CONSCIENTIZATION THROUGH THE CONTEXT OF A BOOK CLUB: ADULTS' EXPERIENCES OF CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

by

RACHEL M. CASSITY

(Under the Direction of Aliki Nicolaides)

ABSTRACT

Adults participate in a variety of activities that foster consciousness-raising. Book clubs are popular social settings through which adults can engage in casual, yet intellectually-stimulating dialogue with other individuals. However, since they are often considered informal and inconsequential venues where adults engage with literature and interact with one another through discussions, research about adult participation in book clubs remains scarce. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand the lived experiences of consciousness-raising for adults through the context of book clubs. This hermeneutic phenomenological study analyzed in-depth interviews of seven study participants to illustrate adults' experiences of consciousness-raising within the contexts of their book clubs. The results revealed three dimensions of the phenomenon: 1) Literature exposes participants to other lives; 2) Dialogue encourages engagement in discussion and communication of perspectives; and 3) Book clubs reflect characteristics of holding environments. Based on the study's findings it was concluded that (a) book clubs are intentional, bounded spaces that function somewhere between communities of interest and communities of practice; (b) book clubs are valuable contexts for researching consciousness-raising because they present similar characteristics to holding

environments and they facilitate reflection and dialogue, all of which help foster consciousness-raising experiences; and (c) consciousness-raising in a book club raises questions about how adults view learning, which is particularly significant in regard to andragogical approaches for adult educators.

INDEX WORDS: Book clubs, Reading groups, Collective reading, Adult education, Consciousness-raising, Phenomenology

CONSCIENTIZATION THROUGH THE CONTEXT OF A BOOK CLUB: ADULTS' EXPERIENCES OF CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

by

RACHEL M. CASSITY

B.A., Flagler College, 2005

M.A., East Tennessee State University, 2008

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2016

CONSCIENTIZATION THROUGH THE CONTEXT OF A BOOK CLUB: ADULTS' EXPERIENCES OF CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

by

RACHEL M. CASSITY

Major Professor:	Aliki Nicolaides
Committee:	Melissa Freeman
	Tom Valentine
	Karen Watkins

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
December 2016

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Chad, who has been a constant source of love and support throughout this entire process. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and profound encouragement. Thank you for comforting me when I was overwhelmed or frustrated. Thank you for pushing me when I doubted my abilities. And, thank you for always celebrating my successes and accomplishments. Without you, none of this would have been possible. I also dedicate this dissertation to my children, Abram, Kaylee, and Rylee, who inspired me to always keep learning and set a strong example. Finally, but certainly not least of all, this work is dedicated to my parents, Joe and Teresa. You are my role models and my biggest fans. Without your strength, work ethic, and unconditional love and support, I would not be where I am today. Thank you for always encouraging me to do my best, setting high expectations, and singing my praises to all who would listen.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my family for all the sacrifices they made so I could pursue my educational goals. Thank you to my husband, Chad, my children, my parents, and the many other members of my family for motivating and reassuring me every step of the way. I appreciate and value your optimism, admiration, and encouragement more than you will ever know.

A special thank you to the individuals who agreed to participate in this study. I truly appreciate your willingness to share your insights and experiences with me. Thank you for being flexible and understanding as I conducted interviews while also juggling a newborn. You provided me with an enlightening glimpse into the world of book clubs.

I also want to express my gratitude to each of my committee members for the roles they played, individually and collectively, in helping me complete my research. I am so thankful for having met Dr. Aliki Nicolaides in the beginning of my journey and having her as my major professor, my mentor, and my friend the entire way. Thank you for providing the right challenges and supports exactly when I needed them. To Dr. Melissa Freeman, I appreciate your gentle encouragement, your wisdom, and your nurturing spirit more than words can express. To Dr. Tom Valentine and Dr. Karen Watkins, I am grateful to have learned so much from you as professors and committee members. It was an honor to work with such prominent members of our field. Thank you all for your expertise, your humor, your patience, and your guidance. Most of all, thank you for helping me become a scholar.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Although it is not a widely researched topic, statistical findings about book clubs suggest that the number of book clubs throughout the United States is increasing. "Over the past decade, reading groups have become a renewed American pastime. In 1990, there were about 50,000 book clubs in the United States; by the turn of the millennium that number had just about doubled" (Daniels, 2002, p. 3). In a digital age which emphasizes individualized learning over social, communal structures, the traditional concept of face-to-face book clubs has become somewhat antiquated. Once founded on their ability to bring together individuals in a single, physical, collective learning environment, book clubs have evolved into groups that more often meet virtually, in online forums, to discuss readings and examine issues that emerge in the literature they explore. While these online formats enable more widespread participation and communication across geographical and cultural boundaries, the transition from the traditional structure of a book club into a less personal, online format provides a different environment and context for book club members. However, despite these evolutions in structure, there are book clubs that remain faithful to the traditional format of face-to-face meetings and continue to thrive today.

When studying adult learning environments, I became intrigued by informal and nonformal learning contexts and the supports and challenges they can provide for adults' meaning-making processes. This interest inspired further inquiry into not just book clubs, but

also how they might function as contexts for adults to experience Conscientization, or consciousness-raising, and what transpired surrounding those experiences. Thus, the following dissertation research was launched in an effort to combine my interests in informal and nonformal adult learning contexts, the connection between literature and Conscientization, and adults' experiences in book clubs.

History of Book Clubs

Book clubs have come a long way from their origins, and they continue to evolve in their intentions and membership. In America, the popularity of reading clubs increased with the formation of knowledge societies, the development of academies, the creation of social libraries, and the movement toward democratization of educational opportunities for women and minorities (Kett, 1994). Early women's reading or study clubs provided an outlet for them to not only educate themselves about these traditionally male-dominated issues, but also to assert their perspectives and express their opposition. It was through these contexts that women, other minorities, and even those more privileged were able to explore new perspectives and voice their concerns about a variety of issues, many of which involved social concerns.

Long (2003) suggested that "the act of founding or joining a reading group and deciding what its program will be provides an occasion for people to define who they are culturally and socially and to seek solidarity with like-minded peers" (p. 92). Beach and Yussen (2011) further claimed that one contribution to the success of book clubs is "the degree to which different members are willing to participate in discussions in ways that generate alternative interpretations" (p. 122). This reinforces the possibility for book club members to experience new and different perspectives or interpretations of the texts they read as they negotiate the complexities of their experiences through the context of the book club. Today, book clubs cover

a multitude of topics and genres. Critical consciousness theories, specifically those of Freire (1970/1996) present connections between reading and developing awareness, or consciousness-raising.

Critical Consciousness

Freire's (1970/1996) concept of Conscientization indicates that certain conditions must be present for the manifestation of critical consciousness, particularly praxis and open dialogue. The emergence from one state of understanding to another reveals how transitions in people's capacity for moral reasoning are impacted by the conditions which facilitate or inhibit critical consciousness and Conscientization. To Freire, (1998) "Conscientization is a requirement of our human condition. It is one of the roads we have to follow if we are to deepen our awareness of our world, of facts, of events, of the demands of human consciousness to develop our capacity for epistemological curiosity" (p. 55). Conscientization assists people in building awareness and experiencing transitions through differentiation and integration as they engage in the continuous process of emerging from current states of being and embedding themselves in new ones.

Freire (1970/1996) claimed that "Critical reflection is also action" (p. 109). Through this argument, he suggested that reflection and dialogue, such as those that occur within the context of book clubs, can be seen as forms of action because they engage people in becoming consciously aware of issues. Freire's (1970/1996) notion of Conscientization reflects the creation of a space that supports people's epistemological shifts in perspective. Book clubs, as contexts, are spaces in which adults can experience consciousness-raising and help facilitate changes in their awareness. Although this study did not focus on book clubs specifically as holding environments, I do explore the literature about holding environments in order to present the ways

in which book clubs reflect the characteristics of holding environments, particularly in regard to how they can cultivate consciousness-raising.

Holding Environment

Winnicott (1965) originally coined the term "holding environment" to describe the conditions necessary for mothers to promote psychological development for their infants. This environment extends beyond the physical holding of the infant to include "the management of experiences that are inherent in existence…" (p. 43). Essentially, the holding environment, if created and maintained by the mother, allows space for the infant to evolve psychologically and attain the "capacity for object relationships" (Winnicott, 1965, p. 44). The concept of a holding environment was adopted within psychological research and applied to various other situations that reflect the circumstances in which people are psychologically and emotionally "held." Notably, Kegan (1982) borrowed the phrase from Winnicott (1965), recognizing that within Winnicott's (1965) idea there are three main characteristics of a holding environment: 1) support, 2) challenge, and 3) continuity or consistency. He then applied this concept to the ways in which adults make meaning of the different experiences they have as they transition between different cultures of embeddedness. Kegan (1982) claimed, "There is not one holding environment early in life, but a succession of holding environments, a life history of cultures of embeddedness" (p. 116). To show the similarities between book clubs and holding environments, I relied upon Kegan's (1982) definition of a holding environment. Based on this definition, the conditions for a holding environment allow space for people to be held cognitively, affectively, and psychologically, providing support for them as they move between their states of being and challenging them to grow, change, and evolve. I described some of the characteristics of the study participants' book clubs and discussed how the book clubs reflect conditions of a holding

environment. Furthermore, as informal learning environments that evade the barriers of some formal learning environments, the study participants' book clubs provided these conditions in unique ways that encouraged open, critical dialogue.

Critical Dialogue in Nonformal and Informal Learning Contexts

Coombs, Prosser, and Ahmed (1973) originally identified the difference between formal, nonformal, and informal education. Building upon their classification, Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) created a more specific framework for the types of adult learning contexts, including self-directed learning in their depiction. Book clubs represent both nonformal and informal learning contexts because they are intentionally created, community-based organizations that simultaneously foster both structured and unstructured learning. Adults who participate in book clubs further demonstrate self-directed learning as they construct their own learning environments. In addition, they collectively organize for purposeful, critical dialogue about the literature they read and the different ideas presented within it. Nonformal and informal learning contexts facilitate critical dialogue because they are natural, voluntary settings in which adults can engage in discussions about topics they consider important and meaningful. Although literature about various nonformal and informal learning contexts exists, book clubs, as examples of such contexts, have not been researched to the same extent.

Existing Book Club Research

Research about book clubs primarily examines the clubs from a critical theory lens (Sedo, 2004; Odrcic, 2007; Long, 1992, 2003), discusses literacy practices (Twomey, 2007; Kelley, 2007), or focuses exclusively on educating children and adolescents about social issues (Polleck, 2010; Sawatzky, 2011). Additional sources emphasize the use of book clubs as pedagogical supplements for promoting literacy and various learning styles (Goldberg, 2012; Bonner &

Tarner, 1999), as extracurricular learning supports, teacher training and collaboration opportunities (Addington, 2001), and as platforms for understanding reader interests in literary genres (Ooi & Liew, 2011; Southwood, 2012). To date, researchers have not specifically delved into studying adults' experiences of consciousness-raising through the contexts of book clubs. This makes my research topic unique and innovative.

Statement of the Problem

Literature has the power to introduce us to ideas, perspectives, and situations we might not otherwise encounter during our daily lives. Adult learning theories that examine adults' interwoven cognitive, affective, and interpersonal capacities for the construction of meaning have been used to understand their engagement with new and potentially challenging concepts. Freire's (1970/1996) notion of Conscientization, in particular, explores the ways in which literacy can be used to raise awareness and inspire adults to engage in critical reflection and critical dialogue. Facilitating group settings which can inspire consciousness-raising experiences and promote discussion of complex concepts is an intricate process that often necessitates the existence of a certain context which both supports and challenges the members of the group as they engage in reflection and dialogue. Kegan (1982) identifies such situations or spaces as holding environments "which hold us (with which we are fused) and which let go of us (from which we differentiate)" (p. 116). Book clubs have the potential to function in a similar capacity because they provide safe spaces for adults to explore complex ideas that manifest in the books they read, and further navigate their feelings and viewpoints that result from changes in their awareness.

Scholars have produced considerable research about the roles of book clubs as socially constructed environments for individuals to exchange ideas and perspectives, and to engage in

dialogue about a variety of topics (Long, 1992, 2003; Sedo, 2004; Odrcic, 2007; Sawatzky, 2011; Sisson, 1996). There is also literature about the use of reading groups as pedagogical approaches in formal learning environments to promote awareness (McGinley, Conley, & White, 2000). Yet another area of research which references book clubs to an extent is the study of critical dialogue that occurs in spaces outside formal classrooms (Brookfield, 1986; Oliver, 1987; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). However, there is very limited research that investigates adults' experiences in book clubs, particularly in regard to their consciousness-raising experiences within those contexts. Therefore, the purpose of my study was to understand the lived experiences of consciousness-raising for adults through the context of book clubs. To address the gap in the literature, my study was guided by the following research question:

- What is the lived experience of consciousness-raising in the context of book clubs?

Significance of the Study

Adults learn in a variety of settings and environments: formal, informal, and nonformal. Exposing adults to new ideas and perspectives through the vehicle of books and via the contexts of book clubs provides them with opportunities to explore things they might not otherwise encounter in real life. My study helps illuminate the ways in which adults experience book clubs, something which has, to date, only been given minimal attention by scholars. By investigating how adults experience consciousness-raising through the context of book clubs, my study further emphasizes the importance informal and nonformal learning environments, such as book clubs, play in promoting not just literacy, but also changes in awareness through critical reflection and critical dialogue. Therefore, it highlights the influences of collective learning environments on building adults' awareness.

If we understand how adults experience consciousness-raising through their encounters with literature and their interactions with other individuals in small group settings like book clubs, adult educators can use this knowledge to help promote awareness-building through their andragogical approaches in other informal, nonformal, or formal adult learning environments. This study provides insight about one of the many nuances of adults' experiences of consciousness-raising by focusing on a very specific context. However, it also helps illustrate how even those contexts which have historically escaped rigorous research are valuable sources of information worthy of further investigation.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter explores the concept of Conscientization (Freire, 1970/1996), as well as critical reflection and critical dialogue in informal and nonformal learning contexts. Specifically, I look at how these areas connect and contribute to the ways in which adults experience consciousness-raising through the context of book clubs. Within the following chapter, I propose that book clubs, as informal and nonformal learning contexts, can facilitate adults' experiences of consciousness-raising by exposing them to new ideas, perspectives, and situations, and engaging them in critical reflection and critical dialogue. Furthermore, I suggest that because book clubs furnish adults with these opportunities, they demonstrate similar characteristics as holding environments, which I define as contexts in which people can experience growth, change, or transition sustained by the supports and challenges the contexts provide (Winnicott, 1965; Kegan, 1982; Drago-Severson, 2009). This literature review, therefore, examines book clubs as contexts in which adults can engage in critical reflection and dialogue and experience consciousness-raising.

I trace the historical progression of book clubs in America and the roles they have performed in adults' lives by drawing predominantly upon the works of the few scholars who have contributed to existing literature, such as Long (1986, 1992, 2003), Sedo (2004), and Kelley (2007). These findings form the foundation of my inquiry about book clubs. I then build upon the book club literature to explore its connection with the other threads of my theoretical framework. Looking for relationships between Conscientization (Freire, 1970/1996), critical dialogue, and

adult learning contexts, I explore the literature around these concepts and how they help identify the characteristics of a holding environment. My research is guided by the following question:

- What is the lived experience of consciousness-raising, in the context of book clubs?

To address this question I use the framework represented in Figure 1.

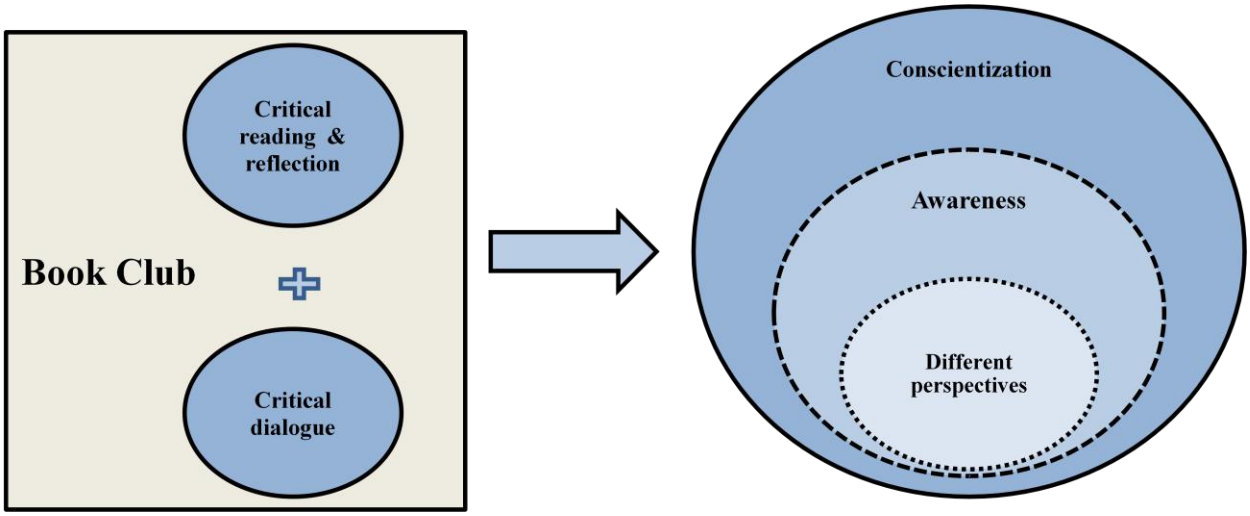

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Framework

For the purposes of this study, I define a book club as a collective, intentional gathering of individuals (Southwood, 2012) designed to facilitate the reading, comprehension, (Long, 1992) and discussion (Beach & Yussen, 2011) of pre-determined works of literature. Despite this general definition, the specific description of a book club remains relatively fluid and flexible because these constructs examine a vast array of subjects and texts, making them diverse not only in their focal points, but also in their membership. Also known as reading groups (Long, 2003), reading clubs (Twomey, 2007), or book groups (McArdle, 2009), book clubs provide a context through which readers can engage with different types of literature, participate in dialogue and discussions with other readers, and share their thoughts, ideas, and interpretations through a social exploration of the text.

The theoretical framework for my study is based on three independent bodies of literature: book clubs, Conscientization, and critical dialogue. I specifically explore the literature of Conscientization and critical dialogue as they relate to book clubs. In addition, I provide a glimpse into the concept of the holding environment, as it is used within adult developmental theory, and identify some similarities between the characteristics of book club contexts and those of a holding environment.

Book Clubs in Scholarship

In academia, book clubs have largely escaped scholarly attention, or as Long (2003) stated, they have "slipped through disciplinary cracks to find themselves in a scholarly no-man's land" (p. x). Book clubs have traditionally been associated with amateur or uninformed readers who gather to discuss popular fiction. With the exception of a handful of scholars who recognized the contributions these contexts can make to a number of fields, the clubs have not been credited as valuable structures that can illustrate advantageous insights. However, as they slowly gain attention, the few scholars who acknowledge the significance of book clubs have discovered that the clubs can enlighten us about a variety of points: literary engagement (Goldberg, 2012; Bonner & Tarner, 1999; Addington, 2001; Twomey, 2007), collective reading and group dynamics (Childress & Friedkin, 2012), human interactions and connections, (Sedo, 2004; Odrcic, 2007; Long, 1992, 2003; St. Pierre, 1995; Kelley, 2007; Sisson, 1996), and teaching and learning pedagogies (Ooi & Liew, 2011; Southwood, 2012; Polleck, 2010; Sawatzky, 2011) just to name a few. Thus, there is a crucial need to spotlight book clubs as significant social structures that contribute to our understanding of how adults experience interactions in informal or nonformal learning environments, and also to reveal data that indicates these seldom studied groups are actually quite prevalent, intentionally constructed

communities in the United States. Therefore, in this review of the literature, I take a deeper look at book clubs historically and currently, trace their evolution as contexts for adults to interact with literature and other readers, and suggest that book clubs should be given greater consideration as contexts to study adult experiences and their meaning-making of those experiences. Although I do not concentrate my review of book club literature on youth and adolescent book clubs, but rather specifically focus on adult book clubs, I do occasionally draw upon the youth literature to fill the gaps in the research and present information about how book clubs are designed and implemented.

Existing Research

Although book clubs in general have received only limited attention, book clubs designed for adults seem to be even less frequently examined or studied than those for children. Much of the literature about children's book clubs deals with engaging students in literacy by promoting more effective reading and comprehension strategies (Simmons, 2012), empowering students to read by facilitating classroom book clubs in which the students lead the decisions and discussions (Raphael & McMahon, 1994; Tyson, 1999; Kooy, 2003), or involving children in book clubs to stimulate their social awareness and involvement (McCall & Ford, 1998; McGinley, Conley, & White, 2000; Polleck, 2010; Sawatzky, 2011). On the contrary, the literature about adult participation in book clubs focuses less on pedagogical strategies and more on the adults' experiences with reading in group environments (Long, 1992; Childress & Friedkin, 2012; Twomey, 2007; Goldberg, 2012), constructing identities and creating social connections (Long, 1986, 2003; Sedo, 2004; Kelley, 2007; Sisson, 1996; St. Pierre, 1995), and exploring the logistics of book club practices (Beach & Yussen, 2011; Ooi & Liew, 2011; Southwood, 2012). I focus on book clubs for adults, presenting the argument that book clubs,

historically and contemporarily, are spaces for adults to have experiences they might not otherwise encounter, but unfortunately, these contexts have largely been undervalued and minimally investigated.

History of Book Clubs

Historically, book clubs have functioned as structures for informal and nonformal learning. Contemporary American book clubs evolved from reading clubs, scholarly organizations that were situated within the creation of gentlemen's clubs and lyceums during the early 1800s (Kett, 1994). In fact, in 1900 the concept of a book club "signified an association for reprinting scarce books or fostering the publication of original compositions by members [of library associations]" (Kett, 1994, p. 44). This differs drastically from what we now refer to as book clubs. Therefore, in their infancy book clubs were better known as reading groups, literary groups, or even types of mutual improvement societies. Kett (1994) referred to mutual improvement as "merely a tag for a variety of antebellum societies that bore a lexicon of titles: 'literary,' 'Franklin,' 'belles-lettres,' 'young men's,' 'mechanics,' 'mercantile,' and the ubiquitous 'lyceum,' which a contemporary aptly defined as a 'literary club of almost any description'" (p. 45). The development of various forms of mutual improvement societies based on literary interests demonstrates the growth in social reading organizations throughout the nineteenth century.

The popularity of reading clubs gradually increased with the formation of knowledge societies, the development of academies, the creation of social libraries, and the movement toward democratization of educational opportunities for women and minorities (Kett, 1994). During the nineteenth century, education broadened in scope to include informal learning environments as supplemental to, or blended with, formal education. The concept of self-

instruction, therefore, became more widely recognized as a valuable form of education. Kett (1994) claimed:

> Although the range of informal influences included the family, workplace, and church—institutions that did not profess educational objectives—educators were primarily concerned with the complementary relationship between formal schooling and such voluntary and purposively educational activities as private reading, attendance at lectures, and participation in mutual improvement societies. (p. 77)

These informal learning environments were rooted in critical reading and interactive discussions based on the material read.

Women and Reading

While men certainly participated in reading clubs, specifically when they functioned as sectors of academia, male participation in reading clubs and book clubs has historically been unbalanced compared to female participation. As such, the literature surrounding male participation is somewhat scarce. Women, in particular, took advantage of these informal learning activities as outlets to engage in dialogue with other individuals who shared similar experiences, social obstacles, and political perspectives. Kelley (2007) asserted that "White women had been gathering in reading circles as early as the 1760s" (p. 4). Kett (1994) also explained,

> Organizing their self-education around subjects enabled women to overcome their anxieties about the lack of order and coherence in their quest for self-improvement and at the same time to acquire an approximation of the formal education that was still more available to the other sex. (p. 153)

Women's clubs continued to grow rapidly throughout the late 1890s and early 1900s in response to changing political dynamics in the United States, as well as expanding perspectives about educational access. "A survey published in 1899 by the United States Department of Labor identified 1,283 women's clubs, their locations, dates of establishment, and stated goals. In reality, the number of women's clubs was much higher" (Kett, 1994, p. 153). An absence of accurate data regarding women's clubs is twofold, indicating first, that research efforts were not exhausted to fully explore participation in these organizations, and second, that as informal learning contexts many of the clubs may not have been classified as women's clubs based on the survey parameters. Kelley (2007) wrote, "Postrevolutionary and antebellum women practiced reading and writing at a host of sites, ranging from family circles to organizations that promoted cultural uplift and moral reform;" however, she also noted that "hundreds of literary societies were neither sponsored by nor attached to a female academy or seminary" (p. 3). Without official recognition or sponsorship from institutions, these clubs could have easily been dismissed as merely social gatherings rather than intentional, learning-oriented constructs. Regardless of the uncertainty surrounding official data about women's clubs, research does indicate that these organizations relied heavily upon social reading and group discussion (Long, 1986; Kett, 1994; Kelley, 2007; Sicherman, 2010), resembling the structure of today's book clubs.

Chautauqua

The Chautauqua movement, inspired by the development of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle (CLSC), is perhaps the most prominent example of reading clubs evolving into national, and even international, academic societies that originated as structures reflective of book clubs. "The Chautauqua circles were reading clubs, similar in some respects to contemporary women's clubs" (Kett, 1994, p. 161). The structure of these reading clubs drew

from formal education, but they were adapted to better suit the needs of adult learners distanced from formal education facilities. Designed as a less formal method of education and self-improvement than traditional college courses, the Chautauqua movement was largely a religiously-initiated endeavor to reach Sunday school teachers, educators, and eventually, other adult learners through an extension or correspondence course college degree program (Davis, 1983; Nelson, 1996; Scott, 2005). This practice quickly gained popularity and spread throughout the United States as a way to bring educational opportunities to adults when they could not otherwise easily access them. Adopting a liberal educational philosophy, Chautauqua emphasized more traditional academics, as well as popular lectures, productions, and forms of entertainment as educational opportunities (Scott, 2005). Between 1880 and 1940, the CLSC enrolled approximately 750,000 people (Davis, 1983, p. 396). The CLSC enabled distance learning for individual advancement; however, it was based upon collaborative learning efforts to assist in the learning process. "Local reading circles, much like contemporary Bible study groups, were encouraged as means of helping students through readings or study questions they might find difficult" (Davis, 1983, p. 397).

By the 1920s the Chautauqua movement began to decline in popularity. The growing accessibility of books, other educational resources, and new ways to communicate allowed the spread of information to occur without the need for correspondence courses traditionally associated with the movement. In addition, educational opportunities were becoming more available for women and other individuals who had previously relied upon the Chautauqua movement for these prospects. "Overall, the Chautauqua movement contributed to the democratization, theory and structure of both adult and university education in the USA" (Scott, 2005, p. 42).The impact of the Chautauqua movement, therefore, left a lasting effect.

The historical progression of reading groups and book clubs paved a path for adult education. In addition, these intentional gatherings affirmed the value of less formal learning contexts and helped emphasize the potential for book clubs to function as spaces for adults to share their perspectives and engage in critical dialogue. In the following section, I explore some of the ways in which book club contexts have evolved into their current representation.

Book Clubs in the Present

As part of the impact of Women's Suffrage, as well as the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s, women and minorities were granted access to more equal educational opportunities. These political changes influenced not only the dynamics of education, but also the roles of book clubs. In large part, women's club gatherings during the 1960s contributed to the stereotype that book clubs consisted of bored housewives. In some respects, the clubs did become less focused on functioning as educational contexts, and allowed more space for entertainment and leisure reading. However, women continued to meet for purposes that extended beyond entertainment. According to Sedo's (2002) research, "during the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a small resurgence in reading groups in the wake of consciousness-raising groups in the American women's movement" (p. 12). Long (2003) attributed a historically uneven participation of males and females in book clubs to the continuation of unequal educational, occupational, and societal expectations. She asserted,

> Under such institutional and ideological circumstances, reading groups have continued to be important for women, in particular, because of women's need to negotiate life choices and identities that are, as argued earlier, both significantly more open and uncharted than in the past and yet are still not really well served by the major institutions of our social order. (Long, 2003, p. 68)

Inarguably, such unequal access to more formal modes of education also contributed to the stereotyping and stigmas attached to book clubs and reading groups as predominantly feminine, leisurely, and unscholarly pursuits, further categorizing them as less worthy of serious academic attention. Yet another contributing factor to the devaluing of book clubs is the decreased participation in reading in our country.

Reading in the United States

Sadly, book reading in the United States is reportedly on a general decline. The Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA), conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts stated, "The percentage of Americans who read at least one book of fiction or nonfiction in the previous 12 months (outside of work or school requirements) decreased from the early 1990s to 2008" (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2008). This decrease was from 61% in 1992, to 54% in 2008. (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2008, Findings and Trends section, para. 1). Inarguably, technological advances that have limited or even eliminated the need for book reading are attributable to this change. In an age where information and reading materials are easily accessible through the Internet, the demand for immediate information reduces the need to peruse a book to gain knowledge. Furthermore, Americans are bombarded with a variety of easily portable, electronic entertainment options, which have often replaced the role of a traditional, paper book.

Interestingly, however, a change in reading habits does not seem to have significantly impacted book club participation. Based on the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts,

> In spite of the overall decline in book reading in the United States, anecdotal evidence suggests book clubs (discussion groups) are currently a popular phenomenon, but data about Americans' participation in them are scarce. A 2005 study found that 6% of

> American adults who read for pleasure and primarily in English, or 3.4% of all adults, participated in book clubs. (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2008, Findings and Trends section, para. 3)

Furthermore, according to the 2010 United States Census Bureau report on leisure activities, 2.5% of adults surveyed had participated in a book club within the last twelve months, with 1.2% reporting to have participated once a month ("Adult Participation," 2012, Table 1240). The report did not provide a specific definition of a book club, so the assumption remains that it follows a general definition of a book club as an organized group of individuals gathered to read and discuss literature. While these figures may seem small and there are obvious discrepancies since research efforts to examine book club participation are limited, the data does suggest that book clubs remain very much alive in contemporary society. The continued existence of book clubs supports the idea that they serve a purpose to help adults become informed about, and discuss, different literature. As spaces that support these interactions and, consequently, promote adults' development of new perspectives and increased awareness, book clubs present similar characteristics as holding environments. I explore the literature about holding environments and their similarities to book club contexts in the following section.

What is a Holding Environment?

As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, Winnicott (1965) originally coined the term "holding environment" in reference to mothers' provisions of environments that foster the psychological development of infants. Essentially, the holding environment, if created and maintained by the mother, allows space for the infant to evolve psychologically and attain the "capacity for object relationships" (Winnicott, 1965, p. 44). The infant is, therefore, developmentally able to begin separating what is subject from what is object and "changes from

a relationship to a subjectively conceived object to a relationship to an object objectively perceived" (Winnicott, 1965, p. 44). In Winnicott's (1965) terms, the holding environment provides support for developmental growth through which the infant begins to make connections and distinctions between himself or herself and the environment.

Kegan's (1982) use of the term "holding environment" presents the best application of this concept to adult learning and development. He described movement between the cultures of embeddedness as fluid, permitting humans to freely shift between different states of being and meaning-making (Kegan, 1982). An essential principle of Kegan's (1982) Constructive Developmental Theory is developmental dependence upon the holding environment, or culture of embeddedness. "This psychosocial environment, or 'holding environment,' in Winnicott's terms, is the particular form of the world in which the person is, at this moment in his or her evolution, embedded" (Kegan, 1982, p. 116). Borrowing the concept of the holding environment from Winnicott (1965), Kegan (1982) extended it to include the developmental context for adults. The holding environment, or culture of embeddedness, consequently serves as the context within which the person experiences developmental growth and transition. "A holding environment must hold—where holding refers not to keeping or confining but to supporting (even 'floating,' as in an amniotic environment) the exercises of who the person is" (Kegan, 1982, p. 162). It must provide certain functions, such as holding securely, letting go when appropriate, and remaining for recovery if needed (Kegan, 1982, p. 158). Under these conditions, the holding environment facilitates development, providing a supportive context for people to experience the vulnerability associated with losing the former self and leaving it behind, while also embracing the new self and the changes that accompany that growth.

References to the role of the holding environment appear in a range of different studies. Spaulding (2011) discussed how the chaplain helped shape student experiences in a college study abroad course by providing mentorship that served as a holding environment for faith development. Scheier-Dolberg's (2014) research explored how educators of English learners experienced Drago-Severson's (2009) pillar practices as holding environments. Implementation of the pillar practices provided a structure and space through which the educators could experience growth and development. Similarly, Cox's (2016) recent study examined adult learning in online educative spaces by applying a constructive developmental lens. Her research revealed how the holding environment structure and conditions in this context facilitated growth by supporting the adults as they needed it, and challenging them accordingly.

Similarities Between Book Clubs and Holding Environments

Freire's (2000) concept of Conscientization, or consciousness-raising, also indicates that certain conditions, such as those represented through a holding environment, must be present for the manifestation of critical consciousness, particularly praxis and open dialogue. He claimed:

> Humankind emerge from their submersion and acquire the ability to intervene in reality as it is unveiled. Intervention in reality—historical awareness itself—thus represents a step forward from emergence, and results from the conscientizacao of the situation. Conscientizacao is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence. (Freire, 2000, p. 90)

This emergence from one state of understanding to another reflects Kegan's (1982) notion of cultures of embeddedness or holding environments as the contexts through which people engage in critical reflection and critical consciousness.

Drago-Severson (2009) also referenced the holding environment as it relates to adult learning opportunities. She wrote,

> …a good holding environment both supports a person where he or she is in terms of making meaning of life experiences and challenges the person to grow beyond that, but without conveying any urgent need for change. In other words, it joins a person in his or her meaning making, or way of knowing. (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 13)

Building upon Kegan's (1982) constructive developmental theory, and his use of the holding environment within the context of CDT, Drago-Severson (2009) argued that understanding adults' ways of knowing is vital to creating developmentally-minded holding environments. She claimed, "Similar to the conditions provided to facilitate a child's growth, holding environments offer developmentally appropriate supports and challenges to adults who make sense of their experiences in different ways" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 57). She went on to explain a developmental challenge as a situation or experience which "presents a person with helpful, stretching sorts of questions and alternative perspectives—over time and when he or she is ready—to gently push or stand at the edges of his or her thinking, feeling, and knowing" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 57). Furthermore, when creating a holding environment for adults, Drago-Severson (2009) stressed considering two main principles: "holding environments need to offer a healthy balance of both high support and high challenge," and "the goodness of fit, or match, between the holding environment and an adult's way of knowing" (p. 57). Therefore, in order for holding environments to be developmentally useful, they must also be relevant and appropriate for the adults' levels of experience, knowledge, and understanding. These characteristics are similarly found in book club contexts, and typically, what make the book clubs secure and successful. Essentially, the purpose and practices of the book clubs must align

with the members' reasons for joining, and provide the right balance of encouragement for the participants to share their perspectives, while also exposing them to ideas that might challenge their ways of thinking.

One of the few works that helps demonstrate the link between holding environment characteristics and book clubs is that of Polleck (2010). She represented the transaction between the reader and a text as a transformative experience in her study of book clubs for inner-city, adolescent females. Polleck (2010) presented a book club as a space "where participants share, negotiate and ultimately transform their understanding of the texts, themselves and the world" (p. 52). The book club, therefore, becomes the vessel through which the participants can engage with the literature while simultaneously reflecting upon the ways in which they interpret the literature and how they construct meaning and connections between themselves and what they read. Polleck (2010) argued, "…one, we cannot separate the efferent and aesthetic responses during book clubs and, two, the unique nature of book clubs allows for a transformative experience that ultimately affects the individual readers cognitively and affectively" (p. 52). It is the effects of the experiences, Polleck (2010) suggested, which then impact the individual's relationship with his or her environment and the ways in which he or she interacts with it. This cyclical connection is represented through a model Polleck (2010) proposed as a conceptual framework for book clubs. The model, represented in Figure 2, depicts how intertwined the connections between the reader, the literature, and the book club become and how each component contributes to both individual and social development.

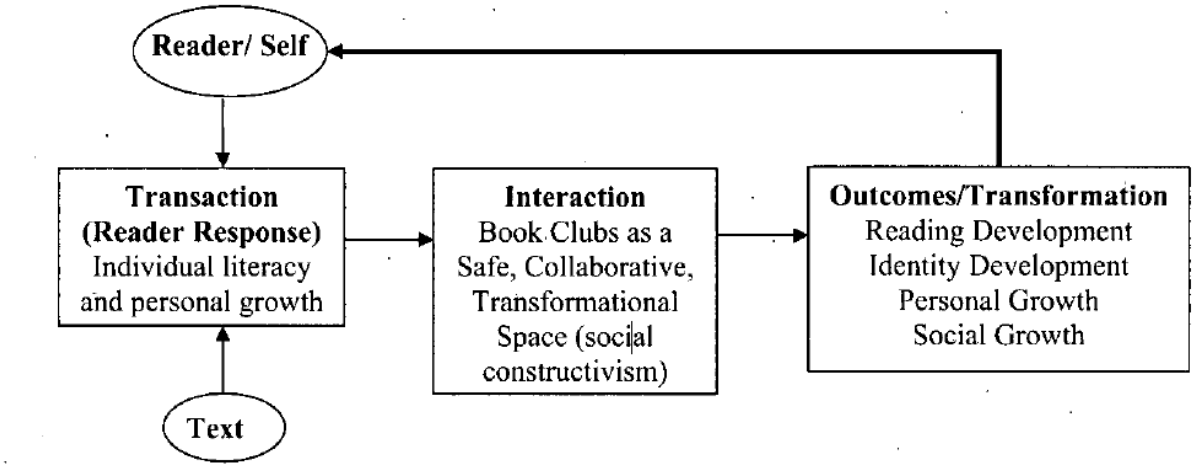

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework for Book Clubs

Book club model representing transformation development in book clubs. Reprinted from "Creating Transformational Spaces: High School Book Clubs with Inner-City Adolescent Females," by J. Polleck, 2010, *The High School Journal, 93,* p. 52. Copyright 2010 by The University of North Carolina Press. Reprinted with permission.

To help identify similarities in the characteristics of a book club and those of a holding environment, I apply Drago-Severson's (2009) model, which she called pillar practices of a holding environment, and explain how each pillar relates to the book club construct. She identified four pillar practices—"establishing teams, providing adults with leadership roles, engaging in collegial inquiry, and mentoring" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 13), which she argued help facilitate adult development. The features of the pillar practices closely align with some book club traits, helping me draw connections between book clubs and holding environments.

Teaming

Teaming, one of Drago-Severson's (2009) pillar practices, can "promote personal and organizational learning through collaboration" because it "opens communication, decreases isolation, builds interdependent relationships, and supports adult development" (p. 71). One of the primary tenets of teaming that specifically reflects book club practices is the role of reflective

practice. As previously discussed, one of the motivating factors for adults to join book clubs is to seek perspectives about literature that either differ or challenge their own. According to Drago-Severson (2009),

> Teaming provides a context for perspective broadening, taking risks, engaging in reflective practice, examining assumptions (our own and other people's) and behaviors, and over time, possibly reframing them. Several principles of constructive-developmental theory inform how teaming supports the process of transformational learning: teaming enables adults to learn from diverse perspectives by affording greater opportunity for individuals to reflect on their own and other people's ways of knowing in a safe place. This process can help us to release ourselves from identifying so strongly with our own perspective and create an opening for better understanding other people's points of view. (p. 76)

Teaming, much like joining a book club, reveals adults' motivations to seek the perspectives of others and gather collectively to share these perspectives in an effort to promote the evolution of their meaning-making. It reflects the desire to connect with other people and share ideas and perspectives, a driving force for book club participation that continues to unite adults in these contexts. Higgins (2005) wrote that book club participation "is partly, perhaps, about the desire to forge personal links in a fractured world…" (par. 17). Book clubs provide the "chance to read, share opinions, chat and have fun—each one will be unique in how it works. Discussing books can help to reinforce, change or challenge perceptions and help to build knowledge and appreciation of the views of others" (Southwood, 2012, p. 36). Book clubs afford the opportunities to interact with other individuals who are not only interested in reading the literature, but also in deeply engaging with the ideas presented in the literature and

communicating with others about the interpretations, discoveries, and conclusions gained through their readings. Sedo's research on book clubs (2002) also suggested,

> Interpretation of books is the reason these people belong to book clubs. Yes, some find the social aspect more important than the books, but the meeting and club's raison d'être is an interpretation of literature that is enhanced by each member bringing her ideas to the circle. (p. 19)

According to Beach and Yussen (2011), there are certain practices that help ensure productive book clubs. These include: (a) employing a systematic book selection processes that build on members' knowledge and experience, (b) involving members' knowledge and experience to collaboratively interpret literary texts, and (c) developing discussion topics collaboratively to further encourage additional interactions and interpretations (Beach & Yussen, 2011, pp. 129-130). Similarly, Smith's (1996) study found that adults valued the social aspect, the equality among book club members, and the spirit of cooperation they experienced in their book clubs (p. 180) above all else. Smith (1996) noted, however, that the social aspect extends beyond merely gathering with friends to discuss the latest bestselling novel. Long (2003) further suggested that "many contemporary reading groups, like those of the past, provide a special kind of closeness different from ordinary friendships. This provides a strongly supportive, even empowering environment for participants—much as was the case a century ago" (p. 346). The social interactions encourage book club members to draw upon life experiences in order to help them share their own perspectives and relate with those of other book club members. Forging these relationships allows book club members to engage in communication with other adults who share a common interest.

Engaging in Collegial Inquiry

Drago-Severson (2009) defined collegial inquiry, another pillar practice of holding environments, as "*collective* reflective practice" and suggested that this form of inquiry differs from reflective practice in that "whereas a person can engage in reflective practice alone or in the company of colleagues, collegial inquiry…is a dialogue that takes place between two or more people—it is not done alone" (p. 154). Building a culture of reflective practice and collegial inquiry requires building a community of trust (Brookfield, 1995, as cited in Drago-Severson, 2009). "Collegial inquiry can help us to become more aware of the assumptions that inform and guide our thinking, behaviors, and approaches to problem solving and to alter those assumptions, freeing us to engage in learning and grow" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 154). This form of inquiry provides adults with the opportunity to interact with individuals who challenge their assumptions about the world. Therefore, collegial inquiry helps us develop a better understanding of what influences our thinking and causes us to develop our perceptions and beliefs.

Book club members also engage in collegial inquiry and integrate the practices of reflection and critical dialogue into their discussions about the books. The book clubs provide adults with the opportunities to discover new perspectives that may either coincide or conflict with their own. Many reading scholars argue that reading is a social process through which readers collectively and collaboratively interpret and make meaning of texts (Fish, 1980; Radway, 1983; Bloome, 1985; Long, 1992; Raphael & McMahon, 1994). While reading certainly can, and does, occur in isolation, one's social environment impacts literary interpretations. Reading theorists further suggest that "literary meaning is the result of a complex, temporally evolving interaction between a fixed verbal structure and a socially situated reader" (Radway, 1983, pp. 54-55). The construction of book clubs for readers to share their

perspectives with one another is indicative of the human tendency to seek confirmation and mutual understanding of literary works. Long (1992) claimed,

> Reading in groups not only offers occasions for explicitly collective textual interpretation, but encourages new forms of association and nurtures new ideas that are developed in conversation with other people as well as with books. Reading groups often form because of a subtext of shared values, and the text itself is often a pretext (though an invaluable one) for the conversation through which members engage not only with the authorial "other" but with each other as well. In such groups, reading becomes more communal than our image of the scholar anchorite would have it, and more active that the picture of reading as a leisured feminine pastime. (p. 112)

The drive for adults to engage in book clubs in order to facilitate deeper understanding of texts and ideas further supports the position that reading is a social activity.

Providing Adults with Leadership Roles

Drawing upon her research, Drago-Severson (2009) asserted that providing adults with leadership roles, yet another pillar practice of holding environments, contributes to not only individual growth, but also the further development of the system in which the adult is involved. Aligned with teaming, providing leadership roles enables adults to engage in self-reflection, and exchange perspectives and ideas with others. Drago-Severson (2009) asserted:

> When serving in a leadership role, we have the opportunity to develop a deeper awareness of our own beliefs, values, and assumptions about leadership; share our thinking with others; and learn about other's perspectives. Engaging in dialogue offers an opportunity for other people to challenge our thinking in ways that support the reshaping

> of assumptions. And as note, broadening our perspectives is essential to development. (p. 114)

Within a book club, leadership roles emerge as adults undertake different positions and responsibilities. For example, many book clubs delegate responsibility for hosting or facilitating either the book club meetings and/or the group discussion sessions, introducing the group members to leadership roles. Accepting such responsibilities can also offer adults an alternative opportunity to engage in personal reflection and critical dialogue with others by placing them in a different position.

According to Sedo's (2002) research on book club participation, "it wasn't until the late 1980s and then after Oprah started her book club, that book clubs gained the popularity they once held in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (p. 12). Oprah Winfrey drew significant national attention to the continued development and perpetuation of book clubs in contemporary society through the creation of Oprah's Book Club. Officially beginning in 1996, Oprah's Book Club ran heavily as a segment on her television talk show until she suspended the book club in 2002 and revived it again in 2003 with a greater focus on the classics than the initial interest in contemporary books (Szalai, 2013). When her show ended in 2011, Oprah's Book Club also ended. However, embracing the use of e-readers and other forms of virtual and social media, Oprah announced the creation of Oprah's Book Club 2.0 in June of 2012 as a joint effort of the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN) and O Magazine to stimulate America's interests in reading once again (Associated Press, CBS News, 2012). Winfrey's reasons for creating her book club have been both applauded for bringing literacy to the forefront of media attention, and critiqued as to whether or not her true motivations were to promote certain authors and publishers, or even as part of a political agenda to support the Clinton administration's literacy

program (Read, 2005, p. 41). Thus, from a consumerism perspective, Oprah's pop culture figure boosted reading and literacy economically. Despite doubt surrounding the intentions for creating Oprah's Book Club, at the very least, it inspired people to purchase books, as evidenced by a growth in the book selling industry during the existence of the book club (Hall, 2003). By drawing media attention to book clubs and reading, Oprah reintroduced reading as something that was considered trendy and worthy of collective discussion. Oprah's leadership role is atypical for book clubs; most are not led by hugely popular celebrities. However, her book club inspired the creation of countless others throughout the country through which adults established and occupied leadership roles and other responsibilities, both shared and individual.

Drago-Severson (2009) argued that serving in such roles facilitates adults' awareness of their perspectives and helps foster a good holding environment. Likewise, book clubs provide opportunities for adults to adopt various forms of leadership, whether they are choosing books that will challenge the members, facilitating meetings, or leading discussions, reflecting characteristics similar to those of holding environments.

Mentoring

The final pillar in Drago-Severson's (2009) pillar practices of holding environments is mentoring. Mentoring relationships and mentoring communities can help foster holding environments by providing "a safe context for broadening perspectives (our own and other people's) and behaviors, and over time, possibly reframing them" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 220). Through such developmentally supportive environments, mentoring communities encourage individuals to engage in open, honest communication and the exchange of ideas.

Drago-Severson (2009) refers to the integration of Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive developmental theory and Daloz's (1999) literature on mentoring to identify how mentoring

communities can function as successful holding environments. Essentially, following Kegan's (1982) model of the holding environment, successful mentoring communities provide support for individuals' meaning making, challenge individuals by presenting them with new and different perspectives, and remain stable and constant as the individual negotiates potentially disorienting growth and change (Drago-Severson, 2009). Although book club contexts may not promote mentoring relationships in their traditional sense, the connection between book clubs and Drago-Severson's (2009) concept of mentoring communities as holding environments emerges through their similar practices—book club members may come to rely upon one another to support their meaning making, challenge their perspectives by introducing new ones, and provide continuity and consistency through regular meetings.

Technology has proven a major influence in fostering the development of mentoring communities and relationships among book club members, as well as the evolution of book clubs. Although my research examines face-to-face book clubs rather than virtual ones, it is important to note that technology impacts the delivery methods of literature and the contexts in which it is read and discussed. Scharber (2009) noted, "Despite technology's purported role in the decrease of pleasure reading (NEA, 2004, 2007), online book clubs may offer a motivating and convenient environment to encourage voluntary book reading" (p. 433). The flexibility afforded to virtual book club members is one of its primary benefits. Sedo (2002) remarked:

> The ability to discuss a book whenever you want to or have time to, and to do it with people from different regions than yourself is important to virtual members, especially those who live in areas where there are no f2f book clubs or for those who prefer the anonymity of cyberspace. (p. 16)

Inarguably, virtual book clubs are able to connect people in ways that traditional formats could not accommodate. They bridge not only geographical regions, but also social boundaries that might otherwise prevent people from communicating and sharing their ideas or interpretations about literature. Adults who participate in virtual book clubs also have a buffer of virtual space between themselves and their book club members that may permit open, honest dialogue. Furthermore, despite this virtual distance, through interviews with online book club members, Fister (2005) discovered that the online book club communities were actually highly supportive, collaborative, and dedicated to deepening their understanding of the literature they read and discuss. Fister (2005) noted the value of virtual book clubs when she wrote,

> An active online discussion among committed readers can reveal much about how readers choose and respond to books, what role reading for pleasure plays in their lives, and how sharing responses to books can enrich the reading experience—and indeed our lives. (p. 304)

As new formats that adapt to fit the changing demands of society, virtual book clubs may provide a way to fulfill the needs of adults who want to participate in collective reading and discussions in a society that impedes their participation through the traditional formats. Technology has perhaps hindered American interests in reading by providing alternative forms of entertainment and more easily accessible information through the Internet. However, it has simultaneously contributed to the growth and development of alternative texts and unconventional book club structures. Technology brings literary texts to readers in new formats. The Internet eliminates the need for physically shopping for books at a store or locating them in the library. In addition to being able to order texts and have them shipped to one's home, the Internet often provides access to electronic forms of texts that are easily downloaded and printed,

or read on a computer screen. Furthermore, e-readers and other hand-held devices enable readers to upload and save numerous texts onto a single, portable, easily accessible apparatus. Not only does this make literature more available, but it also reaches the preferences and demands of individuals who live in an age heavily influenced by digital media. Thus, technology's impact on book clubs adds another dynamic to their support structures, revealing the ways in which the relationships among book club members reflect the mentoring relationships Drago-Severson (2009) identifies in holding environments.

Overall, there are several similarities between characteristics of holding environments and book club contexts. While my research does not define book clubs as holding environments, I note their likenesses in order to explore how book club contexts, like holding environments, can facilitate consciousness-raising experiences. By further drawing upon the definition of a holding environment as a stable and supportive framework (Drago-Severson, 2009) through which adults can navigate the complexity of meaning making (Kegan, 1982) as they engage with complex concepts, I also examine how these constructs compare not only to the original structures of book clubs and reading groups, but also to the contexts into which they have evolved over time. In the next section, I explore, in greater detail, some of the ways in which book club contexts have changed and transformed in order to better understand how they can promote consciousness-raising.

Conscientization and Reading

Freire (1970/1996) wrote, "World and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction" (p. 33). He further claimed that in order for humans to enact change in the world and how they are situated in it, they must practice praxis, which includes an equal emphasis on reflection and action (Freire, 1970/1996). Strongly supportive of dialogue as a

means of promoting praxis, Freire (1970/1996) claimed that "only through communication can human life hold meaning" (p. 58). He opposed the banking methods of education in which educators deposit knowledge upon their students, and instead argued that dialogue between educators and learners can provide pathways for open communication, destabilization of power structures, and learning opportunities for both parties.

Freire (1970/1996) suggested that dialogue, therefore, also promotes the emergence of the oppressed from a state of oppression—it inspires awareness. He wrote:

> Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people…Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself…Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause—the cause of liberation. (p. 70)

Freire (1970/1996) related these ideas of liberation to critical thinking and literacy through his concept of Conscientizacao, or Conscientization. "Conscientizacao is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of emergence" (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 90). He stated, "Since the basic condition for Conscientization is that its agent must be a subject (that is, a conscious being), Conscientization, like education, is specifically and exclusively a human process. It is as conscious beings that men are not only *in* the world, but *with* the world, together with other men" (Freire, 2000, p. 39). The development of this critical consciousness enables people to become aware of conditions, reflect upon them, and form an opinion about them. Freire (1970/1996) asserted,

> People will be truly critical if they live the plenitude of the praxis, that is if their action encompasses a critical reflection which increasingly organizes their thinking and thus

> leads them to move from a purely naïve knowledge of reality to a higher level, one which enables them to perceive the *causes* of reality. (p. 112)

An awareness, or consciousness of how one is situated in the world is therefore promoted by the development of one's perceptions, and likewise, advances such development by exposing him or her to perspectives and situations that provide new outlooks.

Having examined Freire's (1970/1996) concept of Conscientization as a process that emerges from adults' engagement with literacy and other adults through collective, critical dialogue, I connect these ideas to my research on book clubs. Application of the theories to book clubs reveals how book club members' awareness and perceptions are fostered through contexts which, like holding environments, support and challenge their members as they interact with the literature and engage in discussions.

Critical Dialogue

Within the book club contexts, book club members make meaning of both their individual and shared experiences and perspectives by engaging in dialogue. In particular, by collectively examining the literature and discussing their perspectives with one another, the book club members can practice critical dialogue, which can be described as a process of actively reflecting upon, questioning, and analyzing the literature. Building upon Bakhtin's (1981) concept of words, or utterances, as units of meaning through which people are connected with one another and their world, the act of critical dialogue can be viewed as an ongoing exchange of discourse—statements and responses—that deeply explores a topic by relying upon these units of meaning to share and convey thoughts and perspectives. A leading practice in adult education is to engage adults in discourse that inspires reflection, critical thinking, and critical dialogue so they can expand their awareness, and consider how they can relate to ideas that might differ from

their own. It is through this act of critical dialogue within the contexts of book clubs that book club members can also experience consciousness-raising.

Freire's (19701996) representation of critical dialogue, through his concept of liberatory education, is the most relevant illustration of the connection between critical dialogue and literacy. Famously known for endorsing critical pedagogy to promote the democratization of education and to resist oppressive social conditions, Freire (1970/1996) popularized the concept of liberatory education. He asserted that "liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information" (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 60). The simple process of depositing and receiving knowledge, via the banking system, does not enact change. Instead, by reflecting and thinking critically, an individual can become a "co-creator or re-creator" of the world, and can then transform it (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 56). "Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 60). Therefore, based on Freire's (1970/1996) concept of consciousness-raising, the elevation of one's awareness is not established through force, but rather through the sharing of information, ideas, and perspectives as reflective and dialogical practices.

Freire's (1970/1996) concept of authentic dialogue is the preferred method for consciousness-raising. He wrote, "Yet only through communication can human life hold meaning…Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about *reality* does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication" (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 58). Authentic dialogue is described as a "horizontal relationship between persons" (Freire, 2000, p. 45) and it enables or fosters critical dialogue. Therefore, "because dialogue is an encounter among women and men who name the world, it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others. It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another"

(Freire, 1970/1996, p. 70). Engaging in authentic dialogue creates a space in which those who communicate are given equal consideration and respect. Furthermore, authentic dialogue cannot exist without love, humility, faith in humankind, hope, or the dialoguers engaging in critical thinking (Freire, 1970/1996). Essentially, this means that to be authentic, dialogue must be founded in the compassion for others, the acknowledgment of imperfection, the ability to learn from others' perspectives and the belief in their ability to co-create the world, and the perception of reality as capable of change. Consequently, authentic dialogue contributes to the emergence of Conscientization, or the "deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence" (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 90) which is highly reflective of critical dialogue. It is this contribution to developing human consciousness that generates awareness. Freire's (1970/1996) notion of authentic dialogue relates directly to the discussions that occur in book clubs because it demonstrates a method for the book club members to engage in critical dialogue.

Summary

A book club's framework is designed to help generate consciousness about the ideas, characters, and events that unfold in the literature. The focus of a book club indicates a collective effort for adults to participate in critical thinking, as well as praxis through reflection and action. Moreover, as book clubs present characteristics similar to those of a holding environment (Kegan, 1982) for its members to engage and disengage in their transforming perceptions and states of being, they provide a safe platform through which the adults feel safe to share ideas and "in which new identities are forged and confirmed by like-minded peers and mentors" (Brookfield & Holst, 2011, p. 55). The supports and challenges a book club offers can provide its participants with the right environment to experience consciousness-raising as they share their opinions about the books and engage in dialogue with one another.

Having reviewed the literature about the evolution of adult participation in book clubs in America, the looming question of why book clubs should matter still remains. Their quiet presence and subtle influences on the lives of Americans are precisely the reasons why academics have largely neglected to investigate book clubs in great depth. Book clubs have not led to social uprisings, they are not categorized as groups that significantly impact the realm of literacy and reading, and there is insignificant evidence suggesting they have forged new paths in regard to the way people interact with literature or one another. However, the fact that book clubs have endured throughout history, despite dramatic social changes, political forces, and scholarly derision strongly suggests that these structures fill a void in adults' lives in a unique way.

Voluntary in nature, reflective of informal learning contexts, and designed to promote the exploration and discussion of literature, book clubs can offer insights about how adults gather to engage with one another about what they read and the opinions they form about those readings. Book clubs can inform adult learning theories about how adults experience consciousness-raising or build awareness from their interactions with one another in these contexts and the literacy practices they follow as members of such groups. Book clubs indicate not only that reading can be a social convention instead of an individual experience, but also that reading for meaning necessitates active engagement and critical thinking.

Southwood (2012) claimed, "Reading is not a passive process, it involves problem-solving, active prediction (guessing), searching and an ability to use past knowledge and experience to make sense of what we are reading (p. 37). When adults engage in book clubs, they become active participants in these processes, learning how to navigate the texts, their interpretations and perspectives of the ideas presented through the literature, and their

relationships with other book club members. In order to gain a better understanding of how book clubs can contribute to our knowledge of adults' experiences in book clubs, scholars must acknowledge the valuable information these structures can offer and conduct deep, meaningful investigations of book clubs as spaces that foster adults' engagement with literature and with one another.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Although scholars have examined book clubs as informal learning environments and contexts for adults to seek social networks or engage in dialogue, very little is known specifically about adults' experiences of consciousness-raising in book clubs. The purpose of my study was to understand the lived experiences of consciousness-raising for adults through the context of book clubs. To address the gap in the literature, my study was guided by the following research question:

- What is the lived experience of consciousness-raising in the context of book clubs?

Design of the Study

I borrowed Crotty's (1998) representation of the four elements of the research process to initially construct my research proposal. Crotty (1998) depicted these four elements as epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods (p. 4). These are illustrated in Figure 3, along with a visual depiction of how these four elements relate to my research approach. My study took the form of a qualitative research design grounded in an interpretivist epistemology. I applied a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology in order to explore the ways in which adult book club members experienced consciousness-raising through the context of a book club. I drew upon the perspectives of Gadamer (1975) and Van Manen (2014), as they built upon Heidegger's (1996) philosophies about phenomenology, to inform the structure and design of the study. Included in this chapter are sections about the sample selection, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and delimitations and limitations of the study.

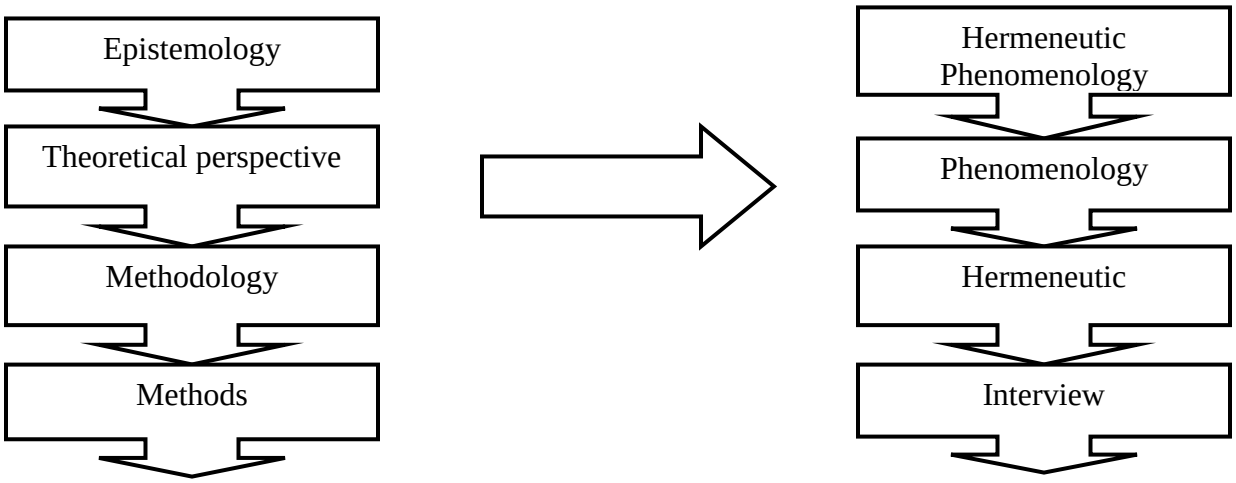

Figure 3. Four Elements of the Research Process

Theoretical Orientation

According to Van Manen (2014), "Phenomenology aims to express, in rigorous and rich language, phenomena and events as they give themselves, and it aims to investigate the conditions and origins of the self-givenness of these phenomena and events" (p. 61). A phenomenological qualitative design best fit my study because I was interested in understanding adults' experiences of consciousness-raising within book clubs. I wanted to explore the study participants' use of reflection, language, and description to convey their experiences and then use that data to reveal the phenomenon. In addition, as the researcher I was a participant in the study, interpreting the data and constructing meaning from it. Therefore, I maintained an interpretivist epistemology, looking closely at how the participants made meaning of their experiences in the book clubs, reflected upon their interactions and exchanges, and then constructed, reconstructed, and interpreted those experiences (Creswell, 2009; Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I used this lens to explore the individual perspectives of my study participants and how they provided unique contributions to interpreting and creating meaning about their experiences in a book club.

Overview of Interpretive Phenomenology

Phenomenology can be viewed as both a philosophical perspective and a methodological approach to studying phenomena. As a philosophical perspective, phenomenology inquires about the meanings and understandings of human experiences and their perceptions of reality. Van Manen (2014) stated, "At the heart of phenomenology is a philosophically consuming fascination with the question of the origin, sources, and meaning of meaning and meaningfulness" (p. 74). Phenomenology "calls into question what is taken for granted" and provides researchers with a way of looking at the "things themselves" (Crotty, 1998, p. 82). Its purpose is "to construct an animating, evocative description (text) of human actions, behaviors, intentions, and experiences as we meet them in the lifeworld" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 19). These complexities of phenomenology have made it an elusive practice within qualitative research, providing researchers with different ways to interpret and apply it.

Although there is not a widely accepted consensus about how to conduct phenomenological research, it has deep philosophical roots. The philosophy of phenomenology largely originated from Brentano's descriptive psychology, which is "conceived of as an a priori science of the laws of the mental, identifying universal laws on the basis of insight into individual instances" (Moran, 2000, p. 8). Phenomenology emerged from Brentano's studies and eventually developed into a philosophy and a science. According to Moran (2000),

> Phenomenology is best understood as a radical, anti-traditional style of philosophising, which emphasises the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe phenomena, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer. (p. 4)

Phenomenology evolved into two distinct branches: descriptive phenomenology, as represented by Husserl (1983), and interpretive phenomenology, as represented by Heidegger (1996). My study draws predominantly upon interpretive phenomenology.

Philosophical Foundations of Interpretive Phenomenology

Interpretive phenomenology goes beyond uncovering the descriptions of lived experience and includes looking closely at the meanings constructed from those experiences. Heidegger (1996) grounds his definition of phenomenology in an ontological perspective, claiming,

> Phenomenology is the way of access to, and the demonstrative manner of determination of, what is to become the theme of ontology. *Ontology is possible only as phenomenology*. The phenomenological concept of phenomenon, as self-showing, means the being of beings—its meaning, modifications, and derivatives. (p. 31)

Heidegger's (1996) philosophical perspective of phenomenology promoted the idea of practical relations with things and recognizes interpretation as a key component. He compared understanding with interpretation and asserted, "Interpretation is existentially based in understanding, and not the other way around. Interpretation is not the acknowledgment of what has been understood, but rather the development of possibilities projected in understanding" (p. 139).

Core Concepts of Interpretive Phenomenology

It is Heidegger's (1996) examination of phenomena, without emphasis of intentionality, which most distinguished his existential, interpretive perspective of phenomenology from Husserl's (1983) transcendental, descriptive perspective. Intentionality, to Husserl (1901/2001) consisted of acts upon objects whereby meaning-making occurs through the different ways in which we engage in thinking about objects. Husserl (1901/2001) referred to intentionality as the

mind's ability to engage in perception and create representations; it is the consciousness of or about objects that can exist within the mind, or transcend it and exist externally. Still focusing on the experiences of phenomena as they occur within the context of the life-world, the essential core concepts of interpretive phenomenology include Dasein, comportments, and hermeneutics and language.

Heidegger (1996) used phenomenology to understand and explore the being of being, the existence, also known as "Dasein" (p. 6). In an effort to understand what it is to be, Heidegger (1996) claimed, "The fact that we live already in an understanding of being and that the meaning of being is at the same time shrouded in darkness proves the fundamental necessity of repeating the question of the meaning of 'being'" (p. 3). He went on to refer to the process of understanding *being* as a "dubious procedure" (Heidegger, 1996, p. 3). Dasein, or being, therefore, is something that must be investigated, interrogated, reflected upon particularly using an ontological perspective. "Da-sein always understands itself in terms of its existence, in terms of its possibility to be itself or not to be itself" (Heidegger, 1996, p. 10).

Heidegger (1996) did not use the term intentionality, but rather replaced it with the concept of Dasein, where Dasein is also equated to care (Moran, 2000). "Whereas Husserl sought to pursue intentionality in the transcendental dimension, for Heidegger, intentionality is an enactment of a concrete factical being: *Dasein*" (Klaskow, 2011, pp. 96-97). Dasein, therefore, is the manifestation of existence. Additionally, although Heidegger (1996) moved away from Husserl's (1983) perception of intentionality, "there is nevertheless a conception of intentionality at work in his phenomenology, and it follows from what Husserl and Heidegger agree are the *basic features* of intentionality" (Klaskow, 2011, p. 98).

Yet another way in which Heidegger (1996) departed from Husserl (1983) in his phenomenological perspective was in regard to natural attitude. Klaskow (2011) asserted:

> What Husserl calls 'the natural attitude,' Heidegger says is *Dasein* in its 'average ordinary everydayness'….Unlike Husserl, who takes the natural attitude merely as a point of departure to be immediately surpassed, Heidegger lingers with *Dasein* in its average ordinary everydayness. From the point of view of the phenomenological observer, it is *Dasein* as we find it initially and for the most part. (p. 97)

Thus, the terms the philosophers used to refer to this form of our being differ, as do the ways in which Husserl (1983) and Heidegger (1996) viewed its presence.

Heidegger (1996) also revised Husserl's (1983) definition of intentionality by referring to it as comportment, or "practical engagements (*Verhalten*)" instead (Moran, 2000, p. 231). "Comportments relate to something: they are directed toward this whereto; or, in formal terms, they are related or referred to it" (Heidegger, 1988, as cited in Klaskow, 2011, p. 96). Additionally, Heidegger (1961) defined this concept when he wrote, "Comportment stands open to beings. Every open relatedness is a comportment. Man's open stance varies depending on the kind of beings and the way of comportment" (Chapter 2, "The Inner Possibility of Accordance"). Comportment, as a different way of identifying intentionality, refers to the interactions or relationships people have with the world.

Finally, another area of philosophical phenomenology in which interpretive phenomenology diverges from descriptive phenomenology is in regard to the roles hermeneutics and language play. Freeman and Vagle (2013) wrote:

> Heidegger was not only critical of phenomenology's (and philosophy's) instrumental use of language but was also most critical of the way language was positioned as secondary

> to the phenomenological project. For Heidegger, language is not only the manifestation of a thing; it is the thing itself. (p. 727)

Thus, Heidegger (1996) merged phenomenology with hermeneutics and emphasized the value of language and hermeneutics in understanding and exploring phenomena. He reconceptualized Husserl's (1983) definition of intentionality by incorporating hermeneutics. Hermeneutics and language provide a way for people to interpret phenomena and investigate lived experiences through the language used to describe and better understand these experiences. Essentially, "the task for hermeneutics is to consider how it is that certain manifestations of 'being in relation' [intentional relations] have taken center stage over others, while simultaneously seeking new possible meanings" (Freeman & Vagle, 2013, p. 731).

Heidegger (1996) defined a phenomenon as, "what shows itself in itself, what is manifest" (p. 25). A phenomenon, therefore, is the appearance or expression of something, its "self-showing" (Heidegger, 1996, p. 26). I examined hermeneutic phenomenology as it was launched by Heidegger (1996) and then applied by Van Manen (1990) because Van Manen's (1990) discussion about thematic analysis is a phenomenological approach that emphasizes the type of interpretive interaction with the data that is helpful in making sense of the phenomenon in my study. The guidelines Van Manen (1990) posited for conducting hermeneutic phenomenology supported my research questions by leading me to explore the phenomenon of adults' experiences of consciousness-raising in a book club. In addition, Van Manen's (1990) approach involves examining the parts of the phenomenon in relation to the whole, which allowed me to practice phenomenological reduction and reveal the phenomenon.

Hermeneutic Phenomenological Methodology

According to Moran (2000), "All our experience is interpreting and encountering what has already been interpreted by ourselves and by others" (p. 235). Gadamer (1976) and Van Manen (1990) both drew upon Heidegger in constructing a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology informed by the philosophy of phenomenology. Gadamer (1976) asserted:

> Philosophical hermeneutics takes as its task the opening up of the hermeneutical dimension in its full scope, showing its fundamental significance for our entire understanding of the world and thus for the various forms in which this understanding manifests itself: from interhuman communication to manipulation of society; from personal experience by the individual in society to the way in which he encounters society; and from the tradition as it is built of religion and law, art and philosophy, to the revolutionary consciousness that unhinges the tradition through emancipatory reflection. (p. 18)

Gadamer (1975) saw language as being central to understanding human experiences. He claimed, "Language is the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world and the all-embracing form of the constitution of the world" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 3). Conducting a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology involves questioning to fully explore how language describes experiences and reveals interpretations. "Questioning opens up possibilities of meaning, and thus what is meaningful passes into one's own thinking on the subject" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 368). Therefore, hermeneutics uses such questioning, reflection, and the examination of language and dialogue to allow humans the opportunities of "coming to an understanding" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 443).

Van Manen (2014) argued that, "At the heart of phenomenology is a philosophically consuming fascination with the question of the origin, sources, and meaning of meaning and meaningfulness" (p. 74). Van Manen (1990) drew upon his interpretations of Heidegger (1996) and Gadamer's (1976) philosophies to develop a methodological approach. This approach deviates from Husserlian philosophical phenomenology because it does not reject subjectivity. Van Manen (1990) remarked:

> The methodology of phenomenology is such that it posits an approach toward research that aims at being presuppositionless; in other words, this is a methodology that tries to ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would rule-govern the research project. (p. 29)

This interpretive approach provides less emphasis than Husserl on bracketing one's presuppositions in order to allow for interpretation to infiltrate the process.

Van Manen (1990) admitted that a central characteristic of hermeneutic phenomenological research is that there is no universal or specific method to follow when conducting this form of research. However, he established six research activities that serve as guidelines for a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology. While Van Manen's methodological approach to hermeneutic phenomenology may seem as though it emphasizes the individual, he prioritized the phenomenon as the main feature of the study. The research activities Van Manen (1990) identified include:

(1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;

(2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;

(3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;

(4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;

(5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;

(6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-31)

These guidelines provide a research approach that generates rich descriptions and interpretations, examines the lived experience of a phenomenon, causes us to reflect upon the experiences we often take for granted, maintains focused attention to exploring a phenomenon through language and writing, and presents a way of looking at the parts of the phenomenon in relation to its whole. A hermeneutic phenomenological research approach based on the six research activities of Van Manen (1990) allowed me to get to the heart of the phenomenon in my study.

Participant Selection

For the purposes of my study, I recruited seven participants. Many qualitative researchers rely upon two criteria for determining the number of participants for their studies, sufficiency and saturation (Seidman, 2013). Phenomenology, however, is about deepening understanding of phenomena and there is no definitive suggestion about sample sizes for phenomenological studies. It is arguable as to whether or not saturation is ever truly reached in phenomenological studies; however, this term does relate to a way of understanding when there appears to be a deepening, repetition, and overlapping of phenomena. I continued to gather research participants and data, via the interviews, until I found the data rich enough to move into the data analysis stage. At that point, I had seven participants. In Table 1, I present some of the participants' relevant demographics.

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Age Range	Education Level	Number of Book Club Memberships
Marci	Female	Caucasian	40-50	College	2
Levi	Male	Caucasian	30-40	College	1
Evelyn	Female	Caucasian	50-60	College	2
Violet	Female	Caucasian	60-70	College	1
Regina	Female	Caucasian	60-70	College	1
Ainsley	Female	Caucasian	30-40	College	2
Dana	Female	Caucasian	30-40	College	1

Criteria for Participant Selection

When selecting participants for my study, I conducted what Maxwell (2013) called purposeful selection. "In this strategy, particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals, and that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97). Purposeful selection allowed me to specifically choose study participants who provided the most relevant information about their consciousness-raising experiences in book clubs. I maintained specific criteria for choosing book club members as my study participants: they had to be at least 18 years old, members of face-to-face book clubs, demonstrate active membership in a book club for at least one year, and attest to an experience in a book club that caused them to view the world differently.

Although recruiting a representative sample from both male and female book club participants was not necessary, I did attempt to recruit participants from each gender in order to get an understanding of their perspectives. However, the majority of those who expressed interest in participating in the study were female, resulting in six females and one male. The literary genre that the book clubs examined was not of great importance, so there were no

restrictions in that regard. One participant was a member of a philosophy-based book club and the others were members of fiction book clubs.

Recruitment Strategies

I used various networking strategies to locate potential study participants. One of my first approaches was to inform multiple book stores and libraries about the study by asking them to post my recruitment flyer since these sites are common gathering places for book clubs. I shared the recruitment flyer document on my personal social media account as well. In addition, I implemented a process similar to snowballing, "where one participant leads to another" (Seidman, 2013, p. 58) to help recruit participants. I asked individuals who were involved in book clubs to reach out to their friends and acquaintances to find out if they might be interested in participating in the study and if they met the criteria I established for the study. In addition, I asked recruited participants to inform their book club members of the study and provide them with my contact information. As part of my recruitment strategy I intentionally asked each prospective participant to briefly explain how they saw the world in a new way as a result of their consciousness-raising experience in a book club. All of the participants were chosen for the study because their responses to that screening question indicated that their experiences had led to a change in perspective on some level.

Data Collection

Drawing upon hermeneutic phenomenological research approaches, I conducted three semistructured interviews with each of the seven research participants. The interviews lasted approximately 45-90 minutes each. I employed Van Manen's (1990) six research activities as guidelines to collect and analyze this data. By utilizing these guidelines, I was able to generate rich descriptions of the phenomenon—the lived experience of consciousness-raising in a book

club. As I began conducting the interviews with the individual participants, I observed some similarities in their responses. These observations helped me construct a list of new understandings of the phenomenon that emerged from the interviews. I relied heavily upon research notes and memoing both during and after the completion of each interview in order to capture those observations for future closer examination.

I conducted the interviews either in semiprivate environments like a coffee shop or conference room, or via Skype or FaceTime because several of the participants were located at a distance and the interviews needed to be conducted in the evenings to accommodate their schedules. I audio taped each of the interviews using two digital recording devices. I used open-ended questions and three separate sets of interview questions in order to allow the participants to fully elaborate on their experiences and relate these through their responses. I provided each of the participants with an interview protocol outlining the purpose of my study, how the interview data would be collected and used, and the measures I would practice to ensure confidentiality. I informed the participants that I would assign them pseudonyms to protect their identites and conceal other identifying information, such as locations or names of other book club members. In an attempt to fully represent the participants' lived experiences of consciousness-raising as they related them, I frequently incorporated direct quotes from their accounts when I described my findings, but I used the participants' pseudonyms and maintained confidentiality.

I roughly followed Seidman's (2013) guidelines for conducting phenomenological interviews in which the first interview provided us with the opportunity to become familiar and comfortable with one another and I asked the participants to describe their history, background, and general experiences in a book club. The second interview was more detailed by asking the participants to reflect upon and describe their experiences of consciousness-raising in a book

club. As part of the second interview protocol with each study participant, I asked them to define Conscientization, or consciousness-raising, in their own words and without consulting any other sources of information. All seven of the study participants expressed slight discomfort and concerns that their definition might not be the "right one." Inevitably, I had to reassure each participant that for the purposes of this study there was no "right answer" and that while their definitions of consciousness-raising were subjective in their very nature, that subjectivity was vital to understanding their different experiences. The third, and final, interview asked the participants to think even more deeply about their experiences and discuss in what ways the experiences impacted their awareness and perspectives.

As the interviewer, my role was to inquire about the participants' experiences of consciousness-raising in a book club, ask them thought-provoking questions, and give them my full attention by openly listening to their responses. In addition, my role as the interviewer was to avoid judgment or clouding the participants' responses with my own interpretations, focusing instead on describing and understanding them so the phenomenon could be revealed.

Data Analysis

The procedures I used to analyze the data collected during my study included the following steps: transcribing the interviews, listening to the recordings while reading the transcripts, revisiting my research notes and memos, and using Van Manen's (1990) interpretive phenomenological methodology to reveal the dimensions of the phenomenon.

Interpretive Phenomenological Methodology

Van Manen's (1990) interpretive phenomenological methodology extends the descriptive phenomenological method. Van Manen (1990), like Gadamer (1976) before him, drew upon

Heidegger in constructing a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology that is informed by philosophical phenomenology. Gadamer (1976) asserted:

> Philosophical hermeneutics takes as its task the opening up of the hermeneutical dimension in its full scope, showing its fundamental significance for our entire understanding of the world and thus for the various forms in which this understanding manifests itself: from interhuman communication to manipulation of society; from personal experience by the individual in society to the way in which he encounters society; and from the tradition as it is built of religion and law, art and philosophy, to the revolutionary consciousness that unhinges the tradition through emancipatory reflection. (p. 18)

Conducting hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, therefore, involves questioning to fully explore how language describes experiences and reveals interpretations.

Examining a phenomenon of interest is the first step of Van Manen's (1990) guidelines. The phenomenon under investigation is one of significance that contributes to a way of understanding some perspective of the world; it is a connection between the phenomenon, the researcher, and the world. The focus of this study stemmed from my combined interest in adults' experiences of consciousness-raising, the role reading plays in adults' lives, and a desire to better understand book club contexts as spaces in which adults can explore reading and discussing ideas they encounter in literature. Furthermore, I wanted to conduct a study that investigated book clubs as valuable contexts. Van Manen's (1990) second step is where "the researcher actively explores the category of lived experience in all its modalities and aspects (p. 32). This refers to looking closely at the actual phenomenon, focusing on it as the center of the study. It involves getting description of the experience "as it is, without offering causal explanations or

interpretive generalizations" (Van Manen, 2014, p. 314). Instead of forcing an interpretation or attempting to analyze each individual experience, I allowed the phenomenon to emerge from the participants' descriptions and take shape in different dimensions

The third and fourth steps of Van Manen's (1990) interpretive phenomenological approach specifically emphasize the role of hermeneutics or language in investigating phenomena. Van Manen (1990) argued that "a true reflection on lived experience is a thoughtful, reflective grasping of what it is that renders this or that particular experience its special significance" (p. 32). It is a deep inquiry into the nature of the phenomenon. Therefore, "phenomenological research consists of reflectively bringing into nearness that which tends to be obscure, that which tends to evade the intelligibility of our natural attitude of everyday life" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 32). Using language or hermeneutics to articulate the phenomenon allows the phenomenon to show itself through a true form and provides insight for those studying the phenomenon. I emphasized the need for the study participants to describe their consciousness-raising experiences in great depth by asking them to reflect upon those experiences, interpret them, and make meaning of them.

"To be oriented to an object means that we are animated by the object in a full and human sense. To be strong in our orientation means that we will not settle for superficialities and falsities" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 33). While the language used in this fifth step of Van Manen's (1990) approach to conducting interpretive phenomenological research may seem as though it gives preference to the individual, his intentions were more toward ensuring that the phenomenon receives the full attention. To accomplish this step, the researcher must remain dedicated to the phenomenon under study, making observations about it only when it has revealed itself through the data. Within my study, this step involved privileging the phenomenon

rather than the participants' individual experiences. This meant practicing phenomenological reduction by rigorously examining and re-examining how the phenomenon presented itself and placing the phenomenon at the center of my questioning. Finally, Van Manen's (1990) sixth step suggests "that one needs to constantly measure the overall design of the study/text against the significance that the parts must play in the total textual structure" (p. 33). He advised examining the whole, the parts, and the whole. Within my study, this involved looking for meanings as they emerged from the participants' descriptions and interpretations as they related to the dimensions of the phenomenon.

Using Van Manen's (1990) six steps as data analysis guidelines allowed me to conduct a research approach that generated rich descriptions and interpretations, examined the lived experience of a phenomenon, caused the participants and I to reflect upon the experiences we often take for granted, maintained focused attention to exploring the phenomenon through language and writing, and presented a way of looking at the parts of the phenomenon in relation to its whole.

Trustworthiness

As noted by Creswell (2009), validity and reliability are not viewed the same in qualitative research as they are in quantitative research. Furthermore, Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, and St. Pierre (2007) claimed that qualitative researchers continue to debate how these concepts work within qualitative research, and that they disagree "over the terms used in these discussions: *validity*, *reliability*, *rigor*, and parallel terms such as *trustworthiness*, *credibility*, *transferability*, *verisimilitude*, *relevance*, *plausibility*, and *confirmability*" (p. 26). Preferring the term trustworthiness, I implemented procedures to help ensure that my research approach produced trustworthy data. I worked toward presenting rich, thick description in my

research reports (Freeman, 2014) to appropriately represent the research findings. I conducted respondent validation with all participants by reading them my memo summaries from their previous interviews. Maxwell (2013) argued that

> This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed. (p. 111)

Respondent validation helped ensure that I did not allow my own interpretations to influence or obscure their accounts of their experiences and accurately captured their descriptions of the phenomenon. In addition, the study participants enjoyed hearing their interview responses and the summary of the previous interview helped the participants return to a mindset where they were focused on recalling and describing their experiences.

As I continued conducting the interviews and memoing, I was able to refine my understandings of the phenomenon that emerged from the data. Upon completion of all interviews I revisited each of the transcripts, eliminating some observations that were no longer consistent or relevant, adding new ones that I identified after examining the data more closely, and categorizing my observations. In my attempts to organize the data, I turned to Van Manen's (1990) discussion of themes in phenomenological research. He wrote:

> Making something of a text or of a lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure—grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of 'seeing' meaning. Ultimately, the concept of theme is rather irrelevant and may be

> considered simply as a means to get at the notion we are addressing. Theme gives control and order to our research and writing. (p. 79)

Despite the urge to create order and organize my observations, I struggled to categorize them into themes, mainly because there was not a sense of any linear or hierarchical configuration. I discuss the way I organized the date in more detail in Chapter 5.

A final important part of ensuring trustworthiness of the data was to participate in self-reflection and clarify the bias that I brought to the study (Creswell, 2009). There are several subjectivities that influenced the approach to my study and the analysis of my data. By using hermeneutic phenomenology I integrated my perspective throughout the analysis as a component of the study in order to present an uninhibited perspective of my writing and admit to potential influences. My academic and occupational background in English and writing affected my relationship with my research topic. As a scholar and educator, I place a great deal of emphasis on reading and the uses and influences of literature on peoples' lives. As such, my interest in this research topic was rooted in my own assumptions that literature, and discussions about it, can heavily impact a person's thoughts and behaviors. One of my primary assumptions, therefore, was that literature would play a major role in the book club participants' consciousness-raising experiences in a book club. I had to be mindful of this assumption while conducting my research and not allow my bias about the power of literature to influence my interactions with the study participants or the questions I asked them.

In addition, although I am an avid reader, I have never participated in a book club. My lack of familiarity with the ways in which book clubs function and my preconceived ideas about book clubs and those who participate in them impacted my observations and interpretations. Inexperience with the spoken and unspoken rules, decision-making processes, and general

variations between different types of book clubs was a minor obstacle in navigating the interviews and discussions with book club participants because I had to ask them to explain some aspects of book club structures I would have otherwise known if I had been a member of a book club. However, this perceived weakness could also function as a strength in some respects because I came to the study without any previous experiences upon which I could draw, making it all new for me.

Finally, and consistent with phenomenological research practices, as the researcher I played a crucial role in shaping what I examined when exploring the phenomenon. There were some aspects of the phenomenon, which I did not question the participants about as thoroughly as others. Specifically, I consciously chose to investigate the participants' descriptions of their book club contexts and the interactions that occurred within them in greater depth than the books that the participants read. I acknowledge this partiality to the context and the dialogue was, for the most part, due to my preconceived beliefs that literature is powerful and capable of impacting people. Therefore, when I followed the phenomenon, there was a noticeably disproportional emphasis on the book club environment and the discussions over the actual readings.

Delimitations and Limitations

Phenomenological research, like other forms of qualitative research, does not seek to develop generalizable findings. Instead, it focuses on discovering the unique perspectives as parts of a whole. As such, the limitations of my study were also its strengths. This hermeneutic phenomenological study presents the experiences and perspectives of only a selected number of book club members, rather than functioning as a representation of all book club populations. Although the book club members interviewed for this study do not provide generalizable results about the consciousness-raising experiences of all participants in book clubs, their responses

provided insightful, rich data about their unique perspectives, and revealed the different dimensions of the phenomenon.

Since my study specifically focused on face-to-face book clubs it neglected to explore the roles of virtual book clubs and whether or not they provide similar conditions for adults as they engage with the readings and other book club members. Additionally, I did not pay much attention to the study participants' use of technology within their book clubs, such as the use of e-readers, locating discussion questions or topics on the Internet, or how technology played a role in convening the book clubs. A closer examination of how technology was integrated in the study participants' experiences might have yielded additional insights about the phenomenon. Ironically, however, I did utilize technology in the form of Skype and FaceTime to conduct the interviews. It is possible that aspect of data collection could have impacted the ways in which the participants responded to the interview questions and their ability to truly focus on remembering and describing their experiences of consciousness-raising in the book clubs.

The time frame in which I conducted my research was yet another delimitation of the study. I was working within a specified time frame in order to produce enough data to complete my dissertation, so the time constraints limited my ability to space out the interviews to ensure that at least one of them was held immediately following a book club meeting. It is possible scheduling the interviews differently might have led to more in-depth recall and responses from the participants.

The criteria for participant selection also posed certain limitations to the study. The book clubs are voluntary, so participants purposefully chose to engage in these settings. The nature of this choice resulted in certain individuals as potential study participants, neglecting to address the experiences of those who might not voluntarily participate in a book club, such as students

required to join a book club as part of a school assignment. Studying these individuals could yield different results about adults' experiences of consciousness-raising in book clubs. In addition, recruitment was challenging and although I believed I gathered rich data from my seven participants, it is possible that the study could have benefitted from gathering data from even more study participants. Finally, the study participants were not diverse in gender, race, education levels, or socioeconomic statuses. It is possible that individuals from different backgrounds might have described different consciousness-raising experiences, leading to a different understanding of the phenomenon.

Summary

This chapter outlines my hermeneutic phenomenological study designed to understand adults' experiences of consciousness-raising in a book club. My research drew upon a collection of constructivist and interpretivist philosophies, as well as phenomenological philosophies and approaches in order to explore the adults' experiences. I conducted semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection in order to better understand the phenomenon and used Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological research guidelines to analyze the data. In the following chapters, I provide a discussion about book club contexts and report my findings about the phenomenon.

CHAPTER 4

BOOK CLUBS: A UNIQUE CONTEXT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand lived experiences of consciousness-raising for adults through the context of book clubs. The study was guided by the following research question:

- What is the lived experience of consciousness-raising in the context of book clubs?

As I will discuss in Chapter 5, the context in which the adults experienced consciousness-raising provided the environment for those experiences to occur. Without the supports and challenges that the book clubs furnished, the participants indicated that they may not have encountered ideas and experiences that prompted such awareness-building. Since the context of the study plays such an integral role in understanding adults' experiences of consciousness-raising, this chapter provides an account of how the study participants depicted their book club contexts. While a few of the participants interviewed were members of the same book clubs, many of them had no connections to one another. After reviewing the interviews I noted various observations about the book clubs, as they emerged through the interviews. Therefore, rather than providing a detailed description of each individual book club, I chose to provide an aggregate profile of their portrayals of these contexts. This chapter presents those observations about the book club contexts.

Overview of the Book Clubs

The study participants included six females and one male. Their ages ranged from early 30's to mid 60's. All of the participants were Caucasian. With the exception of one participant's

book club, the remaining participants' book clubs were based around the reading of fiction books. All of the study participants lived in the same southern state at the time of the interviews, and all of them lived in cities. Three of the participants were simultaneously involved in more than one book club during the times of the interviews. Out of the seven total participants only two separate pairs, Marci and Regina, and Ainsley and Dana, were members of the same book clubs. Table 2 provides a visual depiction of their book club membership and their connections.

Table 2

Book Club Memberships And Connections	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G**
Marci	x	x	-	-	-	-	-
Levi	-	-	x	-	-	-	-
Evelyn	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violet	-	-	-	x	-	-	-
Regina	x	-	-	-	x	-	-
Ainsley	-	-	-	-	-	x	x
Dana	-	-	-	-	-	x	x

The predominant observations that emerged about the book club contexts include commonalities surrounding their demographic compositions, the structure/organization and book selection processes, the expectations or culture of the book clubs, and the motivations for participating in a book club. These are further explored in the sections which follow.

Demographic Compositions

The demographic compositions of each study participant's book club were not significantly diverse in sex, ethnicity, education level, or socioeconomic status. As previously mentioned, the participants in this study were mostly female, with one male interviewee. Not surprisingly, the demographics of their book clubs reflected their study participation in this aspect. While one of the female participants' book clubs did include a male member, the other female participants' clubs were composed of only females. Similarly, the male study participant

was a member of a male-only book club. When asked about these clear distinctions, the study participants admitted that it was not an intentional decision to exclude members of the opposite sex from participating in their book clubs, but rather something that just happened organically. One of the female participants commented on the fact that a male perspective might add a different dynamic to her female-only book club, as did the male participant. In addition, another female participant indicated that while a male member might add a new perspective to the group, she thought perhaps the presence of a male might hinder the open flow of communication, claiming *I guess it would maybe not lead to as open of a discussion, especially some of the books we've read have a woman's perspective and then a man's and I feel like - I don't know - I guess you share a sense of camaraderie when it's all women.* Much like this participant, each of the other study participants openly admitted that there was a certain level of comfort and candidness associated with having same-sex group members.

Similarly, the study participants indicated that their book clubs were composed almost exclusively of Caucasian members. All of the study participants were located in a southern state, but their cities were ethnically diverse. However, out of all seven participants, only one indicated that one of her book clubs included an African American, and another participant claimed one of her book clubs included *a more diverse group of people* because it was housed on a military base. Once again, when asked about this lack of diversity in membership, the participants admitted that exclusion of other ethnic groups was not intentional in any way, but rather just the consequence of how the group was formed.

Much like sex and ethnicities, the book clubs represented by the participants in this study also reflected contexts in which the members shared similar educational backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. Each participant indicated that while he or she may not have directly

inquired about the education levels of all members of his or her book clubs, many of them had obtained a college education and several were either currently employed in a professional field or retired from one. These included occupations in education, the medical field, research, or the military. Even two of the study participants who indicated that they were stay-at-home mothers had earned a college degree and further claimed that the other stay-at-home mothers in their book clubs were also college graduates.

Structure and Organization

Brookfield (1986) defined learning networks as, "groups of adults united by some common concern, some shared status, or some agreed-upon purpose that exchange information, ideas, skills, and knowledge among members and perform a number of functions having to do with problem solving and the creation of new modes of practice or new forms of knowledge" (p. 151). The study participants' book clubs were examples of such informal learning networks. Although they were casual gatherings, the participants did describe the need for a certain degree of structure and organization to keep the clubs functional. The book clubs described by the study's participants reflect this necessity, particularly in regard to leadership, the scheduling of group meetings, and the book selection process.

Leadership

Leadership roles in the book clubs focused primarily on organizing the meetings and keeping the discussions centered on the book. Brookfield (1986) described leadership in collaborative discussion groups, like book clubs, as "typically rotational" (p. 142). Many of the study participants indicated such shared leadership when they claimed that the leadership roles within their book clubs were not always assigned by the group, but rather evolved as one or more individuals took the responsibility upon themselves to convene the group, maintain lines of

communication both during and between meetings, organize the book selection processes, and provide discussion questions. With the exception of the military-based book club, none of the others had an officially designated leader. In fact, several participants noted that the leadership responsibilities were often shared among different group members as their daily lives permitted. As a whole, however, the study participants did admit that some form of leadership was vital to keeping the group on task. One participant claimed, *I feel that we have a more rigorous discussion with leadership or at least when someone imposes a set of questions.* Another remarked that without a *good leader* the book club members could *really not ever say anything and not really have much of a discussion.* Interestingly, the participants used words like "leader," "facilitator," and "organizer" interchangeably to refer to these roles and did not imply that the individual or individuals assuming those roles were given any greater degree of power or influence over others in the group.

Meetings

As previously mentioned, one or more book club members handled the task of scheduling the group meetings. At their initial meeting, the book clubs, as a group, would agree to designate preset meeting days and times (e.g. the second Thursday of every month at 6:00p.m.) and the individual or individuals responsible for organizing the group typically sent out reminder emails prior to the meeting date. Six of the seven study participants indicated that their book clubs met for approximately two hours each month. The remaining participant stated that her book club met every six weeks because the group members struggled to finish the books within four weeks. While the majority of participants specified that their book clubs met in the evening on a weekday, one participant's book club met at 11:00a.m. one Saturday per month.

The meeting locations for the book clubs varied more than their meeting frequency. The locations for the participants' book clubs included: members' homes (rotating through members' homes each month), a meeting room in the public library, coffee shops, a bar, and a restaurant that coincided with the book theme. While I provide further discussion in Chapter 5 about the impact of the social environment on the participants' experiences of consciousness-raising, it is important to note here that the physical space itself was also an essential part of the overall context. Comfort and convenience were vital characteristics of the physical meeting places. Participants who met in book club members' homes noted how the comfort of couches and a lack of formality promoted open discussion. Those who met in the libraries, coffee shops, bars, or restaurants indicated that these facilities were often mutually convenient for various members to access. The only drawbacks one participant noted about meeting in restaurants were the unpredictable noise levels and interruptions from servers and how those could, at times, impede the group's discussion.

Book Selection

As previously noted, with the exception of one participant whose book club focused entirely on philosophical books, all of the study participants' book clubs chose to read and discuss fiction books. Among these groups, popular fiction novels and bestsellers were the typical choices, with a slight preference for historical fiction over other genres. The study participants all indicated that their book clubs preferred to select their books anywhere from one month to an entire year in advance. They completed their book selections by reaching a group consensus. Some participants explained that the book club members would arrive to their first meeting with a list of suggestions and after discussing those suggestions as a group, they would randomly assign the books to specific months. If the book club members could not reach a

consensus about the books, the facilitator or one of the members who demonstrated more leadership among the group would often step in and make the ultimate decision. None of them mentioned any disagreements that erupted from this decision-making process, claiming instead that the main delay was often due to the surplus of suggestions and an inability to choose one book over another. The participants whose book clubs preferred a more structured process to selecting the books stated that they would write the names of books on slips of paper, place them in a container, and draw them out to determine which book was assigned to each month. If the book club rotated its meeting location among the members' homes, the individual who brought the book suggestion would host the meeting during the month in which his or her book was assigned.

Expectations or Culture

Based on the interviews with each participant in the study, there were certain expectations in a book club which include the responsibilities of the members in regard to their participation and behaviors, and the pairing of meetings with food and/or drink. When asked about the responsibilities of the book club members, the typical first response from the study participants was "to read." They then followed this statement with words such as "commitment," "showing up," and "having an opinion" as equally, if not more important responsibilities of the book club members. In fact, one participant noted, *So, I think to be a serious book club member you have to commit to participate.* However, the description of such commitment did not always emphasize the need for book club members to read the books. One participant noted, *Obviously, I would prefer if everybody read…I think it does make for a more vibrant conversation but…people can bring things to the table without having necessarily read one particular portion of something.* In fact, participants overwhelmingly claimed that even if the book club members

did not read the assigned books, it was common to encourage them to attend the meetings anyway. Furthermore, the participants acknowledged that their group members were never criticized for not having read, and if there was any frustration with group members it was over the lack of commitment to regularly appearing at meetings or a tendency to remain silent during group discussions. Therefore, while there was an underlying expectation for book club members to read the assigned books, the commitment to reading came second to the dedication to one's active role in the group.

The study participants also described their book clubs as having a certain culture or set of principles regarding acceptable and unacceptable behavior. As one participant explained, *each one [book club] has a culture and new people can come in but if they don't sort of fit the culture, they don't tend to come back.* Bridges (1979) characterized the "moral culture" for group discussions as one that is mutually respectful, open, and equal. Generally, the study participants spoke about their book clubs' cultures promoting the practice of positive interactions and the encouragement from book club members to share their thoughts and opinions about the books. The study participants all claimed that the majority of their book club meetings included civil and open conversations among the members. Talk of politics and religious preferences that did not relate directly to the book was usually avoided, as was conflict. The participants indicated that while everyone was entitled to their own opinions, critiquing one another about personal opinions was not only an uncommon practice, but also something that would not encourage continued participation from those who chose to voice their opinions. One participant suggested that book club members maintained an informal and open style of communication because they *really want to validate their [other members'] participation.* At times, new book club members were welcomed into the groups, often with a careful consideration of how those individuals

would connect with others; however, if the visitors' interactions contrasted with the positive atmosphere or if their goals conflicted with those of the group they were not invited back to future meetings.

Another notable element of the culture of book clubs is the consistent pairing of book discussions with food and/or drink. All of the study participants indicated that their book clubs incorporated eating and/or drinking into their meetings and established this practice as an integral part of the club's socialization. Involvement of food and/or drink in the meetings varied, however, from just drinks, to snacks, to full meals. Some participants also admitted that they would try to connect the food with the book themes by going to specific restaurants or preparing relevant types of food for the meetings. The participant who was a member of the philosophy-based book club was the only one whose book club did not intentionally include food in the meeting practices. The participant's book club met at the same bar each month and while the book club members would discuss the readings while drinking a beer, the bar did not serve food. When asked if the participant's book club included food as part of their meetings, the participant responded with, *I wish we did…I mean, they've got popcorn there but…no food. That's a good idea though.* One participant admitted that including food in the meetings *adds a lovely little element to the whole thing.* Another explained, *I think because it aligns well with the social aspect of the book club.* Overall, those participants whose book clubs did incorporate food noted that it was an important part of the book club because it provided a way for the group members to mingle, relax, and catch up with one another before they sat down to discuss the book.

Motivation to Participate

I included discussion about the study participants' motivation to participate in book clubs within this chapter because it provides insight about the formation of the book club contexts.

Overall, the study participants emphasized three key factors when explaining their motivation to participate in a book club: 1) socialization, 2) reading different books, and 3) sharing their perspectives with others. In Chapter 5 I provide further discussion about the context's influence on the participants' experiences of consciousness-raising; however, the sections that follow within this chapter explain how the contexts were shaped by the participants' reasons for joining a book club.

Socialization

All of the study participants emphasized that socialization was a main motivating factor for them to join a book club. For example, Levi admitted that *initially it was really just an opportunity to converse with other people about similar interests and just to kind of hang out, for lack of a better term.* Many of the participants remarked that the book clubs were spaces where they could "meet new people." Although the book club members may have entered the clubs as complete strangers, they were specialized and focused contexts. Therefore, the study participants knowingly engaged in settings where the socialization centered around books, making them very specific contexts for interaction to occur. In addition to providing the study participants with spaces in which they could interact with other individuals who possessed a mutual love of reading, the book club contexts made it possible for the study participants to connect with other humans and develop relationships. Marci stated that she thought there was *potential for good friendships because of the common bond of the love of books.* In addition, the study participants added that they chose the book clubs as their social outlets because they were more in line with their introverted personality types. Despite being self-proclaimed introverts, the study participants were driven by a desire to share their reading experiences and thoughts about what

was presented in the books with others, rather than reading and processing the literature in isolation. The book club contexts allowed them those opportunities.

Reading Different Books

Another motivating factor for the study participants to join book clubs was the prospect of reading books they would not ordinarily choose to read. When asked about why she chose to join a book club, Evelyn, like the other participants, stated that the social element was important. She also added, *...and [I] wanted to see if I would enjoy reading things other people chose. Because you get into a bit of a—a place where you're always reading the same authors and you're always reading the same types and this makes you read other things.* Similarly, the other study participants admitted that the book clubs were instrumental for helping them integrate different literary genres and subjects into their reading repertoire. In a sense, the participants suggested that the book club contexts were a place for experimentation with books. They indicated that it was a rare occurrence for a book club member to suggest a book he or she had previously read, but rather recommendations were made based on experience with books by the same author, word-of-mouth, or best-selling advertisements. Therefore, the study participants' book clubs created a space in which variety was expected and usually encouraged. Furthermore, since the groups' book selections were normally established through majority votes, the participants did not always have a choice, forcing them, in a sense, to read books they would not have chosen if reading independently from the book clubs.

Sharing Perspectives with Others

When asked about their reasons for joining a book club, the final factor the study participants revealed was the opportunity to share their perspectives with others. Regina declared, *Well, the book club thing for me was mainly a way, not just to meet other people,*

but…and read other things and be able to discuss it and have some fellowship with others. All of the study participants indicated that they were motivated to enter into discussions with like-minded individuals who were similar to them in that they enjoyed reading and holding conversations about the books. Ironically, however, they also reported that they enjoyed hearing perspectives that differed from their own. Evelyn explained that some of her most positive experiences in her book club involved *hearing people's opinions about things that I might not have ever thought about because you go in reading the book and this is what you think, and then you hear somebody else and you go 'oh, I never thought of it that way.*' The possibilities of broadening their perspectives, in addition to being able to share their own views with other book club members were clear incentives for the study participants to engage in the book clubs. This motivation, combined with the inherent socialization and the exposure to different books helps illustrate the different nuances of the book club contexts.

Summary

Understanding the contexts in which this study's participants experienced consciousness-raising is vital to developing an understanding of what those experiences entailed. Each of the study participants provided their own distinctive insights and descriptions of the book clubs in which they were involved. When examining these book clubs as unique contexts in which the participants encountered consciousness-raising experiences, however, I noted a number of similarities. These observations then allowed me to construct a comprehensive account of the participants' book clubs and represent them as the contexts in which the study participants read and discussed literature, interacted with fellow book club members, and lived through a situation which caused them to view some aspect of the world differently. In the following chapter I will

present my research findings about the adults' lived experiences of consciousness-raising as they occurred through the contexts of the book clubs.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Overview of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of consciousness-raising for adults through the context of book clubs. The study was guided by the following research question:

- What is the lived experience of consciousness-raising in the context of book clubs?

This chapter outlines the manifestations of the phenomenon that surfaced after deep analysis of the participants' descriptions and the different dimensions of the phenomenon. The following pages describe my findings about the participants' consciousness-raising experiences in a book club and explain what I mean by manifestations or dimensions of the phenomenon that emerged from the data. I present my research findings in two sequences. I begin by first discussing the study participants' experiences across their individual differences. This includes their individual definitions of consciousness-raising, the events they identified as the sources for their consciousness-raising experiences in a book club, and the ways in which they described the books, the book club contexts, and the dialogue working together to comprise those experiences. The participants' experiences and responses revealed the manifestations of the phenomenon. In the second sequence of this chapter, I then move my discussion into a presentation of the dimensions of consciousness-raising in a book club in order to more clearly identify the components of the phenomenon that are central to the experience. This process of integrating the

participants' individual experiences into dimensions of the phenomenon allowed me to analyze and better understand what experiences constitute consciousness-raising in a book club.

Sequence One: Participants' Definitions and Descriptions

Overall, the study participants indicated that they viewed consciousness-raising as awareness. This was revealed in the participants' definitions of consciousness-raising in two distinct forms—1) it was an awareness the participant had about other people or circumstances; and 2) it was an awareness the participant had about the way he or she thought about other people or circumstances. Ultimately, these forms functioned as descriptors of the participants' views of consciousness-raising and they are important to note because they reflected the ways in which the participants understood how they could transition from being disconnected from to being connected with the world around them. In Table 3 below, I present the study participants' definitions of consciousness-raising. The use of first person pronouns in reference to the awareness the participants experienced was rare, only occurring as part of two participants' definitions. Regina used the word "us" and Violet used the word "me" to indicate a personal relation to the awareness. The majority of the participants, instead, used the second person pronoun "you" when defining consciousness-raising. The choice to use second person pronouns in their descriptions was interesting because in order to take part in the study, the participants had to have experienced consciousness-raising in a book club, thus including them as members of the "you" they referenced in their definitions. Therefore, although the participants acknowledged their inclusion as those who have experienced consciousness-raising in a book club, the verbiage they used to convey their definitions of the concept separated them somewhat from that action. This is noteworthy, and could provide space for further research about what

happens, from a developmental standpoint, when participants use this type of language to describe their own experiences.

When asked to describe a consciousness-raising experience the participants had within their book clubs, most of them were able to pinpoint either an exact situation or a specific idea which brought about the experience. I also included these descriptions in Table 3 alongside a phrase summarizing the participants' consciousness-raising situation/idea and a direct quote to reflect that summary.

Table 3

Definitions of Consciousness-raising and the Awareness Event

Participant	Definition of consciousness-raising	Consciousness-raising situation/idea
Marci	*…something that you may have been thinking but not always on a real elevated level in your thought processes. Like it may have been in there floating somewhere but…whatever the discussion would be, brought it to the forefront of your mind.*	Summary: Women in the Middle East and their struggle for education Quote: "It was the women's educational, education in general, the characters that survived in those environments over there."
Evelyn	*I was thinking that a book's topic may make you aware of something that you were not aware of and/or change the way you view your opinion of something.*	Summary: Some Southerners still reference the Civil War as a reason for circumstances in the south Quote: "I have become much more aware of, well here in the south, an incredible awareness of the culture in the south and how I –I don't really understand why the Civil War is still raging because in the North we don't even talk about it. But people here—and we're talking two, three, four generations later are saying yes, but that impacted the direction the south went and left us feeling like the north is in control of us."
Regina	*…just being aware of the differences in all of us…*	Summary: Racism in the south is not as prevalent as expected and people are kind, polite, and respectful. Quote: "And I've even found, believe it or not, that there isn't as much overt racism down here as there is up north…which really surprised me when I got down here because of all the stuff I'd seen and heard, I expected to come down and there are a bunch of racists down here, and they're not."

Participant	Definition of consciousness-raising	Consciousness-raising situation/idea
Levi	*…I think it is sort of a socio-political consciousness…or somebody expanding class consciousness into issues of gender and critical race theory and all of these things…But that said, psychologically, I think there is sort of an underlying thing that's 'Well, what is the construct of the unconscious or the aura or consciousness itself?' and there is like this cognitive implication.*	Summary: Fatherhood, while scary, is not out of the realm of possibility and could be enjoyable. Quote: "So, even just at minimal having greater interaction. I think that's really sort of put me at ease about the whole thing. It's still very scary because it's human life…So, I think on a very personal level that's been something that has kind of shifted for me."
Violet	*Well, to me, it's just your view of things, your view of the world and your view of just life in general. How it's in touch with reading to me is how I can look at what other people think and how it affects me, sort of. Like different opinions and different ideas. How do you incorporate that into your life?*	Summary: Racism continues to exist in the south and some Southerners are accepting of it as a normal way of life. Quote: "I think, for me, I'm not from the south and to have a discussion with people that have lived here all their lives, they have a different growing up experience than I did…so some of the discussions on their life experiences growing up in a completely—the same country but a completely different place, has made me think about things differently."
Ainsley	*I mean, I kind of think of it as an enlightenment that occurs in the mind when you're exposed to something in literature that encouraged change, I guess.*	Summary: Father-in-law demonstrates Asperger tendencies and does not have complete control over some behaviors Quote: "Yeah, so it's just totally changed how my—at least my thoughts towards him. Instead of being frustrated now, I'm just like oh, okay, that's just your limitations."
Dana	*I think probably just having a discussion that enlightens you to a point of view that you maybe wouldn't have thought about or considered prior to reading a book.*	Summary: Other people's lives and experiences may be drastically different from our own. Quote: "It's just made me aware of how other people live and how privileged we are and how thankful I should be."

After reviewing the participants' definitions alongside their consciousness-raising situation/idea I observed that their experiences made them aware, or more aware of either a) something they did not know at all; b) something they did not know much about; or c) something that conflicted with their previous assumptions. Overall, the participants' consciousness-raising experiences in the book clubs involved, in some way, an awareness about the challenges others faced, such as racism, developmental problems, or different social issues. Furthermore, the participants identified the three main contributors to their awareness as 1) the books, 2) the environment of the book club, and 3) the discussion in the book club. I referred to these contributors as the "holy trinity" of book clubs in my research notes, and, as I will discuss later, they became essential to understanding the phenomenon. In addition to highlighting the holy trinity of book clubs, the study participants' individual definitions and descriptions of consciousness-raising also indicated another layer of insight about what factors within each part of the holy trinity helped foster their consciousness-raising experiences in a book club. The books often placed the participants outside their comfort zones and exposed them to new or different lives. The environment provided a safe, comfortable space to explore new ideas and socialize. The discussion challenged the participants' perspectives and encouraged reflection.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I did not feel as though this particular study's data were adequately portrayed through the use of themes or thematic tables. When discussing hermeneutic phenomenological reflection, Van Manen (1990) explained:

> Phenomenological themes may be understood as the *structures of experience*. So when we analyze a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience. It would be simplistic, however, to think of themes as conceptual formulations or categorical statements. After all, it is lived

> experience that we are attempting to describe, and lived experience cannot be captured in conceptual abstractions. (p. 79)

Using Van Manen's (1990) suggestions, I turned to Vagle's (2014) advice to experiment with the representation of the forms of data. He suggested, "Try to find a form that can reflect the tentative manifestation image. In other words write around and through the grey areas—whatever they might come to be—and amplify the explosive lines of flight" (Vagle, 2014, p. 137). Instead of identifying the data through themes, I used Vagle's (2014) phrase "manifestations of the phenomenon" (p. 136) to describe the data and drew upon his conceptual representation (Figure 4) to demonstrate the different aspects of the participants' experiences, as well as the dimensions of the phenomenon. In Figure 5 I present the facets of the participants' consciousness-raising experiences in their book clubs. Later, in Figure 6, I use another illustration to provide a representation of the dimensions of the phenomenon—consciousness-raising in the context of a book club.

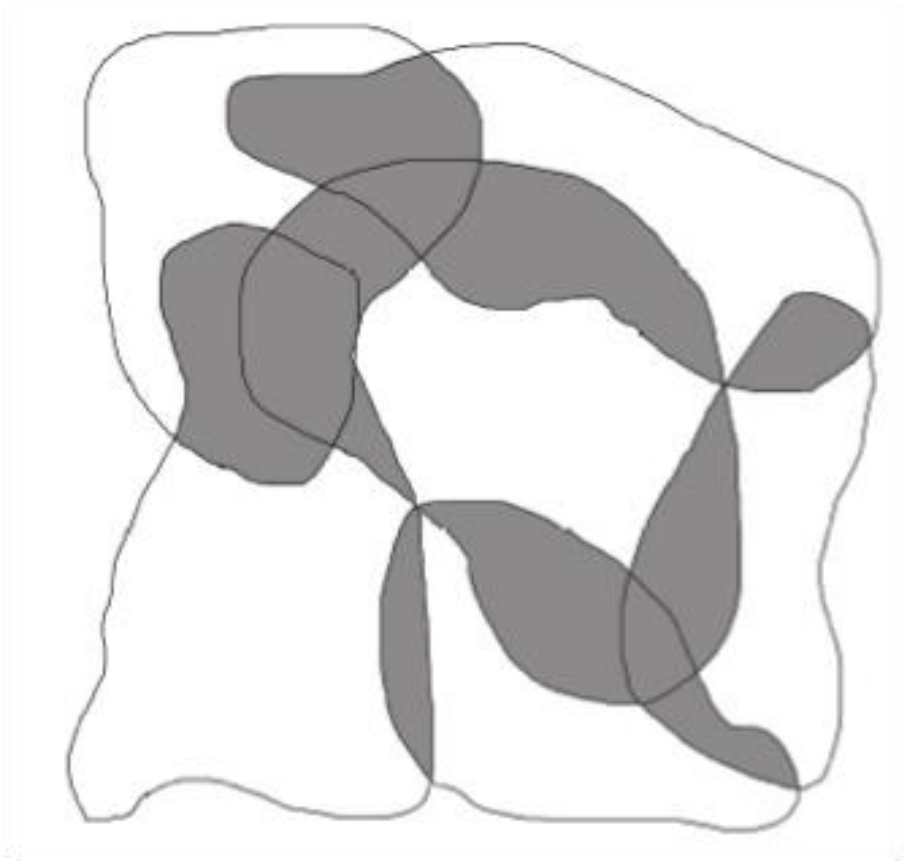

Figure 4. Vagle's (2014) Conceptual Representation

Adapted from "Figure 8.1" by M.D. Vagle, 2014, *Crafting Phenomenological Research*, p. 137.

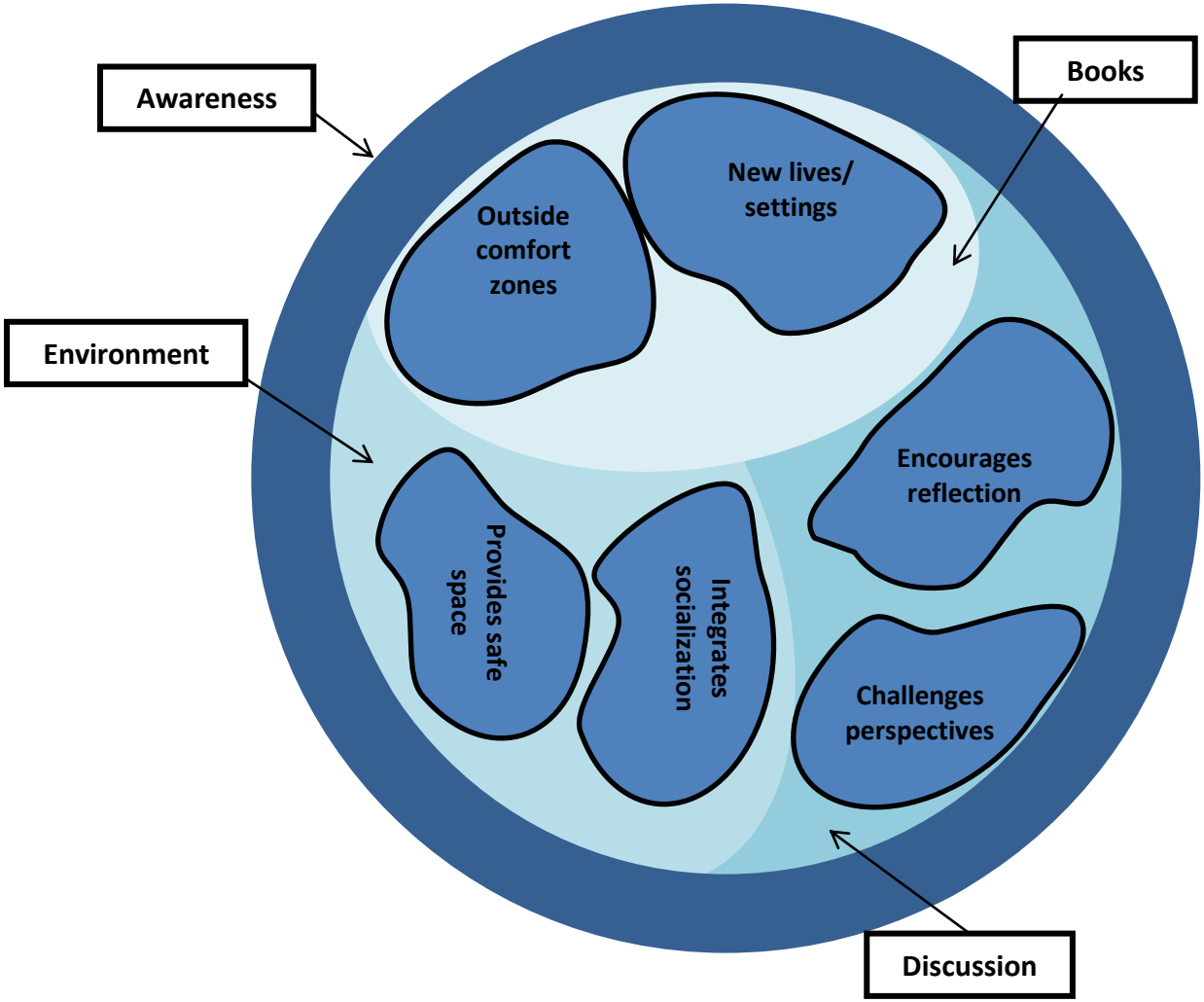

Figure 5. Participants' Experiences of Consciousness-raising in Book Clubs

Sequence Two: Manifestations of the Phenomenon

Each of the research participants' individual experiences helped construct an understanding of the phenomenon in this study—consciousness-raising in the context of a book club. Taken together, their definitions and descriptions revealed the dimensions of the phenomenon as well. Consciousness-raising in the context of a book club manifests when participants are introduced to other situations via the literature they read, and are encouraged to engage in open discussion and share their personal perspectives within a safe group of people who both support and challenge their viewpoints while preserving the group's culture of tolerance and acceptance of differing opinions. In this context, consciousness-raising is fostered through reflective and critical dialogue as the participants live vicariously through others' experiences and develop their awareness of situations or perspectives which were previously unknown. Therefore, the three manifestations of consciousness-raising in a book club are: 1) Literature exposes participants to other lives; 2) Dialogue encourages engagement in discussion and communication of perspectives; and 3) Book clubs reflect characteristics of holding environments. I represent these manifestations and their various dimensions in Figure 6 below and explain them in the following sections. Although I utilize some passages from the participants' interviews to help illustrate how the dimensions of the phenomenon revealed themselves to me, I consciously chose to also provide holistic representations of their accounts because I wanted to ensure that I privileged the phenomenon its self over the individual participants.

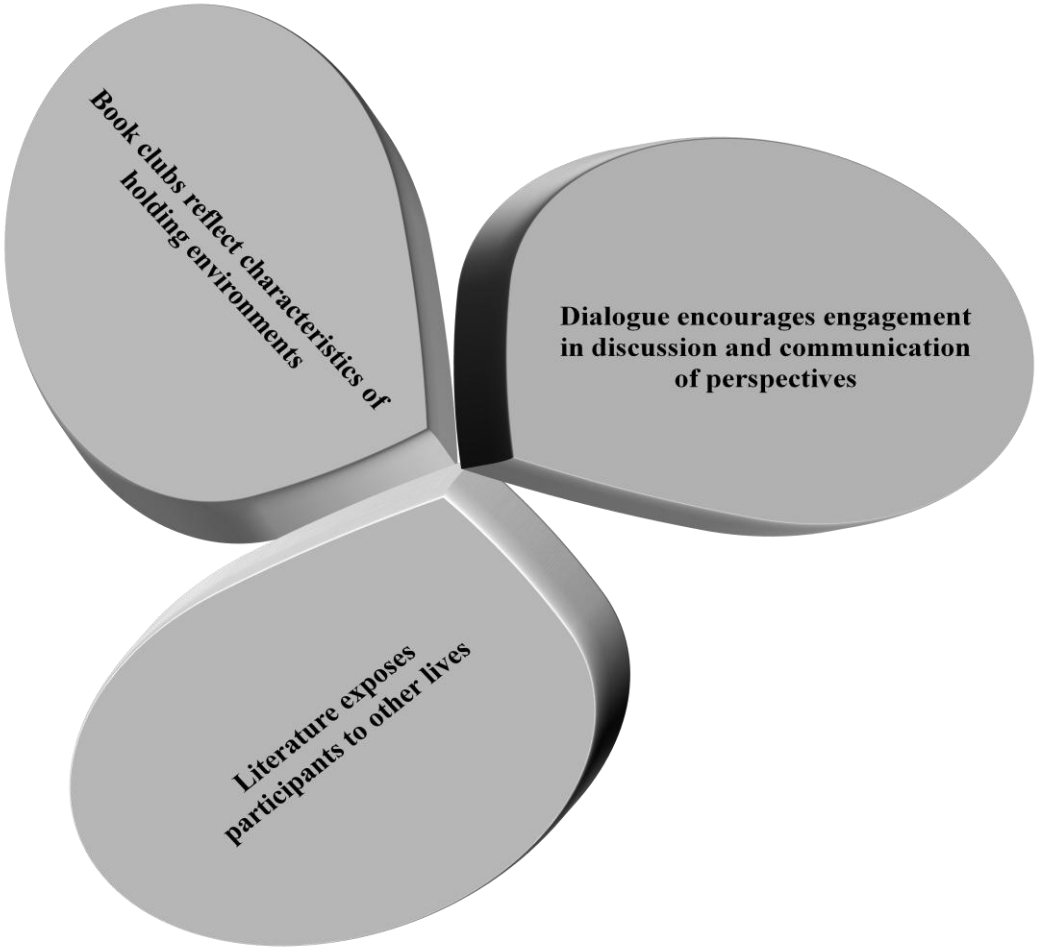

Figure 6. Consciousness-raising in the Context of a Book Club

Literature Exposes Participants to Other Lives

In the study interviews, the participants' experiences with the books revealed one of the manifestations of the phenomenon—literature exposes participants to other lives. The books the study participants read as book club members were important aspects that helped facilitate a consciousness-raising experience in the book clubs. The books themselves served as the vehicle through which the participants were initially exposed to an idea and/or situation. In addition, the books were at the center of the book clubs and an important part of what brought the book club members together as a group. They were the focal points of discussion, providing the book club members with subject matter—topics, ideas, characters, and circumstances—to read about, reflect upon, and explore through conversations. In essence, the books formed the foundation for the construction of the groups.

Most of the participants admitted that the books played an integral role in their consciousness-raising experiences in the book club because they were often books that the participants would not normally choose, they were from different genres than what the participants usually gravitated toward, and the books pushed the participants outside their comfort zones to explore new topics. I constructed a holistic understanding of this dimension of the phenomenon by compiling my observations of the participants' responses. While some participants named specific books that left an impact upon them, others simply identified an influential topic or theme that was the focus of their book club. Due to its recent release to the public, Harper Lee's *Go Set a Watchman* was a popular choice for many book clubs and surfaced in many interviews. Several study participants described this book as an excellent topic of conversation for their clubs because it presented issues of racism and family conflict. Other books the participants identified as significant were *Tobacco Road, The Help, The Immortal Life*

of Henrietta Lacks, *The Boys in the Boat*, *Three Cups of Tea*, *Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *The Bookseller of Kabul*, *The Poet of Baghdad*, *The Language of Flowers*, *The Goldfinch*, *The Rosie Project*, *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry*, and *All the Light We Cannot See*. Additionally, some of the topics of discussion the participants identified as impactful dealt with race and gender inequalities, family dynamics and relationship challenges, identity and personal growth, and cultural values and expectations.

The participants explained that prior to joining a book club, they found themselves getting into reading "ruts" where they would only read a specific genre, or intentionally choose books by a certain author. The book clubs provided the study participants with opportunities to *expand [their] choices in reading* as Marci stated. Regina affirmed, *…and then there are books that I would never read.* Evelyn also claimed, *I'm reading some books about topics that I would not necessarily have read, wouldn't even have known about them.* Even the participant whose book club focused solely on philosophical texts confessed that the book club permitted *the exchange of ideas regardless of what you're reading and being exposed to new thoughts and other people's thoughts and reading things that you maybe normally wouldn't read.* Their responses suggested that the participants were all hesitant to branch out with their book choices independently; however, since the book clubs collectively chose their reading lists the participants found comfort in the solidarity of reading something different and potentially challenging to their preferences and prior experiences. In addition, although the books might provide challenges for the readers, those challenges were often viewed as nonthreatening because they did not actively impact the participants' lives. In other words, they were "just books" with which the participants could choose how and when they interacted.

In addition to pushing the study participants to read different genres or subject areas, the books in the book clubs also exposed the participants to lives, characters, and situations that differed from their own. Ainsley described the interaction with the books when she explained:

> *I can only experience what I experience. I can only think that that's what I think. But books, I think, create a place where we can think outside of our own heads…So it kind of goes back again to that place of escape. But also an escape, a place to grow, a place to experience outside of our normal realities*.

The books were a way for the participants to encounter people, places, and circumstances they might not otherwise come across in their lives. As Iser (1974) asserted,

> The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader. (p. 275)

The books provided exposure to situations and ideas outside the participants' usual realms of experience, which helped the study participants construct new understandings of the world and make those different situations or ideas real to them. Iser (1974) further noted:

> The fact that completely different readers can be differently affected by the 'reality' of a particular text is ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written. The literary text activates our own faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents. (p. 279)

Consequently, because they were often foreign to the participants, the ideas presented in the books also offered challenges to the participants' knowledge bases. Dana, for example, noted that characters in a book her group read lived very different lives than she had because they were

victims of domestic violence, something Dana herself had never encountered firsthand. In addition, Violet and Evelyn, discussed their exposure to ideas about racism and how those ideas contrasted from their own upbringings. Marci talked about how her own educational experiences as a female were vastly different from the Middle Eastern women in the books she read. Finally, Levi declared, *…one of the most intense kind of moments that I think you can feel is being taken by surprise. And I think when you encounter a text like that you either contend with it or you flee from it, I guess.* The books, therefore, were important in facilitating consciousness-raising experiences the participants had in the context of their book clubs by contributing new ideas or situations.

Dialogue Encourages Engagement in Discussion and Communication of Perspectives

Another manifestation of the phenomenon takes shape in the dimension of dialogue. The dialogue within a book club encourages engagement in discussion and communication about perspectives. The study participants were looking for like-minded individuals in the sense that the other book club members had common interests in reading and gathering to discuss what they read. While the study participants reported sharing some similar opinions about what was read with their book club members, they also indicated that they encountered very different perspectives from their own. This is explored further as another manifestation of the phenomenon.

As a proponent of the ways in which literacy and communication could empower and liberate people, Freire (1970/2000) placed particular emphasis on reading and dialogue. Similarly, the study participants commented on the influences their group discussions, in addition to the books, had on their awareness. Evelyn explained, *You could read the book very objectively but it's the members that are talking about it and providing their thoughts.* Like the

other study participants, she indicated that while the books might provide insight about new or different ideas, the discussions further enhanced those insights by engaging the participants in dialogue about their thoughts and opinions. The study participants referenced conversations that ranged from sharing whether or not they enjoyed the books and why; to considerations of the plot line, characters, and authors' intentions; and more in-depth discussions about how they connected with characters or situations in the books and how those connections helped them make meaning of certain ideas or personal reflections. Furthermore, by taking part in these discussions, the study participants also encountered an array of diverse opinions from their book club members, which often posed challenges to their own perspectives. Once again, I used a holistic approach when tracing this dimension of the phenomenon, discovering that the study participants illustrated that their awareness, as consequences of reflection and the challenges posed to their perspectives, all attributed to their interactions with the books they read and the other book club members. For example, most of the study participants used similar phrases when describing how the act of mentally putting themselves in others' positions, whether they were other book club members or book characters, gave them a new lens through which they could view ideas and situations. They used phrases like: "in their shoes," "spectacles," and "from their side of things" to note the ways in which they altered their perspectives based on the way other book club members described their views when they engaged in book club discussions.

As previously mentioned, the study participants' descriptions of their consciousness-raising experiences in a book club suggested that for them, consciousness-raising was awareness. As Freire (1970/2000) asserted:

> The act of knowing involves a dialectical movement that goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to a new action. For the learner to know what he did not

> know before, he must engage in an authentic process of abstraction by means of which he can reflect on the action-object whole, or, more generally, on forms of orientation in the world. In this process of abstraction, situations representative of how the learner orients himself in the world are proposed to him as the objects of his critique. (p. 7)

The study participants engaged in the process of reflection when they encountered a new idea, contemplating how they felt about it, as well as where they stood in relation to it. Consequently, these assessments inspired further awareness, not only that such different ideas or situations existed, but also an awareness of the participants' emerging perspectives about them.

Violet stated, *the exchange of ideas, to me, allows me to look at the world, sometimes just think about how am I looking at the world?* Like Violet, the other study participants admitted that discussions in the book club often made them pause and consider their personal outlooks, suggesting that they frequently participated in self-reflection without necessarily identifying it in those terms.

Levi provided a particularly insightful response when he answered:

> *It's one thing to sit and read and process what a writer is saying and seeing what it means for you but then to reformulate that and verbalize it for other people; and then for them to respond to your reading of something…that's a dialogical act that new things can come out of and I think that really is where that type of consciousness-raising—I think it really occurs there much more. I don't want to say it doesn't occur with just the reading because it definitely does, but I think that there is a difference when it occurs within that dialogue.*

Similarly, Marci emphasized the relationship between articulating one's thoughts for others and how that process contributes to self-reflection. She claimed, *Some people think better if they get*

that auditory feedback loop and they talk it back to themselves or hear themselves or hear their ideas come from somebody else. The study participants appeared to use that act of voicing their thoughts with others and communicating about them to more fully reflect upon their personal perspectives, thereby simultaneously increasing their awareness of how they saw themselves and others.

When describing her book club discussions, Ainsley remarked about the importance of reflection. She stated, *I think you're going to see the most change in yourself with the more reflection you have on it. And just more of the thought power you put into like, 'oh, I need to think about this. I need to draw the lines out.' And it takes some mental effort, I think.* Her use of the words "mental effort" further suggested that self-reflection poses a possible challenge for some people, particularly if it presents ideas that conflict with the mindsets they have adhered to all along.

As Freire (1970/1996) wrote, "Reflection upon situationality is reflection about the very condition of existence: critical thinking by means of which people discover each other to be 'in a situation'" (p. 90). When confronted with others' challenges, the study participants indicated that they reacted by reflecting upon not only how such ordeals made them feel in relation to that particular situation, but also how they made the participants feel about their own situations. Freire (1970/1996) emphasized reflective practice as integral for provoking consciousness-raising, and argued that it occurs in a cyclical pattern whereby it subsequently results from consciousness-raising. He claimed: "For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 53). As revealed through the study

participants' interview responses, as members of book clubs they engaged in reflective and dialogical practices when reading and discussing the literature. These acts of reflection and dialogue inspired the study participants' consciousness-raising experiences in the book clubs. Consequently, their awareness from such experiences further inspired them to reflect upon their relation to the world around them, thus employing them in an ongoing practice of reflection, discovery, and re-discovery.

Ultimately, because each of their book club members brought their unique backgrounds and experiences with them to the readings, meetings, and discussions, there was a significant degree of diversity of thought within the groups, which was shared when the book club members engaged in dialogue and communication about their perspectives. Marci remarked, *And I think one of the things that is very helpful with that [challenging people to think] is being in a group of people in a book club that are different from you in terms of where you're from, your political views, your religious philosophies, and then just to hear other ways of thinking.* Ainsley used the word "spectacles" to describe the different perspectives of her book club members. She claimed, *So it's again—it's there—just expecting 'oh, someone is going to bring something I never could have thought of before.* Similarly, Dana explained, *I feel like two people can read the same book and have very different take-away experiences from it.* Regina also remarked about the value of hearing different opinions and its impact on her awareness when she explained, *You get different points of view. They—they'll say things you didn't think of or they'll bring something up that you didn't notice as much or 'oh, yeah, that's right, they did do that.' And then of course, their life experiences are different than yours and they bring that into it as well.*

In his theory of andragogy, Knowles (1980) asserted that adults emphasize and rely upon their life experiences to help construct their meaning-making. The study participants all focused

on the ways in which other book club members' life experiences contributed to this diversity of thought. Exposure to such differences encouraged the study participants to acknowledge that others' perspectives not only existed, but also sometimes conflicted with their own. In turn, this realization often challenged the participants' ways of thinking. Ainsley related these challenges to her own personal growth stating, But *for me, conflict produces challenges and change. And I like that. It produces growth.* When discussing the impact of different perspectives, Levi explained that *you can only be aware of your limitations so much but there are all of these limitations that you're not aware of and you can try to expose those.* In addition, the study participants often felt challenged to navigate how the different perspectives affected their worldviews. Levi admitted, *And I've been able to, along with these other people, impact these ideas and help make decisions about how I want to…I don't know if 'make use of those ideas' is the right way to put it, but how I want to enfold those ideas into my life or not.*

Since the dialogue engaged the participants in discussions in which they communicated their perspectives with one another, this sense of being challenged by different perspectives presented in the book clubs also made them face their limitations.

Book Clubs Reflect Characteristics of Holding Environments

Building upon Kegan's (1982) ideas about adults' developmental growth, Drago-Severson (2009) suggested that the practice of engaging with challenging perspectives is best attempted "where a supportive, trusting environment encourages and embraces risk taking" (p. 76). The study participants indicated that there was a well-developed balance between the sense of security they felt when sharing their ideas and opinions with their book clubs, and the sense of uncertainty, or "risk taking" they experienced when confronted with ideas or opinions that made them test their own. The final manifestation of the phenomenon is that book clubs reflect

characteristics of holding environments. I used a holistic approach, yet again, for the participants' responses in order to construct a description of this manifestation.

The book club contexts were a vital dimension of the phenomenon because they were both a reason for the participants to meet, and a product of those meetings. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the context included the physical environment, as well as the psychological, mental, and social atmosphere. Comfort and convenience dictated the physical meeting places. Most book club meetings occurred in the members' homes, making the environment less formal and more relaxed. Also, the groups attempted to accommodate all group members by using centrally located meeting locations. The social aspect associated with book clubs was a key component of the context in order to foster consciousness-raising experiences. The book clubs almost always featured food and/or beverages and some sort of "small talk" as a way to ease into the more serious discussions about the literature. Also, there was an understood set of expectations, or a culture, in the book clubs regarding the book club members' behaviors, their interactions with one another, and their responsibilities toward the group. For example, topics of conversation that prompted tension among the group were avoided or carefully posed in a way that encouraged openness and tolerance. Similarly, individual book club members who disrupted the general atmosphere were not invited to attend future meetings and the book club members carefully evaluated whether or not potential new members would fit with the group based on their personalities, attitudes toward literature, and demonstrated abilities to be supportive of others sharing their opinions.

In addition to providing support for the participants to engage in conversations about various ideas, their book clubs fostered consciousness-raising by presenting them with opportunities to socialize with others, to bond, and to feel comfortable revealing their beliefs and

views. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the social element was a key motivating factor for the study participants to join a book club. Several of the study participants referred to themselves as introverts or social introverts, admitting that they used the book club as their main social outlet beyond their close relationships and friendships. Violet declared, *I like the camaraderie and the people. It's a social group as much as anything else and I personally need a little bit of socialization besides just seeing people at work.* Marci stated, that the book club helped her *get into the community and meet people who have shared interests, so that was good.* Similarly, Ainsley claimed, *It just gives you that commonplace point of something to discuss and then look forward to together and just when you read a good book, you're excited to tell someone about it.* Evelyn and Regina both used the word "enjoy" to describe how they felt about socializing with their book club members. Levi even admitted, *I don't know what the primary interest in a reading group would be if it wasn't essentially social.* All of these statements from the study participants confirmed that socializing with people in their book clubs was an incentive to join the book clubs because it inspired a sense of belonging and connectedness with others.

Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 4, the book club interactions also consistently included some form of food or drink. Purnell and Jenkins (2013) asserted "Food in a social gathering builds familiarity and attachment. It creates a close personal connection between the host and the guest and makes interaction among guests possible…Food also facilitates communication between people because of its strong connection to ritual" (pp. 74-75). Nunnery, Thomson, and Maretzki (2000) also established the importance of food in building and strengthening relationships within groups, stating that food connects people "to each other" (p. 6). The act of sharing food and drink contributed to the bonds the book club members formed, and added yet another level of comfort or support. Furthermore, according to a recent study by

aan het Rot, Moskowitz, Hsu, and Young (2015), people who ate with others demonstrated "greater agreeableness and less dominance and submissiveness during meals than at other times" (p. 107). This supports the study participants' acknowledgements of the ways in which their interactions with the book club members felt open, comfortable, and equal.

When asked to describe the space in which their book clubs met, the participants all portrayed them as safe spaces, some of them even using those exact words. Violet referred to her book club as a *safe, positive place* and Dana claimed, *I think people feel safe and free to be open and share their opinions and that we're all very accepting of whatever they're going to say.* Similarly, Ainsley stated that her book club was *like a free space to say whatever*, and Evelyn indicated the importance of safety and security in her book club when she responded, *That's very important because if you can't discuss the book freely without people attacking you, there's no point in being there.* The participants' descriptions highlighted the importance of not only a physically comfortable space, but also one which is mentally and psychologically relaxed, secure, and supportive. They suggested that the book club members' levels of interaction and involvement in discussions depended upon the openness of their group, an avoidance of judgment, and a desire to learn from and support one another. The supports fostered through this context suggest the possibility that the book clubs reflected characteristics of holding environments by providing spaces for the participants to grapple with complex, sometimes challenging ideas while feeling supported or "held" (Kegan, 1982) by their environment and those within it. As noted in Chapter 2, Winnicott (1965) originally coined the phrase "holding environment" and Kegan (1982) adapted it to refer to "the evolution of meaning-making humans experience as they transition through and between different cultures of embeddedness, or the "context in which, and out of which, the person grows" (Kegan, 1982, p. 116). Drago-Severson

(2009) further applied the concept of the holding environment to adult learning by describing them as intentionally-designed spaces to provide adults with the supports and challenges they need to develop. Drago-Severson (2009) also provided three fundamental functions of what she identified as good holding environments:

> Like the teaching and learning process, it needs to "hold well" by meeting a person where he or she is in terms of meaning making. In other words, it must recognize, honor, and confirm who the person is, without pushing urgently for change. Second, when the person is ready, good holding environments "let go" by offering challenges that permit the person to grow toward a new way of knowing. Last, a strong holding environment needs to stay in place, or "stick around," to provide continuity, availability, and stability during the growth process. (p. 58)

The study participants portrayed their book clubs as contexts reflective of such "good holding environments" (Drago-Severson, 2009) because they all remarked about the high levels of comfort and safety they felt within the groups, and their descriptions of their consciousness-raising experiences in the book clubs illustrated the challenges they faced as a result of their membership in the clubs. The book clubs promoted growth, at least in the sense of the participants gaining awareness of something outside their own perspectives. However, it is important to note that none of the study participants' descriptions indicated that the book clubs functioned as spaces that were intentionally designed to promote developmental growth. Instead, the book clubs' roles predominantly were to provide a site for adults to engage in thought and discussion about literature. Nonetheless, future research that specifically focuses on book clubs as holding environments could reveal their potential to serve as structures that foster adult development.

Summary

This chapter discussed the manifestations of the phenomenon—experiences of consciousness-raising through the context of book clubs—as they were revealed through the study participants' descriptions and the dimensions of the phenomenon. The manifestations included 1) Literature exposes participants to other lives; 2) Dialogue encourages engagement in discussion and communication of perspectives; and 3) Book clubs reflect characteristics of holding environments. All of the manifestations brought to light consciousness-raising in the context of a book club. In addition, they highlighted each piece of the 'holy trinity' of book clubs—the literature, the context, and the dialogue. Furthermore, none of the dimensions presented themselves in isolation, but rather were interconnected with one another, contributing together to understanding the phenomenon. The following chapter will discuss the implications of consciousness-raising experiences within the context of book clubs and the recommendations for using these findings.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how adults experience consciousness-raising in book clubs. In order to investigate this phenomenon, I posed the following research question: What is the lived experience of consciousness-raising in the context of book clubs? The phenomenon emerged in three manifestations: 1) Literature exposes participants to other lives; 2) Dialogue encourages engagement in discussion and communication of perspectives; and 3) Book clubs reflect characteristics of holding environments. Each of the manifestations revealed a significant dimension of the phenomenon, highlighting the ways in which adults experience consciousness-raising within that specific context. As a result of conducting the study, I found that consciousness-raising in the context of a book club manifests when participants are introduced to other situations via the literature they read, and are encouraged to engage in open discussion and share their personal perspectives within a safe group of people who both support and challenge their viewpoints while preserving the group's culture of tolerance and acceptance of differing opinions. Based on these findings, I reconceptualized the conceptual framework for book clubs (Figure 2) into a new representation in Figure 7.

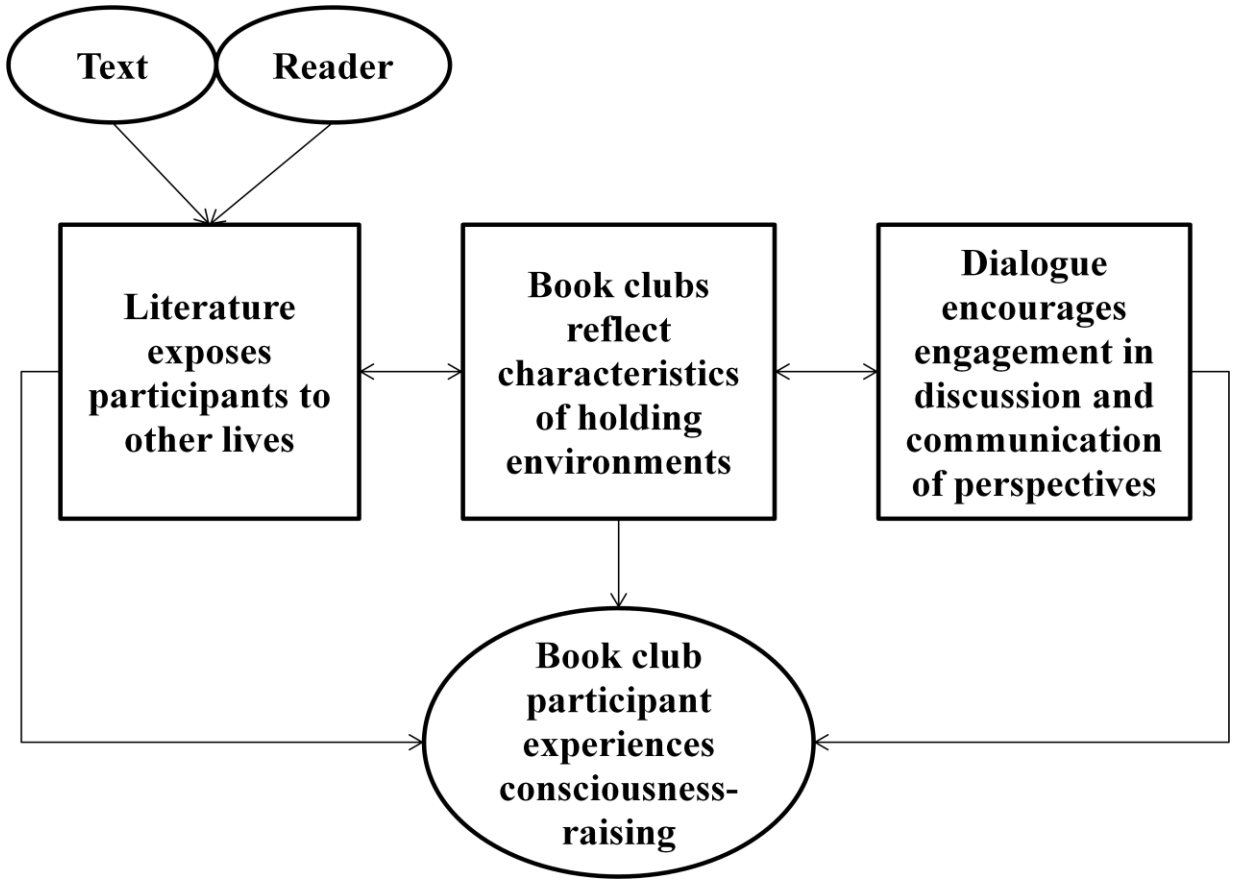

Figure 7. Reconceptualized Conceptual Framework for Book Clubs Based on Study Findings

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter discusses the conclusions I derived from the study's findings and the implications of those conclusions for both theory and practice in adult learning. I found that book clubs are intentional, bounded spaces that function somewhere between communities of interest and communities of practice. I also argue that book clubs are valuable contexts for researching consciousness-raising because they present similar characteristics to holding environments and they facilitate reflection and dialogue, all of which help foster consciousness-raising experiences. Furthermore, the dimensions of the phenomenon in this study provided another way of examining the relationship between awareness and learning, which is particularly significant in regard to andragogical approaches for adult educators. To help explain my conclusions I connect

the findings back to relevant literature about book clubs and consciousness-raising. I conclude the chapter by offering suggestions for future research on this topic and end with my closing remarks.

Conclusion #1: Book Clubs are Intentional, Bounded Spaces

My study revealed that book clubs are intentionally created, bounded spaces with purposeful structures, expectations, and objectives. Book club participants join these reading groups for the main purpose of interacting with other individuals who have a passion for reading and want to engage in discussions about the ideas presented through the literature they read. Essentially, the book clubs exist because the book club members seek out other individuals with similar interests and they want to use the group setting as a way to find a sense of belonging and camaraderie with other readers, express their thoughts about what they have read, and discover others' perspectives about the readings. While socialization is considered a significant part of participation in a book club, even the socialization is purposeful and semi-structured so that it centers on the books the book club members read. Furthermore, because book clubs are such deliberate structures, they are sustained by often unspoken, yet implied principles and expectations.

The types of interactions occurring within book clubs are unique to those contexts because of the parameters they establish. Based on this study, the book clubs served specific purposes as social and intellectual outlets for the study participants; however, they did so while promoting a distinctive balance of rigor and flexibility. In particular, book club environments reinforce the use of personal experiences to help make meaning of the texts and the ideas presented within them (Swanson, 1993; Radway, 1997; Twomey, 2007). As contexts, they have the luxury of emphasizing personal experiences as ways for the book club members to form

connections between their own lives and what they read. This is particularly relevant for adults because they draw heavily upon their experiences when making meaning. The book clubs, therefore, make use of an effective pedagogical strategy, experiential learning. Langer (1995) argued in favor of teachers who implemented reading groups in their classrooms to promote "literary communities" (p. 53) that more closely reflected book club communities in order to encourage more open discussions and allow space for the student readers to engage on a more personal level with the texts. Furthermore, Addington (2001) suggested that reading group contexts provide more comfortable and supportive opportunities for people to participate in cooperative and collaborative meaning-making than traditional classroom settings. Book club contexts, therefore, provide a useful model for establishing and maintaining positive, tolerant interactions among group members, as well as effective and informative experience-based discussions.

These objectives and outcomes of book clubs are the characteristics that place them as informal or nonformal environments somewhere between communities of interest and communities of practice. In some respects, book clubs are reflective of communities of interest because they consist of groups of people who gather to exchange ideas about a similar passion (Fischer, 2001). However, book clubs do not quite fit within this categorization because they go beyond the temporary nature of communities of interest, which usually disband when the group has completed an objective (Fischer, 2001). In addition, unlike individuals in communities of interest, book club participants demonstrate a greater degree of interaction with one another outside the group setting, and do not simply disengage once a discussion has concluded. Instead, book clubs are sustained by the members' commitment to repeatedly gather at regular intervals. Such regularity ties book clubs closely with communities of practice, which Wenger (1998)

identified as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p. 1). Nevertheless, book clubs only possess two of the three characteristics of communities of practice as established by Wenger (1998). Book clubs, like communities of practice, have an “identity defined by a shared domain of interest” in which membership “implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people” (Wenger, 1998, p. 2). In addition, they have the community where “members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other; they care about their standing with each other” (Wenger, 1998, p. 2). However, book clubs do not necessarily reflect the third characteristic of communities of practice, the members being practitioners, (Wenger, 1998) because they are not driven by a goal to solve a problem or develop strategies for completing tasks. Therefore, my findings about book clubs suggest that they are unique structures that fit somewhere between communities of interest and communities of practice. Consequently, they are difficult to classify and through further research, they could reveal an innovative way in which adults gather for collaborative inquiry and discussion.

Conclusion #2: Book Clubs are Valuable Contexts for Researching Consciousness-raising

As explored in Chapter 2, book clubs have typically been left out of academic research because they were not considered venues which contributed noteworthy data. In contrast to this belief, my research demonstrates that book clubs are valuable contexts that provide rich data about the consciousness-raising that can occur within them. This study revealed that book clubs demonstrate characteristics similar to holding environments, suggesting that book clubs can facilitate and support the intentional gatherings of adults who share a similar interest and want to discuss their opinions and thoughts with one another, while simultaneously challenging the book

club participants by engaging them in reflection and dialogue. This discovery helps strengthen the argument against the common misconception that book clubs are purely leisure activities with no scholarly applicability.

The book clubs presented themselves as conduits for people to connect with ideas and other people who both support and challenge their ways of thinking. Edmondson (1999) described these situations as "team psychological safety" in which there is a "shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking" and the team climate is "characterized by interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves" (p. 354). She further distinguished such psychological safety from group cohesiveness because it is rooted, not in the idea that group or team members diminish individuals' decisions to challenge views, but rather in a shared sense of trust and open-mindedness of the group.

While Edmondson's (1999) concepts about group trust reflect the dynamics of book clubs, the clubs also presented characteristics that are more closely linked to holding environments (Kegan, 1982; Drago-Severson, 2009). The book clubs provided a context in which the book club participants could safely assert and share their opinions with the group without concerns about being ridiculed or ostracized. They were "held" by the book clubs because their ways of making meaning were acknowledged and supported (Kegan, 1982). In addition, because the risks in doing so were nonthreatening, book club participants were challenged to "move beyond [their] existing understandings" (Drago-Severson, 2004, p. 35) and felt secure enough to question their opinions or beliefs when they confronted perspectives that conflicted with their own. Finally, the book clubs were consistently present meeting spaces, providing stability for the book club members as they engaged in inquiry and discussions.

Therefore, the book clubs provided important and useful spaces for adults to engage with literature and one another.

Another aspect of this conclusion is the insight it provided about the roles reflection and dialogue play in the phenomenon of consciousness-raising in a book club. As discussed in Chapter 5, the dimensions of consciousness-raising in the context of a book club manifested from the contributions of the holy trinity of book clubs—the literature, the setting, and the dialogue. The dimensions of the phenomenon revealed how reflection and dialogue are closely intertwined, and how important they are in helping facilitate an environment in which this phenomenon can occur.

Van Manen (1990) asserted that "Consciousness is always transitive. To be conscious is to be aware, in some sense, of some aspect of the world" (p. 9).As previously described, the study participants' descriptions of their consciousness-raising experiences in a book club indicated that they had become aware of, or more aware of either a) something they did not know at all; b) something they did not know much about; or c) something that conflicted with their previous assumptions. Consequently, in my study, the phenomenon revealed a distinct connection between consciousness-raising and awareness. Freire (1970/1996) claimed, "The world which brings consciousness into existence becomes the world *of* that existence" (p. 63). Thus, as ideas or situations are brought into peoples' awareness, their perceptions of their realities evolve to include those ideas and situations, rebuilding their realities. As Freire (1970/1996) stated:

> That which had existed objectively but had not been perceived in its deeper implications (if indeed it was perceived at all) begins to "stand out," assuming the character of a problem and therefore of challenge. Thus, men and women begin to single out elements

> from their "background awareness" and to reflect upon them. These elements are now objects of their consideration, and, as such, objects of their action and cognition. (p. 64)

By looking at consciousness-raising as this form of awareness or ongoing process of discovery, reevaluation of one's reality, and subsequent rediscovery of one's perceptions, we can also better understand how reflection and dialogue combine and contribute to consciousness-raising in a book club.

Gadamer (1976) argued that reflection has an emancipatory effect in that it frees us by making us aware of our realities and bringing them to our consciousness. Reflection, in effect, forces us to consider, or reconsider, the ideas or situations which escaped our attention. Gadamer (1976) is careful, however, to also note that "reflection is not always and unavoidably a step towards dissolving prior convictions" (pp. 32-33). Rather, it is a method of making us aware of something and does not demand change in every situation. Freire (1970/1996) also asserted, "Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world. In these relations consciousness and world are simultaneous; consciousness neither precedes the world nor follows it" (p. 62). Like Gadamer (1976), Freire's (1996) description of reflection suggested that the power of reflection lies in its ability to reveal a different way of looking at the world. Van Manen's (1990) statement that meaning is "multi-dimensional and multi-layered" (p. 78) further supports the idea that reflection contributes to one's ability to analyze and make meaning of new ideas and perspectives.

As discussed in Chapter 5, such reflective practices were an integral part of engagement in book clubs because the books and the discussions caused the participants to encounter ideas and perspectives that often challenged them and sometimes made them reexamine or reevaluate their own beliefs or opinions. This finding indicated that reflection was an important element of

consciousness-raising in a book club because it liberates a person by allowing him or her to closely examine not just what he or she thinks, but also *why* he or she thinks that way and what that way of thinking might mean.

Freire (1970/1996) equated consciousness-raising to liberation and claimed that such liberation, or awareness, is accomplished through dialogue. As revealed through the dimensions of the phenomenon, the literature read in the book clubs exposed study participants to lives they might not otherwise have encountered or experienced. Additionally, since this literature was often considered outside the participants' comfort zones, there remains the possibility that without joining the book clubs, the participants might not have had the opportunity to interact with some of the ideas presented to them through the literature. Furthermore, the book club context provided the participants with chances to engage in conversations with other book club members, which not only prompted deep, individual reflection, but also meaningful discussions.

As Van Manen (1990) stated, "Ordinary language is in some sense a huge reservoir in which the incredible variety of richness of human experience is deposited" (p. 61). This study's findings revealed that the conversations that transpired between the book club members were vital to communicating their experiences and perspectives with one another and, consequently, to creating the circumstances within the book clubs which permitted consciousness-raising to occur. The dialogue among the book club members allowed them to share their thoughts and opinions, which provided them with insights as to how other group members viewed certain ideas, as well as how those group members' experiences differed from their own. When discussing the value of conversation, Van Manen (2014) claimed:

> It is not necessarily that the other shares or gives these thoughts to me but that the other can draw thoughts from me—thoughts that I had no idea I possessed. The other is lending

> me thoughts, which make me think in ways that I did not necessarily expect and, thus, may surprise me myself. (p. 130)

Within the book clubs, this exchange of thoughts and ideas among the book club members promoted their awareness of other points of view and encouraged them to try to articulate their own. Long (2003) similarly highlighted the importance of book club discussions when she wrote:

> Conversations allow participants to clarify their own insights and opinions and also to integrate the various perspectives other readers bring to bear on the book. Through this integrative process, individuals—and sometimes the group as a whole—can reach new understandings, whether about life or about the text at hand. The discussion itself, then, can be a creative process, for it elicits a certain kind of value-oriented textual interpretation and encourages (through difference and disputation) a clearer articulation of partially formulated perceptions and implicit assumptions, whether about a specific book or about a personal experience. (p.187)

Dialogue, then, also plays an important role in facilitating consciousness-raising in a book club because it helps the group members search for understanding. Ultimately, dialogue and reflection are closely intertwined and repeatedly elicit one another as part of the ongoing process of inquiry found in book club members' experiences of consciousness-raising within that context.

All this being said, it is important to note a possible limitation within this conclusion. As is true for any context that facilitates consciousness-raising, not just book clubs, we must be cautious in making assumptions about the form and extent of awareness that emerges. Without further study, both inside and outside book clubs, we cannot know for sure if the consciousness-raising that occurs does so as a fleeting moment, or if it is more permanent and takes shape as transformation. Additionally, if one experiences consciousness-raising in these safe, secure

contexts, does that awareness endure apart from the context? These uncertainties require further investigation.

Conclusion #3: Consciousness-raising in a Book Club Raises Questions about How Adults View Learning

When revealing the dimensions of the phenomenon in this study, I was led to a deeper examination of the ways in which adults characterize learning. This resulted in me thinking more about the ways in which the words "awareness" and "learning," are connected yet distinct terms, and how adult educators can use these important features when generating pedagogical approaches. I unpack some of the questions the study raised about adults' perceptions of learning by referencing direct quotes from the study participants as they explained their views. I rely once again upon Freire's (1970/1996) contributions to adult learning theory through his concept of Conscientization and his emphasis on liberating education.

I believe I was working under the assumption that most adults recognized that learning did not always occur in formal learning environments, such as classrooms and other highly structured educational institutions. I presupposed that, as book club members, the participants would easily identify the book club context as one in which informal and nonformal learning could occur. While some of the participants did point out a link between their intentions for the book club and an interest in learning, others, whose definitions of learning strictly referred to what takes place in formal education environments, did not necessarily view their consciousness-raising experiences in the book club as learning experiences. For example, Dana deduced:

> *I wouldn't say that we're learning. I'd say we maybe—we're socializing and maybe expanding our points of view a little bit but we're not—I would not call it educational…I don't know—if I'm not reading a textbook, I don't really consider it learning, I guess. I*

guess that's a perspective. I guess I'm learning. I'm learning someone else's point of view, I guess.

The hesitancy for this study participant, as well as some of the others, to identify their consciousness-raising experiences as forms of learning indicates that the idea of learning holds different meaning for some adults. Consequently, this led me to conclude that some adults' concepts of learning remain closely linked to formally structured learning environments, even when they have had a consciousness-raising experience in a context, such as a book club. This is consistent with existing research about informal learning. For example, Eraut's (2004) research on informal learning in the workplace argued in favor of a more flexible approach to representing learning because learning was still being associated with formal education. In addition, Watkins and Marsick (2001) argued that informal and incidental learning could benefit from increasing learners' awareness that learning actually occurs in these contexts and that, subsequently, formal learning environments could improve if adult educators make use of what is known about how adults learn informally.

Some of my study participants did not realize that, by having their consciousness-raising experiences, they were, in fact, learning through what Freire (1970/1996) called Conscientization, or liberating, problem-posing education. Freire's (1970/1996) main argument about education was that it is democratic. Freire (2005) argued that "awareness happens through knowledge" (p. 144) and he characterized knowing as both an individual and a social process. Through literacy adults become aware of the inequalities in the world (especially in regard to the ways in which those situations impact them personally) and because they are aware or educated about these situations they are therefore more capable of acting against them. He stated, "A deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend that situation is an historical

reality susceptible of transformation" (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 66). This deepened consciousness is Conscientization, which Freire (2005) contended is "one of the roads we have to follow if we are to deepen our awareness of our world, of facts, of events, of the demands of human consciousness to develop our capacity for epistemological curiosity" (p. 55). Liberatory, or problem-posing education, which integrates praxis (reflection and action) is the means through which adults, through the cognitive act of critical reflection become aware of, or learn about, how they exist in their world and with their world (Freire, 1970/1996). Unlike common practices of banking education which occur in many formal educational environments like those the participants recognized as contexts for learning, liberatory, problem-posing education allows for one to become conscious of one's reality, letting knowledge emerge instead of imposing it upon the individual.

Through the literature they explored in the book clubs and their dialogue with other book club members, the study participants were exposed to the reality of oppressive situations and how these situations impacted them or those around them. The study participants illustrated their consciousness-raising experiences as situations in which they learned about their connections and roles with the world in relation to such situations. They described their consciousness-raising experiences as closely connected with deepened awareness about racism, gender inequalities, disabilities, and the struggles that accompany those situations. Through such awareness and reflection upon how they thought about, and felt about, their new understandings, the participants learned, through liberatory education, not only new information about their world, but also how they made meaning of that new information. These realizations revealed to the participants that they had the capacity to enact change through reflection and dialogue. Through reflection, the participants simply thought about what the oppressive situations meant for them and how they

could or could not relate to them, recognizing in effect, their own privileges in the world. In addition, the participants engaged in dialogue with other book club members, sharing their ideas and perspectives, which helped them reinforce their conceptualization of the world.

When asked in what ways they viewed the world differently as a result of their consciousness-raising experience, the participants' responses primarily suggested that they were more capable of putting themselves in others' situations. Ainsley remarked, *I think of it as your mind growing, you're expanding. So it's like—oh, that's something I never have thought of before or I feel like I'm kind of experiencing this through someone else's life or if I were in this situation one day, how would I respond. I didn't understand that person's motivations before but now I do.* Similarly, Dana claimed, *So I feel like that has kind of made me try and be more compassionate towards little things that somebody does that irritate me because you—I just have to remind myself, you don't ever know what their experiences have been, basically.* Furthermore, Levi observed that he was *more apt to consider as many sides as possible in a situation rather than just sort of making a declaration.* These responses suggest the participants learned to recognize how their own situations differ from others, making them, at least in these instances, less focused on themselves as the center of their thoughts and more empathetic towards others.

Interestingly, despite these indications of learning occurring through an informal context some of the study participants did not recognize their process of Conscientization as learning, largely because they defined learning as something which only occurs in a formal learning environment. My conclusion, therefore, is that there was a notable binary occurring for the adults in this study. On the one hand, they recognized that awareness occurred and subsequently led them to developing different perspectives. However, they did not identify the awareness as learning, primarily because it did not occur in the traditional environment they associated with

learning. For that reason, when studying adults or practicing adult education, it is essential to understand how adults view and define learning. Adult educators who make the assumption that adults recognize informal and nonformal learning environments to the same extent as formal learning environments, could be limiting their understanding of not only what adults consider learning, but also what they actually learn within such different contexts. It is necessary, therefore, to clarify these concepts and integrate all aspects of adults' perceptions of learning into andragogical practices.

Implications

This study has a number of implications for research and practice. First, it adds to the literature about book clubs and illustrates them as contexts worthy of continued scholarly attention by highlighting their contributions to understanding adults' experiences of consciousness-raising. Also, the study provides an example of how we can use Freire's (1970/1996) concept of Conscientization as a lens to examine the integration of reading and dialogue in informal and nonformal learning contexts. It demonstrates another way to investigate Conscientization by reframing the idea of consciousness-raising as liberation from unawareness of oppression, to a more of a liberation from general unawareness. In addition, the study contributes to research about holding environments by presenting the similarities between book club characteristics and holding environment characteristics, and promoting the need for further exploration of how book clubs can function as holding environments for adult development and growth.

From a practice standpoint, we should closely examine how book clubs, as bounded spaces with unspoken yet fixed rules, expectations, and cultures, create successful contexts that provide a balance of intellectual stimulation and socialization in order to meet the needs of their

members. Educators and facilitators of adult learning can use this knowledge about book clubs to guide them in constructing similarly successful learning environments. Furthermore, we should look to book clubs as contexts that provide a wealth of insight about adult interactions in informal and nonformal learning environments, and the ways in which these environments can cultivate deepened awareness among adults. In particular, adult educators should take a closer look at the ways in which book clubs foster reflection and dialogue and then use frameworks, like those of book clubs, to create contexts that encourage learners to engage in such processes. Book clubs can show us what supports and challenges a context needs to provide in order to foster deep reflection and critical dialogue, and inspire deep thinking. Finally, a better understanding of how adults define and perceive the concept of learning, and in what environments they consider learning does, or does not, take place could have further implications for adult educators' andragogical practices, by helping us discover ways to reframe the concept of learning, facilitate adults' awareness of their capacity to learn in informal and nonformal learning environments and disrupt the notion that learning only takes place in formal learning contexts.

Suggestions for Future Research

Although this study revealed many interesting insights, much remains to be understood about the different ways in which book clubs, as contexts, can contribute rich and valuable information to academic research. By looking solely at consciousness-raising, this study took an initial step toward exploring just one aspect of adults' experiences within the context of a book club. To better understand additional ways in which book clubs can add to our knowledge in a variety of areas, we should begin by taking book clubs more seriously and recognizing them as legitimate sources of research. Ultimately, we need to ask questions like: Why are adults drawn

to book clubs and what exactly do they want to gain through their participation? We should also ask what educators and facilitators of adult learning can borrow from book clubs, such as their organization, function, implementation of rules and expectations, and methods for engaging adults in successful discussions, and then apply to other adult learning environments? Exploring book clubs as a phenomenon could enlighten us more about their capacity to provide new and meaningful data. Moreover, further investigation that specifically explores book clubs as holding environments that promote adult development could offer greater understanding of how they might promote adult learning and development. Essentially, how can we intentionally construct book clubs as holding environments for adult development and what might this look like? An in-depth examination of the leadership roles, membership responsibilities, and power dynamics, within book club settings could also contribute to our knowledge about how adults interact and conduct themselves within these informal organizations. We should also ask: In what ways do book club contexts encourage and discourage leadership roles and power dynamics among book club members? Finally, the questions this study raised about the ways in which adults define and interpret the notion of learning should cause us to reexamine assumptions about what learning means to adults and explore ways we can use those interpretations to design and implement effective and appropriate adult education practices.

Closing Remarks

John Locke (1900) once wrote, “Reading furnishes the mind only with materials of knowledge; it is thinking [that] makes what we read ours” (p. 53). This study highlighted what I referred to as the holy trinity of book clubs—the books, the environment, and the discussion. Each of these components contributes to the ways in which adults make meaning of their consciousness-raising experiences in a book club, and as Locke (1900) stated, the books alone

cannot facilitate understanding. Book clubs are multifaceted constructs that integrate the books, the environment, and the discussion together to foster reading and thinking.

I chose to research adults' experiences of consciousness-raising in a book club because I was curious about how adults described and interpreted that experience. Despite the limited existing research about book clubs, I suspected that, as contexts which bring adults together to read and discuss literature, book clubs could contribute a great deal to scholarship not only about reading, but also about the practices of reflection and dialogue, group structures, consciousness-raising, and adult meaning-making. This dissertation revealed three dimensions of the phenomenon of consciousness-raising in a book club—1) Literature exposes participants to other lives, 2) Book clubs reflect characteristics of holding environments, and 3) Dialogue encourages engagement in discussion and communication of perspectives. Although it was a single glimpse into one aspect of adults' experiences in book clubs, my hope is that it will not just help us understand what adults' experiences of consciousness-raising in a book club are like, but also inspire further research about the capacity of these contexts and their valuable contributions to research and practice in adult learning and education.

References

aan het Rot, M., Moskowitz, D.S., Hsu, Z.Y., & Young, S.N. (2015). Eating a meal is associated with elevations in agreeableness and reductions in dominance and submissiveness. *Physiology & Behavior, 144*, 103-109.

Addington, A. H. (2001). Talking about literature in university book club and seminar settings. *Research in the Teaching of English, 36*(2), 212-248.

Adriance, M. (1982). Critical dialogue. *Teaching Sociology, 9*(2), 198-207.

American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2008). *Book reading*. Retrieved from http://www.humanitiesindicators.org/content/indicatordoc.aspx?i=92

Associated Press, CBS News. (2012, June 1). Winfrey launches "Oprah's Book Club 2.0" [Supplemental material]. *CBS News*. Retrieved from http://www.cbsnews.com/news/winfrey-launches-oprahs-book-club-20/

Bakhtin, M. (1981). The dialogic imagination. In M. Holquist (Ed.), *Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Beach, R., & Yussen, S. (2011). Practices of productive adult book clubs. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 55*(2), 121-131. doi: 10.1002/JAAL.00015

Berger, P.L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Bloome, D. (1985). Reading as a social process. *Language Arts, 62*(2), 134-142.

Bonner, D., & Tarner, L. (1999). Once upon an HRD book club. *Training and Development, 53*(12), 45-51.

Brookfield, S. (1986). *Understanding and facilitating adult learning: A comprehensive analysis of principles and effective practices*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Brookfield, S. (2010). Theoretical frameworks for understanding the field. In C.E. Kasworm, A.D. Rose, & J.M. Ross-Gordon (Eds.), *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education*. (2010 ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Brookfield, S. & Holst, J.D. (2011). *Radicalizing learning: Adult education for a just world*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Childress, C.C., & Friedkin, N.E. (2012). Cultural reception and production: The social construction of meaning in book clubs. *American Sociological Review, 77*(1), 45-68.

Coombs, P.H., Prosser, C., & Ahmed, M. (1973). *New paths to learning for rural children and youth*. New York: International Council for Educational Development.

Cox, A. B. (2016). *Adult learning in online educative spaces: A constructive-developmental perspective* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Georgia, Athens, GA.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Daloz, L.A. (1999). *Mentor: Guiding the journey of adult learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Daniels, H. (2002). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in book clubs and reading groups*. 2nd ed. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Davis, K.M. (1983). The Chautauqua idea: Building educational fellowship through symbol and ceremony. *The Western Journal of Speech Communication, 47*, 396-410.

Drago-Severson, E. (2004). *Becoming adult learners: Principles and practices for effective development*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Drago-Severson, E. (2009). *Leading adult learning: Supporting adult development in our schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 44*(2), 350-383.

Eraut, M. (2004). Informal learning in the workplace. *Studies in Continuing Education, 26*(2), 247-273.

Fischer, G. (2001). Communities of Interest: Learning through the Interaction of Multiple Knowledge Systems. *24th Annual Information Systems Research Seminar In Scandinavia (IRIS'24)* (Ulvik, Norway), Department of Information Science, Bergen, Norway, pp. 1-14.

Fish, S. (1980). *Is there a text in this class?: The authority of interpretive communities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Fister, B. (2005). Reading as a contact sport: Online book groups and the social dimensions of reading. *Reference & User Services Quarterly, 44*(4), 303-309.

Freeman, M. (2014). The hermeneutical aesthetics of thick description. *Qualitative Inquiry, 20*(6), 827-833.

Freeman, M., deMarrais, K., Preissle, J., Roulston, K., & St. Pierre, E. A. (2007). Standards of evidence in qualitative research: An incitement to discourse. *Educational Researcher, 36*(1), 25-32.

Freeman, M., & Vagle, M. D. (2013). Grafting the intentional relation of hermeneutics and phenomenology in linguisticality. *Qualitative Inquiry, 19*(9), 725-735.

Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: Continuum.

Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York: Penguin. (Original work published 1970)

Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Freire, P. (2000). *Cultural action for freedom*. (2000 ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review. (Original work published 1970)

Freire, P. (2005). *Teachers as cultural works: Letters to those who dare teach*. (Expanded ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Gadamer, H. G. (1975). *Truth and method*. New York: Seabury Press.

Gadamer, H. G. (1976). *Philosophical hermeneutics.* (D. E. Linge, Ed., Trans.). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Giorgi, A. (2009). *The descriptive phenomenological method in psychology*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Goldberg, M. (2012). Extracurricular reading: Creating and sustaining on campus book clubs. *Reader's Advisory, 51*(3), 231-234.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hall, R.M. (2003). The "Oprahfication" of literacy: Reading "Oprah's Book Club." *College English, 65*(6), 646-667.

Heidegger, M. (1961). *The Essence of Truth.* (J. Sallis, Trans.). New York: Continuum. (Original work published 1943).

Heidegger, M. (1996). *Being and time.* (J. Stambaugh, Trans.). Albany, NY: State University of New York.

Higgins, C. (2005, February 12). Why the book club is more than a fad. The Guardian. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/feb/12/books.booksnews on January 16, 2015.

Husserl, E. (1983). *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*. (F. Kersten, Trans.). Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.

Husserl, E., & Moran, D. (Ed.). (2001). Logical Investigations (J.N. Findlay, Trans.) London: Routledge. (Original work published in 1901).

Iser, W. (1974). The reading process: A phenomenological approach. In *The implied reader: Patterns of communication in prose fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (pp. 274-294). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Johnson-Bailey, J., Baumgartner, L.M., & Bowles, T.A. (2010). Social justice in adult and continuing education: Laboring in the fields of reality and hope. In C.E. Kasworm, A.D. Rose, & J.M. Ross-Gordon (Eds.), *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education*. (2010 ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kegan, R. (1982). *The evolving self: Problems and process in human development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Kegan, R. (1994). *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Kelley, M. (2007). The need of their genius: Women's reading and writing practices in early America. *Journal of the Early Republic, 28*(1), 1-22.

Kett, J.F. (1994). *The pursuit of knowledge under difficulties: From self-improvement to adult education in America, 1750-1990*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Klaskow, T. (2011). Looking for intentionality with Heidegger. *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy, 15*(1), 94-109.

Knowles, M. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge Books.

Kooy, M. (2003). Riding the coattails of Harry Potter: Readings, relational learning, and revelations in book clubs. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 47*(2), 136-145.

Langer, J.A. (1995). *Envisioning literature: Literary understanding and literature instruction*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Locke, J. (1900). The conduct of the understanding. London: J. Fleming. [E-book Version]. Retrieved from https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=H8UIAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA5

Long, E. (1986). Women, reading, and cultural authority: Some implications of the audience perspective in cultural studies. *American Quarterly, 38*(4), 591-612.

Long, E. (1992). Textual interpretation as collective action. *Discourse, 14*(3), 104-130.

Long, E. (2003). *Book clubs: Women and the uses of reading in everyday life.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Marsick, V.J., & Watkins, K.E. (2001) Informal and incidental learning. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, 2001(89), 25.

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach.* Los Angeles: SAGE.

McArdle, M. (2009). Book group therapy: A survey reveals some truths about why some book groups work and others may need some time on the couch. *Reference and User Services Quarterly, 49*(2), 122-125.

McCall, A.L., & Ford, M.P. (1998). Why not do something?: Literature as a catalyst for social action. *Childhood Education, 74*(3), 130-135.

McGinley, W., Conley, K., & White, J.W. (2000). Pedagogy for a few: Book club discussion guides and the modern book industry as literature teacher. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 44*(3), 204-214.

Merriam, S.B., Caffarella, R.S., & Baumgartner, L.M. (2007). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide*. (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Moran, D. (2000). *Introduction to phenomenology.* New York: Routledge.

Nelson, J.R. (1996). A subtle revolution: The Chautauqua literary and scientific circle in rural Midwestern towns, 1878-1900. *Agricultural History, 70*(4), 653-671.

Nunnery, S., Thomson, J. S., & Maretzki, A. N. (2000). *Edible Connections: Changing the way we talk about food, farm, and community: A planning guide and video for conducting a food communications forum*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University.

Odrcic, L. J. (2007). *Reading our lives: Collective reading and cultural work in 19th and 20th century Wisconsin women's book clubs*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Dissertation abstracts.

Oliver, L.P. (1987). *Study circles: Coming together for personal growth and social change*. Washington, D.C.: Seven Locks Press.

Ooi, K., & Liew, C. L. (2011). Selecting fiction as part of everyday life information seeking. *Journal of Documentation, 67*(5), 748-772.

Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity—One's own. *Educational Researcher, 17*(7), 17-21.

Polleck, J. N. (2010). Creating transformational spaces: High school book clubs with inner-city adolescent females. *The High School Journal, 93*(2), 50-68.

Preskill, S., & Brookfield, S. (2009). Learning as a way of leading: Lessons from the struggle for social justice. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Purnell, D., & Jenkins, J.J. (2013). Breaking bread, creating community: Food's ability to increase communal ties and relationships. *The Florida Communication Journal, XLI*, 73-84.

Radway, J.A. (1983). Women read the romance: The interaction of text and context. *Feminist Studies, 9*(1), 53-78.

Raphael, T.E., & McMahon, S.I. (1994). Book club: An alternative framework for reading instruction. *The Reading Teacher, 48*(2), 102-116.

Read, D. (2005). From Clinton to Bush, literacy to war: The political contexts of Oprah's book club. *Publishing Research Quarterly, 21*(4), 40-49.

Sawatzky, W. L. (2011). *Discerning inequity through novel study: Middle years students and social justice awareness*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Dissertation abstracts.

Scharber, C. (2009). Online book clubs: Bridges between old and new literacies practices. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 52*(5), 433-437.

Scheier-Dolberg, S.B. (2014). *Educators' experiences learning to meet adaptive challenges involving English learners within the learning-oriented leadership model: A qualitative study* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. (3624032)

Scott, J.C. (2005). The Chautauqua vision of liberal education. *History of Education, 34*(1), 41-59.

Sedo, D.R. (2002). Predictions of life after Oprah: A glimpse at the power of book club readers. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, *18*(3), 11-22.

Sedo, D. R. (2004). *Badges of wisdom, spaces for being: A study of contemporary women's book clubs*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Dissertation abstracts.

Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education & the social sciences*. New York, NY: Teachers College.

Sicherman, B. (2010). Well-read lives: How books inspired a generation of American women. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Simmons, A.M. (2012). Class on fire: Using the Hunger Games trilogy to encourage social action. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 56*(1), 22-34.

Sisson, M.D. (1996). *The role of reading in the lives of African American women who are members of a book discussion club*. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Georgia, Athens, GA.

Smith, M.W. (1996). Conversations about literature outside classrooms: How adults talk about books in their book clubs. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 40*(3), 180-186.

Southwood, S. (2012). The joy of reading groups. *Adults Learning, 23*(3), 36-37.

Spaulding, R. (2014). *Defining a prophetic mission for chaplaincy in the context of secularity and pluralism at Williams College: Teaching solidarity* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. (3504825)

St. Pierre, E. A. (1995). *Arts of existence: The construction of subjectivity in older white southern women*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Dissertation abstracts.

Swanson, A. (1993, December). *Adult book club discussions: Response as a key*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference, Charleston, SC. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 364 837).

Szalai, J. (2013, April 24). Oprah Winfrey, book critic. *New Yorker*. Retrieved from www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/oprah-winfrey-book-critic on February 19, 2015.

Twomey, S. (2007). Reading woman: Book club pedagogies and the literary imagination. *International Reading Association, 50*(5), 398-407.

Tyson, C.A. (1999). Shut my mouth wide open: Realistic fiction and social action. *Theory into Practice, 38*(3), 155-159.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2012). *Adult participation in selected leisure activities by frequency, 2010*. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/ 2012/tables/12s1240.pdf on February 20, 2015.

Vagle, M.D. (2014). *Crafting phenomenological research*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy.* New York: State University of New York.

Van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Winnicott, D.W. (1965). The maturational processes and the facilitating environment: Studies in the theory of emotional development. (The International Psycho-Analytical Library, no. 64). London, UK: The Hogarth Press.

Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Flyer

BOOK CLUB RESEARCH

Are you a member of a face-to-face book club?
Have you been an active member for at least one year?
Has your book club membership caused you to view the world differently?
Are you at least 18 years old?

If so, you may be eligible to participate in a doctoral research study about book club members! Through your participation in the study you can help improve scholars' understanding of adults' consciousness-raising experiences in the context of a book club. In addition, you can help contribute to building scholarly research about the roles book clubs play in adults' lives.

Details about the study:

- This study is being conducted as part of a doctoral student dissertation at the University of Georgia.
- The purpose of the study is to understand the lived experiences of Conscientization, or consciousness-raising, in the context of book clubs.
- Participants will be asked to take part in three separate face-to-face interviews, at their convenience, that will last 60 to 90 minutes each. Interviews will be conducted in mutually convenient libraries or similarly quiet, semi-private environments.
- All information obtained will be treated confidentially.
- Participants must have had a consciousness-raising experience within a book club that, in some way, contributed to building their awareness of the world around them and/or caused them to view the world differently.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact:
Rachel Cassity at **rcassity@uga.edu**.
(Under the direction of Dr. Aliki Nicolaides, Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy Department, University of Georgia, alikin@uga.edu)

Appendix B

Participant Email

Dear Participant,

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in my doctoral research study about book club members. My research focus combines adult learning, book clubs, and consciousness-raising experiences. The purpose of the study is to understand the lived experiences of consciousness-raising, in the context of book clubs. You are being chosen to participate in this study because you have long-standing membership in a book club, and your experience in a book club has caused you to view the world differently in some way.

Below are a few more details about the study, your role, and the time commitment:

- You will be asked to participate in three, 60 to 90 minute audio recorded interviews, answering questions about your participation/interests in a book club and your consciousness-raising experiences within the book club that caused you view the world differently in some way.
- Each interview will be scheduled at your convenience in a semi-private location with a quiet meeting area.
- Preferably, each interview will be scheduled within two weeks of one another so that the interviews may be completed within a maximum three month timeframe.
- All information obtained through the interviews will be treated confidentially. I will protect your confidentiality by using pseudonyms for you, other club members' names, the club name, and any locations or other identifying information provided through the interview.

If you are interested in participating, please provide me with your availability over the next couple of weeks so that we can schedule a date for your first interview.

I look forward to hearing from you soon. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Rachel Cassity

Appendix C

Interview Protocols

Interview Protocol (Interview #1)

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. During this interview I will ask you a series of questions about your *participation and interests in a book club*. If I need additional information, I may ask you to elaborate on your response or rephrase my question to help clarify any confusion. Please feel free to ask for clarification about a question should you need it. This interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes.

Interview Questions/Prompts:

- Please describe your motivation for participating in a book club. For example, how and why did you get involved, how did you select which book club you joined, what do you want to gain from your participation?
- Please describe your history with book clubs and your participation in them.
- Please describe the book club(s) in which you are currently a member, including the meeting structure, membership, book selection process, and the type(s) of literature typically explored.
- In your opinion, what are the most important characteristics of a book club? What makes it successful?
- What are the responsibilities of a book club member and why are these important?
- What do you like the most about being a member of a book club?
- What, if anything, is missing from your book club? What improvements do you think could be made?
- In your opinion, what do you think drew the book club members together in the book club?
- How would you describe the relationships of the book club members?
- What types of leadership roles, if any, have emerged in the book club?

Interview Protocol (Interview #2)

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. During this interview I will ask you a series of questions about *your consciousness-raising experiences within a book club* and take this opportunity to more deeply explore those experiences. If I need additional information, I may ask you to elaborate on your response or rephrase my question to help clarify any confusion. Please feel free to ask for clarification about a question should you need it. This interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Before I begin asking the questions, I will review with you my representations of your responses during the previous interview.

Interview Questions/Prompts:

- What information, if any, would you like to add to our previous discussion about your overall experiences with a book club?
- Think about the environment of your book club and the space it provides for the members to discuss their interpretations and perceptions of the literature. How would you describe this space or environment?
- How would you characterize or describe the types of discussion and communication that occur within the context of the book club?
- In general, what types of positive experiences, if any, have you had in book clubs?
- In general, what types of negative experiences, if any, have you had in book clubs?
- In your experiences, how, if at all, did the book club challenge your consciousness-raising or awareness-building as you read and discussed literature?
- In your experiences, how, if at all, did the book club support your consciousness-raising or awareness-building as you read and discussed literature?
- What literature and issues did you explore while having these consciousness-raising experiences?
- What was it about the literature or the issues that inspired awareness-building or consciousness-raising?
- How did your view of the world change as a result of your consciousness-raising experiences in the book club?

Interview Protocol (Interview #3)

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. During this interview I will ask you a series of questions to more deeply investigate *how your consciousness-raising experiences in a book club caused you to view the world differently*. If I need additional information, I may ask you to elaborate on your response or rephrase my question to help clarify any confusion. Please feel free to ask for clarification about a question should you need it. This interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Before I begin asking the questions, I will review with you my representations of your responses during the previous interview.

Interview Questions/Prompts:

- What information, if any, would you like to add to our previous discussion about your consciousness-raising experiences within a book club?
- What types of changes (if any) in opinions, perspectives, and understanding have you observed in yourself or your book club members as a result of reading the literature?
- What types of changes (if any) in opinions, perspectives, and understanding have you observed in yourself or your book club members as related to participating in book club discussions?
- Please provide a specific example of how you view the world differently now than you did previously, as a result of your consciousness-raising experiences in a book club.
- What do you think influenced or shaped your opinion?
- At what point do you remember being aware of the change in your opinion or perspective about a specific view?
- What was your reaction to this awareness?
- What, if anything, about you has changed (behaviors, actions, interests) as a result of your different view of the world?
- What, if anything, do you think you will do with this different view of the world?