, like K-Mart, Owl Books is a store that is opened to the public, yet she suggested it attracts a higher class of people than K-Mart does. At the same time, she mentioned that she sometimes takes her children to Sparrow Books in the large, busy mall at the north side of the city, as noted here:

Dana: We like to go to Sparrow Books because it's right at the mall. It's convenient. When I do my Christmas shopping. That's where I go because we're over in Lakeview. That's where I buy my books. I like Owl Books better because it's clean and it seems very safe as far as who's going in there. I don't think you get a lot of, uh, trouble-makers who want to spend money on books. And, um, they just have everything. [11/2/01]

The complication here was that Sparrow Books and Owl Books are both big-box booksellers; however, Sparrow Books attracts a more diverse customer base. I argue that this is because it is located in a mall that is closer to an urban center, and it is accessible by public transportation. Dana said she preferred Owl Books because it was "clean" and "safe as far as who's going in there," so the perception of "safety and books" was disrupted when she perceived the bookstore as having a more diverse clientele. She reaffirmed her original position by reflecting on the idea that "trouble-makers" would not be spending money on books. She appeared to associate books, literacy, and the bookstore with what she saw as upstanding, law-abiding, and employed citizens. She then elaborated on the idea of the bookstore as a "safe space":

Interviewer: I'm interested in what you said earlier about Owl Books feeling like a "safe" environment.

Dana: Right. You know, uh, it seems very safe, uh, there's a lot of, uh, staff around, shelving books and doing things like that. If I send the kids into a corner to work on the books, or to look for books, and I go out of sight around the corner, they seem fine.

Interviewer: Are there other reasons why it feels safe? I mean, for instance, you could go to K-Mart where workers are stocking shelves.

Dana: Um, probably it's because of the cost of the books, and that it's exclusively books. If I went to a department store, they're selling a lot of other things. It brings in a lot of different kinds of people. At Owl Books, you go, you buy your book, and, uh, take off. It's safe, too, because the children's section is in the back of the store, so it's a longer way to get to the door. And they don't have the kids' department over by the coffee area, um, so that they're over there by single people sitting there reading, so that's safe. It's very clean, they have a lot of nice displays, they have a little puppet theater which makes it look nice. All of those things are inviting. The atmosphere makes it feel safe, and so do the workers.
[11/2/01]

Like other middle-class parents I interviewed, Dana indicated she was comfortable when her younger children were out of her sight at Owl Books. When they arrived at the store, she said she usually spent 15 to 30 minutes looking at books with her children, and once they were interested in a book, she "ran over" to the café to get a cup of coffee, then came "right back." [11/2/01] This comfort level came from the "safe" feeling she said she has about the physical layout of the store (i.e., the entrance/exit were at the opposite end of the store from the Children's section), but it also came from the elevated status she assigned to books and the people associated with them. It spoke to the extent to which she perceived Owl Books to be "safe," if she was willing to entrust her children to this public site of consumption, where people were free to come and go. Dana went into more detail about her way of thinking about having her children outside her view:

Interviewer: Can you talk about your comfort level as far as where you are in relation to your kids at Owl Books?

Dana: I would be comfortable if I was within range of my younger kids, even if they were temporarily out of my sight. Yes, I would be comfortable, and I was, because the two little kids were looking in one section and my daughter was in her section for junior teens right outside the kids' section. She's a little older and needed some help. Her section was close to

that little section. Actually, it was arranged so the little kids would have to exit, there's only one way for them to get out of the children's section, and they would have had to pass by me in the little bit older section, the junior teens, so, uh, that would work. I wasn't thinking about it before, because, you know, you have this feeling about whether you're safe or not, but that would be [didn't finish thought], you know, you generally look to see how can they get out of where they are, because little five year olds tend to wander. It is, it is, it's the status of Owl Books. Because if I go to Sparrow Books, I don't leave them, because there's too many exits. They could just disappear. The children's section is right by the open mall, the outside hall. There's too many ways out of the little kids' section. And sometime it feels like there are strangers hanging around.

Interviewer: Strangers?

Dana: People we don't know that seem unfamiliar. It doesn't feel like that at Owl Books.
[11/2/01]

In talking about "strangers" at Sparrow Books, Dana was using language that made meanings around class. Unlike Owl Books, which had a predominantly middle-class clientele, informants suggested to me that Sparrow Books had a more diverse customer base. I argue that this was because it was more easily accessible by public transportation and was located within walking distance of some lower income, ethnically and racially diverse neighborhoods. Dana mentioned that she preferred to go to Owl Books because it was "less public" and "more familiar," but would stop at Sparrow Books if they were at the mall for something else. She said she was uncomfortable having her children out of her sight at Sparrow Books because there were multiple exits in the store. When Dana spoke of the relationship between safety and the "status" of Owl Books in relation to Sparrow Books, she was in some respects talking about class.

In order to interrogate further the theme of "safety and the bookstore," I asked third grader Robby to share his perspective on Sparrow Books, as compared to Owl Books, and his parents jumped in on the conversation:

Interviewer [to Robby]: What do you think about Sparrow Books? What kind of atmosphere does it have for you?

Robby: Well, kinda nice. Sometimes it's pretty nice.

Interviewer: How does it feel when you're in the store?

Robby: Um, um. Sometimes, well it depends what books I need. Like about when I'm near the comic books, I kind of feel tired.

Interviewer: You feel tired near the comics?

Robby: Well, yeah, because I read a lot of them. And when I'm near the animal books, I kinda feel the same way as I feel around the comic books.

Audrey: You like looking through the stacks for books.

Interviewer: You ever talk to any of the other kids in the store, or do you mostly stay to yourself?

Robby: Well, there's mostly not really that much kids in there.

Audrey: Kids in bookstores seem to be attached to their adults.

Interviewer: Some of the people I've talked with feel safe in a bookstore.

Audrey: Well, Owl Books seems safer than Sparrow Books because Sparrow Books is attached to a mall.

Art: The thing I like, the comic book section at Sparrow Books, the entry has been closed off. Which is better. Owl Books is set up really smart because people have to go down the aisle to get to the kids' section. Whereas the children's book section at Sparrow Books at the mall, it's close to the entrance, there's a couple different ways in and out. Like last night, where he was, I mean, I knew I could hear and I could see, I knew exactly where he was. Owl Books doesn't have racks of comic books. [09/28/08]

Tensions grew when Art and Audrey realized that Robby was left alone the night before at Sparrow Books in the mall, which was something that, clearly, they were uncomfortable with:

Interviewer: When you go to the bookstore, do you go right to the kids' department? Or do you go someplace else first?

Robby: Mostly right to the kids' section. I just usually go to the kids' section.

Art: Although last night, when we were done with the kids' section, you went right over the graphic novel/comic book rack, while we did our thing.

Robby: But that was not at Owl Books.

Art: That was at Sparrow Books.

Interviewer: What were you two doing?

Audrey: I was in the checkout line. [to Art, with a critical tone]: That was when you were supposed to be with him. It's not the kind of place he can be left on his own.

Art: (defensive) Well, I was with him. I was with him. Sort of. I mean, I was where I could see him. I was looking at some books, but I could make eye contact with him. [09/28/08]

The arrangement of Owl Books, with the children's section in the back and only one door for entering and exiting, provided a physical space that parents indicated made them feel more comfortable than they felt at Sparrow Books, which had multiple entries and a busier, bustling environment. When middle-class parents in this study went to the bookstore with their children, they wanted to pursue their own interests for at least some of the time, so they preferred a store that – while “public”— offered some physical barriers to people's comings and goings, an arrangement that provided them with an opportunity for “alone time” where they felt comfortable being away from their children. I argue that issues of class also came into play here, with parents suggesting that a “higher class” clientele frequented Owl Books, while a more “diverse” clientele was at Sparrow Books, as Art suggested in a follow-up question here:

Interviewer: Can you pin down for me the differences between Owl Books and Sparrow Books? I am trying to understand the safety piece.

Art: I don't know if the word “higher class” truly applies to Owl Books, but that's the closest I can come. You're not far from the university neighborhood. You get professors and professors' kids, and then the hospital is nearby, too, so there are doctors and nurses and such. It just seems like the people you see at Sparrow are sometimes more “street.”

Interviewer: More “street”?

Art: Yeah, they aren't closeted at the university. They come from more diverse backgrounds. I know I am totally stereotyping here... it is more of a feeling than a scientific thing. [11/22/08]

Art framed “street” as a positive trait in one respect, by comparing Owl Books customers to those associated with the university, whom he calls “closeted.” Even the word “street” seemed to be a “hip” term that suggested Art's progressive perspective. At the same time, it followed that Art was

one of the “closeted” ones, as he taught at the university and suggested that he was not completely comfortable with the safety of Sparrow Books himself, because of the “street” clientele. He struggled to elevate the status of those he saw as “street” and “diverse” (which most likely meant economically disadvantaged, and either Black, Hispanic, or other people of color) by showing his respect for diversity, while also suggesting he had particular concerns about the implications of “street” presence at Sparrow Books. Although safety concerns to a large degree appeared to hinge on the layout of the two bookstores, I argue that class and racial homogeneity also played a role in my informants’ comfort levels, as a middle-class and white homogeneity seemed to bolster parents’ sense of security at Owl Books.

Conclusion

When middle-class parents in this study took their children on outings to Owl Books, mothers and/or fathers were looking for an experience where they could do leisure work. That is, parents viewed Owl Books as a safe place where they sought pleasure through time they spent together and apart from their children. Parents wanted to feel comfortable about leaving the children in the care of book workers, which gave them the opportunity to pursue individualized interests, whether it was enjoying coffee in the café, or browsing through magazines and books that interested them. Safety was associated with what parents in this study perceived to be a homogeneous, white, middle-class clientele at Owl Books, while their sense of safety diminished at what they perceived to be the more economically diverse Sparrow Books. Furthermore, aside from the leisure pursuit, parents saw the bookstore as a place where they could teach particular skills to their children related to reading, spending money, and social behaviors. Middle-class parents in this study suggested that these skills would help their children in the present by leading to higher grades in school. They suggested that these skills would also provide greater possibilities for their children

to "succeed" in the future, for example, being accepted to top-ranking colleges, which would lead to professional, high-paying jobs, which would secure for them a middle-class lifestyle. In short, parents associate literacy skills with academic achievement, and academic achievement with professional achievement, and they connect all of the above to upward social mobility and middle-class status.

Parents saw Owl Books as a destination for family outings that involved both individualized and family pleasures, as well as informal educational lessons, a dual purpose I called "leisure work." In this respect, at Owl Books, parents' work became an extension of teachers' work, which at times required parents and children to negotiate their ideas around reading and books. Within a pursuit of middle-class ideals as connected to reading and books, parents often expressed a nostalgia around reading. That is, parents in this study said they wanted their children to enjoy reading and books, as they did when they were children, so parents eagerly shared their favorite books with their children. Although on the surface these interactions might appear to be inconsequential, I argue that these kinds of informal interactions between middle-class parents and their children around books carry a great deal of power, as they inculcate children into a middle-class world. These experiences teach children to assume they will attain their parents' status, or even higher. The confidence, language, and negotiation skills middle-class children acquire through leisure work are cultural capital that makes these assumptions become social realities, thereby reproducing middle-class life.

CHAPTER 6

Reading Status: Children, Literacy, and Middle-Class Orientations

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, and “what is the use of a book,” thought Alice “without pictures or conversation?”

from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll (1865)

This chapter explores children’s perspectives on the consumption of books in the context of the family outing to the big-box bookstore Owl Books, in order to understand the relationship of this experience to class, status, and middle-class reproduction¹, within the context of pleasurable experiences around books. As the chapter addresses questions around children’s consumption of books and middle-class reproduction, it asks: What meanings do children make around the big-box bookstore? How do family trips to the bookstore promote a middle-class orientation? How do children negotiate books as both educational and enjoyable? What can be said about children’s identity formations around books? And, how does children’s consumption of books relate to the acquisition of various literacies associated with middle-class achievement? I examine these literacies² with respect to the following categories: academic literacy (that is, achieving reading and writing competencies as defined by schools); consumer literacy (gaining knowledge about consumption practices); and social literacy (learning how to behave in ways that enhance status).

The framework here for understanding what children learn about literacy, class, and status at

¹ *Discussion of class, status, and social reproduction appear in the Introduction chapter and the Literature Review.*

² *The application of the term “literacy” for this project is based on a progressive interpretation by The New London Group (1996), which resisted the traditional definition of literacy (“teaching and learning to read and write in page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language” [p. 1]). By introducing the concept of multiliteracies, the group argued that the traditional definition failed to accommodate the world’s social, cultural, and linguistic diversity. They asserted that the term multiliteracies “overcomes the limitations of traditional approaches by emphasizing how negotiating the multiple linguistic and cultural differences in our society is central to the pragmatics of the working, civic, and private lives of students” (p. 1).*

Owl Books is constructed around theories suggested by Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1990), particularly his ideas about cultural capital and social reproduction. This chapter also draws from the work of Annette Lareau (2003), who argues that “social class differences in children’s life experiences can be seen in the details of life” (p. 35). By "details" she suggests that middle-class children are affected by their parents’ engagement in a process of “concerted cultivation,” where parents “see themselves as developing [their children] to cultivate [their] talents. Organized activities, established and controlled by mothers and fathers, dominate the lives of middle-class children” (p. 1). This chapter comes from a similar perspective to understand how the “details of life” in everyday experiences reproduce class.

Bourdieu claims that ideas about taste and status are internalized through the socialization of children from a young age, and this process results in the reproduction of class. Through the experience of the family outing to Owl Books, middle-class children learn and practice academic, consumer, and social literacies that promise to provide them with access to the privileges associated with middle-class status. Relationships with books, as observed through interactions at the bookstore and through conversations with children around reading and books, become a way of negotiating academic experiences at school, where reading is viewed as important from the earliest grades, and one's academic status is dependent on it. Middle-class children also learn it is important to know how to negotiate book purchases; in other words, their experiences at Owl Books teach them how to spend money. Finally, at the bookstore, middle-class children learn about the value of social skills. From the time they are infants, caregivers take them to the weekly Story Time, where children learn and practice manners, such as listening, not interrupting, taking turns, and staying still. As they get older, books become social makers and social breakers. Tweens and young teens want books to provide a level of engagement and a chance to connect with friends, as well as an opportunity to share knowledge about books they care about. However, at other times, children are

labeled "geeks" or "nerds" for the same. It is through everyday, naturalized experiences around book consumption, and its associated literacies, that children develop a habitus from which they negotiate, embody, and deploy middle-class dispositions, desires, privileges, and practices that lead to middle-class reproduction.

Children's perspectives predominate this chapter to show how discourses about middle-class culture are visible in their conversations and coded language predominates in this chapter with respect to literacy, class, and status. Because the chapter considers how children think about literacy, and since their views are greatly influenced by parents, it seemed essential to include in some instances parents' perspectives; however, an in-depth look at parents' influence on their children's experiences with reading, books, and consumption appeared in Chapter 5. The discussion and data in this chapter are organized into sections corresponding to the three literacies mentioned earlier: academic literacy, consumer literacy, and social literacy. In each section, I frame and introduce a form of literacy, look at the ways in which children talk and think about it, and examine how children understand its value. By weaving together these analytical perspectives, the chapter explores what children's talk reveals about connections between middle-class family outings to Owl Books, literacy practices as cultural capital, and middle-class reproduction.

Academic Literacy

Academic literacy is the term I use to signify how schools understand, represent, and position reading and books, evidenced by how schools encourage, teach, and measure reading skills and behaviors. In the traditional classroom field, cultural capital takes the form of academic literacy, which Gallego and Hollingsworth (2000) define as "the learning of interpretive and communicative processes needed to adapt socially to school and other dominant language contexts, and the use or practice of those processes in order to gain a conceptual understanding of school subjects" (5). I

make the assumption here that schools value reading by emphasizing its importance in multiple ways (e.g., language arts classes, book fairs, author visits, and summer reading programs). I also assume that schools create a complicated understanding of status for children around academic literacy by stressing the importance of reading books and achieving higher reading levels, while also at times limiting children's opportunities to make choices around reading. Furthermore, schools sometimes restrict children's desires to engage in reading practices while at school. The aim is not to condemn academic literacy; rather, it is to understand how children acquire a middle-class orientation through their experiences around books, and to suggest that schools may sometimes undermine children's love of reading by sending mixed messages about literacy and books. This section considers how children's perspectives on academic literacy connect and conform to social reproduction, where the "value" of reading and books is associated with opportunities around middle-class privilege.

Children's negotiations with teachers, parents, and peers around books and book consumption socialize them into a middle-class world. This chapter understands these naturalized experiences as part of children's habitus, a concept that helps us to see how children develop, understand, and negotiate a sense of themselves and middle-class status through ideas around books and reading.

A thread of interview questions investigated children's views of academic literacy. That is, I explored how children felt about reading at school, as well as reading outside of school, including reading associated with visits to Owl Books. Other questions guiding the interviews included: What do children think about reading and books? Where does the desire to read come from? How does reading associated with school (academic literacy) affect children's relationships with peers? What differences, if any, exist between reading done at school (academic literacy) and reading done outside of school? What is the relationship between reading practices and identity for children? What is the relationship between notions about academic literacy and social reproduction? Taking these questions into account, this discussion of academic literacy explores how children come to

understand academic literacy through their parents, through schools, and through their relationships with peers, and what those perspectives imply for middle-class reproduction. As noted earlier, academic literacy is defined as the kinds of text-bound experiences that are sanctioned by schools, as explored next.

The notion of reading as an activity with a practical purpose was a perspective held by Robby, a vivacious redhead who wore round wire-rim glasses that magnified his big blue eyes, and whose perspectives were introduced in Chapter 5. A third-grade student with a middle-class background who attends a private elementary school, the Renaissance School, in the city of Centertown, Robby said that reading served a function because it helped him in his daily life by giving him ideas about “things to do.” Robby’s parents are both educators; his mother, Audrey, is a third-grade teacher in a city elementary school, while his father, Art, is an adjunct writing instructor who teaches at two area colleges. In the following discussion, although Robby saw the potential value of what could be learned from books, he questioned the validity of some of the information they provided, even though he was somewhat unsure of the “facts” himself:

Robby: I was thinking that mostly the dinosaurs don't really have that much, um, information... there's so much dinosaurs that there's more than we even discovered yet.

Interviewer: Oh, really?

Robby: Yeah.

Interviewer: So there's stuff to learn about it still...

Robby: Yeah.

Interviewer: It's not all known?

Robby: Yeah, it's not all known. It's kind of like some dinosaurs they don't even really know about yet.

Me: Wow.

Robby: And some books are even wrong about the T-Rex being the biggest meat eater. Actually, the Gigantasaurus, well, not that Gigantasaurus because that's a plant eater... uhhh... like, I can't think, I don't know.

Art: Pallasaurus?

Robby: No, that's not really the biggest. It's Gigano- something.

Me: Okay.

Robby: Mostly all old books say that the T-Rex is the biggest meat eater and that's wrong.

Me: So maybe they found out new information? Since they wrote the book?

Robby: Yes, they have the wrong information, they might not have found the other ones yet when they wrote it. They just thought that at the time.

Art (to Robby): That's cool that you know that. That you know when something isn't right.

[Robby looks pleased.] (09/28/08)

Robby was thinking critically about the ideas presented, which Lareau would say comes from a place of middle-class privilege where children are socialized to ask such questions through critical, yet well-mannered, engagement with those in authority. Through this discussion around reading, Robby's parents were socializing him into middle-class culture and privilege through the process of enculturation, defined as "a partly conscious and partly unconscious learning experience with the older generation invites, induces, and compels the younger generation to adopt traditional ways of thinking and behaving" (Harris 7). By acknowledging, encouraging, and rewarding Robby for challenging information he has read in a book, his parents were teaching him skills that would help him operate in a middle-class world, and Robby's "pleased look" indicated his willingness to embrace the opportunity.

Tracey, age 13, revealed through our discussions several complications around understanding academic literacy as connected to notions of class to cultural capital and social reproduction. As explained in Chapter 5, her father, Dave, is a janitor with a part-time rug cleaning business. Tracey's mother and Dave's wife, Doreen, adds to the family income by cleaning her cousin's home. Although Tracey's immediate family is working class, her extended family (aunts, uncles, and

cousins) is middle-class. Dave said that, unlike himself, each of his three siblings have a college degree, with one brother traveling the world as an international business executive and, in fact, this brother had recently given a lecture at the college where Dave is a janitor. Dave said his siblings remained close, speaking regularly and seeing each other several times a year. The middle-class influence that came from Tracey's extended family made it difficult for me to pigeonhole her into a working class category, an identity that was further complicated by her association with middle-class peers at a middle-class school. She appeared to toggle easily between working-class and middle-class worlds at points during every day of her life, as she moved from one social context to another. Tracey expressed a number of times a perspective linking academic literacy with class mobility and middle-class opportunity. Her perspective on possibilities for transcending working class life to attain middle-class status through academic literacy skills, and the hard work it would require if reading skills were weak, was revealed through Tracey's definition of "success":

Interviewer: How do you feel about reading skills? Do you have thoughts about reading skills and what they might mean for someone's future?

Tracey: I think there could be a connection between reading and success. People who are successful, they're either extremely hard workers or extremely lucky if they don't read.

Interviewer: What do you think is success in life?

Tracey: Like, if you want to be a teacher, as a child, and then it's your dream, and if you reach your dream to become a teacher, then I would say that's successful. To me, that's success. Doing what you want and reaching your dreams. But if you aren't good at reading, then you'd have to work extra hard to get your dream. That's what I mean.

Dave (to Tracey): You can do it if you work hard because you're a really good reader. (to Interviewer): She is very smart. It's amazing how she loves to read. I haven't read a book, maybe one, but this one is always reading. (to Tracey): You can have more than your mother and I have. Do more things. I know you will. (to Interviewer): She will. More than her mother and me. (06/07/09)

Although Dave is working-class economically, he was enculturating Tracey into middle-class life.

She was learning from her father that, if individuals lack academic literacy skills, they will need to

work harder than those who are good readers in order to achieve their goals in life. However, this ideal had not borne out in the context of her immediate family. Her father works extremely hard in life juggling his full-time job as a janitor with a part-time rug cleaning business, yet he said he is not living his dream and indicated he wants "more" for his daughter. He barely makes ends meet and said he was disappointed with his limited choices when it came to work opportunities and earning potentials, which he attributed to his lack of academic literacy skills. However, despite the immediate experiences of her own working class family, Tracey held fast to the powerful ideology around the American dream that promised upward class mobility and unlimited potential to those who worked hard, while believing that academic literacy skills would help anyone's dream become a reality.

The middle-class children I interviewed were aware of their schools' views on academic literacy. This awareness affected their perspectives on schooling and on their current and future potential for participating in middle-class life. They sometimes experienced tensions between their own perspectives and their school's perspectives on reading. Of the six children I interviewed, four of them (Morgan, age 9; Jack, age 11; Robby, age 8, and Stefan, age 7) were identified as having "learning problems" in school associated with reading. With their children listening during the family interviews, some parents named the "learning problem" as a "learning disability" that was identified by testing conducted in schools (in the cases of Morgan, Jack, and Robby). Stefan's mother, Keisha, mentioned he was in a low reading group when Stefan was out of the room, but she made no mention of a learning disability. Although my sample was small, I was surprised that the majority of my child informants were labeled in this way, especially when I discovered how passionate each of them was about reading and books, how articulate they were, and how sophisticated their vocabulary was when it came to expressing ideas about literacy and general topics. These children acknowledged their struggles with reading at school, while emphasizing their

love of books and their breadth of reading experiences outside the classroom. Their stories revealed a disconnection between their love of books and their passion for reading, while pointing to limitations they said suppressed those inclinations and desires at school. One example is eleven-year-old, fifth grader, Jack, a slender redhead with big brown eyes and an endearing toothy smile. Jack had attended an elementary school in the city, but due to his parents' dissatisfaction with a lack of support for what his mother said were severe learning disabilities in reading and math, the family moved to a neighboring suburb. Jack began attending this new school just a few weeks before our interview.

After his mother talked with me one-on-one about Jack's struggles with learning disabilities, I expected to hear from him expressions of resistance and negativity around reading and books, but the experience was quite the opposite:

Jack: Books my dad shows me are fantastic. I'll read those books all day long. The ones at school, they're not so good sometimes.

Interviewer: What kinds of books at school?

Jack: I'm thinking about textbooks. Sometimes they're way too short, the parts we read. They're only around 5 or 15 pages long. I like long books.

Interviewer: So do you think thicker books are better than thinner books?

Jack: Yeah because if I find a thicker book, if it sounds amusing, then heck, I'll pick it up and start flipping through it and start getting into it and I'll like it.

Interviewer: But a short book?

Jack: A short book is kind of reading the first few pages and then it's over. (9/21/08)

Jack showed how academic literacy as represented by schools presented difficulties for him, in contrast to his literacy experiences at the bookstore or library, where he indicated that he could make his own choices around reading. His struggles with books at school were apparent when he talked about feeling fatigued when he was asked to read textbooks, and when he described his dutiful efforts to plod through the readings. He characterized textbooks as being "way too short,"

which appeared to reflect their fragmented quality (i.e., consisting of discrete chapters) and lack of an overall narrative story. Jack appeared confident and enthusiastic about his ability to take on a longer book, while he had doubted his ability to engage with shorter academic texts. The books assigned in school were not books Jack would choose to read on his own, which may have contributed to what the school defined as poor reading performance. For Jack and other children in this study, the best reading experiences involved pleasure that came from the freedom to make choices around which books to read. One of the pleasures Jack said he associated with Owl Books was that he was able to browse the bookshelves and choose what he wanted to read. Jack's disposition brightened when I asked him to talk about the kinds of books he chose to read outside of school. Unlike his statements around the difficulties of reading in school, Jack said that he found reading to be "easy" outside of school, where he had the power to make reading selections. This excitement was evident when Jack said he was "crazy about" fantasy books, and when he indicated that he enjoyed non-fiction books about history that seem fantastic. His passion was evident here:

Interviewer: What do you think about books?

Jack: Um, I just like what authors write, like fantasy and stuff. I'm really into fantasy.

Interviewer: Oh, so what are your favorite books?

Jack: Well, one that I just finished up is called *The Holiday House*, that's just a great book.

Interviewer: What makes a great book?

Jack: It's a fantasy, and I love fantasies.

Interviewer: What does it make you feel like when you read?

Jack [very passionate]: I just start reading fantasy books and, like, I start thinking, this is incredible, there is magical stuff happening, they're sending this guy up to this place on a mission to rescue this person from a mythical lion or something. I also think Greek mythology is astounding as well. I don't like non-fiction. 'Cuz I don't really care about history and all that... But I have learned some really amazing things from history that sound like they're fantasy.

Interviewer: Like what?

Jack: Like the Nazi's war. Like we learned about in school. That was so crazy it seemed like a fantasy. But it was real. (11/09/08)

Although Jack viewed in-school reading and out-of-school reading as separate and divergent experiences (e.g., school=hard/tiresome; out-of-school=easy/inspiring), he used a sophisticated intertextual approach when discussing fantasy books, seeing possible links between those books and non-fiction books, as well as to history lessons in school. In this way, the two experiences were not so divergent as they might appear, which suggests possibilities for more effective approaches to reading education in schools, particularly when it comes to students identified as learning disabled. This is explored more fully in Chapter 7 (Conclusion).

As noted in the Chapter 5, mothers and fathers in this study whose children have learning disabilities encouraged their children's reading behaviors by taking them to Owl Books, where they could help children expand their reading experiences. In this way, parents attempted to bridge gaps in academic literacy that were not being satisfied, or that were perhaps being created by, schools. While I am praising Owl Books for providing literacy experiences that extend children's experiences at school, I resist this simplistic analysis, since the ability to browse the bookshelves at Owl Books is not equally accessible and available to all children across social and economic boundaries. In many ways, a trip to the bookstore is a middle-class privilege, since working class and low-income families have neither the disposable income to purchase books, nor the means to get to the store via public transportation. Although parental involvement is important when it comes to encouraging children's reading abilities, Owl Books, and the experiences of book consumption that take place there during a family outing, is not the panacea to problems with reading education in schools.

I found that from a young age, children in this study were affected by their experiences around academic literacy in school, particularly around the formation of reading groups. Although children told me that reading levels were not always made explicit to them, they indicated it was not

hard to “figure it out.” Such was the case with thirteen-year-old Tracey, an avid reader. Although Tracey comes from a working-class family, her extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins) is middle-class, she attends a middle-class suburban school, and she appeared to easily negotiate these two worlds. Tracey told me that last year she surmised from her observation of reading group assignments that she was placed in the advanced group. Her teacher did not tell her this directly, but she said she “figured it out” when she saw the other students in the group. Tracey immediately thought her teacher had made a mistake, and to this day, she said she still felt the same way, as reflected here:

Tracey: I knew I didn’t belong in that reading group. It was all the best readers.

Interviewer: But you said you like to read and that you read all the time.

Tracy: It’s not the same as being in the high reading group. I got put in there by mistake.
(06/02/09)

A disconnect exists between Tracey’s passionate engagement with books and reading, and her perception that she would not qualify as a strong reader from her school’s perspective. She said she was unworthy to be in the highest reading group, even though she said she “never goes anywhere without a book.” To her, this placement was a “mistake.” How is it possible she would feel this way? In one respect, I wonder why neither Tracey, nor her parents, asked her teacher for confirmation that she was, indeed, in the correct reading group. It made me think that she was misrecognizing her abilities. From Lareau’s perspective, their working class orientation would prevent them from asserting themselves, or questioning the school system, in this way. From a critical perspective, I ascribe Tracey’s confusion to the mixed messages schools convey about academic literacy. Perhaps her experience illustrates the need to interrogate the methods for measuring reading aptitudes, as well as the existence of hierarchical reading groups. Children I spoke with said they knew they were assigned to reading groups reflecting their teachers' assessment

of their abilities, usually through the form of tests. Children told me that while it may be a stigma to be in the lowest reading group (i.e., being labeled a “dummy” or a “retard”), there was also some social risk involved in being in the highest reading group (i.e., being labeled a “geek” or a “brainiac”). The middle group appeared to carry no label. Tracey was aware of the types of stigma associated with reading groups, while also being keenly aware of what it takes to be successful. The point here is not to explore the effects of reading groups on children's self esteem; rather, the intent is to understand how children's and parents' perspectives on how schools frame ideas about books, reading, and status, and how these ideas become part of children's habitus in ways that reproduce middle-class culture.

Several children I talked with compared and contrasted in-school reading with out-of-school reading. Tracey was eager to talk with me about reading and books. Her excitement for reading and books was expressed here:

Tracey: I don't go anywhere without a book. I always have to have a book. I'll, like, find a book that I've never read and I will take it with me everyplace I go.

Interviewer: Can you tell me, what do you think about reading?

Tracey: On my own, it's kind of like a hobby. At school it's more what they like you to read. (06/07/09)

Tracey's use of the term “hobby” reflected the pleasure she got from reading books she chose to read on her own. Hobbies are typically self-selected experiences that one enjoys doing for enjoyment and relaxation, as opposed to requisite structured or institutionalized experiences, such as those that take place at school. The pleasure Tracey derived from reading books on her own was different from academic literacy as she suggested was framed by her school, and as she indicated she experienced first-hand in her classes. She differentiated between these reading experiences, with the “pleasure” piece.

The only excitement Tracy expressed about academic literacy lessons in school related to the

“fun” of finding school vocabulary words in books she read outside the classroom:

Tracey: It’s kinda fun because there are new words in there that you don’t even know. Like one of our vocab words was lackadaisical. I did not even know that word existed.

Interviewer: But you might read it in a book someday, right?

Tracey: I found some of our vocab words in books, like I found one yesterday.

Interviewer: You did? What word?

Tracey: "Eloquent."

Interviewer: That’s a good word. It sounds like you like the idea of having good vocabulary words to draw from.

Tracey: Yeah, when I’m reading a book, I might see a word and think, “Oh, that’s one of our vocab words,” or “Oh, that was one of my vocab words.” That’s pretty sweet when that happens. (06/07/09)

Learning new vocabulary words at school facilitated Tracey’s reading “hobby” outside of school, and this is when she experienced and acknowledged the practical value of academic literacy. After she revealed her enthusiasm around vocabulary words, she expressed some frustration around the reading culture at school. She was outraged that teachers sometimes discouraged reading at school, a restriction she and her Book Club friend, Kelsey, did not understand; however, they did not, or perhaps could not, resist or question the teacher’s directive:

Interviewer: Tracey, how often do you read?

Tracey: Every day. I try to read whenever I can. If we have a test and I finish it early, I will take out my book and read it. The other day, my friend Kelsey finished her test early, and she took out a book, and the teacher came over and said, “People who are **READING** during the test will get a zero.” Kelsey had a look on her face like, “I want to kill you for not letting me read.”

Interviewer: Really?

Tracey: Seriously! The teacher didn’t want her to read! In school! Like it’s bad thing. (06/07/09)

Tracey came to understand academic literacy as a skill that was highly regarded, yet also tightly regulated, in schools. While she understood that schools valued reading, she saw a contradiction in the control teachers exerted over students' academic literacy experiences. From Tracey's perspective, her school's expectations around reading achievements conflicted with its control over reading opportunities. It made no sense to her that reading a book in school would lead to a punishment (i.e., a zero on a test). When Tracey saw academic literacy through this lens, reading became something to be hidden or avoided altogether while at school, unless under the prescriptive direction of teachers. Based on school experiences as the one described above, she did not give up on reading. For students, like Tracey, who love reading and cherished books, academic literacy requires on-going negotiation because of their perception of the educational system's contradictory messages, which they read loud and clear.

Tracey's questioning the meaning of "popular" showed her desire and ability to question the social norms of middle school. She envisioned herself as outside the popular group, but did not think of herself as "unpopular." On the contrary, she seemed confident in knowing and expressing who she was. She expressed how she made meaning around notions of "popular" and "cool" by dismissing them as not "really" existing, viewing them as social constructions, not as inherent qualities. Tracey said a tension existed between her group of friends and the "popular" children, as illustrated in the following conversation:

Tracey: There was this day when my friend Cat, she reads a whole lot, we were walking down the hallway and it was really crowded, and this girl, she walked right into Cat and didn't even try to miss her. I saw Cat's face and she was like [shocked expression]. And this girl who ran into her, she was all, like, popular and preppie and jock. I'm like, ugh. And that was, like, my best friend she was running into.

Interviewer: Is Cat in your book club?

Tracey: Yes, not all the time, but sometimes when she can do it, she is. (06/02/09)

Tracey deconstructed the notion of "popularity" and how it worked, which gave her social power

over the situation by helping her to transcend hostility directed at her friend and at herself through their association with the book club. Although Tracey had cultural capital within the book club, there was a sense that she stood to lose cultural capital among other peers at school. I argue that her working-class background gave her a perspective that identified, as well as interrogated, such ideas around status. She negotiated her life between a working-class family context at home and a middle-class context at school. She understood power in ways her middle-class peers may not. For her, power was not taken for granted as a “given.” She was not born into a family with middle-class economic privilege. The book club was a context where she earned social power among the members, and she was willing to take the social risk that could mean that her membership caused her to lose social power in the greater context of school. She started the club and was a key participant. Although she did not intentionally hide the club's existence from her “popular” peers, at the same time, she seemed relieved that the club was not visible within the school context, except to its members.

The social power behind the formation of this club was a complicated one. Overall I found Tracey’s habits and views to be largely middle-class, except for her inability to see herself as a high reader. At the same time, her working class background might make her uncomfortable about belonging to a club with middle-class peers who she said can more easily afford to purchase books. However, at the same time, her engagement as a leader of the group put her on equal footing with the other members socially within the context of the club, and also outside the group, since friendships extended beyond it. However, as noted earlier, she risked being an outcast among other children at school if they found out she belonged to the book club. Although this may have been true regardless of social class, I wondered if for Tracey, the risk seemed greater due to her working class ties. Then again, she may have been well-equipped to deal with the risk of ostracization because she could have encountered similar situations in the past, due to having a less privileged

background than her peers in school. Within the group, Tracey's currency came from her expertise around books-- discovering them, reading them, and being able to speak confidently about them to the other members. She showed confidence around her agency here:

Interviewer: What happens between you and your friends when it comes to books?

Tracey: I have a bunch of friends, some are big readers and we talk about reading a lot and we share ideas about books and stuff. Our talking is about that. Ashley and I are in the book club and sometimes we argue about books. Like she'll say, *Twilight* is icky, and I'll say *Twilight* is cool. Things like that.

Interviewer: How does that feel?

Tracey: Okay. It's okay if we have different ideas. As long as nobody gets too bossy about it. We have strong opinions about books. We just like them, that's all. (06/02/09)

Tracey's connection to Ashley and others in the book club extended beyond a common taste in books, to a common feeling about books. She had positive feelings about the relationship she had with other girls in the book club and the currency she had within the club, as reflected by her willingness to express an oppositional position to Ashley. It appeared that the relationship between Tracey and Ashley was emotionally charged when it came to book discussions, but they seemed to view those encounters as intellectual exchanges rather than personal attacks, and as a result, they have remained close friends for several years. I found through my conversation with Tracey that the two have stuck together and supported each other, in private and in public, and the same went for other book club members, although to a lesser degree. For instance, any shortcoming Tracey might have experienced due to a lack of money for books was minimized through the book club's collaborative approach to book purchases, as shown when they worked together to buy books they wanted individually:

Interviewer: How do you usually pay for things you buy at Owl Books?

Tracey: Sometimes me and my friends, we share money so we can buy things. Last time we went there, me and my friends, we all pooled our money and gift cards, like Ashley, we got all the stuff that we wanted.

Interviewer: Well, who would own the stuff that you bought? Would you share it?

Tracey: Like, Ashley got *Ink Heart* so that was her book. Bridget got a book I can't remember. I bought a different book. We all got something we wanted, so that was really good. (06/02/09)

Though they purchased these books from a collective pool of money, Tracey indicated they have ownership over their individual selections. The relationship between book club members appeared to gain strength because of the camaraderie they expressed around book consumption. From Tracey's perspective, this approach seemed to equalize opportunities for buying books, which might otherwise have become a marker of the absence of disposable income associated with a working-class background. It also created a stronger group identity, since individual members in the group came together for a common cause—to support each other in purchasing books they wanted to own. Though they may have disagreed on which books were “good,” they did agree that books were important to own, enjoy, and talk about.

Like Tracey, fifth-grade Jack talked openly and passionately about books in relation to his friends. He shifted the conversation from books to movies to television shows, acknowledging that books are often made into movies, movies into books, television shows into books, and books into television shows. I found this interesting, since a number of book selections at Owl Books were crossovers from popular films and tv shows, which to parents and workers suggested “lowbrow” or “commercialized” books. Below, Jack talked about the “status” of movies, a term he used to refer to the quality of the movie, which he suggested reflected how popular it was:

Interviewer: Do you share your “good book” ideas with your friends? Do you talk about good books?

Jack: Sometimes. We talk about movie status more. Like we say something like, “Hey, did you hear about *Madagascar 2*? I hear it's getting pretty good ratings.”

Interviewer: What do you mean by status?

Jack: How good it is. If kids go to see it and they like it a lot.

Interviewer: Do you remember talking about the status of books with your friends?

Jack: Yeah, like *Pokemon*, I just hated that book. I mean I just saw one episode of it, and I thought, "Oh my God, this is so stupid." It's like, every single kid in my whole entire class just LOVES Pokemon, except me. But I think just BLAHHHHHHCCCCCH!!!!

Interviewer: How did that feel?

Jack: It made me feel uneasy. I just thought, I hate *Pokemon* so much. Whenever it came on, I would just turn it off. I just hate it. My best friend, he still thinks it's Heaven. He's 11.

Interviewer: What do you say when he brings it up?

Jack: He gets all excited about Pokemon, and I'm like, "ooooohhhhhhhhh!!!!!!!" I say, oh, man, let's do a math problem instead.

Interviewer: Do kids read Pokemon at school?

Jack: They are not supposed to, but they do it on the bus or sometimes they trade [Pokemon] stickers at lunch. I am happy they are banned.

Interviewer: What about other books at school?

Jack: We mostly read what the teachers tell us to read. It isn't my favorite to do that, but that's how it goes. (11/09/08)

Jack perceived that schools did not allow certain books at school and preferred students to read what they prescribed, which echoed Tracey's frustration around her perception of the school's regulation of reading practices, as explored earlier in this chapter. Jack expressed a strong, critical opinion about *Pokemon* books and its spin-off television show, despite his perception that everyone else in his class at school is a fan. His identity came from the attitudes and perceptions he has about books, and about the relationship between his ideas and the ideas of his peers. Children talked about books at school, even when the books they discussed were not part of the academic curriculum. In this way, books became part of various social worlds that children created for themselves. Children negotiated their perspectives around books in relation to their perceptions around ideas of their peers, and they formed identities in terms of their taste in particular books and other products (such as movies and tv shows) related to those books. What is considered

“lowbrow” for adults is sometimes considered “highbrow” in these children’s worlds.

Conversations with friends sometimes centered on discussions about books, with a similar opinion about what makes a "good book" serving as a point of solidarity, while differing opinions presented points of conflict. As suggested with Tracey and her book club, children who love books take some social risk. Among some peers, book knowledge was valued and appreciated, while other peers from more "popular" groups mocked such activities as book clubs, according to Tracey. Influences from peers affected children's views of academic literacy. Children appreciated books for the practical knowledge they provided, and for providing them with the pleasure of escaping into a fantasy world through reading. They understood that academic literacy was a ticket to their future success, but they were not so willing to relinquish their own desire to read books of their own choosing. Their "taste" in books was a reflection of their identity. To give up an identity around books was to give up a sense of themselves, which signified the kinds of struggle inherent between reading at school and reading outside of school. However, no matter the outcome in terms of book choices, children in this study learned and practiced skills of negotiation and compromise that would help them succeed in a middle-class world.

Consumer Literacy

There are abundant opportunities to buy things at Owl Books. Along with its book inventory, at least half of the products in the children’s section were not books; that is, the department included such merchandise as toys, puzzles, games, book bags, pencil cases, art supplies, and calendars. Some books were hybrids between books and toys, such as the book about trucks that came with five Matchbox trucks, the book about a princess that came with a small make-up kit, and the book about juggling that came with juggling balls. Many products were spin-offs and included logos from popular television shows and movies, which children suggested they easily

recognized and remembered as offering pleasurable experiences. Middle-class children sometimes had their own spending money they saved from allowances, earned from doing odd jobs, or received in the form of gift cards. When they were not spending their own money, they needed to negotiate their wishes for purchases with their parents, who held the purse strings. All of these experiences made Owl Books a site where middle-class children learned to become good consumers, which involved a set of knowledges and social skills I am calling "consumer literacy."

Children learned to negotiate deals with their parents around book buying at the bookstore. This was often complicated, since parents set limits on their buying and often had different ideas about what constituted a wise purchase. While sometimes the parents "won" these debates, I observed several savvy children who were able to get exactly what they wanted because they used effective tactics on their parents. One of these children was 12-year-old Carly:

Interviewer: Do you usually get to buy anything?

Carly: Yeah, my mom usually buys me stuff because most of the books I like they're usually paperback and they're, like \$5.95 and \$6.95. They're not that expensive. If I want to get a hardcover book, I usually just look for a soft cover book. I look for it in paperback because it's less expensive.

Interviewer: Does your mom automatically buy everything you want?

Carly: NO! (emphatic). No! Well, like, if I want to get something that she thinks is really stupid or that I won't read, then she doesn't want me to read, she won't buy it for me, then she'll help me look for something I might read and I might like better. She probably wouldn't want me to get one of those boy band-y books, or one of those books based on a movie. I don't mean a book where a movie was made from the book, I mean a book made from a movie, she wouldn't like that.

Interviewer: Do you know why?

Carly: Because she'd probably want me to buy something more challenging that would help my vocabulary skills, and help me be a better reader, instead of a book that I've already seen in the theaters and I know the ending and stuff, and I won't be surprised. Like, she likes me to read Nancy Drew books because it helps me think about what's going to happen.
(11/14/01)

As seen with Carly, children learned to become literate consumers by reading and responding to signals from parents. Although Carly did not say she had free rein to purchase anything she wanted, she identified her mother's standards and found ways to work with them in a mutually satisfying way. For example, Carly was willing to buy soft cover, rather than hard cover, books, even though she would prefer to own books in hard cover. Carly also recognized the distinction her mother made between high-brow and low-brow selections, noting the difference between a book made from a film (as lower quality) and a film made from a book (as higher quality). She suggested she needed to convince her mother that more popular books were worthwhile. These negotiations around books taught Carly to be a good negotiator and a good consumer, which are skills I am calling “consumer literacy.”

I found that, like Carly, other children in this study learned about the relationship between power, money, and status through negotiations with their parents, who set limits on their expenditures and who sometimes had different ideas from children about what constituted a wise and worthwhile purchase. Part of the process for becoming a good consumer was learning about the best places to purchase particular items, or to get around purchasing them at all. Seven-year-old Stefan showed he already had insight into the kinds of books available at another big-box bookseller, Sparrow Books, and at the public library. I asked him to share his perspective here:

Interviewer: I'd love to talk to you to see how you feel about places where you can find books. What do you think about Owl Books? or Sparrow Books?

Stefan: I like Sparrow Books better.

Interviewer: How come?

Stefan: Because they have coloring books. They don't have that at Owl Books. And they have sticker books, too.

Interviewer: Is that a place you like to go to? The bookstore?

Stefan: (nods)

Interviewer: What do you like about it?

Stefan: Just because there are a lot of books you can buy if you want to, but I mostly like the library.

Interviewer: How do you feel about the library?

Stefan: I like it better because you can take it out and read it at home. But I mostly like new books better because they're mine if I buy them. You can get those at the bookstore but sometimes not at the library. They only have used books. But you can borrow them and see if you like them and then take them back. (10/5/08)

Stefan's assessment of the availability of coloring books only at Sparrow Books showed he had an opinion about the quality of the inventory at both stores. He learned differences about the stores and knew how to be a comparison shopper. This knowledge helped him participate in middle-class culture, where consumption is a practical matter, but it is also a social matter, where one's identity is connected to where one shops and what one buys. Stefan also pointed out the difference between the bookstore and the library, showing his fluency for comparing and evaluating both sites. He enjoyed the library because he could borrow books and try them out, even though he preferred buying new books because he could own them. His desire to “try them out” before buying them showed he was developing discriminating taste, even at the early age of 7. The ownership of books was something Stefan valued, but he would not enter into the purchasing process lightly.

The idea that Stefan could easily imagine having the means to purchase the books reflected a middle-class assumption. He elaborated on this idea in the following conversation, before his mother, Keisha, corrected him:

Interviewer: What do you think about Owl Books?

Stefan: I like it because there's mostly books, so it's kinda like a library, only you can keep the books that you actually buy. I bought these books of Spiderman and you can hear information because there's a speaker on it.

Keisha (mother): It was a discount book.

[addressing Stefan]: We only buy discount books, honey, unless it's for a gift. Otherwise we take books out of the library. (10/5/08)

The conversation revealed Keisha's powerful presence and influence over Stefan's perspectives on book consumption. Although I had directed my question to Stefan, his mother wanted to clarify for me, and to him, that they only purchase "discount" books. I wondered if she was clarifying this point because the book Stefan mentioned was "lowbrow," as it was about a comic book hero and had the element of a toy (the built-in speaker). She was teaching something to Stefan, and to me, through this discourse. Further, it seemed as though she was presenting to Stefan, and to me, a particular perspective that showed her family was fiscally conservative and supportive of libraries, which carried greater cultural capital than a big-box bookstore. Keisha was teaching Stefan consumer literacy skills by socializing him around values associated with buying and borrowing. Her inclusiveness of Stefan through the use of "we" is her way of establishing authority over, and influencing, his point-of-view. Stefan's perspective on spending money, as expressed in the following discussion, showed he has internalized his mother's values when it came to "borrowing" rather than "buying":

Interviewer: Have you spent your own money at Owl Books?

Stefan: I already have \$7.10.

Interviewer: Really? That's pretty good. Tell me what you like to do at the bookstore.

Stefan: I like to go into the kids' department. My favorite part is the toys magazine. It's a little bit right on the side of the store. There's benches that you can read them on. I can read the magazines and then I won't spend my money.

Interviewer: What do you think you will do with your money?

Stefan: I would probably save it for something.

Interviewer: Like what?

Stefan: A computer.

[Keisha smiles.] (10/5/08)

Stefan showed he had learned to delay gratification by saving his money today in order to make a larger purchase in the future. He showed that while he was learning values around the benefits of reading, he was also learning about values around consumption. He saw money as something that could be saved, which indicated he had a conception of, and access to, disposable income (e.g., knowing he has the possibility of saving money for a computer). These middle-class understandings around finances are further reflected when Stefan indicates he can use strategies at Owl Books that will help him save money. When he read a magazine in the store, or borrowed a book from the library, he showed he has learned to think of, and utilize, a retail or public space to experience pleasure from reading, without spending money. This raised some interesting questions for me, such as, why would a middle-class family prefer discount books (which are not typically the more “highbrow” titles)? Why would they not just buy the cheaper books at Kmart? Is there something more prestigious about Owl Books? It appeared that being consumer conscious was a stronger middle-class value than being budget conscious. In other words, *where* and *how* someone buys is sometimes more important than *what* someone buys, according to middle-class standards.

Other families I talked with read and enjoy children’s books at the bookstore, without necessarily purchasing them, and they indicated no discomfort in doing so. This could show that the store makes them feel welcome. For families I met and observed, Owl Books was an enjoyable place to be. One example was Dennis and his five-year-old son, Ethan, whom I met in the children’s department of Owl Books. Dennis, an accountant, told me they take outings to Owl Books because they can read books together while they sit in the children’s area. Although in some sense they used the bookstore as a library, saying they were comfortable sitting and looking at books for an hour or two at a time, Dennis said he ultimately purchased a book for Ethan during a typical visit because he saw books as worthwhile purchases. However, aside from Dennis teaching his son that reading is a valuable and pleasurable experience, he was teaching Ethan something about

consumption, as noted here:

From field notes: The father reads with great enthusiasm to Ethan, who sits on his lap in one of the children's Adirondack chairs. Ethan has a blonde brush cut and wears casual clothes—a blue t-shirt, shorts, and well-worn sneakers. The dad appears to be in his mid to late 30s and also wears casual attire—a baseball cap, shorts, yellow t-shirt, and sneakers. The boy stands up, holding the book his father just finished reading to him, then heads toward one of the shelves. This is their conversation:

Dennis: Make sure you put it back in the same spot. I can't help you. My butt is stuck in this chair. [laughs]

Ethan: Okay, Daddy, I'll put the library book back.

Dennis: This isn't a library, honey, it's a bookstore. Now pick out a good book. One that doesn't cost a fortune.

Ethan heads to the rotating book rack next to the stage which houses the children's book department's most inexpensive (\$3.25 to \$3.75) soft cover books. He starts spinning it around so he can make his selection. (9/8/05)

This example shows that Ethan was learning from his father to be a good consumer who was aware of the cost of merchandise and could work within a budget. At five years old, he already knew how to identify and locate less expensive books in the store, which showed he had learned something about the value of money. Practicing these skills will benefit Ethan now and in the future in terms of his participation in middle-class culture, where he will have disposable income to manage and will very possibly have a professional job where the knowledge of budgeting is valued at home and at work. It also showed that Ethan is learning to control money, rather than having money control him.

In *Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*, Thorstein Veblen (1899) argues that people across classes seek and signal status through “conspicuous consumption” and “conspicuous leisure.” Simply being seen in the presence of books in a bookstore may elevate one's status as a “literate” person, yet as suggested earlier, it may bring with it social risks with some peers. Because children learn from their parents and schools that books are valuable and literate people are socially rewarded, they may also learn that book purchases signal a “good consumer”; however, it is

far more complicated than that. When deciding on which book to buy (i.e., acting as a “good consumer”), I found that children in this study had to negotiate their own tastes, balancing them with competing perspectives of parents, peers, and teachers. To spend “wisely” is to take many perspectives into account. If one is a “good consumer,” the outcome is one that pleases oneself, not only by virtue of the pleasure associated with reading a “good book,” but also from the social rewards that come from others regarding the ownership of particular books, and from spending money wisely. From this perspective, selecting (or owning) a book is akin to selecting (or identifying) a self. It does not happen in isolation, but rather it happens within social groups.

Jack, age 11, approached book consumption at Owl Books in a manner that reflected the development of his consumer literacy skills in relation to the self. He showed how his decisions about consumption were based on his perspective of the store, the development of his opinion about the book, and his knowledge of how money works-- that is, how one gets it, and how one spends it, while participating in consumer culture:

Interviewer: Well, what do you think of Owl Books?

Jack: Owl Books I like.

Interviewer: What do you like about it?

Jack: It has a ton of great books, great comic books, it's mainly where I find most of my favorite books.

Interviewer: Do you usually buy a book when you're there?

Jack: Yeah, sometimes, if I get the opportunity I will.

Interviewer: What would the opportunity be?

Jack: Usually I'll just go and look at the fantasy section [at Owl Books] and I'll see one and I'll kind of read the back, and I'll just be, like, "Oh, this sounds good, I think I'll start reading it." I might read some parts of the book to see if it flows. I usually go by the name of the book and the little part that explains the book. I look at the cover, too, and the title. Like, if something looks appealing, or sounds appealing to me, I'll say, "Hmmm, this looks nice." So that's usually how I buy it.

Interviewer: That's quite a process. Do you spend your own money?

Jack: Well, sometimes. That's usually how I use my dog sitting money. On buying books. I was sitting this one Chihuahua for a while, but we got our own dog, so I can't do it anymore. Now I'm a little short on cash for the time being. I have to ask my parents to buy something if I want it.

Interviewer: How does that work?

Jack: If I really want something, if I can explain to them why it's a good book, and if it isn't too expensive, then they'll usually get it for me. (11/9/08)

Jack understood some economics of book buying, which were complicated by the fact that he did not always have his own money to spend. This meant he needed to rely on his parents' discretion when it came to book purchases. This is a middle-class phenomenon, since working-class parents may not have the disposable income to pass along to children who want to buy books, even if they would like to do so. Jack showed he engaged in a thoughtful process around his selections by examining each book closely before deciding if it was one he wanted to purchase for himself, or one he could convince his parents was worthwhile so they would buy it for him. He said his process for making judgments included looking at the cover, reading reviews and summaries on the cover, thinking about the title, and reading excerpts from the book. These were deliberate steps in making a discriminating decision around consumption. Furthermore, as noted in the Chapter 4, Jack expressed strong opinions about the Owl Books staff, asserting they were "stupid" and not qualified to provide the advice he, the customer, deserved. This sense of entitlement connected to consumer literacy was sanctioned by middle-class culture, where from Lareau's perspective, children have been taught and encouraged to have and express ideas, including ideas oppositional to an adult. However, they must learn to express their perspectives in ways that middle-class culture find acceptable. Jack indicated he was developing a taste around books and knowledge around book buying. He indicated he had learned to convince his parents to pay for books he likes. This involved a kind of social maneuvering that would benefit him in encounters with other adults and his peers, by giving him knowledge about how to acquire social power. This knowledge will help

him to succeed in a middle-class context, in his present and future educational pursuits, as well as in his future professional life that will secure for him a middle-class future.

Another informant who expressed ideas around her consumer literacy skills was Tracey, age 13, who was introduced earlier as a girl from a working-class nuclear family, but whose identity was informed by an extended middle-class family and a middle-class school environment. She typically spent her own money when she bought a book, but her desire to buy certain titles was curtailed by her budget, which was the money she earned. While she spoke respectfully of her father and mother, the middle-class influences she experienced at school informed the way she thought about herself and her place in the world. Tracey had some knowledge about the system of monetary exchange when it came to negotiating purchases, and this knowledge was a crucial aspect of her decision making process. She had a greater appreciation for money than some middle-class children, since she had learned to live within her family's tight economic situation, and since she was spending her own money. One strategy for getting the books she wanted was using the library:

Interviewer: So when you go to Owl Books, do you usually want to buy a book? Or just look around and scope them out?

Tracey: Sometimes I want to buy them. It depends on how much they cost and how expensive they are.

Interviewer: So are you earning your own money now? How do you get money?

Tracey: I get money from my mother when I help her clean, and I'm getting \$20 for helping clean my uncle's boat tomorrow. My mom owes me ten bucks. When I have \$30, I'm getting a new phone that has a keyboard.

Interviewer: How often do you buy books?

Tracey: Last time I bought a book, I bought *Twilight*. That was around three months ago. In the kids' books, I still like *A Series of Unfortunate Events*.

Interviewer: You like those books?

Tracey: I read the first one and I've got the fifth one.

Interviewer: Is that something you'd be more likely to buy, or to take out of the library?

Tracey: I can't find it in my library at school, so I need to buy it.

Interviewer: What makes you buy a book as opposed to taking it out of the library?

Tracey: There are some I'd like to buy. Like a special book. Or else the library doesn't have it and the person isn't returning it. So I have to buy it.

Interviewer: What makes a book special to you?

Tracey: Like I read the first two pages or chapters and it makes me want to read more. It's like, "I have to read this book!" Then I might want to buy it, if it seems good like that. If it's the kind of book I like. It won an award.

Interviewer: An award?

Tracey: Yes.

Interviewer: What does that mean to you?

Tracey: That it has a good quality and it's probably a good book.

Interviewer: Do you rely on the people who make the awards?

Tracey: Kind of. They read a million books so they're experts on it and they know what they're talking about.

Interviewer: In the first place, what would make you even pick up a book and open it?

Tracey: Like, if the title is interesting. Like, if I see a title that sounds good to me, I say, like, hmmm... that title sounds good. Like there's this book, *Kira-Kira*, I found it at the library and a librarian at school had told me it was too adult for me and I still got it anyway. (06/02/09)

Tracey's experience with the librarian reflected the negotiation skills children need in order to read the books they want to read. Access to "good books" was sometimes controlled by adults at home and at school. Children said these adults wanted them to develop a love of reading, yet discouraged and controlled their reading choices. In Tracey's case, her family lacked disposable income. She was aware that her mother owed her money, which suggested her mother did not have the resources to pay her back. She developed alternative strategies to figure out how to get the books she wanted, including using the library. Tracey's choice, *Kira-Kira* won the 2005 Newbery Medal, the highest honor awarded to children's literature and, ironically, bestowed by the Association of Library Service

to Children (ALSC), yet she had to circumvent the librarian in order to gain access to the book. When discussing books that she bought, it was clear that Tracey made well thought out and carefully considered purchases. This may have come partly from her family's lack of disposable income, but it also came from her abiding respect and love for books. Book buying for Tracey was not a frivolous process. Tracey understood that her taste in books affected her status and identity, as Bourdieu describes here:

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed (1984 [1979], p 6).

Tracey took her interest in reading and books seriously and suggested she made wise and discriminating decisions about books, based on the criteria she established, sometimes with an eye toward the opinions of “experts” (e.g., librarians and award committees). She was learning to negotiate her purchases by taking into account various influences: her emotional reaction to a book, the knowledge she had about perspectives of those in authority (e.g., librarians and award committees), and the feeling she had about what owning a particular book, or books, said about her.

Tracey indicated through our conversation that she sometimes has less social power than her peers because of her working-class ties; however, she regained some power through her knowledge of books. A librarian’s comment about a book being “too adult” did not dissuade her from this purchase, and in fact, may have made it more intriguing, since Tracey mentioned she saw herself in the borderland between children’s books and adult books. Although she still expressed an affinity for children’s books, she said she often browses through parts of the bookstore outside the children’s section. The “adult” themes of some books may give her a feeling of social power that excludes children. It also may reflect her maturity and readiness to take on books with adult themes.

She mentioned the “adult” nature of the young adult book, *Kira-Kira*, and how children should not be protected from what are labeled as “adult themes,” such as death:

Interviewer: How do you feel about what you can learn from a book?

Tracey: A book, it teaches you life lessons, like, in *Kira-Kira*, her sister died, and you gotta deal with death in your life. In regular school we don't really learn about death, maybe in social studies, with wars and stuff, but not on a personal level. (06/02/09)

Tracey mentioned her school librarian kept this book in a secure place, and would not allow children to have access unless they had her approval. Tracey said that children should not be sheltered from these themes; rather these are important topics that need to be explored and discussed, and books provide great opportunities to start the conversation. For someone like Tracey, who does not have the economic capital to purchase books, the library takes on greater import in terms of providing access to books they view as valuable for their intrinsic qualities. However, when librarians act as gatekeepers, it becomes discouraging for Tracey and, I imagine, for other children who share a similar passion for books.

Children in this study learned a literacy of consumption through experiences connected to their family outings at Owl Books. Conversations between parents and children focused on how to spend money by making sound choices about books, which took into account the value of the book. "Value" was defined as the actual cost of the book, as well as the "quality" of the book. Children's book purchases were often negotiated with parents who preferred "literature" (i.e., classic books and/or books that have garnered awards from prestigious institutions, such as the Caldecott or Newbery medals) because they said it was high quality, while they dismissed mass market books (i.e., books with tie-ins to children's movies or tv shows) as lowbrow and discouraged their children from these titles. An exception occurred when parents, who were paying for the book, considered a mass market book to be more affordable than a literature book. That is, sometimes economics drove decisions around book consumption. Another exception was when a child was identified as having

a learning disability, in which case parents seemed more open to allowing him or her to read almost anything, even if it was below the child's reading level. It seemed enough for these parents to know that their child was reading *something*, and that their child was not discouraged from reading at all. Sometimes this was expressed as an empathetic feeling that came from a parent's desire to assist in making reading a pleasurable activity, after observing it had been a problematic, disappointing, and stressful one at school. Parents I observed wanted to turn things around, and sometimes they bought more commercialized books as a way of making reading more exciting and fun. Children appeared to seek and enjoy praise from teachers and parents for "reading well." They liked to own books and were very thoughtful about their book choices. While most children I spoke with preferred to buy books that provided pleasure, they realized their parents and teachers wanted them to buy "reading books," so they negotiated their positions by agreeing to buy books that were educational, without relinquishing their position that a "good book" must also be "fun." These negotiations around books taught children how to be good consumers, which is a skill that will help them to succeed in middle-class culture, which in turn reproduces class distinctions.

Social Literacy

Owl Books is a site where children learn and practices social literacy skills; that is, they learn to read and respond to social cues that lead to socially-acceptable behaviors as defined by middle-class culture. This social process of middle-class enculturation was particularly evident during Wednesday morning's weekly Story Time, which was aimed at pre-schoolers. It was typically middle-class mothers, or female caregivers, who brought their children to Story Time. I characterized them as middle-class because they appeared to have the leisure time to take their children to this event, and they often purchased books or other merchandise, reflecting their access to disposable income. Mother and caregivers sat and chatted among themselves, or did some reading of their own, while Owl Books employee Nina sat on the small stage, reading three or four

picture books to the typically 8 to 12 children gathered around her, lying on the stage floor or sitting in miniature chairs. Nina was a stout white woman in her late 50s, with yellow cotton-candy textured hair and black reading glasses dangling from a beaded chain, who had been leading Story Time for a number of years. She mentioned that many of the children who came to Story Time had older siblings who attended when they were younger. She had a history with Owl Books, and she took pride in her role. Following the book reading, she lead a crafts project, usually involving coloring a handout or constructing a simple object out of paper. Book selections and projects tied into holiday themes when appropriate. Woven into each of these experiences were lessons that taught children to be social beings who would be prepared to behave appropriately according to middle-class standards. While Nina's passion was directed at helping children develop a love of reading, she was also teaching manners when she asked children to be quiet, or to sit cross-legged, and to not disturb or bother other children. Other social instructors were the mothers and caregivers who oversaw their children's actions and commented frequently to their children in ways that corrected their social missteps. The following observation shows how a mother sent her son a message about manners, which he read and responded to:

The dark-haired boy, around age 3, sat on a bench at the side of the stage, near his mother, while his mother thumbed through some magazines, not paying much attention to Nina. The boy's eyes were fixed on Nina, and he slid his way to the center bench, where he was closer to her. By the end of the first book, he had moved up onto the stage and sat in a mini-Adirondack chair right next to Nina. He sat sideways and dangled his feet near Nina. The mom waved her hand to get his attention, and signaled to him to move his feet onto the floor, which he did promptly. (10/9/01)

This boy had learned to understand and obey his mother's hand signals. It appeared that these kinds of messages had been delivered, received, understood, and acted upon before. Owl Books presents an opportunity for middle-class children to develop an appreciation of books, while practicing their social skills and manners in an environment, where they have help and reinforcement from Nina in this regard.

Although Nina indicated to me she had strong opinions about children's social skills, or lack thereof, she did not express them openly to those at Story Time because she cared about the children and because she did not want to offend the parents and caregivers. As a worker, she said she has a role to perform, and she did not view her role as disciplinarian; rather she said she was "trying to set a good example." She shared this perspective on children's social behaviors she observed during Story Time:

Nina: The kids share things with me and I love that. That boy I was telling you about said, "Nina, I stood up to go to the potty today." (laughs) You don't expect to get that from kids except for here when I get to know them. Some kids love the singing part and some like the reading. Some are book kids and others are music kids. One boy puts his hands over his ears whenever we sing. This is the best part of my week, the Story Time. Kids are so funny. They enjoy it so much for the most part. It's a painless way for kids to get out and socialize. Some kids are social, some are anti-social. They're disruptive or run around and don't pay attention or something.

Interviewer: What do you do when they're disruptive?

Nina: Nothing, really. I don't want to offend the mother. I just hope she takes care of it. Usually she does. (10/9/01)

Nina did not want to "offend" parents because they were customers, and therefore, they had some control over her work at Owl Books. Without their business, or if they stopped showing up for Story Time, she would have no job and would lose the pleasure she experienced from doing what she loved to do.

When Nina described Story Time, she made many inferences about social expectations for middle-class children. For example, she characterized her audience as children who "take piano lessons" and "do ballet." However, she opposed scheduling too much structured activity for the children who came to Story Time:

Nina: I think it's sad, really, when kids are so pressured at a young age. They do too much. (6/4/2002)

It seemed ironic that she had this perspective, since she was proud of the fact that many of the same

children came to Story Time regularly, where she, too, was offering a structured activity. Story Time was ritualized, as it was offered at the same times each week, it had a consistent following, and the same activities occurred each week in the same order:

Nina: It is pretty much this way: we sing two songs, then read a story, then sing two songs, then read a story, then sing two songs, then read a story. Altogether we read four stories and sing eight songs. We intersperse songs as a break from reading. Then I hand out mimeographed sheets they can color. I hand out crayons and they can color them on the stage. Then I give them stickers for sitting still.

Interviewer: What about kids who won't sit still?

Nina: I give them stickers anyway.

Interviewer: Really?

Nina: Just so they don't feel left out. (10/9/01)

While Nina said she rewarded children with stickers for good social behavior, the consumer nature of Owl Books limited her power to an extent. She indicated she was compelled to give the same reward (stickers) to all children, regardless of their behavior. Like other workers whose interviews appeared in the Chapter 4, Nina mentioned she must please parents because, as an employee, they are her customers. This meant that, although she said her role was to “teach” children good manners, she realized she must do this in a subtle, sometimes inconsistent way, so neither children nor parents were upset because children are “left out.” This example illustrates how the institutionalized structure of Owl Books as a social field affects an aspect of children’s socialization. Workers knew they must treat children in ways that please all parents, because the viability of the store depended on it. This meant that children learn at this very young age that social rules exist, but they can be broken with little or no consequence because economic capital wields social power.

Although Nina described Story Time as a structured activity in the preceding conversation, she resisted characterizing it that way. Instead, she worked to make that distinction between Story Time and other “high pressure” activities quite clear:

Nina: Here there is no pressure. It's like going to grandmother's house for a visit. They're just there for the pleasure of the experience. (6/4/2002).

Nina said there was no pressure to "perform" at Owl Books, meaning that children did not "perform" in the way they would if they were playing a sport or practicing a musical instrument. However, I argue that children were pressured to perform appropriately in terms of their social behaviors during Story Time, because Nina had developed strategies to train children to behave in socially acceptable ways:

From field notes from Story Time: Eight toddlers (five girls, three boys) sit on the stage in varying positions. Three sit in chairs, three sit cross-legged near Nina, one is lying on his tummy with his head propped up on his hands. One boy is lying across the three small steps leading up to the stage where Nina sits in the center, holding the books she will read. She tries to get their attention by holding up the books.

Nina: It's time for our stories, everyone. (To boy on stairs): Come on up here with the rest of us, Mark.

Mark: I don't want to. I like it here.

(Nina looks over to a woman whom I assume is Mark's mother. She is engaged in a conversation with a friend.)

Nina (to other children): We'll get started as soon as Mark comes up here and sits with us. The children want to hear the stories, Mark.

Mark slides up the stairs and sits outside the circle.

Nina: Good job, Mark. Now we can get started. (10/9/01)

In this and many other instances, Nina praised those with good behavior, and delivered carefully phrased messages to those misbehaving, which sent a message about what was socially acceptable, and what was not. In this way, she was acting in ways that were socially acceptable for her role in the context of Owl Books.

Aside from indirectly influencing the ways in which workers teach social skills to children, middle-class parents shape their children's social knowledge and behaviors at Owl Books through a rewards system. This was understood through a dialogue I had with Robby, a vivacious, red-headed

third grader whose parents are both educators who were both present for the interview. The interview took place at a Red Lobster restaurant, with Robby and both of his parents, Art and Audrey, present. In the conversation below, Robby referred to the “Robbymeter,” a system his parents used to rate his behavior. High numbers on the Robbymeter translated to good behavior, which garnered the award of a new book, while low Robbymeter ratings had consequences that sometimes included punishments, such as curtailing activities with friends. He said that the greatest sign of “good behavior,” according to his parents, was reading a book. This is an example of the ways that middle-class parents teach their children about the value of academic literacy through messages about social acceptability and manners:

Robby: They (points to parents) think reading will help me.

Interviewer: You think in the future, if you're a good reader, it will help you?

Robby: In some ways, yeah.

Interviewer: How does it help you now?

Robby: Um, well, not really, well it does help my parents get a little bit comfortable.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Robby: I mean, when they're like, telling me that the Robbymeter is about reading, and that absolutely, then they just get calmed down if I'm reading.

[His parents make surprised sounds that give a disapproving impression.]

Robby [in response to his parents' disapproval]: I said sometimes. I said sometimes.
(09/28/08)

Robby showed his parents that he understood they equated “good behavior” with “good social skills” (i.e., showing respectful manners, not talking back, not talking loudly, not acting out). He also suggested they defined “good behavior” by “good reading habits.” He said his parents were most pleased when he was reading, so he tried to assuage their disapproval through his repeated use of the qualifier “sometimes.” Robby, a middle-class child, learned to negotiate his parents’ reward system

in a manner that benefits him, as indicated here:

Interviewer: So now that you've told me about the Robbymeter, I have to ask, how is today going for you?

Robby: Pretty good.

Interviewer: Will your rating be based on how you're acting when you're here at the restaurant, or how you acted before you got here?

Robby: Um, um, actually mostly, well, both. He counts both.

Interviewer: Can you explain that a little? How the rating works?

Robby: Um, well, it's like the day I found out there was a Robbymeter, I asked about a candy bar and he said, well, you can only get a candy bar if you're a 7 or up, and I had an exactly 7 on it. I'm not sure how it works. You'll have to ask him. [points to Art]

Interviewer [to Robby]: How does the rating work in terms of books?

Robby: Well, if I get over a 7, it means I get a book. They give me a number every time we do something, or even if we're just at home.

Audrey [mother]: Is that the only time you get a book, Robby? Think about times you've actually gotten books and what decides if you get a book.

Robby: Well, mostly by how I act.

Art [father]: Well... [disagreeing tone]... but there's been times when you've wanted a book, remember when there was a *Wizardology* book you wanted and we just went to the store and got it?

Robby: Yeah, the *Wizardology* book. But I still had to act good to get it or else you wouldn't have gotten it for me.

[Art and Audrey look at each other uncomfortably.]

Interviewer: What are some things you do to act "good"? What does it mean to be "good"?

Robby: It means that I can get most of the book stuff I want. That's how he said it [points to Art].

Art: That was about a 2.

[Robby looks unhappy.] (10/13/08)

Throughout the interview, Robby conflated "good" behavior, "good" social skills, and "good" reading because they were values conflated by middle-class culture, and by his middle-class parents. During this interview, it felt as though Robby's parents were sending him mixed signals. On one hand, they instituted a rewards system, yet at the same time, they made it seem insignificant when Robby expressed his understanding of what he must do (i.e., display good social behaviors) before they would buy him a book. Art and Audrey reflected a middle-class parenting style, where rewards are offered to children for complying with set standards, and where consequences are levied in response to bad behavior. They engage in the process of constructing and enacting this system of control because they believe it will teach children social skills. At the same time, middle-class parents resist being labeled as being too controlling, or as stifling their children's individuality. Robby learned to read his parents' ambivalence and worked with their parenting style in ways that pleased Art and Audrey and got Robby what he wanted: a book. This social knowledge prepares children to be social participants in a middle-class world, which promises fulfillment from the process of knowing what one wants, going after it in socially acceptable ways, and, ultimately, achieving whatever one wants in life.

Conclusion

From a family perspective, outings to Owl Books are experiences where parents become teachers, and children become students. Children learn from interactions around book purchases that reading is valuable and books are important, which is a powerful message reinforced by parents, teachers, and Owl Book workers, who are all intent on conveying it. The middle-class parents I interviewed and observed indicated they had the leisure time and inclination to have a presence in their children's academic and social development, and their children learned to negotiate the directive style of their parents, meaning they sometimes accepted and other times resisted the

direction.

This chapter has argued that children are aware of their academic standing at school, especially when it comes to assigned reading groups (e.g., “low” or “high”), and about learning disabilities as identified by a school system. Aside from ascertaining their academic potential through messages they receive at school, children heard their parents talk openly about their concerns when they fell below parents’ or schools’ expectations. Children seemed frustrated about this, but acknowledged them as legitimate, because they understood reading to be important to their success in school and to their naturalized desire for a middle-class future. While children suggested that teachers and parents sanctify reading, they indicated they received conflicting messages about reading at school. Some books they would like to read were not easily accessible at the school library, and times for reading books at school were restricted.

My research showed that older middle-class children (i.e., those in middle school) generally had more independence than younger middle-class children (i.e., those in early grades in elementary school) when it came to consumer activities at Owl Books, although children from both groups suggested their parents often participated in the decision-making process to varying degrees. Older children seemed to have more opportunities for making money, or they received gift cards to Owl Books for birthdays or holidays, so they indicated they were more in control of spending it and making book choices independent of their parents’ influence. Although parents exert their influence on older children by pointing out the symbolic value of books from a middle-class perspective (i.e., the value of reading- you will do well in life if you read good books), they appeared to more strictly monitor younger children’s choices as they teach them how money works in a more literal sense (i.e., monetarily- you have this amount of money to work with). Therefore, younger children usually needed their parents’ permission to buy books, mainly because the parent controlled the money required to make the purchase, and they were sometimes rewarded with a book for “good behavior.”

Story Time is an occasion for children to learn and practice "good behavior" and manners that will make them acceptable to, and comfortable in, middle-class society.

In all of these respects, family outings to Owl Books are experiences where middle-class children learn how to be "good consumers." Experiences involving book consumption suggest that books are valuable products to own because they represent cultural capital for middle-class culture, although specific kinds of books are valued differently, depending on an individual's subject position. The experiences of consumption and status, along with discussions and negotiations around book purchases, teach children a middle-class orientation. Children's consumption activities at the big-box bookstore become part of a "naturalized" middle-class experience, where children learn to conform to, and derive pleasure from, middle-class practices and values around books.

**CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION and IMPLICATIONS for
EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE and FUTURE STUDY**

“Bummer. A Fox Book superstore.”

“Quelle nightmare.”

“It has nothing to do with us. It’s big, impersonal, overstocked, and full of ignorant employees.”

“But they discount.”

“But they don’t provide any service. We do.”

The dialogue above is from Nora Ephron’s *You’ve Got Mail* (1998), a film about a big-box bookstore that puts a small independent bookstore out of business, suggesting that the chain bookstore is a greedy and heartless institution that dumbs down the high-status experience of books. How could anyone feel a connection to an “impersonal, overstocked” store “full of ignorant employees”? I empathized with this sentimental perspective until, while in the final editing stages of this dissertation, I discovered that the entire Owl Books chain—including all 777 big-box stores—was put up for sale. According to the *New York Times*, “the board believed the stock was ‘significantly undervalued’ and that it had set up a special committee to review its options” (*New York Times*, Aug. 4, 2010). The article stated that according to analysts, people are reading less, and those who want to buy books are more likely to buy them in other retail outlets, rather than at the bookstore. Michael Norris, senior analyst at Simba Information, said that customers “might pick up a book when they’re buying hand sanitizer or Band-Aids, rather than actually seeking out a bookstore as a destination and then buying a book at that point. A lot of independents are figuring it out one bookstore at a time, and that’s what the Owl Books of the world have to do” (*NYTimes*, Aug. 4, 2010). I was surprised at the sadness I felt thinking that the Owl Books where my research had taken place might no longer exist. What could ever replace it? I began feeling nostalgic about the hours I spent there, the people I had met, the familiar and unfamiliar faces, the many cups of coffee and glasses of iced tea (depending on the season), the giant peanut butter chocolate chip

cookies, the occasional panini, and all those books. I realized that for me, and for the workers, parents and children I talked with for this project, the big-box bookstore is a world of books where middle-class people—including myself—experience pleasure associated with books. I have discovered that my connection to Owl Books is a function of my position as a middle-class white woman who has the cultural capital to feel comfortable at the store, and, furthermore, to be accepted and welcomed by workers and customers I approached about sharing their perspectives. And it was from that perspective that I felt sadness about the potential closing of a store I once resented for taking the place of local independents.

This ethnographic project has helped me to make meaning of the complex perspectives and experiences of workers and families who love books and privilege literacy and book consumption, while sometimes struggling for middle-class status. This dissertation is about middle-class privilege and has considered how people work to maintain those privileges through typically unexamined, everyday experiences, in this case the family outing to the big-box bookstore. Owl Books offers the materiality of books, but more importantly for this project, it offers the experience of books. Through the leisure work that takes place during the family outing to the bookstore, parents teach their children to be middle class through informal educative experiences. While my informants said they value these experiences, they also suggested in other respects that the chain store cheapens or degrades the experience of books. The negotiation of these perspectives, and others, around books, has formed the questions that established the basis of this dissertation. Families and workers in this study have revealed how the status and meaning of books is continually negotiated in various contexts, including in the store, at home, and at school. The study has shown how the experience of books in each of these contexts affects and reflects workers', parents', and children's perspectives about themselves and their place in their social worlds. In a broader sense, this dissertation suggests that the family outing to the big-box bookstore reproduces middle-class orientations through

normalized, everyday experiences around books. The experience of the bookstore in this study indicated how middle-class reproduction happens at the absence of working class and economically disadvantaged people, who are often excluded from the experience due to their minimal access to cultural and economic capital. When unquestioned and unexamined, from this study's perspective, the exclusive nature of the everyday experience of the family outing to the big-box bookstore contributes to social inequality.

I chose Owl Books as my research site because, like the informants in this study, I am a lover of books. I engaged in conversations that raised a number of questions and made me interested in learning how Owl Books affects the ways in which workers and middle-class families think about reading and books, and I wanted to understand the social implications of those relationships. As my work continued, this project sought to understand the relationship between book consumption and middle-class reproduction in the context of the big-box bookstore, from the perspectives of workers and middle-class families who spend time there. This conclusion reflects on this dissertation's major themes and findings from the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu, who has been a major influence on its foundational thinking, and from his perspective, suggests what I have drawn from conversations with workers, parents, and children about meanings associated with book consumption and social class. Finally, it offers possibilities for further inquiry into the relationship between reproduction and cultural capital associated with reading and books, and outlines a rationale for further research in the areas of informal education within the context of the family.

The dissertation has been organized around informants (workers, parents, and children) who provided insights into their relationship to reading and books. I found that these perspectives about book consumption are connected to middle-class reproduction. From a Bourdieusian perspective, books and the consumption of books become markers of class-based distinctions and dispositions that reproduce middle-class culture in ways that are unconscious and naturalized because they are

shaped through everyday experiences, such as family outings to the bookstore. These dispositions are reflective of, and perpetuated by, class-based society in the United States, where “taste” is enacted through acts of consumption that are signs of social distinction. From childhood, children learn that what they buy, including various kinds of books, represents who they are.

I have relied on Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* for a theoretical underpinning, and I have drawn from his concepts of *cultural capital* and *field*, to understand how middle-class dispositions and behaviors are reproduced in the context of book consumption at the big-box bookstore. I have focused on understanding the power of various forms of cultural capital here, while looking at how middle-class children learn to practice skills around economic capital (i.e., how to spend money wisely, from a middle-class perspective) at the bookstore. This project has focused on how workers and middle-class parents and children draw from their knowledge about what is valued and what cultural capital they need to operate in various social contexts. In this way, economic capital provides access to cultural capital, since books and literacy skills associated with reading and books provide privileges within certain cultural fields, for example, the field of education, or the field of the bookstore, or the field of a particular classroom.

Bourdieu’s theory of practice has provided a rich and nuanced understanding of the everyday experiences and interactions of children, parents, and workers at Owl Books, where I have found that habits, dispositions, and customs, as well as institutional structures around consumption, affect social behavior and lead to middle-class reproduction. From Bourdieu’s perspective, the everyday experience of a family outing to a bookstore is culturally significant because it reproduces class status and maintains social inequalities through agents’ experiences within an institutional structure of book consumption. Some of these inequalities stem from perspectives on the cultural capital around books that creates particular distinctions connected to “taste.” More commercialized books, such as those connected to popular films or television shows for children, are considered “lowbrow” by

parents, while they carry high cultural capital among children's peers. This study has found that from workers to parents and children, informants distinguish themselves as individuals who value reading and books in ways that provide them with cultural capital in a social process that reproduces middle-class culture. The process of book consumption, as explained in this dissertation, is a reflection of how this works for middle-class families and workers in the context of Owl Books.

This project has reflected on book consumption as going beyond a romanticized notion of a "love of reading." Although that may be part of the story, the subtext is that, inherently, it is also a "love of middle-class life" that propels this experience. I have found that workers and middle-class parents inculcate these notions into children's lives during the educational, everyday family trip to the bookstore, although the process for children is not a passive one. Children negotiate these experiences in multiple ways. In terms of education, this dissertation has found that children learn not only about reading and books from the perspective of schools, they learn how to be middle-class from the perspective of middle-class consumer society. The learning that takes place in this context becomes part of middle-class children's habitus by letting them know what is available and possible in their social worlds, which becomes knowledge and experience that perpetuates the status quo in securing and reproducing middle-class life. These experiences are summarized next in the context of this project and from the perspective of workers, parents, and children.

This dissertation has looked at bookstore workers' desire to have high status, a classification they continually negotiate between their lack of power and the symbolic capital associated with literacy and books. They struggle with their relationship to middle-class customers who view literacy and books as highbrow experiences, while they view chain store environments and their workers, in general, as lowbrow. As both a bookstore and a chain store, Owl Books falls somewhere in-between highbrow and lowbrow, which complicates perceptions around workers' roles. Further, some titles at Owl Books are considered trade books with highbrow status, while other books and merchandise

are considered mass market with lowbrow status from both workers' and parents' perspectives. In the end, workers must continually negotiate tensions between highbrow ("classic" and award-winning children's books) and lowbrow (more commercialized books, such as those with ties to children's television shows and movies) as part of their on-going struggle for status. Workers suggest they do not "approve" of mass market merchandise, yet they understand it is important to the store's financial viability, but more importantly, they say that, when it comes to these lowbrow books, at least children are reading "something." This shows that the desire to achieve and maintain status around literacy becomes inherently problematic when it exists within a site of consumption.

Along that line, this work has explored the tension between their identities as experts who are doing important work by encouraging children to develop a love of reading, while feeling unable to exercise their expertise due to the consumer culture that defines and, to their mind, confines them as sales clerks. Furthermore, in terms of work, Owl Books is a place where workers negotiate their roles, which vary from book expert, to childcare provider, to liaison between customers and the home office. The multiplicity of roles simultaneously excites and frustrates them. Another argument emerging from my research relates to workers' attitudes toward their own work, toward the customers, toward fellow booksellers, and toward the Home Office. Workers mostly take pride in their work and see it as an elite and important position that is helping to create a generation of literate youths; however, they also resent parents they say drop off their children and treat them like babysitters and clerks without expertise.

This project has understood workers' perspectives in relation to prestige and work. When bookstore workers say they are doing important and special work, they are more willing to accept lower wages and perform mundane tasks. Again drawing from Bourdieu, this dissertation has also observed how Owl Book workers in the children's book department sometimes negotiate their lack of power in making decisions about displays, book selections, and children's activities because of

workers' active engagement in accepting their low status because the Home Office "knows what it's doing." Bourdieu would call this act of negotiation an example of workers misrecognizing the power relations that affect their roles within the field of book consumption. As a result, their roles are performed and accepted in ways that appear unconscious, with workers negotiating a sense of agency in the process. Although in several instances workers pointed out the Home Office's control over even minor details in the bookstore, and they describe an "ideal bookstore" as very different from Owl Books, the status they associate with their work as book sellers trumps the frustrations they might experience otherwise. Workers in this study said they value their jobs because of their association with books and literacy, and they enjoy the sense of community they have with their coworkers.

In contrast to workers' images of themselves and their elevated status associated with book work, the middle-class parents and children I spoke with position Owl Book workers as clerks with, at best, minimal expertise who are less respected than librarians, whom they view as professionals. Parents sometimes resent workers for disrupting precious family time. There is a sense that workers see their work as special, and they identify a hierarchy among children's book workers. Workers in the children's book department say they are in their "own world" in comparison to other workers in the store, which children's bookseller Justine described as their own "kingdom." Nina, the Story Teller, chimed in that Madeline, the children's book manager, was "King" and everyone else were "knights," with Justine concurring that they were all "soldiers." (11/11/2002) Nina appears to have the highest status among workers, since she has a teacherly role and has the power to choose the books she reads to the children. As she sits center stage, she appears to have a degree of celebrity status, despite the fact that I observed parents treating her and other workers as babysitters left to watch over children and pick up after them, while parents pursue their own leisure interests in the store, whether it be mothers socializing with other mothers, or fathers going off to look at

magazines and books of interests. Overall, in light of observations and conversation with Owl Books workers, I argue that a significant part of their “work” is to continually negotiate their status in a number of ways: with the Home Office, with parents, with children, and, most significantly, within and among themselves.

Owl Books is structured to provide everything materially and socially that middle-class families with disposable income would want-- a broad selection of books, music CDs, and film DVDs, and other merchandise with cultural distinction; a schedule of entertainment and cultural events for children and adults; a selection of designer pastries and coffees; and an upscale atmosphere with amenities that seem incongruous to a chain store, such as overstuffed chairs and a sofa positioned around a fireplace; mahogany-colored bookcases with the feel of either a home library or a public library with a big budget; classical or jazz music playing over the intercom; and workers who present themselves as professional, devoted book lovers eager to interact with and assist customers. Owl Books is very public, yet it has a largely middle-class, white clientele and has neither safe nor convenient access to public transportation, which would enable individuals who are economically disadvantaged (i.e., people who cannot afford a car) to come to the bookstore. It has a loose, bohemian atmosphere (a hybrid between an upscale university library with its mahogany-shaded shelving and a 1950s Parisian café with its larger-than-life murals of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Stein), yet workers suggest it has restrictive policies originating from a hierarchical power structure that controls all that goes on there. Every fine detail—including nearly everything a customer sees, touches, hears, smells, and tastes—is precisely dictated and monitored by The Home Office.

Despite what I found to be an atmosphere controlled by the corporate structure, workers say they find some power in their roles and feel pride in their work. They say their jobs have high status, akin to the value of lawyers and college professors, yet most are paid just above minimum

wage and most say the job at Owl Books supplements their primary income at another job. Owl Books has little in the way of physical restrictions, yet it tightly restricts its book inventory, with “The Home Office” prescribing the list of books unless a worker follows a protocol for making a special request. Most books are published by major publishing houses, with titles from smaller, independent publishers usually available only by special order. Consequently, contrary to the impression one might get from a quick visit to Owl Books, their selection of children’s books is very limited and highly controlled. In conjunction with this ethnography, I looked at around 100 children’s picture books featured in a prominent position at the front of the children’s book department, finding that the vast majority featured white characters operating in middle-class worlds, even when the characters were presented as talking animals. These limited representations in the store’s most visible products make the environment more explicitly appealing to middle-class families, while implicitly sending a message to low-income or working-class people that says, “You don’t belong here.” This is another example of the ways in which Owl Books reproduces class distinctions in ways that are ideologically “normal” to workers and its middle-class customers. This project has shown that beyond having, at best, a faint voice when it comes to creating store policy, workers have little or nothing to say about book inventory, displays, or special events.

Workers are nostalgic about independent bookstores in terms of what they mean to a community and what they mean to lovers of books. When asked to talk about the “ideal bookstore,” there is a yearning and passion around the possibility of sharing their ideas and using their creativity. At the same time, workers are protective of the reputation of Owl Books. They did not openly criticize the bookstore or the corporate structure itself, and often followed up any concerns with an immediate rationalization. To criticize Owl Books was to criticize themselves or to discount the value of their work. Furthermore, the corporate structure of the bookstore reflects the attitudes and values of consumer culture in general. The notion that “The customer is always right”

creates an environment where workers say they cannot question or oppose the behaviors of parents and children, even when those behaviors cause workers to feel compromised or uncomfortable. In corporate consumer culture, the person holding the credit card is the one who holds the social power associated with economic capital.

Parents in this study expressed that they want to spend time with their children at bookstores because they have an enjoyment of books, and because they see literacy skills as important to their children's future success, as defined by middle-class culture. In these respects, parents teach children that books and reading are a form of cultural capital. Specifically, these middle-class parents view "success" for their children across a continuum, beginning in the present (achieving high grades in school), in the nearer future (getting into a good college), and in the more distant future (landing a professional job with a good salary). Parents I interviewed expressed feelings of sentimentality around books, as symbols of their own childhoods they wanted to share with their children through experiences and conversations around reading. Books from parents' childhoods were understood by parents and children as treasured memories, with one parent doling out to his son novels he had saved from his childhood. Clearly, these middle-class parents want their children to learn to love books and value reading as they do. They see reading as essential to their children's success at school, and in their future careers, seeing "good books" (i.e., "literature") as instrumental to achieving those successes. In this context, parents seek "success" for their children, which they define as having access to social and economic opportunities now and in the future. However, parents let go of their desire for children to read "literature" when a school labels a child a weak reader and/or learning disabled. In those instances, parents negotiate their perspectives and advocate for books that children enjoy and are on their reading level, so children will not become frustrated. These parents believe that "reading something is better than reading nothing." In any case, I began to see how middle-class parents are extending the work of teachers

and schools by emphasizing the value of reading to their children, and by situating reading opportunities within the pleasurable experience of the family outing to the bookstore. Middle-class parents appear keenly aware of their children's reading abilities as determined by a school system, and they enact strategies for addressing the situation if their children's reading level is low, or if a child has been labeled as learning disabled. In those cases, middle-class parents ramp up their involvement by finding ways to encourage their children to read. This sometimes means that parents compromise more ambitious or challenging reading goals for their children by allowing books that are "on level" or even "below level."

Parents told me they view Owl Books as a "safe space" reserved for the well-mannered, refined, and well-educated; however, it is a public environment with no physical gate-keeping mechanisms, such as turnstiles, metal detectors, or check points at the entrance. There is a membership (discount) card, but it is not required for entry. As evidence of the feelings of safety around books in the bookstore, workers and parents tell me that every day, children are left in the children's section while parents explore their own interests elsewhere in the store. So where does this feeling of safety come from? This dissertation has argued that while discourse around "safety" represents genuine concern about public space, it also suggests a subtext about class that suggests a "safe" environment is one that has middle-class and racial homogeneity. I observed a toddler who appeared to be around two-years-old sitting alone on a small chair, while sucking on a pacifier and looking at a book, in the children's book department. At first I thought her mother was browsing the shelves, until some fifteen minutes later when another woman who turned out to be the child's mother entered the area and began talking to her. These kinds of observations, along with my interviews with workers who mentioned that parents leave their children in their care on a daily basis, sometimes literally leaving the store to run errands elsewhere, told a story about middle-class families and family time. I discovered that this is how middle-class "family time" is spent—with

parents and children under the same roof, at times pursuing separate interests. Families come to and leave the store together, but they go their separate ways once they get there. This speaks to the ability and desire of middle-class parents and children to pursue individual interests, thereby constructing “family time” as simultaneously “me time.” This may be explained by what some researchers call the overscheduled lives of middle-class families, where children are engaged in multiple scheduled activities managed by a working mother, either single or married, who struggles to juggle the busy lives of her family members. I found this to be true with my informants, although fathers were sometimes participants in the bookstore outing.

Parents often mentioned the purposefulness of visits to Owl Books, either to buy a gift or purchase a particular book, with visits being fit in during other scheduled errands, where the bookstore was in the vicinity of other stops. Middle-class parents and children talked about their busy schedules, seeming to thrive on the energy it creates, while at the same time complaining about the pressure full schedules create. I found that the bookstore provides a desirable setting for busy middle-class families who want to spend time together, while having the opportunity to pursue individual interests, all under the same roof. I have named this multi-tasking activity of middle-class family time “leisure work,” where family leisure time is structured to accomplish goals that parents say provides pleasure and enjoyment, along with opportunities for children to practice literacy skills and to develop a love for reading and books. I discovered that, unlike more restricted spaces where families spend time together such as a dance studio, country club, or theme park, the big-box bookstore is a space that anyone is allowed to walk into if they can get there. They may not always feel at ease or welcome once they arrive because as I have suggested, the bookstore may send out some exclusionary messages, but they will be allowed in if they so desire. I found a shared sense of value around reading as an important activity, which was a sentiment expressed by everyone in the study. This means that the bookstore has varied meaning to middle-class families who go there.

For some less affluent middle-class parents, it may constitute a major outing and significant treat, while for more affluent parents, it might be used more as a convenient stop-off point during a day of errands, or as an opportunity to select and purchase a gift together for a child or for a friend's birthday party. The bookstore for more affluent families may mean providing an opportunity to reward a child for good behavior by buying her a book. In this way, the bookstore suggests a multitude of possibilities for thinking about middle-class status and its reproduction.

My research has shown that parents in this study are concerned with improving their children's literacy skills in reading, while they also rely on Owl Books as a site for teaching their children social literacies (i.e., manners) and consumer literacies (i.e., shopping skills). Each of these literacies are defined for this project according to middle-class values. Toddlers who regularly attend the weekly Story Time learn to sit quietly, raise their hands, take turns, not interrupt, and be "respectful" of others. These social literacy lessons are emphasized again during the craft activity that follows the story reading. I found that parents often used the material prize of a book as a reward for "good behavior." Furthermore, I discovered how middle-class parents use outings to the bookstore as opportunities for teaching their children the value of money through influencing, or sometimes controlling, their children's purchases. While parents' intention was to provide these literacy opportunities for their children through the family outing to Owl Books, they managed to make time for pursuing their own individual interests while at the store. Each family I spoke with described parents' individualized time at the store, whether it is defined as enjoying a cup of coffee or browsing through magazines, while their children were in the children's book department. Parents indicated that their perception of the bookstore as exclusive in the sense it has intelligent, upstanding customers, meaning for them that Owl Books is a "safe space" where they are comfortable being out of their children's sight, and vice versa. This observation further reinforces the idea that middle-class families tend to engage in "leisure work," where parents structure "family

time” as needing to accomplish simultaneously the goals of leisure and of education, and where each individual member has his/her needs fulfilled. While middle-class parents value the needs of the collective family, they also value the needs and desires of individual family members, including their own. Middle-class parents I talked with all described their lives as “hectic” and “overwhelming,” where they rush from work, to pick up their children at school, then put together a meal, then drive their children to extracurricular activities. The big-box bookstore satisfies this desire and propensity for middle-class families to do “leisure work” that can be simultaneously educational and fun, and also simultaneously collective and individualized, since the time families spend “together” is often spent physically “apart,” all under one roof.

The children in this study showed me how their relationship to reading and books presents complicated meanings when it comes to identity and status associated with parents, peers, and teachers, and how their habitus provides a way to see possibilities for themselves within various contexts. As noted earlier, I found that middle-class children who go to the bookstore on a family outing are learning literacies associated with middle-class achievement, such as academic literacies associated with school, consumer literacies associated with spending money, and social literacies associated with good manners, as defined by middle-class culture. Bourdieu would suggest, that middle-class children are learning how to access the cultural capital necessary for securing themselves a place in middle-class culture through such everyday experiences as the family outing to Owl Books. As children learn about reading and books, and about manners and spending money wisely, they are learning to be middle class. They learn about the relationship between taste and social status when parents and workers teach them that their access to social rewards will improve as they acquire good taste in books.

I found that the relationship between “taste” and “status” for children becomes more complicated when it comes to peers. Children in this study see certain mass market books as giving

them more immediate access to social status among some of their peers, because these books are connected to popular movies, television shows, video games, and other involvements children talk about with each other. At the same time, my informants explained how some books are seen as “babyish” or “dumb,” especially for those in the middle grades, when there appears to be a wider range of interest, from younger titles to more sophisticated ones. For example, Jack, a fifth grader told me that his friend still loves Pokemon, a fact that Jack says he can barely tolerate, but he has learned to express his opposition in ways that use humor that does not damage their friendship. Thirteen-year-old Tracey, my only informant with working-class parents, felt her passion for books made the popular crowd ostracize her, though she deconstructed the meaning of “popular” (i.e., it “doesn’t really exist”) as a way of negotiating their opinion about her. On the other hand, Tracey and several girlfriends made a book club where books became a way of building community among them. Although some members would come and go, a core group of three remained intact. These girls cooperated around their book experiences; for example, they pooled their money and gift cards in order to ensure that each girl was able to buy something she wanted at the bookstore. According to Tracey, this kind of experience around books brought the girls together, even though they frequently had strong and differing opinions about which books reflected “good taste.” Regardless of individual reading perspectives or book preferences, she suggested that strong opinions about books were accepted among these girlfriends in a way similar to Jack’s experience, where they would “agree to disagree” in order to maintain the friendship. These examples, and others that appear in the Children’s chapter, showed me how reading and books provide social rewards, as well as social risks, for children, which they learn to accept and navigate astutely.

To summarize, this study found that children learn ideologies around the value of academic, consumer, and social literacies at the bookstore. Expressed by parents, workers, and children themselves in terms of their necessity for attaining middle-class opportunities, these knowledges are

cultural capital that secure children's position in middle-class life by setting them up to do well in school, attend a well-respected college, and landing a professional job. Children in this study indicate that parents teach them reading skills, skills around spending money, and basic manners while at Owl Books. Workers and teachers support parents' efforts by reinforcing ideas around the value of books and reading, and by providing opportunities for children to acquire and practice each of these literacies. However, children are not passive recipients of these literacies. They negotiate their own positions with respect to which books they want to read, how they spend money, and how they want to behave. Middle-class children as young as age 7 show a confidence when interacting with adults, including parents and workers, as suggested by Lareau. These children have learned to have an authority of their own. They ask questions and expect answers. Further, they are passionate about the books they love and thoughtful about deciding which books to buy and how to spend money.

Implications for Educational Practice and Future Study

This study raises several possibilities for future research that would extend the discussion around the broad themes of book consumption, education, family, and work. As emphasized earlier, my formal interview sample was limited and did not include a diverse representation of families who go to bookstores. This was in large part a function of my research site's location on a busy highway in a suburban strip mall, with no sidewalks or safe access by public transportation, meaning it is only accessible by car. Owl Books has stores in urban areas that provide possibilities for investigating other perspectives not included here. This means that potential future research on bookstores and book consumption would aim to understand how economically disadvantaged people and people of color in urban communities gain access to books. With that in mind, the study might broaden to include independent bookstores and public libraries located in larger cities.

Possibilities include looking at public library-based programs designed for urban youth. A research questions might be: How do we understand the meanings that diverse families make of books? For this, I would go to an urban library in order to see how the family outing looks there, what shape it takes, and how families or parents or guardians interact with kids around books.

This project also invites more work to be done on informal education that takes place outside of schools, including additional research on the family outing. For example, future research might complicate the notion of educative locations to sites of consumption for family outings and “leisure work,” such as museums, nature centers, and theme parks. Further, this study has recognized how workers and customers see the big-box bookstore as a cultural center offering the cultural capital of community offerings, such as outreach to book fairs at local schools, a group for adults writing children’s books, and poetry slams for high schoolers. Research questions could look at informal education in the context of capitalism; that is, how do sites of consumption shape informal educational experiences? What happens at the intersection of cultural capital and economic capital? How is meaning made around education when learning is commodified? How do parents see themselves as educators in relation to their children’s formal education in schools? What is the appeal of informal educational experiences connected to leisure? How do corporations and businesses that provide for-profit educational experiences for families shape ideologies around education? What motivates parents to participate in these activities? How do these experiences inform ideas about gender, race, and class?

Another future research area would look at book clubs, which have become popular social milieus in contemporary culture. Book clubs exist in a range of contexts and forms. I found examples of book clubs not directly associated with Owl Books that were created for particular groups: women, senior citizens, adult men, teens, tweens, and even toddlers. I discovered book clubs established for African-American women, Asian women, and Latina women. What are the

implications of these experiences? How do members form identities around books? How do members gain or lose social power through conversations around books? Although many clubs are formed independently by founding members, it appears that these clubs are encouraged and promoted by publishers, television personalities (e.g., Oprah), and retailers. Popular fiction today often includes suggestions for book club discussions in the back of books, and publishers create opportunities for book club members to pose questions on authors' blogs so readers feel more connected to writers. A future study could aim to understand how customers participate in book clubs that negotiate the bookstore as an informal educational site selling the prestigious product: "books." The popularity and ubiquity of book clubs in general raises a number of potential research questions: How do book club members create communities through their relationship to books? How do they make meaning of their relationships to each other through books? What are the social implications of practices involved with book selections? How do book club members come to know and identify themselves and each other through books? What is the discourse around books in book clubs? What are the tensions between popular books and literature? What is the relationship between book clubs and social reproduction?

Owl Books organizes, advertises, and carries out a monthly book club for customers. An employee who runs the club chooses a title and leads a discussion in the store's most "homey" area, with overstuffed chairs situated around a gas-burning fireplace and hearth. A monthly book club for children is also offered at the store. Questions these observations raise include: What is the nature of social relationships that form around books and book consumption? What do informal educational experiences mean to book club members? How do book club members think about and negotiate their involvement in social experiences organized by corporations that profit from the group's existence? In addition to the in-person book clubs, the corporate Owl Books website offers web-based book clubs and blogs. Owl Books offers discounts for those who sign up to purchase

selections from its on-line book clubs. There is a parents and educators' blog, where on-line members who sign up for the blog can post their perspectives on particular children's books. This gives members of both groups a voice, and it provides an opportunity for conversations between teachers and parents. The website also offers blogs on topics organized around book selections, such as gardening, cooking, romance novels, and self help. In order to join the discussion, one must buy certain books. Electronic book reading devices are another area marketed by Owl Books. Some school districts are considering purchasing these reading devices for their students. What effect does technology have on people's relationships to books, especially when it comes to social experiences around books? Will this be the direction of books if Owl Books no longer exists in the future?

Other potential research questions raised by this study might consider the ways that workers in low-status jobs connected to highly-regarded cultural products or services come to think about their work, and about themselves in relation to their work. Examples are clerks at music stores, ticket takers at performance spaces, or gift shop workers at museums. Possible questions include: How do workers negotiate their roles when it comes to low-status work in a high culture environment? What is the relationship between products sold or services rendered, prestige around work, and misrecognition? Another possibility is to study other workers who do book work with children and families. Possible informants are bookstore workers and owners, and public or school librarians and library clerks. Potential research questions include: How does the experience of book work shift among various roles performed in these contexts? What is the relationship between these kinds of book work and the reproduction of class? How does book work and literary expertise connect to social power? How is meaning made around the family outing to these sites?

This project suggests the need for further research to inquire into the implications of consumption practices, to understand how everyday, unquestioned experiences, reproduce social

class. It would be exciting to see these studies done from children's perspectives, which are too often absent from research about them. I have argued that the normalized experience of family time involving "leisure work" at the bookstore appears to be exclusively middle-class, and that this practice is an example of how middle-class life is reproduced in ways that often go unrecognized because without a critical eye they seem innocuous. I am not arguing that these experiences for the middle-class children in this study are harmful to them personally; in many ways they boost middle-class children's literacy skills and self-confidence, while providing pleasure to children and their parents, and connecting teachers with parents. These experiences give middle-class parents an opportunity to participate in developing their children's literacy skills, which are important and relevant to anyone's life. However, at the same time I have argued that the commonplace experience of the middle-class family outing to Owl Books is, in some significant ways, problematic for society because it is exclusive, and because it goes unquestioned; therefore, from Bourdieu's perspective, this experience reinforces the systemic power structures in society that reproduce middle-class culture and foster social inequalities. Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction has shaped my interpretation of the experience of the big-box bookstore. With that in mind, I expect and hope that the project that has just ended here has, in many respects, just begun.

Appendix A: Coding Categories

1. BBB= BIG-BOX BOOKSTORES
2. BBS= BIG-BOX STORES
3. B= BIOGRAPHY
4. BCC= BOOKS AS CULTURAL CAPITAL
5. CW= CARE WORK
6. CS= CHILDREN'S STRUGGLES
7. C= CLASS
8. COM= COMMERCIALIZATION
9. CP= COMMUNITY PROGRAMS
10. CON= CONSUMPTION
11. CH= CORPORATE HIERARCHY
12. CC= CULTURAL CAPITAL
13. EDU= EDUCATION/SCHOOLING
14. FT= FAMILY TIME
15. G= GENDER
16. H= HABITUS
17. HB= HIGHBROW
18. IB= INDEPENDENT BOOKSTORES
19. K= KNOWLEDGE
20. LC= LITERACY
21. LIT= LITERATURE
22. LB= LOWBROW
23. MN= MANNERS
24. MCS= MIDDLE-CLASS ASPIRATIONS/DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS
25. MCL= MIDDLE-CLASS LIFE/ORIENTATIONS
26. MRC= MISRECOGNITION
27. PAR= PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S LIVES
28. PSTR= PARENTS' STRUGGLES
29. PL= PLEASURE
30. PC= POPULAR CULTURE
31. PW= PROFESSIONAL WORK
32. PS= PUBLIC SPACE
33. R= RACE
34. R= READING
35. SFTY= SAFETY
36. SR= SOCIAL REPRODUCTION
37. SP= STATUS/PRESTIGE
38. VC= VALUES OF CHILDREN
39. VP= VALUES OF PARENTS
40. VW= VALUES OF WORKERS
41. W= WORK
42. WSP= WORK & STATUS/PRESTIGE
43. WST= WORKERS' STRUGGLES

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VISITING APPOINTMENTS.....

2007 **Visiting Instructor, Creative Writing Graduate Program**
Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY
Summers **Visiting Instructor, English Department**
2000-2003 Colgate University, Hamilton, NY
1997, 1999 **Instructor, Public Presentation Skills**
USDA Forest Service Communications Short Course
Facilitated by SUNY ESF Faculty

RELATED EXPERIENCE.....

1990-1995 **Media Specialist, Corporate Communications**
Community General Hospital, Syracuse, NY
1982-1990 **Publications Director**
Sargent-Webster-Crenshaw & Folley, Syracuse, NY
1980-1982 **Public Relations Director, Office of Communications**
Cazenovia College, Cazenovia, NY

AWARDS and HONORS.....

- Syracuse University Writing Program, Excellence in Teaching Award (\$1,000 prize) (2010)
- Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi for 4.0 GPA in doctoral coursework (2004-present)
- Merit Recognition, Syracuse University Writing Program (2008)
- SUNY ESF President's Award for Community Service/Service Learning (2003)
- Certificate for Teaching Excellence, Colgate University (2001, 2002)
- Distinguished Teaching Award, SUNY ESF (1999)
- Ten Best New Kids' Show Award, TV Guide (1996)
- Everson Museum of Art, On My Own Time Art Award (1991)
- Silver Award for Outstanding Achievement in Professional Communications, MerCom's Mercury National Awards Competition (1989)
- Award of Merit for Outstanding External Publications, International Association of Communicators/Business and Industry Communicators (1986)
- Excellence Award: Most Effective Newsletter, Women in Communications, Inc. (1983)

PUBLISHED AND PRODUCED WORKS.....

BOOKS:

Shelter, a novel. Walker & Co./Bloomsbury USA: New York. (2006)

* Reviewed and praised by: *Kirkus Reviews, Publishers Weekly, School Library Journal, Children's Frontlist*, and *VOYA* (Voice of Youth Advocates).

Ghost Bat in a Gum Tree: An Endangered Species Counting Book. Falcon Press: Helena, MT. (1998)

* Reviewed and praised by: *Children's Literature Review*.

Real Stuck, Way Up. Barron's Educational Series: NY, NY. (1997)

* Reviewed and praised by: *Children's Literature Review*.

The Little Shoe Book. Random House, Inc.: NY, NY. (1995)

* Reviewed and praised by: *Children’s Literature Review*.

Pappyland Activity Book, Volumes I and II. Craftsman & Scribes: Syracuse, NY. (1995)

A Quilt for Elizabeth. Centering Corporation: Omaha, NE. (1992)

* Reviewed and praised by: *School Library Journal*.

Film rights optioned by FilmFair Communications, Hollywood, CA (1993)

ADULT FICTION:

“Milk,” a short story featured in *The North American Review* (1999)

PERFORMANCE PIECE:

Rainforest Rhythms & the Jungle Jive. A children’s play performed Boston, MA (2009)

TELEVISION:

Writer for 35 half-hour episodes of **Pappyland**, a PBS children’s television series being aired in more than 130 markets nationwide. Broadcast to 60 million homes on The Learning Channel (TLC) (1996-2003)

AWARDS

TV Guide ~ Best New Kids’ Show

Reviewed favorably by: *The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, and Parents Magazine*

NEWSPAPERS and JOURNALS:

“Service Learning: The Classroom Without Walls,” published in GREEN Supplement to the *Syracuse Post-Standard* (2009)

Contributor to **House Beautiful, Corporate Design, Building Design and Construction, Electric Light and Power, American School and University, Architectural Lighting, School and College, and School Product News.**

RESEARCH INTERESTS.....

- Cultural Studies
- Popular Culture & Media Studies
- Communication Studies

PRESENTATIONS.....

Environmental Literacy and Composition Roundtable. SUNY Council on Writing Conference, Binghamton, NY (2011, forthcoming)

Teaching Cultural Studies. Cultural Studies Association, Chicago, IL (2011, forthcoming)

Go Animal! An Environmental Education Program. North American Association for Environmental Education, Buffalo, NY (2010)

Trash Talk: The Found Object Monologues. The Association of Writers & Writing Programs Conference, Denver, CO (2010)

Consuming Bodies: Workers, Literacy, and Status at the Superstore Bookseller. Gender, Bodies & Technology Conference, Virginia Tech, Roanoke, VA (2010)

Go Animal! Extinction Stinks!

- Fairgrieve Central Schools, Fulton, NY (2010)

- Plymton Elementary School, Plympton, MA (2009)
 - Dr. Edwin E. Weeks Elementary School, Syracuse, NY (2008)
- Writing for Children: Ten Simple/Complex Non-Rules to Follow/Break: A Reading and Discussion.*
Barnes & Noble, Syracuse, NY (2007)
- Point of View: Seeing It Like It Isn't.* Fabius-Pompey Elementary School, Fabius, NY (2002)
- Children's Writing Workshop.* Manlius, NY (1998-2001)
- The Feng Shui of the Writing Center.* International Writing Centers Association Conference,
Baltimore, MD (2000)
- Children's Books as Cultural Mirrors.* Enders Road Elementary School, Manlius, NY (2000)
- Envisioning/Revisioning Ourselves as Teachers of Advanced Writing: Theorizing Practice, Practicing Theory.* Fall Teaching Conference, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY (1999).
- The Rhetoric of Children's Books.* Conversations in Composition, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY (1999)
- Gender Identity and Values Shaped by Culture.* Fall Teaching Conference, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY (1997)
- Keynote Speaker.* Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators of Central New York Conference, Syracuse, NY (1996)
- Workshop Presenter,* New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc., Parents as Reading Partners Conference, Syracuse, NY (1996)
- Keynote Speaker.* Central New York Librarians Association Conference, Syracuse, NY (1996)
- Panelist,* New York State Teachers' Conference, Syracuse, NY (1994)
- Writing Children's Books ~*
- Sandy Creek Elementary School, Sandy Creek, NY (2001)
 - Reynolds Elementary School, Baldwinsville, NY (1999)
 - McConnellsville Elementary School, McConnellsville, NY (1999)
 - Onondaga Road Elementary School, Camillus, NY (1999)
 - Camden Elementary School, Camden, NY (1997)
 - MacArthur Elementary School. Binghamton, NY (1997)
 - Brookville Central School District, Binghamton, NY (1996)
 - East Hill Elementary School, Camillus, NY (1996)
 - Heman Street Elementary School, East Syracuse, NY (1996)
 - Appleby Elementary School, Marathon, NY (1996)
 - Lakeland Elementary, Solvay, NY (1994)
 - Chestnut Hill Elementary School, Liverpool, NY (1993, 1994)
 - Craven Crawford Elementary School, Liverpool, NY (1993, 1994)
 - Donlin Drive Elementary School, Liverpool, NY (1993, 1994)
 - Elmcrest Elementary School, Liverpool, NY (1993, 1994)
 - Liverpool Elementary School, Liverpool, NY (1993, 1994)
 - Morgan Road Elementary School, Liverpool, NY (1993, 1994)
 - Nate Perry Elementary School, Liverpool, NY (1993, 1994)
 - Wetzell Road Elementary School, Liverpool, NY (1993, 1994)
 - Willow Field Elementary School, Liverpool, NY (1993, 1994)
 - Caledonia-Mumford Elementary School, Caledonia, NY (1993)
 - Avon Elementary School, Avon, NY (1993)
 - Letchworth Central School, Gainesville, NY (1993)
 - Solvay High School, Syracuse, NY (1993)
 - H.W. Smith Elementary School, Syracuse, NY (1993)
 - Tecumseh Elementary School, Syracuse, NY (1993)

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS.....

- Member, Cultural Studies Association
- Member, Conference on College Composition and Communication
- Member, Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators
- Member, International Writing Centers Association
- Member, Modern Language Association
- Member, National Council of Teachers of English
- Member, National Women’s Studies Association
- Member, American Educational Studies Association
- Member, SUNY Council on Writing

NATIONAL AWARDS COMPETITION JUDGE.....

National League of American Pen Women’s Award Program, Memoir Category,, the oldest arts organization for American women, with 135 branches throughout the US. (2010)

SKILLS WORKSHOPS.....

SUNY ESF

- Presenter, Professor David Sonnenfeld’s *Senior Seminar in Environmental Studies* (EST 494) (2010)
- Presenter, Professor Jack Manno’s *Introduction to Environmental Studies* (EST 132) (2009)
- Presenter, *Presentation Zen*. Professor Ruth Yanai’s graduate students (2009)
- Presenter, *Facing the Fear of Public Speaking*, Multicultural Affairs (2005-present)
- Presenter, *Assessing Student Writing*, Graduate Student Colloquium (1995- present)
- Presenter, *Shelter: A Reading*, Friends of Moon Library (2007)
- Presenter, *Critical Thinking*, Freshman Orientation (2000- 2007)
- Presenter, *Small Group Communication*, Orientation Leaders’ Orientation (1995- 2007)
- Presenter, *Study Skills*, Pre-Orientation Workshop for Incoming Freshmen (1996-2000)
- Presenter, *Critical Thinking*, Pre-Orientation workshop for Incoming Freshmen (1996-2000)

OUTREACH

- The Garden: An Analysis of Environmental Racism*, ESF in the High School, SUNY ESF (2010)
- The Method as a Tool for Analysis*, ESF in the High School, Henniger High School (2009)
- Careers in Writing*. ESF in the High School, Nottingham High School (2009)

SERVICE.....

SUNY ESF

Writing Program:

- Chair, Writing Program Council (2009- present)
- Coordinator, Writing Resource Center (1994-2009)
- Member, Writing Program Council (2006-2009)

Department of Environmental Studies:

- Member, Executive Committee, Environmental Studies
- Member, Environmental Communication Standing Subcommittee
- Member, Facilities & Space Committee

Faculty Advisor, Environmental Studies Student Organization

Campus-Wide:

- Member, Campus-Wide Promotion & Tenure Committee (2008- present)
- Member, Search Committee, Director of the Library, SUNY ESF (2009)
- Member, Service Learning Advisory Council (2003- present)
- Participant, Faculty Mentoring Conferences (1995- present)
- Member, Graduate Student Committees (2003- present)
- SUNY ESF Representative, Syracuse University Senate (1998- 2003)
- Member, Syracuse University Senate Subcommittee on Diversity (1999- 2003)
- Member, Syracuse University Senate Subcommittee on Research (1998- 1999)

Community:

- Service Learning Initiative, *Writing for Environmental Professionals* (CLL 410) (2001-present)
 - More than 360 students have performed community service in Central New York as part of the requirement for this class. Class projects are connected to the service experience. Service sites include: Westcott Community Center, Baltimore Woods, Syracuse City Schools, Utica Zoo, New Environment Institute, NYPIRG, and Syracuse Homes.
 - *Success by 6, Author/Presenter*. Sponsored by the United Way, Success by 6 aims to ensure that children under the age of six are prepared for success in school. (1998-present)
 - *Success by 6 Gently Used Book Drive*. (2002)

TEACHING.....

TEACHING INTERESTS

- Professional Writing
- Communication/Journalism
- Cultural Studies/Popular Culture
- Public Presentation Skills
- Creative Writing
- Qualitative Research Methods

EXPERIENCE

COMMUNICATION

Graduate:

- Advanced Public Presentation Skills (2006-present)

Undergraduate:

- Advanced Public Presentation Skills (2006-present)
- Public Presentation Skills for Environmental Professionals (2001-present)
- Art and Forms of Advertising (1993-present)
- Introduction to Public Relations (1993-present)
- Technical Communication for Engineering Managers (2005-2009)
- News Writing (1980-1982)

WRITING & LITERATURE

Graduate:

- Children's Writing Workshop (2007)

Undergraduate:

- Writing for Environmental Professionals (1997-present)
- Academic Writing: Analysis and Argument (1993-present)
- Academic Writing for At-Risk Students (1997-present)
- Professional Writing for Management Students (2005-2009)
- Technical Writing for Engineering Students (2005-2009)
- Academic Writing for Communication Majors (Learning Community) (2003-2005)
- Academic Writing for Engineering Managers (1998-2001)
- Introduction to the Literature of Nature (On-line) (1999)
- Writing and the Environment (1993-1997)
- Perspectives on the Environment (1993-1997)
- Writing for Children (1992-1995)