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Literacy Identity and Motherhood: Implications of Hermans' Dialogical Self Theory

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Literacy Identity and Motherhood: Implications of Hermans' Dialogical Self Theory

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This multiple case study shows how motherhood works with and against two women's literacy identities, as interpreted through the theoretical lens of Herman's Dialogical Self Theory. The evidence of this is shown in the tension between their roles as mothers and their personal roles as readers and writers. In many ways, taking on a reader or writer role meant to deny other roles for these women, showing the clash between efforts to consolidate multiple I-positions. While their meta-positions helped them recognize the discrepancies in their I-positions, there was little evidence of mediating third positions to negotiate their roles. This descriptive study explored the way two women approach their roles "I a reader" and "I as writer" while simultaneously navigating their I-position "I as mother." This exploration was conducted through the use of semi-structured interviews and the subsequent coding of the transcripts of those interviews. The coding included the identification of all instances where I-positions manifested in the interview text. Among numerous other roles, the roles related to literacy and motherhood involved a particular friction. The findings of the study make evident that tension exists for these two women between their roles as mothers and as literate people.

Keywords: literacy, identity, write, roles, reader, writer, motherhood

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Introduction

An individual's literacy identity is the culmination of the reading and writing-related experiences they are exposed to during their lifetime and their subsequent internal and external dialogues at play: "Literate identities, reading identities, and writing identities describe the ways that a person constructs the self as a reader, writer, and user of language . . . The learning of these skills is mediated by a person's developing beliefs about language, literacy, and the self" (Wagner 25). Identity comprises far more than the way an individual sees themselves. It also includes the influences accumulated over a lifetime, framing the way an individual sees their world and how they see themselves as readers and writers. As Lewis states in "Literacy and Identity," "Readers and writers, then, are constructed through linguistic and social codes that shape their relationships to texts. If for no other reason, this is the crux of why identity matters to the study of literacy" (313). In other words, cultural influences, individuals, and forces outside the self are integral to construct identities, including literacy identities, formed through the lifetime. Surrounding cultural influences inform literacy identity: "recognizing literacy practices as social has led many theorists to recognize that people's identities mediate and are mediated by the texts they read, write, and talk about" (Moje, et. al. 416). Outside influences such as family and community culture have great effect on how someone's literacy develops. People are constantly classified and labeled in subtle ways, including related to literacy:

Identity labels can be used to stereotype, privilege, or marginalize readers and writers as 'struggling' or 'proficient,' as 'creative' or 'deviant' (Lin, 2008). Because the institutions in which people learn rely so heavily on identities to assign labels of progress, particularly in relation to reading and writing skills (S. Hall, 1996; Lewis & del Valle, 2009), these identity labels associated with certain kinds of literacy practices can be

especially powerful in an individual's life . . . texts and the literate practices that accompany them not only reflect but may also produce the self (Davies, 1989, cited Moje, et. al. 416)

Literacy and identity become the study of literacy-and-identity because of the integrated nature of these topics on the self and its development.

This study examines the experiences of two mothers who disidentify as readers and writers and considers how their literacy identities affect their adult day-to-day lives. Using a multiple case study approach, this thesis utilizes data collected from interviews with the two female adult participants and thematically analyzes their responses. These effects manifest as conflicts between their literacy identities and their motherly day-to-day role. The navigation of the tensions involved reveals much about their individual relationships with their literacy.

Literature Review

Literacy and the self are intertwined and directly inform one another in their creation. The literature review that follows examines the intersection between literacy and identity. Identity and literacy are affected by both the former self (typically involving a student role of some kind), and the adult self of an individual: the two literate selves are connected. Bernardo Ferdman, in his "Literacy and Cultural Identity" explained: "Literacy, I believe . . . touches us at our core in that part of ourselves that connects with the social world around us. It provides an important medium through which we interact with the human environment" (181). Literacy is a multi-layered and socially driven skill. Ideally, students are taught to read and write within the frame of their growing personal identities and external sociocultural influences, not separate from them. Otherwise, if "the experiences, perceptions, and relationships students value are not acknowledged, they often learn that literacy is an exclusive, limiting activity that diminishes

their efforts to construct expanded identities” (Lewis 310). Consequently, the growth of students’ literacy identity is hampered.

The process of teaching a student to read, for instance, ideally considers and incorporates the student’s life context and those already-existing facets of their identity (Hall 243). Teaching with student’s frameworks in mind allows students to retrofit their developing literacy identities into their existing paradigms, increasing the likelihood they will integrate the new skills as part of themselves and pursue them into the future. The alternative is an impersonal and inflexible approach to literacy learning, resulting in resistance to efforts later in life to reverse former negative literacy encoding. This was the case in one study, where a lack of integration produced a group of reading-hesitant youth and adults, who even after being engaged in enticing digital reading apps to stir their interest, felt that while they enjoyed the process of reading in a new format, they were still unlikely to pick up a traditional text because of past negative experiences (Hall, “How Youth and Adults”). Without integrated teaching while young, sometimes the connections are never made between the outside and inside-classroom life, leaving reading perpetually disconnected from “normal” life for a person.

Schools are one of the greatest influences in children’s identity-building, including their reader and writer identities. (Glenn 85; Compton-Lilly 35). An adult with a negative reader identity may also be a student with a lack of positive exposure to reading and writing in the classroom: “Adults who self-identify as poor readers . . . have pointed to a long and difficult history with reading, often beginning in school, as evidence for why they cannot read well (Sheehan-Holt & Smith, 2000). In a separate study dealing with both youth and adult struggling readers, those who formed negative beliefs about themselves as readers during their school years appeared to limit their involvement with texts and have little interest in reading (Belzer, 2002;

Shore, Sabatini, Lentini, & Holtzman, 2013)” (cited Hall 675). In other words, the development (or lack thereof) of literacy identity in school leads to a disinterest in engagement with reading and writing later on, long after those shaping influences have faded.

It is valuable to consider the adult within the context of their literacy experiences during the whole span of their lifetime. If individuals have been told they are—or simply been treated as—struggling readers, that impression will become a small or large part of their inner dialogue about who they are and what they’re capable of. One case study of a 20-year-old struggling reader illustrated the way that he negotiated a number of narratives and perspectives representing “various understandings and expectations” of his reader selves (Coombs 169). These particularly involved the relationships in his life and the impressions he received in those relationships regarding his literacy capabilities. His mother, brother, and peers all shaped the way he approached texts and saw himself as a literate person. Their influence included both support and motivation, as well as more negative complications to the idea of his literacy. One way to describe the phenomenon of individual literacy identities is: “As they actively assimilate the words and ideas of others that position them as capable readers and learners, struggling readers may develop a more complex and nuanced understanding of their identity and abilities” (Coombs 170). The literate self is simultaneously a disjointed and cohesive entity, as the culture that surrounds it informs and reshapes its ever-changing identity.

Past literacy experiences shape everyone's present experiences, but this is especially true for adults who have not yet developed strong reader identities. This was starkly obvious in the negative classroom literacy experiences recounted by the ten adult GED students in one research study (Compton-Lilly). These students were interviewed from among four different GED classrooms over the course of a year about their literacy. Based on their responses regarding

“official and unofficial reading competence,” the researcher concluded: “reading identity is complex, highly situated, and embodied in various social practices including literacy practices” (42). An example of the complexity involved in the concept of a reading identity is the amount of “unofficial” (or non-classroom) reading that was consumed but unknown to teachers, outside the confines of the classroom. The teachers did not adequately communicate to the students was the fact that their practices of literacy outside the classroom (including magazine and novel reading) was just as legitimate a literacy as that taught to them inside the classroom. The result was a compartmentalized understanding of literacy that did not consider their personal practices as literacy, leaving them to see themselves as less-than-literate as they became adults.

The Compton-Lily study also showed that literacy was being viewed as a “one and done” experience—either developing it or not—among other misconstrued ideas surrounding reading and writing. But individuals must see themselves as in-development to be successful, with literacy approached as a skill that’s actively under construction. This perspective is what was required for the ten adult students in the GED course to see their own literacy more accurately (Compton-Lilly 35, 43). The conclusions of the researcher were that helping growing readers is vital, since struggles with basic literacy practices—for instance, extracting information from texts or understanding overall meaning—equates to difficulty with literacy-related tasks later in life.

In a separate study, five female adult students in a GED course grew to see that they were more literate than they previously thought, because they learned to see their literacy from outside the traditional lens they were given for reading and writing in school. These individuals didn’t see that they were highly literate in their chosen mediums, outside of more formal frameworks. Before, they saw reading and writing as school-related behaviors and comprehended their

improvement only within that context (Belzer 112). In yet another revealing study with adults perceived as non-readers, several considered reading integrally linked to educational experiences in the past, and the mentalities they maintained from school classrooms. In “Negotiating Literacy Identity in the Face of Perceived Illiteracy,” Sheila Benson sits down with multiple adults who do not separate their current perceived literacy from their experiences as school-age children. However, the reality is that, “adult literacy practices differ from the school-determined literacy practices that enter many people’s minds when they think of literacy” (132). One adult participant considered literacy strictly reading for recreation; since he didn’t enjoy that activity, he saw himself as non-literate. The impact on his self-perception was described as follows: “When school becomes the only lens through which literacy is viewed, adults can easily see themselves as lacking when, in fact, they are not. . . school literacy is a small piece of a larger life continuum” (139). This example touches on a critical component of what the perspective on adult literacy should really be. As a result of this persistent singular definition for literacy, a large part of the adult population continues to view themselves as less-than when it comes to literacy.

Literacy is malleable and upgradeable, regardless of prior background. It can improve with further education and increased positive influences, even later in life and with significant obstacles. (Duncan, 2013; Reder 2010). Though daunting, the friction between past bad experiences and present literacy can be mended. Literacy identity is entwined with overall identity: in one study with thirteen adult students who were struggling dyslexic readers, through positive education and relationship-based interactions, researchers saw a “shift from a prior negative self-perception to a current positive social identity” (Caskey 73). These individuals were given literacy-based support through mentors and provided with literacy information and tools they hadn’t previously had. Making these changes within just the short time period of the

study improved their impression of themselves and their abilities (Caskey 83). Studies like this one point to the need for adult literacy capabilities to be considered malleable. Reading and writing skills can be improved, going so far as revamping one's existing literacy identity and fueling further desire to acquire life-changing literacy skills.

Attention to adult literacy identity is vital. Adults still have great capacity to benefit from a contextualized understanding of their own literacy (Hall, "How Youth and Adults"). Issues of adult literacy identity result not only from the readers and writers as they are today, but also their broader past experiences with reading, writing, and themselves as literate individuals. Reader and writer identity is important at a deeper than superficial level, affecting adult practical tasks at home and executing one's livelihood (consider, for instance, simply being asked to compose a short report for your supervisor). Failure to give attention to the intricacies and possibilities of improvement in adult literacy identity is a mistake, because great and affecting change is possible for one's identity and literacy at all stages of life. This study contributes to this growing body of research as it examines the intricacies of adult literacy identity through motherhood. The new additions to such a conversation are in the ever-changing role of mother that the two participants are grappling with that intertwine and inform their literacy identities.

Hermans' Theory of I-Positions

Because literacy identity is crucial in real lives and a malleable feature of those lives, Hermans' theory of I-positions is a useful lens to understand how people approach their literacy. Hermans' I-positions take all of a person's experiential roles into account, including those of "I as reader" and "I as writer." Indeed, these two positions and how people interact with them in the context of other life roles, constitute the literacy identity. The theory of the "dialogical" self, as introduced by Hubert Hermans, combines William James' concept of the "I" and Bahktin's

multi-voiced self into what he calls “the dialogical self.” James’ concept of the “I” is very pertinent here: that is, that an individual’s identity is composed of the impressions they have of themselves over time. This is imitative of the way that literacy identity is created, perceived, and changed through time and circumstance. Along with Hermans, James sees value in recognizing the multiplicities within the self. Different elements of the self combine to create the overall dialogue of each life situation (247). Social environments shape and inform who people are and who they are becoming.

Dialogic processes occur not only between the self and outside forces, but within the individual themselves (Hermans 255). There are never neutral interactions; each moment of dialogue (whether verbal, physical, internal, external, or otherwise) has some kind of repercussion. When a dialogic interaction takes place, the individuals involved position themselves in relation to that event. In response to social influences around them, people “transform ‘you are . . .’ utterances from the community to ‘I am . . .’ utterances in constructing a self-narrative” (Hermans 264). As a person enters into dialogue with these influences, they alone determine if and how they are shaped by them. Hubert Hermans’ theory of the dialogical self states that people maintain space both inside and outside the self. Dialogues are natural to humans, and parts of human identity are in constant conversation with the interior and exterior environments. This self-informing process is unending for the life of a person, a “continuous dialogical process in which the child, and later the adult, ‘answers’ to these influences” (Hermans 264). The present reality of most adults is built on the back of a self-conception, created starting from a child out of the dialogues around them.

The concept of culture is something that exists within (and not entirely separate from) the self (Hermans 262). The collective becomes part of the individual as the individual influences

and takes part in the collective. Dialogical self theory provides for a self that exists within a larger group identity. One's literacy identity is affected by these influences: "Because collective voices are not only outside but also in a particular individual self, the relationship between a collective voice may constrain or even suppress the meaning system of an individual" (263). For example, if a reader is a member of a community that does not value—or even devalues—literacy, it is going to be much harder for that individual to desire the attainment of that skill set. People may envision a certain role for themselves, but if it conflicts with societal expectation or idea, they are less likely to take it on. The self cannot be conclusively determined, in the same way as its surrounding culture: "The composite concept 'dialogical self' transcends this dichotomy by bringing the external to the internal and, in reverse, transporting the internal to the external" (Meijers and Hermans 7). Not only do self and culture represent separate entities within an ongoing discourse, but the two are so entwined as to become convoluted. The basis for Hermans, Frans Meijers (a later collaborator with Hermans) and their position is an envisioning of "self and culture in terms of a multiplicity of positions with mutual dialogical relationships" (243). Using this theoretical lens makes the connection between culture and the self possible.

To combine Bakhtin and James as Hermans does, is to support the notion of both a continuous *and* discontinuous self. Hermans' dialogical self with its attendant "I-positions" moves between roles and informs itself with and by way of those roles (248). The self functions from the position of multiple roles as-we-see-them, whether it be relational (I-as-father, I-as-daughter), professional (I-as-colleague, I-as-employee), or otherwise. Hermans uses the term "I-position" to refer to the roles manifesting themselves at different times and in different circumstances. An identity positioned in time and place links an individual to the moment, but also means that change is possible in the next moment. The postmodern world accelerates this

phenomenon, heightening the speed with which the versions of ourselves are taken on, used, and summarily abandoned in a continuous cycle. The creation and perpetuation of “I” positions stems from both internal and external forces, choices made and the dialogue between them (Hermans 254). The multi-faceted self encompasses everything an individual knows about themselves, with literacy identity composing only a portion.

A person’s different roles are their “I-positions” (e.g. I-as-self, I-as-student, I-as-reader), but Dialogical Self Theory additionally “makes a distinction between I-positions which are evoked in specific situations and meta-positions which allow a cross-situational overview of specific positions” (Meijers and Hermans 10). I-positions are the roles and positions humans embody, and the attendant meta-position which oversees all other roles, allows for meaning-making, and increases awareness of personal roles and the interplay between them. To further clarify meta-positions, it’s important to understand the following:

A meta-position has several specific qualities: (a) it creates an optimal distance toward other, more specific, positions... (b) it allows one to take an overarching view of a multiplicity of positions, both internal and external ones, so that they are considered simultaneously and in their patterns (helicopter view); (c) it enables one to see the linkages between positions as part of one’s personal history and the collective history of one’s group or culture; (d) it allows a long-term view of the self when past, present, and future positions are seen in their interconnections; (e) it leads to an evaluation of the several positions and their organization. (Meijers and Hermans 10)

A meta-position is a perspective that allows for a better view of I-positions from one minute to the next, and that are switched between based on circumstance. Meta-positions help show the

intricacies of the self now and who that person will become, in relation to inner and outer influences and histories.

The second critical feature of Hubert's Dialogical Self Theory is the "third position," or a mediating role that can engage when friction arises and there is a need for resolution between I-positions. The concept states: "In the case of two conflicting positions, a third one may emerge that mitigates, under certain conditions, the conflict between the original ones" (Meijers and Hermans 11). Perhaps there is a gap for someone between the way they see themselves as a learner and their role as an employee. The third position works between these I-positions to mitigate the gap and create more continuity in the person's identity. A third position emerges, provided the person has identified the conflicting roles through use of a working meta-position. Third positions and meta-positions provide the ability to center and align different I-positions in pursuit of a more cohesive and whole self.

The theoretical lens of Hermans' Dialogical Self makes the connection possible between culture and the multi-faceted self. The multi-faceted self includes one's literacy identity, with the parts of the reader and writer identities even more compartmentalized segments of that identity. The nature of I-positions vying for space within each individual as outlined by Hermans' theory is representative of the way the reader and writer identities themselves work.

Methodology

The base for this thesis was an IRB-approved, in-depth case study of two individuals. A case study approach is valuable because it requires investigation of a concept more closely to gain an understanding of its background. The goal is to decipher what is going on with the subjects, separately from—though informed by—the circumstances themselves (Yin 15). Case studies allow researchers to examine individual representations of a phenomenon; in this study,

that phenomenon is struggling literacy identity. It is the in-depth nature of these two case studies, and not simply the case studies on their own that carry value. The goal is to analyze the cases in such depth that the research can comment on the larger phenomenon, not just the cases themselves (Yin 41).

The value of the case study during this research was to explore the insights found in deeper examination of the literacy identities of two self-identified adult struggling readers. The perceptions of two individuals with struggling literacy identities represent highly relevant data, as it is two first-hand accounts as told by the subjects themselves. There's no better source than those with the firsthand information supporting the concept aiming to be illustrated (Yin 31). Though the original research question—whether the literacy identities of the two women studied would continue to have an effect on them into their adult lives—originally focused on an idea that could be termed an abstraction (that is, literacy identity as a concept), the investigation drew from two real human lives. The case study method established a level of concreteness for the work: an added validity and weight drawn from the experiences of two real people. Starting as a question after the literacy identity of these two women generally, the focus turned into a discussion of the women negotiating their literacy as they also acted within their role as mothers.

Participants

IRB approval was received for this study before beginning research. The two participants discussed in this study are middle-class white women with children, one in her twenties and one in her thirties, who both identify as struggling readers (self-identified as not reading well or often enough), and were living in the suburbs of a large city in the Intermountain West. Besides this and their both being a part of the larger communities' dominant Christian religious affiliation, their contexts varied a little between them: Ella was a stay-at-home mom of 2- and 4-year-old

children at the time, whose priority most of the time was them and their happiness. Samantha also had five children under fourteen who she focused on, on top of which she additionally took beauty clients one to two days a week and homeschooled her children, making her demands somewhat different as a mother. Both were in stable marriages and had stable shelter, regular income, and other basic necessities. Some may argue this made them more well-placed than the portion of the world's population who are actually struggling readers. One researcher, in a national longitudinal study of adult literacy, found that "the initial level of literacy proficiency affects both the initial level of earnings and the rate of subsequent earnings growth for the individual" (Reder 19). In other words, based on one particular group of post high-schoolers, literacy and earnings are related in a direct way. However, in this study the participants have their basic needs already met, allowing the less survival-level needs, such as literacy, to be attended to.

Motherhood was a large part of both their identities at the time of this study and it was the tension involving that role and literacy that emerged to have particular importance to this study. Initially it was not motherhood itself that was a qualifying trait of participants, but that part of their lives ended up arising from the data to show the most tension, and came to bear in the discussions of participant literacy in critical ways.

Both participants felt that their literacy was lacking in some way, either the amount or the form of their reading and writing. This self-characterization made them ideal candidates for this study. Along with their self-identification as struggling readers, there was evidence for such a conclusion from their background and school experiences. Being a familiar acquaintance to the two selected participants, the researcher had associated with them enough to know how they saw themselves in the sense of literacy. They were chosen because they were typical of non-readers

in their general awareness of struggling with their literacy identity, and their lack of insight as to whether they needed (or wanted) to take action or steps to improve their literacy. Neither of them were expected to think a particular way or change their lives somehow as a consequence of—or through participation in—this study.

The participants knew that they were part of a research inquiry into those who saw themselves as struggling readers. It is possible that knowing the purpose behind the study affected the answers they gave to questions. Part of this effect would have been tied to how the two participants related to the researcher: whether they felt comfortable, and how this added or detracted from any responses. Their level of comfort around their interviewer would have had a direct effect on the answers they chose to give, prompting either more or less disclosure and the content of those disclosures. Being a familiar acquaintance to both women beforehand would have had a varying degree of influence on participant answers during the interviews. There is the possibility of a skewed answer due to a friendly desire from them to “help” and provide the answers they believed were needed or wanted for the research. By the same token, it's also possible that any familiarity with the researcher made them more comfortable disclosing information and talking about difficult topics. In this way, the researcher relationship could have been actually advantageous to the data collection. Both of these effects were equally possible.

Data Collection

This study was intended to capture the distinct perspectives of the case study participants. This choice aimed to use the individual's experiences and personal data itself as the content for the study. When the data in use is the life stories and experiences of people, their accounts and perspectives bear even more weight and become the topics of the scrutiny or investigation itself (Yin 120). The interviewee functions as the authority on him or herself and all attendant

experiences. The point of using a case study as opposed to other research methods is to investigate a real-life instance, through the use of an individual's own life expertise.

With IRB approval, the researcher gathered evidence from two sources: interviews and participant-observation. The case studies were with two separate participants, and consisted of three interviews with each. These interviews were all conducted in the same place for each person: for Ella, in the living room of her home, and for Samantha, in the private salon room where she worked. The interviews were done by the single researcher, in person, with the audio recorded live and transcribed afterward. Each participant's first interview simultaneously functioned as a screening to verify they met the qualifications for the study as aliterate struggling readers. Obviously in both cases, the participant was suited to the study as suspected and the interviews proceeded. They were semi-structured interviews, with questions determined beforehand but with room to edit and change with the conversation as the participant opened up about parts of their life that seemed appropriate or relevant. The second interview mainly focused on questions and conversation surrounding reading identity. The third was somewhat of a conclusive moment and primarily centered around questions of writing identity. There was at least a week and sometimes two to three weeks between each interview session. Interview transcription did not begin until after all three interviews concluded. There was, however, preliminary findings gathered along the way, with previous interviews informing those moving forward since recordings were reviewed in between for quality and effect. By the time the third interview finished, it was evident that data saturation had been reached: participants began to repeat themselves, retell stories, and discursively retracing their same steps by the end of the third interview.

The investigation also included observation in the form of “field notes,” or what was observed related to different parts of the participants’ lives while the interviews were conducted, jotted down as impressions immediately post-interview. These were alternatively short observations or items to remember to bring up in the next interview, such as something they touched on that needed further questioning.

Data Reduction/Analysis

The process of going through the data in order to distill it down and glean the most relevant and helpful parts from the results and data was arguably the most important part of the study. It was in this process that decisions were made between one piece of data and another, between the inclusion of one concept over or instead of another. Through the reduction phase, the filtering of the the data aimed to decipher what the data was saying. The reading and re-reading of the data collected was vital, as doing so allows the researcher to get a thorough sense of the content through repetition.

Proceeding through each interview transcript, Hermans' dialogical self theory was used to review and code the data according to places where I-positions were present and the participants were acting within them. Each paragraph or sentence was marked and labeled by the I-position manifesting there. These included “I as reader,” “I as writer,” and “I as mom.” For example, “I as reader” included such quotes as “I’m not a huge fan of buying a book unless I know I like it.” In the beginning, the categories consisted of more than these, including such categories as “I as student,” “I as learner,” “I as spiritual/religious person,” and “I as daughter.” While some of these removed categories contained interesting bits of data that were tempting to pursue, the study was undertaken for the purpose of insight into participant literacy, and the scope had to be narrowed to be effectively helpful. While the relationships of the participants to their family

members or the style of learning they most identified with may have been indirectly helpful to understanding them as literate individuals, it was not immediately critical to the patterns that were emerging from the data as far as tension between I-positions. In other words, through the lens of Dialogical Self theory, if the I-positions being identified through the analysis were not at odds with another I-position, there was no conflict and thus nothing there to be further explored. By that determination, the I-position categories were reduced to only those needing deeper analysis. After coding in this manner, the focus became the instances of conflict between the competing I-positions that jostled against one another, vying for space. These were moments of tension where the participant's narrative came into conflict. The effort to consolidate between any two I-positions creates friction for an individual, or a sense of cognitive dissonance that must subsequently be worked through to resolve. These were the most important intersections, and where analysis and discussion actually came into play.

After gathering, coding, and analyzing, the conclusion that was arrived at, lends to a greater understanding of some of the factors that contribute to and influence the development of adult literacy identities. The two separate but related case studies supported one another in their resultant similar ideas, cross-case. The dialogue between the case studies' ideas created "an opportunity to pursue a critical methodological practice—to develop converging lines of inquiry" (Yin 126-7). Not only do the cross-case reports stand on their own as their conclusions support one another, but they contribute to a more expanded search for ideas. The resulting discoveries to all of the described methodology are now outlined below within their respective case studies.

Findings

The findings that follow show both the distinct differences and the overlaps between these case studies. While both struggle with literacy in their own ways, there are patterns that

emerge between their approaches to motherhood, the conflicts between their roles and how they react to those conflicts.

Ella: The Emphasis on a Single I-Position

Ella (names have been changed) is a married mother of two, born and raised in the Mountain West area. At the time of the interview she was a homemaker full-time. Willing and open to talk about her literacy identity, she appeared eager to analyze her experience as a literate person and a mom. Ella:

Went to BYU Idaho for about January to April of 2011. Then I was done. Then I came back here that fall. And I went to UVU for about three weeks until they said tuition is due. And I was like, “Yeah, I don't think I can do this.” It was stressful.

Like her parents, she has her high school diploma, and has “never gone further.” While she considers going back for a class or two for fun, she’s not interested in getting any further schooling.

A critical quote from Ella early on in her interviews states:

Like I feel like I read a lot when I was in school because I could check stuff out easily at...the school library, and now I'm like, ugh...I have to get the kids in the car, I have to go to the library. I have to like, put them somewhere where they're...because they're not going to read the same books I want to read. They gotta be entertained.

Here is Ella’s position “I as reader,” as she describes her reading habits while she was in school and would check books out at the library. They were the habits of convenience, when she had means and ability easily at her fingertips: “I read a lot when I was in school because I could check stuff out easily at...the school library.” This raises the question of how much of an effect the ease of the role played in it being part of her literacy identity.

At the same time, the role “I as mom” exists in conflict with her reader role, which is blatantly evident in the language she uses: “ugh...I have to get the kids in the car...have to like, put them somewhere...they gotta be entertained.” It is an imposition on her “I as a reader” I-position to change the patterns that worked for her before she was a mom. This is partly due to the fact that what she reads is different from what they read, but more than that, her concern is occupying them while she browses for herself. Her first thought is really of transport: getting them into the car before even getting to the library. Once there, she has to “put them somewhere.” The tone of arduous effort in her words suggests a dissonance between her “I as reader” and her “I as mom” positions.

There is no evidence of a meta-position at work with her literacy here. Instead, her perspective extends as far as seeing the issues at work and no further. She observes the status of things as they are and doesn’t consider an alternative approach or piecing out different possibilities. Her language shows this in her words like, “They *gotta* be entertained.” Her words focus on things as they are, and suggest the way they will remain. A third position is not present to move between the “I as mom” and “I as reader” identities, nor does it look to be forming. In either case, there is no role between her as a mom and her as a reader to negotiate the interrelationship. This is not to say that a metapositional view or third position can’t enter the conversation, but as it stands, without another point of view influencing the way she sees the two roles, nothing will change.

Further evidence of Ella’s internal conflict came during one of the interviews in the following quote:

I did a lot of Nicholas Sparks too, that kind of stuff. But I haven't read that kind of stuff in a long time. I mean, because I realized I need, like, dead silence when I'm reading a

book. Noises distract me. And it's very uncommon for my house to be dead silent. Except at night, but...by then my eyes are like, heavy. And there's no way I'm going to read..."

Here again, "I as reader" is present, shown in Ella's reflection on the way she "used to" read, but not "in a long time" because she needs "dead silence when I'm reading a book." Any noises in her reading vicinity affects her ability to read a book. At the same time, the identity position of "I as mom" is specifically present in her statement that "it's very uncommon for my house to be dead silent," as well as the fact that it's only quiet "at night," but by then her eyes are "heavy" and she's exhausted. The repercussions of her "I as mom" role are evident when she predicts a lessened likelihood of success in herself as a reader: "and there's no way I'm going to read," in direct connection to her role as mom in that situation. "I as mom" creates a stumbling block for the performance of her role as a reader as long as it requires strict silence and alertness. In this way, Ella's reader identity is strongly dependent on her I-position as a mom.

Ella is also not using a meta-position here either, which can be seen in the nature of her answers as limited statements of fact describing the present as static reality. Her perspective precludes the ability to see I-positions from an overarching viewpoint, making it difficult to see overall relationships and decide how multiple roles could occupy the same space. There is also no mediating third position entering the conversation, seen in her reasoning that it's uncommon for her house to be silent: "except at night...*but* by then my eyes are...heavy." If there's any position working between her reader identity and her role as mom, it's an excuse-giving and not a consolidating or problem-solving one as is needed to qualify as a third position.

As Ella continues, so do her expressions of the circumstances surrounding her literacy identity:

I wish I read more...like when people talk about reading books. Like I wish I had the time to read more and that's what's sad is I do have the time, I just don't have the volume level that I need. Because...like right now, I could easily be reading a book but they're making so many sounds that my brain is...listening to them more than reading.

This quote, while making similar points about her “I as reader” role, adds reasoning language. Starting with, “I wish I read more,” she adds the next line: “I just don’t have the volume level that I need.” Her rationalizing here doesn’t hide the fact that there is a definite “I as reader” role at play. In fact, this quote makes it clear that not only does this reader identity I-position exist, but Ella has desires for it to change. She describes, “when people talk about reading books.” She wants to be that kind of person: considered a reader, and engaged with and talking about books.

“I as mom” manifests itself more discreetly within the bounds of this quote, but is still evident in Ella’s reference to her kids: “...*they’re* making so many sounds that my brain is...listening to them more than reading.” The kids exist are referenced within an illustrative scenario about the challenges of her literacy identity, but the circumstance only exists because of her role as mother. It is also her role as a mom that created the situation in the first place where she wishes she read more: if it wasn’t for the life changes from becoming a mother, the “I as reader” role might have remained the same.

There is not a third position present here, and without that to negotiate between two differing roles, “I as reader” and “I as mom” remain in finely delineated arenas. As mentioned before, Ella does talk about “when people talk about reading books. Like I wish I had the time to read more.” While mainly appearing to suggest a desire for change and an openness to revision, she is in fact wishing that her literacy identity—and specifically her reader identity—were stronger and more impactful in her life. But this sentiment extends only so far as a wish, since it

does not reach as far as to, for instance, cause a consolidation of her competing perspectives through a mediating third position.

Ella does utilize a meta-position in this quote. She states: “I wish I had the time to read more and that's what's sad is I do have the time, I just don't have the volume level that I need.” She momentarily self-corrects when she says “that’s what sad is I *do* have the time” after saying “I wish I had the time to read more.” Mid-sentence she edits her self-perception involved with her reader identity, but no more signs of a meta-position appear here, suggesting it is the extent of her thinking in the meta-positional direction.

Considering the trends of Ella’s comments, this quote further on in the interview is especially interesting: “I don't know the stereotypes of readers. I think they have a lot of time. And quiet. I think they probably have like a list of books that they want to get through. And they know how to find books that are interesting.” The same tension surrounding “I as reader” and her literacy identity is felt here, as she goes from saying she has no specific impressions of readers, to voicing a few specific observations. Not only that, the observations she shares in regards to what readers are like, are the two things that complicate her role as reader with her role as mother. For example, the feature of having silence is so entwined with her idea of reader identity, that she has trouble not seeing it as a required characteristic for the role of reader:

I don't get it. I couldn't do it. Yeah, no, I'm dead silence... When I put Eli laid down for a nap, get Jett on his tablet... And that's like, then my house will be quiet, ‘cause Talon's gone back to work so it's even more quiet.

Ella has reasoned out a way to make elusive quiet time a possibility for her own situation. But the very next line returns to the other issue with her literacy identity, that “real” readers are capable of overcoming, unlike her: “I could probably find something. But again, I don't know

where to find books that are going to be worth my time.” In other words, she highlights her second distinguishing characteristic of readers that she lacks: they are able to “find books that are interesting.” To her, both of the concerns that make her a non-reader are a result of her role as a mom. “I as reader” and “I as mom” overlap and intertwine, clashing at times and causing her role as mom to overshadow and in some cases entirely quiet her reader identity. As it stands, without an adequate third position or meta-position, there is no hope of change in the future for her role as reader and, by extension, her literacy identity.

Samantha: Pushing for an Interplay of Roles

Samantha, as mentioned before, has five kids and takes beauty clients on the side. As far as her context for literacy, she says: “I felt like I didn't apply myself in high school...I graduated from high school with my associate degree, because I thought it was stupid. School was just dumb. I wasn't getting great grades, because it wasn't challenging. And so I wasn't trying.” Her reading as an adult is limited almost exclusively to audiobooks when she wants to read something. Besides this, she consumes great amounts of information through and with friends through podcasts, articles, and recommended audiobooks.

Instead of lessening Samantha’s reading frequency, her kids have only made reading more of a regular occurrence:

I mean I...my reading has gone up dramatically, because I read with my kids. But now...I would say my daughter...who's eight, reads the most in my life. And she loves reading and she's a great reader...Yes, it's not super consistent. But like, we'll usually...pick a book and I'll read one on one with them.

Samantha reads with her kids and her oldest daughter in particular. This involves sitting down with a chosen book and reading together. Samantha’s “I as reader” role within her literacy

identity has grown *because* she is a mom. Her daughter reads the most out of the people in her life, and that reading includes her in it, as she reads “one on one” with her. Not only that, but her daughter’s influence on her is important because she is a strong reader who heightens Samantha’s literacy participation by association. Her “I as reader” role has been enhanced since stepping into her role as a mom.

For Samantha, the I-position “I as mom” increased her reading and the role literacy plays in her life. Her kids brought more into her personal “I as reader” role than she had access to by herself. Granted, helping her kids with their reading is not reading or listening to her own texts on her own, but this doesn’t change the fact that her association with the written word and literacy practices increases as a mom.

The fact that she sees “it’s not super consistent” but that her daughter reads the most of those in her life shows a meta-position at work in regards to her literacy. She’s able to see that reading has increased but there’s still work to be done. The foresight and awareness required to make these value judgments of her own work is evidence of her meta-position at work. Additionally, she can see evidence of quality and quantity of readers that surround her. With that said, it looks like a third position perspective is missing. No voice enters the conversation to aid in ensuring she also steps up to match her daughter’s reading, say, or learns to make their shared reading as well as her daughter’s reading more consistent.

While helping her with her reader identity, Samantha’s role as mom also complicates her literacy identity and raises bigger questions. She is her children’s mother and also their teacher, further entangling her literacy with theirs, since she’s the one actively trying to teach them. As both a stay at home mom and her children’s homeschool teacher, Samantha describes:

I feel pressure to keep them caught up...I should say, I have felt the pressure. And I'm trying to build them...to keep them caught up with their grade level. So that when they go back to school at some point, they're not feeling less-than, because they don't want to be made fun of, and things like that. And also, it's just so necessary for life...you have to be able to read...[but] as far as level of reading beyond like, what levels there are...beyond like, what, junior high, right?...I'm not sure that I care. Do you get dramatically better at reading beyond that? I guess, when I was on my [church proselyting] mission, I got way better. I got faster at reading. And that's important to me, because the ability to consume information is important.

With religion a large part of her culture and her idea of literacy, the mention of her mission and experience on it is not surprising. Her role “I as reader” has its effect here as a contextual resource. While what she says focuses on her kids and her efforts to help them become the readers she hopes them to be, the yardstick she’s measuring with comes from her own experiences and literacy identity. For instance, her statement, “I guess, when I was on my mission, I got way better. I got faster at reading...” shows her reflection and use of personal experience to reason that people continue to grow as readers past “beyond like, what, junior high, right?” As reader she sees that “it’s just so necessary for life...you have to be able to read.” She also reasons in the end that “the ability to consume information is important,” which comes from personal impressions as a reader over the years.

In the role “I as mom,” Samantha feels pressure to provide her kids with the best of education so they don’t feel “less-than.” This concern pertains to maintaining the same grade standard literacy level they would be aligned to in public school. It is interesting, however, that her motivation for keeping her kids at a certain level in reading stems from a desire for them to

avoid being “made fun of” when they go back to school at some point. This is not likely her only concern when homeschooling her kids, but it does factor into her thinking as their mom and their teacher.

The reasoning taking place between her “I as mom” and “I as reader” roles here, gives evidence of both a meta-position and a third position at work. About reading, she states: “it's just so necessary for life...you have to be able to read...[but] as far as level of reading beyond like, what levels there are...beyond like, what, junior high, right?...I'm not sure that I care. Do you get dramatically better at reading beyond that?” Here Samantha steps back and analyzes her beliefs about reading, in a type of stream-of-consciousness manner, asking questions of the things she currently believes. Not everyone employs this type of meta-position style thinking to their lives, let alone their literacy. Next she answers her own questions: “I guess, when I was on my mission, I got way better. I got faster at reading. And that's important to me, because the ability to consume information is important.” Doing this overall self-study takes meta-positional work. In a related vein, her third position of either “I as scholar” or “I as learner” is doing the reasoning and answering of her own questions as she moves between the two roles and maneuvers the relationship between “I as reader” and “I as mom.”

While giving an example of what she reads, Samantha again makes it clear that she has found things to combine her roles “I as mom” and “I as reader” in innovative ways:

I love C.S. Lewis. So much. So...I listen to all the *Chronicles of Narnia*. It's super nice, because I can turn them on and it's...somewhat entertaining for my kids, but also like, fifteen layers deep. And I'm like, this is so cool. And that ties into something I'm learning over here. That's...totally obscure.

Samantha has found a way for her I-position “I as reader” to effectively coexist with “I as mom.” The result is the maintenance and enrichment of her own literacy, while still functioning as a mom and entertaining her kids. “I as reader” is present in this quote in the way she states her enjoyment of C.S. Lewis and the depth in his writing. Her reader self is also making connections between the *Chronicles of Narnia* and other texts she has, which speaks of her reading awareness and comprehension. A little more obvious in this quote, her role “I as mom” highlights the way the *Chronicles of Narnia* keep her kids engaged, letting her simply “turn them on” and they’re taken care of.

As far as meta-position, she is able to see that the choice of C.S. Lewis for reading serves two literacy identities: that of her own and her kids’. The fact that Samantha included this author as an example shows her value in the double utility of *The Chronicles of Narnia* as a text selection. The third position appears in this role she fills that values both her kids’ and her own literacy: able to identify that both are important, and thus valuing a book that can serve both sides. As a third position does, the role looks between the two roles and finds solutions between and to join them. This I-position could be called “I as self” or “I as individual,” as the efforts put forth are to create solutions for her different personal life roles.

Unlike Ella, Samantha had insightful clashes of her I-positions not only between “I as mom” and “I as reader,” but also with “I as *writer*.” When talking about her own school writing experiences, she says she “rarely” enjoyed it and it consisted of “reports and things like that. Just assignments like that.” In contrast, when speaking about writing with her kids in the role “I as mom,” she states:

I write with my kids for school...So what's interesting is when I'm trying to get my daughter to write creatively, I enjoy it. I think it's fun. Because she'll...start telling a story

or, you know, I'll be like, "okay, you make it up...you dictate to me and so I'll write it down." And she'll say, "and the boy went across the lake," and I was like, "okay, but why is he going across the lake?" And I asked all these questions...and we got to put a little more feeling into it. Like, "was he afraid to go across the lake? Or was he excited to go across the lake?" Or, you know, like, I ask all these questions. I'm like, this is kind of fun.

When it came to Samantha's own literacy, or herself in the "I as writer" role, writing was a chore and consisted of obligatory assignments. But it's not turning out the same way with her kids.

When she writes with them now and taps into her literacy through that interaction, she finds great joy in the process. In this case, it is the *combination* of her roles as mom and as writer that are bringing more joy to her literacy. Stepping into her motherhood role brought added enrichment to her life instead of hampering it in some way.

Notice she says: "So what's interesting is, when I'm trying to get my daughter to write creatively, I enjoy it," suggesting that, in contrast to when she herself writes, if it's with her *daughter*, it's a positive experience. This says things both about her as a writer and as a mother. On the one hand, her writing experiences weren't altogether positive previously, and in contrast, being able to help her kids with their writing has changed her writing experience and literacy identity for the better. The quote also reveals that, to Samantha, writing is successful with "more feeling" and creativity, as she is able to do with her daughter. It takes a meta-position to remember these examples with her daughter and identify that they were recent positive examples of writing for her. Identifying these instances is what's going to create more of them into the future, and help her see more instances of literacy around her.

Though with different takes on the I-positions in their lives (in other words, "I as writer" vs. "I as reader" taken differently), Ella and Samantha are both trying to navigate the conflicts

that arise between their roles. Ella has found little success so far in accessing a meta-position to help her see and implement a third position to help “I as reader” and “I as mother” coexist. Samantha has had better luck with looking for and achieving crossover that can benefit multiple roles she holds.

Discussion

Both Ella and Samantha are far more literate than they realize, acknowledge, and identify as. For instance, Samantha is highly literate, frequently reading audiobooks and eagerly consuming their information. The participants do not see that their versions of literacy “count” and are valuable in the same ways as reading a traditional book or writing a novel. While there is value in their desire to fit the typical reader or writer mold (as it may cause them to push themselves), the mindset doesn’t afford them any benefit besides greater guilt that they aren’t readers or writers as they see it, and wish they could be.

The critical juxtaposition of I positions for both participants in this study were the roles “I as reader” and “I as mom.” Their main role at this point in their lives is their identity as a mother, consuming their mind and many of their days. In accordance with that fact, “I as mom” came across as the key spot of tension alongside other roles in their experiential data. “I as mom” is a potent role, involving a deeply instinctual part of many women’s inner self. Discovering how all the other roles a person sees for themselves fit beside or in concert with those they already embody is a process that finds only one of its iterations with the “I as mom” and “I as reader” dichotomy.

Conclusion

This research shows that these two mothers who identify as struggling readers encounter conflicts as they negotiate their literacy identities with the other identities in their lives. Their

marked conflicts can be seen easily through the theoretical lens of Herman's Dialogical Self Theory. The personal roles of reader and writer of the two women studied, existed in tension with their role as mothers. Samantha sees her own literacy in a more expansive way and uses her children's literacy to fortify her own. The actions she is able to take that inform both her and her children's literacy are of most worth to her. For Ella, the "I as mom" role currently complicates her already conflicted relationship with literacy. When she is acting in the role of mom, she finds it difficult if not impossible to also act to enrich her own literacy, and vice versa. This suggests that while acting within the "I as mom" role, the roles of "I as reader" and "I as writer" are given secondary importance—with the possibility of equal importance—if through the mediating use of a third position. Taking on a reader or writer role almost always meant the denial of the role of mom to these participants, quickly showing tensions between simultaneously manifesting I-positions. Such a finding shows a difficulty using a meta-position to negotiate multiple I-positions as connected to their struggling reader identities. While their meta-positions often allowed them to recognize the discrepancies in their I-positions during their interviews, there was rarely evidence of a third position, or action being taken to attempt to resolve any identity conflicts. More research is needed to explore whether there are similar identity conflicts for other or all mothers. While this suggests that women acting in the role of "I as mom" have a difficult time juggling any I-positions in concert with "I as reader" or "I as writer," further research needs to be done to explore whether this finding applies to mothers at large.

The main import behind drawing attention to the literacy of these two women, is the malleability of these individuals' identities, and the fact that they could and still can, improve their literacy identity. This is possible with an improvement in their reading and writing experiences, in hopes of replacing the negative impressions they have accumulated to lead them

to their current lacking literacy identity. This can come through encouragement to envision third positions at work in their own lives. Using third positions to negotiate, and overall meta-positions to further treat themselves as multi-positional selves, they will be capable of improving their literacy identities in very real ways.

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