

SUPPORTING FEMALE ADOLESCENT SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH  
THROUGH A READING INTERVENTION

by

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## Abstract

Stress and anxiety is a normal part of the human experience. However, adolescents are especially sensitive to heightened stress and anxiety and can suffer short- and long-term consequences of extreme or sustained duress. Female adolescents in particular report higher levels of stress and anxiety than boys. This study investigated the effects of a bibliotherapeutic reading intervention on student stress, anxiety, and other constructs thought to interact in a system of student social-emotional health including self-beliefs, motivation, emotion, coping response, and academic achievement. A quasi-experimental mixed methods study was conducted with 9<sup>th</sup> grade females ( $n = 24$ ) in treatment ( $n = 13$ ) and delayed treatment ( $n = 11$ ) groups reading self-selected young adult (YA) novels independently and a teacher-selected YA novel with a class. Data was collected from focus groups, student writing, and pre- and post-measures related to academic dispositions and social and emotional well-being. Quantitative data did not achieve statistical significance but indicated a trend toward reduced stress and anxiety and increased autonomy, suggesting an area for further study. Qualitative data revealed students perceive reading as relaxing and calming, especially when provided with choice. Student writing and focus group responses also suggested that fiction reading prompts students to engage in perspective-taking and apply insights to their own lives. Future research may expand the scope of this study with a larger sample to clarify potential effects of reading on adolescent stress and anxiety and to further investigate the findings regarding student empathy and perspective-taking. Educators may encourage independent reading through choice, relevant texts, and time for reading during the school day.

Dissertation Adviser: Dr. Juliana Paré-Blagoev

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated with love to my husband, Christopher Boragno, in gratitude for the gift of believing in me. Thank you for listening to the story of this work as it developed and for your unwavering faith. *We made the road by walking.*

And to my daughter, Cora James Boragno. You are the sun. This was a more meaningful journey because of you, our sweet girl.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii
<b>Dedication .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>List of Tables .....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Problem of Practice .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Theoretical Framework: Complex Interplay of Factors.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Needs Assessment Study .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Supporting Students’ Social and Emotional Health with Reading .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Research Purpose and Objective.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Findings .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter 1 .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Adolescent Stress and Anxiety.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>A Problem of Practice: Female Adolescent Stress and Anxiety .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Problem Statement .....	9
<b>Academic, Emotional, and Social Factors of Adolescent Stress and Anxiety .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Academic Factors.....	10
Emotional Factors .....	11
Social Factors.....	12
<b>Effects of Adolescent Stress and Anxiety .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Adolescent Stress and Anxiety: A Model of Interacting Factors .....</b>	<b>15</b>
Self-Beliefs.....	16
Emotion .....	20
Motivation.....	22
Coping.....	26
Academic Achievement .....	28
<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Chapter 2 .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Social Emotional Health at an All-Girls School.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Context of Study .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Purpose of Study and Research Questions.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Method.....</b>	<b>32</b>
Participants.....	33
Instruments.....	33
Procedure.....	36
<b>Findings .....</b>	<b>37</b>

Self-Beliefs.....	37
Academic Self-Handicapping .....	37
Fear of Failure .....	39
Achievement Motivation and Achievement Goals .....	39
Emotional State .....	40
Mindset.....	41
Academic Achievement .....	41
Summary of Student Survey Responses.....	42
Faculty and Staff Perception .....	43
<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Chapter 3 .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Supporting Students' Social Emotional Health .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Theoretical Framework: Bibliotherapy.....</b>	<b>46</b>
Review of Bibliotherapy Literature.....	49
Developmental Bibliotherapy .....	55
<b>Reading for Pleasure .....</b>	<b>56</b>
Qualitative Studies of Reading with Adolescents .....	57
Optimal Conditions for Reading .....	61
<b>Intervention Literature Summary .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Chapter 4 .....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Intervention Design: Method and Procedure.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Purpose of the Study.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Research Design.....</b>	<b>65</b>
Fidelity of Implementation.....	66
Outcome Evaluation.....	68
<b>Method.....</b>	<b>68</b>
Participants.....	69
Instruments .....	69
<b>Procedure .....</b>	<b>72</b>
Participant Recruitment.....	73
Intervention .....	73
Data Collection.....	75
Data Analysis .....	76
<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Chapter 5 .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Results and Discussion .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Fidelity of Implementation .....</b>	<b>79</b>
Program Adherence.....	80
Intervention Dose .....	80
Participant Responsiveness .....	81
Fidelity of Implementation: A Summary .....	84
<b>Student Stress and Anxiety .....</b>	<b>84</b>
Observed Stress and Anxiety .....	84

Self-Reported Stress and Anxiety .....	85
Other Noncognitive Factors Related to Stress and Anxiety .....	93
<b>Student Perceptions of Reading Young Adult Literature.....</b>	<b>99</b>
Autonomy.....	99
<b>Student Perspective-taking through Reading Young Adult Literature .....</b>	<b>102</b>
Recognizing Others' Challenges .....	103
Recognizing Others' Strategies .....	104
Evaluating Others' Strategies.....	105
Empathy for Others' Challenges .....	107
Relating to One's Self.....	109
Perceived Effects of Perspective-Taking .....	113
<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>Implications for Practice.....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>Implications for Research .....</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>Limitations .....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>121</b>
References.....	123
<b>Appendix A - Needs Assessment Survey .....</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>Appendix B - Needs Assessment Interview Protocol .....</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>Appendix C - Needs Assessment Assent/Consent Form .....</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>Appendix D - Logic Model .....</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>Appendix E - Researcher Daily Journal Template.....</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>Appendix F - Intervention Surveys .....</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>Appendix G - Focus Group Protocol.....</b>	<b>168</b>
<b>Appendix H - Reading Notebook Prompts .....</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>Appendix I - Intervention Assent/Consent Form.....</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>Appendix J - Parent Email Requesting Participation .....</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>Appendix K - Sample of Classroom Library Texts Alphabetically .....</b>	<b>175</b>

## List of Tables

Table 1.1	<i>Short-Term Effects of Stress and Anxiety</i> .....	14
Table 1.2	<i>Maladaptive Coping Strategies for Adolescent Stress and Anxiety</i> .....	15
Table 2.1	<i>Student Respondent Frequency by Grade Level</i> .....	33
Table 2.2	<i>Summary of Survey Responses</i> .....	37
Table 2.3	<i>Frequency of Student DASS-21 Scores</i> .....	40
Table 2.4	<i>Self-Reported Academic Achievement</i> .....	41
Table 2.5	<i>Self-Reported Honors or AP-Level Enrollment</i> .....	42
Table 4.1	<i>Process Evaluation Summary Matrix: Fidelity of Implementation</i> .....	67
Table 4.2	<i>Outcome Evaluation Summary Matrix</i> .....	78
Table 5.1	<i>Means and t tests for Group 1 and Group 2 Pre- and Post-Measures by Construct</i> .....	86
Table 5.2	<i>Means of Change and t tests for Group 1 and Group 2 from Time 1 to Time 2</i> .....	87
Table 5.3	<i>Selected Qualitative Themes and Quantitative Measures Used in Study and Recommended for Future Research</i> .....	119



## List of Figures

Figure 1.1.	
<i>Relationships between factors of adolescent stress and anxiety</i> .....	16
Figure 1.2.	
<i>Dimensions of achievement goal orientation</i> .....	24
Figure 2.1.	
<i>Model of factors of adolescent stress and anxiety with corresponding measures</i> .....	34
Figure 4.1.	
<i>Intervention scales with corresponding factors in model of adolescent stress and anxiety</i> .....	70

## **Executive Summary**

Adolescence is a transitional stage of development marked by physical, moral, social, emotional and intellectual change (Arain et al., 2013). Even the literary canon reflects the change and challenge that characterize adolescence: Romeo and Juliet's defiant relationship and untimely end, Scout's friendship with her reclusive neighbor and rejection of her community's racism, and Ponyboy's attempts to make meaning from the tragedies he experiences. Adolescents have described their own emerging identity as a puzzle, a stringless kite, and a wave (Larsen & Larsen, 2004), metaphors that reflect the complexity and vulnerability (Steinberg, 2005) of their developmental stage.

One of the changes adolescents experience is the transition from middle school to high school. Many adolescents experience school change as stressful (Fenzel, 1989) and adolescent girls in particular seem to experience increasing levels of stress and anxiety during this transition (Roeser, Eccles, & Strobel, 1998; Suldo & Shaunessy-Dedrick, 2013). There are academic factors (Suldo & Shaunessy-Dedrick, 2013), emotional factors (Lyman & Luthar, 2014), and social factors (Stapinski, Araya, Heron, Montgomery, & Stallard, 2015) that interact with individual characteristics (Hobfoll, 1989) to affect adolescents' stress and anxiety.

## **Problem of Practice**

While many adolescents experience healthy levels of stress and anxiety and employ adaptive means of coping (Arnett, 1999), heightened levels of stress and anxiety in female adolescents is a widespread and well-documented problem (Burke & Weir, 1978; Compas, Orosan, & Grant, 1993; Kozina, 2014) that negatively impacts

social and emotional health and academic achievement. Adolescents are especially sensitive to stress and anxiety, possibly due to the neurological changes of the developmental stage (Lupien, McEwen, Gunnar, & Heim, 2009). Girls report higher levels of anxiety than boys (Christiansen, 2015) and experience greater stress during times of transition (Suldo & Shaunnessy-Dedrick, 2013). This stress and anxiety can negatively affect adolescents' social and emotional health (Yadusky-Holahan & Holahan, 1983) and academic achievement (Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000). While this problem is evident on a national (American Psychological Association, 2010) and international scale (Låftman, Almquist, & Östberg, 2013), this study is concerned with the problem of female adolescent stress and anxiety at an independent all-girls Catholic school in the Mid-Atlantic U.S. For the purposes of this study, this school is referred to by a pseudonym: All Saints Academy.

### **Theoretical Framework: Complex Interplay of Factors**

An individual's experience of stress and anxiety operates within a larger system of beliefs, emotions, coping behaviors, environmental factors, and individual characteristics. The interplay between these factors is complex. For example, there are predictive links between students' social-emotional health, coping strategies, and academic achievement (Mega, Ronconi, & De Beni, 2014). Further, adolescents' negative emotions such as fear or anxiety are associated with poor academic performance (Arsenio & Loria, 2014). In turn, poor academic performance can have negative effects on students' emotional well-being (Verboom, Verhulst, Sijtsma, Penninx, & Ormel, 2013). Beliefs such as those about the self (Bong & Clark, 1999; Usher & Pajares, 2006), the nature of learning and intelligence (Dweck, 2008), and the

meaning of achievement (Elliot, Sheldon, & Church, 1997) also affect parts of this system.

### **Needs Assessment Study**

To understand the manifestation of this system and the problem of stress and anxiety in the particular context of All Saints Academy, the researcher conducted a mixed methods needs assessment study in the spring of 2016. Students in 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade ( $n = 180$ ) completed surveys and key faculty and staff members ( $n = 2$ ) participated in structured interviews. Findings suggested students perceived their school as valuing mastery of content and skills as well as high test scores, correct answers, and other demonstrations of ability or skill. Students reported engaging in self-handicapping behaviors and expressed a fear of disappointing others if they failed at a task. Student survey responses and faculty and staff interview responses suggest that students experience high levels of stress and anxiety. Many students ( $n = 72$ , 40.90%) scored as moderately to extremely severely stressed, while about a third of students scored as moderately to extremely severely anxious ( $n = 65$ ) and moderately to extremely severely depressed ( $n = 58$ ).

### **Supporting Students' Social and Emotional Health with Reading**

These data revealed students may benefit from support to help address their stress and anxiety and associated behaviors. The researcher developed an intervention in response to these findings and the research literature on bibliotherapy and adolescents reading for pleasure.

Bibliotherapy is defined as the use of books as tools for healing mental disorders (Pardeck, 1995) and promoting mental and emotional well-being (Hébert & Kent,

2000). A sub-category of this approach, developmental bibliotherapy, is used in classrooms or other settings with nonclinical facilitators and generally healthy participants (Afolayan, 1992). Bibliotherapy, including developmental bibliotherapy, may have several benefits including showing an individual that others experience the same problem, helping an individual discuss and plan to solve a problem, relieving emotional distress, and improving an individual's beliefs about the self (Aiex, 1993, as cited in McCullis & Chamberlain, 2013). Bibliotherapy has been employed to address anxiety (McCullis & Chamberlain, 2013), specific fears (Lewis, Amatya, Coffman, & Ollendick, 2015), aggression (Schechtman, 2006), depression (Ackerson, Scogin, McKendree-Smith, & Lyman, 1998) and other social emotional concerns (e.g. Betzalel & Schechtman, 2010).

Reading for pleasure has been found to benefit adolescent development (Howard, 2011) and reduce stress (Rizzolo, Zipp, Stiskal, & Simpkins, 2009) and anxiety (Jin, 1992). Reading is also associated with improved academic outcomes (Whitten, Labby, & Sullivan, 2016). Students may find reading to be an empowering activity and believe that it will make them more successful (Mathers & Stern, 2012). Students may perceive additional benefits such as building an identity as a reader, establishing trust with others, using books to solve problems, developing social and moral agency, and experiencing personal happiness (Ivey & Johnston, 2013).

### **Research Purpose and Objective**

Informed by the needs assessment and research literature on bibliotherapy and reading for pleasure, and leveraging her role as an English teacher at All Saints Academy, the researcher implemented a reading intervention in two 9<sup>th</sup> grade English

classes. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of reading and responding to age appropriate literature on student stress and anxiety and other associated factors. The objective of the intervention was to reduce student stress and anxiety and equip students with a coping strategy. The following research questions framed the study:

RQ1: How does reading young adult literature affect students' stress and anxiety?

RQ2: What are student perceptions of the experience of reading young adult literature in a school setting?

## **Research Design**

A mixed methods quasi-experimental design using a delayed treatment group was conducted to inform the research questions. The quantitative data included pre- and post-measures on stress, anxiety, fear of failure, achievement motivation, self-determination, and academic self-handicapping. Qualitative data included focus groups, student writing, and field notes of researcher observations. The delayed treatment design was used to provide a comparison group for the intervention while allowing all students to participate in intervention activities.

## **Intervention**

Students enrolled in one of two 9<sup>th</sup> grade English classes ( $n = 33$ ) participated in reading and responding to a shared novel and a self-selected novel. Students were assigned nightly reading in the shared novel and given an average of 10 minutes per

class meeting to read their self-selected novel. Modes of response to the reading included whole class discussions, small group discussions, and an online Reading Notebook with writing prompts.

### **Data and Data Analysis**

The researcher collected survey data from students who signed and returned assent/consent forms ( $n = 24$ ). The statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, paired sample  $t$  tests, and independent samples  $t$  tests. The researcher also collected qualitative data from student focus groups, student writing, and field notes of researcher observations. The researcher analyzed qualitative data using a conventional content analysis design (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and identified themes through an inductive approach without predetermined categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **Findings**

The qualitative data indicated that students generally find reading relatable fiction to be a calming activity, especially when given choices regarding text selection and pacing. However, statistical tests did not achieve significance and no causal claims can be made. This result was not unexpected given the relatively small sample and associated low power of the study. Still, the raw data may be interpreted to suggest that the intervention may have been effective at reducing stress and anxiety and promoting autonomy. On average, students in the treatment group experienced decreased stress and students in the delayed treatment group experienced decreased anxiety after the intervention. A comparison of the treatment and delayed treatment group also suggests that participation in the intervention may have staved off an increase in anxiety as the school year progresses. Future research may expand the scope of this study by

implementing the intervention with a larger sample in order to clarify the results and determine the effect, if any, of reading young adult literature on student stress and anxiety. Additionally, the implementation process and qualitative data suggest several possibilities for future research including student choice, empathy, and the use of reading as a coping strategy.

Students expressed the benefits of reading the shared young adult novel as well as self-selected texts in their Reading Notebook responses. Student writing demonstrated five general themes of response to the texts: (1) recognizing others' challenges, (2) recognizing others' strategies for confronting challenges, (3) evaluating others' strategies for confronting challenges, (4) expressing empathy for others' challenges, and (5) relating others' experiences to one's self. Responses included comments on identity, racism, stereotypes, coping strategies, friendship, and some reflected a metacognitive awareness of the value of relating reading to the self. These categories may warrant further study to better understand the effect of reading on students' empathy and coping.

Overall, students found reading a young adult novel with a class and independently to be enjoyable and engaging. Their responses suggest that they enjoy relating to the characters in their reading and feel empowered by selecting books and pacing their own reading schedule. Researcher observations indicate that reading can help students develop awareness of others and make meaningful connections between their reading and their own lives.



## **Chapter 1**

### **Adolescent Stress and Anxiety**

Adolescence is a time of transition. Some female adolescents experience increasing levels of stress and anxiety during their transition to high school and in the ensuing years (Roeser et al., 1998; Suldo & Shaunessy-Dedrick, 2013). There are several factors that may contribute to the increased stress and worry that adolescents experience including academic factors such as workload (Suldo & Shaunessy-Dedrick, 2013) and academic context (Feld & Shusterman, 2015), emotional factors such as a tendency toward perfectionism (Lyman & Luthar, 2014), and social factors such as peer interactions (Stapinski et al., 2015) and parental support (van Ingen et al., 2015). Stress does serve an evolutionary purpose (Badyaev, 2005) and all individuals experience some degree of stress. As such, adolescent stress and anxiety are often seen as normal, hormonal, and temporary. However, high levels of stress in adolescence can have negative effects (Lupien et al., 2009).

This chapter provides an overview of the problem of adolescent stress and anxiety including the short- and long-term effects of heightened stress and anxiety in adolescence as well as evidence that suggests this problem is more pronounced in girls. There are social, emotional, and academic factors related to student stress and anxiety. These can be considered through the lens of relevant theoretical frameworks that reveal a complex interplay of environmental factors, beliefs, emotions, motivation, coping behaviors, academic achievement.

### **A Problem of Practice: Female Adolescent Stress and Anxiety**

Consistently heightened levels of stress and anxiety are widespread problems facing adolescents, with females experiencing a greater impact than males. Research demonstrates that girls report higher levels of anxiety than boys (Christiansen, 2015) and adult women report more stress than adult men (American Psychological Association, 2016). Females also report experiencing more academic stress and anxiety than males (Misra & McKean, 2000), especially in individualistic cultures such as the United States (Kormi-Nouri, MacDonald, Farahani, Trost, & Shokri, 2015). Suldo and Shaunessy-Dedrick (2013) found that girls in periods of transition perceived more stress and experienced more mental health problems than boys in transition.

While children and adolescents experience high levels of stress, parents often remain largely unaware and therefore unable to intervene (American Psychological Association, 2010). Adolescence, in particular, is a time of heightened stress and anxiety as a result of maturational shifts occurring at this time in hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis activity; these shifts result in heightened stress-induced responses (Romeo, 2013). Recent media interest further demonstrates the extent of the issue as publications have featured articles from researchers and psychiatrists documenting the greater rates of anxiety in girls than in boys (Sax, 2016), high levels of unhappiness reported by adolescent girls in Europe and North America (Bromwich, 2016), and general poor emotional well-being in college students (Brackett, 2016).

#### **Problem Statement**

Adolescents, especially females, can experience heightened stress and anxiety that may negatively impact their social and emotional health and academic achievement.

## **Academic, Emotional, and Social Factors of Adolescent Stress and Anxiety**

This section describes some of the academic, emotional, and social factors that influence student stress and anxiety. Academic factors include student workload and homework expectations as well as a student's academic environment. Emotional factors include the emotional impact of anxiety and the emotional effects of perfectionist tendencies. Social factors include perceived social support from parents and peers and the role of online social media in social connections.

### **Academic Factors**

Academic factors of adolescent stress and anxiety include student homework load and their academic environment. Kouzma and Kennedy (2002) note that since adolescents spend most of their time at school or at school-related activities, much of their stress will be school related, including stress attributed to the amount of homework they are required to complete. Students with at least two hours of homework each night are most likely to report activity-related stress (Brown, Nobiling, Teufel, & Birch, 2011). In a study of ten high schools identified as high-performing and upper-middle class, Galloway, Conner, and Pope (2013) found that students reported more than three hours of homework a night. This homework load was associated with greater engagement in school, but also with academic induced stress and physical health problems. In other studies, girls were found to spend more hours on schoolwork (Kouzma & Kennedy, 2002; Duckworth & Seligman, 2006), to experience increased stress when working on homework alone (Kackar, Shumow, Schmidt, & Grzetich, 2011), and to report higher levels of stress about homework (Kouzma & Kennedy, 2002; Rogers & Hallam, 2006) when compared to boys.

Other aspects of a student's academic environment such as whether it is a higher achieving context, also affect their perceptions of stress and anxiety. High-achieving contexts are traditionally understudied, but can contribute to the academic and other pressures a student experiences because of the emphasis on academic excellence (Luthar & Barkin, 2012; Lyman & Luthar, 2014). As in other school settings, in high-achieving or high-performing contexts, girls report more stress than boys, possibly related to ways that the context encourages perfectionism and comparison (Låftman et al., 2013). In this type of environment students report high levels of stress as well as unhealthy coping behaviors (Feld & Shusterman, 2015). In a study to develop a new instrument for measuring stress in students enrolled in advanced or accelerated coursework, Suldo, Shaunessy-Dedrick, Roth, and Ferron (2015) found academic demands to be the most identified source of stress by high school students, parents, and teachers. Students taking advanced or accelerated coursework, such as IB or AP classes, perceive greater stress than students who do not enroll in an advanced curriculum (Suldo & Shaunessy-Dedrick, 2013).

### **Emotional Factors**

Anxiety is characterized as an emotion and efforts to manage it are classified as emotion-regulation (Bateni, Abolghasemi, Aliakbari, & Hormozi, 2013). Ultimately, emotions are a result of how an individual understands one's own interactions with the surrounding environment, and therefore reveal one's perception of how well the current demands of the context are being met (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). As such, stressful encounters induce dynamic emotions, including anxiety (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985).

Further, emotional factors can contribute to female adolescent stress and anxiety

when students tend toward perfectionism. Perfectionism can have adaptive characteristics (e.g. high personal standards) but also maladaptive ones (e.g. excessive self-criticism, self-doubt, discrepancy between perceived performance and reality) (Lo & Abbott, 2013). Rice, Leever, Christopher, and Porter (2006) identified perfectionism as a predictor of stress. In the same study, stress intensified the emotional effects of maladaptive perfectionism. Certain perfectionist behaviors such as worrying about making mistakes and having compulsive tendencies are especially harmful for girls (Rice, Leever, Noggle, & Lapsley, 2007). A study of varied subgroups found that 30% of the students surveyed ( $n = 938$ ) could be classified as maladaptive perfectionists and were therefore at an increased risk of mental and emotional health problems (Sironic & Reeve, 2015). The same study linked perfectionist tendencies to stress in female adolescents.

### **Social Factors**

There are several social factors of female adolescent stress and anxiety including social support from parents and peers. Female adolescents report greater stress than males in their daily lives, particularly regarding social connections (e.g. acceptance by peers, romantic relationships, feelings of isolation, and arguments with parents) (Burke & Weir, 1978). Parenting style may also be a factor in stress related to social connections. Students who perceive their parents as overprotective or over-involved may experience greater levels of stress, anxiety, and a fear of failure in academic contexts (Sideridis & Kafetsios, 2008). When parental support is informational rather than emotional, the link between academic stress and high levels of anxiety is exacerbated (Leung, Yeung, & Wong, 2010).

The role of the peer group is also significant. Adolescents who experience peer

victimization (i.e. bullying) report increased anxiety even months later (Stapinski et al., 2015). Increasingly, social support from peer groups is sought in online contexts. Frison and Eggermont (2015) found that high school students seek social support through social media, especially when experiencing daily stress; however, when social support was perceived as absent or inadequate, students experienced increased stress and depressed mood. The authors note that the large number of connections or friends a typical adolescent has on a social media site lessens the likelihood of strong ties and therefore makes it unlikely for the individual to receive a response to social support seeking, increasing the likelihood of failure to perceive support. Females, in particular, are more likely to experience social stress and to use smartphones for social purposes (van Deursen, Alexander, Bolle, Hegner, & Kommers, 2015). Despite the widespread use of social media, it is often a source of stress, sometimes due to social comparison and relationship conflicts (Fox & Moreland, 2015).

### **Effects of Adolescent Stress and Anxiety**

There are numerous potentially deleterious effects of stress and anxiety on a student's physical and emotional well-being (see Table 1.1). The research literature suggests that adolescents are particularly sensitive to the effects of stress (Lupien et al., 2009). Individuals typically develop coping strategies to respond to stress and anxiety; coping refers to active efforts to manage external (i.e., relational) or internal (i.e., emotion) stressors and can be adaptive or maladaptive (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In a study of coping strategies across age and gender, adolescents and girls of all ages were found to score low in adaptive (constructive) coping strategies and high in maladaptive (destructive) coping strategies (Hampel & Petermann, 2005). Table 1.2 contains a list of

maladaptive coping strategies exhibited by adolescents experiencing general stress and anxiety.

Table 1.1

*Short-Term Effects of Stress and Anxiety*

Condition		Effect	Author(s)
Stress	Anxiety		
X		Difficulties in and out of class with managing work, family, and leisure	Kormi-Nouri et al. (2015)
X		Impaired memory and recall	Schwabe & Wolf (2010)
X		Interpersonal conflict and dating violence	Mason & Smithey (2012)
X		Less sleep and decreased sleep quality	Astill, Verhoeven, Vijzelaar, & Van Someren (2013)
X		Sexual risk behavior in some populations	Hulland et al. (2014)
X		Increased risk of depression and anxiety	Yadusky-Holahan & Holahan (1983)
X		Lower academic achievement	Struthers et al. (2000)
X		Body dissatisfaction and disordered eating	Blodgett & Lemer (2012)
Prolonged		Reduced ability to acquire, retain, and recall information	Joëls, Pu, Wiegert, Oitzl, & Krugers (2006)
	X	Reduced ability to acquire, retain, and recall information	Janssens, Rosmalen, Ormel, van Oort, & Oldehinkel (2010)
	X	Difficulty retaining and retrieving information	Nelson & Harwood (2011)

Table 1.2

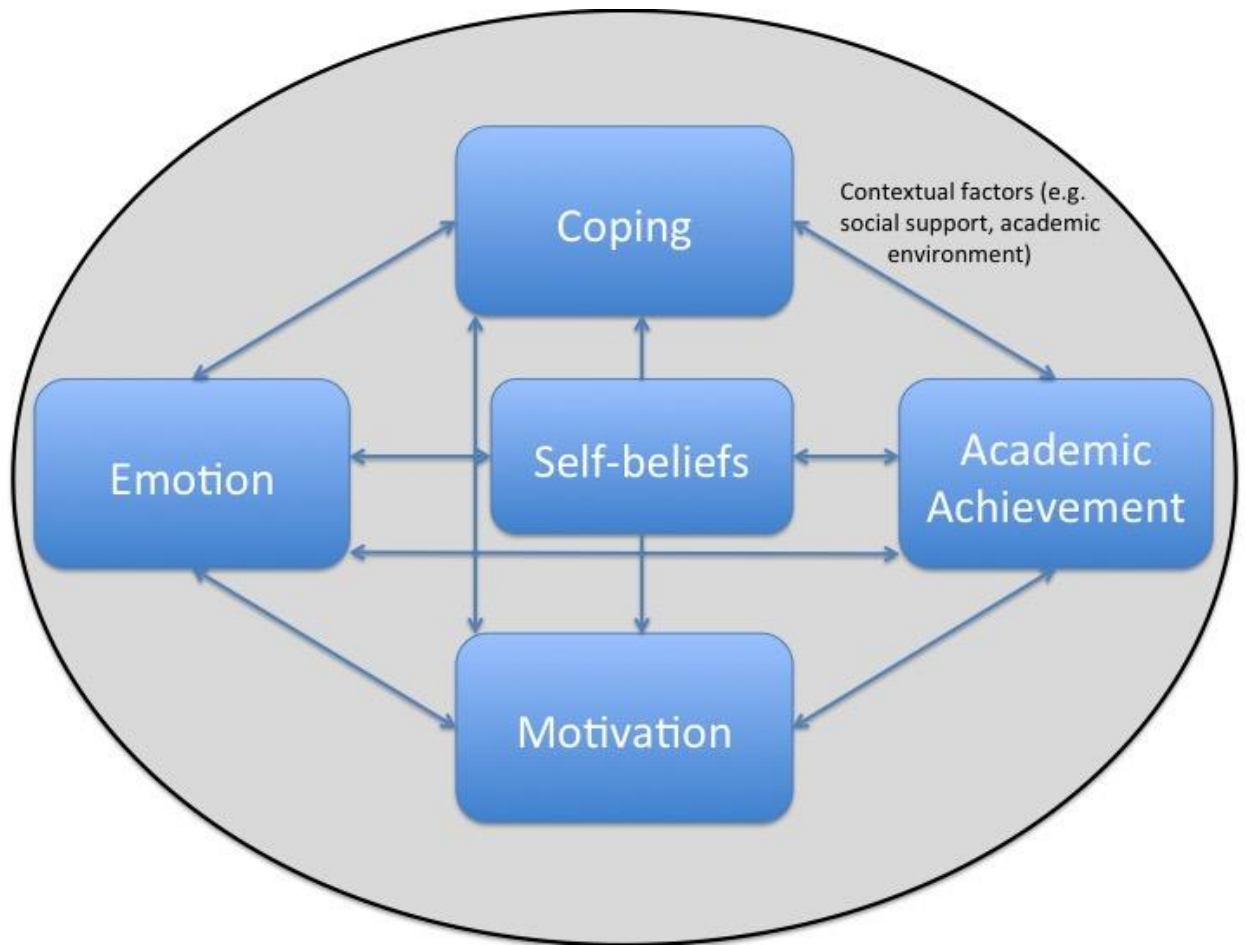
*Maladaptive Coping Strategies for Adolescent Stress and Anxiety*

Coping Strategy	Author(s)
Self-harm and self-injury	Hasking, Momeni, Swannell, & Chia (2008); Nock (2009)
Behavioral disengagement and self-blame	Horwitz, Hill, & King (2011)
Eating disorders	Watson, Hoiles, Egan, & Limburg (2014)
Alcohol consumption	Pardee, Colder, & Bowker (2014)

**Adolescent Stress and Anxiety: A Model of Interacting Factors**

The stress and anxiety that high school students experience is one part of a complex interplay of factors. These factors include self-beliefs, emotion, coping, motivation, and academic achievement. The relationships between these factors are illustrated in Figure 1.1. Self-beliefs are a powerful factor, influencing one's academic achievement directly (Usher & Pajares, 2006) and indirectly by eliciting particular coping responses (Zuckerman, Kieffer, & Knee, 1998), motivational orientation (Bong, Cho, Ahn, & Kim, 2012), and emotions (Higgins, 1989) based on these beliefs. Academic achievement becomes part of a feedback loop that then informs a student's motivation (Ames, 1992), coping strategies (Zuckerman et al., 1998), and emotions (Verboom et al, 2013). Emotion has implications for factors within this system beyond affecting academic achievement. Student emotions can inform coping responses directly (Zuckerman et al., 1998) and indirectly by informing motivation orientation (Mega et al., 2014). These factors are situated within a larger context that includes the academic environment (Ames, 1992) and social support from parents (Lee & Shute, 2010) and peers (Chen,





*Figure 1.1.* Relationships between factors of adolescent stress and anxiety.

Chang, & He, 2003; Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998). The following section is a review of the research literature on the constructs related to and associated with female adolescent stress and anxiety. Consideration is also given to relationships between constructs.

### **Self-Beliefs**

Beliefs about the self influence the amount of stress and anxiety an adolescent experiences and what they are ultimately able to achieve (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). In turn, student achievement informs the way students see themselves and their abilities (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Self-beliefs can be parsed further into constructs that include self-efficacy and self-esteem. Self-efficacy is defined as student beliefs about their own

capability to produce desired outcomes and to exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy is formed through information gleaned from performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1978). Self-esteem can refer to general self-esteem, an individual's positive or negative attitude toward the self as a whole, or specific self-esteem, an individual's attitude toward the self in particular contexts or as it relates to specific tasks (Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995). Consistent with earlier research (e.g. Muris, 2002), Muris, Meesters, Pierik, and de Kock (2016) found significant gender differences in self-beliefs and anxiety with girls reporting lower self-esteem and self-efficacy and higher anxiety and depressive symptoms than adolescent boys. Finally, self-beliefs can be closely linked to one's ideas about intelligence and ability (Dweck, 2008). This link suggests that understanding student stress and anxiety requires an exploration of beliefs not only about the self but about the nature of intelligence and ability.

**Self-efficacy.** Self-efficacy has repeatedly been found to act as a significant predictor of student academic achievement that is even stronger than prior achievement (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Self-efficacy can be characterized as general – referring to a belief in one's overall competence (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2004) – and academic – referring to self-beliefs specifically in the academic domain (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Students derive their sense of self-efficacy from a variety of sources including their accomplishments (also called mastery experience), vicarious experiences, verbal or social persuasion, and emotional arousal (also called physiological states) (Bandura, 1978). Notably, mastery experience and social persuasion are the most powerful predictor of academic self-

efficacy for girls, a group that is more likely to look to others for an understanding of the self (Usher & Pajares, 2006). Girls are also more likely to underestimate their academic competence when evaluating themselves, a tendency that is associated with depression and anxiety (Cole, Martin, Peeke, Seroczynski, & Fier, 1999).

While academic self-efficacy and general self-efficacy can be measured in attempts to predict academic achievement, another factor is self-regulatory efficacy, or the student's belief that he or she possesses the self-regulatory strategies required for academic success (Caprara et al., 2008; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994). Students with beliefs in their efficacy to regulate their own learning showed higher academic aspirations and achievement (Bandura et al., 1996). Bandura's sources of self-efficacy have also been validated for student beliefs about academic and self-regulatory self-efficacy (Usher & Pajares, 2006). Self-regulatory efficacy can decline during the transition to high school; however, the less a student's self-regulatory efficacy declines upon the transition to high school, the higher the students' high school grades and the greater the likelihood of the student remaining enrolled in high school (Caprara et al., 2008). This finding underscores the importance of self-regulatory efficacy in academic achievement. Girls report lower levels of self-regulatory efficacy, a difference that is more pronounced in females with ADHD (Major, Martinussen, & Wiener, 2013).

**Self-esteem.** Colloquially, self-esteem, often conflated with confidence, is used as a somewhat vague umbrella term to explain performance, effort, and disposition. Few studies have considered the predictive power of self-esteem in an academic context. Rosenberg et al. (1995) argued that general self-esteem reveals one's overall psychological and emotional well-being, while specific self-esteem is more relevant to

issues of behavior. Self-esteem can be measured by assessing the extent to which an individual feels satisfied with oneself and how one views his or her value when compared to that of others (Rosenberg, 1965). Links between low self-esteem and high anxiety have been documented in the literature (e.g. Fisher, Schenider, Pegler, & Napolitano, 1991). Further, Byrne (2000) found that girls with low levels of self-esteem were less successful in using coping strategies to reduce anxiety and fears.

**Mindset.** Mindset refers to one's beliefs about the general ability of any individual to change and is linked to how individuals construct beliefs about their own abilities and value (Dweck, 2008). A student who espouses a fixed mindset believes that intelligence, ability, talent, and other characteristics are generally unchangeable; a student with a growth mindset believes that these characteristics may meaningfully change throughout a person's life (Dweck, 2008). These theories of intelligence are generally regarded as implicit, meaning they are not clearly articulated, even in the mind of the person who possesses them (Burnette, O'Boyle, VanEpps, Pollack, & Finkel, 2013).

Student mindset has implications for learning and academic achievement. Mindset can affect how resilient a student is when faced with challenges and rejection. Students who believe that their intellect can be developed have shown higher achievement in school transitions and in challenging academic courses (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Further, in an investigation of the relationships between growth and fixed mindsets (referred to by the author as incremental and entity theories, respectively) and personal growth, students with growth mindsets set goals for their learning over time (Martin, 2014). Other researchers have investigated the extent to which the beliefs that underpin mindset influence learning by affecting one's attention and conceptual processing

(Mangels, 2006). This study found that the growth, or incremental, mindset was associated with higher scores on a retest regardless of stated confidence, indicating that students with a growth mindset are more likely to correct errors and improve based on negative feedback.

A fixed/growth mindset dichotomy has also been applied to emotions and personality. De Castella et al., (2013) found that a fixed mindset with regard to emotions was associated with lower levels of overall well-being and increased emotional distress. The authors suggest that these findings are a result of the emotion regulation strategies adolescents employ in response to their mindset. Similar findings address the impact of a fixed mindset regarding personality traits. The belief that personality is fixed can promote negative reactions to challenges and social rejection and can contribute to increased stress, poor overall health, and low academic achievement (Yeager et al., 2014). These studies suggest that the belief that one's dispositions, skills, emotions, or attributes are unchangeable may exacerbate existing negative self-beliefs and ultimately inhibit positive change.

## **Emotion**

Understanding student emotions, including anxiety and stress-induced emotions such as frustration and anger, is important given the role of emotions in learning. While emotions are sometimes categorized as positive or negative, nearly all emotions are context dependent, may vary by culture, and may have adaptive and maladaptive qualities (Salovey & Mayer, 1995). Though the concept of emotion remains largely undefined in contemporary research, some have even argued that no emotion is negative if experienced unobstructed (e.g. Scheff, 2015). Still, in a study in which students reported

emotions typically considered negative (e.g. guilt and shame), experiencing negative emotions was shown to impede paths to learning by promoting disengagement and interfering with future learning attempts (Mangels, Good, Whiteman, Maniscalco, & Dweck, 2012). Such emotions can also influence a student's self-regulated learning and motivation, which can then impact academic achievement (Mega et al., 2014). Arsenio and Loria (2014) identified a direct link between student emotion regarding academics and academic achievement. Students who experience negative emotions regarding school (e.g. fear, anxiety, shame) are more likely to have lower GPA. The authors also found that disengaged coping, or attempting to change an emotion rather than a problem or stressor, was associated with lower GPA.

Research in the field of neuroscience indicates that the learning process is greatly affected by emotions (or emotional thought) and that further attention should be given to this important component of learning (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007; Newton, 2013). Neuroscience research has established the effect of social and emotional factors on learning outcomes and academic achievement, suggesting that traditional classroom practices may inhibit long-term learning (Immordino-Yang, 2016). The sum of this research indicates that emotions play a critical role in student learning.

It may not always be evident that adolescents are experiencing negative emotional states or that these emotions are affecting their learning process and here again there is a gender difference. In a study of gender differences in ability to conceal disappointment, Davis (1995) concluded that girls are generally more skilled at emotional dissimulation, the act of hiding true feelings or intentions. The author suggests that the social pressure on girls to be compliant may increase their social monitoring abilities and aid in hiding

negative emotions. The pressure to conceal negative emotions may intensify a student's distress while also making it more difficult to identify students in need of intervention.

Emotion affects and is affected by other constructs in the model. While emotions can affect learning and academic achievement, students also experience emotional responses to their achievement or failure (Kim, Lee, Chung, & Bong, 2010). Further, emotion has been shown to influence and regulate motivation (Pintrich, 2003), a relationship that Pekrun, Elliot, & Maier (2006; 2009) suggest is reciprocal. Students motivated by avoiding failure were more likely to experience negative emotions such as shame, anxiety, and hopelessness (Goetz, Sticca, Pekrun, Murayama & Elliot, 2016). Feelings of shame and anxiety toward academic tasks can work to undermine students' beliefs in their capabilities (Usher & Pajares, 2006) and, in turn, intensify their emotional distress (Higgins, 1989).

## **Motivation**

One aspect of students' social emotional health that manifests in the academic context is student motivation. Theories of motivation can help parents and educators understand and influence student behavior, especially within achievement contexts such as academics and sports (Duda & Nicholls, 1992). Understanding how and why a student may be motivated to perform a particular task or skill offers insight into student emotions and values and can predict future behavior and outcomes (Wolters, 2004). Within an academic environment, academic stress may impact a student's motivation; similarly, a student's motivation and goals may contribute to greater academic stress and anxiety (Ranellucci, Hall, & Goetz, 2015). Some students may be motivated to avoid negative outcomes or by a fear of failure (Conroy, 2001).

**Achievement motivation.** In studies of student motivation, a common framework is Elliot and Harackiewicz's (1996) theory of achievement motivation. In this framework, motivation is defined as the instigation and direction of behavior and may be further distinguished by approach or avoidance behavior (Elliot & Covington, 2001). Approach motivation is instigated by a positive or desirable outcome or possibility, while avoidance motivation is instigated by a negative or undesirable outcome or possibility (Elliot, 1999). This distinction has been applied to performance goals, or other goals that focus on normative competence or performance of a task or skill (Elliot, Murayama, Kobeisy, & Lichtenfeld, 2014; Murayama, Elliot, & Yamagata, 2011).

In academic and other settings, the initial trichotomous theory contends that individuals adopt performance-approach, performance-avoidance, or mastery-approach goals and behave accordingly (Elliot, 1999). Later literature supports the inclusion of mastery-avoidance goal orientation as well, creating a 2x2 hierarchical model (Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Figure 1.2). Generally, mastery goals are focused in some way on mastering or improving in a task or skill and are grounded in the task and the self for measures of competence (Elliot et al., 2014; Elliot et al., 2011). These may be considered more beneficial to students since mastery goals are associated with high competence expectancies, intrinsic motivation, lower fear of failure, and academic achievement (Elliot et al., 1997).

By comparison, performance-avoidance goals can be detrimental. Elliot, Shell, Henry, and Maier (2005) found that performance-avoidance goals serve to undermine performance when compared to performance-approach and mastery goals. In an academic context, pursuing goals of avoiding failure or the appearance of failure, can



have a negative effect on academic achievement (Elliot et al, 1997; Mega et al., 2014). Low self-efficacy beliefs in academics encourage an avoidance goal orientation as students attempt to avoid what they see as likely failure (Bong et al., 2012; Usher & Pajares, 2006). Avoidance goals can also have deleterious effects on a student's social-emotional well-being and elicit negative emotions and coping mechanisms. The adoption of avoidance personal goals is associated with lower overall subjective well-being and an increase in neuroticism, demonstrating the potential wide-spread effects of an avoidance goal orientation (Elliot et al., 1997).

Performance-approach	Mastery-approach
Performance-avoidance	Mastery-avoidance

*Figure 1.2.* Dimensions of achievement goal orientation.

While performance-avoidance goals are generally seen as detrimental to student learning and overall well-being, performance-approach goals have been interpreted in both positive and negative ways (Elliot & Moller, 2003). For example, while mastery goals have been found to predict sustained interest in a subject, performance-approach goals were found to better predict performance in the same subject (Harackiewicz, Barron, Tauer, & Elliot, 2002). Despite the general consensus around these distinct achievement motivation orientations, some recent literature does encourage a less polar view of these constructs in favor of a model with additional factors which accommodates the mediating effect of effort beliefs (Tempelaar, Rienties, Giesbers, & Gijselaers, 2014).

**Fear of failure.** Avoidance goal orientation can provoke anxiety as students worry about the possibility of failure (Herman, 1990). Students exhibit a fear of failure

when they avoid challenging tasks to prevent disappointing results or sabotage their own efforts to avoid authentic failure (Conroy, 2001). Individuals who fear failure may also set their aspirations defensively high or defensively low (Atkinson, 1957). Fear of failure reflects a motivation to avoid failure or a “capacity for experiencing shame and humiliation as a consequence of failure” (Atkinson, 1957, p. 360). Failure-fearing students are generally characterized by worries and self-doubts, whereas success-oriented students are noted for their motivation, resilience, and enthusiasm (De Castella, Byrne, & Covington, 2013). A fear of failure can be dangerous to one’s emotional and psychological well-being because of the shame and guilt it promotes (Da Castella, Byrne, & Covington, 2013) as well as the resulting feelings of helplessness (McGregor, 2005). Fear of failure is also associated with anxiety, low resilience, vulnerability to setbacks, and underachievement (Martin & Marsh, 2003). Fear of failure can be measured using several different dimensions including fears of experiencing shame and embarrassment, fears of devaluing one’s self-estimate, fears of having an uncertain future, fears of important others losing interest, and fears of upsetting important others (Conroy, Willow, & Metzler, 2002). These measures suggest that fear of failure reflects a desire to avoid poor performance as well as the appearance of failure to others.

A fear of failure is generally acknowledged as a detrimental characteristic (Conroy, 2001). Still, others contend that there are potential positives to a fear of failure by way of increased number of study hours (Brunborg, Pallesen, Diseth, & Larsen, 2010). However, the same research finds that the link between a preoccupation with failure and an increase in study hours does not correlate with increased academic achievement. More research is needed, then, to examine the quality of study and work by students exhibiting

a preoccupation with failure.

One possible contributor to a student's fear of failure is the classroom teacher and the messages the teacher sends to students about the consequences of failure and the importance of avoiding failure. Putwain and Remedios (2014) investigated how the use of these messages relates to motivation and academic performance by measuring how frequently students hear statements intended to motivate them through arousing fear and how threatening they perceive these messages to be. Such statements are referred to as "fear appeals." The researchers found that a greater number of fear appeals, specifically fear appeals that are perceived as threatening, lower student motivation and student achievement. Others have found that teachers who do use fear appeals can mediate the negative effects of these messages by also using efficacy appeals, or statements intended to motivate students by emphasizing their capability (Sprinkle, Hunt, Simonds, & Comadena, 2006). These findings underscore the role of the academic environment in student motivation.

### **Coping**

Experiencing stress and anxiety provokes a coping response. Coping refers to behaviors directed at reducing demands that exceed the resources a person has to address them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and might include attempts to increase one's resources, redefine demands to better manage them, and manage the tension that arises from experiencing demands (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987). Student coping can be adaptive or maladaptive, yet females report an increasing inability to cope during adolescence and are also more likely to engage in the maladaptive strategy of self-blame (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2000). Other maladaptive coping responses are informed by student motivation.

Coping strategies for students who experience a fear of failure can include defensive pessimism and academic self-handicapping. Defensive pessimism refers to the student practice of altering the meaning of failure by setting unrealistically low expectations for themselves (Urdan & Midgley, 2001). Examples include statements such as “I already know I’ll have to take this class again during summer school” or “Only the honors students get awards at the end of the year.” Students are most prone to defensive and pessimistic thinking when anxious about failing, though they are only at risk of poor academic achievement and disengagement from school when they also display a lack of motivation (De Castella, Byrne, & Covington, 2013).

Self-handicapping refers to behaviors students engage in as a means to self-sabotage and provide an excuse or reason for their failure beyond inadequacy or inability (Urdan & Midgley, 2001). These behaviors may include strategic withdrawal of effort or purposeful avoidance of a task or performance situation (Putwain, 2018). These behaviors are prevalent in anxious students (Rappo, Alesi, & Pepi, 2017) and may be elicited by beliefs about the self and one’s abilities (Urdan & Midgley, 2001). When a student can attribute failure to self-handicapping behaviors such as procrastination, getting overly involved in many activities, or not paying attention in class, in theory, he or she protects the self from the feeling of failure (Conroy et al., 2002). Although self-handicapping can work to protect general self-esteem in the immediate context, these strategies often bring about the failure a student is trying to avoid (De Castella, Byrne, & Covington, 2013). Similarly, negative emotions can elicit self-handicapping behaviors as a student attempts to avoid future distress, but the behaviors, in turn, may cause greater emotional harm (Zuckerman et al., 1998). Another study shows that academic self-

handicapping tendencies were associated with lower self-concept clarity (used in this study to describe self-efficacy), higher test anxiety, and an emphasis on superficial learning strategies and a de-prioritizing of self-regulatory academic strategies (Gadbois & Sturgeon, 2011). These connections suggest that coping behaviors interact with emotion, self-beliefs, motivation, and academic achievement.

### **Academic Achievement**

The effects of academic achievement are understudied in the literature since academic achievement is typically the outcome targeted for intervention. However, grades and other types of achievement measures offer feedback to students that may inform their emotions, motivation, self-beliefs, and coping strategies. For example, lower academic achievement is associated with affective problems and withdrawn/depressive behavior, especially in girls (Verboom et al, 2013).

One achievement measure that seems to affect both motivation and overall emotional state is instructor feedback. In a study incorporating brain imaging technology, norm-referenced feedback – feedback about one’s performance relative to others – resulted in activation of brain regions associated with negative emotions in students with low competence (Kim et al., 2010). Similarly, in a study of the effect of anticipated feedback on achievement goals and emotions, norm-referenced feedback was linked to performance goals, which then predicted participants’ emotions regarding upcoming examinations (Pekrun, Cusack, Murayama, Elliot, & Thomas, 2013). In this study, performance-avoidance goal orientation and anticipation of norm-referenced feedback were associated with anger, shame, hopelessness, and anxiety. Generally, when students anticipate a specific kind of feedback (self-referenced, norm-referenced, or none at all)

following an assessment, they adopt a goal orientation that reflects the feedback they expect to receive (Pekrun, et al., 2013). These findings suggest that students experience negative emotions and hold performance oriented goals when academic achievement is defined by comparisons or ranking.

The context of academic achievement can also affect motivation and contribute to a student's fear of failure (Ames, 1992). In a study of 61 postsecondary students, all students, but especially those with test anxiety, performed poorly and were less motivated when exposed to highly evaluative classrooms (Hancock, 2001). Harsh evaluation by an instructor or one's peers can contribute to feelings of anxiety and promote a performance-avoidance goal orientation (Elliot et al., 1997). This suggests that motivation is affected by the context and nature of achievement, which can vary between classrooms. Grades and other measures of academic achievement can also alter student self-beliefs. When a student faces rejection in the form of academic failure, a change in student beliefs about the self can occur, eliciting a fear of failure and preventing recovery from the rejection (Howe & Dweck, 2015). Similarly, when academic feedback presents a reality that departs from student expectations, the result can be disappointment and a fear of failure, a risk factor for low academic achievement (Könings, Brand-Gruwel, van Merriënboer, & Broers, 2008).

### **Conclusions**

The stress and anxiety reported by adolescent girls is consistently higher than in adolescent boys. Some sources of this stress and anxiety may be academic pressures and time constraints, emotional tendencies toward perfectionism, and social considerations such as support from peers and parents and social media use. While not an exhaustive list,

these factors play a role in the daily stress adolescents report. The stress and anxiety that adolescent girls experience is worthy of study and intervention given the short- and long-term effects of stress and anxiety on physical, social, emotional, and mental health as well as on academic outcomes.

While stress has an evolutionary function and can be both necessary and useful in certain contexts, the heightened and widespread stress and anxiety in adolescents has implications for their overall well-being and academic achievement. This stress and anxiety is part of a complex interplay of factors including student beliefs about themselves and the nature of intelligence and ability, a fear of failure and resulting behaviors, motivation and goals, and strategies for coping with negative emotions. Thus, investigating student experiences with stress and anxiety requires an exploration of these other factors.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Social Emotional Health at an All-Girls School**

As the literature suggests, female adolescents' social and emotional health influences and is influenced by a variety of factors, including several in the academic context. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the method and findings of a needs assessment conducted to better understand the academic dispositions and social emotional well-being of female high school students.

#### **Context of Study**

This needs assessment study was conducted at All Saints Academy, an all-girls independent Catholic school in the mid-Atlantic United States. The school is part of a global network of 33 schools in the United States, Europe, and Africa. The school serves approximately 300 students in grades 6-12 in a Middle School and Upper School. In the Upper School, 46% of students take Honors classes and 58% of eligible students (11th and 12th graders) take AP classes. The school is considered high achieving as an academic context. Additionally, 67% of Upper School students participate in a student life program such as student government or yearbook. Approximately half of the students enrolled in the Upper School receive some kind of academic accommodation based on the results of a psychological evaluation for reasons including diagnosed learning disabilities such as ADHD, physical disabilities such as arthritis, and mental health diagnoses such as test anxiety. The most common accommodation is extended time on summative assessments. Other typical accommodations include a copy of teacher notes, preferential seating, a word processor for written work, a world language waiver, and small group testing. Yearly tuition for grades 9-12 is \$32,950 in addition to a technology



fee of \$1,250 for new students and \$470 for returning students.

### **Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this needs assessment study was to investigate student needs as revealed by their social and emotional health and beliefs about themselves. This needs assessment measured students' perception of themselves, their stress and anxiety, and their school as well as the faculty and staff perspective of student needs. Because of the interplay between adolescent stress and anxiety and other factors discussed in Chapter 1, this study examined multiple constructs related to stress and anxiety.

The following research questions frame this needs assessment study:

- What do students believe about themselves and their abilities?
- Do students engage in academic self-handicapping behaviors to avoid authentic failure?
- Are students fearful of failure?
- What do students perceive as the achievement goals indicated by the school?
- What kind of achievement goals do students hold for their academics?
- What emotional state are students experiencing?
- What do students believe about learning and intelligence?
- How is student social emotional health perceived by those who work with students?

### **Method**

This needs assessment study used a convergent parallel design to investigate student stress and anxiety and related factors. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently and from different populations and later compared.

## Participants

The participants in this needs assessment study included students, faculty, and staff at All Saints Academy.

**Students.** All students enrolled in the Upper School (grades 9-12) were eligible to participate in the study. Of approximately 225 students, 183 (81%) returned signed assent/consent forms and began the survey. Of the 183 students who began the survey, 180 completed the survey. Table 2.1 presents the grade level of the participants.

Table 2.1

*Student Respondent Frequency by Grade Level*

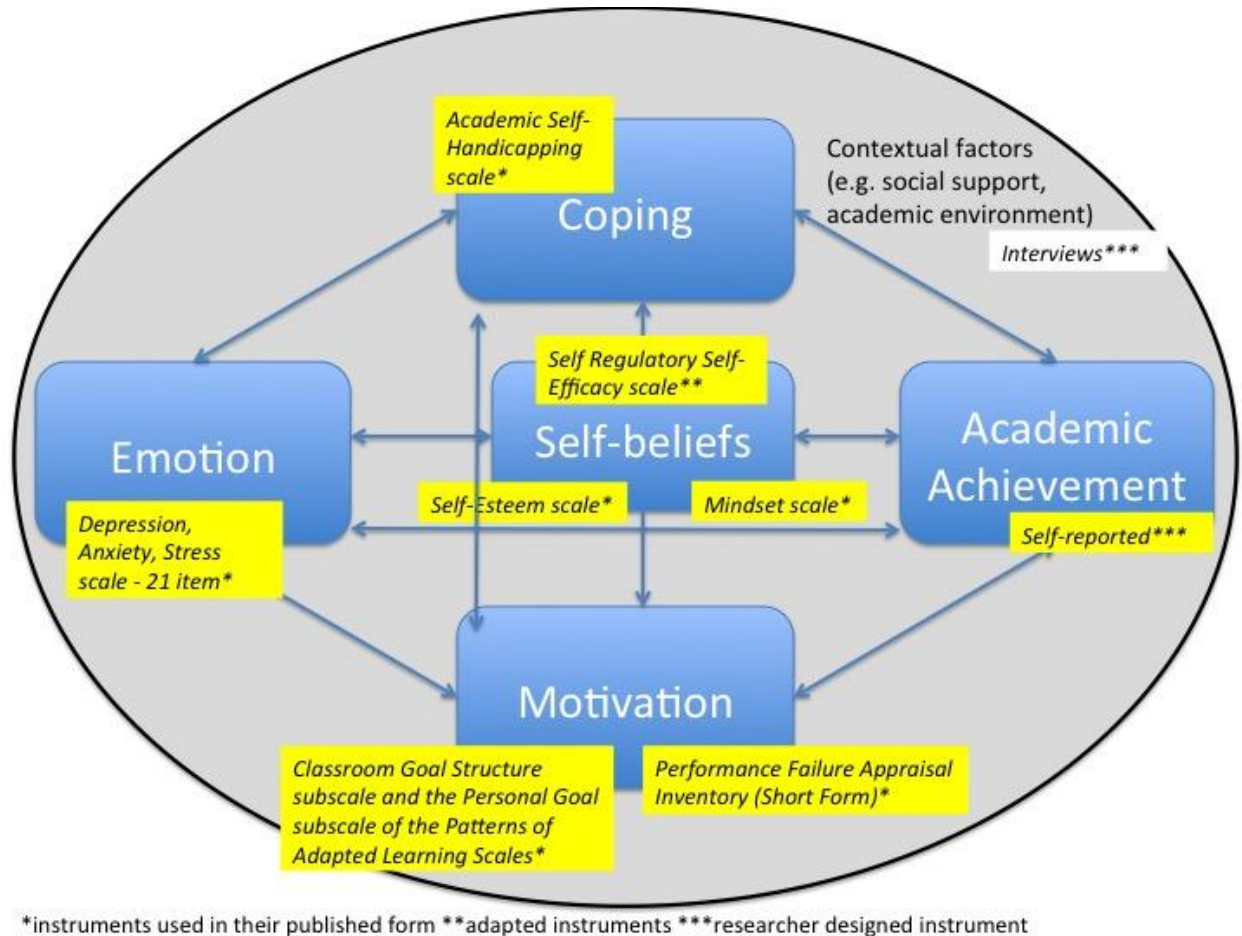
	Grade 9 <i>n</i> (%)	Grade 10 <i>n</i> (%)	Grade 11 <i>n</i> (%)	Grade 12 <i>n</i> (%)
Number of and % of Total Participants	45 (25)	55 (30.6)	40 (22.2)	40 (22.2)

**Faculty and staff.** The researcher identified key faculty and staff members whose work relates to student mental health to participate in semi-structured interviews. These individuals included the Upper School guidance counselor and dean of students. The guidance counselor serves the student body by facilitating biweekly class meetings in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade and teaching health classes. She is also available to individual students by appointment. The dean of students moderates the school's student government organization and meets with students on an as needed basis regarding disciplinary issues. These two individuals consented and participated in the needs assessment study. Both the guidance counselor and dean of students hold advanced degrees in education.

## Instruments

Both quantitative and qualitative information was collected in this study.

Quantitative instrumentation included an online survey containing multiple scales measuring student self-efficacy, self-esteem, academic self-handicapping, fear of failure, achievement motivation and goals, emotional state, mindset, and academic achievement. The qualitative instrument was an interview protocol. These instruments correspond with the constructs in the model presented in Chapter 1 (Figure 2.1).



*Figure 2.1.* Model of factors of adolescent stress and anxiety with corresponding measures.

**Survey instruments.** The survey used in this study contained questions from existing surveys (Appendix A). Students' academic self-efficacy was measured using a modified form of a subscale of the children's Multidimensional Self-Efficacy Scale

(Bandura, 1990): self-efficacy for self-regulated learning scale (Zimmerman et al., 1992). Adjustments were made to this scale to reflect updated technology terms (noted in Appendix).

Self-esteem was measured using a validated 10-item self-esteem scale in its entirety (Rosenberg, 1965; Bong et al., 2012). Academic self-handicapping was measured using the 6-item Academic Self-Handicapping scale in which students rate the extent that they engage in various scenarios of self-handicapping (Thomas & Gadbois, 2011; Urdan & Midgley, 2001). Fear of failure was measured using the Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (PFAI – Short Form), a 5-item scale in which respondents rate the extent to which they believe they will experience specific effects of failure (Conroy et al., 2002).

Achievement motivation and achievement goals were measured using the Classroom Goal Structure Subscale and the Personal Goal Subscale of the Patterns of Adapted Learning Scales (PALS) (Midgley et al., 2001). The 21-item Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) was used to measure students' negative emotional states (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). Mindset was measured using a 16-item survey developed by Dweck (2008). Academic achievement was measured using a researcher-developed question in which students indicated their typical grades and course enrollment.

**Interview protocol.** Interview protocol included four questions with allowances for follow up questions (Appendix B). These questions included one question about students' general concerns, two questions about student stress and anxiety, and one question about student coping strategies. In addition, interview participants were invited to share any other relevant observations regarding student social-emotional health at

school.

## **Procedure**

This section will outline participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis for the needs assessment study.

**Participant recruitment.** All upper school students were eligible to participate in the study. To recruit students, English teachers explained the purpose of the research study to each of their classes and distributed assent/consent forms (Appendix C). Key faculty and staff members were identified by the researcher and received emails requesting their participation.

**Data collection.** The student survey was created using Qualtrics and was distributed to English teachers via email using a link. Teachers then displayed the link on the board for students to access on a personal phone, laptop, or school device. Class time was provided for students to respond to the survey. All student responses were anonymous. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with faculty and staff members. During each interview, the researcher took notes on a password-protected laptop.

**Data analysis.** Quantitative data was analyzed by generating descriptive statistics for each scale of the survey. Qualitative data were analyzed using a conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Themes were not predetermined prior to data analysis and were identified during the data analysis stage. The data was first studied holistically through repeated rereading (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and initial observations were recorded. The researcher then identified salient themes from the data that relate to the research questions of the study.

## **Findings**

This section outlines the findings of the research study organized by research question. Survey responses are summarized in Table 2.2. Quantitative student responses are followed by qualitative faculty and staff responses.

### **Self-Beliefs**

Of the 180 students who submitted the survey, 174 students completed all 11 items of the self-efficacy of self-regulated learning scale. Students rated their self-regulation of academic tasks on a 5-point Likert-scale from 1 (not well at all) to 5 (very well). Student scores ranged from 24 to 53 with 55 being the highest possible score ( $M = 40.24$ ;  $SD = 6.61$ ).

All 10 items of the self-esteem scale were completed by 178 of the 180 students who submitted the survey. Students rated belief statements on a 4-point Likert-scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Five items were reverse scored (e.g., I feel I do not have much to be proud of). Student scores ranged from 27 to 40 with 40 being the highest possible score ( $M = 28.29$ ;  $SD = 5.86$ ). More than half of the respondents (55.6%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “at times I think I am no good at all.” Similar results were found for the statements “I certainly feel useless at times” (56.7%) and “I wish I could have more respect for myself” (66%).

### **Academic Self-Handicapping**

All 6 items of the Academic Self-Handicapping scale were completed by 177 of the 180 students who submitted the survey. Students rated how likely they were to engage in specific academic self-handicapping behaviors on a 5-point Likert-scale from 1 (not true at all) to 5 (very true). Student scores ranged from 6 to 28 with 30 being the

Table 2.2

*Summary of Survey Responses*

Construct	Scale (possible range)	<i>N</i>	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Self-Beliefs	Self-Regulatory Self-Efficacy scale (11-55)	174	24-53	40.24	6.61
	Self-Esteem scale (10-40)	178	27-40	28.29	5.86
	Mindset scale (16-64)	175	23-64	45.98	8.08
Coping	Academic Self-Handicapping scale (6-30)	177	6-28	13.75	4.73
Motivation	Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory – Short (-10-10)	179	-10-10	1.17	4.80
	Mastery Classroom Goal Structure subscale of PALS (6-30)	179	11-30	24.74	4.27
	Performance Approach Classroom Goal Structure subscale of PALS (4-20)	180	4-20	13.15	3.73
	Performance Avoidance Classroom Goal Structure subscale of PALS (4-20)	180	4-20	9.26	4.38
	Mastery Personal Goal subscale of PALS (5-20)	179	11-20	16.98	2.35
	Performance Approach Personal Goal subscale of PALS (5-20)	179	5-20	12.81	3.53
	Performance Avoidance Personal Goal subscale of PALS (4-16)	179	4-16	10.70	3.04
	Depression subscale of DASS – 21 (0-21)	177	0-21	5.76	4.93
Emotion	Anxiety subscale of DASS – 21 (0-21)	175	0-19	5.43	4.81
	Stress subscale of DASS – 21 (0-21)	176	0-21	8.58	5.04

highest possible score ( $M = 13.75$ ;  $SD = 4.73$ ). Most students identified two items as at least somewhat true of their own behavior: purposely putting off schoolwork (55.87%) and purposely fooling around instead of studying (53.63%).

### **Fear of Failure**

All 5 items of the Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (Short Form) were completed by 179 of the 180 students who submitted the survey. Students rated how strongly they believed various statements about the effects of their failure on a 5-point Likert-scale from -2 (do not believe at all) to +2 (believe 100% of the time). Student scores ranged from -10 to 10 with 10 being the highest possible score ( $M = 1.17$ ;  $SD = 4.80$ ). Most students indicated that at least 50% of the time their failure results in important others being disappointed (74.86%) and causes them to worry about what others think (72.63%).

### **Achievement Motivation and Achievement Goals**

All 14 items of the Classroom Goal Structure subscale of the PALS survey were completed by 179 of the 180 students submitting the survey. Most students perceived the achievement goals of the school to be mastery oriented and identified all mastery oriented statements to be at least somewhat true (88.27%). Most students also perceived the achievement goals of the school to be performance approach oriented and identified all performance approach oriented statements to be at least somewhat true (78.21%). The majority of respondents did not perceive the achievement goals of the school to be performance avoidance oriented and less than a third of students identified all performance avoidance oriented statements to be at least somewhat true (31.28%).

Of the 180 students who submitted the survey, 179 students completed all items



on the Personal Goal Structure subscale of the PALS survey. Results were consistent with student perception of the school's goals with the exception of a greater percentage of students identifying all performance avoidance oriented statements to be at least somewhat true (42.46%). Responding to the performance avoidance statement "one of my goals is to avoid looking like I have trouble doing the work," about half of respondents (51.40%) agreed or strongly agreed. A similar percentage of students (52.51%) agreed or strongly agreed with the related statement "one of my goals is to keep others from thinking I'm not smart in class."

### **Emotional State**

Each of the 21-items of the DASS-21 describes a symptom of depression, anxiety, or stress. Respondents indicate how often in the previous week they experienced the symptom listed on a scale from 0 (never) to 3 (almost always). About one third of students scored as moderately to extremely severely anxious ( $n = 65$ ) and moderately to extremely severely depressed ( $n = 58$ ). About 40% of respondents ( $n = 72$ ) scored as moderately to extremely severely stressed. Table 2.3 summarizes the distribution of student DASS-21 scores.

Table 2.3

#### *Frequency of Student DASS-21 Scores*

Subscale	Normal (score range)	Mild (score range)	Moderate (score range)	Severe (score range)	Extremely Severe (score range)
Depression	95 (0-4)	23 (5-6)	28 (7-10)	14 (11-13)	17 (14+)
Anxiety	73 (0-3)	37 (4-5)	19 (6-7)	16 (8-9)	30 (10+)
Stress	93 (0-7)	11 (8-9)	26 (10-12)	35 (13-16)	11 (17+)

## Mindset

Of the 16 items on the mindset scale, 8 items describe a growth mindset and 8 items describe a fixed mindset. 175 students responded to all 16 items by rating their agreement with each statement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Fixed mindset items were reverse scored in order to calculate a growth mindset score for each respondent. Student scores ranged from 23 to 64 with 64 being the highest possible score ( $M = 45.98$ ,  $SD = 8.08$ ).

## Academic Achievement

Nearly all respondents ( $n = 177$ ) indicated their advanced course enrollment and typical academic grades. Table 2.4 outlines student responses to the survey item measuring self-reported academic achievement. Table 2.5 illustrates student enrollment in honors and AP-level course.

Table 2.4

### *Self-Reported Academic Achievement*

Grades	<i>n</i> (%)
Mostly A's and B's	135 (76.27)
Mostly B's and C's	39 (22.03)
Mostly below C's	3 (1.69)

Table 2.5

*Self-Reported Honors or AP-Level Enrollment*

Course	<i>n</i> (%)
Math	89 (49.44)
English	41 (22.78)
Social Studies	37 (20.56)
Science	55 (30.56)
World Language	30 (16.67)
Not enrolled in Honors or AP	53 (29.44)

**Summary of Student Survey Responses**

The survey data inform responses to the research questions that guided the needs assessment. Regarding student self-beliefs, students indicate that, on average, they possess moderate self-regulatory self-efficacy. Students also seem to have moderate to high levels of self-esteem when considered overall, yet individual survey items suggest that more than half of students wish to have more self respect and struggle with self worth. Student responses indicate that many students engage in self-handicapping behaviors, specifically avoiding schoolwork by putting it off or fooling around in order to have an explanation for future failure. This may be a strategy for avoiding the appearance of failure since students indicated that when they consider future failure, they are primarily worried about disappointing others and what others may think of them. Regarding achievement goals, students perceive the school as valuing mastery of academic content and skills and, to a lesser extent, performance approach goals. Student

achievement goals were similar to the goals they perceived within the school. The exception is that more students reported performance avoidance goals and performance approach goals than perceived these goals in the school. Regarding student emotional state, survey responses indicated that many students are experiencing moderate to extremely severe stress, anxiety, and depression. Lastly, students indicate that, in general, they believe intelligence and talent can be changed, though the survey items did not refer to a particular context.

### **Faculty and Staff Perception**

The guidance counselor and the dean of students both expressed concern over the stress and anxiety they perceive students experiencing. One particular area of concern was the ways that students' beliefs about themselves can lead to increased stress and anxiety. The guidance counselor and the dean of students described the desire to maintain positive beliefs about the self as a primary cause of student stress and anxiety. Students were described as forming beliefs about the self through social comparison and "not wanting to feel different" (Counselor, Interview). Students who view themselves as strong academically may avoid seeking challenge or asking for help when needed to avoid renegotiating their identity; similarly, students may withhold effort in a certain area to avoid experiencing authentic failure. While both the counselor and the dean of students referred to self-doubt as developmentally appropriate, each also expressed concern about potentially harmful behaviors students may engage in when stressed or anxious about their perceptions of themselves.

A second cause of student stress and anxiety as described by both the guidance counselor and the dean is a desire that others maintain a relatively positive perception of

one's self. The dean remarked, "People in this area put a lot of weight in...image and perception" (Interview). Later, she added, "[the students] want their parents to think they are smart or other kids to think they are smart or pretty or athletic. They want to be all of those things" (Interview). The counselor also noted that students' desire to please means that they "want to please the teacher more than they want to get the grade. The grade is a reflection of how the teacher feels about them and they care what their teachers think of them" (Interview). Both the guidance counselor and the dean of students noted that students experience stress and anxiety because of the expectations others have of them. The guidance counselor suggested that the lack of racial and socioeconomic diversity at the school creates limiting expectations of what a successful student looks like at the school. Both the guidance counselor and the dean of students suggested that parents can also hold limiting expectations of students and the counselor remarked that these expectations "do not honor who their kid is but who they want their kid to be" (Interview). Students then experience anxiety around not disappointing key adults in their lives.

Another issue identified by the guidance counselor is the somewhat contradictory position adolescents are in. She described students as under near constant surveillance or direction of adults. These adults include parents whom adolescents are beginning to separate from in preparation for adulthood and teachers who encourage students to be responsible and take ownership of their learning. Students are perceived to feel as though "adults control their lives and have expectations of you and are in charge of you. It's hard to be controlled to that extent as you try to figure out who you are" (Counselor, Interview).

## **Conclusions**

This needs assessment study investigated students' social-emotional health and academic attitudes as well as the perceptions of key faculty and staff members at the school. Both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that students experience stress and anxiety including many students experiencing particularly high levels of stress. Many students seem to fear failure and what others may think of them in the event of failure. Students seem especially concerned about disappointing parents and teachers. This fear and its associated behaviors persist despite most students receiving generally high grades. Chapter 3 will explore the research literature used to design an intervention to meet the student needs identified in this needs assessment.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Supporting Students' Social Emotional Health**

The previous chapters established the problem of female adolescent stress and anxiety in both general and specific contexts. The research literature supports an argument for the malleability of the constructs discussed in these chapters: academic self-beliefs (Chapman & Tunmer, 2003), achievement goal orientation and academic motivation (Dweck, 2002), coping strategies (Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008), fear of failure (Stamps, 1973), and state anxiety and/or stress in the short-term (Smith, Hancock, Blake-Mortimer, & Eckert, 2007) and long-term (Miller, Fletcher, & Kabat-Zinn, 1995) through specific interventions targeting each of the above.

The needs assessment data considered through the lens of existing interventions as well as the experience and professional knowledge of interviewed adults at the school, suggest that students may benefit from a break from social comparison and adult evaluation, more choices and perceived control over their actions, and relatable models of ways to address the challenges of adolescence. Reading may provide an opportunity for students to escape from the immediacy of their stress and anxiety and enter another person's perspective. This chapter will outline a theoretical framework and review the research literature related to reading as a tool for addressing adolescent stress and anxiety.

#### **Theoretical Framework: Bibliotherapy**

Bibliotherapy has been defined in myriad ways over the last 70 years. The term bibliotherapy generally refers to the use of books as tools for healing mental disorders (Pardeck, 1995) and promoting mental and emotional well-being (Hébert & Kent, 2000).

Citing Aies (1996), Wilson & Thornton (2006) define bibliotherapy as a “technique which aims to assist individuals to overcome negative emotions related to a real-life problem by guided reading, followed by individual or group discussion in a non-threatening environment” (p. 36). Bibliotherapy involves counselors, teachers, and other professionals tasked with connecting literature to the emotions of the reader for therapeutic purposes (Johnson, Wan, Templeton, Graham, & Sattler, 2001). Most definitions of bibliotherapy allow for the use of any genre of text, including self-help and other nonfiction texts. Creative bibliotherapy specifically uses literature to provide support for mental health and well-being (Brewster, 2009) and some research has explored the use of nontraditional texts such as film (Hébert & Neumeister, 2001) and video games (McCullis & Chamberlain, 2013).

The process of bibliotherapy has typically been described using phases or stages, though these phases vary throughout the research literature. Pardeck and Pardeck (1993) articulate the goals of bibliotherapy as providing readers with a deeper understanding of problems, prompting discussion of problems, discovering new approaches to problems, and gaining awareness that others may face the same problems as the reader. These goals correspond loosely with Pardeck’s (1995) four phases of bibliotherapy: identification of the reader’s problem, selecting a book to match the reader’s needs, guided reading, and follow-up with the reader about their learning and newfound awareness. Hynes and Hynes-Berry (2012) frame the phases of bibliotherapy from the perspective of the reader and trace the individual through the process of reading: recognition, examination, juxtaposition, and application to self. In the recognition phase, the reader connects with a character or experience in the work. In the examination phase, the reader explores their



reactions and feelings of the recognition phase. In the juxtaposition phase, the reader considers their new understanding as a result of examination alongside their former understanding. Finally, in the application phase, the reader evaluates their newfound self-awareness and commits to making changes in attitudes and behaviors. Similarly framed phases are evident throughout the research literature.

Shrodes (1955) also identified stages of bibliotherapy as processes that occur during and after reading: (1) identification, (2) catharsis, and (3) insight. In the identification phase, readers recognize similarities between themselves and the fictional characters in the reading (Hébert & Neumeister, 2001); the more a person has in common with the characters, the closer the reader is thought to identify (Hébert & Furner, 1997). Shrodes (1955) reflected on the importance of identification, noting that even if the relatable character chooses unrealistic approaches to problem solving or engages in maladaptive coping, the reader may experience this as a deterrent from their own maladaptive patterns. Catharsis is the reader's experience of an empathetic or emotional reaction to a character's or characters' feelings (Hébert & Neumeister, 2001). Insight refers to the reader's reflection on the connections they perceive between their own circumstances and that of the characters (Hébert & Neumeister, 2001). Halstead (1991) refers to these same three stages as recognizing, feeling, and thinking. Slavson (1950) offered a fourth stage, universalization, or the recognition that others experience the same issues or problems as the reader and that we are fundamentally not alone in our experiences. Hébert & Neumeister (2001) consider a fourth stage to be the process of application, or using the insights the reader gains to address their own issues.

Bibliotherapy has been used for the purpose of achieving several therapeutic

outcomes. Aiea (1993) as cited in McCullis and Chamberlain (2013) outlines nine potential reasons for the use of bibliotherapy: (1) showing an individual that others experience the same problems, (2) showing an individual that a problem has multiple solutions, (3) helping an individual discuss a problem more freely, (4) helping an individual develop a plan to solve a problem, (5) improving an individual's self-concept, (6) relieving emotional distress, (7) facilitating honest self-appraisal, (8) providing an opportunity to develop outside interests, and (9) improving an individual's understanding of human behavior. More succinctly, McCullis and Chamberlain (2013) identify the major benefits of bibliotherapy as self-expression, an exploration of one's thoughts and emotions in relation to one's self and others, and a revelation of new approaches to problem solving.

### **Review of Bibliotherapy Literature**

A number of studies have investigated the effects of bibliotherapy, especially in comparison to other therapies. While further research is needed to clarify recommendations for the use of bibliotherapy in a classroom setting, the tenets of the practice may be applicable in reducing adolescent stress and anxiety in academic contexts. Some researchers advocate for the use of bibliotherapy in the classroom (e.g. Sullivan & Strang, 2002; Catalano, 2017). Pehrsson and McMillen (2005) noted that despite abundant case study literature and anecdotal reports, few empirical studies have been done on creative bibliotherapy in classroom settings.

Bibliotherapy may be effective at improving social-emotional outcomes in students and adults (Detrixhe, 2010). In a study of the effects of reading on personality and empathy, exposure to nonfiction texts was associated with feelings of loneliness and

negatively associated with social support (Mar, Oatley, & Peterson 2009) suggesting that nonfiction texts may be problematic in bibliotherapy treatments. Bibliotherapy using literature has been shown to improve emotional intelligence and social adjustment in an elementary classroom setting (Sullivan & Strang, 2002). The participation of a teacher or other professional may contribute to the efficacy of bibliotherapy; a shared text used for bibliotherapeutic purposes may improve the relationship between a student and a teacher or mental health professional, providing a shared experience and increasing student motivation (Detrixhe, 2010). In a meta-analytic study aiming to identify parallels between bibliotherapy and cognitive behavioral therapy, Montgomery and Maunders (2015) found a small to moderate positive effect on child behavior including pro-social behavior. However, this particular study does not meet the requirements of meta-analysis because of the small number of articles studied; as such, this work evidences the need for additional research in the area of creative bibliotherapy.

While empirical studies of bibliotherapy offer the strongest scientific support for such a treatment, they are few in number and are not often applied in educational settings or in therapy for children. Betzalel and Schechtman (2010) note that “the rare cases of empirical research on bibliotherapy relate to depression symptoms of an adult population” (p. 426). Of the few quantitative studies using randomized controls, participants are typically provided with nonfiction texts with explicit messages and instructions regarding one’s mental health issue rather than with a fiction text (Schechtman, 2006, p. 645). The empirical studies of bibliotherapy often differ in context and target population from the intervention proposed, but suggest that the practice is beneficial for participants’ overall well-being. The following section outlines the most

applicable and frequently cited literature in this area of study.

**Empirical studies of bibliotherapy with children and adolescents.** In studies of the efficacy of bibliotherapy in children and young adults, a variety of texts, contexts, and follow-up procedures are present. In a randomized control study of nine children between the ages of 5 and 7 who had reported a fear of nighttime and going to sleep, parents read a fictional children's book about overcoming fears (Lewis et al., 2015). After measuring daily and weekly nighttime behaviors at a baseline rate, four weeks later at post-treatment, and one month after the treatment, the researchers concluded that the findings supported the use of bibliotherapy in treating children's fears, though advocated for more research to determine the most appropriate length of treatment and long term effects. A case study of a 5-year old boy diagnosed with severe OCD used a similar approach with an age-appropriate, fictional book read at home and referenced at school by a teacher (Tolin, 2001). Throughout and after a six-week period, the participant's compulsive behavior decreased rapidly and continued to improve at one month and three month follow-up assessments. In a randomized control study of slightly older children, Schechtman (2006) integrated a story, poem, or film about aggression into integrative counseling sessions during class time with a treatment group of boys ages 8 to 16 who had been identified as aggressive by their teachers. The control groups either received no counseling or received integrative counseling without the bibliotherapy component, while the treatment group discussed emotions seen in the text, reasons for the behavior observed, alternative nonaggressive strategies, and finally identified parallels with one's own behavior. At the conclusion of the treatment, students receiving integrative counseling with the bibliotherapy component demonstrated greater gains in empathy and

therapist satisfaction and higher stages of change and frequencies of insight, while both the integrative therapy alone and with bibliotherapy groups both reported reduced aggression and increased empathy. These studies offer support for bibliotherapy using fiction in children and adolescents.

One empirical study in particular offers a more specific theory of treatment for the changes associated with bibliotherapy. Betzalel and Schechtman (2010) studied 79 boys and girls ages 7 to 15 who had all been removed from their homes by law and were living in group homes; participants were therefore not necessarily diagnosed with a mental disorder but exhibited anxiety symptoms and adjustment, social, and behavioral difficulties. Participants were divided randomly into groups receiving cognitive bibliotherapy (using eight works of realistic literature that referred directly to fears, anxieties, and behavioral difficulties), affective bibliotherapy (using eight fictional texts that promote identification with literary characters), and a control group, and received treatment in eight 45-minute sessions. Researchers found a reduction in social anxiety in both treatment groups when compared with the control and a reduction in adjustment symptoms found in the affective bibliotherapy condition, leading the authors to conclude that affective bibliotherapy is a superior treatment to cognitive bibliotherapy in this study. They also suggest that the findings may be due to participants identifying with the characters in the texts used in the affective bibliotherapy group in a way that allows them to form connections to their own feelings in a less threatening or direct way. They posit that stories allow for a therapeutic distance from the participants' own problems and allow for a less intimidating exploration of difficult topics; this exploration, they suggest, may lead to sharing with other participants and promote group cohesion.

Other empirical studies of bibliotherapy treatment for children and adolescents use more explicit texts that directly address participants' social-emotional challenges. In a study of 22 adolescents in grades 7-12 who had scored a 10 or higher on several scales measuring depression, participants received a copy of a self-help manual titled *Feeling Good* (Burns, 1980) and completed workbook exercises in conjunction with their reading (Ackerson et al., 1998). Over the treatment period of four weeks, participants received a weekly phone call to report the number of pages and exercises completed, and self-reported data at pre-treatment, post-treatment, and at a one-month follow-up. A delayed condition group was also assessed before the waiting period, one month later, and then again following treatment. The results indicated a reduction in depressive symptoms in the immediate treatment condition and continued abatement of these symptoms into the follow-up period. In a study of slightly older students with a mean age of 18.6 years, Register, Beckham, May, and Gustafson (1991) recruited 121 test-anxious college students in a study of the efficacy of bibliotherapy, also using a self-help style guide, in this case a manual incorporating stress-inoculation training procedures and content. Participants were divided into groups receiving bibliotherapy plus weekly phone contact for compliance, bibliotherapy only, phone contact only, and a waitlist control. All participants completed self-report measures at pre-treatment, at the conclusion of the four-week treatment, and at a follow-up one month later. Both experimental conditions of bibliotherapy showed greater results in reducing self-reported anxiety and these gains were maintained one month later. Because of the study design, researchers are able to attribute these effects to the bibliotherapy rather than the phone contact.

**Empirical studies of bibliotherapy with adults.** Studies of adults treated with

bibliotherapy are less applicable to classroom contexts, yet may be useful in identifying mechanisms of change and demonstrate the value of bibliotherapy across age groups. In a study of 36 adults who met the criteria for a panic disorder, participants were randomly assigned to a bibliotherapy group tasked with reading *Coping with Panic: A drug-free approach to dealing with anxiety attacks*, a group therapy group that met weekly for 90 minutes with a therapist, or a wait list control (Lidren et al., 1994). In pre-test, post-test, 3- and 6-month follow-up assessments of participants' panic, researchers concluded that bibliotherapy and group therapy were more effective than the control in reducing frequency and severity of panic attacks and panic symptoms and increasing self-efficacy. The authors suggest that bibliotherapy showed greater gains in this study than in others because of the longer length of the treatment (eight weeks) and tout its cost-effective implementation. In another study using the same text, *Coping with Panic*, 30 adults who reported experiencing a panic attack within the last two weeks were randomly assigned a bibliotherapy group, a bibliotherapy group with biweekly 15-minute phone contact from a therapist, and a phone-contact only group (Febbraro, 2005). Over the eight-week period, both bibliotherapy and bibliotherapy with phone contact groups showed decreases from pre- to post-treatment in panic conditions and fear of having a panic attack.

Self-help books have also been used in bibliotherapy treatment of adults with depression and depressive symptoms. Songprakun and McCann (2014) studied 56 adults diagnosed with moderate depression randomized into an intervention group receiving bibliotherapy and a control group receiving the standard therapeutic care. After reading *Good Mood Guide* over an eight-week period, the experimental group showed reduced levels of depression and psychological distress between the baseline self-report and post-

test self report. The intervention group also showed an improvement in resilience; the authors posit that this contributed to increased positive emotions, further reducing levels of depression and distress. While bibliotherapy has not been studied extensively in empirical studies, it may have long-term benefits for participants. In a separate study, 50 adults who participated in a three-year follow-up continued to demonstrate gains from the initial bibliotherapy treatment aimed at reducing depressive symptoms (Smith, Floyd, Scogin, & Jamison, 1997).

### **Developmental Bibliotherapy**

The empirical studies of bibliotherapy discussed in this chapter employ clinical bibliotherapy implemented by a counselor or therapist. The type of bibliotherapy implemented in schools or other nonclinical settings is known as developmental bibliotherapy and can be used with groups of typical students (Afolayan, 1992). The goal of developmental bibliotherapy is to address students' social and emotional development by facilitating the process of identifying with a character or experience in fiction, reflecting on this identification, and growing emotionally (Hébert & Neumeister, 2001). It has been practiced in classrooms to address a variety of social and emotional issues, including anxiety (McCullis & Chamberlain, 2013).

Because developmental bibliotherapy is implemented in an academic setting with a group, there are additional considerations for effective practice. Teachers are encouraged to establish a supportive, safe, and positive environment, use positive enforcement, and remain nonjudgmental of both the text and student responses (Johnson et al., 2001). Additionally, though developmental bibliotherapy may be implemented in a classroom, the emotional response to the literature takes priority over one's intellectual



understanding of the text (Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 2012). In fact, “even a misinterpretation of the text is considered both legitimate and useful if it leads to the release of feelings or insights related to self-understanding” (Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 2012, p. 32). Lastly, exposure to the text is not sufficient for effective bibliotherapy; follow-up activities are expected and may include discussion, art activities, and journaling (Hébert & Furner, 1997) and/or other self-selected options that students choose to pursue individually (Hébert & Neumeister, 2001).

As in other classroom activities, benefits of bibliotherapy may be delayed or initially imperceptible to students and teachers. Shrodes (1955) argued that these circumstances should not preclude the use of bibliotherapy with students:

For most students a therapeutic approach to reading will be of most benefit as a kind of preventive therapy. At the very least it is likely to arouse an interest in books and help the student to find meaning in them. In some cases there may be a delayed reaction. A book that at the time of reading merely entertained him may become a part of his mind's store of images, a segment of his experienced world, a touchstone for his evaluation of experience, a salutary reminder of danger, a clue to understanding his motives, a clarification of reality, a strategy for coping, or a vision of order. For others there may be immediate results of increased self awareness and acceptance and a greater capacity to maintain satisfying human relationships. (p. 29)

### **Reading for Pleasure**

While bibliotherapy offers a theoretical framework for addressing students’ social and emotional needs through the use of fiction, the general act of reading has also been

studied in the research literature. Although there is a general decline in reading for pleasure among teenagers and adults (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007), research consistently demonstrates the physical, emotional, and social benefits to the leisure activity of reading. Leisure activities of varying types are generally considered therapeutic and engaging in a leisure pursuit of one's choosing promotes health and well-being (Caldwell, 2005). The specific activity of reading for pleasure has been found to decrease acute stress in students reporting academic stress, as measured by decreases in systolic blood pressure, diastolic blood pressure, heart rate, and a Daily Stress Inventory (Rizzolo et al., 2009). Reading for pleasure significantly reduced stress in participants of the study and was found to be as effective as other typical leisure activities. A similar study found reading for pleasure to be effective at reducing state anxiety and emotional stress (Jin, 1992). While leisure of any kind may promote health and well-being, reading as a leisure activity has had a measurable impact on commonly utilized measures of stress and anxiety.

### **Qualitative Studies of Reading with Adolescents**

The research literature on the nonacademic benefits of reading is primarily qualitative, relying on student focus groups, interviews, open-ended self-reports, and case studies. These studies identified a variety of benefits to students and classroom communities engaging in reading, specifically young adult literature. In a qualitative research study investigating the role of reading for pleasure in adolescents, 68 students from nine Canadian junior high schools (ages 12-15) participated in focus groups in which they provided reasons for pursuing reading for pleasure (Howard, 2011). The researchers found the focus group to be an appropriate method as “the interaction

between participants increased the range and complexity of ideas expressed, and the group forum allowed for detailed discussion and...extreme views tended to be weeded out” (p. 49). Students claimed that engaged reading could lead to improved literacy and thinking skills and help a reader to clarify vocational goals, understand historical and social events, develop social conscience and empathy, empower the self, provide guidance on future behavior, and serve as a source of escape, relaxation, and reassurance. The focus groups allowed the author to conclude that while “readers often choose a book for pleasure” they inadvertently discover “insights related to themselves, their lives, and their problems” which in turn facilitate self-identification, self-construction, and self-awareness (p. 53). The author further concludes that reading aids adolescents in the transition from childhood to adulthood. In a report from the National Endowment for the Arts (2007), researchers make similar claims, ultimately concluding that reading has implications for educational outcomes, employment prospects, and one’s involvement in civic life.

Other studies advocate for specific strategies for increasing reading engagement in schools using student-reports of the benefits of reading for pleasure as support for these programs. In a study espousing the benefits of a reading café on a school’s campus, Mathers and Stern (2012) administered in-class literacy questionnaires to 160 students split roughly evenly between the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades in a small urban district in the Northeast. These brief questionnaires used simple language and were intended to evaluate student attitudes about reading; students responded to 6 yes or no items on the questionnaire and were asked to provide explanations for their responses. Student responses indicated that the participants believed reading to be empowering in that it

helps students gain intelligence and achieve success in school and beyond. Additionally, students reported that reading is pleasurable when students are interested in the content of the text and are given the freedom to choose their own text. Students also emphasized the importance of an enthusiastic and dedicated teacher in facilitating reading for pleasure. The authors concluded that successful independent reading programs empower students. They hypothesize that by providing time and space at school for students to experience reading for pleasure, students will identify as readers, develop reading as a habit, and integrate the practice into their own identity. A particular school cited in the study has instituted the reading café model and increased the number of books checked out in a school year from 3,000 books to 45,000 books.

Another strategy involves replacing the traditional English course curriculum with student-selected texts and time for reading and teacher modeling of reading. Ivey and Johnston (2013) studied 71 students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms with teachers who had received training in promoting reading for pleasure in the English classroom and committed to a year-long emphasis on reading student-selected young adult literature. An important component of the study was providing access to high-interest texts, rotating four selections of 150-200 books through the four classrooms participating in the study. The authors collected data from end of year student interviews, end of year teacher interviews, biweekly observational data, impromptu conversations with students, and video/audio records of student-initiated book discussions. From these data the authors identified 15 main categories of outcomes and constructed case studies; ultimately, they used keywords (made me, because, so, etc.) to identify 317 causal statements. Outcomes of the intervention, as reported by students, include engaged reading, talking with others

through and about books including as a means of problem solving, new friendships and increased interpersonal trust with peers and instructors, shifts in identity as readers, expanded social imagination, agency in reading, social and moral agency, increased intention to make positive life decisions, increased agency of self-regulation, and personal happiness. Students also noted that personal choice and having access to a variety of texts, including those on controversial topics, were important components of encouraging reading. The ability to choose one's reading, may result in other social-emotional benefits as reading chosen texts for pleasure is associated with a sense of control or personal autonomy (Nell, 1988).

These studies required students to be reflective about their reading and were explicit with participants about the research questions explored. Strommen and Mates (2011) approach an investigation of student reading habits differently, weaving literacy questions in with those on leisure and home activities in order to obscure the intent of the study. Questionnaires were administered to 65 homogeneously grouped 6<sup>th</sup> grade students and 86 homogeneously grouped 9<sup>th</sup> grade students, followed by interviews with students whose questionnaires identified them as Readers or Not-Readers according to predetermined criteria. The authors found that the scale was valid for identifying Readers and Not-Readers and were then able to draw conclusions about Readers' behaviors and beliefs, highlighting the benefits of reading for pleasure. A relevant finding was that Readers profess to love reading, indicating that it provides greater depth of understanding of interpersonal relationships and increases empathy as Readers relate to fictional characters and identify with the problems of others. These behaviors and beliefs are in contrast to those around academic reading with both Readers and Not-Readers reporting

that they see reading as an outside of school activity and skim in-school reading assignments for the answers needed for the assignment. Readers praised teachers who “demonstrated enthusiasm for books, had [books] in their classrooms, let students borrow books, and read aloud in class frequently” (p. 187).

The demonstrated malleability of the particular constructs in the outcomes of these qualitative studies indicates promising outcomes for a social-emotional intervention incorporating reading for pleasure. These qualitative studies are typical of pleasure reading research in that the students themselves report the findings and many of the authors use an inductive approach to categorize responses. Empirical research on the effects of reading for pleasure is less common.

### **Optimal Conditions for Reading**

The research on bibliotherapy and the effects of reading for pleasure suggest three key conditions for optimizing the effects of reading on adolescent social and emotional health: (1) choice, (2) time, and (3) appropriate text selection. First, in an article reviewing key research findings on teenagers and reading, Manuel (2012) identified student choice as a necessary component of facilitating students’ development of personal reading lives. Manuel (2012) suggests that this may be at least in part due to adolescents’ developing desire to be autonomous, even as they navigate structured contexts that value obedience and compliance. Students in a study of independent reading demonstrated the cyclical nature of autonomy and reading, noting that reading is an activity with empowering benefits (Mathers & Stern, 2012). Second, in a meta-analytic study of the effect of in-school independent reading programs, Yoon (2002), identified the importance of providing class time or another time during the school day for students

to engage in independent reading. This practice best facilitates student attitudes toward reading, maintains a sense of pleasure and leisure, and avoids increasing student workload. Third, identifying appropriate texts may enhance the positive effects demonstrated in the research. Because young adult literature specifically addresses complex problems that adolescents face, this genre may help students make sense of the world and process their feelings about their own lives (Hébert & Kent, 2000). Additionally, Graff (2009) found that students preferred to select books that were representative of their peer culture and “reflective of their cultural personhood in contemporary settings” (p. 358). This underscores the need for diverse perspectives in the books used in developmental bibliotherapy.

### **Intervention Literature Summary**

The interventions discussed here demonstrate the value of reading for pleasure in and out of the classroom, especially as a means of bibliotherapy with students being guided by an instructor. These activities have been shown, in a few published studies, to have some positive effects on student social-emotional well-being and academic outcomes. Limitations exist in that there are few empirical studies on the effect of reading for pleasure on adolescents’ social and emotional health and even fewer on bibliotherapy in a classroom setting. Even so, the research indicates that engaging students in reading for pleasure and providing guiding reflective activities as a bibliotherapy treatment may yield physical, emotional, and academic benefits. Importantly, no studies suggested negative outcomes. Reading with students introduces them to a practice that can continue to be utilized and developed over a lifetime. This practice may serve as an adaptive

coping strategy and replace maladaptive behaviors associated with adolescent stress and anxiety.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Intervention Design: Method and Procedure**

To address the stress and anxiety students experience as they enter high school, the proposed intervention was developed for implementation in 9<sup>th</sup> grade English classes at All Saints Academy, a single-sex independent Catholic school in the Mid-Atlantic United States. The intervention aimed to reduce stress and anxiety through reading young adult literature, both independently and with a class, and responding to the reading through journal prompts. The intervention design and implementation was informed by the data from the needs assessment and the research literature on bibliotherapy and reading (e.g. Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 2012; Hébert & Kent, 2000). This study draws from the research conducted with related, but not identical, contexts and participants as well as descriptive studies on adolescents' reading habits and attitudes. It is further informed and justified by the needs assessment demonstrating the targeted population experiences high-stress based on self-report and practitioner reflections.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand how the experience of reading and responding to young adult literature affects students' stress and anxiety. Further, this study sought to understand student experiences of reading relatable fiction texts independently and with a class. The research study tested the hypothesis that students who read and responded to young adult literature independently and as a component of their coursework would decrease their self-reported level of stress and anxiety. The research questions for this study were:

RQ1: How does reading young adult literature affect students' stress and

anxiety?

RQ2: What are student perceptions of the experience of reading young adult literature in a school setting?

### **Research Design**

This study is quasi-experimental (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002) and employs a convergent parallel design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Course registration protocols at the targeted school preclude random assignment. The design includes pre- and post-measures and a delayed treatment group in order to ensure all students receive the same 9<sup>th</sup> grade English curriculum. This design allows for what Henry (2010) refers to as an interrupted time-series design in which post-intervention change in a treatment group is compared to the change in an untreated group over the same period of time. The delayed treatment group participated in the intervention after the treatment group completed all intervention activities.

The mixed-method design of this study was intended to provide a holistic understanding of both the effect of the intervention on student stress and anxiety and student experiences of the intervention. The study included quantitative data from pre- and post-measures and qualitative data from focus groups, researcher observations, and student writing. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed independently and later merged to understand areas of convergence and divergence (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The intervention logic model depicts the necessary inputs, activities, and outputs for the implementation of the intervention and identifies the projected outcomes of the treatment (Appendix D). Hypothesized outcomes include reduced stress and anxiety and awareness of reading as a coping strategy. In order

to conclude that these outcomes are a result of the intervention, fidelity of implementation must also be measured and analyzed.

### **Fidelity of Implementation**

Fidelity of implementation refers to the extent to which an intervention is implemented in accordance with the intended program model (O'Donnell, 2008). Evaluation of the process of implementing an intervention is vital to understanding whether the essential activities of the program have been implemented as intended and whether any observable outcomes can be attributed to the program as designed. The analysis of fidelity of implementation sought to understand the extent to which the prescribed activities of the intervention were implemented as designed. High fidelity is achieved if the researcher facilitated all intervention activities and students attended class, selected young adult novels for independent reading, read both their independent choices and the shared text assigned to the class, and responded to written prompts.

**Indicators of fidelity of implementation.** For each component of the intervention, there are measurable indicators for process evaluation to ensure fidelity of implementation throughout the program. The indicators used in this process evaluation are measures of program adherence, intervention dose, and participant responsiveness (Dusenbury et al., 2003). Table 4.1 provides a summary matrix for fidelity of implementation data collection and analysis.

***Indicators of program adherence.*** The indicators measuring adherence to program design reflect the extent to which the activities of the intervention were delivered as intended. The researcher maintained a daily journal of field notes (Appendix E) and recorded the activities completed during the intervention. Students also

Table 4.1

*Process Evaluation Summary Matrix: Fidelity of Implementation*

Measures	Instruments	Frequency	Data Analysis
Adherence to program design	Researcher field notes	During each class	Inductive thematic coding
	Reading Notebooks	1-2x/week	Descriptive statistics
Intervention dose	Researcher Field Notes	During each class	Inductive thematic coding
	Attendance Records	During each class	Descriptive statistics
Participant responsiveness	Researcher Field Notes	During each class	Inductive thematic coding
	Reading Notebooks	1-2x/week	Descriptive statistics
	Formative Assessments	1x/week	Descriptive statistics
	Focus Groups	At the end of the intervention (T3)	Inductive thematic coding

maintained a Reading Notebook in which to respond to program activities and which provides data on adherence to program design.

***Indicators of intervention dose.*** The indicators measuring intervention dose include the class time focused on the activities of the intervention and student attendance in class. Both measures quantify the amount of time students participated in the intervention. The researcher recorded the amount of time spent on intervention activities

and daily attendance in a daily journal of field notes.

***Indicators of participant responsiveness.*** Participant responsiveness was measured using data provided by students and the researcher. Students' Reading Notebooks provided data on how responsive students were to written prompts reflecting on their reading and student performance on reading quizzes indicated whether students were completing the assigned reading in the shared text. Student comments in focus groups indicated levels of student responsiveness to the reading and reflection activities. The researcher also provided data by noting student participation in a daily journal of field notes.

### **Outcome Evaluation**

As illustrated by the logic model (Appendix D), several outcomes were measured. These outcomes included student stress and anxiety, other noncognitive factors associated with stress and anxiety including fear of failure, academic self-handicapping, achievement goal orientation, and perceived self-determination, and use of reading as a coping strategy. Students provided data through survey responses, focus groups, and written responses in a Reading Notebook. The outcome evaluation measured only proximal outcomes as it was not possible to measure long-term outcomes during the time frame of the intervention.

### **Method**

This section provides a description the study participants, the treatment and delayed treatment groups, instruments used, and the procedure including participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis.

## **Participants**

Students participating in the treatment group (Group 1) were members of the researcher's 9<sup>th</sup> grade English class meeting during G period during the 2017-2018 school year. Of 17 students enrolled in the class, 13 completed an assent/consent form and enrolled in the study. Students participating in the delayed treatment group (Group 2) were members of the researcher's 9<sup>th</sup> grade English class meeting during E period during the 2017-2018 school year. Of 16 students enrolled in the class, 11 completed an assent/consent form and enrolled in the study.

## **Instruments**

Nine instruments were used to collect data, including six Likert-scale surveys integrated into one survey (Appendix F). The surveys used in the study included: Academic Stress Questionnaire – Revised (ASQ-R; Byrne, Davenport, & Mazanov, 2007), Generalized Anxiety Disorder – 7 item scale (GAD-7; Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, & Löwe, 2006), Perception of Classroom Goal Structures subscale of Patterns of Adapted Learning Scale (PALS; Midgley et al., 1998), Perceived Self-Determination scale (PSD; Reeve, 2002), Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory – Short Form (PFAI; Conroy et al., 2002), and Academic Self-Handicapping Strategies scale (Urdan & Midgley, 2001). Figure 4.1 illustrates the corresponding constructs for each of these measures. Additional instruments included focus group protocol, student Reading Notebook responses, and researcher field notes.

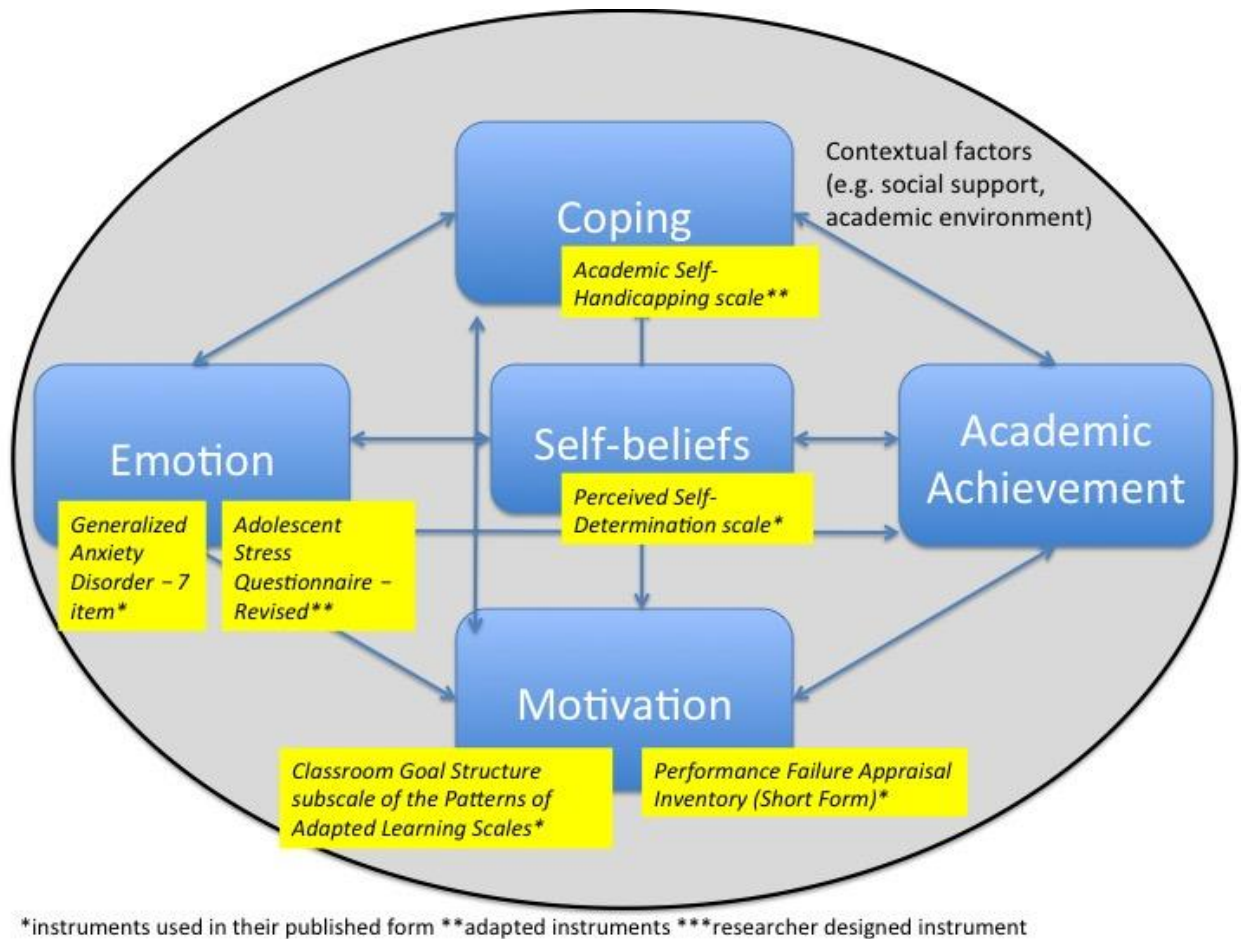


Figure 4.1. Intervention scales with corresponding factors in model of adolescent stress and anxiety.

**Adolescent Stress Questionnaire.** The Adolescent Stress Questionnaire (ASQ; Byrne et al., 2007) was adapted for the purposes of this study to include only those items related to academics and life at school. The 9 items included in this study asked participants to rate the intensity of distress experienced in response to stressors. Participants rated stressors such as “keeping up with school work” and “concern about the future” on a 5-point Likert-scale from 1 (not at all stressful) to 5 (very stressful).

**Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale.** The Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale (GAD-7; Spitzer et al., 2006) measures anxiety and is validated for use with

the general population (Löwe et al., 2008) and for test-retest purposes (Watkins et al., 2012). Participants were asked to indicate how often over the last two weeks they have been bothered by various problems that indicate anxiety. Participants rated problems such as “feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge” and “not being able to stop or control worrying” using a 4-point Likert-scale from 0 (not at all) to 4 (nearly every day).

**Patterns of Adapted Learning Scale.** The Perception of Classroom Goal Structures subscale of the Patterns of Adapted Learning Scale (PALS; Midgley et al., 1998) is a 14-item scale. This instrument was used to measure students’ perception of the goal orientation of the class. Survey items included values associated with mastery goal orientation, performance approach goal orientation, and performance avoidance goal orientation. Participants were asked to rate value statements on a Likert-scale from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (very true).

**Perceived Self-Determination scale.** The Perceived Self-Determination scale (PSD; Reeve, 2002) is a 9-item scale used to measure student autonomy. Survey items asked participants to rate the perceived causality of one’s actions, internal volition, and perceived freedom of choice on a 7-point Likert-scale. For example, students indicated the extent of their agreement to the following statements: “I felt I was doing what I wanted to be doing” and “I felt I was pursuing goals that were my own.”

**Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory – Short Form.** The Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory – Short Form (PFAI; Conroy et al., 2002) is a 5-item scale used to measure fear of failure. Participants rated statements about the consequences of failure on a 5-point Likert-scale from -2 (do not believe at all) to +2 (believe 100% of the time). Survey items include statements such as “When I am failing, I worry about what



others think of me” and “When I am failing, important others are disappointed.”

**Academic Self-Handicapping Strategies – Revised scale.** This instrument is described in Chapter 2. The survey was adapted to include the most common behaviors identified during the needs assessment and exclude those that were not identified as problematic for respondents. These items measured students’ tendency to use defensive strategies including procrastination, spending time with friends instead of doing schoolwork, and purposely withholding effort.

**Focus group protocol.** To understand student experiences in the intervention and to gather data on student perception of stress and anxiety throughout the intervention, students participated in one of three focus groups facilitated by the researcher. Questions were developed by the researcher and focused on students’ experiences of reading and responding to literature, perceived stress and anxiety around these activities, and feedback regarding key activities of the intervention (Appendix G).

**Reading Notebook writing prompts.** Student responses to reflective prompts about self-selected texts and the shared text were used to further understand the student experience of reading young adult literature in the classroom (Appendix H).

**Researcher field notes.** The researcher also served as the instructor of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade English class in which the intervention was implemented. As such, researcher field notes were recorded in a daily journal and were used to add an additional perspective to student perceptions of their stress and anxiety.

## **Procedure**

This section provides an overview of participant recruitment, intervention components, the timeline of intervention activities, data collection, and data analysis.

## **Participant Recruitment**

Students were eligible to participate in the intervention if they were enrolled in one of the researcher's 9<sup>th</sup> grade English classes. All students enrolled in these classes participated in intervention activities including selecting texts, reading a self-selected text and a shared text, responding in writing, and responding to surveys. Only students who signed and returned assent/consent forms participated in focus groups and generated data to be used in this study. To recruit participants for this study a teacher other than the researcher explained and distributed assent/consent forms to students (Appendix I). A follow up email was sent by the researcher to parents of all eligible students (Appendix J).

## **Intervention**

The following is a description of the intervention timeline and activities. Guided by the researcher, students selected young adult novels to read independently, read the assigned text as a class, and responded to the reading through written prompts.

**Timeline.** The intervention took place in the fall of 2017 with Group 1 beginning the intervention in mid-November and completing all intervention activities by mid-December. Group 2 began the intervention in the beginning of January and completed all intervention activities by the beginning of February. Students met with the researcher for class no more than four days each week.

**Independent reading.** The researcher guided students in selecting young adult literature to read independently by beginning class each day with one to three short presentations on popular titles shelved in the classroom library (Appendix K). The researcher previewed each book by displaying the cover, providing a short summary,

reading a page of the book aloud, and giving her opinion of the book. These books were then displayed at the front of the classroom.

Students catalogued books they were interested in reading, books they had already read, and books they were currently reading using GoodReads, an online social media site for readers. Students were not limited to the books presented by the researcher or those shelved in the classroom library. Students were expected to bring their self-selected books to class with them in order to read during the provided time. Class time was provided to students initially once per week, but was adjusted in response to student feedback to provide more opportunities for reading. During this reading time students were permitted to sit wherever they chose around the room. Over school breaks and long weekends, students were encouraged to read their self-selected texts.

**Shared text reading.** Students were required to read the novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* by Sherman Alexie as part of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade course of study in the researcher's class. This novel addresses themes of belonging, poverty, coming of age, racism and racial stereotypes, loss and grief, friendship, and identity. This text was selected because of its relatable themes of growing up and accessible reading level for a typical 9<sup>th</sup> grade student at the school.

During the intervention, students completed nightly reading assignments, periodically took short reading quizzes, and participated in daily discussions of the reading. These discussions included literary elements such as character development and conflict, author craft, and personal reactions to the text. Nearly all reading was completed outside of class and students were not permitted to read the shared text during class time intended for independent reading.

**Reading Notebook reflections.** Students completed written assignments in an online Reading Notebook that responded to characters and conflicts in the shared text and students' self-selected texts. Three of the Reading Notebook prompts focused explicitly on the character of Junior from *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* and three of the prompts allowed students to choose between writing about *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* and their self-selected text. Reading Notebook prompts asked students to reflect on the reading, their perception of the characters, and later, connections they made to the reading. Students wrote in Reading Notebooks during class and as an ungraded homework assignment. Students were told that there were no right or wrong answers to the prompts.

### **Data Collection**

Data for both process and outcome evaluation were collected at designated times throughout the intervention. The convergent parallel design of the study required collection of quantitative and qualitative data concurrently and with equal priority (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Data collection included survey data, focus groups, researcher observations, and Reading Notebook reflections.

**Surveys.** The survey instrument consisted of the quantitative measures discussed earlier in this chapter. An instructor other than the researcher explained and distributed paper surveys to students. Students in Group 1 completed a pre-measure survey in mid-November (T1) and a post-measure survey in mid-December (T2). Group 2 completed pre-measure surveys at T1, T2, and a post-measure survey in the beginning of February (T3). Surveys were identified with a participant number known only by the student and the instructor distributing surveys. Students submitted surveys in an envelope that was

sealed and returned to the researcher. At no time were completed surveys matched with student names.

**Focus groups.** Focus groups were held to allow for interaction between participants and to promote a “range and complexity of ideas” with “extreme views...weeded out” (Howard, 2011, p. 49). Open-ended questions were asked to elicit richer responses (Howard, 2011) and allow for follow up questions. 17 students from Group 1 and Group 2 participated in one of three focus groups with the researcher at T3. Focus groups were held in the researcher’s classroom during the school day at times when 9<sup>th</sup> grade students are commonly available. Each focus group ran for 30-45 minutes. Focus groups were recorded in Microsoft OneNote and later transcribed by the researcher.

**Researcher observations.** The researcher maintained an electronic daily journal of field notes including the date, daily attendance, intervention activities, time spent on each activity, the instructional method employed, student participation in the activities, and other general observations.

**Reading Notebook reflections.** Students responded to six Reading Notebook reflective prompts in a section of their Microsoft OneNote Class Notebook. Students were not able to view other students’ Reading Notebooks but were aware that the researcher had access and read responses.

## **Data Analysis**

This section describes the statistical tests for quantitative data and the coding for qualitative data.

**Statistical tests.** Survey data were entered from paper surveys into Microsoft

Excel, cleaned, and entered into SPSS. Surveys were scored according to Likert-scales and items were reverse scored where applicable. Descriptive statistics were calculated for each scale and rate of change from pre-measure to post-measure. Paired sample *t* tests were performed on data from both groups to examine change between participants' pre- and post-intervention scores. Independent samples *t* tests were performed to examine the difference between the average change in Group 1 from T1 to T2 and the average change in Group 2 during the same period.

**Qualitative data coding.** There are three categories of qualitative data in this study: focus group transcripts, Reading Notebook responses, and researcher field notes. For each type, the researcher thoroughly examined all data to generate a holistic impression of the intervention and recorded notes. All qualitative data were uploaded to NVivo for coding and analysis. The researcher employed conventional content analysis to analyze the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The researcher identified themes through an inductive approach and did not impose preconceived categories or theoretical perspectives on the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **Summary Matrix**

The summary matrix in Table 4.2 depicts alignment between variables measured, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis.

### **Conclusions**

This chapter provided an overview of the researcher's implementation of a reading program in 9<sup>th</sup> grade English classes to address the problem of student stress and anxiety. Implementation was informed by the research literature and the needs assessment. The chapter outlined the purpose of the study, intervention activities, process

and outcome evaluation, method, procedure, and data collection and analysis.

Table 4.2

*Outcome Evaluation Summary Matrix*

Measures	Instruments	Data Collection Frequency		Data Analysis
		Group 1	Group 2	
Stress	Adapted ASQ-R	T1, T2	T1, T2, T3	Paired sample <i>t</i> test; Independent samples <i>t</i> test
	Researcher field notes	From T1 to T2	From T2 to T3	Inductive thematic coding
	Focus group protocol	T3	T3	Inductive thematic coding
Anxiety	GAD-7	T1, T2	T1, T2, T3	Paired sample <i>t</i> test; Independent samples <i>t</i> test
	Researcher field notes	From T1 to T2	From T2 to T3	Inductive thematic coding
	Focus group protocol	T3	T3	Inductive thematic coding
Achievement Goal Orientation	Perception of Classroom Goals subscale of PALS	T1, T2	T1, T2, T3	Paired sample <i>t</i> test; Independent samples <i>t</i> test
Autonomy	PSD	T1, T2	T1, T2, T3	Paired sample <i>t</i> test; Independent samples <i>t</i> test
Fear of Failure	PFAI – Short Form	T1, T2	T1, T2, T3	Paired sample <i>t</i> test; Independent samples <i>t</i> test
Academic Self-Handicapping	Academic Self-Handicapping Strategies – Revised scale	T1, T2	T1, T2, T3	Paired sample <i>t</i> test; Independent samples <i>t</i> test

## **Chapter 5**

### **Results and Discussion**

The purpose of this dissertation was to understand student experiences of stress and anxiety and to investigate the effect, if any, of reading young adult (YA) literature on student stress and anxiety and other noncognitive factors associated with academic achievement. In Chapter 4, I outlined the research study design and the components of the intervention. The purpose of this chapter is to present findings for each research question. As stated in Chapter 4, the following research questions frame the analyses in this study. The research questions were:

RQ1: How does reading young adult literature affect students' stress and anxiety?

RQ2: What are student perceptions of the experience of reading young adult literature in a school setting?

#### **Fidelity of Implementation**

Analyzing student outcomes and experiences with the reading of young adult literature required an investigation of intervention fidelity of implementation. Fidelity of implementation refers to the degree to which the program was implemented as intended (Dusenbury et al., 2003). This section is a discussion of program implementation, including any shifts in implementation from the study design described in Chapter 4. The researcher's role was to document implementation of the intervention and observe student engagement and participation throughout the intervention. This documentation informs the analysis of fidelity of implementation.



## **Program Adherence**

Program adherence refers to the extent to which the essential activities of the program were implemented as planned (Dusenbury et al., 2003). The researcher implemented program activities as intended, with one exception, and recorded class activities and methods daily. The exception to strict program adherence was that the intervention was designed to provide students with class time to read self-selected YA literature during one class period per week. In response to student requests, 10 minutes of reading time was provided at the beginning of each class, replacing the one class of longer reading time. This shift increased student participation in reading self-selected books because a single absence resulted in missing only 25% of the reading time provided throughout the week instead of a possible 100%. Additionally, all written response prompts were identified in participants' Reading Notebooks.

## **Intervention Dose**

Intervention dose refers to the amount of exposure participants had to program activities or the duration of the program activities (Dusenbury et al., 2003). Students were required to attend all classes as part of their regular course of study as 9<sup>th</sup> grade students of the school. Attendance was recorded online by the instructor as required by the Employee Handbook, as well as recorded on a daily observation journal. The average attendance in Group 1 was 15 students out of a total 17 students with one student being absent 5 times due to injury and no other student being absent more than 3 times. Group 1 participated in intervention activities during 13 class periods over one month. These class periods represent all classes held during this period of time. The average attendance in Group 2 was 15 students out of a total 16 students with no student being absent more than

3 times. Group 2 participated in intervention activities during 15 class periods over one month. These class periods represent all classes held during this period of time.

Researcher field notes show that class periods ranged from 25 to 45 minutes in length and that time spent on intervention activities ranged from 15 minutes to 45 minutes per class period.

### **Participant Responsiveness**

Participant responsiveness refers to the extent to which study participants are engaged by and involved in the program (Dusenbury et al., 2003). Participation varied across the components of the intervention and over time. This section will evaluate student participation in reading a self-selected YA novel, reading a shared YA novel, and reflecting on reading through the online Reading Notebook writing prompts.

**Choice reading participation.** To promote student ownership of an individual reading life, the instructor assisted students in setting up accounts on GoodReads.com, a social media site for readers to preview, catalog, and review books. All students in both groups signed up for a GoodReads account. The instructor also previewed recent, popular, young adult fiction before and during the intervention by displaying a book, providing a brief summary, reading a short excerpt, and giving a personal endorsement of the book. These books were then displayed in the front of the classroom during reading time and were often selected by students during the same class period.

The researcher's observation journal notes that Group 1 initially had low participation in reading choice novels with about half of the class selecting and reading a book while others looked out the window or spent the reading time browsing for a book to read. In the beginning of the second week, as many as 6 students did not have books to

read on the given reading day and the instructor worked with these students on strategies for selecting a book. By the end of the second week, all students had books and were settling into reading, with many students selecting a new place in the classroom such as the couch, armchairs, or the floor to read more comfortably. The researcher observed students beginning their reading more quickly upon entering class and decreasing the time they took to find their book and get settled throughout the intervention. During the last week of the intervention, the instructor noted that “nearly all students have a go-to book with them” and that students asked if they could read over the holiday break and bring classroom library books home with them (O, December 12, 2017).

The researcher’s observation journal describes Group 2 as taking much less time to establish reading habits during class, perhaps because they began the intervention with the expectation of reading every day, rather than once a week. This difference came about because the researcher observed students struggling to pick up where they left off in their reading from the previous week and having difficulty sustaining focus when reading for an entire class. The instructor observed that students “were surprisingly rapt with attention during book talks” and GoodReads records indicate that students added books to their to-read lists (O, January 18, 2018). Most of the books highlighted in instructor book talks throughout the intervention were taken by students to read. By the second week of the intervention, fewer than two students needed to retrieve a book from another room or needed help getting started in each class meeting. Students varied in their reading of choice books outside of class, but in class reading participation was high across both groups.

**Shared text participation.** Students were assigned nightly reading in a shared

text, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. This book is a young adult novel written for and about high school students and is similar to the texts students selected for themselves in that it is a coming of age novel with an adolescent narrator. However, unlike student-selected texts, assignments related to this book were graded. In Group 1, one student was often absent and behind in the assigned reading as a result of ongoing health issues and one student infrequently completed the assigned reading citing too much homework in other classes. Except for these cases, students in Group 1 demonstrated high levels of participation in reading the shared text through participation in class discussions and performance on short quizzes. In Group 2, two students did not take at least one of the reading quizzes and chose not to take a make-up quiz. Except for these cases, all students in Group 2 demonstrated high levels of participation in reading the shared text through participation in class discussions and performance on short quizzes. The researcher's observation journal notes that on two occasions, students discussed their enjoyment of the book. A student who initially said she preferred the class's previous reading assignment decided she enjoyed the book after she finished it.

**Reading Notebook participation.** Students maintained a Reading Notebook section of their online notebooks throughout the intervention in which they responded to six journal prompts: three journal prompts were specifically about *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* and three of the journal prompts could be applied to the shared text or students' self-selected books. Students were aware that the instructor would read their responses and that they would not be graded on the content of the response. In Group 1, all students completed at least half of the writing prompts with an

average response rate of 5 of the 6 writing prompts. In Group 2, most students completed all of the prompts, averaging a response rate of 5.5 of the 6 writing prompts.

### **Fidelity of Implementation: A Summary**

For fidelity of implementation to be met, the intervention must generally adhere to the program design and students must participate in reading and responding to young adult literature. Researcher observations indicate that the program was implemented as designed, with one shift made in the distribution of time allotted for reading. This shift did not affect the total time students were given for reading. Student attendance, participation rates in reading, class discussions, and online Reading Notebooks, demonstrate a high level of participant responsiveness for all but one participating student. Overall, fidelity of implementation was maintained for the intervention.

### **Student Stress and Anxiety**

The first research question focused on students' perceived stress and anxiety in response to reading young adult literature. To best understand student experiences of stress and anxiety, data was collected and analyzed from the researcher's daily observations, student survey responses before and after the intervention, student focus group responses, and student Reading Notebook responses.

### **Observed Stress and Anxiety**

The researcher noted that students expressed stress and anxiety about events both related and unrelated to coursework throughout the intervention. Students in Group 2 asked multiple questions about how many words or sentences were expected in their Reading Notebooks, which may demonstrate an anxiety about getting the answer right and meeting the instructor expectation. Additionally, students took midterm exams in

between Group 1 completing the intervention and Group 2 completing the intervention. Both groups expressed stress and anxiety over midterm preparation and the wait to receive grades, though students did not take a midterm in English classes. Finally, the school experienced the sudden loss of a leader in the community in early January, an event that was impactful for many students. Increased anxiety was observed in Group 2 during this time, but did not affect students' participation or observed engagement in daily reading.

The researcher's observations suggest that students found reading, especially self-selected novels, to be a relaxing activity. After two weeks of students in Group 1 reading self-selected books, the researcher wrote,

Students were generally excited to read at the beginning of class and supportive of the change to daily reading. One student remarked that it was "calm and peaceful" to read during class. (O, December 4, 2017)

The next week the instructor wrote,

I observed a relaxed nature in students both in posture – sitting on the couch, putting feet up on chairs, sitting on the floor and leaning back into the wall – and in expression – repeatedly telling me how much they enjoyed reading or remarking "oh good, we're reading!" (O, December 11, 2017)

These observations suggest that the experience of reading self-selected young adult literature was either not stress- and anxiety-inducing or momentarily relieved students' stress and anxiety.

### **Self-Reported Stress and Anxiety**

Student stress and anxiety was measured using quantitative survey data as well as

students' responses in focus groups and to Reading Notebook writing prompts. The quantitative data was analyzed through comparisons of Group 1 and Group 2, paired sample *t* tests, and independent sample *t* tests. Qualitative data was analyzed using emergent thematic coding.

**Adapted Adolescent Stress Questionnaire – Revised (ASQ-R).** The ASQ-R measures sources of student stress across various aspects of respondents' lives. Survey items related to students' personal lives with family and peers were eliminated to preserve student privacy and focus data on academic and school-related sources of stress. Participants were asked to rank various academic situations (e.g. getting along with teachers, keeping up with schoolwork) on a 5-point scale from 1 (not at all stressful) to 5 (quite stressful).

The Group 1 pre-measure of the adapted ASQ-R total ranged from 10 to 35, and the Group 1 post-measure ASQ-R total score ranged from 10 to 36, with 45 being the highest possible score. In Group 1, 6 students reduced their stress, 4 students showed no change, and 3 students increased their stress. The Group 2 pre-measure of the adapted ASQ-R total ranged from 17 to 37, and the Group 2 post-measure ASQ-R total score ranged from 15 to 34. In Group 2, 6 students reduced their stress and 5 students increased their stress.

To determine whether the intervention had a significant effect on student stress, the researcher compared pre-and post-intervention adapted ASQ-R scores for both Group 1 and Group 2 using a paired sample *t* test. The researcher also compared the change in stress in Group 1 from T1 to T2, during which Group 1 completed the intervention, to the change in stress in Group 2 from T1 to T2 during which time Group 2 served as a control

Table 5.1

*Means and t Tests for Group 1 and Group 2 Pre- and Post-Measures by Construct*

Construct		Pre-measure		Post-measure		Paired sample <i>t</i> test	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Stress	Group 1	23.54	8.02	22.54	8.14	.667	.518
	Group 2	26.36	5.75	26.82	6.51	-.264	.797
Anxiety	Group 1	8.08	5.99	8.08	6.40	.000	1.000
	Group 2	8.73	5.41	7.18	2.99	1.111	.292
Mastery approach orientation	Group 1	27.00	2.71	25.77	3.83	1.060	.310
	Group 2	26.00	41.5	25.55	4.46	.544	.598
Performance approach orientation	Group 1	10.31	3.40	9.38	3.28	1.282	.224
	Group 2	9.27	2.83	10.00	3.32	-.733	.480
Performance avoidance orientation	Group 1	11.38	6.98	11.69	6.76	-.391	.703
	Group 2	9.55	4.25	8.82	3.57	.702	.499
Perceived self-determination	Group 1	35.62	11.66	40.46	13.12	-1.421	.181
	Group 2	32.18	13.70	31.09	10.44	.435	.673
Fear of failure	Group 1	1.23	5.22	0.46	5.62	.636	.537
	Group 2	0.18	4.02	1.18	3.52	-1.009	.337
Academic self-handicapping	Group 1	4.46	1.76	4.62	1.76	-3.41	.739
	Group 2	3.73	0.79	4.82	1.78	-2.782	.019

Table 5.2

*Means of Change and t Tests for Group 1 and Group 2 from Time 1 to Time 2*

Construct	Group 1		Group 2		Independent samples <i>t</i> test	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Stress	-1.00	5.42	1.82	4.85	-1.331	.197
Anxiety	0.00	3.65	2.00	4.63	-1.184	.249
Mastery approach orientation	-1.23	4.19	0.27	2.76	-1.017	.320
Performance approach orientation	-0.92	2.60	-0.36	3.26	.468	.645
Performance avoidance orientation	0.31	2.84	0.73	2.83	-3.61	.721
Perceived self-determination	4.85	12.29	2.55	11.11	4.77	.638
Fear of failure	-0.77	4.36	2.27	2.69	-2.009	.057
Academic self-handicapping	0.15	1.63	-0.45	1.37	.981	.337



group using an independent samples  $t$  test. Results of both  $t$  tests are reported in Table 5.1 and 5.2. Despite not demonstrating significance, the raw data suggest a trend that students who participated in the intervention experienced slightly decreased stress, while students who did not participate in the intervention over the same time period experienced increased stress. This finding may warrant repeating the study with a larger sample to further investigate these results.

**Generalized Anxiety Disorder – 7 item scale (GAD-7).** The GAD-7 measures student anxiety. Participants were asked to rate how often in the previous two weeks they were bothered by various problems indicative of anxiety (e.g. feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge; not being able to stop or control worrying). The 4-point scale rates frequency from 0 (not at all) to 3 (every day).

In Group 1, the pre-measure GAD-7 total ranged from 1 to 21, and the post-measure GAD-7 total score ranged from 0 to 20, with 21 being the highest possible score. During the intervention, 8 students decreased their anxiety, 2 students showed no change, and 3 students increased their anxiety. In Group 2, the pre-measure GAD-7 total ranged from 1 to 17, and the post-measure GAD-7 total ranged from 3 to 11. During the intervention, 6 students decreased their anxiety and 5 students increased their anxiety.

To determine whether the intervention had a significant effect on student anxiety, the researcher compared pre-and post-intervention GAD-7 scores for both Group 1 and Group 2 using a paired sample  $t$  test. The researcher also compared the change in anxiety in Group 1 from T1 to T2, during which Group 1 completed the intervention, to the change in anxiety in Group 2 from T1 to T2 during which time Group 2 served as a control group using an independent samples  $t$  test. Results of both  $t$  tests are reported in

Table 5.1 and 5.2. Again, while this finding does not demonstrate significance, the raw data suggest that students who participated in the intervention experienced no change in anxiety while students who did not participate in the intervention over the same time period experienced increased anxiety. The direction of change is consistent with the hypothesis of the study and may warrant further study with a larger sample.

**Student responses regarding stress and anxiety.** In focus groups, participants discussed the effect of reading young adult literature on their stress and anxiety. These discussions included a consideration of the conditions and factors related to reading that create stress and anxiety and those that relieve stress and anxiety. Additionally, some student responses to writing prompts in the Reading Notebook addressed the effect of reading YA literature on stress and anxiety.

***Stressful aspects of reading.*** Students attributed stress and anxiety to reading when it was assigned as homework with a due date or when there was additional graded work attached to the reading. Kate said,

Reading outside of class for me is kind of stressful...I just read a lot slower than most people so that kind of [makes me think] like oh, am I going to be able to fit this in? Can I do it tomorrow morning? How am I going to plan it out if I have more homework? So that gives me anxiety. (FG)

Leah had a similar reaction to required reading, saying, “I’ll be thinking as I am reading it I don’t want to read this book and I get more stressed out because I actually need to read it for class” (FG).

Other students shared similar thoughts on written work assigned with required reading. One participant shared, “It puts me on edge and like ugh, I have to think and I

have to look back at my book and it's stressing me out because I feel like I need to like craft a perfect response” (Hope, FG). An emphasis on writing the correct response was echoed by another participant who said “I feel like I need to look back and like, remember the exact quote that person said to make sure I actually get it right. So that part is stressful” (Cecile, FG). Sometimes, the association of reading with homework evokes a stress response in students, as in the participant who shared, “I’ve never looked at homework and said ‘wow, this isn’t stressful.’ Homework and studying is stressful” (Gabby, FG).

Worrying about how the reading will be applied later was also a student concern, especially when the assigned reading is perceived as difficult to comprehend. Alana said, “if we’re reading for a quiz, a test, something that we’re going to be graded on, I feel like reading, at least for me, isn’t that relaxing because...I’m just like stressed out about understanding it” (FG). Kelsey added, “when we read for a school book...I get a little stressed or like uneasy about what to pay attention to more than other things, for example, what our writing prompt is going to be about” (FG).

Students discussed the ways in which reading for homework is stressful without differentiating between the types of reading assigned. However, a theme of difficulty understanding the reading as a stressful factor emerged, as in the case of Catherine who said, “in Antigone [a Greek tragedy, required reading in 9<sup>th</sup> grade English], you look at the sentence and you’re like I don’t know what that means and I don’t know what that means” (FG). Another student added, “those books *do* stress me out” (Kelsey, FG). Students agreed that young adult literature was easier to read than “old books” (Hope, FG) because of the mental effort required in reading classics or books from the canon.

Mia's experience of reading traditional classroom texts is that "not only are you thinking about what's going in the book, you're also thinking I don't even know these words" (FG). This was contrasted with the experience of reading a particular young adult book wherein "if you don't know a word...you can read the sentence and kind of figure it out" (Catherine, FG). It follows that students found young adult literature to be less stress-inducing in at least the sense that it is more easily comprehensible.

***Calming aspects of reading.*** Students reported that reading during class time was a calming or relaxing activity. Students referred to the daily reading time as "a really chill time of day for me" (Hope, FG) and as a time that "kind of calms me down" (Desiree, FG). Cecile said, "for reading independently I usually look forward to it because it feels like you're starting on a relaxing note because you get to read your books" (FG). Students consistently referred to reading time in class as a stress- and anxiety-reliever. As Catherine put it, "I want to just read because you start reading and it's like yeah, this is relaxing, like relieving" (FG).

The freedom to choose a book to read and to pace one's own reading was frequently cited as an element of reading for stress relief. Leah said, "for a book to calm me down it has to be something that I truly like" (FG). Other students agreed, saying "if it's something that I just want to read for fun and I like it, I feel a lot more relaxed" (Alana, FG) and "if it's free choice then I am just kind of chilled out" (Kate, FG).

Students also shared that reading was effective in reducing their stress and anxiety because of the break it offered from the school day or other homework. Participants described the reading time as a "detox" (Kate, FG) and "a time to step back" (Alana, FG) when compared to other classes. One participant described her day as "class class class"

and the class time provided for reading as “a time to sit back and read” (Gabby, FG).

Cecile said,

I like doing it cause it's just like a time, cause I feel like in all of the other classes you'll always like write stuff down on your Surface [laptop] and it's always...fast-paced I guess so I feel like if we read it just gives you a minute to just like slow down for a second. (FG)

Similarly, Hope stated:

I have like 3-4 hours of homework a day usually, so I get home and I do like one assignment and I'm like [smiling] oh reading, it's like my buffer between one assignment and the next, it's like my chill time. (FG)

Even when reading for homework purposes, students saw benefits of reading for their well-being. Some students said that they became absorbed by the characters and the story in the shared text, relieving some stress and anxiety. Mia described feeling like she “enter[s] into their world sometimes so then I feel like I am living their life and it takes my stress away” (FG). Kelsey added,

I feel like it does help to kind of soothe me because a lot happens in my life and everyone else's and I feel like it's good to see that in a book that the character may have some of the same problems as you. (FG)

Students wrote in their Reading Notebooks about the effect they perceived specific books having on their stress and overall outlook. After reading *The Fault in Our Stars*, Nicole wrote that the book showed her “how important it is to live in the present” and that she began “notic[ing] myself enjoying life more” (RN). The main character in Rachel’s book, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, inspired her to write “I am

blessed to be mentally healthy and have good, kind friends who will support me through my struggles” (RN).

### **Other Noncognitive Factors Related to Stress and Anxiety**

The first research question focuses on *how* stress and anxiety might be reduced by the intervention. Investigating this question requires a consideration of noncognitive factors that may be related to experiences of and coping mechanisms related to stress and anxiety and that may have been affected by the intervention. This section reports findings of measures of noncognitive factors related to stress and anxiety.

**Achievement goal orientation.** Achievement goal orientation was measured using the Perception of Classroom Goal Structures subscale of the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS). Participants were asked to rate belief statements that reflected mastery orientation goals, performance approach goals, and performance avoidance goals. Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (very true).

**Mastery goal orientation.** In Group 1, the pre-measure mastery goal orientation total ranged from 21 to 30, and the post-measure mastery goal orientation total ranged from 20 to 30, with 6 being the lowest possible score and 30 being the highest possible score. During the intervention, 4 students increased their perception of the class as mastery goal oriented, 4 students showed no change, and 5 students decreased their perception of the class as mastery goal oriented. In Group 2, the pre-measure perception of mastery goal orientation total ranged from 17 to 30, and the post-measure perception of mastery goal orientation total ranged from 16 to 30. During the intervention, 2 students increased their perception of the class as mastery goal oriented, 6 students showed no change, and 3 students decreased their perception of the class as mastery goal oriented.

To determine whether the intervention had a significant effect on students' perception of the class' mastery goals, the researcher compared pre- and post-intervention scores for both Group 1 and Group 2 using a paired sample  $t$  test. The researcher also compared the change in perceived mastery goal orientation in Group 1 from T1 to T2, during which Group 1 completed the intervention, to the change in perceived mastery goal orientation in Group 2 from T1 to T2 during which time Group 2 served as a control group using an independent samples  $t$  test. Results of both  $t$  tests are reported in Table 5.1 and 5.2. While these findings do not demonstrate significance, the raw data are inconsistent with the hypothesis. Repeating the study with a larger sample may clarify these results.

***Performance approach goal orientation.*** In Group 1, the pre-measure performance approach goal orientation total ranged from 4 to 15, and the post-measure performance approach goal orientation total ranged from 3 to 15, with 3 being the lowest possible score and 15 being the highest possible score. During the intervention, 4 students increased their perception of the class as performance approach goal oriented, 2 students showed no change, and 7 students decreased their perception of the class as performance approach goal oriented. In Group 2, the pre-measure perception of performance approach goal orientation total ranged from 4 to 15, and the post-measure perception of performance approach goal orientation total ranged from 4 to 15. During the intervention, 8 students increased their perception of the class as performance approach goal oriented, 1 student showed no change, and 2 students decreased their perception of the class as performance approach goal oriented.

To determine whether the intervention had a significant effect on students'

perception of the class' performance approach goals, the researcher compared pre- and post-intervention scores for both Group 1 and Group 2 using a paired sample  $t$  test. The researcher also compared the change in perception of performance approach goal orientation in Group 1 from T1 to T2, during which Group 1 completed the intervention, to the change in perception of performance approach goal orientation in Group 2 from T1 to T2 during which time Group 2 served as a control group using an independent samples  $t$  test. Results of both  $t$  tests are reported in Table 5.1 and 5.2. ***Performance***

***avoidance goal orientation.*** In Group 1, the pre-measure performance avoidance goal orientation total ranged from 5 to 25, and the post-measure performance avoidance goal orientation total ranged from 5 to 25, with 5 being the lowest possible score and 25 being the highest possible score. During the intervention, 4 students increased their perception of the class as performance avoidance goal oriented, 7 students showed no change, and 2 students decreased their perception of the class as performance avoidance goal oriented. In Group 2, the pre-measure perception of performance avoidance goal orientation total ranged from 5 to 18, and the post-measure perception performance avoidance goal orientation total ranged from 5 to 15. During the intervention, 4 students increased their perception of the class as performance avoidance goal oriented, 4 students showed no change, and 3 students decreased their perception of the class as performance avoidance goal oriented.

To determine whether the intervention had a significant effect on students' perception of the class' performance avoidance goals, the researcher compared pre- and post-intervention scores for both Group 1 and Group 2 using a paired sample  $t$  test. The researcher also compared the change in perceived performance avoidance goal



orientation in Group 1 from T1 to T2, during which Group 1 completed the intervention, to the change in perceived performance avoidance goal orientation in Group 2 from T1 to T2 during which time Group 2 served as a control group using an independent samples  $t$  test. Results of both  $t$  tests are reported in Table 5.1 and 5.2.

**Perceived self-determination.** Perceived self-determination was measured by the Perceived Self-Determination scale. Participants were asked to rate statements about the level of volition, choice, and perception of agency they experience in class. Items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 7 (very much true).

In Group 1, the pre-measure self-determination total ranged from 22 to 60, and the post-measure perceived self-determination total score ranged from 21 to 57, with 63 being the highest possible score. During the intervention, 8 students increased their self-determination, 1 student showed no change, and 4 students decreased their self-determination. In Group 2, the pre-measure perceived self-determination total ranged from 17 to 63, and the post-measure perceived self-determination total ranged from 21 to 56. During the intervention, 4 students increased their self-determination and 7 students decreased their self-determination.

To determine whether the intervention had a significant effect on students' perceived self-determination, the researcher compared pre-and post-intervention scores for both Group 1 and Group 2 using a paired sample  $t$  test. The researcher also compared the change in perceived self-determination in Group 1 from T1 to T2, during which Group 1 completed the intervention, to the change in perceived self-determination in Group 2 from T1 to T2 during which time Group 2 served as a control group using an independent samples  $t$  test. Results of both  $t$  tests are reported in Table 5.1 and 5.2.

Despite not demonstrating significance, the raw data suggest that students in Group 1 experienced a modest increase in self-determination during the intervention. Further, the students who participated in the intervention increased in self-determination by nearly twice as much as the students who did not participate in the intervention during the same time period. Conducting a similar study with a larger sample is warranted to clarify whether an association exists between the intervention and self-determination.

**Fear of failure.** Fear of failure was measured by selected items from the Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory – Short Form (PFAI). The items were selected from subscales that measured fears of devaluing one's self-estimate, of having an uncertain future, and of the effect of one's failure on important others. Participants were asked to rate statements about failure on a 5-point scale from -2 (do not believe at all) to +2 (believe 100% of the time).

In Group 1, the pre-measure adapted PFAI total ranged from -8 to 9, and the post-measure adapted PFAI total score ranged from -9 to 9, with 10 being the highest possible score. During the intervention, 5 students decreased their fear of failure, 1 showed no change, and 7 students increased their fear of failure. In Group 2, the pre-measure adapted PFAI total ranged from -8 to 6, and the post-measure adapted PFAI total ranged from -5 to 6. During the intervention, 3 students decreased their fear of failure, 3 students showed no change, and 5 students increased their fear of failure.

To determine whether the intervention had a significant effect on students' fear of failure, the researcher compared pre-and post-intervention adapted PFAI scores for both Group 1 and Group 2 using a paired sample *t* test. The researcher also compared the change in fear of failure in Group 1 from T1 to T2, during which Group 1 completed the

intervention, to the change in fear of failure in Group 2 from T1 to T2 during which time Group 2 served as a control group using an independent samples  $t$  test. Results of both  $t$  tests are reported in Table 5.1 and 5.2. The result of the independent samples  $t$  test is approaching significance which suggests that for Group 1, the intervention may have mitigated the increase in fear of failure that Group 2 demonstrated. Further research with a larger sample may clarify this finding.

**Academic self-handicapping.** Academic self-handicapping was measured using selected items from the Academic Self-Handicapping-Revised (ASH-R) scale. Participants were asked to rate scenarios of academic self-handicapping on a 5-point scale from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (very true). The scenarios addressed procrastination, distractions, and purposeful lack of effort.

In Group 1, the pre-measure adapted ASH-R total ranged from 3 to 9, and the post-measure adapted ASH-R total score ranged from 3 to 9, with 15 being the highest possible score. During the intervention, 4 students decreased their academic self-handicapping, 5 students showed no change, and 4 students increased their academic self-handicapping. In Group 2, the pre-measure adapted ASH-R total ranged from 3 to 5, and the post-measure adapted ASH-R total ranged from 3 to 8. During the intervention, 6 students showed no change and 5 students increased their academic self-handicapping.

To determine whether the intervention had a significant effect on students' academic self-handicapping, the researcher compared pre-and post-intervention adapted ASH-R scores for both Group 1 and Group 2 using a paired sample  $t$  test. There was a significant difference between the Group 2 adapted ASH-R pre-measure and post-measure, however the test reveals that students in this group increased their academic

self-handicapping. This finding is inconsistent with the hypothesis and may be clarified with additional research using a larger sample. It is not immediately clear what factors contributed to this effect occurred in Group 2. The researcher also compared the change in academic self-handicapping in Group 1 from T1 to T2, during which Group 1 completed the intervention, to the change in academic self-handicapping in Group 2 from T1 to T2 during which time Group 2 served as a control group using an independent samples *t* test. Results of both *t* tests are reported in Table 5.1 and 5.2.

### **Student Perceptions of Reading Young Adult Literature**

The first research question aims to investigate how stress and anxiety may be affected by the reading intervention and the second research question considers student experiences in the intervention. Both questions were addressed in student responses in focus groups. Student comments in the focus groups were analyzed to answer both the question of the process by which stress and anxiety may have been affected and how students experienced the reading intervention.

#### **Autonomy**

Students consistently remarked on the value and importance of autonomy in their book selection and reading pace. They identified ways that this freedom affected their stress and anxiety in addition to the ways that their autonomy affected their reading pace and their enjoyment of reading. A student interaction in a focus group exemplifies the value students placed on autonomy as Jillian discussed choosing to read a classic novel in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade:

Jillian: Last year we all got to pick a choice book [for summer reading] and I read *The Great Gatsby* and that was like the best book I've ever read because I guess I

just like those books and it was like, I just like started it in the right mind set and it made it easier to finish.

Kate: Because you have a choice.

Hope: You feel more compelled to read it.

Cecile: With like *The Great Gatsby* that was your choice book.

Jillian: And that was my favorite book. (FG)

**Effects on stress and anxiety.** Students frequently commented on the value of choice in their reading and directly or indirectly noted the effect that this choice had on their stress and anxiety. Leah said, “If it’s something that I just want to read for fun and I like it, I feel a lot more relaxed” (FG). Several students agreed with this comment that relaxation was a more realistic expectation of self-selected novels rather than those that had been assigned in school. Hope said, “If it’s free choice then I am just kind of chilled out and I can just stop whenever I want, I can think about whatever I want, I can be in my own place” (FG). These comments suggest that the freedom to select the book and to read separate from teacher expectations are as important to students as the reading itself with regard to stress and anxiety. Another student echoed a similar sentiment, saying:

When I'm reading a free choice book it's more like I can be in my own place and I don't have to be worried about annotations, I can just read it and I can like make my own inferences about why someone did this or why one character did this versus another decision and just kind of personalize it. (Gabby, FG).

**Effect of autonomy on pacing.** Students also commented on the value of choice in the pacing of their reading of self-selected novels. Choosing when to read and, notably, when not to read was valued by several students. Kate said, “with a free choice book you

can choose to stop reading it.” (FG). Similarly, Cecile appreciated that “with my reading by myself book it’s kind of like you can take your own pace” (FG). Despite having the freedom to stop reading, some students found themselves reading more often. Mia said, “sometimes if you're like really into the book, your free choice book, you'll like binge read it and understand it more because you just like read it all in one day” (FG). Students did not explicitly state a connection between reading at their own pace and their perceived stress and anxiety, but as noted earlier, found teacher-paced reading to be stressful or anxiety-inducing.

**Effect of autonomy on enjoyment.** Student comments also reflected an enjoyment of reading which they perceived as related to their autonomy in selecting books. Comparing required reading to self-selected texts, one student commented, “I personally like free choice books better because it feels you have a personal connection with the book that you choose for yourself” (Desiree, FG). One student identified pleasure as a goal of reading, saying “I feel like with a book that I want to read, I read it more for enjoyment” (Leah, FG). Several students agreed with this statement, connecting their enjoyment of a book to whether they experienced autonomy in the selection of the book. As one student put it, “I also really liked my free choice book because I picked it” (Hope, FG). Students did not explicitly state a connection between enjoying a book and their stress and anxiety. However, engaging in an enjoyable leisure activity may have a positive effect on students’ stress and anxiety (Caldwell, 2005).

**Effects of autonomy on student identity as readers.** After the intervention, students expressed ideas about themselves as readers and the types of books they prefer to read. Students remarked on a variety of strategies that they used to select books for

themselves. Kate said,

I watched [a movie] and then I really liked it and so I was like why don't I actually read it. And then I read *Insurgent*...and then *Allegiant* after that. And, I just like the dystopian novels so I looked more into getting those. (FG)

Several students employed this strategy of selecting books based on movies that they had enjoyed or expected to enjoy. Others identified their reading interests by genre or plot.

Kelsey said "I like a lot of mystery and suspense and drama and just like a lot happening so I feel that there's not any dull place, slowing down. I like an exciting book" (FG).

Several students remarked that they trusted the recommendations of friends and those of the researcher. One student said, "if someone has told me it's good I'll maybe read a little bit of it and then decide if I like it" (Emily, FG). Student reflections on their choices and strategies suggest that having autonomy in one's reading life develops an awareness of the self as a reader.

### **Student Perspective-taking through Reading Young Adult Literature**

The second research question focused on how students experienced the reading of young adult literature. A finding related to this research question was the widespread experience of considering and taking the perspective of another person through the process of reading. Researcher observations and student responses in focus groups and Reading Notebooks reveal students engaging in perspective-taking in five ways: (1) recognizing others' challenges, (2) recognizing others' strategies for confronting challenges, (3) evaluating others' strategies for confronting challenges, (4) expressing empathy for others' challenges, and (5) relating others' experiences to one's self. These themes were identified by the researcher through an inductive approach to the qualitative

data; however, these themes have echoes of Hynes and Hynes-Berry's (2012) four-stage biblio/poetry therapy model of recognition, examination, juxtaposition, and application to self.

### **Recognizing Others' Challenges**

Most students recognized the challenges that the characters in the shared text or in their self-selected book were facing. Students were able to recognize these challenges very early on in their reading. Jillian, who had just started *Challenger Deep* remarked that her book was “about this kid named Caden who has severe stress and anxiety” (FG). After reading the first chapters of *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, Eve wrote that the main character “is going through bigger problems than the normal teenager. He knows he is poor, but he has dreams” (RN). Similarly, Kate wrote, “If you live in a certain neighborhood that has a bad rep, then you can automatically have the same rep. It can make you feel (sic) lower than other people” (RN). Some students alluded to the particular challenges of adolescence. Rachel wrote, “Junior has a hard life, and additionally, he has to deal with the fact that he is a teenager – and that is hard too” (RN).

Students also noticed the effect that these challenges had on a given character's identity. One student wrote, “at school, the kids do not know the struggles of living on a reservation and just listen to the harsh stereotypes, which does not help Junior's self-confidence at all” (Mia, RN). Another student wrote, “Living on a reservation makes Junior hate himself and feel worthless all the time – especially at school” (Desiree, RN). Erin wrote, “Throughout the first few pages I felt that Junior has a hard time accepting who he is and his relationship with his family... Junior has a few disabilities and is self-



deprecating of himself” (Erin, RN). These students are reacting to the effect of the character’s difficult circumstances on his identity formation and self-concept.

At times, students were able to connect an individual character’s challenges to larger social issues. Natalie wrote, “Junior has to face racism, self-deprecation, poverty, and his own health. I feel like he has almost the whole world against him. Right now nothing is going his way” (RN). Some students saw the book itself as a reflection of the challenges others experience due to lack of representation. After beginning the book, Leah noted, “There aren’t many books about Native American teens during modern times” (RN).

### **Recognizing Others’ Strategies**

Beyond identifying the challenges that the characters face, students also recognized the strategies that these characters use to address their struggles. Many of these strategies were concrete actions that characters took to overcome difficulty. One student wrote, “Junior manage [sic] difficulty, stress, or unfair situations buy [sic] drawing out his emotions in his diary. Whenever he feels angry at something whether it is unfair or difficult he writes about it and draws out his image of the situation” (Cecile, RN). Similarly, Natalie wrote, “in stressful situations Junior makes fun of them with his cartoons and drawings to understand the world more and make fun of the event to make himself feel better” (RN). These comments reflect an understanding of how and why these strategies are employed by the character.

Some students noticed how a character’s strategies might evolve in different situations or as the character grows. Kate wrote, “Junior mostly just brushes off [sic] what people say at the end of the book. In the beginning he was much more ‘you said

something about me you will suffer” (RN). Another student wrote, “Junior handles his stress by leaning on others...and he learns to value his friendships so he can have people by his side” (Erin, RN). Student responses reflect an understanding of the malleability of one’s ability to address challenges and the effect that time and experience have on one’s use of various strategies.

Students also identified acceptance as a strategy that characters use to address difficulties. Charlotte wrote, “I think [Junior] manages [difficult situations] by accepting the fact that there will always be things like that” (RN). Another student wrote, “[Junior] realizes that sometimes he has to think about what is best for himself and not everyone else. He makes decisions for himself and understands the consequences and results that come from his decisions” (Desiree, RN).

### **Evaluating Others’ Strategies**

Many students reflected on the characters’ strategies for overcoming difficulty and evaluated the strategies for effectiveness and for their effect on others. One student noted that a character electing to transfer schools provided him with “better life opportunities” (Hope, RN).

Another student referred to the new school as “the best choice for [him]” (Madeline, RN). These comments reveal students evaluating the character’s strategies for overcoming a difficult situation. The researcher noted students evaluating characters’ strategies:

Without my directing students to this conclusion, they determine that Junior grows to appreciate the people and place that have made him who he is, and this allows him to accept himself. They discuss the last line of the book, “they don’t keep score,” as meaning that they don’t judge each other or themselves. (O,

December 7, 2017)

Several students commented on choices that they believed a character should or should not make. One student advised that the main character of the shared text “needs to be there for his best friend as his dad abuses him” (Gabby, RN). This comment reflects the student’s understanding of the appropriate action for the difficult situation. Similarly, reacting to the end of a young adult novel, Kate said,

I was just like she needs to have some big ending and...I’m like you gave up.

Like she was so sassy, and I was like you’ve got this and then she was just like oh. And I was like what?! Like, you better show stop them all [get everyone’s attention]!” (FG).

This comment reflects both engagement as a reader who has been disappointed in the ending of a book and an evaluation of how the character chose to confront her challenges.

Others observed strategies that were ineffective or otherwise harmful to the character. Asha wrote that the main character of the shared novel “puts himself down a lot and that is not good” (RN). Similarly, another student wrote “after Roger made a racist comment about Junior, Junior punched him right in the face, which probably wasn’t the best way to handle the situation” (Mia, RN). Another student wrote, “he should have handled the situation better by not using violence to express how he is feeling (Gianna, RN). These comments make clear value statements regarding the success of the character’s strategies. Another student evaluated the strategies of a character in her self-selected book and noted “[she] does not manage situations well. She hides them from her friends and family” (Gabby, RN). This comment suggests that students engage in evaluation of character strategies for overcoming difficulty even when reading

independently.

### **Empathy for Others' Challenges**

Student reactions to both their self-selected texts and the shared text reveal empathy toward characters facing difficult situations. Students expressed a range of empathetic responses to characters' challenges. Jillian said that her main character's anxiety "makes me so worried for him" (FG). A student reacting to the challenges faced by the main character in the shared text wrote, "some parts made me upset, like when he was saying how he thinks he is ugly" (Gabby, RN). Another student wrote, "I feel bad for him because he is so down on himself and explains how he goes hungry and had to kill his dog" (Rebecca, RN). These reactions reflect students' empathy toward the character and his problems. Kelsey also saw the value in developing empathy through fiction reading:

I do think that the book is really eye-opening and helps you to understand someone's life whom [sic] lives this way. I get a little frustrated and feel something great needs to happen to Junior and his life. (RN)

Students also expressed empathy by noting the unfairness of the circumstances that the characters in the shared text and their self-selected texts were facing. Nicole wrote, "In *The Fault In Our Stars*, Hazel is diagnosed with cancer. This situation is difficult, stressful, and unfair" (RN). In response to the shared text, another student wrote, "I feel bad for Junior because he didn't ask for this life but he is making it work the best he can" (Desiree, RN). Similarly, Desiree shared "He's kind of heartbreaking because he didn't do anything to deserve the treatment he's getting" (RN). Some students also expressed a desire to help the character. Emily wrote, "I want to help him and help his

family and friends” (RN).

Student responses also reflected empathy for those beyond the characters in the book who experience racism and racist stereotypes as the character in the shared text does. Gabby wrote, “In society, we use many racial slurs and different racial mascots and we shouldn’t” (RN). This comment reflects both awareness and a moral judgment. Mia wrote, “I am shocked at how poor and miserable the lives of the Indians were and ashamed and embarrassed by how the whites treated the Indians” (RN). At a later date she added,

Through Junior, I have gotten a better understanding of the struggles that [Native-American Indians] face daily and how terribly they were treated and all the unfair misconceptions. Hearing this story through an Indian also brought even more sympathy in my opinion, because one could see how much the stereotypes affected him. (Mia, RN)

Students also reacted to other difficult circumstances that the characters in their self-selected texts and the shared texts faced. One student wrote

I have a new perspective on trauma...I have realized that other people have a lot of pain even if they don't share. Maybe the pain inside them cause [sic] them to become a bully or nerd or whatever they appear to be. (Jillian, RN)

Many students commented that they saw others’ challenges in new ways. Cecile wrote, “I have gotten a new perspective on how it feels to be poor and not sharing it and hiding it from everybody” (RN). Another student wrote,

*Part-time Indian* has helped me understand how people that are new would feel...I understood more why you shouldn’t be biased towards someone because

of how they look because you never know what they are going through or what their life is like at home. (Desiree, RN)

### **Relating to One's Self**

Student comments and written reflections also revealed students relating to the challenges and strategies of characters in both self-selected texts and the shared text. Students identified with various aspects of these texts including concerns about attending a new school, having a split identity, experiencing stereotypes, feeling a range of emotions, and facing challenges. Student responses also revealed a desire to relate to the characters in their reading.

**Relating to new school concerns.** Many students identified with the struggles experienced by the main character in the shared text after he chooses to attend a new school. Cecile wrote about transferring to All Saints Academy: “I had the same worries and conflicts. Some of my friends were upset I was leaving [Sacred Heart], just like Rowdy” (RN). Another student wrote, “I understand Junior a little because I left all my friends that I had known for years when I came to [All Saints Academy] and leaving them” (RN). Madeline wrote,

I can relate with Junior's conflict when he left the reservation, his old school, and all his friends so that he could go to Reardan. By applying to a new high school I had to leave all my friends. I was the only one from my middle school that is going to [All Saints Academy]. Some of my friends went to the same school. It was a big change but it was a change that I needed to do for me because [All Saints Academy] was the best choice for me. Just like how Reardan was the best choice for Junior. (RN)

**Relating to split identities.** Several students also related to Junior's experience of feeling torn between two places or identities. One student wrote, "I relate to how Junior is split between two places. I am in two friend groups and that can get complicated" (Leah, RN). The researcher observed "students discussed belonging to two different places, families, or cultures and the benefits (belonging to more than one place) and drawbacks (not feeling like they belong in either place)" (O, January 8, 2018). Some students specifically related to Junior's difficulty of identifying as Native-American Indian and attending a majority white school. Eve wrote,

He is really caught in the middle between two worlds, but both worlds treat him like crap. I sometimes feel the same as Junior. I live in Southeast D.C, and it's a totally different environment than Potomac. People think because I live in the "hood" I am uneducated or ghetto. (RN)

The same student later shared,

I feel closest to Junior because of what I am going through now. I am from Southeast DC and I go to school in Potomac. It's a big difference than what I'm used to. Sometimes I feel like I don't belong anywhere. I feel sometimes I act too "white" for one side and the other I don't act "white" enough. (RN)

**Relating to experiencing stereotypes.** Students also reacted to the stereotypes portrayed in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* and related to the experience of feeling stereotyped. Many students noted ways that they feel judged because of where they live or their appearance. One student wrote,

Living in a wealthy part of this country and attending a school in Potomac, one of the wealthiest zip codes in the country, can broadcast the idea that my friends and

I are all spoiled, rich, and incapable of hard work. These stereotypes do not apply to me and most of the people I know. (Rebecca, RN)

Jillian wrote,

Living on a reservation might make Junior feel constricted and unimportant to the world. If I was in Junior's situation, I would. Living in such a wonderful place and looking the way I do, I find people assume I am not intelligent or I am a spoiled brat. When people I don't know imply that, I feel they are not seeing me for who I really am, or even getting to know me first. I feel as if people set stereotypes for me before they even know me and I have to work to change their made up minds, and prove them wrong. (RN)

Several students related to the main character's experience being stereotyped as a racial minority. Leah wrote, "because I am black there will always be stereotypes about who I am" (RN). Hope also related to the shared text because of the stereotypes she has experienced about her cultural identity. She wrote,

This stereotype affects the way I think about myself because it sometimes makes me feel like no matter what grades I get, people will always see me as a try-hard. I know it's all in my own head, but when people start saying these things, they begin to be lodged in your head as well. (RN)

One student reflected on the ways that she had perpetuated stereotypes of others. She wrote, "People always judge people by their appearances instead of getting to know them first. I am guilty of sometimes judging people on their appearance which is not a good thing" (Madeline, RN).

**Relating to emotions.** Students related to the emotions of fictional characters in



both the shared text and self-selected texts. Nicole identified with her character experiencing feelings of joy. She wrote, “I love getting the bittersweet feeling when you realize how much you are going to miss something while still in that moment. I think Hazel gets this feeling multiple times in the book and realizes how amazing life is” (RN). Another student related to the main character in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and reflected on his growth. She wrote,

I feel that I can relate to Junior because he often doubts himself and struggles to lean on others. Sometimes I feel the same way because I worry about what others think of me and when I can’t do something I tend to doubt myself as well. Though, he learns that people in Reardan do care for him even though he may mess up or be different and that is what I try to remind myself. (Erin, RN)

**Relating to strategies for facing challenges.** Students related characters’ strategies for facing challenges to their own strategies for dealing with difficult situations. Abby wrote,

I manage my difficult situations in a similar way as Junior does but instead of drawing, I write. It is my way of dealing with situations that are frustrating and stressful and I think Junior and me are very similar in this way because we both like to escape the world for a while and just think. (RN)

Another student reflected on a strategy she shared with a character in her self-selected text. She wrote, “Similar to Caden, I have to physically move to get through my stress” (RN).

Even in instances in which students used different strategies than the characters, reading still seemed to prompt introspection. One student wrote,

Usually when I am in a stressful situation, sometimes before a game, I tend to keep my feelings to myself rather than voicing them to a coach or parent, or letting others talk to me, unlike [Junior]. Although I know this may not be the best way to calm myself, this is usually how I cope with my stress. (Alana, RN)

This response suggests that the student noticed a difference between her strategies and those of a fictional character and had begun evaluating her strategies for facing challenges.

**A desire to relate.** Several students expressed a preference for relatable characters and storylines. Gabby said, “I really only enjoy realistic fiction...really with teenagers, like people I can relate to” (FG). Another student said, “when you’re reading [*The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks* by E. Lockhart] you’re like oh wait, this actually happened to me” (Charlotte, FG). Some students also recognized the benefits of making personal connections to their reading. Kelsey said,

I feel like it’s good to see that in a book that the character may have like some of the same problems as you and you’re like ok, my life may be crazy but this person’s is like just as crazy or crazier. (FG)

### **Perceived Effects of Perspective-Taking**

Students demonstrated some awareness of their perspective-taking while reading through written responses in their Reading Notebooks. Their responses revealed that examining others’ perspectives in reading positively affected their thinking about themselves and others. One student shared,

Reading *The Journeys of Socrates* has given me a new perspective in that I now understand that one should never take everything for granted, because with a

blink of the eye, so much can be lost and forgotten. The novel has also taught me that second chances in friendships, relationships, or with family can mean so much. I think that was a major takeaway for me, as I have not been very kind with second chances in the past. (Hope, RN)

Hope's comment reflects a willingness to reexamine her own life and actions after reading. Another student wrote, "Reading my choice book has shown me that I do not have to be like everyone else and to take pride in my scars and my differences" (Emily, RN). Students also noted that taking others' perspectives prompted appreciation for their own lives. One student wrote, "[My book] made me understand how important it is to live in the present. After reading that book, I have noticed myself enjoying life more and taking time to realize how thankful I am to live the life I live" (Nicole, RN). Another student shared,

[My character] Julia does not have many of these blessings, which makes me realize that I am one of the extremely fortunate people in this world. I understand things in a different way now because this book has taught me so much about other parts of the world and how other people really life (sic) a tough life. (Rachel, RN)

### **Discussion**

This study aimed to investigate effects of independent reading and shared text reading on the stress and anxiety of female adolescents. While the findings did not demonstrate statistical significance, the intervention may have had several benefits to students' well-being. On average, the raw data reveals that the students in Group 1 experienced decreased stress and students in Group 2 experienced decreased anxiety after

participating in the intervention. Additionally, the raw data indicates that while Group 1 did not show any change in anxiety during the intervention, the delayed treatment group showed an increase in anxiety over the same period. These findings are not statistically significant and further research is needed to understand whether the possible trends within the raw data suggest that reading young adult literature can help students cope with the stress and anxiety of the transition to high school. Ultimately, these results are consistent with the literature in that the findings are inconclusive, but are potentially informative for future research.

Student comments also suggest that reading can be a stress reliever, especially when students are permitted to select their own reading. This relief may be attributed to the reprieve from other, more cognitively demanding work; the escape of an entertaining or compelling story; or the strategies for coping with stress and anxiety exemplified by fictional characters.

The data suggest that reading for pleasure may reduce students' stress and anxiety immediately before and during the activity. Surveys administered weeks apart may not have been timely or sensitive enough to measure these changes with the limited sample size.

One element of the intervention that students identified as important was the freedom of choice given in text selection and reading pace. Students in Group 1 showed an increase in perceived self-determination after the intervention while students in Group 2 did not. Student comments suggest that promoting students' autonomy in this intervention facilitated their enjoyment of reading, the development of their identity as readers, and allowed for conditions in which reading reduced stress and anxiety, even

momentarily. This is consistent with the needs assessment practitioner reflection of the tension students experience between a need for freedom as developing adolescents and the high degree of adult supervision and control in many aspects of their lives.

The findings associated with other noncognitive factors such as achievement goal orientation, fear of failure, and academic self-handicapping suggest that the intervention had little to no effect on these constructs. Even in instances in which the raw data findings suggest the intervention had a deleterious effect, qualitative data did not corroborate this conclusion. One possible explanation for this is that the instruments used to measure these constructs contained broadly worded items. Fredricks and McColskey (2012) question the precision of broadly worded survey items to measure student responses to particular tasks or situations. Reflecting specifically on measuring engagement, the authors note, “For researchers interested in studying how much engagement varies as a function of contextual factors, the general items may not be appropriate” (p. 766). Some of the survey items used in this study may have been too broad to precisely identify potential effects of the intervention.

An additional finding of this study was the ways in which students engaged with the perspectives of others through their reading and made connections to their own lives. These findings suggest that reading about diverse experiences may lead readers to empathetic responses to others’ difficulties and reflections on their own challenges and coping strategies. Thus, in some cases, reading young adult literature may allow students to bridge differences between themselves and others as well as use the experiences of others to think meaningfully about their own beliefs and actions. More research is needed to understand this process and whether engaging with the experiences of others is a form

of escapism and potentially provides a reprieve from one's own stressors and anxieties.

### **Implications for Practice**

The qualitative results from this study suggest that students may benefit from reading young adult literature independently and with a class. Although the findings of the study from quantitative surveys do not demonstrate statistical significance, student responses suggest value in reading. Reading young adult literature can be a tool students use to disconnect from other work and responsibilities and allow a break from daily stressors. It can also, especially in more formalized ways, guide students toward understanding of the experiences of others and the ways in which these experiences can inform students own lives. Teachers may consider making these connections explicit and using students' reading to discuss larger social issues as well as personal decision making and coping strategies.

Another implication of this research is the importance 9<sup>th</sup> grade students place on autonomy and the link they identify between autonomy and enjoyment, engagement, and achievement. Providing students with choice in their reading may be appropriate in other contexts. When possible, teachers may consider building choice into text selection, pacing schedules, writing assignments, and seating arrangements.

This study suggests that implementation of a similar intervention or reading program include time during the school day to read and immediate access to high-interest, popular titles within or in proximity to the classroom. It also suggests that implementing a similar program requires a researcher or instructor who has knowledge of current titles and can make recommendations to student readers. In the absence of a classroom library or a knowledgeable instructor, schools may consider seeking the

expertise of a school librarian and use a mobile book cart. The findings of this study suggest that reading young adult literature in high school settings may be a reasonable approach to addressing issues students face without compromising the objectives of a high school English course.

### **Implications for Research**

Further research might investigate outcomes of reading young adult literature with different populations and conditions. First, additional research might examine the effect of reading age appropriate literature with a larger sample, with male students, or with various grade levels. Additionally, the implementation of this intervention reflects only a small percentage of the school year; as such, future research might consider a longer duration and implement an intervention throughout the school year. Such research should aim to identify any changes in student beliefs or habits as well as consider more immediate measures of stress and anxiety while students read. Researchers might also consider a more holistic approach to reading young adult literature in high schools and embed the activities into a reading period, study hall, or homeroom meeting and shift the reading outside of the academic classroom.

While there are several facets of this study that suggest a need for further research, the qualitative data reveal the value of the student voice in research that seeks to understand adolescents. Students drew powerful conclusions about others, themselves, and their environment through reading and reflecting on young adult literature. Here, student comments and written responses add depth and clarity to ambiguous survey results. The qualitative data deepened or clarified the quantitative data with regard to the student experience of stress, anxiety, and reading. Consistency between themes identified

Table 5.3

*Selected Qualitative Themes and Quantitative Measures Used in Study and Recommended for Future Research*

Qualitative Themes	Quantitative Measures Used in This Study	Authors	Quantitative Measures Appropriate for Future Research	Authors
Reading as stressful	Adolescent Stress Questionnaire (ASQ);	Byrne et al. (2007)		
	Generalized Anxiety Disorder – 7 item scale (GAD-7)	Spitzer et al. (2006)		
Reading as calming	ASQ		Adolescent Coping Orientation for Problem Experiences scale (A-COPE);	Patterson & McCubbin (1987)
	GAD-7		Interpersonal Reactivity Index – Fantasy scale	Davis (1980)
Autonomy	Perceived Self-Determination scale	Reeve (2002)	Emotional Autonomy scale	Steinberg & Silverburg (1986)
			Reading Engagement Inventory (REI)	Wigfield et al., (2008)
Recognizing others' challenges			IRI – Perspective-taking scale	Davis (1980)
Recognizing others' strategies			IRI – Perspective-taking scale	Davis (1980)
Empathy for others' challenges			IRI – Empathic concern scale	Davis (1980)
Relating to self			REI items 7, 8;	Wigfield et al., (2008)
			A-COPE	Patterson & McCubbin (1987)



in the qualitative data and quantitative measures used in the study are outlined in Table 5.3

Another area of further research is in expanding the scope of this study. A larger sample may also allow for greater diversity of participants. Finally, given the qualitative findings, additional research may investigate coping strategies, perspective taking, empathy, and engagement by collecting quantitative data on these constructs. Appropriate measures for these constructs are identified in Table 5.3. Additional research regarding the role of perspective taking in the reading process may also contribute to the literature by extending the stages or phase of developmental bibliotherapy or further developing community or other-centered benefits of reading for pleasure.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations of this research including the sample size and composition, the school environment, and intervention length and timing. The size of the student body limited the sample size of the study and the generalizability of the findings. The study sample included 55% ( $n = 33$ ) of the school's 9<sup>th</sup> grade class; only 13 students from the treatment group and 11 students from the delayed treatment group returned consent forms and completed all applicable surveys. The small sample size affected the ability of the researcher to detect statistically significant differences between and among groups. Further, the generalizability of the study is limited by the demographic homogeneity of the sample.

The school environment limits generalizability to other contexts. The intervention was implemented in a private, single-sex, independent school with its own student expectations, required coursework, academic support program, and mental health

initiatives. These factors may vary across schools and affect intervention implementation and student experiences.

The intervention was conducted over a period of less than 3 months and may not be enough time to detect change in student stress and anxiety or other related factors. Additionally, the intervention was conducted during the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the academic year and included multiple school breaks, long weekends, and midterm exams. These breaks and additional stressors may have affected the student experience of the continuity of the intervention.

### **Conclusions**

This research study investigated the experiences of female adolescents reading young adult literature as a component of a required course of study as well as independently. The intervention aimed to positively affect students' stress and anxiety related to academic work and the school day. While the quantitative results do not indicate statistical changes in stress, anxiety, or other noncognitive factors related to stress and anxiety, qualitative responses suggest benefits to the intervention.

Participants in this research study indicated that reading young adult literature may provide at least two benefits to students. First, students report that reading for fun provides them with relaxation and calm. Second, student responses suggest that reading aids students in the exercise of considering others' perspectives and evaluating their own lives. Nearly all summative remarks regarding reading YA literature in class and for fun noted personal development and went beyond a discussion of plot points.

The students in this study read a variety of texts for a variety of purposes. However, all read about the experience of teenagers coming of age and the joys and

difficulties this entails. This intervention allowed for students to pause during a time of transition in their lives and connect with the journey of another. Amidst the important academic work taking place in high school classrooms, may students also have time and space to read, relate, and reflect.

*“The books we love, they love us back.*

*And just as we mark our places in the pages, those pages leave their marks on us.”*

– from a student selected young adult novel, *Nevernight* by Jay Kristoff

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## Appendix A

### Needs Assessment Survey

This is a survey to measure how students feel about themselves and their academic work. You do not need to spend too much time thinking about each of the questions and should answer as honestly as possible – there are no right or wrong answers. Your responses will remain anonymous and will not be shared with anyone from home or school.

The “progress bar” at the top of the page will show you how much more you have to go. Some pages have many statements to consider while some pages only ask a few questions. Thank you for taking this survey!

If you have any questions after you’ve submitted the survey, please feel free to ask Ms. Bulger.

How well can you...	Not well at all	Not too well	Moderately well	Pretty well	Very well
finish homework assignments by deadlines?					
study when there are other interesting things to do?					
concentrate on school subjects?					
take class notes of class instruction?					
use the library or a computer* to get information for class assignments?					
plan your school work?					
organize your school work?					
remember information presented in class and textbooks?					
arrange a place to study without distractions?					
motivate yourself to do schoolwork?					
participate in class discussions?					

\*language updated by the researcher

How well can you...	Not well at all	Not too well	Moderately well	Pretty well	Very well
learn math?					
learn science?					
learn reading and writing skills?					
learn to use technology?					
learn foreign languages?					
learn social studies?					

For the following questions, consider how true each of the following statements is for you. Then, select your response. 1 = not at all true; 3 = somewhat true; 5 = very true

	1	2	3	4	5
Some students fool around the night before a test instead of studying. Then if they don't do well, they can say that is the reason. How true is this of you?					
Sometimes students purposely get involved in lots of activities. Then if they don't do well on their class work, they can say it is because they were involved with other things.					
Some students look for reasons to keep them from studying (not feeling well, having to help their parents, taking care of a brother or sister, etc.). Then if they don't do well on their class work, they can say this is the reason.					
Some students let their friends keep them from paying attention in class or from doing their homework. Then if they don't do well, they can say their friends kept them from working.					
Some students purposely don't try hard in class. Then if they don't do well, they can say it is because they didn't try.					
Some students put off doing their class work until the last minute. Then if they don't do well on their work, they can say that is the reason.					

Consider each of the following statements and respond with how true you feel each statement to be about our school. 1 = not at all true; 3 = somewhat true; 5 = very true

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
In our school, trying hard is very important.					
In our school, how much you improve is really important.					
In our school, really understanding the material is the main goal.					
In our school, it's important to understand the work, not just memorize it.					
In our school, learning new ideas and concepts is very important.					
In our school, it's OK to make mistakes as long as you are learning.					
In our school, getting good grades is the main goal.					
In our school, getting right answers is very important.					
In our school, it's important to get high scores on tests.					
In our school, showing others that you are not bad at school work is really important.					
In our school, it's important that you don't make mistakes in front of everyone.					
In our school, it's important not to do worse than other students.					
In our school, it's very important not to look dumb.					
In our school, one of the main goals is to avoid looking like you can't do the work.					

Please respond to the following statements to indicate how much you believe each one.  
-2 = do not believe at all; 0 = believe 50% of the time; +2 = believe 100% of the time.

Statement	-2	-1	0	1	2
When I am failing, I am afraid that I might not have enough talent.					
When I am failing, it upsets my “plan” for the future.					
When I am failing, people are less interested in me.					
When I am failing, important others are disappointed.					
When I am failing, I worry about what others think of me.					

Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree

	1	2	3	4
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.				
At times I think I am no good at all.				
I feel that I have a number of good qualities.				
I am able to do things as well as most other people.				
I feel I do not have much to be proud of.				
I certainly feel useless at times.				
I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on equal plane with others.				
I wish I could have more respect for myself.				
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.				
I take a positive attitude toward myself.				

Below is a list of statements dealing with your feelings about intelligence and ability. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree

	1	2	3	4
You have a certain amount of intelligence, and you can’t really do much to change it.				
Your intelligence is something about you that you can’t change very much.				
No matter who you are, you can significantly change your intelligence level.				
To be honest, you can’t really change how intelligent you are.				
You can always substantially change how intelligent you are.				
You can learn new things, but you can’t really change your basic intelligence.				
No matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit.				

You can change even your basic intelligence level considerably.				
You have a certain amount of talent, and you can't really do much to change it.				
Your talent in an area is something about you that you can't change very much.				
No matter who you are, you can significantly change your level of talent.				
To be honest, you can't really change how much talent you have.				
You can always substantially change how much talent you have.				
You can learn new things, but you can't really change your basic level of talent.				
No matter how much talent you have, you can always change it quite a bit.				
You can change even your basic level of talent considerably.				

Please respond to the following items that ask about your personal goals. Even though you answered similar questions earlier in the survey about the school environment, these questions are specifically about you. 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree

	1	2	3	4
It's important to me that I learn a lot of new concepts this year.				
One of my goals in class is to avoid looking like I have trouble doing the work.				
One of my goals in class is to learn as much as I can.				
It's important to me that my teacher doesn't think that I know less than others in class.				
One of my goals is to master a lot of new skills this year.				
One of my goals is to keep others from thinking I'm not smart in class.				
It's important to me that I thoroughly understand my class work.				
It's important to me that I don't look stupid in class.				
It's important to me that other students in my class think I am good at my class work.				
It's important to me that I improve my skills this year.				
It's important to me that I look smart compared to others in my class.				
One of my goals is to show others that I'm good at my class work.				
One of my goals is to show others that class work is easy for me.				
One of my goals is to look smart in comparison to the other students in my class.				

Consider if any of the following statements have applied to you in the past week.  
 0 = did not apply to me at all; 1 = applied to me to some degree or some of the time;  
 2 = applied to me a considerable degree or a good part of the time; 4 = applied to me very much or most of the time

	0	1	2	3
I found it hard to wind down.				
I was aware of dryness of my mouth.				
I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all.				
I experienced breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness).				
I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things.				
I tended to overreact to situations.				
I experienced shaking or trembling.				
I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy.				
I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself.				
I felt that I had nothing to look forward to.				
I found myself getting agitated.				
I found it difficult to relax.				
I felt down-hearted and blue.				
I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing.				
I felt I was close to panic.				
I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything.				
I felt I wasn't worth much as a person.				
I felt that I was rather touchy (moody).				
I was aware of the action of my heart even though I wasn't doing anything physical like exercise.				
I felt scared without any good reason.				
I felt that life was meaningless.				

Please select the subjects in which you are enrolled in an "honors-level" or "AP-level" class.

☐ Math
 ☐ English  
☐ Social Studies (including Psychology)
 ☐ Science  
☐ World Languages

How would you describe your grades?

☐ I usually receive A's and B's.  
☐ I usually receive B's and C's.  
☐ I usually receive below C's.

What grade are you in?

☐ 9<sup>th</sup> grade
 ☐ 10<sup>th</sup> grade
 ☐ 11<sup>th</sup> grade
 ☐ 12<sup>th</sup> grade

## **Appendix B**

### **Needs Assessment Interview Protocol**

1. Can you identify some common threads or trends that you see in terms of the issues students approach you with?
2. In your professional opinion, do you see students exhibit signs of stress, anxiety, and/or depressive symptoms?
  - a. What do students identify as a source of these symptoms?
  - b. What would you identify as a source of these symptoms?
3. What do you think of the factors that I have identified as contributing to students' stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms?
  - a. Homework
  - b. Peer interactions
    - i. social media
  - c. Parent expectations
    - i. helicopter parenting
  - d. Rigorous environment
    - i. High SES
    - ii. honors classes
  - e. Gender roles and norms
  - f. Perfectionism
4. Do you think students successfully manage stress and/or are aware of their stress?



## Appendix C

### Needs Assessment Assent/Consent Form

Protocol Number:

Student Participant Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructor Participant

Code: \_\_\_\_\_

### Johns Hopkins University Homewood Institutional Review Board (HIRB)

### Student Assent and Parental Informed Consent

**Title: Achievement motivation, self-efficacy, and emotions in female adolescents**

**Principal Investigator: Marissa Bulger, Ed.D. student, School of Education**

**Date: April 5, 2016**

#### **PURPOSE OF RESEARCH STUDY:**

The purpose of this research study is to measure constructs related to female adolescents social-emotional health. These constructs include beliefs about the self, achievement motivation and goals, fear of failure, emotional state, and academic achievement.

We anticipate that approximately 200 students will participate.

#### **PROCEDURES:**

1. Students will complete an online survey in their English classes. This survey will include fixed responses to a number of statements and scenarios. All responses will remain anonymous and no attempts will be made to identify student respondents.

Time required: 25 minutes

#### **RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:**

There are no anticipated risks to students.

#### **BENEFITS:**

Potential benefits include an increased understanding of students' motivation and their beliefs about ability, intelligence, and themselves. Further, the research aims to consider how to mitigate negative effects of these beliefs and their corresponding actions.

Title: Achievement motivation, self-efficacy, and emotions in female adolescents  
PI: Marissa A. Bulger  
Date: 04/05/2016

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:**

Your child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You choose whether to allow your child to participate, and your child will indicate below whether she agrees to take part in the study. If you decide not to allow your child to participate, or your child chooses not to participate, there are no penalties, and neither you nor your child will lose any benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled.

You or your child can stop participation in the study at any time, without penalty or loss of benefits. If you want to withdraw your child from the study, or your child wants to stop participating, please contact Marissa Bulger via phone or email: (301) 365-0955, [mbulger@holychild.org](mailto:mbulger@holychild.org).

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Any study records that identify you or your child will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. The records from your child's participation may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including members of the Johns Hopkins University Homewood Institutional Review Board and officials from government agencies such as the Office for Human Research Protections. (All of these people are required to keep your identity and the identity of your child confidential.) Otherwise, records that identify you or your child will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

All measures will be examined by the Principal Investigator and research affiliates only (including those entities described above). No identifiable information will be included in any reports of the research published or provided to school administration. A participant number will be assigned to all surveys.

Surveys will be collected in electronic format. Survey data completed electronically will be collected via Qualtrics. These data will not include identifiable information. Electronic data will be stored on the PI's computer, which is password protected.

Only group data will be included in publication; no individual achievement data will ever be published.

**COMPENSATION:**

Your child will not receive any payment or other compensation for participating in this study.

Title: Achievement motivation, self-efficacy, and emotions in female adolescents PI: Marissa A. Bulger Date: 04/05/2016
---

**IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS:**

You and your child can ask questions about this research study at any time during the study by contacting Marissa Bulger via phone or email: (301) 365-0955, [mbulger@holychild.org](mailto:mbulger@holychild.org).

If you or your child have questions about your child's rights as a research participant or feel that your child has not been treated fairly, please call the Homewood Institutional Review Board at Johns Hopkins University at (410) 516-6580.

**SIGNATURES**

**WHAT YOUR SIGNATURE MEANS:**

Your signature below means that you understand the information in this consent form. Your signature also means that you agree to allow your child to participate in the study. Your child's signature indicates that she agrees to participate in the study. By signing this consent form, you and your child have not waived any legal rights your child otherwise would have as a participant in a research study.

---

**Child's Name**

---

**Child's Signature**

**Date**

---

**Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian**

**Date**

---

**Signature of Person Obtaining Consent  
(Investigator or HIRB-Approved Designee)**

**Date**

## Appendix D

### Logic Model

Inputs	Activities and Participants	Outputs	Short-term Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes (not measured)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permission from department and administration</li> <li>• Classroom library</li> <li>• Familiarity with young adult literature</li> <li>• Class time in 9<sup>th</sup> grade English classes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student selection of texts</li> <li>• Reading of self-selected text and shared text</li> <li>• Writing and discussion exercises concurrent with reading</li> <li>• Participants: 9<sup>th</sup> grade English students (n=24)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Notebook reflections on shared text and self-selected text</li> <li>• Researcher field notes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased awareness of reading as a coping strategy for stress and anxiety</li> <li>• Decreased stress and anxiety, fear of failure, performance avoidance goals, and academic self-handicapping</li> <li>• Increased autonomy and mastery goal orientation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased academic achievement</li> <li>• Personal development</li> </ul>

## Appendix E

### Researcher Daily Journal Template

Week of \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

	Activities	Class time (minutes)	Attendance	Instructional Method	Participant Responsiveness	Other Observations
M						
T						
W						
R						
F						

## Appendix F

### Intervention Surveys

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?

1 = not at all; 2 = several days; 3 = more than half the days; 4 = nearly every day

Statement	1	2	3	4
Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge <sup>[L]</sup> <sub>SEP</sub>				
Not being able to stop or control worrying				
Worrying too much about different things				
Trouble relaxing				
Being so restless that it is hard to sit still				
Becoming easily annoyed or irritable <sup>[L]</sup> <sub>SEP</sub>				
Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen				

Please indicate how true each statement is of you. 1 = not at all true; 3 = somewhat true; 5 = very true

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Some students put off doing their schoolwork until the last minute so that if they don't do well on their work they can say that is the reason. How true is this of you?					
Some students let their friends keep them from paying attention in class or doing their homework. Then if they don't do as well as they had hoped, they can say friends kept them from working. How true is this of you?					
Some students purposely don't try hard in school so that if they don't do well, they can say it is because they didn't try. How true is this of you?					

Please respond to the following statements to indicate how much you believe each one.  
-2= do not believe at all; 0 = believe 50% of the time; +2 = believe 100% of the time.

Statement	-2	-1	0	1	2
When I am failing, I am afraid that I might not have enough talent.					
When I am failing, it upsets my "plan" for the future.					
When I am failing, people are less interested in me.					
When I am failing, important others are disappointed.					
When I am failing, I worry about what others think of me.					

Please rate each statement to indicate how stressful you found the following situations in the past month. 1 = not at all stressful; 2 = a little stressful; 3 = moderately stressful; 4 = quite stressful; 5 = very stressful; N/A = the statement doesn't apply to me

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Teachers expecting too much from you						
Difficulty with some subjects						
Keeping up with schoolwork						
Going to school						
Getting along with your teachers						
Not getting enough timely feedback on schoolwork						
Concern about the future						
Putting pressure on yourself to meet your future goals						
Not enough time for activities outside of school hours						

Please indicate how true the following statements are.

1 = not at all true; 3 = somewhat true; 5 = very true

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
In our class, trying hard is very important.					
In our class, how much you improve is really important.					
In our class, really understanding the material is the main goal.					
In our class, it's important to understand the work, not just memorize it.					
In our class, learning new ideas and concepts is very important.					
In our class, it's OK to make mistakes as long as you are learning.					
In our class, getting good grades is the main goal.					
In our class, getting right answers is very important.					
In our class, it's important to get high scores on tests.					
In our class, showing others that you are not bad at class work is really important.					
In our class, it's important that you don't make mistakes in front of everyone.					
In our class, it's important not to do worse than other students.					
In our class, it's very important not to look dumb.					
In our class, one of the main goals is to avoid looking like you can't do the work.					

Please indicate how true the following statements are of your experiences in English class.  
1 = not at all true; 7 = very much true.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I felt I was doing only what the teacher wanted me to do.							
I felt I was doing what I wanted to be doing.							
I felt I was pursuing goals that were my own.							
While reading and doing the activities, I felt a relaxed sense of personal freedom.							
During reading and the activities, I felt free.							
During reading and the activities, I felt pressured.							
I believe I had a choice over which books and activities to try.							
I felt like it was my own choice as to which book to read and which activities to do.							
I felt that I had control to decide which book to read and which activities to do.							



## **Appendix G**

### **Focus Group Protocol**

The student investigator will conduct the focus group using the following guidelines:

- All students participating in the study will receive a list of the priority focus group questions when they are invited to sign up to participate in the focus groups.
  - The students participating in the focus group will decide if they would prefer to speak at will or to raise hands and be called on to contribute.
  - The student investigator will ask for participant volunteers to read the focus group questions (provided on individual index cards). If participants opt for raising hands to indicate that they would like to speak, the participant who read the question will choose a participant to speak, who, when finished, will call on another student with a raised hand, and so on. When all participants with raised hands have been called on to speak, or if the student investigator perceives a saturation point, a participant will read the next question. If participants opt to speak at will, the student investigator will allow participants to discuss the question until there are no further comments or a saturation point has been reached.
  - The student investigator may ask a follow up question to understand consensus, clarify a participant's point, or to elicit wider consideration of an idea the student investigator did not anticipate in formulating the questions.
  - If the priority questions have been addressed and time remains in the focus group session, the student investigator will select from the list of auxiliary questions. The questions will be selected based on topics left unexplored in participants' responses to the priority questions.
-

## **Focus Group Questions**

### **Priority Questions**

#### Questions about reading:

- If any, describe differences in your experience of reading the shared book versus the free choice book.

#### Questions about stress and anxiety:

- How did you feel when you thought about coming to English class during this unit?
- What effect do you think the reading had on your stress and anxiety levels?
  - What about the reading had this effect?
- What effect do you think the class activities had on your stress and anxiety levels?
  - What about the activities had this effect?

### **Auxiliary Questions (if time allows)**

#### Questions about book selection:

- How did you select your free choice book?
- Did this unit influence how you might select books in the future?

#### Questions about reading:

- When/where did you do most of your reading?

#### Questions about stress and anxiety:

- How would you describe your state of mind during reading?
- How would you describe your state of mind during the class activities?

#### Questions about academic behaviors and other emotional factors:

- Were you concerned about the consequences of not doing well in this class?
- Did you expect to gain anything from this unit?

## Appendix H

### Reading Notebook Prompts

Reading Activity #1	What do you learn about Junior so far in the novel? Consider what kinds of things Junior deals with as he “comes of age.” What is your reaction to these first pages?
Reading Activity #2	<p>In our shared text, Junior often draws cartoons to convey his feelings. In your Reading Notebook, draw a cartoon of your own.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Option A: Create a “heart map” that shows all of the things that are important to you; fill the heart with pictures or words that reflect what you love.</li><li>• Option B: Draw a cartoon sign that shows the different directions you could go next (these might be literal places or figurative places). You can use Junior’s sign as a guide.</li></ul>
Reading Activity #3	<p>Think back to the videos and articles we studied on Native American Indian reservations. Journal about Junior’s life on the reservation.</p> <p>You might consider: How does life on the reservation affect how Junior thinks about himself? How does it affect how others see him at school? How does where you live affect the way you think of yourself or how others see you?</p>
Reading Activity #4	Think about either <i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian</i> OR the book that you chose to read for fun. Are any of the characters relatable to you? Journal about how you relate (or don’t relate) to the character(s) or conflict(s) in your reading.
Reading Activity #5	Think about either <i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian</i> OR the book that you chose to read for fun. How does the character manage difficult or stressful situations? How does this compare to how you handle difficult or stressful situations? How similar or different are you from Junior or the character in your book?
Reading Activity #6	Has your reading (either <i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian</i> OR the book that you chose to read for fun) given you a new perspective or helped you see something in a different way? Journal about why or why not.

## Appendix I

### Intervention Assent/Consent Form

Johns Hopkins University  
Homewood Institutional Review Board (HIRB)

#### Student Assent and Parent Informed Consent

<b>Title:</b>	Female Adolescent Stress and Anxiety: Bibliotherapy in the High School Classroom
<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	E. Juliana Paré-Blagoev Assistant Professor, School of Education
<b>Student Investigator:</b>	Marissa Bulger
<b>Date:</b>	10/04/2017

#### **PURPOSE OF RESEARCH STUDY:**

- The purpose of this research study is to learn more about the role of reading and discussion of young adult literature in supporting students' emotional well-being and motivation.
- We anticipate that approximately 33 students will participate in this study.

#### **PROCEDURES:**

- Students will read a shared young adult novel and a self-selected young adult novel as part of their regular academic experience. Students will then participate in writing and discussion activities in which they identify conflicts and coping strategies of the fictional character and consider application of these conflicts and strategies to their own lives. This portion of the study will be integrated into approximately 18 class meetings over a 6-week period and will not interfere with regular instruction of grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing.
- Students will be asked to complete a survey at 2-3 points throughout the semester, depending on which class they are in. The survey is intended to measure stress and anxiety, motivation, and emotional well-being as it applies to academics. All students will be invited to participate in a focus group at the end of the study in which they will be asked questions about their experience.
- Note that ALL students currently enrolled in Ms. Bulger's English 9 class will participate in this instructional activity and complete the survey. However, only data from those students who give assent and whose parents give consent will be included in the analysis.

#### **RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:**

- The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life.

**BENEFITS:**

- Students may benefit from the reading and discussion of young adult literature.
- This study may benefit society if the results lead to a better understanding of students' academic experiences and emotional states and provide guidance on improving students' experience.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:**

- Your child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You choose whether to allow your child to participate, and your child will indicate below whether she agrees to take part in the study. If you decide not to allow your child to participate, or your child chooses not to participate, there are no penalties, and neither you nor your child will lose any benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled. You or your child can stop participation in the study at any time, without penalty or loss of benefits. If you want to withdraw your child from the study, or your child wants to stop participating, please contact Marissa Bulger via phone or email: (301) 365-0955, [mbulger@holychild.org](mailto:mbulger@holychild.org).

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

- Any study records that identify you or your child will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. The records from your child's participation may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including members of the Johns Hopkins University Homewood Institutional Review Board and officials from government agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the Office for Human Research Protections. (All of these people are required to keep your identity and the identity of your child confidential.) Otherwise, records that identify you or your child will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.
- Survey responses will be anonymous and any written work and focus group recording will be de-identified before being shared with the principal investigator. No identifiable information will be included in any reports of the research published or provided to school administration.
- Surveys will be collected in electronic format via Qualtrics and will be stored in a password-protected folder. Relevant written work will be collected electronically by email or scanned and stored in a password-protected folder.

**COMPENSATION:**

- Your child will not receive any payment or other compensation for participating in this study.

**IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS:**

- You and your child can ask questions about this study at any time during the study by contacting Marissa Bulger via phone or email: (301) 365-0955, [mbulger@holychild.org](mailto:mbulger@holychild.org).
- If you or your child have questions about your child's rights as a research participant or feel that your child has not been treated fairly, please call the Homewood Institutional Review Board at Johns Hopkins University at (410) 516-6580.

## **SIGNATURES**

### **WHAT YOUR SIGNATURE MEANS:**

Your signature below means that you understand the information in this consent form. Your signature also means that you agree to allow your child to participate in the study. Your child's signature indicates that he or she agrees to participate in the study. Participating in the study means that you/your child's data will be included in the analysis. All students will participate in the activities described in the protocol as they are part of the course activities.

Note: The retention of de-identified data and its use in data analysis is the only aspect of the study for which assent/consent is sought. The description of the study activities is included to explain the relevance of the data being sought.

By signing this assent/consent form, you [and your child] have not waived any legal rights your child otherwise would have as a participant in a research study.

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**Child's Name**

---

**Child's Signature providing assent**

**Date**

---

**Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian**

**Date**

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**Signature of Person Obtaining Consent  
(Investigator or HIRB-Approved Designee)**

**Date**

## **Appendix J**

### **Parent Email Requesting Participation**

Dear Parents,

Now that the school year is well underway, I hope you are all settling in to the community and enjoying your time at Holy Child.

I am writing with a request regarding my dissertation research at Johns Hopkins University. As part of my studies, I'd like to collect information from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade students about their experiences in English class and their sources of stress. The format for this data collection is one survey, taken anonymously during class at 2-3 points throughout the year, and a focus group that students may choose to participate in during a study hall.

In class today, students received a permission form for you to sign if you consent to have your student participate in the survey and focus group – an electronic copy is attached here as well.

Signing this form does not require your student to participate in either the survey or the focus group. Participation is voluntary and students will not be penalized for not participating.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Best,

Marissa Bulger

## Appendix K

### Sample of Classroom Library Texts Alphabetically By Title

Title	Author	Title	Author
Ahgottahandleonit	Donovan Mixon	The End of FUN	Sean McGinty
Dear Martin	Nic Stone	The Fault in Our Stars	John Green
Disappeared	Francisco X. Stork	The Girl Who Could Silence the Wind	Meg Medina
Eleanor & Park	Rainbowl Rowell	The Hate U Give	Angie Thomas
Every Day	David Levithan	The Haters	Jesse Andrews
Girl in Pieces	Kathleen Glasgow	The Miseducation of Cameron Post	Emily M. Danforth
Haunting the Deep	Adriana Mather	The Mosaic	Nina Berkhout
How to Build a House	Dana Reinhardt	The Perks of Being a Wallflower	Stephen Chbosky
I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter	Erika L. Sanchez	The Savage Song	V.E. Schwab
I Like Him, He Likes Her	Phyllis Reynolds Naylor	The Sky is Everywhere	Jandy Nelson
I Will Save You	Matt de la Pena	The Smell of Other People's Houses	Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock
If You Come Softly	Jacqueline Woodson	This is Where it Ends	Marieke Nijkamp
Like No Other	Una Lamarche	This Lullaby	Sarah Dessen
Mask of Shadows	Linsey Miller	This Song is (Not) for You	Laura Nowlin
Matched	Ally Condie	Twisted	Laurie Halse Anderson
Midnight At the Electric	Jodi Lynn Anderson	Untwine	Edwidge Danticat
Real Live Boyfriends	E. Lockhart	We Are Okay	Nina Lacour
Rebel Belle	Rachel Hawkins	We'll Always Have Summer	Jenny Han
Red Queen	Victoria Aveyard	When Dimple Met Rishi	Sandhya Menon
Ruthless	Sara Shepard	Wherever You Go	Gwendolyn Heasley
Scribbler of Dreams	Mary E. Pearson	Wherever You Go	Heather Davis
Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda	Becky Albertalli	Wild Beauty	Anna-Marie McLemore
Spliced	Jon McGoran	Writing My Wrongs: Life, Death, and Redemption in an American Prison	Shaka Senghor
Still Life with Tornado	A.S. King	Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass	Meg Medina
The Disappearances	Emily Bain Murphy	You Bring the Distant Near	Mitali Perkins



## MARISSA A. BULGER

marissa.bulger@gmail.com

Connelly School of the Holy Child

Potomac, MD 20854

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### ACADEMIC BACKGROUND:

Johns Hopkins University; Baltimore, MD

Doctor of Education; Mind, Brain, and Teaching Specialization

- Conferral of degree anticipated December 2018
- Practitioner researcher degree culminating in applied dissertation

University of Notre Dame; Notre Dame, IN

Masters of Education; Secondary English

- Degree granted in conjunction with the Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE), two-year teaching and service program
- 5-12 English Licensure, State of Indiana, May 2011

Villanova University; Villanova, PA

Bachelor of Arts; English

University of St. Andrews; Fife, Scotland

### TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

Connelly School of the Holy Child; Potomac, MD

2011 – Present

#### ENGLISH TEACHER

- Freshman English Teacher and AP Language & Composition Teacher
- Curriculum Leadership Team member supporting faculty in curriculum development
- Lead AIMS subcommittee to prepare for accreditation process
- Created Senior English curriculum with emphasis on collaborative pedagogical practices
- Revised Freshman English curriculum to reflect social-emotional and neurodevelopmental needs of adolescents
- Served on exploratory committees for academic scheduling and senior capstone course
- Kairos Retreat adult team leader

Ascension Catholic School; Donaldsonville, LA

2009 – 2011

#### ENGLISH TEACHER

- English II, English III, and English IV Secondary School teacher
- High School English department chair
- Student council adviser; responsible for homecoming week, Catholic schools week, prom, all class officers and school elections
- Created and implemented English literature curriculum, Grades 10-12
- Instituted before school tutoring program
- Organized and led educational summer experience in Europe

### PRESENTATIONS:

Bulger, M., & Moylan, K. (2015, November). *The study of influence: Nonfiction in the high school classroom*. Presentation at the Annual Convention of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), Minneapolis, Minnesota.

**HONORS/AWARDS:**

Grant recipient, AmeriCorps National Service	2009-2011
Ascension Catholic High School Teacher of the Year	2009-2010
Ascension Parish Knights of Columbus High School Teacher of the Year	2009-2010

**PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE  
National Council of Teachers of English